

## Harvey Mitchell

Unknown Researcher

c.1965

(Editor's note: Documentation in the files of the Texas Historical Commission concerning this marker consists of several pages of handwritten research notes. These notes are typed as found, with footnotes, bibliography and supplemental materials added by the Editor. Three separate sources are cited.)

Texas: Brazos River Valley Records, pp 28, 57.<sup>1</sup>

P. 28: Harvey Mitchell, d. Jan. 9, 1901; aged 79 years, 8 mos., 18 days.

P 57: [reproduction of newspaper clipping, no date.] "To name one of the new dormitories to be erected at the A&M College 'Mitchell Hall' in honor of the later Col. Harvey Mitchell, it occurs to **The Eagle** would be but a just tribute.... It was due more to his efforts than to any other one man, or perhaps any half dozen men, that the A&M College was located in Brazos County... He could truly be called the 'Father of Brazos County.' The growth, the development and the prosperity of this, his home county, were his constant thoughts and greatest ambition ...."

Biographical Souvenir of the State of Texas, Chicago: F. A. Battey & Co., 1889, p 601.<sup>2</sup>

The subject of this sketch ranks among the first settlers of Brazos County, Texas.

He was born in Giles County, Tennessee, April 9, 1821. He died January 9, 1901 at age 79 years, 8 months, 18 days. His father, James Mitchell, was born in Virginia, but when an infant his parents moved to N.C., where he lived until quite a

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<sup>1</sup> **Texas: Brazos River Valley Records**, Daughters of the American Revolution. James Blair Chapter (Corsicana, Texas).

<sup>2</sup> **Biographical Souvenir of the State of Texas**, F. A. Battey & Co. Chicago, 1889.

young man, when he moved to Tenn. For several years James was justice of the peace of Giles County, Tenn. He came to Texas in 1855 and died in 1856. His wife, whose maiden name was Jane Henry, was born in Lincoln County, NC in 1782.... [She] was married to James Mitchell ca 1806. She died in 1860.

Harvey Mitchell was reared to 18 years of age at his birthplace. His parents then bade him goodbye and he came to Texas where for four years he spent a life of excitement and peril in the frontier. Following this he located in Boonsville (sic), Texas, then the county seat of Brazos County. Here he resided until 1860, when he moved to Bryan, his present home. A pleasing reminiscence is recalled by many who knew Harvey in his younger days. It is said that in the early history of Brazos County when the people were too poor to pay the salaries requisite for incumbents to fill the various county offices, Harvey acted as county judge, treasurer, tax collector, and superintendent of public instruction, also postmaster. Dating from the period of his advent into Brazos County, Mr. Mitchell has been untiring and assiduous in his efforts to develop and further the interests of this portion of the Lone Star State.

A lasting memorial of this fact is the State Agricultural and Military College, located about 5 miles from Bryan. At the time when the legislature was looking for a suitable location upon which to establish this institution, they appointed a committee to investigate and report the most desirable site in the State; also to learn what inducements would be offered by the various interested counties. Several of the larger cities of Texas were desirous of securing this prize as such it was deemed to be, and many were the liberal offers of money and appropriations of land for buildings and farm purposes.

Mr. Mitchell conceived the idea that to secure this much coveted trophy for Brazos County would result in a decided social and financial benefit to its inhabitants. Pursuant with this idea, a meeting was called in Bryan and Judge Mitchell was one of three gentlemen selected to meet the college committee and negotiate with them. As a result of his sagacity, together with an over abundance of energy and perseverance, the preference was given to Brazos County and today this magnificent structure, with its beautiful grounds and acres of well-cultivated farm lands, is one of the most complete schools of its kind in the United States.

In 1848, Judge Mitchell married Miss Arthuisa, a daughter of John Foley, a native of Tennessee. Five children are now living: Jefferson T., Arthuisa J., Alice, Fannie, and James. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of June 1885, Mrs. Mitchell died and was buried in Boonsville (sic) Cemetery. Judge Mitchell is a Mason.... He was one of the organizers of Ivanhoe Commandry of Bryan.

Indian Wars & Pioneers of Texas, by John Henry Brown, pages 593-595.<sup>3</sup>

Harvey Mitchell was born April 9, 1821 near Cornersville, Middle Tennessee. At age 18 he joined other young men and came to Texas. He resided at old Tinninville, Robertson County, fall of 1839. There he joined Captain Eli Chandler's company of "Minute Men," and remained in frontier military service under Chandler and Capt. Wm. M. Love until January 1, 1842.

While not in the woods on duty, Harvey Mitchell was employed by the few families in Tinninville to teach school during 1840. In 1841 he was similarly employed by Major Eli Scales and neighbors on Cedar Creek (now in Brazos County.)

Tinninville at that time was military headquarters for all operations between the Trinity and Brazos.... There was not a single civilized human habitation north of it in Texas.... The service to which Mitchell belonged consisted in periodical excursions from river to river in search of Indian marauders and in pursuit of them when they raided.

"Brazos County having then been created, by invitation Mr. Mitchell moved to Boonville, January 1, 1842, to take charge of office of County Clerk or deputy and amanuensis and do all the work for all the county officials." Mitchell also hired out to the Carter family to teach school at \$20.00 a month, to augment his earnings.

1845, he turned the school over to Miss Carter, whom he had educated. He went into mercantile business. 1848, as County Clerk, Mitchell issued his own marriage license, and until 1853, ran all county offices. Then others took over and

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<sup>3</sup> **Indian Wars & Pioneers of Texas**, John Henry Brown, L.E. Daniell, Austin, Texas, c.1886.

Mitchell moved to 'Red Top' (now Benchly [sic]). Later he was appointed Assessor of Confederate State Taxes, and moved back to Boonville in 1863.

From about 1865 to 1879: Mitchell lived on the edge of Boonville on a large estate, in a beautiful home he built. In 1879 he lost his home through proceedings against friends whose notes he had signed. 1880: He bought a small farm on the Navasota River. Through friends, mainly Guy M. Bryan, Jr., Mitchell got back on his feet and eventually owned 1,000 acres.

In course of years, he built the three first courthouses of Brazos County: First, 1846 – the “Board Shanty Courthouse”.... Second, 1853 – “a more pretentious courthouse....” Third, 1878 – the brick courthouse in Bryan....

He was elected at different times: Chief Justice, County Clerk, County Surveyor....

1842 – 1853: Mitchell had charge of all public archives; and “there being no lawyer in the county was the man on whom the people depended to write deeds, bonds, contracts, petitions and reports for administrator and guardians, and to officiate as preacher at weddings, etc., all of which he did gratuitously....:

Harvey Mitchell built the Methodist church now [1891] in Bryan, donating \$500 of its cost and lending \$500 more to finish and seat it. Previously he had built Alexander Chapel (first church edifice ever built in the county) for the Methodists; and Union Chapel for the Presbyterians.... Donated to all churches in Bryan when first built.... Also to other public buildings....

“But his crowning joy is over his successful effort in securing the location in his county of the Agricultural & Mechanical College of Texas. It was the highest ambition of his life. He was fully impressed with its importance as a source of revenue to his people for all time to come....

The State Senator from the district in which Brazos County is situated, Hon. W. A. Sayles, Judge Spence Ford and Mr. Mitchell were selected to meet with the commissioners... and if possible secure the award.... Judge Ford did not go and Mr. Sayles went on to Galveston, leaving Mr. Mitchell alone (in Houston) to wrestle with powerful competitors for the award – San Antonio, Austin, Waco and other prominent and wealthy points....

He managed to learn what bonus his people would have to raise.... He wired Mayor Donovan for instructions, and waited for a reply, but none came.... Nerved with the excitement of desperation, he resolved to act on his own responsibility and proceeded to write out a bid offering the necessary bonus which was accepted on condition that he would have perfect title to the land (2250 acres which he had previously shown them) presented within 48 hours.... with the help of other citizens,... the money was raised, the lands bought and deeds to same secured and delivered to the commissioners within the time specified”....

## **Bibliography**

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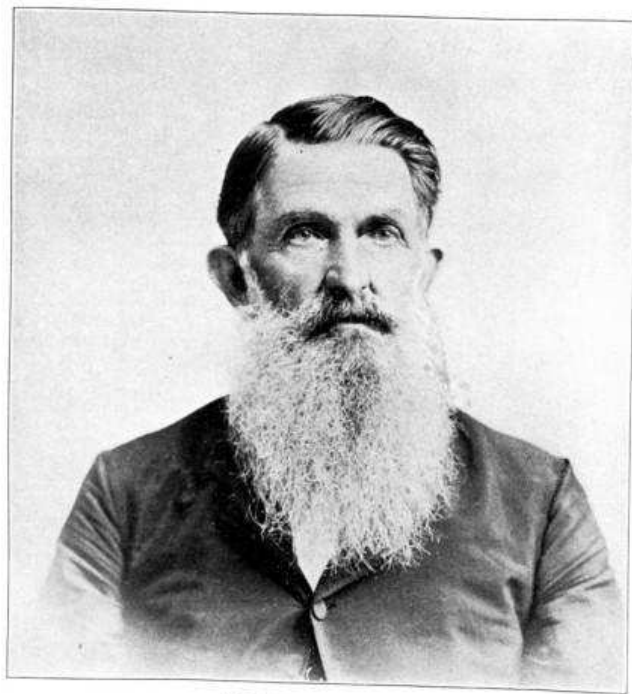
**Texas, Brazos River Valley, records**, v. 1-2; cemetery, miscellaneous, bible records; Texas, genealogical, bible, marriage and cemetery records; bible records; Texas, ...miscellaneous documents and unpublished court records; ancestors of members of the James Blair Chapter; genealogical records; colonial bible records and wills; genealogical records. FHL United States & Canada, Film 850650. Daughters of the American Revolution. James Blair Chapter (Corsicana, Texas). The Mormon family history library catalog adds this note: Microfilm of original records in the D.A.R. Library in Washington, D.C.

**Biographical Souvenir of the State of Texas**, F. A. Battey & Co. Chicago, 1889.

**Indian Wars & Pioneers of Texas**, John Henry Brown, L.E. Daniell, Austin, Texas, c.1886.

The following pages are copies of selected pages from **Indian Wars & Pioneers of Texas**, John Henry Brown, published by L.E. Daniell, Austin, Texas, c.1886, pages 593-595. The electronic images following were obtained from the “Portal to Texas History,” hosted by the University of North Texas Libraries. As of May, 2008, the web address for that site is: <http://texashistory.unt.edu>

A copy of **Indian Wars & Pioneers of Texas** is located in the Rare Book Collection at the Carnegie History Center, 111 S. Main St. Bryan, Texas.



HARVEY MITCHELL.



surgeon in the Confederate army during the war between the States, when Gen. Magruder commanded in Texas. Among other signal services to the Confederate cause he aided in passing large quantities of arms, ammunition and much needed medical stores into the country.

In the Diaz Revolution in 1876, he espoused that cause, and was a staunch supporter and friend of Gen. Diaz. He was commissioned a surgeon in the Mexican army, and served as chief surgeon of the Military Hospital at Matamoros from 1878 to 1882, under Gen. Servando Canales. During this period he rendered important quarantine services to both the United States and Mexico. He has served Texas as a State health officer, and has also been an officer of the National Board of Health. His eminent and faithful public services ended in 1882, since which time he has quietly practiced his profession, and devoted much of his time to the care of his landed and stock interests.

Dr. Combe is president of the Medical Examining Board of his district, has been president of the Brownsville and Matamoros Medical Association, once an important, useful and prosperous organization, and has served his city as a member of its board of Aldermen.

He married, May 15th, 1865, Miss K. M. Impey,

a step-daughter of the Hon. Stephen Powers of Brownsville.

She was a lady of broad intellectual culture and social accomplishments. She was a daughter of Frederick Impey, a merchant of New Orleans, where she was born. Five sons have been born of this union, viz.: Frederick J. Combe, M. D., Charles B., Jr.; Frank B., Dr. Joseph K., and Emile B. Combe.

The life of Dr. Combe has been a busy and useful one and connected with many incidents that have largely made up the most thrilling part of the history of the southwestern portion of the State. He is quiet and unassuming in manner and is esteemed as one of Brownsville's most worthy citizens. During the yellow fever epidemic of 1882, Dr. Combe distinguished himself by the promptitude with which he diagnosed the early cases, and his heroic conduct generally throughout the epidemic. He was in constant communication with Surgeon-Gen. J. B. Hamilton, of the United States Marine Hospital Service, Washington, D. C., who complimented him for his services. Dr. Combe enjoys not only the confidence and esteem of his fellow-citizens of Brownsville and the members of his profession, but has thousands of friends and admirers throughout Texas and Mexico.

## HARVEY MITCHELL,

### BRYAN,

Was born April 9th, 1821, near Cornersville, Middle Tennessee, and was brought up on a farm. His education was limited to a common school course, as his father was not able to send him off to college. At the age of eighteen he joined a company of young men and came to Texas overland with emigrant wagons, reaching old Tinninville, Robertson County, in the fall of 1839, where he joined Capt. Eli Chandler's company of "Minute Men" and remained in the frontier military service under Capt. Chandler and Wm. M. Love, until January 1st, 1842.

When not in the woods on duty during this period, he was employed by the few families at Tinninville, to teach school during 1840, and was similarly employed by Maj. Eli Seales and neighbors on Cedar creek (now Brazos County), during 1841.

Tinninville at that time was headquarters for

all military operations between the Trinity and Brazos rivers, and, being on the extreme northern boundary of the settlements, there was not a single civilized human habitation north of it in Texas. It was the place of rendezvous and starting-point for all the company's expeditions. The service of the company to which Mr. Mitchell belonged consisted in periodical excursions from river to river in search of Indian marauders and in the pursuit of them when they succeeded in getting into the settlements and stealing horses, which they frequently did, sometimes killing and scalping a lone man and carrying off his wife and children.

In this service the company had numerous skirmishes, but no pitched battle of note.

Brazos County having been created and organized by invitation Mr. Mitchell moved his residence to old Boonville, January 1st, 1842, to take charge of

the County Clerk's office as deputy and act as amanuensis, and do all the office work for all the county officials.

This was a necessity at that time, as the perquisites of all the offices were not sufficient to support one man, and no one could be found willing to leave their farms and move to town to fill an office, and to save the county organization from dissolution this plan was adopted, and to augment his earnings Mr. Mitchell hired out to the Carter family to teach school at \$20.00 per month and board, attending to all official duties at leisure hours (at night, evenings, mornings, etc.).

In 1845 he turned over the school to Miss Carter, whom he had educated, and he engaged in merchandising and, there being no other stores in the county, and having the confidence and patronage of the people, he was successful and prosperous.

Having fallen desperately in love with Miss A. J. Foley, who had finished her education in 1847, under the tutelage of the Hon. John Sayles, at Brenham, Texas, and finding that his affections were reciprocated, they were married April 6th, 1848, and being Clerk of the County Court at that time, he had to issue his own marriage license — a rare occurrence, it is to be presumed.

He continued selling goods, trading in land and stock, and running all the county offices until 1853 — when others became eligible and willing to take his place, and in 1855 he moved to "Red Top" (now Beuchly) and engaged extensively in the land business and merchandising. Being personally familiar with all the original surveys in Brazos and with many in Robertson County, and also with most of the non-resident owners, he succeeded in acquiring a large landed property; but, having been appointed Assessor of Confederate State Taxes for Brazos County, for convenience he moved back to Boonville in 1863, and after the close of the war built a new and beautiful home a mile out of town, where he lived until 1879, in which year, having previously voluntarily surrendered all the earnings of his forty years' life of toil to the creditors of friends, so-called, in whom he had misplaced confidence, not reserving even his beautiful homestead, he bought a cheap shanty in Bryan on credit, and, disposing of surplus furniture, moved into it and hired out his baby boy, James E. Mitchell, now of Fort Worth, Texas, to a jeweler in Bryan at \$10.00 per month, to aid in making a new start. His other living children, Jefferson P. Mitchell, Mrs. R. L. Weddington and Mrs. Wm. H. Dean, now of Bryan, and Mrs. E. R. Nash, now of Waco, were all grown and providing for themselves, but were not able at that time

to aid him financially. In 1880 he bought a small farm on the Navasota river and, with the assistance of friends, mainly Guy M. Bryan, Jr., purchased other adjoining lands, and improved them and now has a farm of 1,000 acres, well improved and stocked, under cultivation, but resides at his home in the town of Bryan. But he is now old and feeble and realizes that his life-work is about finished. His time is mainly spent now in reviewing the past, in which he finds some comfort. His living children are all engaged in useful pursuits and are well thought of by the people who know them and are kind to him, and he feels some pride in the consciousness of having been efficient in helping to convert what was an unbroken wilderness in 1841, with isolated settlements at long distances apart and without any of the luxuries and conveniences of enlightened civilization, into one among the most prosperous and populous counties in Texas; that his own beloved county (Brazos) to-day abounds in churches and schools; is the home of the A. and M. College of Texas, has railroads, commodious and substantial buildings, good highways, a number of factories and many palatial residences, and possesses a large and prosperous population engaged in commercial and agricultural pursuits. As a soldier, he did his full share toward its protection while it needed protection as a border county. The duty was assigned to him to build three of the courthouses the county has had, the first in 1846 ("the Board Shanty Court House"); the second in 1853, a more pretentious structure, and the third, the "brick courthouse" in Bryan, in 1878. He served, either under commission or an amanuensis, in all the county offices for a term of years when no other plan could preserve the county's autonomy. He never sought any office, but was elected at different times to that of Chief Justice, County Clerk and County Surveyor as the occasion required for the public good, and from 1842 until 1853 had the custody and control of all the archives of the county and, there being no resident lawyer in the county, was the man upon whom the people depended to write deeds, bonds, contracts, petitions and reports for administrators and guardians, and to officiate as preacher at weddings, etc., all of which he did gratuitously. He built the Methodist Church now in Bryan, donating \$500 of its cost and lending \$500 more to finish and seat it. He built Alexander Chapel (the first church edifice ever built in the county) for the Methodists and Union Chapel for the Presbyterians, and donated liberally to all the churches in Bryan when first built, and also to other public buildings as well. But his crowning joy is

over his successful effort in securing the location in his county of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. It was the highest ambition of his life. He was fully impressed with its importance as a source of revenue to his people, for all time to come, as thousands of dollars would annually be brought into the country and disbursed among the people for labor and supplies.

The commissioners authorized by law to select and secure a suitable location for this institution, had visited and examined many competing points in the State, that offered by Brazos County among the rest, and advertised for bids, in the way of bonuses, to be opened and the location awarded on a given day in Houston. The State Senator from the district in which Brazos County is situated, Hon. W. A. Saylor, Judge Spencer Ford and Mr. Mitchell, were selected at a large mass meeting held in Bryan to meet the commissioners on the day fixed and, if possible, secure the award. Accordingly Senator Saylor and Mr. Mitchell went down to Houston a few days in advance. Judge Ford did not go and Mr. Saylor went on to Galveston, leaving Mr. Mitchell alone to wrestle with powerful competitors for the award — San Antonio, Austin, Waco and other prominent and wealthy points.

But he managed to learn what bonus his people would have to raise to secure the prize, which was so great that he feared it was beyond their reach. He wired Mayor Downward for instructions, and waited for a reply, but none came; and, nerved with the excitement of desperation, he resolved to act on his own responsibility, and proceeded to write out a bid offering the necessary bonus, which was accepted on condition that he would have perfect titles to the land (2250 acres which he had previously shown them) presented within forty-eight hours.

He was then *en route* for New York to spend the summer, but boarded the first train back to Bryan, reported what he had done and, with the help of other citizens, mainly that of Hon. John N. Henderson, now Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, and M. W. McCraw, now deceased, the money was raised, the lands bought and deeds to same secured and delivered to the commissioners

within the time specified, and he resumed his journey to the northern cities, the proudest man in America.

In this transaction he felt, and still feels, that, while it brought a paramount blessing to his county, he also rendered good service to the State. The position selected for the site of the college being central, healthy and attractive, and a great trunk line (the H. & T. C.) railroad running through the grounds, which, with its various branches and multitudinous connections, affords convenient access to all parts of the State, make it an eminently fitting location for this great institution.

These services have secured for him many flattering soubriquets, such as "Father of the County," etc., etc.

But his reminiscences are not all of a happy character. He has had many sad and sorrowful experiences. He was at one time, most unexpectedly, reduced from comparative affluence to a condition bordering on destitution and dependence, while powerless to prevent it. He was made to witness the death of his aged father and mother and the passing away of a beloved sister and two brothers, who had left happy homes to follow and be with him in Texas. He was called upon to consign to their little graves four bright, loving and promising children within one short week. He has been separated by death from the large majority of loved ones and intimate friends of the long, long ago, and is to-day one of the only two living men who were citizens of Brazos County when it was organized in 1841. But the supreme, heartrending grief of his life, was the surrender of his ever faithful, loving, angelic wife, to the cold embrace of death on the 3d day of June, 1885.

\* It brought a shivering, ponderous darkness to his soul, from which he shall never be released in this life, and now, as the thickening and lengthening shadows of life's evening gather around him, his chief consolation is that, if it be true that there is a blissful haven in the great beyond for the souls of the pure and good of earth's children, she is surely among the blest, and that ere long he will be with her, and all the loved ones that have preceded him and are yet to follow.