

# Mills County was Carved From Four Area Counties

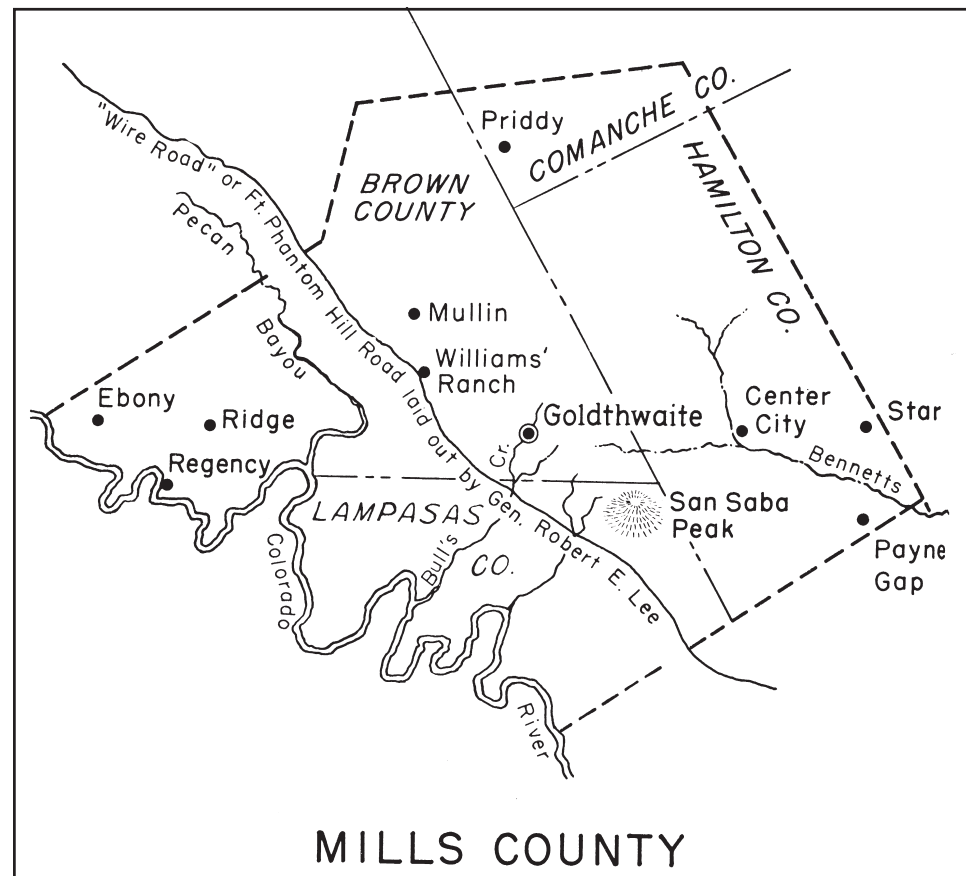
Mills County is in central Texas, bordered on the north by Comanche County, on the east by Hamilton County, on the south by San Saba and Lampasas counties, and on the west by Brown County. It was named for Judge John T. Mills, and its area covers 734 square miles of hills and plateaus that drain to the Colorado River.

Temperatures in Mills County range between an average minimum of 34° F in January to an average maximum of 87° F in July. The average annual rainfall is 27.52 inches, and the growing season lasts 230 days. Major roads are U. S. Highway 84/183 (west to east) and State Highway 16 (north to south).

In earlier times the region was a hunting ground for Apaches and Comanches, who fought over it until the mid-nineteenth century. Although the area was off the route of Spanish explorations, Pedro Vial did pass through the area in 1786 and 1789 while exploring a route from San Antonio to Santa

Fe. The first white traveler was probably Capt. Henry S. Brown, who led a party across the Colorado River in 1828 to recover stock stolen by Indians. The first permanent settler, Dick Jenkins, established himself in the area in 1852; other early pioneers were D. S. and Sam Hanna, W. Lee Brooks, B. F. Gholson, John Williams, R. D. Forsythe, and Mr. and Mrs. Mose Jackson. A Methodist circuit rider held the first religious service in the cabin of Charles Mullin in 1857.

The first post office in what is now Mills County was established in Williams Ranch in 1877. In 1887, the Texas state legislature carved Mills County from lands formerly assigned to Brown, Coman-



che, Hamilton, and Lampasas counties. Goldthwaite became the county seat.

In 1890, 5,493 people lived in Mills County. By that time, the area's agricultural economy was already fairly well-established. The county had 680 farms and ranches, encompassing 142,299 acres, that year. Ranching

## In 1887, Mills County was formed out of Brown, Lampasas, Comanche and Hamilton Counties

was an important part of county life; almost 25,000 cattle and 23,000 sheep were reported. Crop farming was also well-established in the county by this time. Cotton had first been planted in the area in 1864; by 1890 7,000 acres in Mills County were planted in the fiber, 7,200 acres in corn, 3,500 acres in oats, and 2,800 acres in wheat. After 1890, cotton became increasingly important and soon surpassed cattle as the county's leading industry. Almost 22,000 acres were planted in cotton in 1900 and almost 46,000 in 1910. By that time there were 1,484 farms in Mills County, and the population had increased to 9,694.

Periodic droughts and the agricultural depression following World War I forced local farmers to cut their cotton acreage in the late 1910s, so that only 25,600 acres were planted in cotton in 1920. During the 1910s the area's population also began to steadily decline. By 1920 9,019 people lived in

Mills County, and by 1930 only 8,293 people lived there. Farmers and ranchers began to diversify, and increasingly turned to raising sheep, goats, and poultry. By 1930, when about 32,000 acres were planted in cotton, there were 21,300 cattle, 68,000 goats (many of them raised for mohair), 78,000 sheep, and 67,000 chickens reported on county farms. In their search for new products, farmers also began to turn to pecans, fruit, and dairy products.

The area's economy was hit hard during the Great Depression of the 1930s, although federal relief projects helped to offset some of the worst effects. Crop-

land harvested in the county dropped from 89,343 acres in 1930 to 78,372 acres in 1940, and the number of farms declined nine percent during the decade. By 1940, only 1,364 remained.

Meanwhile, the population of the county continued to decline, dropping to 7,951 by 1940. The decline of cotton farming in the area continued during the 1940s and 1950s; by 1959 only 2,078 acres were devoted to the fiber. Land once tilled was turned over to pasturage for increasing numbers of mohair goats and sheep, and farm consolidations also continued.

By 1959, cropland harvested had declined to 32,000 acres, and only 767 farms remained in the county. As a result, the area's population also continued to drop. It fell to 5,999 in 1950, 4,467 in 1960, and 4,212 in 1970. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the county gained a number of manufacturing establishments. By 1982, eight manufacturers employed 100 workers. That year oil was discovered

in the county, and 28,122 barrels were produced; by 1990, however, oil production had ceased altogether since then. The population of the county grew slightly after 1970 to reach 4,477 in 1980 and 4,531 in 1990.

Other communities include Mullin, Priddy, Caradan, Center City, Ebony, Regency, and Star.

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