

Continuation of;
THE PROMISED LAND - A HISTORY OF BROWN COUNTY, TEXAS
by James C. White

(16) Coggin Brothers Bring Cattle

Cattle operations on an almost unbelievably large scale, resulted from the coming to Brown County of the Coggin brothers, who were arrivals of 1857. Their herds, pooled with those of W. C. Parks, another frontiersman who became their partner, ranged all over West Texas, and at one time numbered as many as 24,000 animals. There were many Cattlemen among the earliest citizens of the county - McInnis, Cox, Windham, Baugh, Fowler, Lee and several others - but none engaged in the industry on so large a scale or apparently profited as handsomely as did these transplanted North Carolinians.

A story outlining the far-flung operations of the Coggin brothers and W. C. Parks is taken from a National Livestock Historical Association publication of several years ago, as follows

"M. J., Samuel R. and Simeon L.; Coggin were three of the nine children of Mr. and Mrs. Levi Coggin, a native of North Carolina. When he was five years of age, Samuel R. Coggin was moved with his family to Marshall County, Mississippi, and with his brother, M. J. Coggin, moved to Houston, Texas, in 1854. With a capital of about \$700 the brothers entered into a partnership which lasted more than forty years and brought them wealth.

"M. J. Coggin acted as ranch manager, and Samuel R. Coggin as financial agent. They engaged in freighting to north Texas, hauling salt, bacon, flour, coffee, molasses and other commodities. Each trip required a month because there were no bridges and few roads. Salt brought \$10 a hundred pounds and other supplies were priced in proportion.

•• In 1856 the brothers disposed of their outfit and bought 3,000 steers. They stayed a while in Bell County, and then came to Brown County in 1857, soon thereafter establishing a herd in Coleman County. At that time there was no civilization west of Brownwood to the New Mexico border. Stiles Brothers lived four miles away and had a ranch there. Beef cattle were sold to buyers who shipped them by steamer from Shreveport, and usually brought around \$15 per head for four and five year old steers."

When the war of the Confederacy began, the Coggin brothers left their affairs in the hands of J. E. and Frank Stiles of Coleman County, and joined the Southern forces. Samuel R. Coggin was a member of Allen's regiment, Walker's Brigade, in Ben McCullough's Division, and was engaged in active service in Arkansas. After two

years he was discharged and returned to Brownwood on account of his health. He then joined with other settlers in repelling Indian raids and building up the new country.

In the middle sixties, the Coggin brothers bought the interests of the Stiles brothers. W. C. Parks, recently arriving in Brown County, joined the firm which then was known as Coggin & Parks. Mr. Parks had also been a Confederate soldier and came to Brown County after being discharged. Coggin & Parks operated immense herds of cattle, on the open range that extended indefinitely to the west.

Operations of this firm were so large that they have become legendary. Some reports say the firm had as many as 31,000 cattle under their brand at one time, and that Indians stole from 7,000 to 12,000 head from them. J. Y. Taber, a nephew of the Coggins, says that "Uncle Modie" Coggin, who was in charge of the cattle operations for the firm, told him 24,000 head was the largest number they ever owned at one time, and that losses to Indians and rustlers were less than reported. It was impossible to handle a herd larger than about 3,000 head at one time and Indian raids could not have taken away many more than that, Mr. Taber said. The major raid of the Indians was broken up by troops from Camp Colorado, and the remainder of the herd was driven to a ranch in Tom Green County. A second raid on a Christmas Eve resulted in the loss of many and claims later were paid by the federal government amounting to about \$35,000.

The remnant of this herd was sold by Coggin & Parks in 1872 to John S. Chisholm, about 8,000 head being involved in the deal. The Coggins then left the cattle business temporarily, but a short while afterwards took it up again with the idea of producing a better grade of cattle. They bought herd bulls and other good breeding stock and in 1882 brought high class bulls from Kentucky to place with their herds.

The first fence in Coleman County was built by them, enclosing a 1500 acre pasture. Other land was bought around Brownwood in 1874, and the widely known Coggin ranch Southwest of Brownwood. Originally containing about 10,000 acres, was bought and fenced. It is now owned by E. E. Kirkpatrick, and is a well-developed property.

The Coggins were among the most active town builders in the early days of Brownwood. They built the first stone house in Brownwood in 1875, giving inspiration for a building boom which during the next few years brought a great many stone structures into the business section. Several of these early business houses, with the original tin roofs placed on them in the late seventies by J. C. Weakley, are still being used by business concerns. One of the last big cattle deals of the Coggin brothers was the purchase from John S. Chisholm of about 4,000 head which were placed on Peace River. These animals later were sold to the founders of the Matador Land & Cattle Company.

The banking operations of the Coggins began after they had disposed of most of their cattle holdings. Henry Ford, who came here in the late seventies, became associated with them, and until his death in 1910 was active in the private bank, known as Coggin Bros. & Ford. Through this bank were financed a great many of the business and industrial venture of the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and by personal leadership the Coggins and Mr. Ford gave inspiration for much of the development of the community and of this section of the state.

M. J. Coggin remained a bachelor, but S. R. Coggin married Mrs. Mattie Smith of Alvarado in 1884. Upon his death he directed that his widow make provision in her will for leaving their large fortune to Daniel Baker college, in which they long had been interested, as an endowment fund to finance the education of needy Brown county boys and girls. Also provided was a fund for construction of a building which is used as a fine arts studio and auditorium. But for this endowment, it is generally agreed, the college would not have been able to weather the stormy years, and scores of Brown County young people have been enabled to complete their education because of it.

Mr. and Mrs. Coggin also made provision for giving the municipality the beautiful tract of land known as Coggin Park, and for the erection of a building, at a cost of \$10,000, on the tract. Due to faulty planning, the building when erected proved to be of little use and after being more or less neglected for several years was demolished and replaced by a small stone structure which houses the park keeper. The Coggin park is contiguous to the Parks Estate, where W. C. Parks and his family made their home until death broke up the family circle. The H. L. Cravens home now occupies the site of the old Coggin home, a great two-story structure of wood, which was burned several years ago.



Daniel Baker College

Daniel Baker College in 1900



Samuel R. & Mattie Coggin

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Coggin, Ford & Martin Bank under construction in 1874.

Clay Riley October 2014.