

Interview with Mr. William P. Jones, Reagan, Texas

William P. Jones was born in Virginia in 1852. He moved to Texas with his parents in 1860. In the late 1930s, he was interviewed about his early life. Among the stories he recollected was the following incident. What is the importance of the incident at the courthouse? Why do you think armed vigilantes watched voters register? Can you tell what Mr. Jones's attitude toward the vigilantes was? If so, how?

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"While we were living in Navasota, the Civil War was declared and four of my brothers served under the flag of the Confederacy. Walter was in Hood's Brigade and was killed in action; another, Napoleon, was in the same Brigade but he lived to return home. Stanfield fought in Speight's Brigade and he, too, returned home after the war. He fought in Louisiana. Richard Hampton was in Tom Green's Brigade and he, too, came back. He was also in some of the battles. . . .

"At the close of the war there was constant fear of the negroes "rising up" against the whites, but in our community they settled peacefully to work, most of them stayed on with their former masters. They worked the land on the "shares" (part of the crop). . . .

"After I reached manhood I lived for a few years in Marlin and did contracting work. I helped to build some of the first business houses and hotels in Marlin. . . .

"I remember the City Hall as being the oldest building in [Marlin?]. It was erected before the Civil War and was occupied in ante-bellum days as a mercantile establishment by Bartlett and Bowles and then by Green and Bartlett. It served as a school building for a time and was finally bought by the city and converted into the City Hall, housing all of the city's officers.

"On a certain occasion during the reconstruction days, its roof supported a citizen's squad of vigilants, armed with long rifles and shotguns with eyes riveted on the courthouse, watching every crook and turn as the white voters marched between lines of bayonets in the hands of "freedmen soldiers" to exercise their right of the polls. The [parapet?] wall of this building afforded a good gun rest for the vigilantes during the watch.

"For four days this scene was repeated, it taking this long for the voters to register, the county only allowing one voting place by the "carpet-bag" government then in power. But as it so happened the negro "freedmen soldiers" managed to help keep the peace and the voting went off with no trouble, altho' it was said that out of a spirit of mischief a reckless white man began shooting on the last day and this caused a hurried departure to the Brazos bottom of the negro voters who had been to register."

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