

Savage Frontier

Volume I
1835–1837

*Rangers, Riflemen, and
Indian Wars in Texas*

Stephen L. Moore

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Prologue

The Indians of the prairies have no local habitations, and, therefore, we can not hope to conquer them by any number of troops . . .

Everything will be gained by peace, but nothing will be gained by war.

President Sam Houston's address to First Congress of Texas, May 5, 1837.

As long as we continue to exhibit our mercy without showing our strength, so long will the Indians continue to bloody the tomahawk.

President Mirabeau B. Lamar's inaugural address to Third Congress of Texas, December 9, 1838.



President Houston's message before the First Congress of the Republic of Texas stressed that the government should pursue a conciliatory policy towards the Indians to help prevent depredations on Texas settlers. His successor, President Lamar, adopted a far less tolerant Indian policy upon taking leadership of Texas and its frontier forces.

From the first rangers employed by Stephen F. Austin in 1823, settlers of Texas had been subjected to Indian hostilities from the earliest days of colonization. Militia districts and periodic ranging companies were employed during the next decade to protect the settlements, largely from attacks by hostile coastal Karankawas.

The year 1835 was significant in that it saw a whole new level of fighting between the whites and native Indians. Depredations became more frequent, but more importantly, the settlers became more organized to offensively take the fight to the Indians. The Texas Rangers were formally and legally organized during 1835 and the first true ranger expedition was carried out that summer.

Many books have been written on the rangers and the Texas Indian wars, but none have taken a comprehensive look at the pivotal period of 1835-1839. Indian depredations and frontier conflicts reached a climax during this period. Ranging battalions were organized and battle tactics were refined. By late 1839, some Indian tribes had already been driven from the republic. Some of

the brightest Texas Ranger leaders, later fabled for their exploits in the 1840s, cut their teeth in battles during the 1830s.

Savage Frontier is the first in-depth study of the Texan leaders, the expeditions and the battles which shaped the frontier systems of future decades. Select fights and a few leaders of the late 1830s have previously received great attention. Other Indian fights, ranger leaders and entire campaigns have received little to no attention in histories of this period.

Walter Prescott Webb's *The Texas Rangers*, published in 1935, paints a broad picture of this force from its creation through the early 1900s. Webb's pioneer account gives a compact history of the 1830s rangers. Subsequent works have only delved a little deeper, focusing primarily on the battles for which there is ample documentation available.

For this manuscript, numerous military, county and social histories of early Texas were consulted on the early Texas Indian wars in order to bring new details to each battle covered. As often as possible, the events of the 1830s are allowed to be told first-hand through the participants whose stories were captured in newspaper articles, diaries, letters or by early historians. We are fortunate in that some early rangers, such as George Bernard Erath and Noah Smithwick, left vivid memoirs which detail the 1830s ranging service. Such recollections are even more powerful when accurate dates are added via the use of available republic-era documents.

Original letters and documents quoted are done so in the language of the original authors. However, I have chosen to correct spelling and add punctuation in many cases for readership. No words are added to such quotes, with any exceptions denoted by [] brackets. Some historians may argue against this methodology, but these quotes are more significant when the reader can clearly understand what was being expressed in the writer's limited grammar and spelling abilities.

Setting the record straight on dates and service periods for the various ranger and riflemen companies was accomplished with the cooperation of Donaly Brice and the staff of the Texas State Archives. Over the course of several years, Mr. Brice has furnished copies of numerous muster rolls, company pay rolls and other primary source material.

Considerable information was obtained from the Republic of Texas Audited Claims, Public Debt Claims, Pension Papers and Unpaid Debt microfilm series. These files contain the original service papers filled out by the men and their companies during their

service period. These documents give insight into the locations of companies, their tenure of service, payroll information, personnel losses, recruitment efforts and eyewitness accounts of various battles or skirmishes. They were also vital in my efforts to reconstruct some of the missing muster rolls of the 1830s.

These records helped to clarify dates of key events, which have in some cases been recorded inaccurately. For example, the 1839 mounted rifleman expedition led by Colonel John Neill is often shown as having occurred in 1838. Just as often, the leader of this expedition is erroneously listed as James Clinton Neill. Often times these mistakes were made from someone's use of a second-hand-source, such as a participant's recollections passed along to them by another person.

Numerous ranger records, army papers, muster rolls and other military documents were forever lost when the Adjutant General's office was burned in 1855 and during a fire in the Texas Capitol in 1881. Other records have disappeared from the Texas Archives over time. Setting the record straight between fact and folklore is thus much more difficult.

My interest in the Texas frontier wars originally stemmed from family research. Great-great-great grandfather Thomas Alonzo Menefee and his father Laban Menefee both served as Texas Rangers during the Indian campaigns of 1839. Great-great-great-great grandfather John M. Morton served in an 1839 Houston County ranger battalion and fought in the Cherokee War that summer. Great-great-great grandfather William Turner Sadler was active in the 1830s Indian wars as a ranger, militia and army captain. Great-great-great-great grandfather Armstead Bennett, a veteran rifleman of the 1811 battle of Tippecanoe in Indiana, supplied early ranger and militia companies with goods from his fortified home, known as Bennett's Fort, in present Houston County.

The earliest men fought with what little they had for everything they did not have: independence, freedom from Indian depredations and security for their families.

Distinguishing who was truly a "Texas Ranger" during the 1830s has often been a subject of interpretation. The rangers of the Republic of Texas were at times formally commissioned in battalions by the republic's congress. Some served in militia districts during times when regular militia units were not on active campaign. Others served in conjunction with regular army units.

A few units consisted primarily of Tejanos. There were even Indian units which served as scouts and rangers, including Indians

from Cherokee, Shawnee, Choctaw, Lipan Apache and Delaware tribes. Some men served with the early ranger companies as guides, teamsters and volunteers, although their names were not officially entered on muster rolls. In this sense, these men were truly serving as rangers but were not hindered by the legal requirement of fulfilling a service enlistment should they chose to move on to other endeavors. Many early Texans thus served the Texas Rangers without ever having their names scribed to a roll for history's sake.

Historians of the rangers and Indian wars will find new material in this study. Campaign rosters and casualty lists have been compiled from archival data for such events as Colonel John H. Moore's 1835 Indian campaign, his 1839 Comanche offensive and other expeditions made by the militia. Personal accounts help accent the drama of the time. An 1839 Texas hill country expedition led by Henry Karnes, for example, is enlivened by the details of the diary of one of the participants.

Volume 1 traces the evolution of the Texas Rangers from the earliest days to the legendary unit's legal creation during the Texas Revolution. One of the earliest movers for an organized Texas Rangers corps was Robert Morris Coleman. He commanded a company in 1835 and in July of that year called for a formal organization of the ranging forces. This was followed up on by Congress and during the Texas Revolution three different ranger battalions were approved. This study does not exclusively focus on ranger history but does, however, reveal which companies truly served as such. For example, prior ranger histories have only identified a few of the companies operating during the Texas Revolution. A closer study reveals that as many as fourteen different companies of Texas Rangers served between October 1835 and April 1836.

More than eighty men who had served as rangers under ten different captains either fought at San Jacinto or guarded the baggage at Harrisburg. The revolutionary rangers played an important role in maintaining peace on the Texas frontiers during the absence of regular army companies. They were instrumental in building or manning at least four frontier outposts. Two ranger companies had skirmishes with Indians during the Texas Revolution. A thirty-two-man ranger company from Gonzales, officially raised by a government-appointed ranger recruiter, paid the ultimate price for Texas independence in being sacrificed at the Alamo.

The ranger superintendent based at Fort Parker was killed soon after the revolution in one of the most well-known Indian depreda-

tions of Texas history. A new battalion of rangers was soon formed under Colonel Robert Coleman to cover the Colorado River frontier. His command would be short-lived. While he was away tending to new military installations, one of his junior officers allowed a man to die on the post. Coleman, the organizer of the Texas Rangers, was court-martialed and he died before he ever reached trial.

By mid-September 1836, thirteen ranger companies were in service on the frontiers. Collectively, these comprised approximately 450 men in four battalions, a new strength for this service. By the spring of 1837, however, only one battalion of five companies remained in service under Major William H. Smith. A full ten-company rifleman battalion was authorized by congress in June 1837, but the battalion never fully developed.

The rangers of 1837 were not able to carry out major campaigns against the hostile Indians but did engage in a number of fights. An expedition carried out during the approach of winter ended with a detachment of the rangers suffering terrible losses at the battle of the Stone Houses.

In Volume 2, *Savage Frontier* examines the key years of 1838 and 1839. The ranger battalion dwindled during late 1837 as men's enlistments expired. President Sam Houston was not interested in maintaining the army or regular ranging companies. Major Smith retired from the service, as did the ranger captains, until the senior lieutenant remaining discharged the balance of his rangers in April 1838. Within months of the disbanding of the Texas Rangers, Major General Thomas Rusk began authorizing the use of his revamped Texas Militia. During 1838, the Texas Militia was out in force on a number of expeditions. In between periods of alert, Rusk allowed his militia brigades to maintain small battalions of mounted rangers. These ranger battalions and the militia conducted offensive expeditions to the Kickapoo village in East Texas, up the Trinity River to the Cross Timbers area of present Dallas/Fort Worth, and chased Caddos across the United States border into Louisiana.

Continued depredations throughout Texas compelled new President Mirabeau Lamar to adopt an extermination policy toward hostile Indians upon his taking office in December 1838. He immediately appropriated funds to build up a new Frontier Regiment of the Texas Army, comprising both infantry and cavalry. During early 1839, Lamar's Congress also authorized numerous companies of Texas Rangers to serve the more troubled counties. One such unit in Houston County was that of Captain John Wortham. According to orders, Wortham's ranger

company was “organized to protect and defend lives and property and whose duty was to die in such defense thereof.”

The year 1839 was very active in the Indian wars of Texas. Depredations were particularly deadly for settlers, but the white settlers aggressively retaliated. Campaigns and offensive strikes were carried out by the army, cavalry, rangers and even hastily-assembled civilian volunteer groups.

The new Frontier Regiment made two major offensive thrusts during the year, the Cherokee War during the summer and another campaign in December. Ranger companies also had a number of encounters during the year. Lamar authorized several other expeditions against Comanches and other hostile tribes. By year’s end, the Cherokees had been largely driven from Texas and the Shawnees had been removed. The Comanches, however, would remain a formidable presence for some time.

The fabled Texas Rangers continue to serve the state on into the twenty-first century. Along the way they have evolved from the mounted frontiersmen to special lawmen. Today, this small force falls under the supervision of the Texas Department of Public Safety. As recently as July 1999, the Texas Rangers received national recognition for ranger Drew Carter’s peaceful apprehension of one of the FBI’s most wanted murderers.

This modern perspective on the Texas Indian wars does not seek to justify the persecution or prejudices that prevailed in the 1830s. It uncovers new detail on the men that served during this time and should aid genealogists tracing their early ancestors’ adventures on the old frontiers.

The spelling of names on muster rolls contained within this text has been corrected where possible. When in doubt, the original spelling from the roll is used. Although most 1830s rangers were of Anglo-European descent, there were many *Tejano* and Indian rangers as well. The enlistment officer often recorded their names by transliteration and translation. When an Indian name was difficult, the recruiter often scribed his Anglo nickname, his adopted Spanish name or a crude translation of his name via interpreter.

The modern conveniences and spreading cities of Texas make it more difficult with each passing decade to appreciate the duress of living on such remote frontiers where neighbors once banded together to fight “savages” with whatever weapons they could quickly muster.

Few of the Indian battlefields of early Texas history have received any more attention than a commemorative marker.

One notable exception is the Cherokee War's Neches battlefield near Tyler, which the Dallas-based American Indian Heritage Center purchased in 1997 and is working to preserve. The battleground will remain intact, with a cultural center planned near the entrance to the property.

AIHC board member Kenneth Cade gave my wife, father and I a tour of the battlefield in 1996. He took us to the site of the old Delaware village on the hill above the river, the ravine which the Indians used to hold off two Texan charges, and the open field where Chief Bowles was slain.

I remember reflecting on the irony of my own lineage. Present on one side of a musket had been great-great-great grandfathers Sadler and Morton. Firing back with bows and rifles from across the Neches battlefield were the people of my great-great-great grandmother Moore, who had descended from the Cherokees.

Standing near the monument to Chief Bowles on this hot, windless July afternoon, Cade read aloud a little poem called "Gathering" which he had written in tribute to the Indians. Visitors to this battleground have reported extreme temperature differences on even the hottest summer days. Some feel that this is the spirit of Bowles and his Cherokee warriors who died in this sacred graveyard while fighting to keep their land.

...The Great Spirit is calling to you and me. Do we hear the voice?
It is like the beat of a distant drum moving closer every day.
It echoes like the love song of the flute on the still air of
the East Texas night. The Great Spirit speaks, saying:

*"Children, you must gather and unite.
You are of the Real People family,
You must secure the sacred site!"*

As Cade read his poem's last stanza, a healthy breeze began to blow over the little field, strong enough to bring a little relief from the relentless sun. The others of my little group made no comment, but it seemed to be more than chance. Perhaps, somewhere in the wind's whisper, the spirits of our native American ancestors were trying to send a message. We should honor those who fought and died for their beliefs in the past, but should not repeat the mistakes of such prejudices and persecutions in the future.

CHAPTER 1

**Attack and
Counterattack***1823–1835*

The campground was ominously quiet as the first rays of sunlight filtered through the trees along Sandies Creek. The dawn air was cool on the mid-April morning in South Texas. The tranquility was violently interrupted by the sudden report of rifles and resounding war whoops as more than five dozen Comanche Indians descended on the scene.

The men of the camp scrambled to make a stand. Improvising breastworks of carts, packsaddles and trading goods, the besieged fired back at the Indians, who outnumbered them by upwards of six to one. The contest was fierce but it was over before it had begun.

From a small porthole type window in his pioneer cabin several hundred yards away, John Castleman could only watch the massacre in anguish. He was frustrated that he could not assist the besieged and that they had not heeded his advice.

His gut instinct was to open fire with his rifle, however futile the effort may prove to be. Only the pleading of Castleman's wife restrained him. The first shot he fired would only insure that he, his wife and children would also be slaughtered. Even still, it was difficult to watch as others died before him.

Castleman and his pioneer family had become bystanders to a bloody Indian depredation in south central Texas. It was April 1835 when the Indians descended near his place and slaughtered a party of traders.

John Castleman, a backwoodsman from Missouri, had settled with his wife, four children and his wife's mother in the autumn of 1833 fifteen miles west of Gonzales. His cabin often served as a place of refuge for travelers moving down the San Antonio Road from Gonzales. Castleman's place was located in present Gonzales County on Sandies Creek, a good watering hole. Indians were known to be about the area, and they had even killed his four dogs in one attempt to steal Castleman's horses.

On about April 15, 1835, a thirteen-man trading party with loaded packs mules from Natchitoches, Louisiana, made camp a few hundred yards from Castleman's cabin. The group included a French trader named Mr. Greasier, his two partners and ten Mexican cart drivers and muleteers. Having noted Indian tracks about, he warned these traders that their lives were at stake if they did not use his place as a fortification for the night.¹

The traders declined the offer to use Castleman's cabin, choosing to retire for the night near the waterhole. The Indians attacked these traders right at daylight, the yelling from which awakened Castleman. The traders fired back and continued to hold their ground for some four hours while the Indian circled them. The attackers slowly tightened their circle as the morning sun rose, falling back temporarily whenever the traders managed to inflict damage on their own numbers.

The traders suffered losses and drew to a desperate point. The Comanches finally took advantage of their enemy's desperation and made an all-out onslaught from three sides. They succeeded in drawing the fire of the party simultaneously and left them momentarily unloaded. During this brief instant, the Indians rushed in with victorious war whoops and fell upon the traders in hand-to-hand combat.²

Raiding to acquire fine stock and other goods became a ruthless sport to the Comanche (translatable as "the real people" in Indian tongue) as settlement of Texas began to encroach upon the hunting lands the Indians had long claimed. By 1830, the Indian population in the territory of Texas was perhaps fifteen-thousand compared to about seventeen-thousand settlers of Anglo-European, Mexican national and black origin. In combat with early settlers, the Comanche warriors had learned to exploit any advantage a battle might offer them, such as lengthy time required to reload weapons in the case of the French and Mexican traders. The determined Indians could accurately fire a half dozen arrows in the time it took an opponent to reload his rifle a single time. The battlewise Comanches forced the traders to discharge all their weapons at once before moving in to slaughter the men before they could reload.³

This last terrific charge was witnessed by Castleman from his window, who immediately realized that it was over for the poor traders. The victims were brutally mutilated and scalped. The Comanches stayed long enough to dispose of their own dead, round up the traders' mules and collect all booty that was desired. As they slowly filed past his house single file, Castleman counted eighty surviving warriors, each shaking his shield or lance at the house as they passed.

Castleman waited until he thought it safe before visiting the battle ground. He found no men still alive and found each to be horribly mutilated. The area was drenched in blood, littered with the strewn goods, and peppered with arrows stuck through boxes, saddles and carts and lying broken on the ground. The Indians had only thrown the bodies of their own dead into a pool of water for the fiends of nature to dispose of.

John Castleman hurried back to his house, gathered his family and set out immediately for Gonzales to carry the news.

In the early days of Texas, those who ventured into the prairies did so at their own risk. White settlements were only beginning to flourish. Those starting homes or farms farther north and west were venturing into territories long considered that of the local Indian tribes.



Battle on the Rio Blanco: April 1835

Castleman's story spread rapidly and by the following morning, a party of between twenty-seven and thirty men was saddled up in Gonzales and ready to go. The two principal early accounts of this episode differ slightly on the details of what followed and even as to who was in command.

Early Indian wars chronicler Andrew J. Sowell, whose uncle was among those in this party, wrote that Bartlett D. McClure, who had arrived in Texas in 1830, was elected captain of a twenty-seven-man pursuit party. John Henry Brown, another early Indian wars historian who likely obtained his account from less direct sources, says that Dr. James H. C. Miller was in charge. In the absence of good documentary evidence to support either man, McClure will be used here as the posse commander since Sowell knew many of the men who participated in this event.

Known participants of this party from Gonzales were Captain McClure, Dr. Miller, Mathew Caldwell, John Castleman, George Washington Cottle, James C. Darst, John Davis, Almeron Dickinson, William S. Fisher, David Hanna, Tom Malone, Daniel McCoy, Jesse McCoy, Jonathan Scott, Andrew Jackson Sowell, Landon Webster, _____ White, and Ezekiel Williams.⁴

Arriving at the scene of the battle near Castleman's, McClure's posse followed the trail of the Indians into the Guadalupe valley. They crossed the Guadalupe at a spot later called Erskine's Ford located some twelve miles from Seguin in present Guadalupe County. They proceeded toward Gonzales and crossed Darst Creek, where

they soon found evidence of the Indians before them. For amusement, the Indians had apparently tied spools of thread to their horses' tails and let the string unwind itself as they passed over the prairies. This made for an easy trail which the Texans pursued rapidly toward the northwest to the headwaters of Mill Creek.

The Indians continued onward slowly day and night, while Captain McClure's pursuers were forced to camp at night near the York's Creek divide when the trail was lost to darkness. While scouting out ahead on the second night, Andrew Sowell detected Indians singing and rode back to inform Captain McClure. The next morning, the Texans found that they had only been about two miles from the Indians' camp. This camp was found on a high ridge overlooking the present town of San Marcos in Hays County.⁵

From this point, the Indians were entering the hill country where pursuit was becoming much more difficult. The Texans camped on the third night on the Blanco River in the cedar brakes. The scouts found plenty of sign that the Indians were just ahead of them. They moved forward cautiously the next morning and entered a valley just as a dense morning fog began to lift. As they did so, the yell of an advance Indian scout on the mountain across the river signalled to all that they had been discovered.⁶

Captain McClure ordered an immediate advance into the cedar brake near the river. The thick woods soon compelled his men to dismount their horses and proceed on foot. Two or three scouts were sent ahead. Sowell claims that these men were Almeron Dickinson and James Darst, while Brown's version has these men being Mathew Caldwell, Dan McCoy and Ezekiel Williams. The remainder of the party moved slowly forward in single file, stooping and crawling as they went.

The scouts soon happened upon the Indians, who had stopped to eat. The scouts turned to sneak away, but were discovered and gunfire quickly erupted behind them as they fled. McClure and the others following prepared themselves at the sight of the spies, literally running for their lives from pursuing Indians. McClure, Miller and others are said to have laid in ambush until their own men came running past. At that moment, McClure then raised his rifle and fired at the first Indian to come in range.

Brown states that Caldwell, having been hotly pursued, passed through the small clearing and then immediately wheeled and fired a deadly shot into one of the Indians.⁷ John Castleman, the witness to the horrible massacre of the traders just a week previous, is said to have also shot and killed an Indian. After

losing two of their number to the Texans, the Indians shouted warnings to their fellows and fled.⁸

Andrew Sowell Sr. was among the settlers waiting as the Indians ran toward their ambush. His nephew, A. J. Sowell, later wrote:

Several shots were fired, and a third Indian had his bow stick shot in two while in the act of discharging an arrow. Andrew Sowell attempted to fire with a flintlock rifle, but it flashed in the pan. He had stopped up the touch-hole to keep the powder dry in the fog, and had forgotten to take it out. The other Indians now ran back towards the river, yelling loudly. By this time most of the men had gotten clear of the brush and charged with McClure across the open ground.⁹

The early weapons used by the Texan volunteers in 1835 did not lend themselves to rapid firing. Most of the men who made up such hastily organized pursuit parties were settlers who survived by farming and hunting. Therefore, their weapon of choice in the 1830s was most often a flintlock rifle such as the one described by Sowell. The early versions, commonly known by modern collectors as "Kentucky Rifles", were generally made of polished maple or cherry wood with ornamental brass fittings. The caliber ranged from .36 to .45 and the gun's octagonal barrel was forty-four to forty-six inches in length.¹⁰

Monikers such as Kentucky rifle or Tennessee mountain rifle evolved due to the fact that the guns often arrived in Texas with immigrants from those American states. All were actually versions of the Pennsylvania long rifle, designed by German craftsmen who settled in Pennsylvania.¹¹

These early rifles were considered extremely accurate. A good marksman could kill his prey from three hundred yards and could be especially deadly from one hundred yards. This was in comparison to those who carried the basic musket, which was considered inaccurate beyond fifty yards.

The smoothbore musket was more well suited for infantrymen, who could quickly load the powder and ball. The Texans who became rangers and Indian fighters largely carried rifles, but some carried muskets. Muskets were much cheaper. By the time a new mounted ranger battalion was called for in December 1836, they were required to use rifles. The rifles were time-consuming to load; the rifle ball had to be carefully rammed down the muzzle with a greased patch.



TEXAS FRONTIER WEAPONS

(Above) Cross section of the 1830s rangers' tools of the trade. At top is an 1820s era .48 caliber Pennsylvania/Kentucky flintlock rifle. Directly below is a .60 caliber Ketland flintlock pistol. The slightly shorter barreled pistol is a .52 caliber Deringer pocket pistol. Noted for his quality craftsmanship, Henry Deringer Jr. began manufacturing large caliber pistols in Philadelphia in 1806. Also shown are a nineteenth century powder horn and a Bowie knife. A staple of the early ranger's equipment, such a knife was an important secondary weapon, as well as an early camp tool.

(Below) Nineteenth century Indian peace pipe tomahawk and Lipan Apache arrows. The arrows are distinguishable as Lipan by the colors around their shafts.

Author's photos, courtesy of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, Waco, Texas.



Almost all of the early weapons in Texas were of the flintlock variety, both muskets and rifles. During the 1820s, percussion caps were introduced to fire the powder charge in a weapon. The caps were more expensive and much harder to find supplies of, so flintlock continued to be the largest source of means to ignite the powder during the 1830s in Texas.

A flintlock rifle could be converted to percussion cap rifle by unscrewing the old lock and removing the hammer, powder pan and frizzen. A new hammer was placed in the old fittings and a special plug was threaded into the old torch hole to hold the cap. The required parts were mass produced by several United States gunsmith plants. Texas gunsmiths and blacksmiths were capable of converting older rifles into percussion arms.

Aside from muskets and rifles, a smaller number of men also carried pistols. Most early 1830s pistols were also flintlocks, but these began converting to percussion caps by late in the decade. Henry Deringer's single shot pistol was a "belt pistol" for use in very close fighting. Samuel Colt patented the first practical repeating firearm in 1836 but there is little evidence of Colt revolvers being used by Texas military until late 1839 and early 1840.

Captain McClure's volunteer forces pursued the Indians to the Blanco River, where the fighting became more general. More of the fifty-odd Comanches were killed as they tried to cross the water with their stolen goods. Andrew Sowell shot and killed one Indian as he tried in vain to climb a steep bank on the far side. In the end, they left much of their spoils behind and moved swiftly from the area. The whites chose not to cross the river and continue their pursuit. They were fortunate to have not had any man killed nor any serious injuries sustained.¹²

The colonists returned to their horses and found that only one had escaped, but it was soon recovered. They gathered up the more valuable of the goods which they could carry. Many Indian bows, shields, blankets and buffalo robes were stashed along a bank on the river for another party to return for later.

The date of this 1835 Indian battle was a few days before April 20, as on this date William H. Steele wrote to Empresario Sterling Robertson with details of the fight. Steele, who was just passing through en route to Béxar, wrote that the Gonzales citizens were said to have killed five Indians.¹³

The volunteer party had not relieved the area of its Indians problems, but had made a statement to the raiding raiders: the developing settlements of Texas were not about to give up without a fight.



Early Texas Rangers and Indian Battles: 1821-1834

Clashes between settlers and Indians were building to a new level of intensity by the spring of 1835. Hostile encounters between the native Americans and the newly arriving Texas settlers, however, had been occurring for many years. One of the earliest clashes was reported in 1821 between a party of white settlers who attacked some coastal Karankawa (translatable as “they live in the water” in native tongue) Indians inhabiting Galveston Island.¹⁴

As the settlement of Texas progressed, encounters between colonists and the more hostile Indian tribes increased. White colonization of Texas was arranged by empresario Moses Austin in 1821, but his son Stephen Fuller Austin became known as “The Father of Texas” for fulfilling his father’s land grant. Austin’s original three hundred families, known as the “Old Three Hundred”, started colonies on land situated along the Brazos River near present Washington County and along the Colorado River near Columbus.

During the early days of colonization in Texas, settlers formed civilian posses to strike back against Indian raiding parties. The Mexican governor organized the early settlers into two militia districts in late 1822. Male immigrants to Texas between the ages of eighteen and fifty-five were soon included into the militia system, which boasted six districts by November 1824.¹⁵

The roots of the legendary Texas Rangers can be traced back to two early Texas settlers, John Jackson Tumlinson and Robert Kuykendall. Tumlinson was serving as the *alcalde*, or civilian leader, of the Colorado River settlement and Kuykendall was an early militiaman who had led a posse against Karankawa Indians in 1822. These two men wrote to Governor José Trespalacios on January 7, 1823, to ask permission to raise fifteen men to serve with ten regular soldiers from San Antonio. The plan was for these men to build blockhouses and small boats to make a combined land and sea attack on coastal Indians.

Thirty-year-old Lieutenant Moses Morrison, one of Austin’s Old Three Hundred settlers and the second-in-command of the Colorado settlement’s militia district, became commander of the volunteers requested by Tumlinson and Kuykendall. Morrison, a veteran of the U.S. Army, was able to muster in ten men, who are credited by some with being the first true rangers of Texas.

By definition, rangers were a group of armed men who operated independently from a regular military organization. They were generally self-armed, non-uniformed squads of civilians who patrolled

the outer frontiers of a settled area to protect against Indian hostilities. Stephen F. Austin first used the term "rangers" to describe an employment offer for ten men under Lieutenant Morrison to provide protection. This note was written on the back of a proclamation by the Baron de Bastrop, another empresario born in the Netherlands, that was dated August 1823.

Moses Morrison's force was employed for the three month period spanning May 5–July 5, 1823. His muster roll shows the company to also comprise corporal John McCrosky and privates Caleb R. Bostwick, Pumpry Burnitt, John Frazer, William Kingston, Aaron Linville, Jesse Robinson, Samuel Sims and John Smith.

Of these men, Bostwick and Robinson had arrived in Texas the previous year. Linville had just arrived in 1823 and received a one-third league of land in present Matagorda County. John McCrosky was another of Stephen F. Austin's Old Three Hundred colonists in the present Brazoria and Austin counties area. After serving in Morrison's company, he later was elected third lieutenant of a militia company at San Felipe de Austin on July 10, 1824.¹⁶

Lieutenant Morrison's men spent much of their three months hunting for food to survive on. They struggled with finding powder suitable for their guns and were not able to build any blockhouses. The men camped and explored near the mouth of the Colorado River, but were brought back to the Colorado settlement in August.¹⁷



An engraving of Stephen Fuller Austin (1793-1836). Dubbed the "Father of Texas," Austin was also instrumental in organizing the early militia of Texas and the first Texas Rangers. From James DeShields' *Border Wars of Texas*.

Return from Monthly Inspection June 5th AD 1823

Number 2

Names	Company	Capt. of	Privates	Exp. to	Company	of	Private	of	Private	of	Private	of	Private	Remarks
Moses Morrison	1		1		30		30		days					
John McCreight	1		1		15		15		days					
William Kingston		1	1		15		15		days					
Pumphrey Burnett		1	1		10		10		days					
Naron Lincoln		1	1		10		10		days					
Samuel Sims		1	1		15		15		days					None
John Frazer		1	1		17		17		days					
John Smith		1	1		10		10		days					
Jose Robinson		1	1		20		20		days					
Wald R. Byrwick		1	1		20		20		days					
Total	1	1	10	7	162		162							
Aggregate	1	1	10	7	162		162							

The muster roll of Moses Morrison's ten-man company is on display at the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame in Waco. This unit is credited by some as being the first true Texas Ranger company. Bexar Archives (1717-1836), CN Number 10095. *The Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.*

Austin's note was a plan to employ ten mounted rangers to be attached to the men under command of Lieutenant Morrison. They would act both as mounted scouts and as a rapid deployment force to pursue raiders while the militia guarded the settlements. The early colonists did not favor such a standing unit and there is no evidence that this unit was ever properly formed. Austin's vision for companies of mobile rangers who remained on constant duty on the outer frontiers did not die, but his idea would take several more years to fully develop.¹⁸

John Jackson Tumlinson, who had requested the need for a ranger-type system in January 1823, was killed on July 6, 1823, by Indians near the present town of Seguin in the Colorado settlement. Tumlinson and a companion, aide Joseph Newman, had been en route to San Antonio to secure ammunition requested by Moses Morrison's men when he was killed by Karankawa and Huaco Indians. His son John Jackson Tumlinson Jr., later a respected ranger captain, collected a posse and led them against a band of thirteen Huaco (Waco) Indians camped above the present town of Columbus. The posse leader's teenage brother, Joseph Tumlinson, acted as a scout for this unit and managed to kill the first Indian when the Texans surprised the Waco camp. Captain Tumlinson's posse killed all but one of the Indians.¹⁹

In June 1824, Austin reorganized his militia into five companies. Soon thereafter, captains Jesse Burnam and Amos Rawls fought nine Karankawa Indians on the Colorado River, killing eight. Austin also sent Captain Aylett C. Buckner with a party of volunteers to the Waco Indian village to make a treaty with the Waco, Tawakoni and Towash Indians.²⁰

Captain Randall Jones' twenty-three-man militia company was authorized by Austin to make an expedition against a force of Indians who had killed several immigrants en route to Austin's Colony. Jones' men fought two skirmishes with the Indians in September 1824. In the first, the whites killed or drove away all of their attackers. On the following day, Captain Jones and his men made a surprise dawn attack on the Indians. They managed to kill an estimated fifteen Indians before losing three of their own killed and several wounded, forcing Jones to order a retreat.²¹

One of the little settlements that would remain a centerpiece for Indian troubles and revolution was Gonzales, the capital of Green De Witt's young Texas colony. The area of De Witt's Colony as contracted with the Mexican government included all of present Gonzales, Caldwell, Guadalupe and De Witt counties and portions of Lavaca, Wilson, and Karnes counties.

The peace in this area was shattered on July 2, 1826, when a party of Indians attacked a group of pioneers, stealing their horses and personal effects. Bazil Durbin was wounded by a rifle ball that drove so deeply into his shoulder that it remained there for his next thirty-two years of life. The Indians next plundered the double log home of James Kerr, where John Wightman had been left alone in charge of the premises. Wightman was killed, mutilated and had his scalp removed by the Indians. The fear spread by this depredation was enough to prevent the Gonzales area from being permanently settled again until the spring of 1828.²²

The most serious encounter of 1826 occurred when a party of Tawakoni Indians came into the settlements stealing horses and hunting the Tonkawa Indians they so hated. The Tonkawa Indians' name was derived from "they all stay together" but has also been translated as "men who eat men." They were also reported to have killed and scalped a Mexican resident while on their depredation. The Indians made their camp in the creekbed of Ross' Creek in present Fayette County near the town which later became known as La Grange. Captain James J. Ross led thirty-one militiamen out to fight these Indians on April 4, 1826. His party was composed of many future Fayette County settlers, including John J. Tumlinson Jr., John Cryer,

and S. A. Anderson. When Ross' men raided the Indian camp they caught them by surprise. Some of the Indians were dancing around with fresh scalps, while others were parching corn or lying down. Of an estimated sixteen Indians, the Texans killed eight and wounded most of the others.²³

Following Ross' raid, Stephen F. Austin proposed to wage an aggressive campaign against the hostile Waco and Tawakoni Indians, enlisting the help of the more friendly Cherokees, Shawnees and Delawares. By June 1826, his militia had grown to five companies with 565 total troops. Captains Rawson Alley, William Hall, Horatio Chriesman and Bartlett Sims did carry out one campaign but found the Indian villages empty.²⁴

When a Mexican commandant ordered a suspension of the campaign until help could arrive from Mexico, Austin called a meeting of representatives in August from his militia districts. From this meeting, the representatives decided to keep a permanent force of "twenty to thirty mounted men" in service continually, with each landowner either serving or furnishing a substitute for one month for each league of land he owned. There is no record that these recommendations were ever approved by the Mexican government or that such ranging commands served in the late 1820s.

Perhaps the earliest confirmed existence of a true Texas Ranger company was in January 1827. Austin had taken his militia out to maintain order during the Fredonian Rebellion in Nacogdoches. To protect his colony from surprise Indian raids in his absence, Austin ordered Captain Abner Kuykendall and eight other men (John Walker, Early Robbins, Thomas Stevens, Barzillai Kuykendall, John Jones, William Kuykendall, James Kiggans, and John Furnash) "to range the country" between the Brazos and the Colorado along the San Antonio Road.²⁵

The balance of 1827 and 1828 found Austin colony settlers and the native Indians on somewhat better relations. In July 1829, however, a battle was fought against Indians who had taken control of Thomas Thompson's small farm near present Bastrop on the Colorado River. Thompson led ten men in a fight against the Indians, killing four and chasing away the others. Colonel Austin ordered two volunteer companies of fifty men raised. The companies were under captains Oliver Jones and Bartlett Sims and were supervised by Colonel Abner Kuykendall. Captain Harvey S. Brown raised another volunteer company during this time due to murders and depredations committed by Indians around the Gonzales area. Although Captain Sims

and his company scouted extensively in pursuit of the Indians, these combined forces only managed to kill one Indian while on their offensive.²⁶

The homes of Charles Cavina, who had emigrated to Texas in 1828 and received a league in Matagorda County, and neighbor Elisha Flowers were attacked by an estimated seventy Karankawa Indians in 1830 near Live Oak Bayou on Old Caney Creek in Austin's Colony. Four women in the Cavina house were killed, as was Mrs. Flowers. Two badly wounded girls survived the assault. Cavina raised sixty of Austin's settlers and command was given to Captain Buckner. At the site of present Matagorda on the Colorado River, Buckner's men fought a heated battle with the raiding Indians. Among his volunteers who narrowly escaped death in this battle was Moses Morrison, who had been the organizer of the earliest Texas Rangers. In the ensuing massacre, the vengeful Texans killed Indian men and women alike. As many as forty or fifty Indians were killed until the riverbanks literally ran red with blood.

By the early 1830s, the volume of immigrants flowing into Texas strained the relationships between Mexican officials and the white settlers. Texas colonists seized the heavily fortified Mexican post on the Gulf Coast at Velasco on June 26, 1832, marking the first armed conflict between colonists and the Mexican government. A convention of delegates from most of the Texan settlements was soon held. The representatives reorganized Stephen Austin's militia and even suggested forming a forty-man ranger company to cover the territory between Austin and DeWitt colonies.²⁷

The colonists held another convention in 1833. When Austin went to Mexico City to present the convention's resolutions, he was arrested and held there for twenty-eight months. By the time he returned to Texas, colonists were growing more resentful of Mexican authorities. William Barrett Travis led a small group of men with a cannon who forced the surrender of a coastal Mexican garrison at Anahuac on June 29, 1835. Most settlers, however, continued to cooperate with Mexican authorities. Several more months would pass before Texans were provoked enough to start a revolution.