

The History of Vernon

Wilbarger County was created on Feb. 1, 1858 and named for Josiah and Mathias Wilbarger, two brothers who were early-day settlers to the area. Josiah Wilbarger is the better known of the two brothers. Born on Sept. 10, 1801 in Kentucky, Josiah Wilbarger came to Texas soon after his marriage in Pike County, Mo. in September 1827 to Margaret Baker.

The couple arrived at Matagorda on Dec. 26, where Wilbarger taught for a year before moving to La Grange, where he taught and did surveying until he settled in Stephen F. Austin's colony in a bend of the Colorado River 10 miles above the site of present Bastrop. He was granted a league of land in January 1832.

Josiah Wilbarger's younger brother, Mathias, came to Texas from Kentucky in 1829 to join his brother.

In August 1833, Josiah Wilbarger was a member of a surveying party that was attacked by Comanche Indians near Pecan Springs, about four miles east of the present-day site of Austin.

Wilbarger was wounded with an arrow in the neck and was scalped, but managed to cover his head with a sock. He drug himself to Pecan Springs, where he was found the next day by Reuben Hornsby, who took Wilbarger to his home.

Wilbarger never completely recovered from his wounds although he lived for some 11 more years. He died at his home on April 11, 1844. Wilbarger County was established in 1858 and named in honor of the two Wilbarger brothers.

The county has had many interesting incidents in its history, one of which was the wolf hunt in which President Theodore Roosevelt took part. The hunt occurred in April 1905 with Comanche Chief Quanah Parker also on the hunt.

Photo Provided:
The original Wilbarger County courthouse.



The original Vernon High School.

What's in a Name?

Vernon, which eventually became the county seat of Wilbarger County, was not the first settlement in the county. That distinction went to Doan's, a community near the Red River, where the Doan family had established a trading post.

In 1879, a mail line was established from Wichita Falls to points north through Doan's. A mail route was also established south to Seymour in 1880 and settlers began to move in very rapidly.

Wilbarger County was officially organized on Oct. 10, 1881 and named for both Josiah and Mathias Wilbarger. The county government was established, and Vernon was incorporated in 1889.

The exact origin of the town's name is somewhat of a mystery. In the early

beginnings, the village to be known as Vernon was first called Eagle Spring by Tonkawa Indian Scouts because of eagles nesting in the cottonwood trees beside the fresh water spring.

Later, a trading post was located at Condon Springs (now Hillcrest Country Club) and a community was established called Eagle Flat. The post office department later declined the name due to too many other towns with "Eagle." The town's name was then changed to Vernon. It is not clear exactly how the name was chosen.

Some accounts report that it was in honor of Washington's home, Mount Vernon with the "Mount" dropped as there were no mountains in the area. Another more colorful story suggests the town was named after "Vernon Brown," a whiskey drummer, who left free samples of his wares.