

HILL COUNTY.

HILL county is bounded on the west by the Brazos river, which separates it from Bosque county; on the north by Johnson county; on the east by Ellis and Navarro, and on the south by Limestone and McLemman counties. It contains 1,030 square miles, or 659,200 acres, and is capable of sustaining a population of 200,000 people. The grand old State of New Jersey, having about the same area, has already a population of 300,000, but it is true that many of them are in cities, sustained by trades which have for their patronage the outside world.

Hill county is situated near the geographical center of the State, on the thirty-second parallel of north latitude, and ninety-seventh meridian of west longitude.

TOPOGRAPHY.

Topographically the county may be divided into four parts, and for convenience we will begin on the west.

The first subdivision embraces all that part of the county lying east of the Brazos river and west of the Cross Timbers, amounting to about 160 square miles. This includes the rich yellow sand and chocolate lands of the river valley, than which no more fertile soil

is found on the globe. Leaving the valley going east, we ascend the "breaks," which are merely the rough, uneven lands that separate the valley from the table lands above. The "breaks" furnish fine grazing for horses and sheep, and also an abundance of cedar timber. The table land is for the most part level prairie, though dotted here and there with groves of oak and mesquite. The soil of the table land varies from a gray and sandy loam to the stiff, waxy land of black and chocolate color. Corn, cotton, wheat and oats are the staple products of this part of the county, all of which give good returns to the industrious farmer. This section is in most parts abundantly supplied with good water. Noland river runs through the northern part of it, and its clear, crystal waters teem with every variety of the finny tribe. Along the "breaks" of the Brazos numerous bold springs send their sweet waters over pebbly beds, to mix with the turbid waters of the Brazos. Several flowing wells of soft artesian water gladden the hearts of the enterprising farmers who believe the "earth and all things therein were made for man." Whitney is the principal town of this subdivision. It is situated on

the Texas Central railroad, a branch of the Houston & Texas Central. It has a population of about 700, and commands a large trade from the surrounding country. It has live, energetic and enterprising merchants and business men who are worthy the confidence of the people. Blum, on the Noland, is also a fine town, and has many of as clever citizens as can be found anywhere. It has a population of several hundred, and does a fine business.

The second subdivision embraces the Cross Timbers. This is a belt of timber land which passes through the county from northeast to southwest, from six to eight miles in width, and contains about 200 square miles in Hill county. The timber is principally post oak, but is interspersed with hickory, ash, elm, black jack and some other varieties of oak. Aquilla creek, which has its source in Johnson county, courses its way through the "timbers" and empties its waters into the Brazos in McLennan county. The soil of this section, while sandy, varies in color from dark to gray. The greater part of it is very fertile. Corn and cotton flourish, as also do peas, potatoes, melons and fruits of all kinds. The people are generally prosperous and happy. Water is not so abundant as in the first subdivision, but a fine quality is usually found at from twenty to forty feet beneath the surface, and in some parts natural springs are found. The principal trading points of this section are Covington, Woodbury, Peoria and Aquilla, all of which get a fair local trade from the surrounding county.

The third subdivision embraces that part of the county from the eastern edge of the Cross Timbers to the "Mountain." While this section is several feet higher than the Cross Timber belt, it is yet a valley. This valley varies from eight to twelve miles in width. It has its beginning on Red river, in Grayson county, and embraces the eastern part of Grayson county, the western part of Collin, the eastern parts of Denton, Tarrant and Johnson counties, the western parts of Dallas and Ellis counties, and passes through the center of Hill, into McLennan, and on to the Colorado at Austin. It is questionable whether there can be found anywhere on the face of the earth a body of upland equal in extent, in richness and fertility of soil, in abundance of yield and variety of products, to be compared with this valley. Hill county comes in for her full share of this magnificent and beautiful belt, which embraces about 250 square miles of her territory, of which there is scarcely one acre but that is susceptible of cultivation. Here corn, cotton, wheat, oats, millet, sorghum, the native and cultivated grasses, luxuriantly grow and yield a bountiful harvest. There are numerous springs in this belt, but a large majority of the inhabitants get their water supply under the earth at a depth of fifteen to thirty feet. Almost this entire valley is enclosed in farms and pastures. Hillsboro, the county seat, is the principal town of this belt and of the county. It is located a little east of the center of this valley, within one mile of the geographical center of the county, on an elevated ridge or plateau, that is bounded by

ravines which furnish splendid drainage.

The general face of the county is what would ordinarily be termed "level;" there are no considerable elevation or depressions. The "Mountain," from which the county took its name, is the water-shed or dividing ridge between the waters of the Brazos and Trinity rivers, and is a mere prairie ridge of an elevation of about 150 feet above the general surface of the country, and passes from north to south through the country, about two and one half miles east from its center. The "lower cross timbers," a belt of post oak and hickory timber in the main, but occasionally interspersed with other oaks and swamp timbers, ranging in width from four to eight miles, passes through the county about parallel with the "Mountain," at a distance of about six miles west from the center of the county.

The Brazos river, a never failing stream of considerable size, borders the county on the west. Noland's river, a most beautiful stream, passes through the northwest portion of the county; the Aquilla, a large creek, meanders the cross timbers, while its tributaries drain the section between the "Mountain" and the cross timbers. East of the dividing ridge, Richland, a large creek, and its tributaries, White Rock, Ash and other smaller creeks, drain the eastern portion of the county. The Brazos river, Noland's river, Ash creek, Aquilla creek, and some smaller creeks supported by springs, are perennial, the other streams failing in dry seasons.

The prairies are the *consequents* of this periodicity and the rather peculiar confor-

mation of the country. Underlying the soil, on the prairies, is a stratum of lime, sand and gravel closely approaching concrete, ranging in thickness from ten to twenty feet, which is incapacitated to support vegetable life. Under this stratum is a stratum of sand and gravel, varying in thickness from ten to twenty feet, and underlying this is a stratum of soft slate, which constitutes the "water bed."

During the periods of drought, evaporation exceeding the rain fall, the moisture necessary to the support of vegetable life is exhausted from the surface or soil stratum, and to a considerable depth below, and no vegetation except that which can be sustained by surface moisture, produced by occasional showers of rain and the precipitation of moisture from the atmosphere in the shape of dew, can exist. The conformation of the timbered portions of the county is similar to that of other timbered sections. The climate, for equability as to heat and cold, will compare favorably with other sections of the same latitude, the thermometer very seldom marking above 95 degrees—Fahrenheit—or 10 degrees below zero. The much dreaded "norther" is simply the result of intense cold North, which occasionally forces the "arctic waves" down here, for about four months in the year. Owing to the levelness and openness of the country for a long distance North, the change of temperature is frequently sudden—changing from mild to the extreme degree of cold within from twelve to twenty-four hours. The extreme cold, however, continues only for a few days. During the summer months

cool breezes from the South are almost continuous, rendering the nights especially delightful.

The altitude of Hillsboro above the level of the sea is 627 feet, while Woodbury is 700, Blum 622, Hubbard 633, Fort Worth 550 to 650, Temple 682, etc.

For the geology of this section of Texas, see page 50, and for time see page 47.

TIMBER.

The timber in this portion of Texas is generally inferior to that of southern and eastern Texas, or other timbered countries. In Hill county it offers no exception to this rule though fully answers for all ordinary uses, and there is an abundance for all demands. Formerly it was used for building and until a few years ago many of the residences were built of lumber from the native timber. Since the advent of railroads, however, lumber has become sufficiently cheap to dispense with the local manufacture and the use of native timber. The varieties of timber are post oak, burr oak, black jack, elm, hackberry, mulberry, pecan, walnut, cottonwood, mesquite and several others, including cedar, which, however, is in the main confined to the western section near the Brazos. The belt known as the cross timbers consists mainly of post oak, burr oak and hickory, though it is interspersed occasionally with other varieties of trees. The Brazos and other streams are bordered with growths of timber, and there are also some groves of post oak and other trees in the interior prairies.

Timber constitutes about one-fourth the area of Hill county.

WATER.

This subject has already been referred to in connection with the three subdivisions of the county. It may be added as a fact generally conceded that no county in this portion of the State is better favored in this particular. The Brazos and Noland rivers, Aquilla creek and several other streams are perennial, while still others furnish water at all times except in the driest seasons. Besides these streams there are, in many portions of the county, springs of pure limestone water, which fail only in extremely dry seasons. The water-courses are so located as to supply the various portions of the county with drainage and water facilities. The Brazos river, which forms the western boundary, is one of the principal rivers in the State and affords a never failing flow of water. Noland, a beautiful stream, passes through the northwest portion of the county. Aquilla creek, a stream of considerable importance, rises near the Johnson county line and flows south through the county, meandering the cross timbers and emptying into the Brazos in McLennan county; it also has a number of tributaries which drain the western and central portions of the county, among them being Hackberry creek, which rises near the northern boundary of the county and flows south parallel with the cross timbers, emptying into Aquilla near the south boundary of the county and draining all the valley west of the mountain. In the eastern portion, Rich-

land, a large creek with two main branches, and its tributaries, White Rock, Pecan, Ash, Post-oak and other smaller creeks, afford drainage and water supply. Together, these streams afford abundant stock water, and the Brazos furnishes water power which has to some extent been utilized for milling purposes. Aside from the flowing streams and bountiful springs, water may be obtained for domestic purposes almost anywhere by digging or boring to depths ranging from ten to thirty feet, at but small expense. Tanks or artificial ponds are used for stock where streams are not at hand. Artesian wells are also coming into fashion in this section of the State.

Water for drinking and culinary purposes is obtained almost anywhere in the county at a depth of twenty to thirty feet. But the best method of obtaining and keeping good water for house purposes is to catch rain-water in cisterns blasted out of the shaly rock near the surface of the ground.

A. H. White, near Aquilla, has a mineral well, yielding the following analysis, the figures denoting the number of grains to the gallon of water; Common salt, 23.75; sodium sulphate, 6.84; ferrous sulphate, 43.87; ferric sulphate, 18.10; aluminum sulphate, 83.91; magnesium sulphate, 116.63; calcium sulphate, 124.38; calcium carbonate, 10.20; silica, 4.14; carbonic acid gas, 121 cubic inches to the gallon. Of course such water tastes very decidedly of iron or copperas, and it is considered by some physicians here as a good combination of chemicals for medicinal purposes.

A number of artesian wells have been successfully drilled in Hill county,—notably in Files' valley, Whitney, and near Hillsboro, etc. Near Whitney, C. M. Carver had one sunk on his place to the depth of 1,640 feet, which runs about 3,000 gallons a minute, of pure soft water. Recently there was sunk at Lake Mills, by Robert H. Deering, on the place of Mrs. N. A. Haley, just west of Hillsboro, a well which first yielded water at a depth of 121 feet and eight inches. Pure water was reached at a depth of 170 feet, which rose to the surface, and if piped would probably have arisen about thirty feet. Itasca has an artesian well under headway, and Hillsboro one contracted for.

SEASONS.

The severe drouths which prove so disastrous elsewhere seldom affect the farmers here to any serious extent, and it rarely occurs that the farming interest in Hill county suffers materially from an extended failure of rainfall. Even in the driest seasons those who cultivate carefully and industriously produce what would in many of the old States be deemed good crops. Aside from the benefit derived from our more favorable seasons it is a fact beyond all question that this soil stands drouth better than that of most other counties, and that when crops are planted here in season, which is a month or two earlier than in other States, they are far less liable to injury from drouths, and the farmer can rely with more certainty on being amply rewarded for his labor.

As is well known, deep plowing will ena-

ble the soil to hold more water, so that the effects of the drouth, which usually succeeds from about the first of June until November, will be little noticed. Besides, the dry-weather crevasses permit the rains to wash down nutrient material to a good depth and thus insure permanent fertility.

As to the weather in this part of Texas, see page 56. Here in Hill county, the principal local weather phenomena within the last few years have been the following: October 15, 1886, there was a very heavy rain, with wind and hail, in this section. Near Lebanon church houses were unroofed, small buildings blown over, and so much timber thrown across the roads that they were rendered impassable. One old citizen, when asked if he had any hail in his section, replied, "No; it just came down in a sheet of ice and broke up when it struck the ground!" We have often heard of "cloud-bursts," but this is the first instance of an "ice-burst" to our knowledge. Another farmer said that when on his way to Aquilla after the storm, as he was crossing a branch near the lower side of his cotton-field, he saw his last lock of cotton calmly floating down the stream, apparently bound for the Galveston market!

April 3, 1891, water froze to the thickness of a "dollar."

CLIMATE AND HEALTH.

By comparing our tables of temperature with those of the more northern States, an important fact will be demonstrated, namely, that our climate is far more uniform throughout the year. We are equally exempt from

the extreme summer heat and the extreme winter cold of the north, and it is an admitted fact that this uniformity of our climate is more favorable to health, other things being equal. While at the north thousands perish by sunstroke every summer, there occur very few well authenticated instances of sunstroke in Texas. The delightful gulf winds from the south prevail in the summer and extend this far into the interior, greatly mitigating the heat of that season. The prevailing diseases of the North, such as consumption and other diseases arising from the severe winters, are quite unknown in Texas. Miasmatic diseases are unknown here, there being no natural causes to produce them. The ordinary summer temperature varies from 80 to 85 and the extreme heat seldom exceeds 104. The influence of the gulf breezes is so marked that the average temperature is much lower during the summer months than it is in the higher latitudes of the North. The actual winter weather here is generally confined to a period of less than three months, commencing in December and extending to the first of March. Freezes occur at intervals during the winter, but as a rule the freezing temperature does not continue long. The snow falls are light and infrequent. Sometimes there is a sleet for a day or two. Under this head it may be well to notice also what are called "Texas northers." The "norther" constitutes an important feature of Texas climate, but one by no means fraught with such portentous meaning as people abroad have been taught to believe by sensational writers. The "Texas norther" is nothing

more than what it is elsewhere known as a cold north wind.

THE COUNTY ORGANIZED.

Going first far back into independent Texan times, we find that Robertson county was created December 14, 1837, as follows:

"*Be it enacted*, etc., That all that section of country lying and situated in the following boundaries be and the same is hereby set apart and constituted a new county, to be known and called by the name of Robertson, viz.: The line beginning on the Brazos river at the county line of the county of Washington, and running on that line easterly to the Trinity river; thence up that river to the northern edge of the Cross Timbers; thence due west to the Brazos river; thence down that river to the beginning point."

Navarro county was created April 25, 1846, thus:

"SECTION 1. *Be it enacted*, etc., that all that portion of the county of Robertson including within the following bounds be and the same is hereby erected into a new county, to be called and known by the name of Navarro, to wit: Beginning on the east bank of the Brazos river at the northwest corner of Limestone county, and thence with the line of said county to the Trinity river; thence up said river to the line of Dallas county; thence west to the corner thereof; thence north with the line of said Dallas county to the southern boundary line of Fannin county; thence west to the Brazos river; and thence down said river to the place of beginning.

"SECTION 2. That said county of Navarro,

as to right of representation, shall be considered as a part of the county of Robertson until entitled by numbers to the right of separate representation.

"SECTION 3. That until the seat of justice shall be permanently established as hereafter provided by law, the temporary seat of justice shall be at the residence of W. R. Howe, and all courts shall be held thereat."

The first act of the legislature referring to Hill county was approved February 7, 1853, and described its boundaries as follows:

"That all the territory comprised in the following limits, to wit: Beginning on the southwest line of Ellis county at a point twenty-two miles from its northwest corner; thence with the southwest line of said county of Ellis to its south corner; thence to the extreme north corner of Limestone county; thence with the boundaries of Limestone and McLennan counties as now defined, to the Brazos river; thence up that river with its meanders to a point south seventy-five degrees west from the place of beginning, thence north seventy-five degrees east to the place of beginning,—be and the same is hereby constituted a new county, to be known by the name of the county of Hill."

Sections two and three of the act refer to the organization of the county and the location of the county seat.

SECTION 4. "That the county court of said county shall have power to purchase if necessary 320 acres of land for the use of said county, and shall lay the same off into suitable lots for a town; and after selecting and setting apart such suitable lots as may be

necessary for a courthouse, jail, clerks' offices, churches, schoolhouses and burying ground, they shall proceed to sell the remainder, or such portion thereof as they may deem necessary, at public auction, at such time and upon such terms as will most conduce to the interest of said county, and shall apply the proceeds thereof to the erection of necessary public buildings for the use of said county."

Section five provides for the compensation of the chief justice.

SECTION 6. "That all that territory situated north of the county hereby created and which was heretofore included within the limits of Navarro county, be attached to and from a part of the territorial limits of the said new county, and for all county and general purposes shall form a part of the same; and the location of the seat of justice thereof and the county hereby created shall be attached to and form a part of the Thirteenth Judicial District."

Thus we see how that Hill county was carved out of Navarro, the latter out of Robertson, and the latter again from Washington.

The county was named in honor of George W. Hill.

February 15, 1858, the Legislature passed the following act, defining the dividing lines between the counties of Hill, Navarro and Limestone:

"SECTION 1. *Be it enacted*, etc., that the dividing line between the counties of Hill and Navarro shall hereafter be as follows: Beginning on the upper line of Navarro county, three miles northeasterly from its junction with the northeast line of Hill

county, thence running southeasterly parallel with and at the distance of three miles from said line of Hill county, the entire length of said line, to a point which shall be the southwest corner of Navarro, the southeast corner of Hill and the north corner of Limestone county; provided that Hill county shall pay the expense of running and marking said line.

"SECTION 2. That the north boundary line of Navarro shall hereafter be as follows: Beginning at the northwest corner of Freestone county, thence in a direct line to the point designated in the preceding section as the mutual corner of the three counties named; thence a line shall be drawn direct to the southeast corner of Hill county as heretofore existing, so as to complete the division between Hill and Limestone counties."

Hill county, according to article 810 of the Revised Statutes of 1879, is bounded as follows: "Beginning at the northeast boundary of McLennan county, thirty-eight and a half miles north thirty degrees west from the east corner of Falls county; thence north sixty degrees east to a point bearing thirty degrees east from another point on the southeast line of Ellis county, three miles north sixty degrees east from the south corner of said county; thence north thirty degrees west of the said point; thence south sixty degrees west three miles to the south corner of Ellis county; thence north thirty degrees west to a point on the Ellis county line, bearing south thirty degrees east twenty-two miles to the west corner of Ellis county, as established by the act of January 28, 1850; thence

south seventy-five degrees west to the Brazos river; thence down that river with its meanders to the northwest line of McLennan county; thence with said line north sixty degrees east to its north corner; thence south thirty degrees east to the place of beginning."

In February, 1858, John Flower was authorized by the county court to survey the county lines dividing Hill from Ellis, Navarro and Limestone counties, and the dates were fixed and published in which each survey was to be made. Mr. Flower made the survey, and the field notes are recorded in the first volume of the Commissioners' Records, page 100 *et seq.*

According to the provisions of the legislative act, Hill county was duly organized by the election of the necessary officers in August, 1853,—James H. Dyer as chief justice, Thomas M. Steiner, Thomas Bragg, James R. Davis and J. M. Sanford as county commissioners, and C. N. Brooks as county clerk. No sheriff being elected at the organic election, Haywood Weatherby was duly appointed sheriff by the Commissioners' Court at its first term.

Mr. Dyer was elected two or three times to office, and was living meanwhile about four miles north of Hillsboro, where he was a farmer and stock-raiser. Moving from this locality he lived eight years in Steiner valley, this county, and is now living in Bosque county. He is an extraordinary man; is a philanthropist, but positive in manner, warmly loving his friends and equally cold to his enemies.

Steiner cast his fortunes with the notorious filibuster, William Walker, and lost his life in the vain effort to civilize Nicaragua.

C. N. Brooks, whose penmanship shows so beautifully in the county records, discharged the duties of both county and district clerk for several years. He died on a farm four miles west of Hillsboro, in the summer of 1891. Nicholson, the first district clerk, was his brother-in-law.

Bragg and Sanford both died in this county, leaving an untarnished reputation and a progeny that fully sustains the honorable reputation of their ancestry.

Davis is still living, eight miles east of Hillsboro.

Clayton Williams, the second chief justice of the county, died several years ago.

At the time Hill county was organized, there were only a few hundred voters in the county, and they were engaged almost exclusively in stock-raising. The prairie part of the county, like a vast meadow, was covered with a luxurious growth of rich and nutritious grasses, upon which vast herds of cattle and horses roamed at will, a little less wild than those that range the broad savannas of South America. On the Brazos river, which is the western boundary of the county, there were a few persons engaged in agriculture in connection with stock-raising. Also a few small farms had been opened along the eastern edge of the Cross Timbers, along the western slope of the "Mountain," and on White Rock creek. There are now many farms in the county either of which numbers more acres of cultivated land than

