

Influence of the Edwards Plateau on Frontier History of the Texas Hill Country*

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Search and Discovery Article #70149 (2013)**

Posted October 8, 2013

*Adapted from oral presentation at History of Petroleum Geology Forum, AAPG Annual Convention and Exhibition, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, May 19-22, 2013

Editor's note: the viewer is referred to: *The Reckoning: The Triumph of Order on the Texas Outlaw Frontier*, the author's book published by Texas Tech University Press in 2012.

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Abstract

The geological attributes and presence of the Edwards Plateau exerted a powerful influence on the history of the Texas Hill Country during the late 19th century. The Plateau is an immense tableland that covers more than 25,000 square miles of west-central Texas, the geomorphic expression of the resistant Edwards Limestone. Rainfall sinks into permeable limestone terranes on top of the Plateau rather than running off. Because the formations underlying the porous Edwards Limestone are relatively impervious, water accumulates in the lower Edwards, forming an extensive unconfined regional aquifer which is the source of all the springs around the Plateau margins. The consequences of this geology are unusual: a vast, elevated, waterless plain, dissected around its margins by limestone canyons fed by perennial springs that form the headwaters of all the rivers in central Texas.

Because of its rugged margins and the absence of dependable surface water on top, the Plateau was a formidable wilderness barrier to permanent habitation. Early regional roads, as well as the Western Beef Trail, mostly skirted the Plateau. Marauding Indians used the thick-turfed plateau uplands as wilderness war trails to fall suddenly upon unsuspecting settlements around the plateau margins, thus inhibiting permanent settlement.

In 1873, opportunistic Anglo-Celtic cattlemen and homesteaders began settling the apron of stream-laced lands that bordered the Edwards Plateau on the east. Criminal confederations took root in isolated locations for many reasons: 1) sparse population; 2) lack of organized government and Law; 3) access to northbound trail herds; 4) clandestine livestock markets along the Mexican border; 5) abundant hiding places around the dissected margins of the Plateau; and 6) adjacent wilderness as a waiting refuge from pursuing lawmen.

Sustained campaigns by Texas Rangers, aiding fearful settlers and beleaguered county lawmen, gradually brought order to the region. New technologies ended the frontier period. Regional railroads skirting the Edwards Plateau put an end to the cattle drives. The plateau uplands

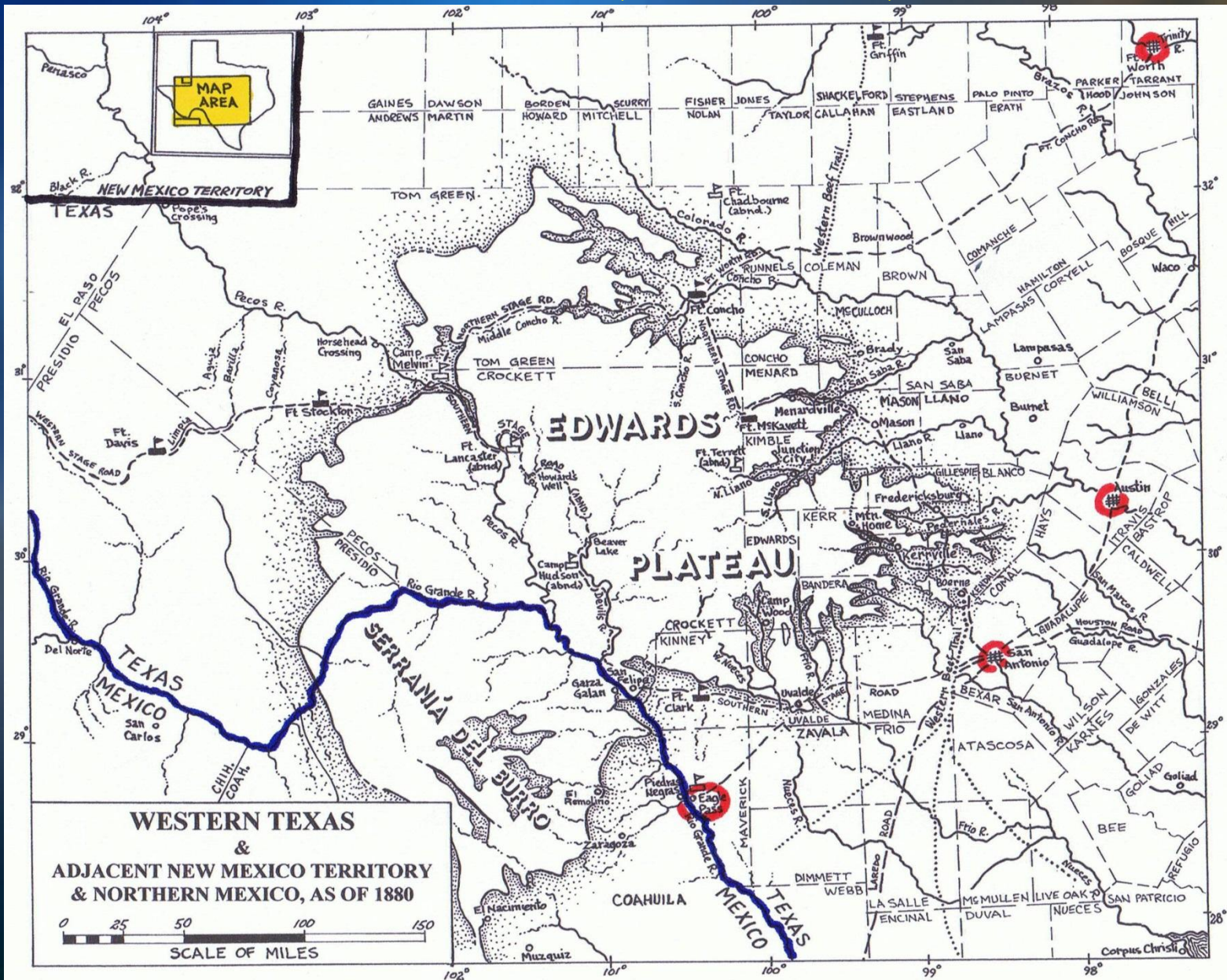
began to be settled when cable-tool drilling and windmills provided reliable water from the Edwards aquifer, and barbed wire allowed ranchers to control grazing. The frontier era in the western Hill Country was over.

INFLUENCE OF THE EDWARDS PLATEAU ON FRONTIER HISTORY OF THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

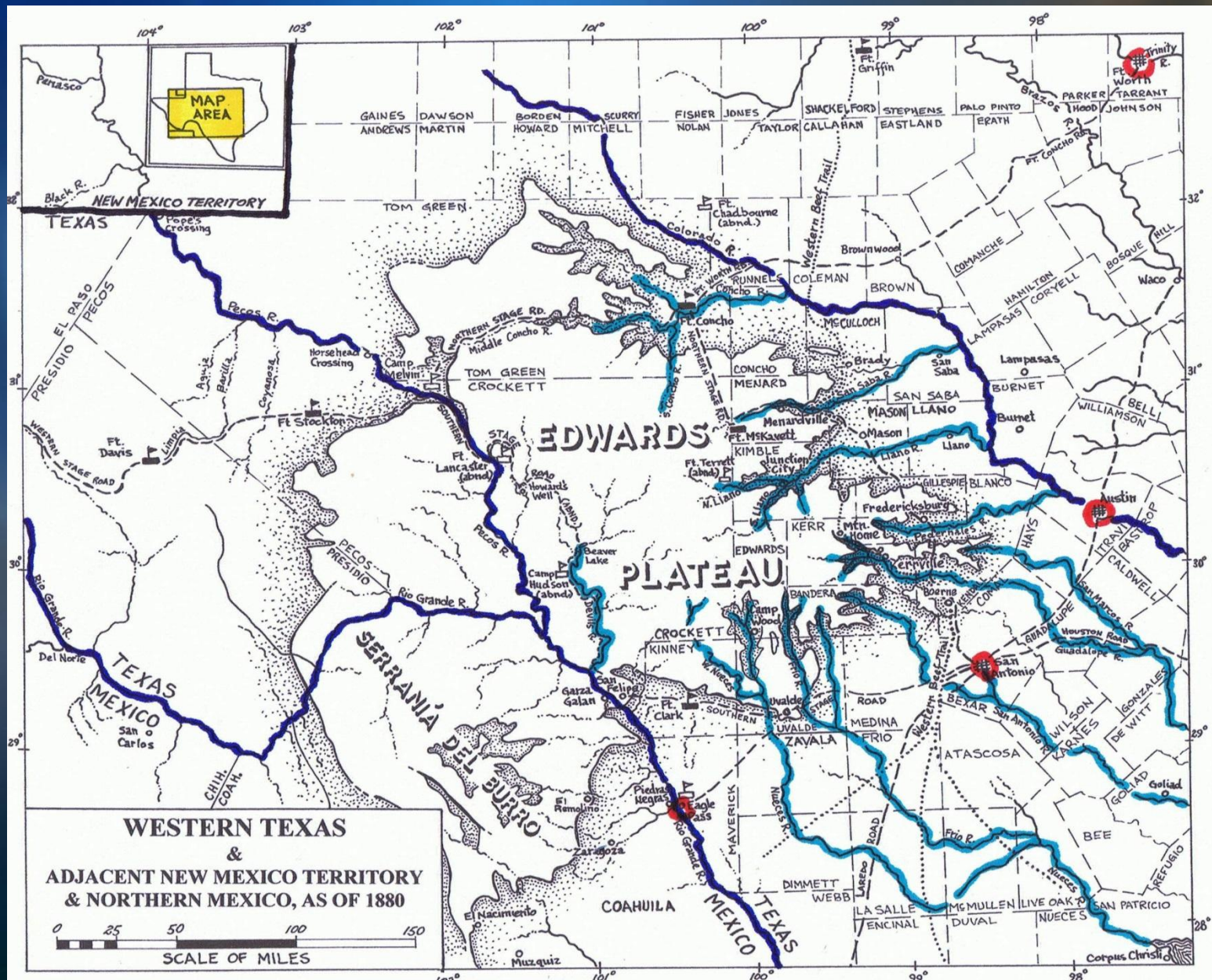
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May, 2013

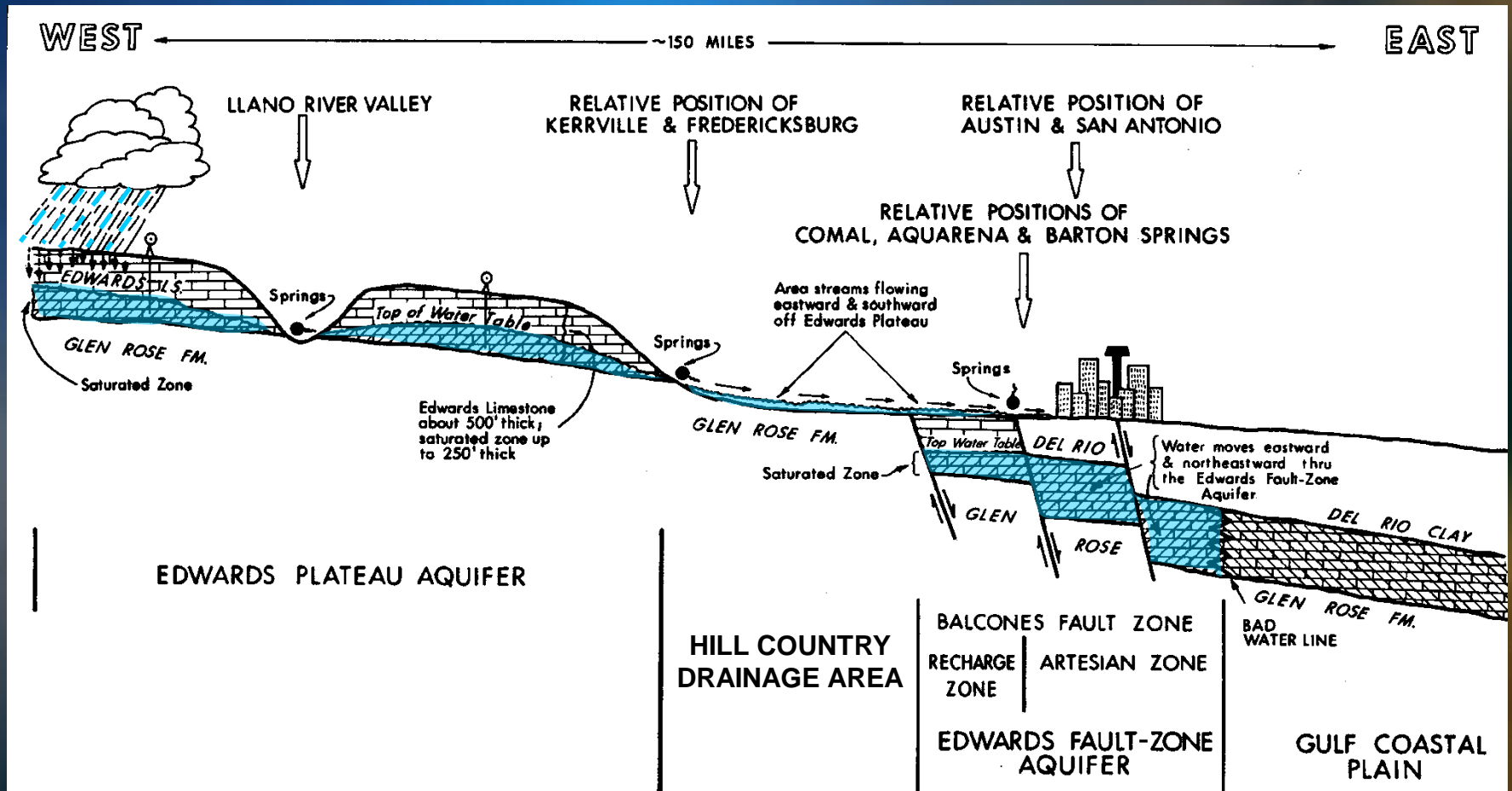
EDWARDS PLATEAU, WEST TEXAS, 1870



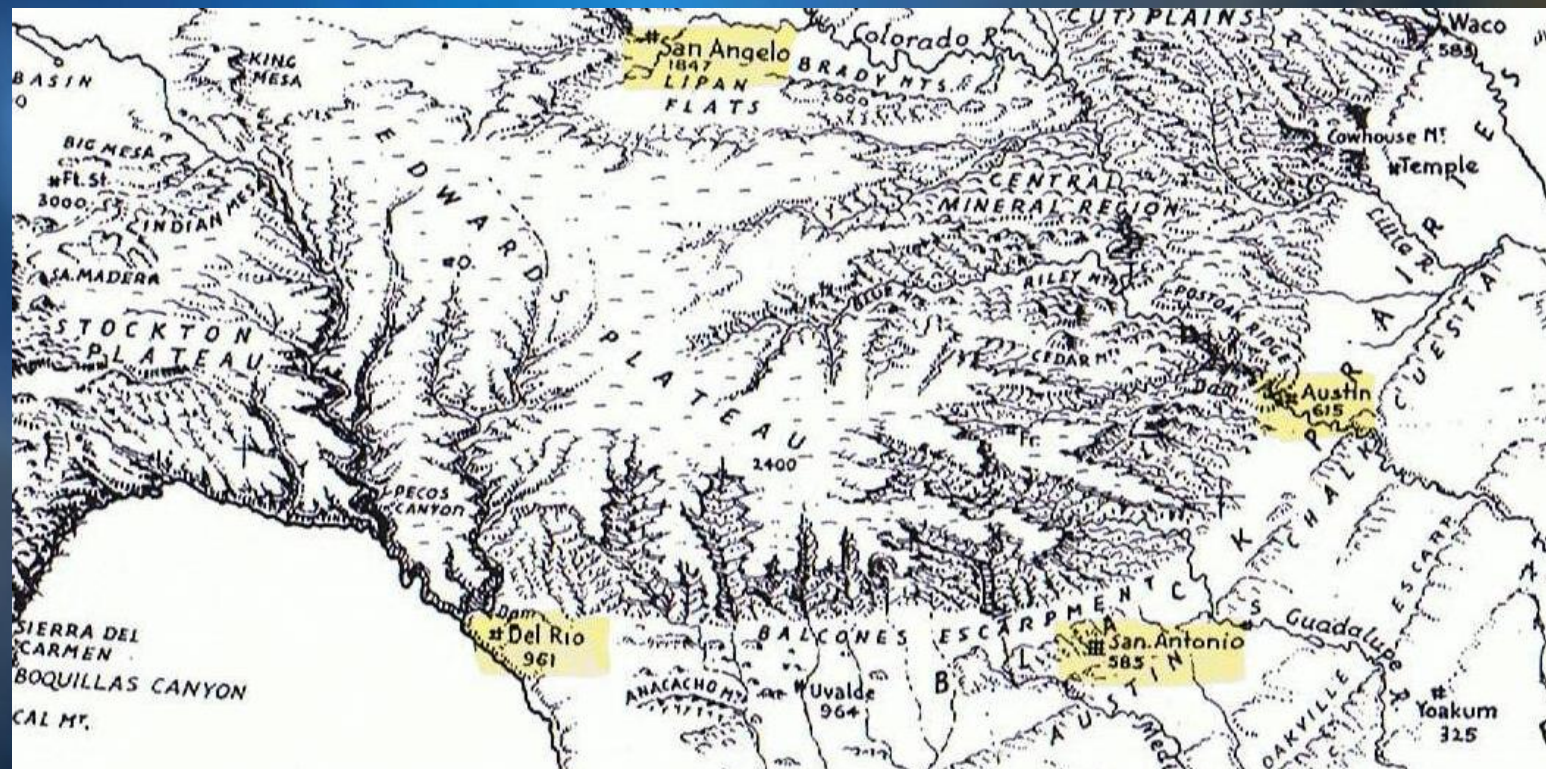
TEN RIVERS ORIGINATE FROM EDWARDS PLATEAU



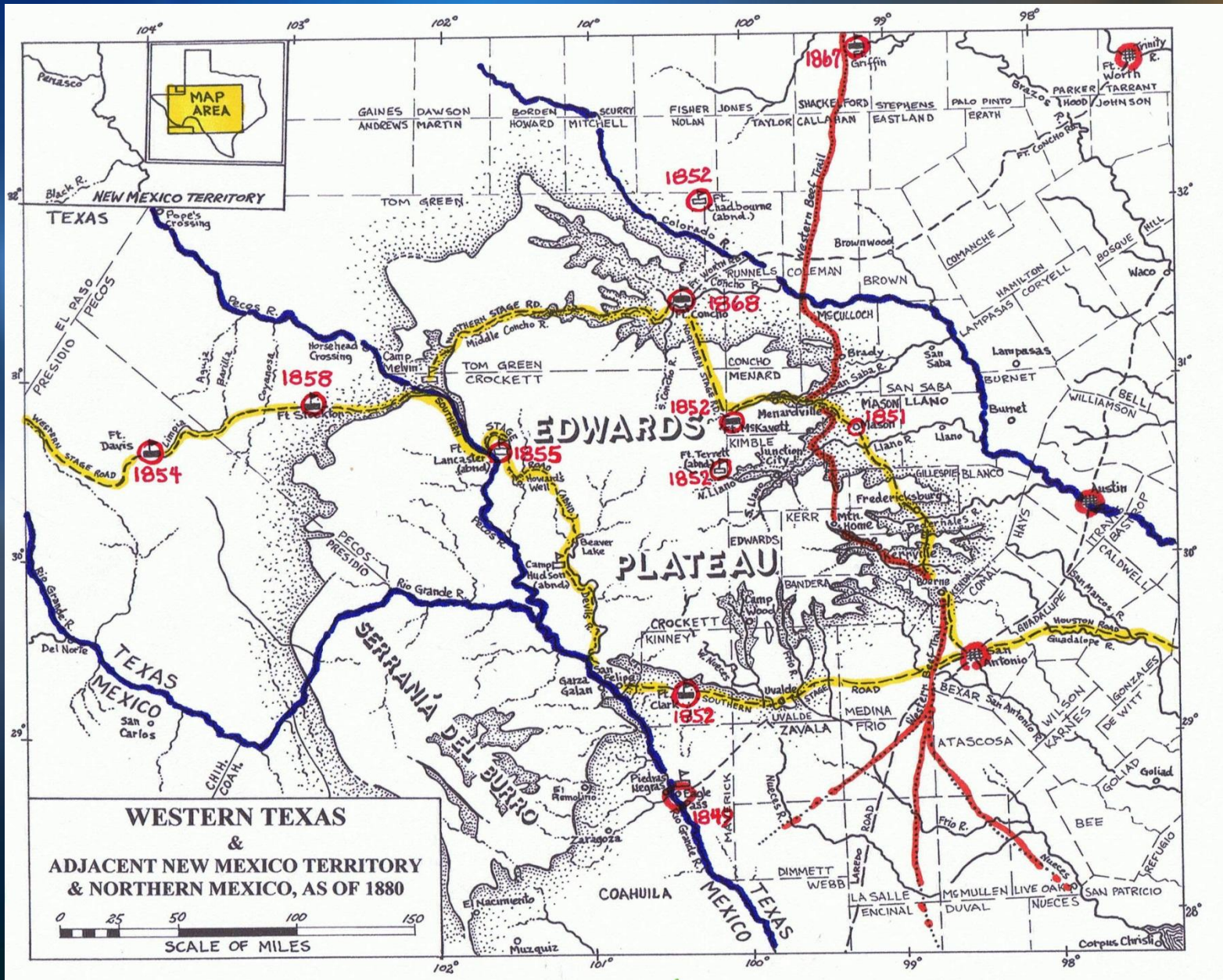
CROSS-SECTION, HYDROLOGY OF EDWARDS AQUIFERS



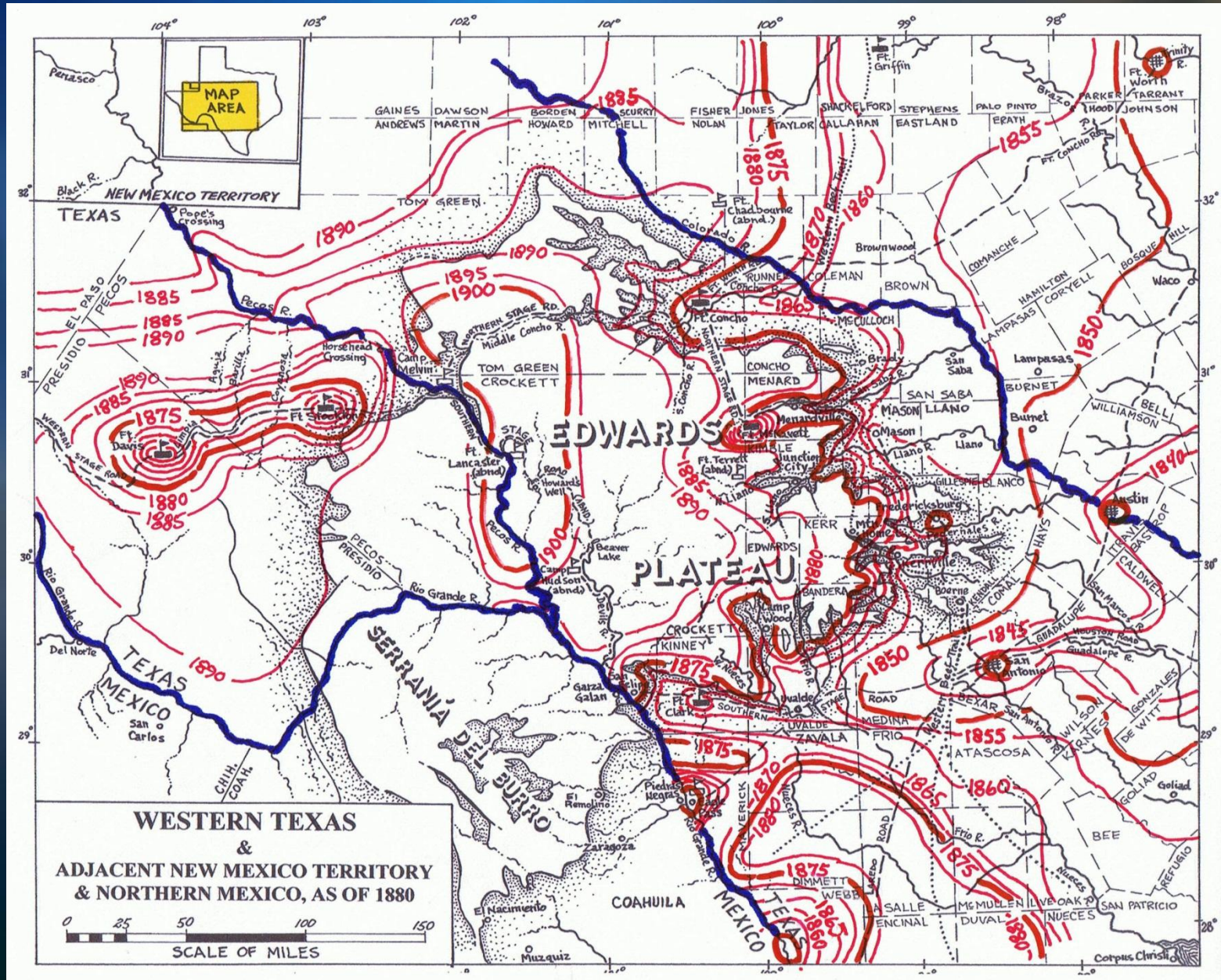
PHYSIOGRAPHY - EDWARDS PLATEAU



MILITARY POSTS, ROADS, & WESTERN BEEF TRAIL

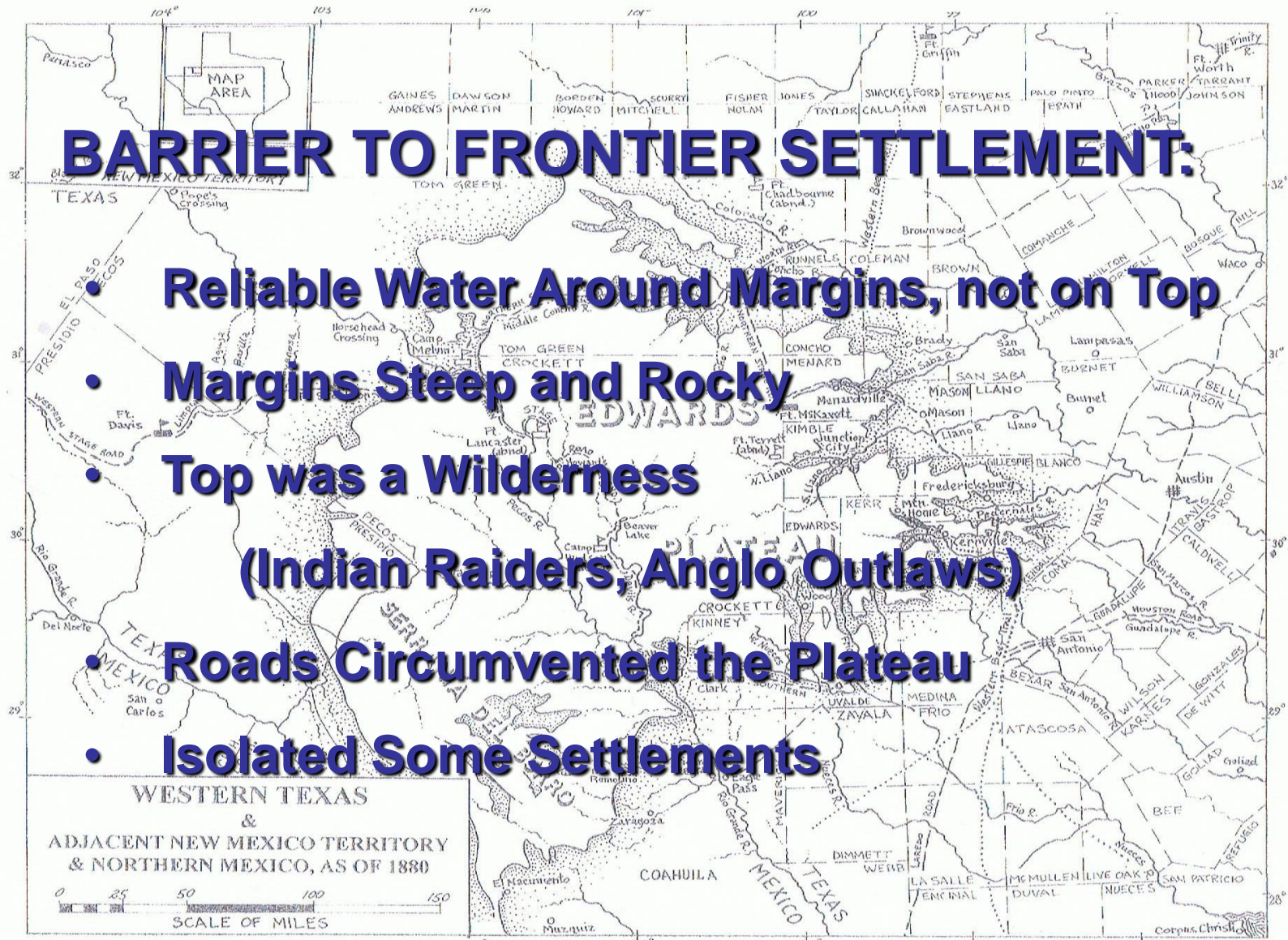


EDWARDS PLATEAU - A BARRIER TO SETTLEMENT



BARRIER TO FRONTIER SETTLEMENT:

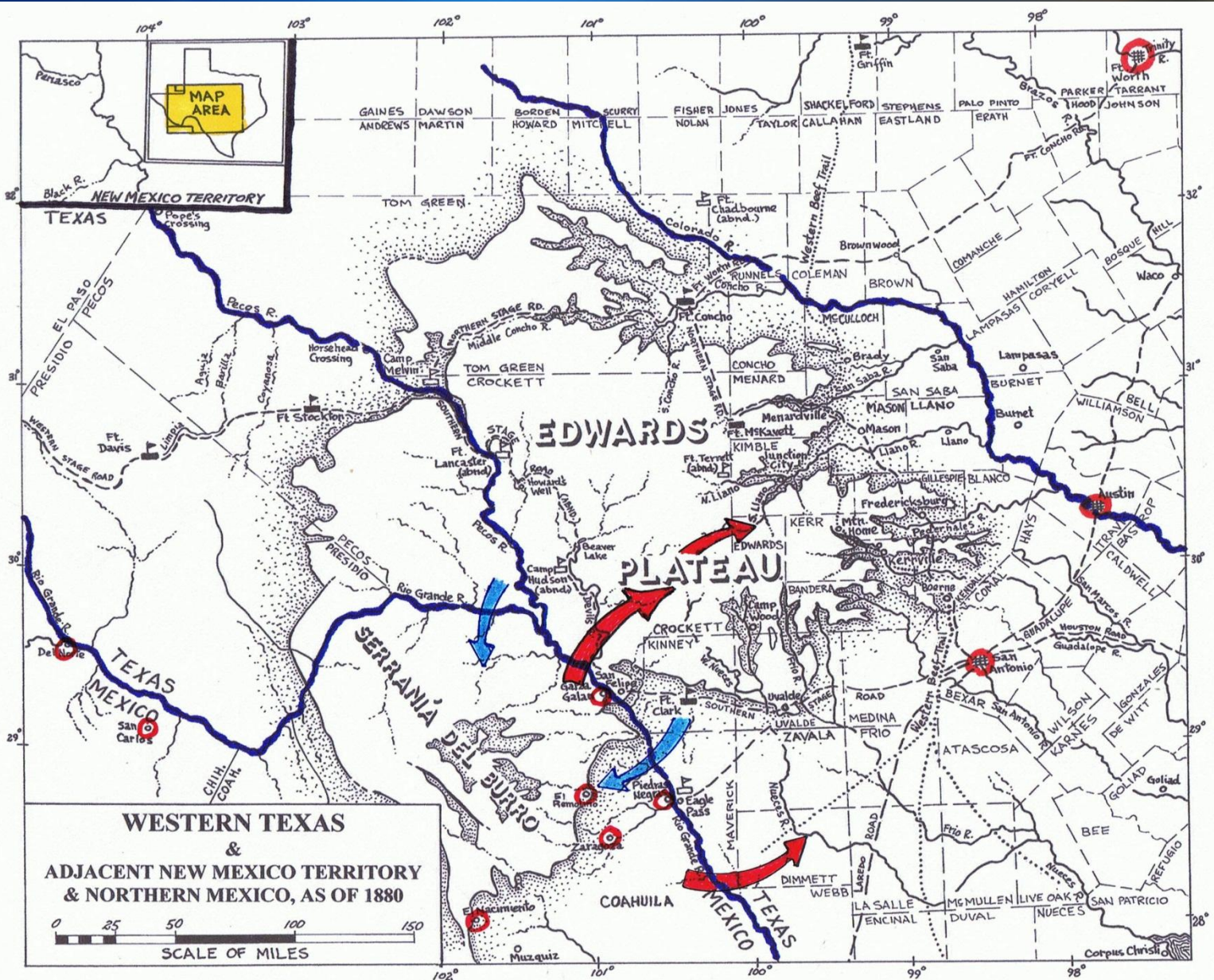
- Reliable Water Around Margins, not on Top
- Margins Steep and Rocky
- Top was a Wilderness
(Indian Raiders, Anglo Outlaws)
- Roads Circumvented the Plateau
- Isolated Some Settlements



INDIAN RAIDERS IN HILL COUNTRY- EDWARDS PLATEAU AFTER 1865

- > NORTHERN PLAINS INDIANS -- UNTIL ~1875**
Comanche (Penataka, Kwahadi), Kiowa
- > MEXICAN INDIANS -- UNTIL ~1882**
Kickapoo, Lipan, Seminole, Mescalero

MEXICAN INDIAN SETTLEMENTS AND BORDER RAIDS, 1865-1880



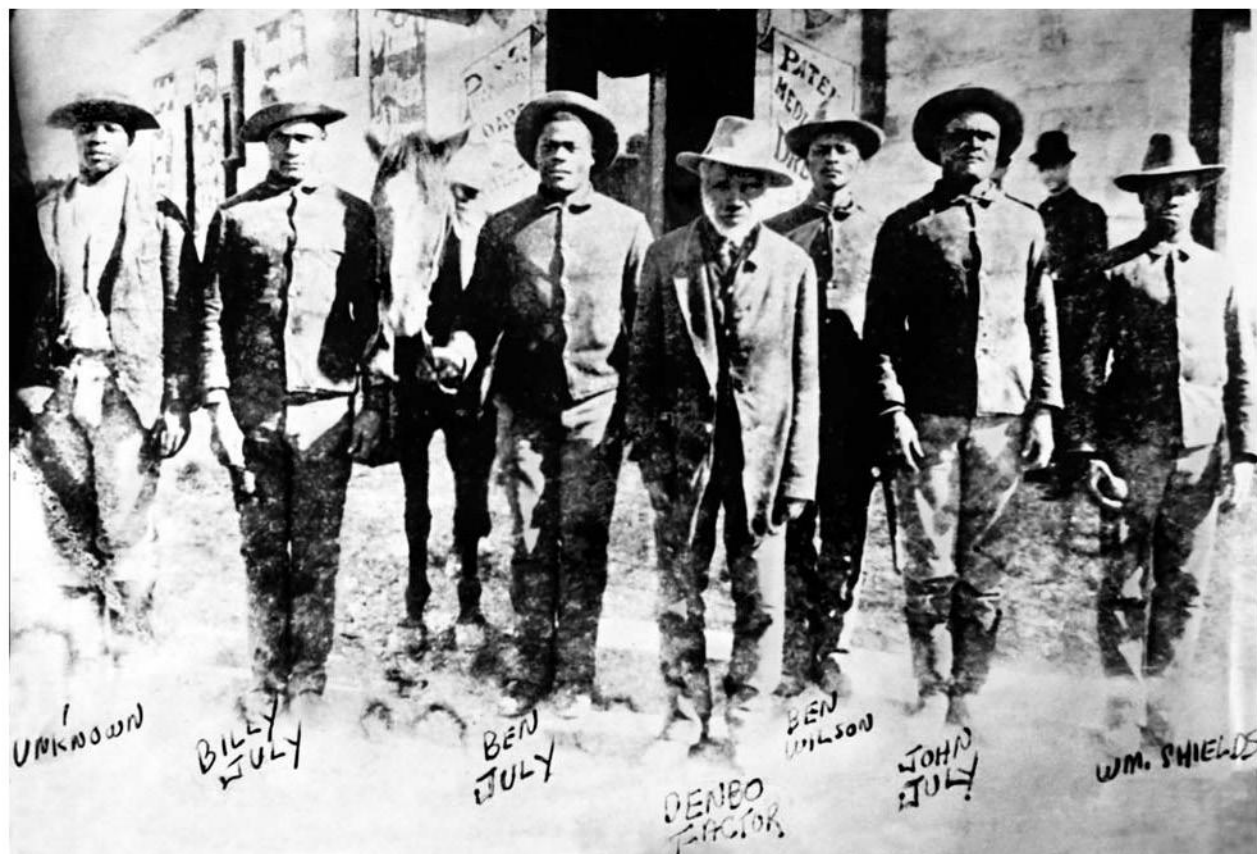


Figure 3: Black Seminole Scouts at Fort Clark, Texas, about 1885: left to right, Plenty Payne, Billy July, Ben July, Denbo Factor, Ben Wilson, John July, and William Shields (courtesy of Institute of Texan Cultures, University of Texas at San Antonio). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).

WHY WERE OUTLAWS ATTRACTED TO FORKS OF THE LLANO?

- 1. Unpopulated region**
- 2. Open range, ample streams for water**
- 3. Criminal markets accessible**
- 4. Natural hiding places around Plateau margins**
- 5. Adjacent wilderness (Plateau top)**
- 6. NO LAW**

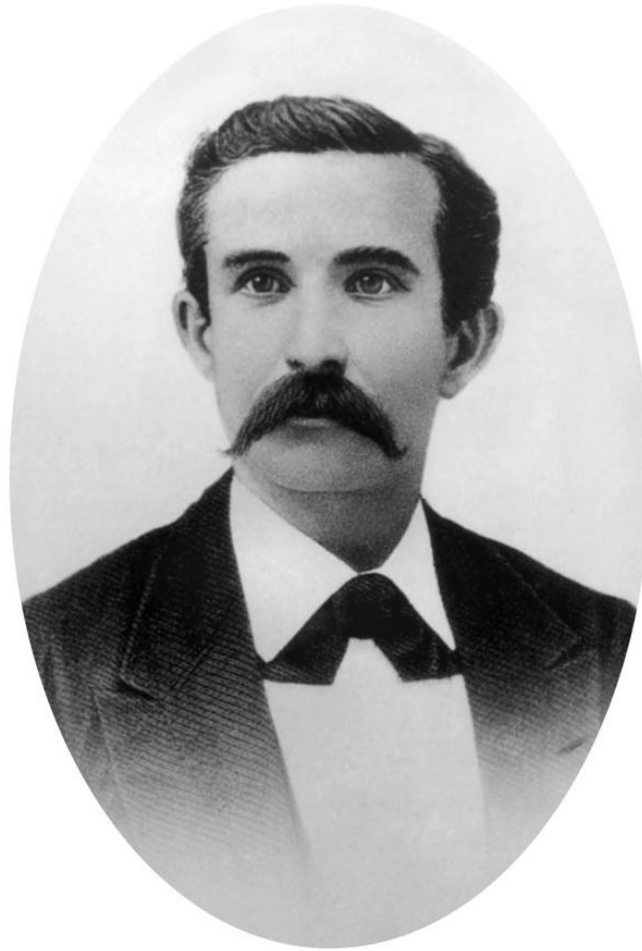
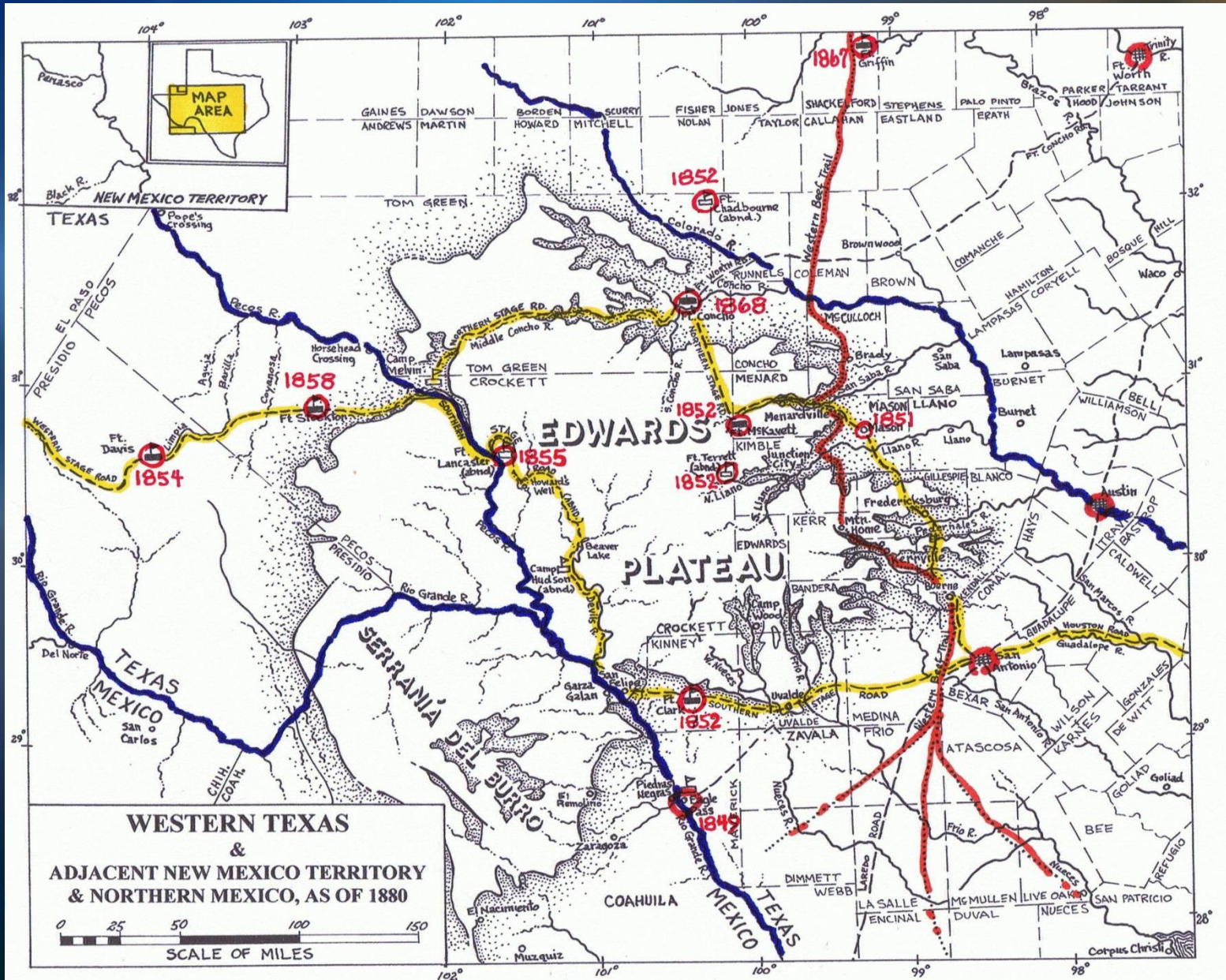


Figure 8: Major John B. Jones, Commander, Frontier Battalion, Texas Rangers, about 1875 (courtesy of Institute of Texan Cultures, University of Texas at San Antonio). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).

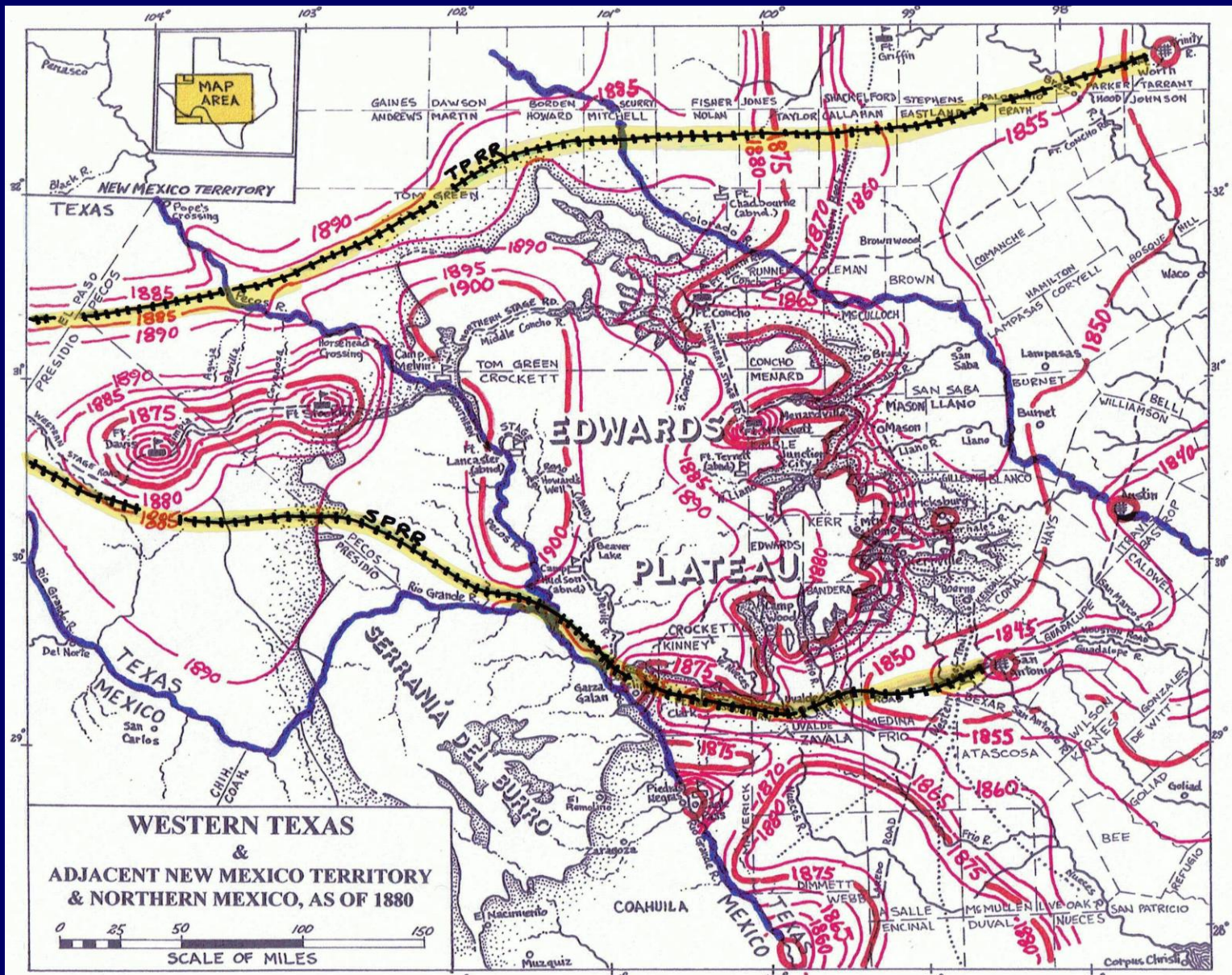
MILITARY POSTS, ROADS, & WESTERN BEEF TRAIL, 1875



END OF FRONTIER PERIOD, EDWARDS PLATEAU

- 1. IMPOSED ORDER ALLOWS RULE OF LAW**
- 2. RELIABLE WATER ON PLATEAU:**
 - **Cable-tool Drilling to Aquifer**
 - **Windmills Lift Water to Surface**
- 3. BARBED-WIRE FENCING**
- 4. SUPPRESSION OF MEXICAN INDIAN RAIDING**
- 5. RAILROADS (T.P. AND S.P.)**

CLOSE OF FRONTIER PERIOD, WEST TEXAS, 1882



Putting Human Faces and Events On the Historical Summary . . .

***. . . The Reckoning: The Triumph of Order
On the Texas Outlaw Frontier***

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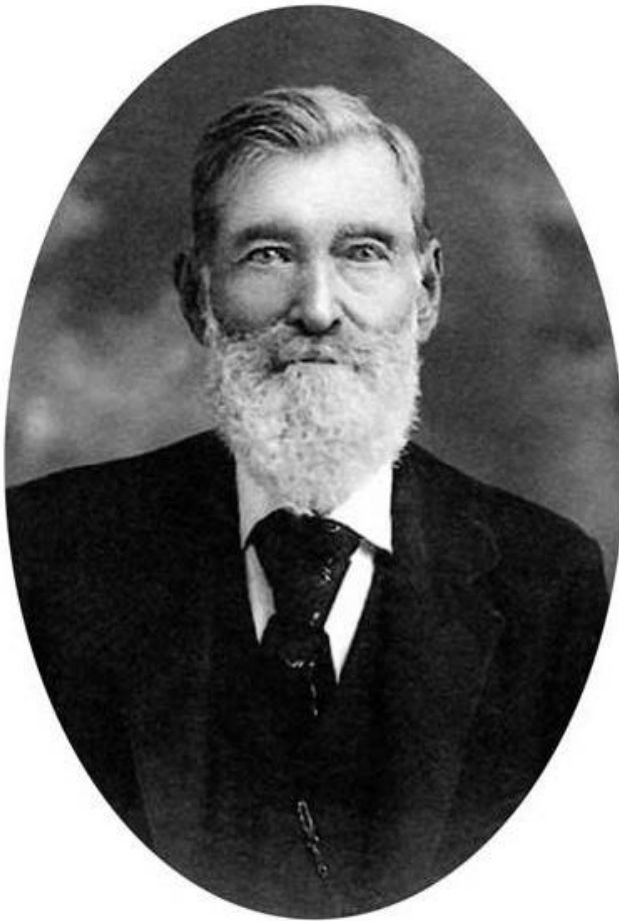


Figure 4: William and Mary Evaline Gordon Potter, mid-1870s (courtesy of Mary Lou Midkiff). Image digitally enhanced, with permission.



— from a C.S. Fly Photo

James Potter

*Came to Tombstone in 1881 with the
third herd of cattle John Slaughter brought from Texas*

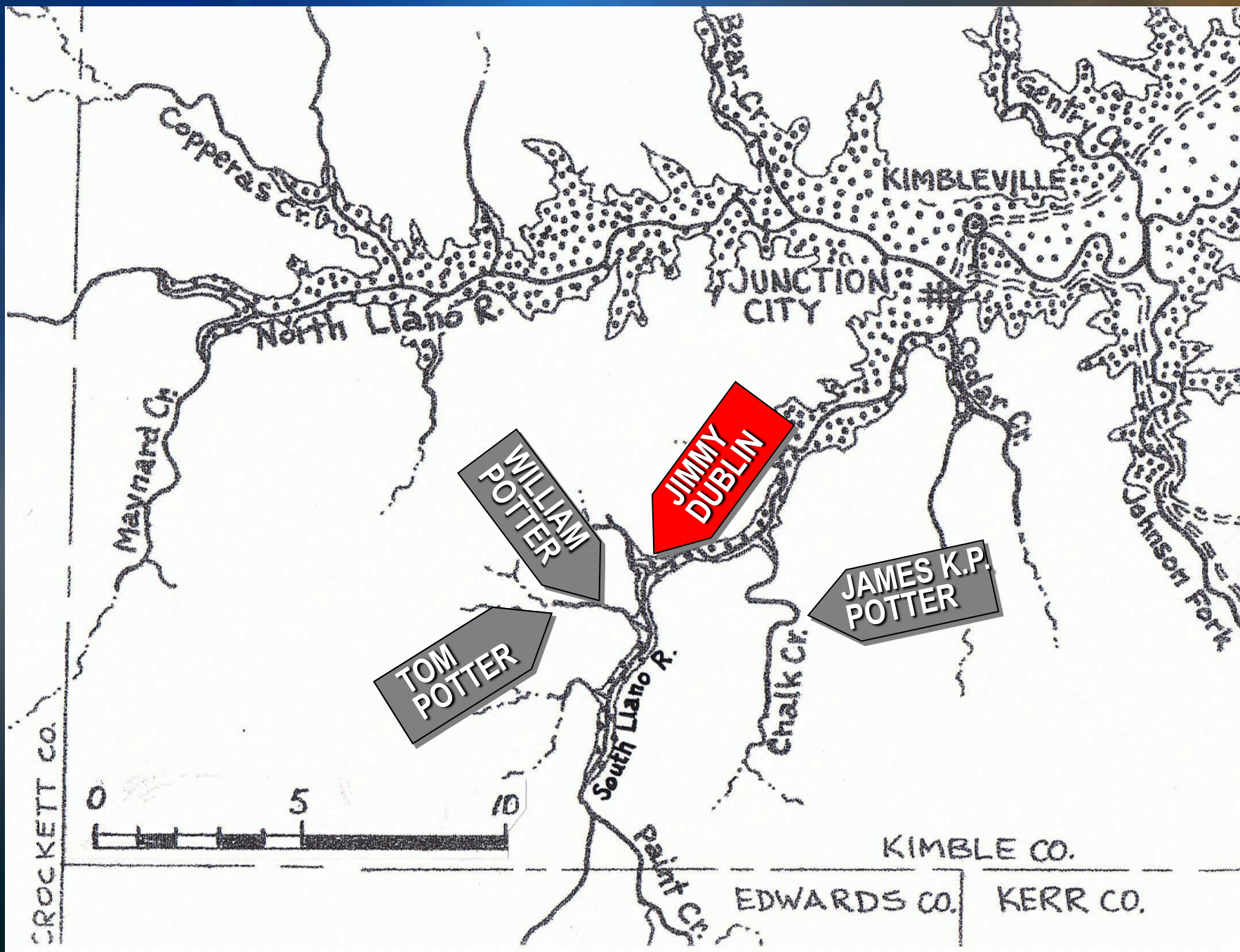




Figure 11: Roll (left) and Dell Dublin, about 1875 (courtesy of Frederica B. Wyatt, Kimble County Historical Society). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).

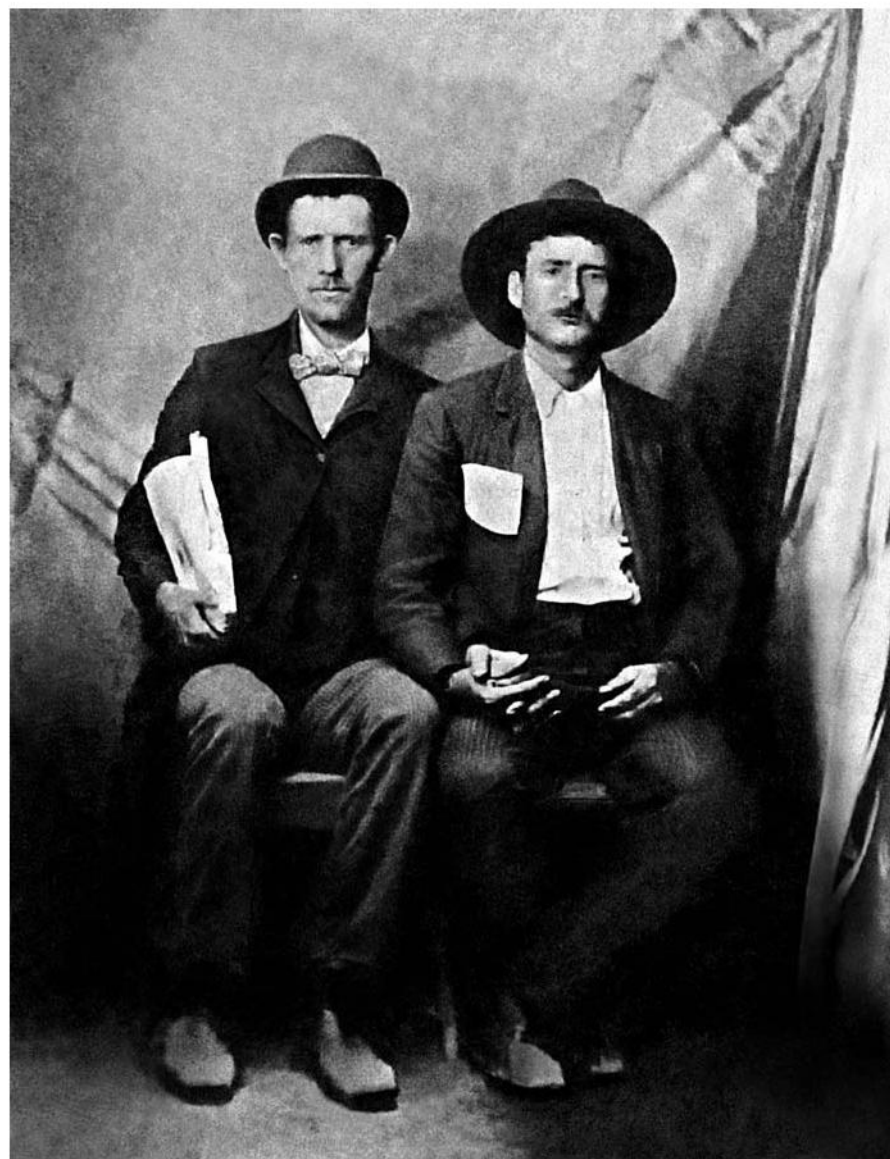
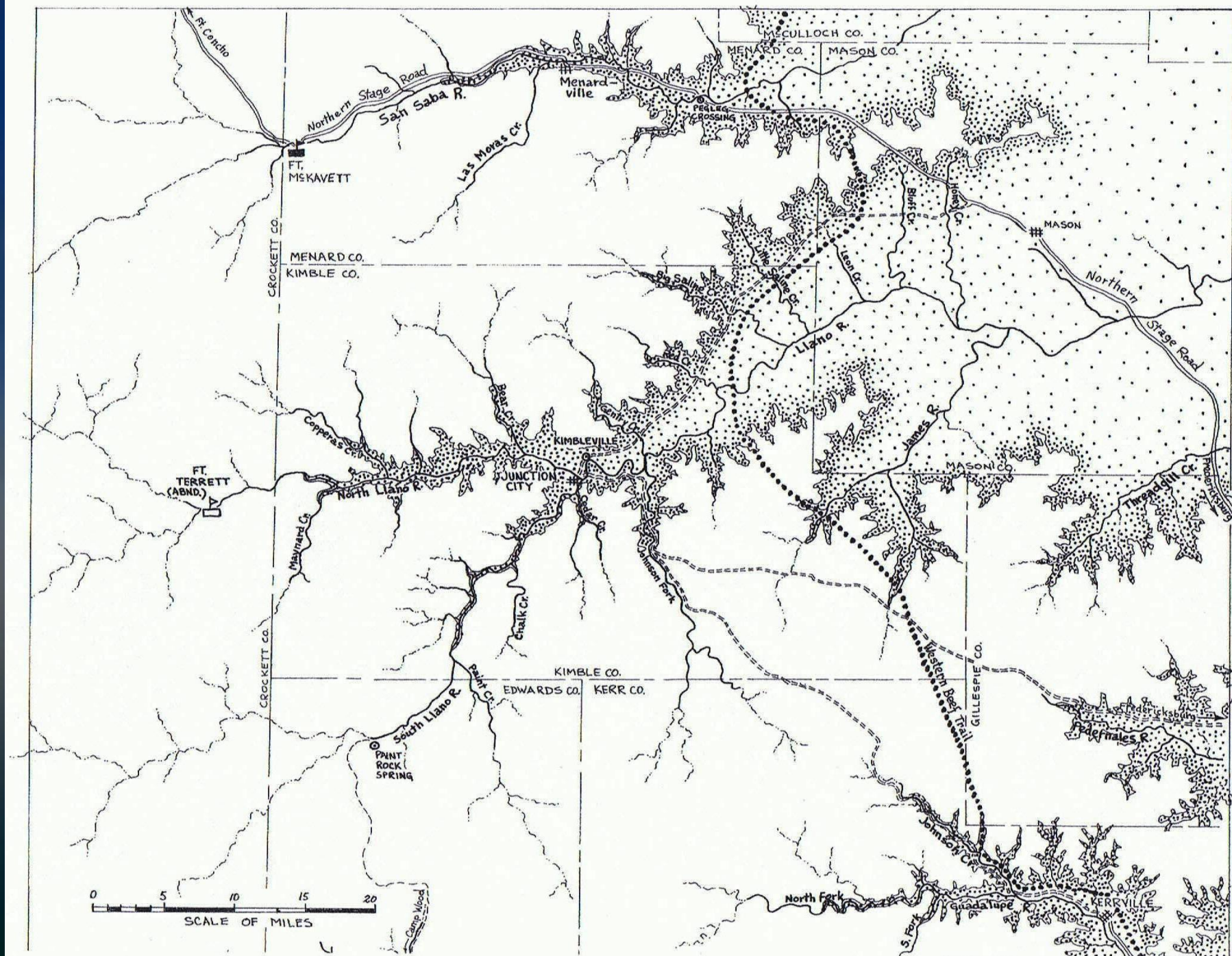


Figure 12: Roll (left) and Dell Dublin, about 1879 (courtesy of Frederica B. Wyatt, Kimble County Historical Society). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).





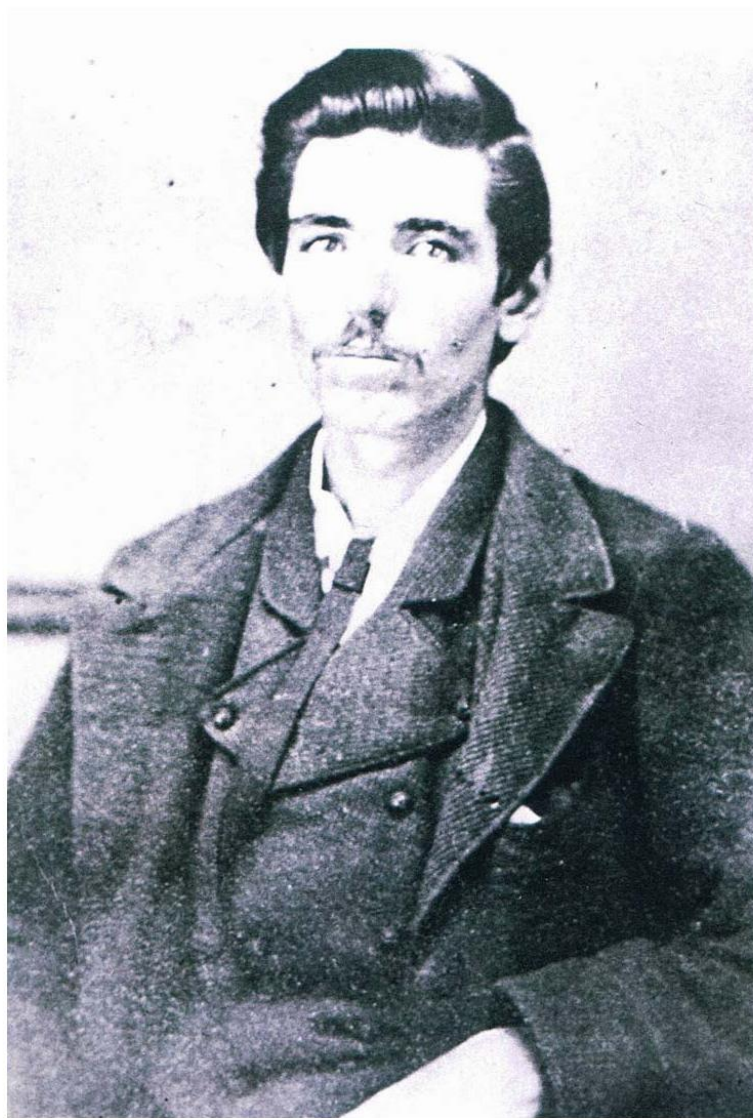


Figure 14: Frank Latta, first Sheriff of Kimble County, elected in February 1876, resigned eight months later, probably intimidated by threats on him and his family, the first of many early Kimble County officials in the first three years to resign their offices. Photo taken about 1880 (courtesy of Kimble County Historical Commission).



Figure 33: John A. and Martha B. Miller, about 1905; “Honest John” Miller was elected Justice of the Peace when Kimble County was organized in early 1876 and served on the first Grand Jury at the Kimble County Roundup. He and his wife were witnesses for the prosecution of the Pegleg stage robbers in August, 1880 (courtesy of Kimble County Historical Commission).

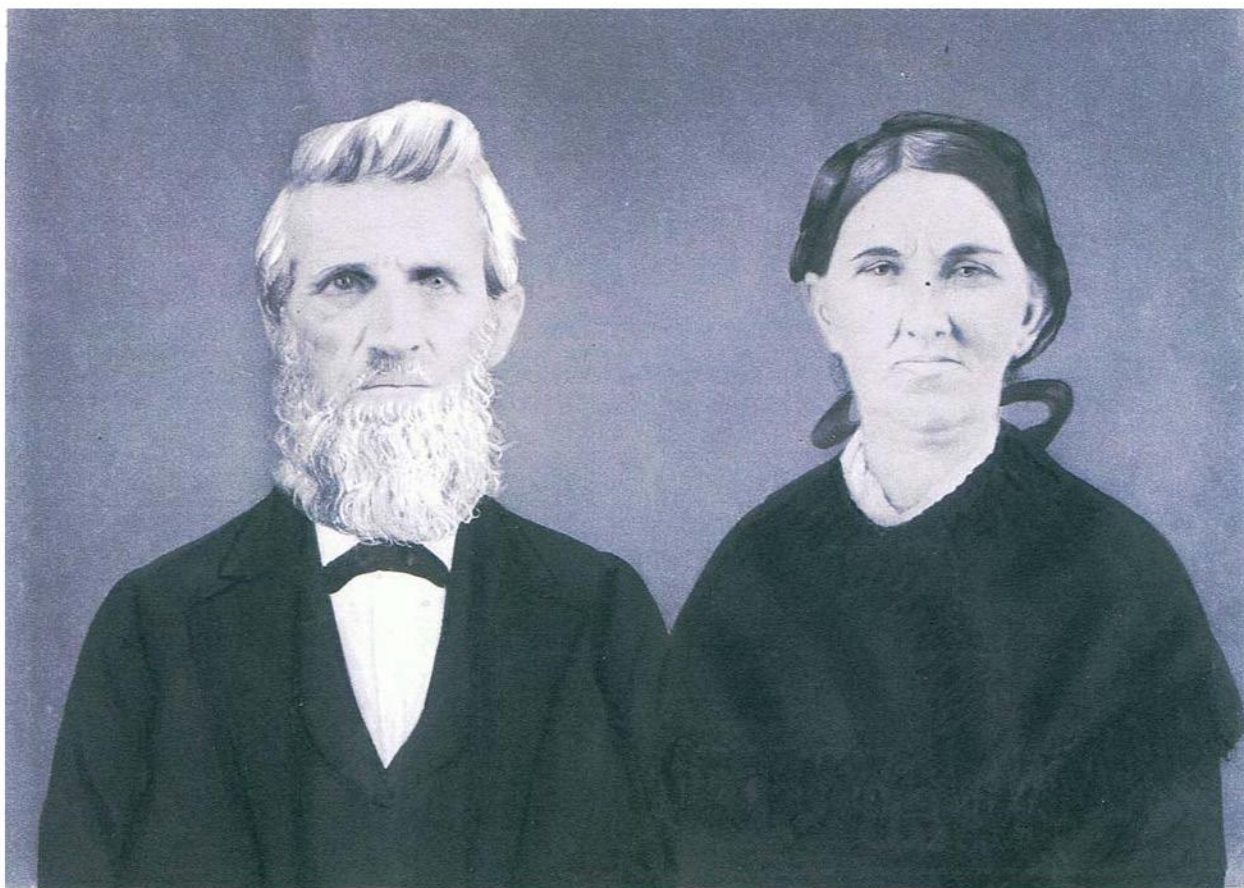
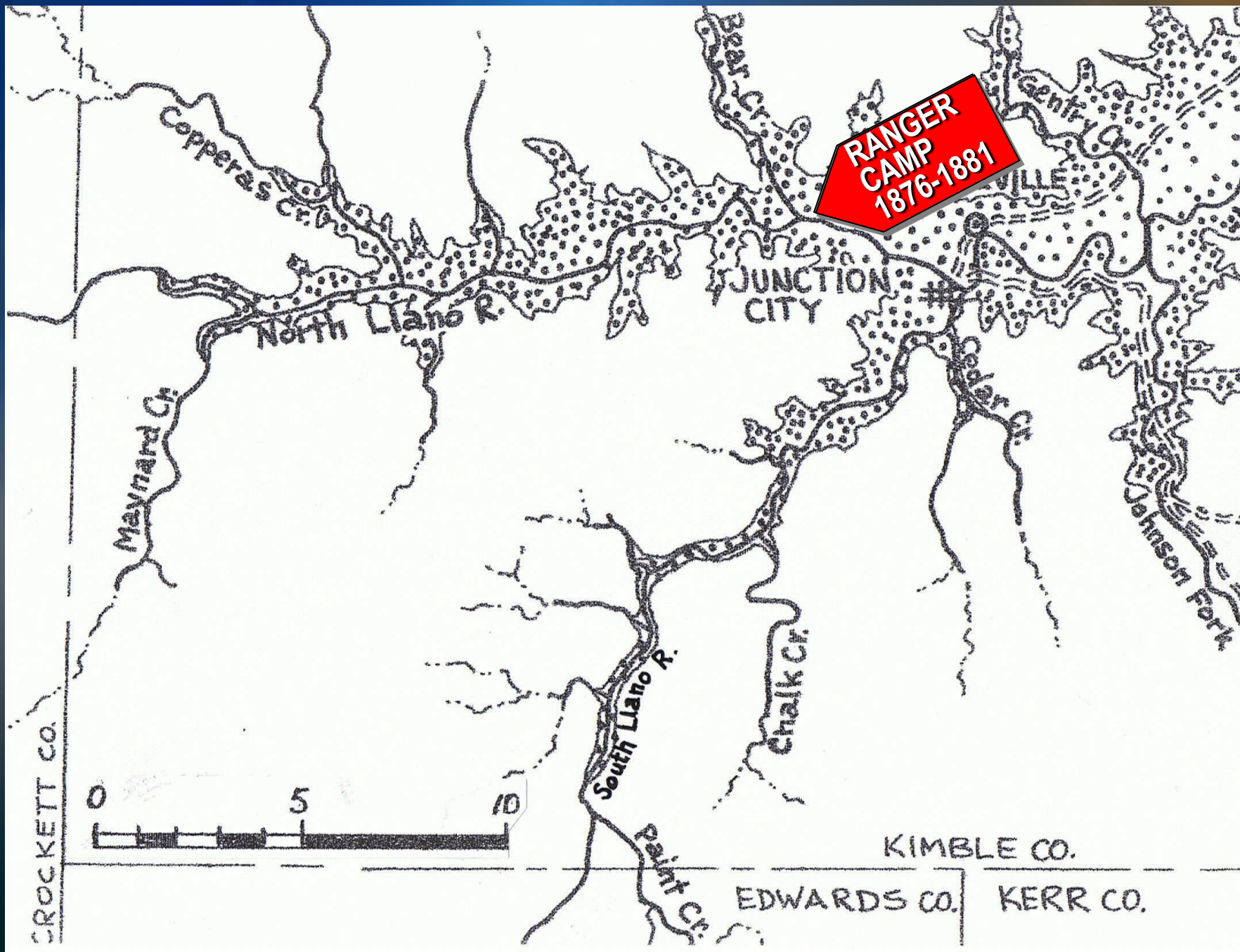
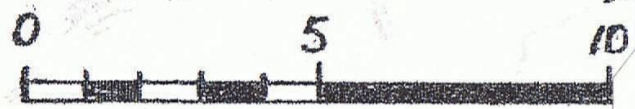


Figure 15: Ben F. and Sally C. Pepper, early settlers in the South Llano Valley, about 1890; Pepper, an influential citizen was one of the first to farm the river floodplains, and built the first two-storey stone house in the area (courtesy of Kimble County Historical Commission).



RANGER
CAMP
1876-1881

CROCKETT CO.



KIMBLE CO.

EDWARDS CO.

KERR CO.



Figure 22: Texas Rangers packing for a scout, Company D camp on San Saba River near Fort McKavett, Texas, 1878 (from Noah H. Rose Collection, courtesy of Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).

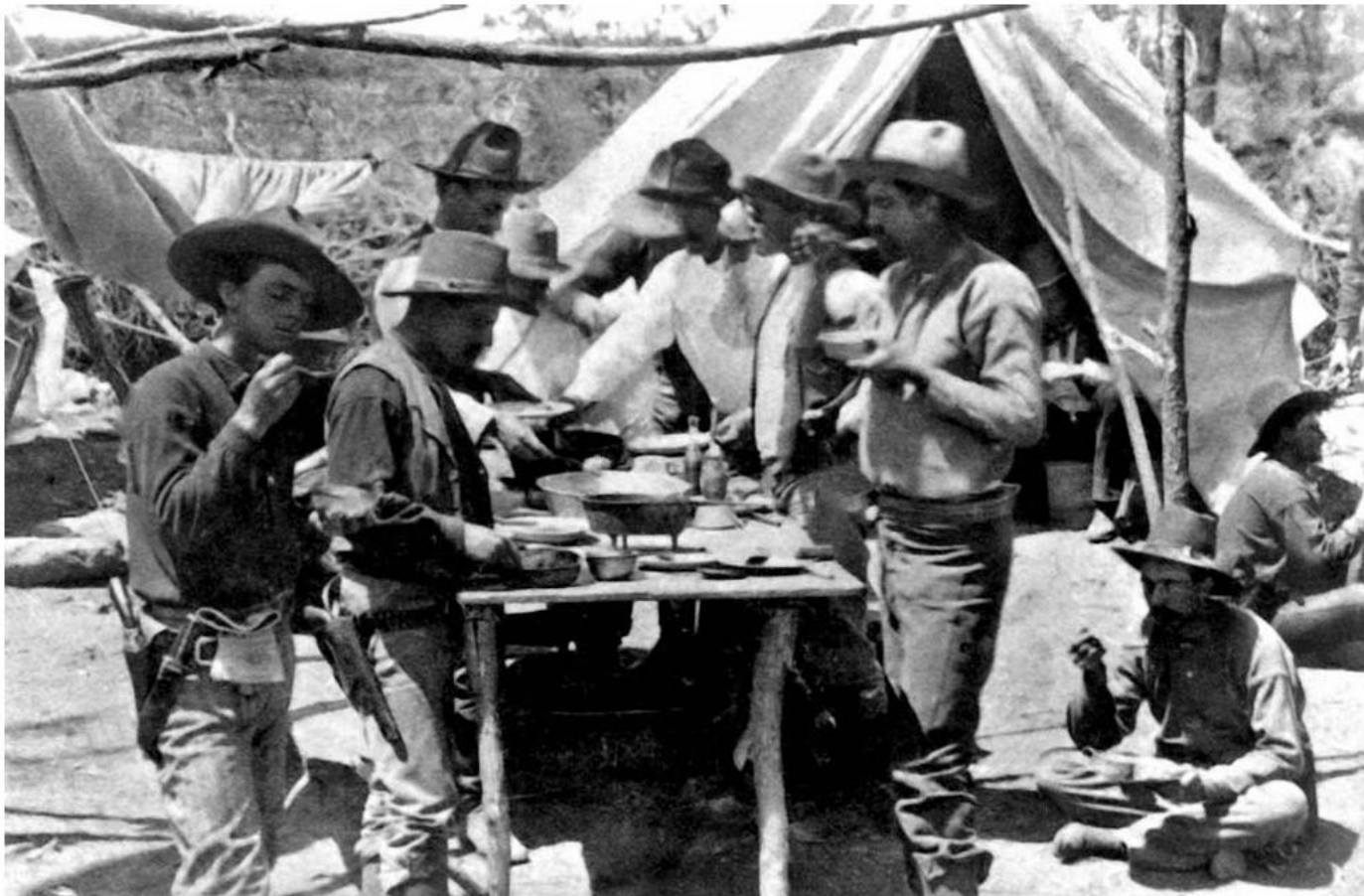


Figure 21: Texas Rangers at midday meal, Company D camp on San Saba River near Fort McKavett, Texas, 1878 (from Noah H. Rose Collection, courtesy of Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).



Figure 16: Lieutenant Frank Moore, commanding Company D, 1876-1877 (courtesy of Institute of Texan Cultures, University of Texas at San Antonio). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).

Names of Parties Interested in Stealing in Kimble
and forming Combinations as given by Ben Anderson

Family

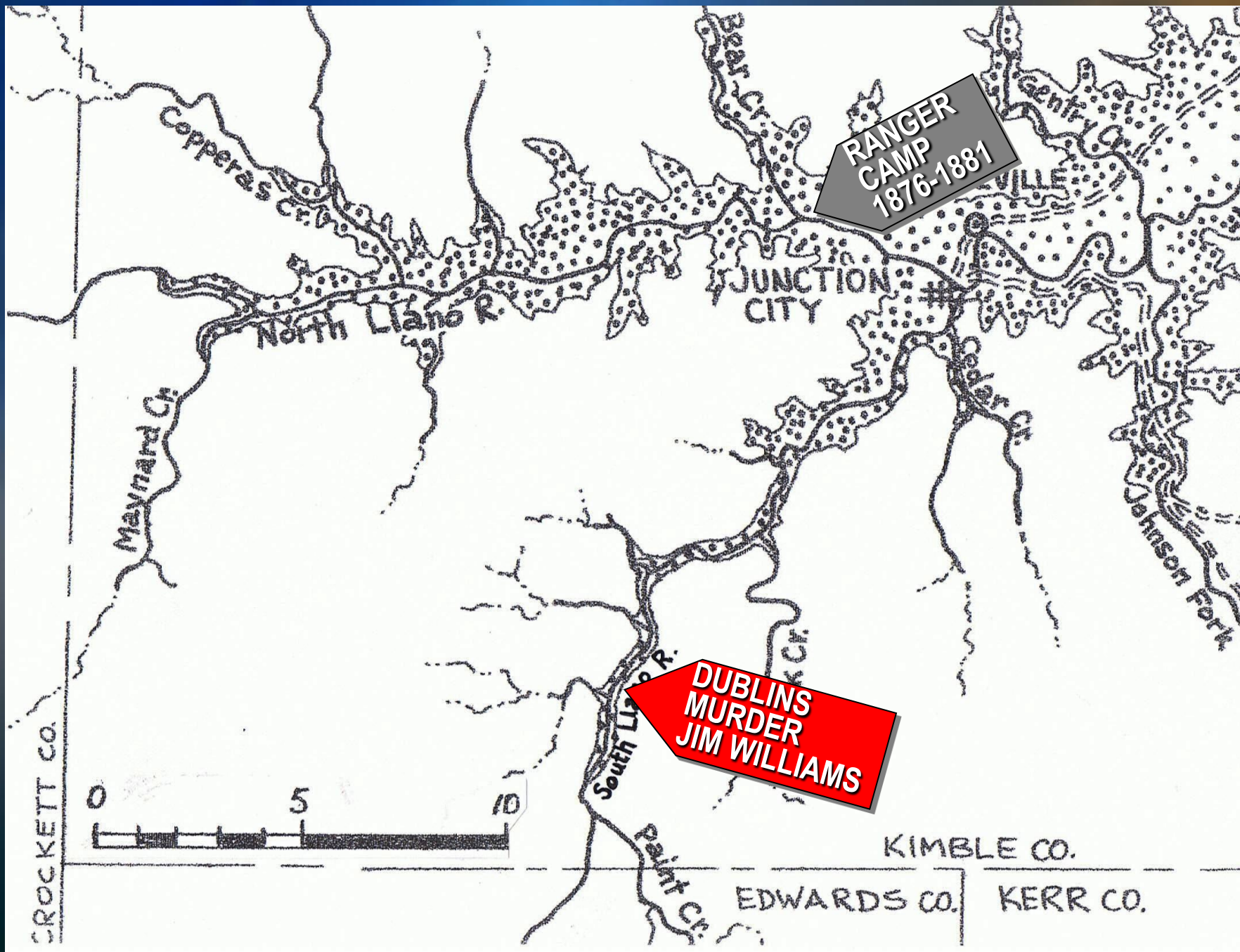
C. M. Little " 1
Bill Alkire " 2
Haygon " " 3
S. M. Womack " 4
Bill Hedgesforth " 5
Cotton " " 6
Butler " " 7
Potter, three boys " 10
Donlin, three boys " 13
Parland, two boys " 15
James Mc Meara " 16
Bill Taylor " 17
Marvin Middleton " 18
Louis Cast " 19
Cabbam two boys " 21
Joe Armstrong " 22
Jack Rundale " 23
Lon White " 24

George Burton " 25
Bill Rundale " 26
Black Bart " 27
High Brown " 28
Josh Davis " 29
John Miller " 30
Bill Deal " 31
Sam Walker " 32
C. O. Buchanan " 33
on C. Edwards " 33
J. C. Cathey " 34
Thomas Duffin " 35
J. B. Frank " 36
Paul L. L. L. " 37
James L. L. " 38
Porter L. L. " 39

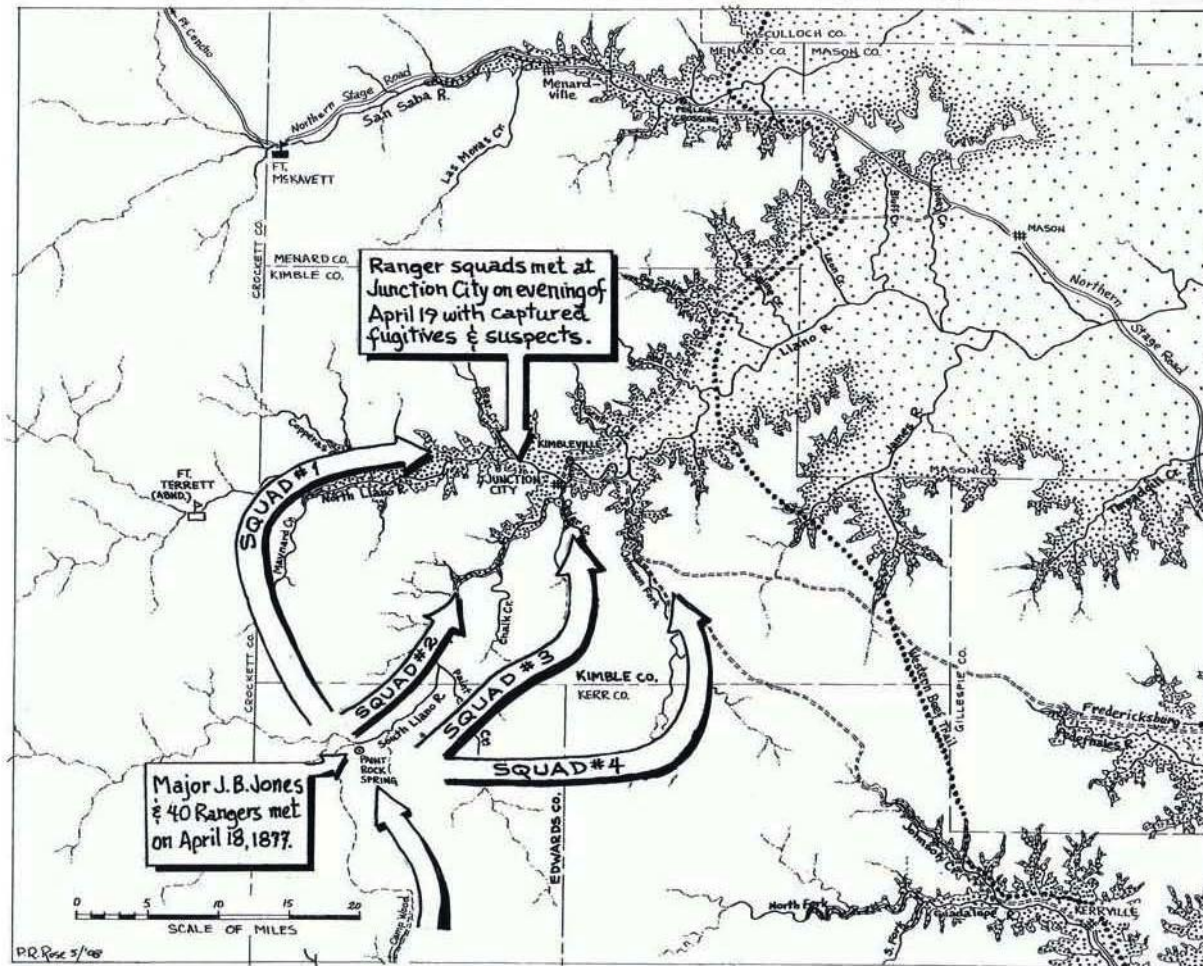
Per. H. W. Elliott Sheriff Mc...

Lieutenant Moore
Commanding Company D
Frontier Battalion

Figure 17: Suspect list given to Major John B. Jones, commanding the Frontier Battalion, Texas Rangers, by Lieutenant Frank Moore, commanding Company D. This "hit list" was provided by prisoner Ben Anderson to Menard County (Deputy) Sheriff H. W. Elliott, who passed it on to Lieutenant Moore, probably in April, 1877, for use in the Kimble County Roundup. In left column of names, note "Potter, three boys" followed by "Doulin, three boys". (Suspect list courtesy of Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin).



THE KIMBLE COUNTY ROUNDUP, DAY ONE (APRIL 19, 1877)



Map 6: Kimble County Round Up. On the first day of the operation four squads of Rangers swept the north- and east-draining streams of the Llano watershed, and met, with their prisoners, at Junction City. On the second day, Major Jones sent squads to scour the stream valleys on the north side of the Llano: Copperas, Bear, Gentry, Red, and Big Saline Creeks. Lt. Frank Moore brought a detachment of Company D Rangers to Junction City on the second day to serve as guards of the 41 captured suspects, pending their trials the following week.



Figure 18: Judge W. A. Blackburn, Judge of 17th Judicial District of Texas, 1876 - 1896, early 1880s; Judge Blackburn presided at the first District Court session held in Kimble County, and all subsequent sessions for 19 years (courtesy of Talley Press, San Angelo, Texas). Image digitally enhanced, with permission.

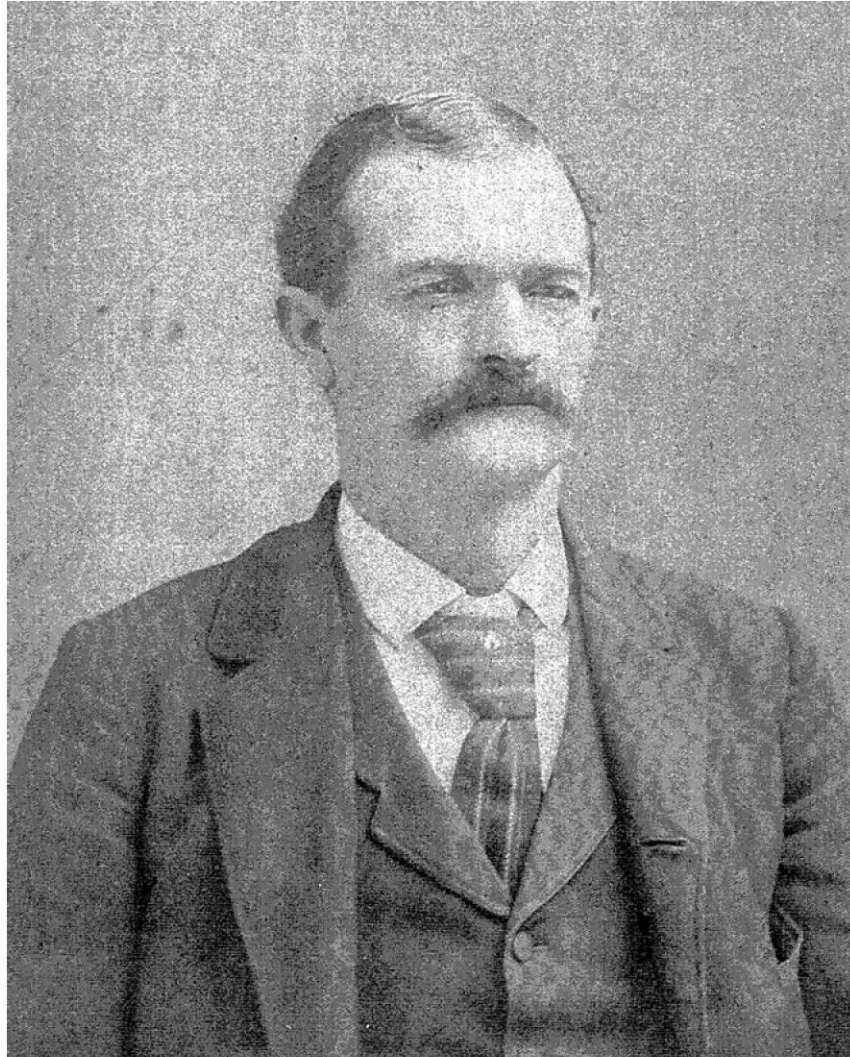


Figure 24: John B. Gorman, Sheriff of Kimble County 1877-1880; 1882-1884. Gorman was appointed when J. M. Reynolds was forced to resign by Major John B. Jones and District Judge W. A. Blackburn; photo taken about 1880 (courtesy of Kimble County Historical Commission).

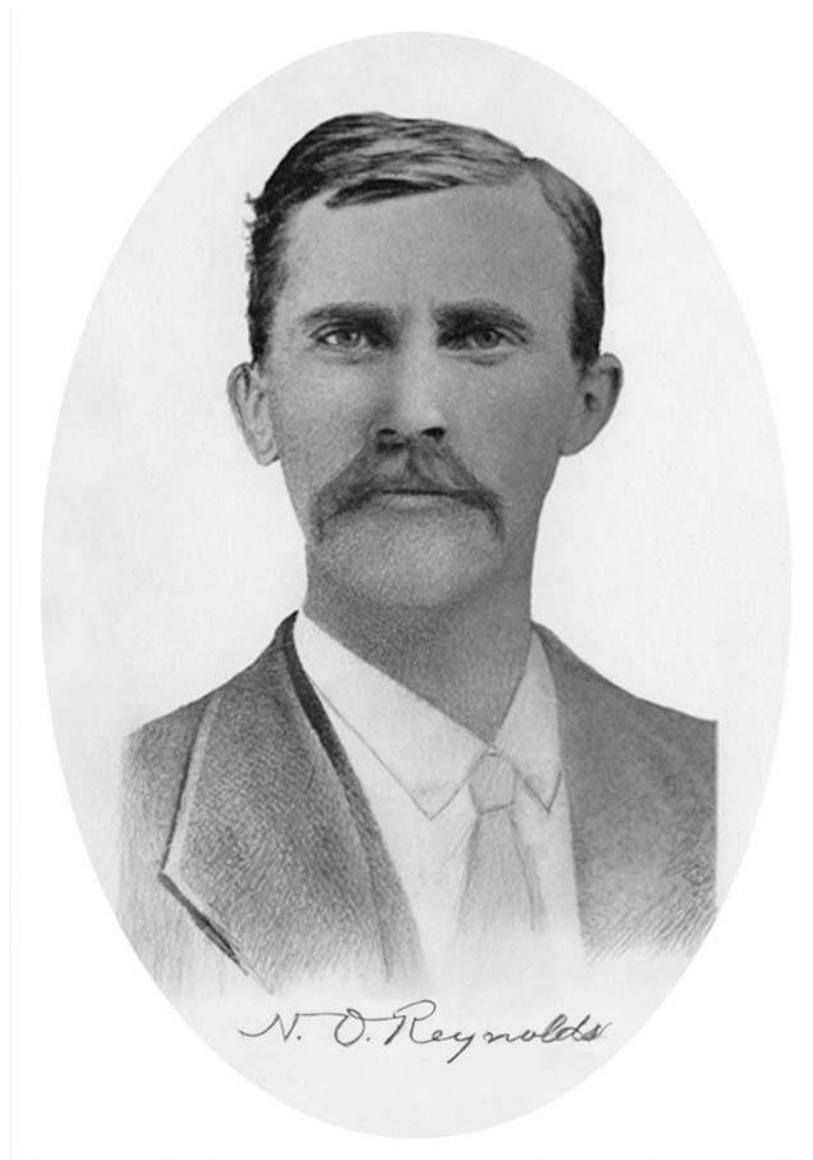


Figure 19: Lieutenant Nelson O. Reynolds, Commander, Company E, Frontier Battalion, Texas Rangers, about 1875 (courtesy of Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).



Figure 20: Corporal James B. Gillett, Company D, Frontier Battalion, Texas Rangers, on his horse, "Dusty", 1879 (from Noah H. Rose Collection, courtesy of Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).

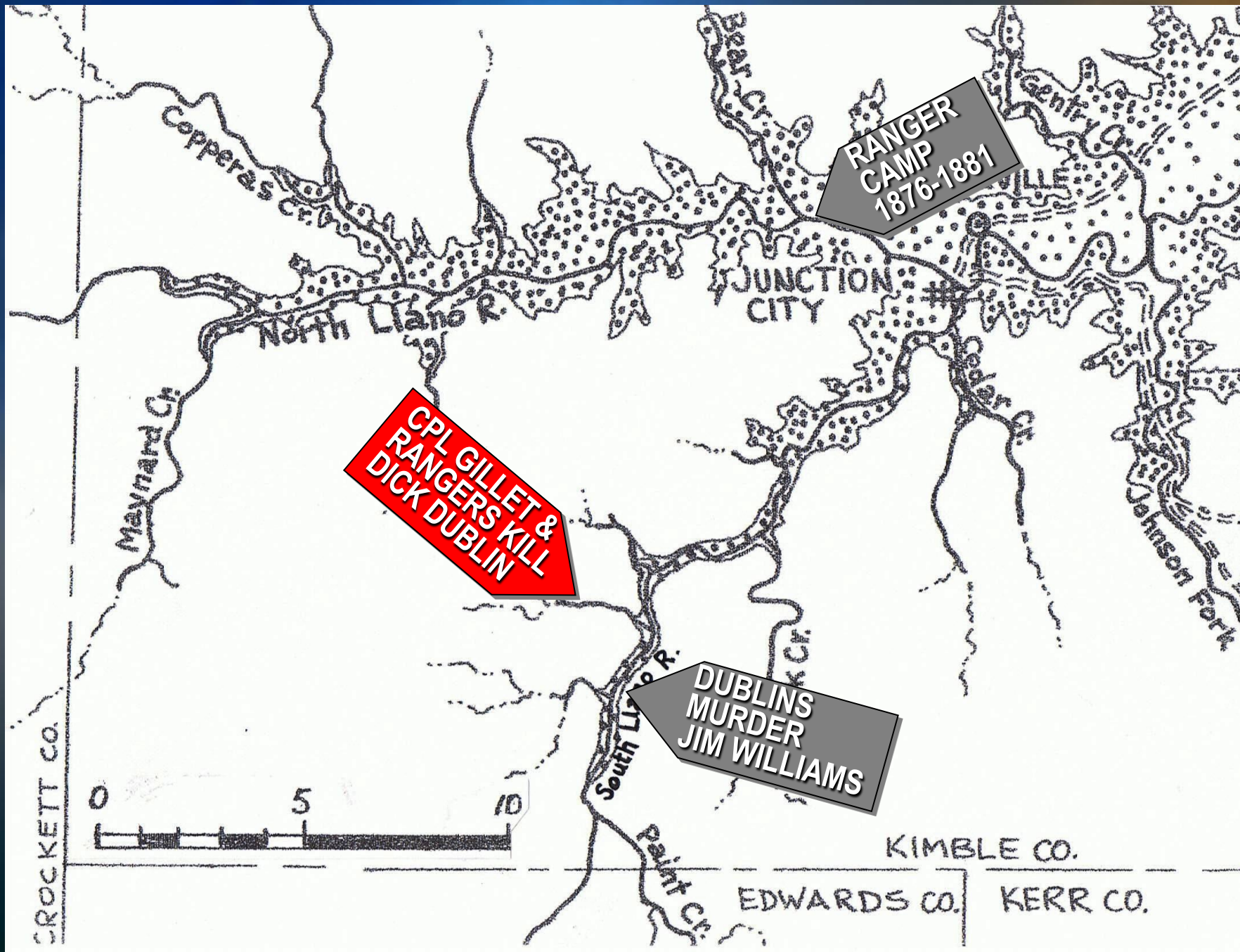




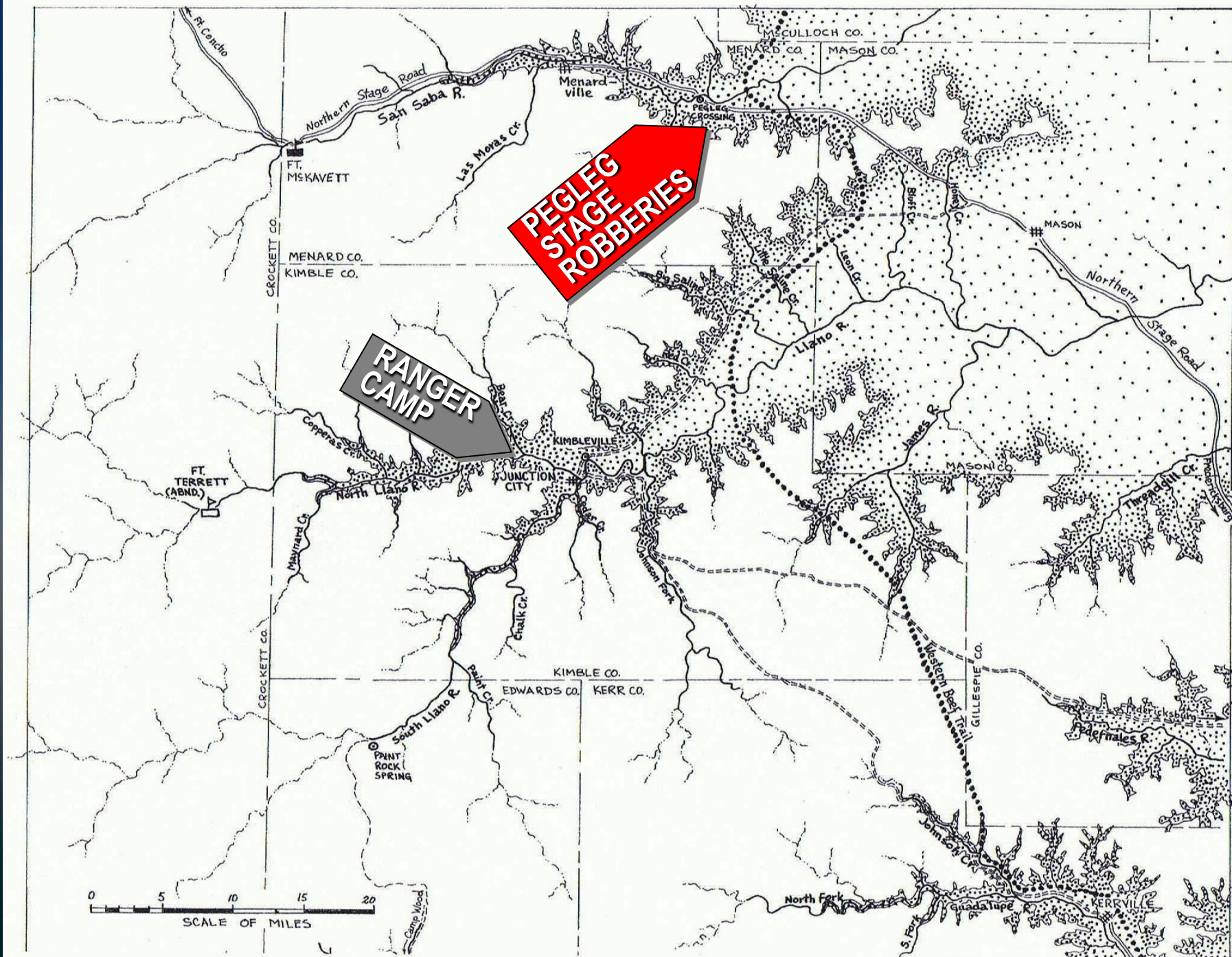
Figure 9: Captain Dan W. Roberts, Commander, Company D, Frontier Battalion, Texas Rangers, May, 1880 (courtesy of Institute of Texan Cultures, University of Texas at San Antonio). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).

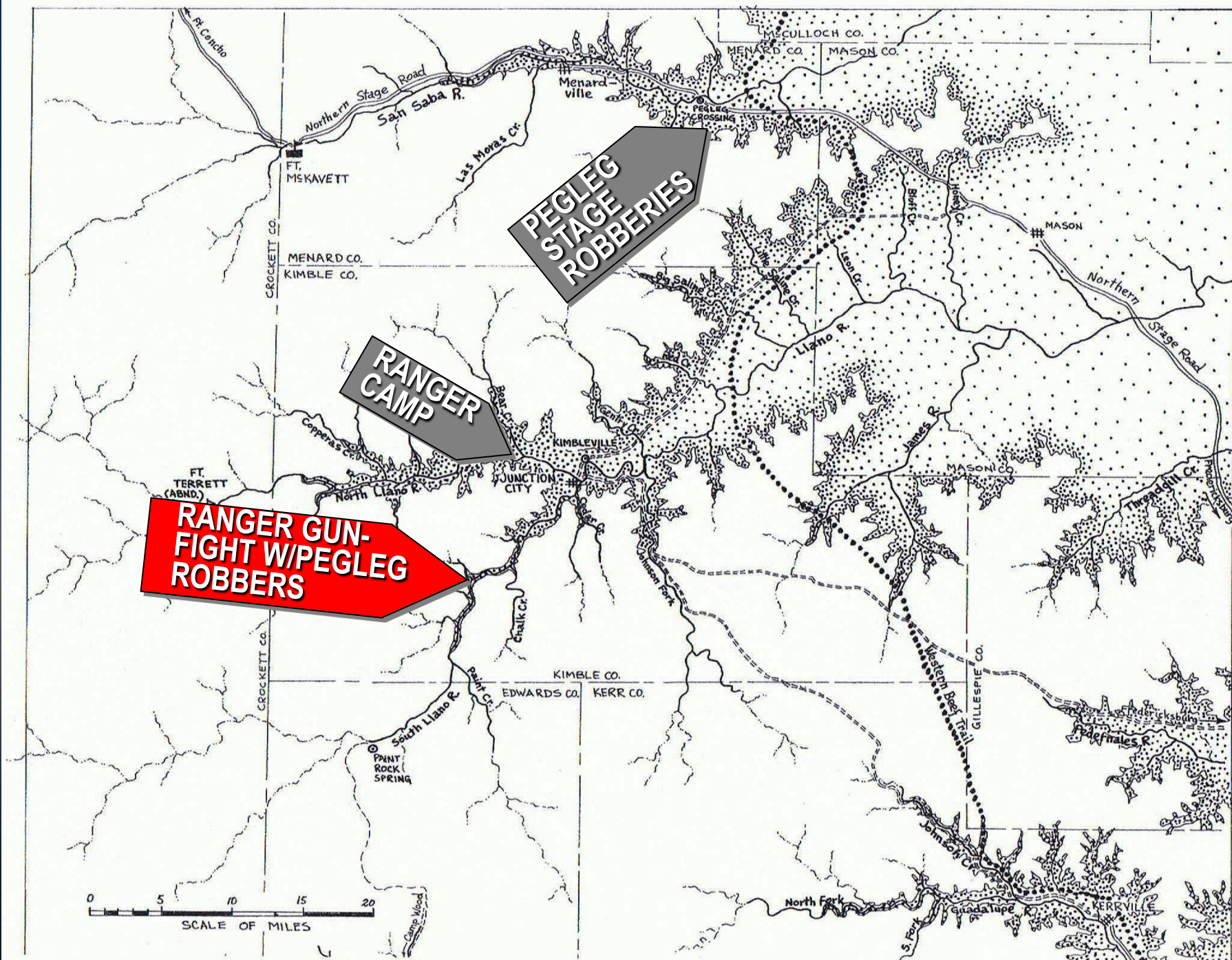
STAGECOACH AT BEN FICKLIN (FT. CONCHO), 1876





Figure 29: Stagecoach in front of Nimitz Hotel, Fredericksburg, Texas, about 1885. In 1876 - 1879, stagecoaches such as this one were robbed repeatedly near Pegleg Station on the San Saba River, about 12 miles east of Menard, Texas. The Nimitz Hotel was the last “civilized” stop for westbound travelers from San Antonio until they arrived at El Paso, about a week later (courtesy of American History Center, University of Texas, Austin). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).





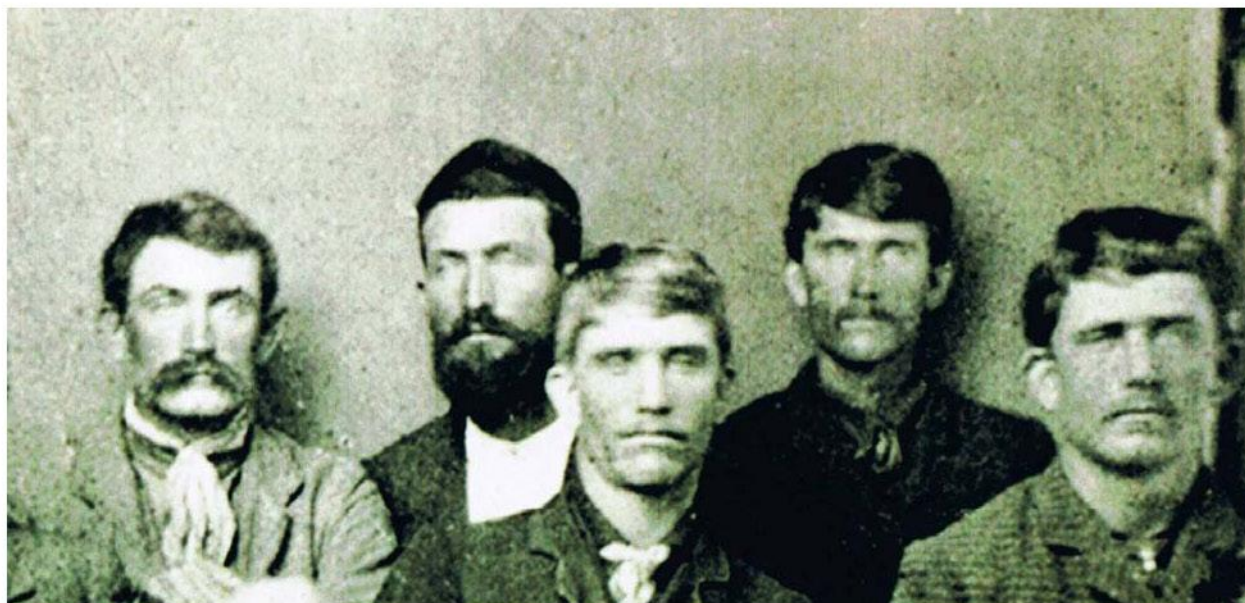


Figure 31: Ruben H. "Rube" Boyce (far left), with brothers, about 1879 (courtesy of Frederica B. Wyatt). An accomplice of the Dublins and Potters, Boyce was arrested, charged with U. S. Mail robbery, and confined in the Austin jail, from which he made a spectacular escape on January 4, 1880, aided by his wife, Adeline. Image digitally enhanced, with permission.

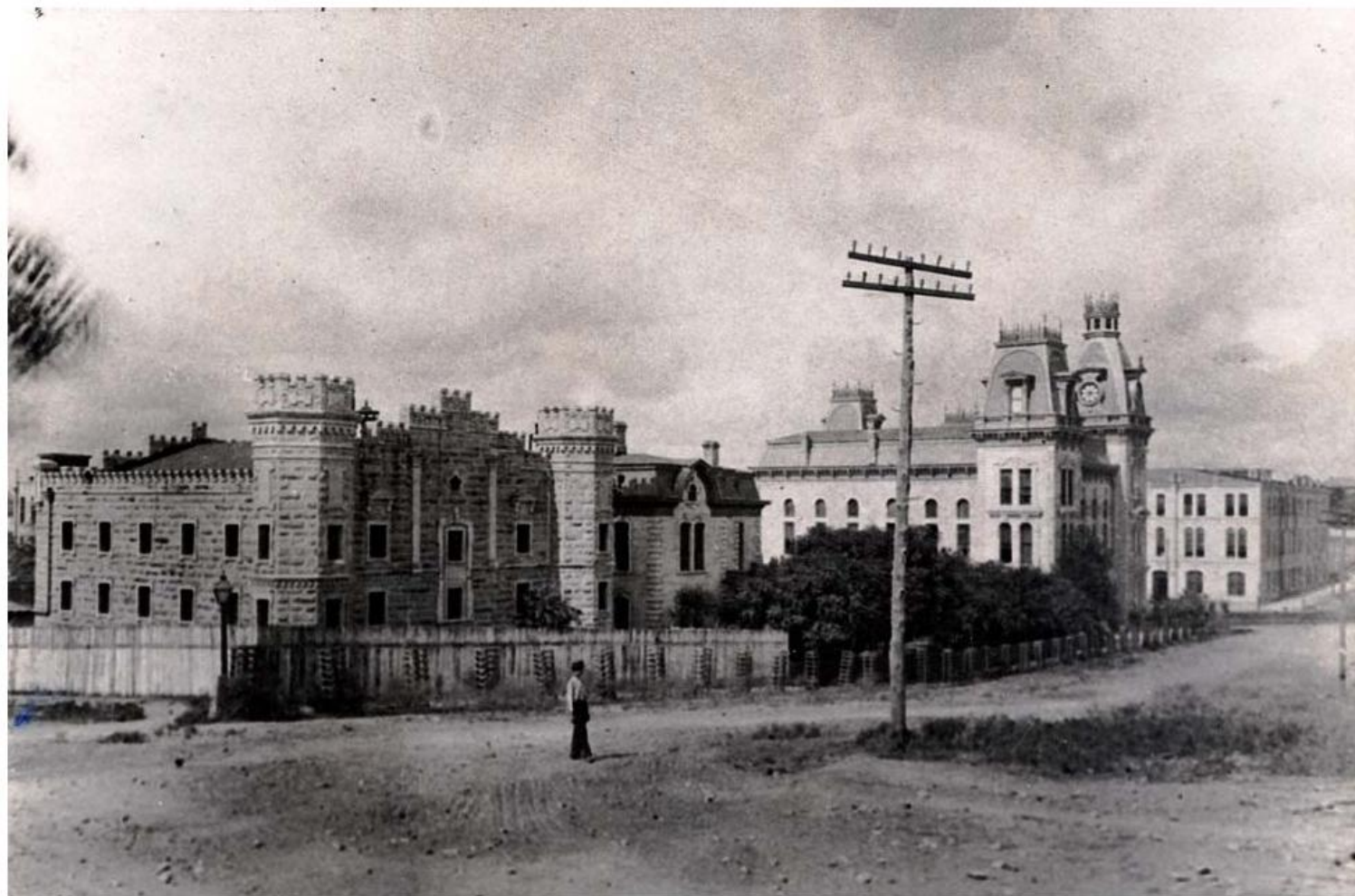
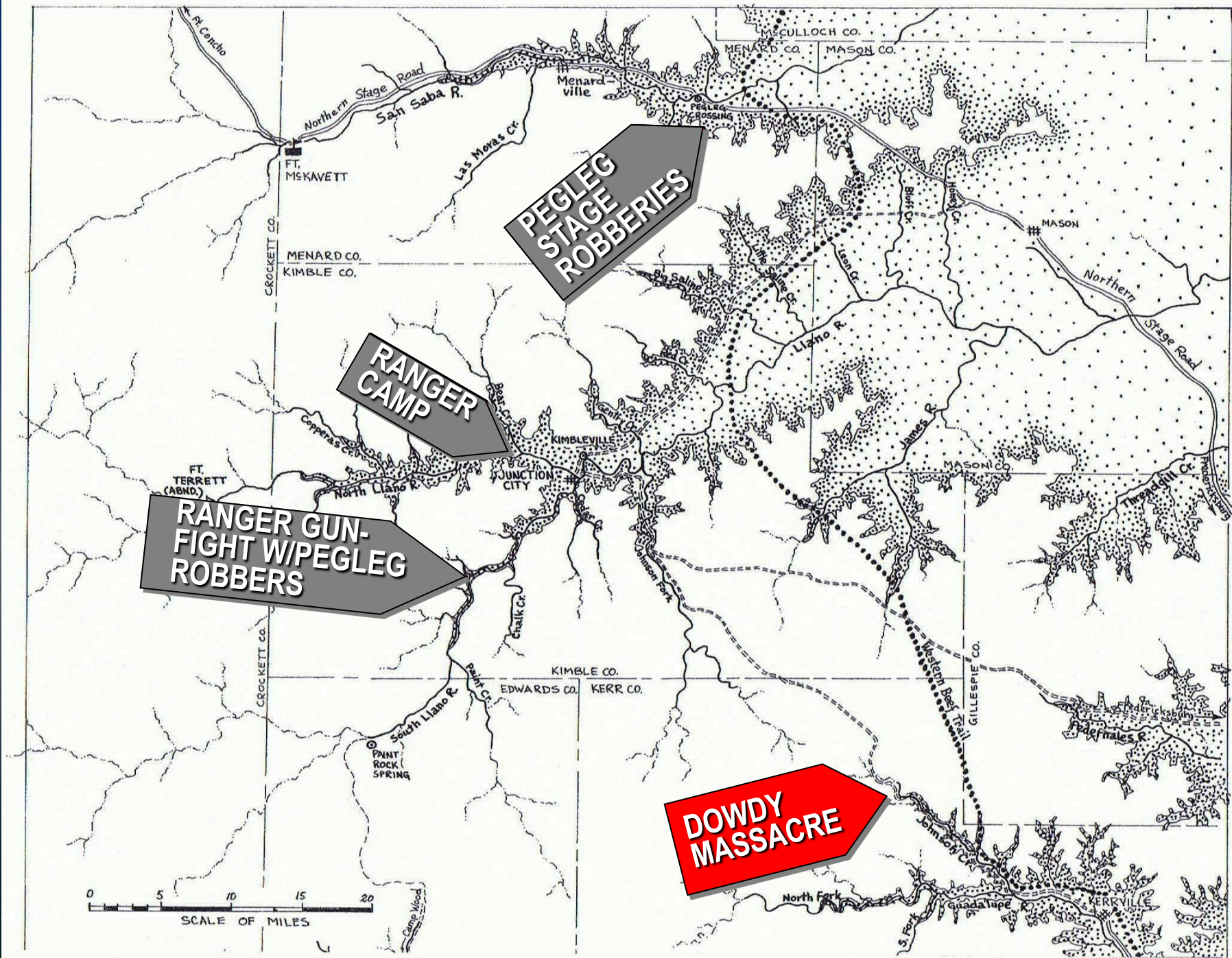


Figure 30: Travis County jail, next to Travis County courthouse (in background), corner of 11th and Brazos Streets, Austin, Texas, in about 1900. This is where the suspects in the Pegleg robberies (Mack and Bill Potter, Roll and Dell Dublin, Matthew Wilkins and Rube Boyce) were kept in late 1879 and 1880, while awaiting their trial in Federal Court; with the aid of his wife, Boyce staged a dramatic escape from this jail on January 4, 1880 (courtesy of Austin History Center, Austin, Texas). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).



**PEGLEG
STAGE
ROBBERIES**

**RANGER
CAMP**

**RANGER GUN-
FIGHT W/PEGLEG
ROBBERS**

**DOWDY
MASSACRE**

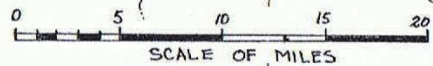




Figure 26: Original Dowdy home site at head of Johnson Creek, northwestern Kerr County, Texas, looking north. Johnson Creek lies 50 yards to the right (east). This is the location where James E. and Susan C. Dowdy first brought their family to Kerr County in early October, 1878; the massacre took place about one-half mile to the left (west) of this site, up on the easterly slopes of the Edwards Plateau. The original cabin and tent were located about halfway between the windmill and the large tree to the right (photo by the author, 2008).



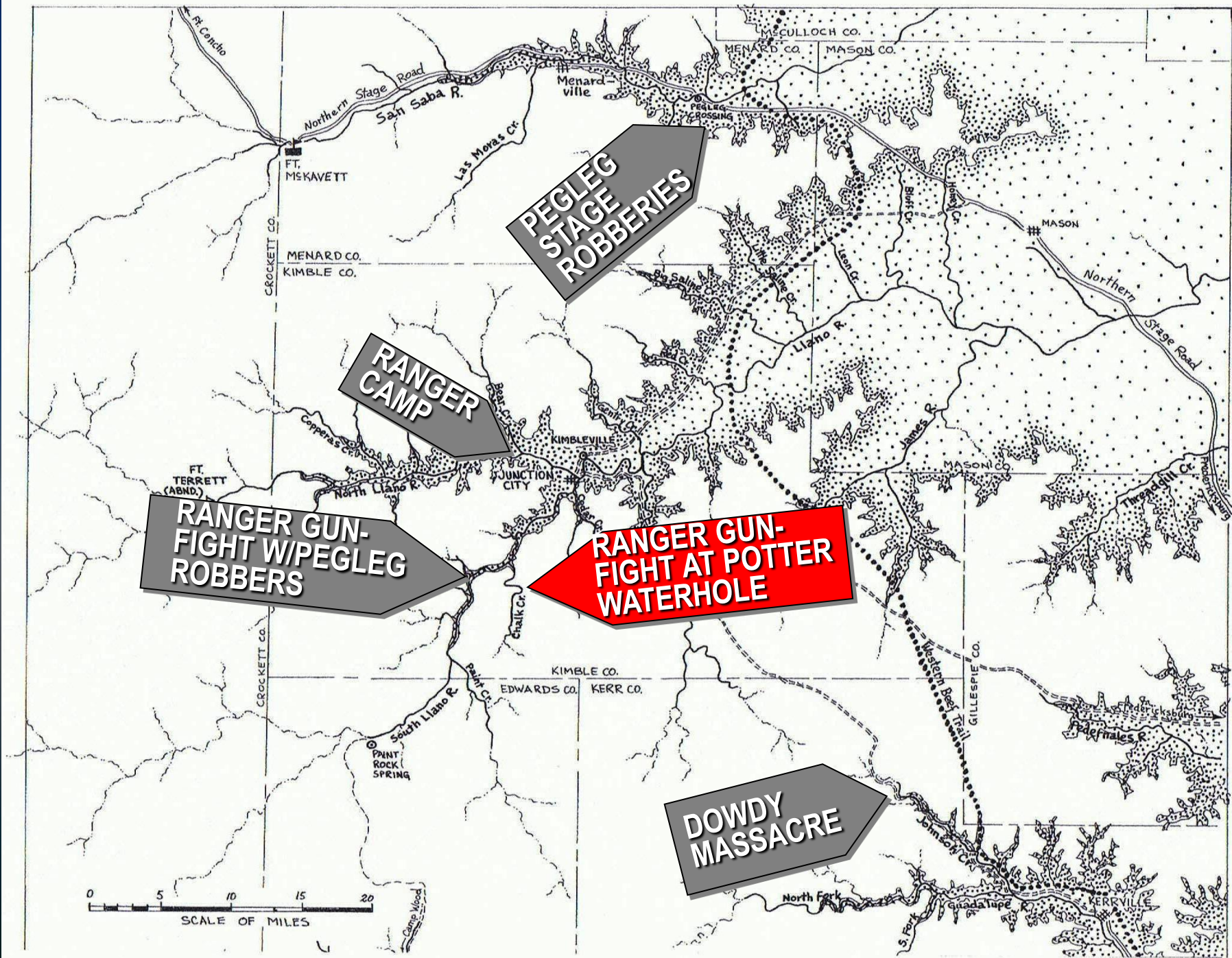
Figure 27: Portraits of the four murdered Dowdy young people, about 1878, clockwise from upper left, Alice (18), Martha (16), James (10) and Susan (14), (courtesy of W. C. Dowdy). Image digitally enhanced, with permission.



Figure 28: Dowdy gravesites, Sunset Cemetery, near Mountain Home, Kerr County, Texas. The four murdered Dowdy young people are buried two to a grave in the center of the photo. The graves of the two infant sons of Tom and Susan (Reeves) Dowdy are in the foreground; the tall gravestones in the background are those of James E. and Susan (Cassell) Dowdy, parents of the murdered young people. The graves of the Dowdy children are embedded with clam shells brought from the Gulf Coast (photo by the author, 2008).

DUBLIN – POTTER FAMILY EVENTS, SPRING, 1880 - SPRING, 1881

- 1. POTTERS DISCOVER THEIR HOMESTEADS HAVE BEEN PRE-EMPTED (SPRING, 1880)**
- 2. TOM POTTER'S HALF-BREED SONS FRANK, JOHN & "INDIAN JIM" JOIN UNCLE J. K. P. POTTER & GEORGE CLEVELAND HORSE-STEALING RING (SPRING, 1880)**
- 3. TOM POTTER DIES MYSTERIOUSLY, AGE 48 (JUNE, 1880)**
- 4. CONVICTION OF POTTER & DUBLIN SONS FOR MAIL ROBBERY IN FEDERAL COURT, AUSTIN (SEPT., 1880)**
- 5. PATRIARCH JIMMY DUBLIN, AGE 61, ABANDONS FAMILY (SPRING, 1881)**
- 6. DUBLIN FAMILY MOVES WITH POTTER FAMILY TO BURNET CO (SPRING, 1881)**



PEGLEG
STAGE
ROBBERIES

RANGER
CAMP

RANGER GUN-
FIGHT W/PEGLEG
ROBBERS

RANGER GUN-
FIGHT AT POTTER
WATERHOLE

DOWDY
MASSACRE

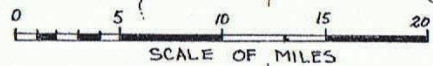
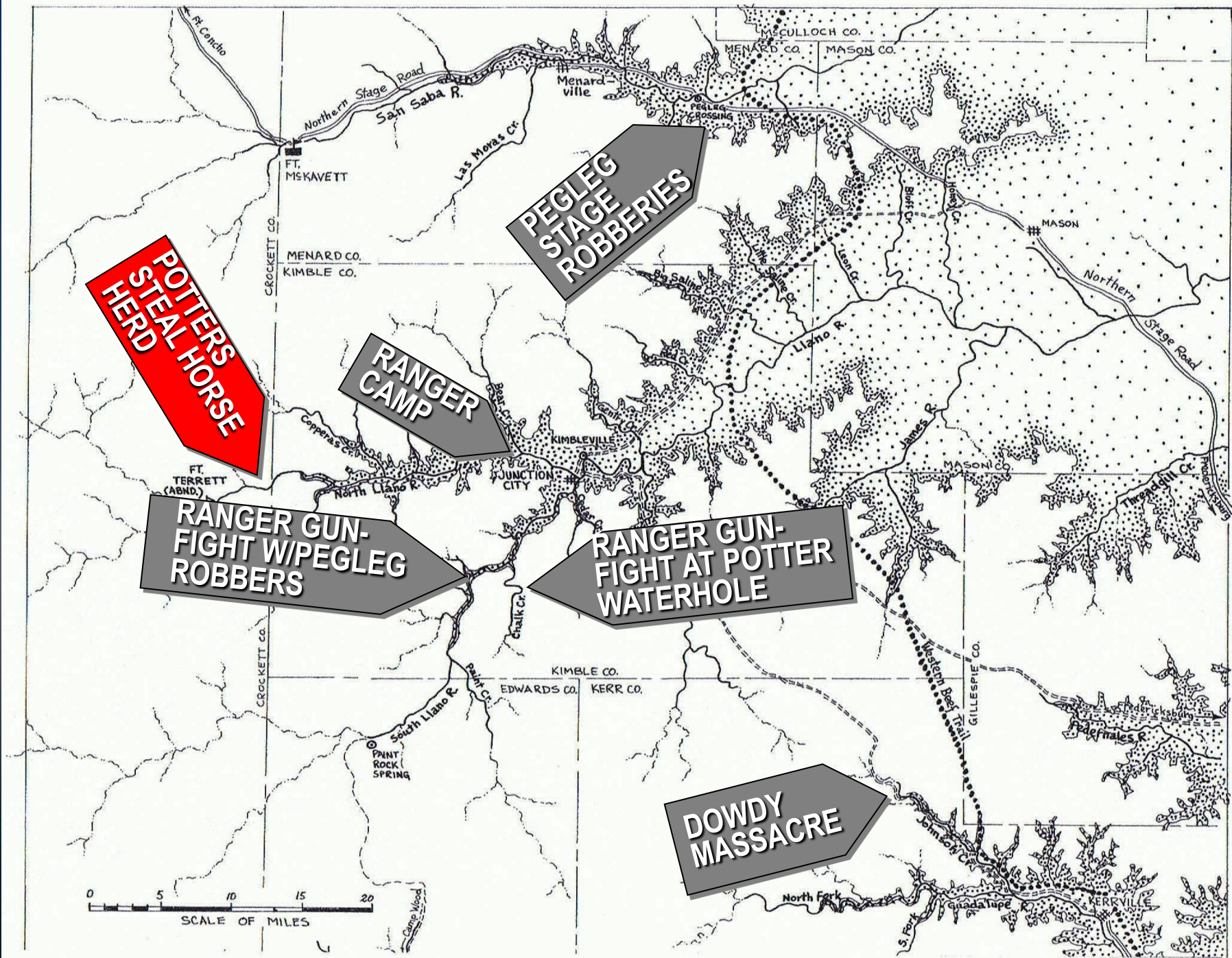




Figure 13: Potter Waterhole, upper Chalk Creek, southwestern Kimble County, Texas, looking north. James K. P. Potter and his family are believed to have located near here in 1877, shortly after their arrival in Kimble County (see p. 50). This is also believed to be the location where Texas Rangers and outlaws of the Potter-Cleveland gang engaged in a gunfight on the night of July 27, 1880 (see p. 125). “Indian Jim” Potter was probably under the large oak tree at left when fired on by the Rangers, who were watching the outlaw from the top of the cliff at right (photo by the author, 2010).



**POTTERS
HERD
STEAL HORSE**

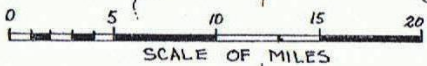
**PEGLEG
STAGE
ROBBERIES**

**RANGER
CAMP**

**RANGER GUN-
FIGHT W/PEGLEG
ROBBERS**

**RANGER GUN-
FIGHT AT POTTER
WATERHOLE**

**DOWDY
MASSACRE**



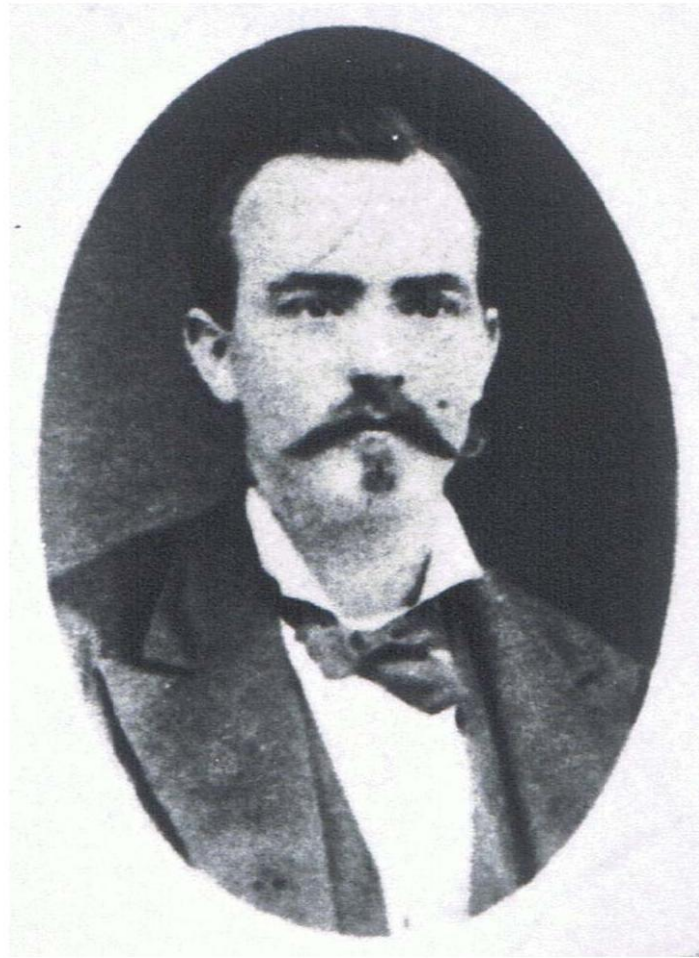


Figure 34: Corporal R. G. Kimbell, May, 1880 (courtesy of Institute of Texan Cultures, University of Texas at San Antonio).

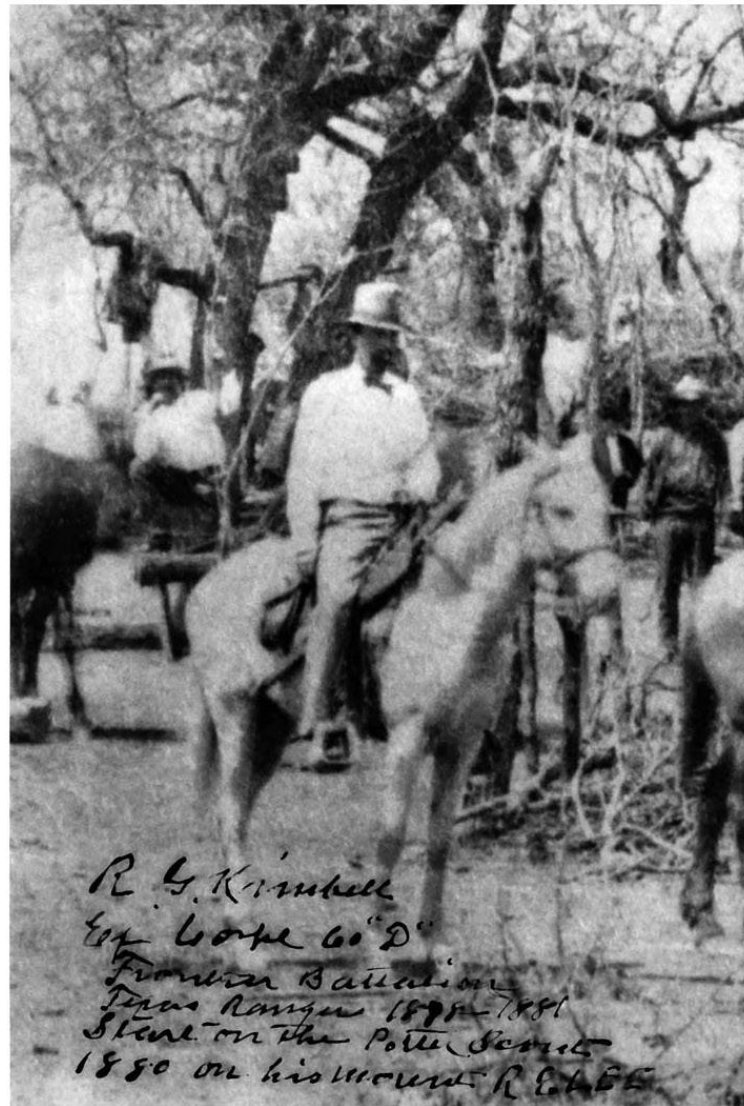
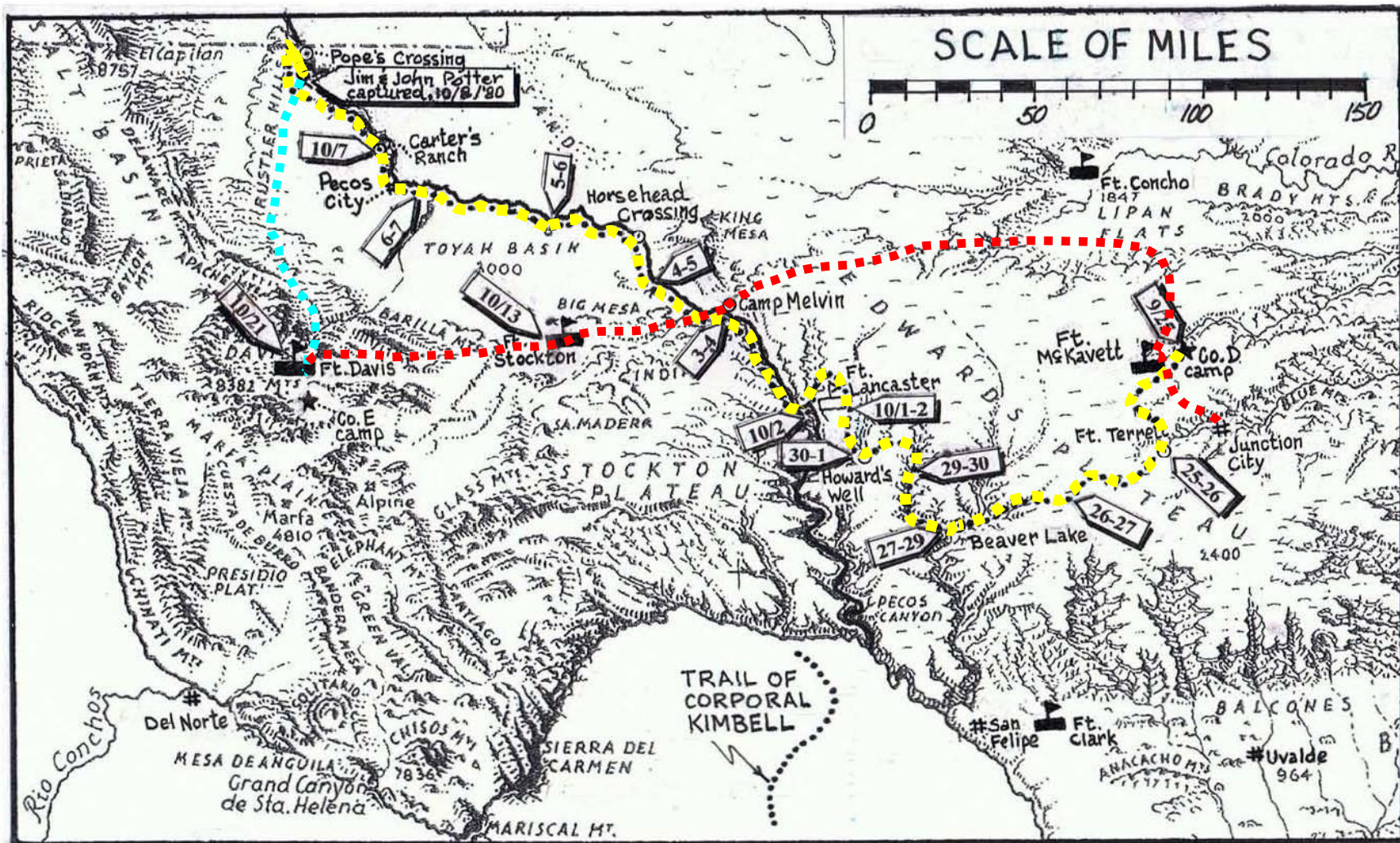


Figure 35: Corporal R. G. Kimbell, mounted on his favorite horse, "Robert E. Lee", in Ranger camp near Fort McKavett, Texas, just before leading his squad in pursuit of the Potter/Cleveland horse thieves, September 25, 1880 (courtesy of Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).



Map 7: The Chase: Route of Corporal Kimbell's Squad in Pursuit of Potter Horse Thieves, September 25 - October 21, 1880.



Figure 38: Bexar County police headquarters building and attached jail, northwest corner of Military Plaza, San Antonio, 1890. Prisoners John Potter and Bill Dunman were confined here together from early December, 1880, to May 7, 1881, awaiting transportation to Junction City for their separate trials (from Noah H. Rose Collection, courtesy of Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).

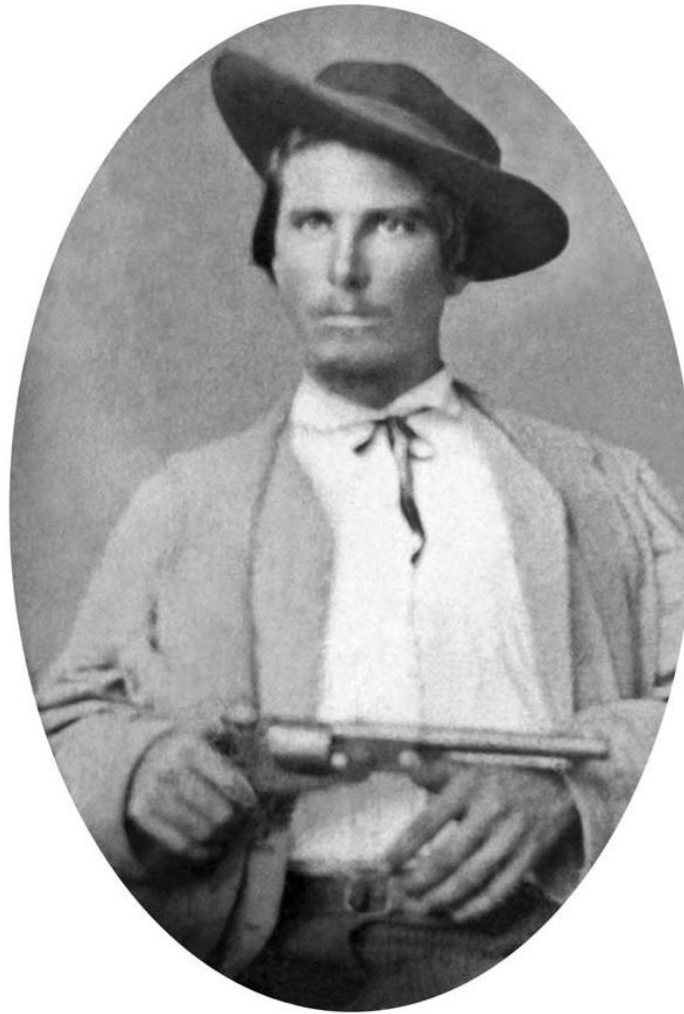
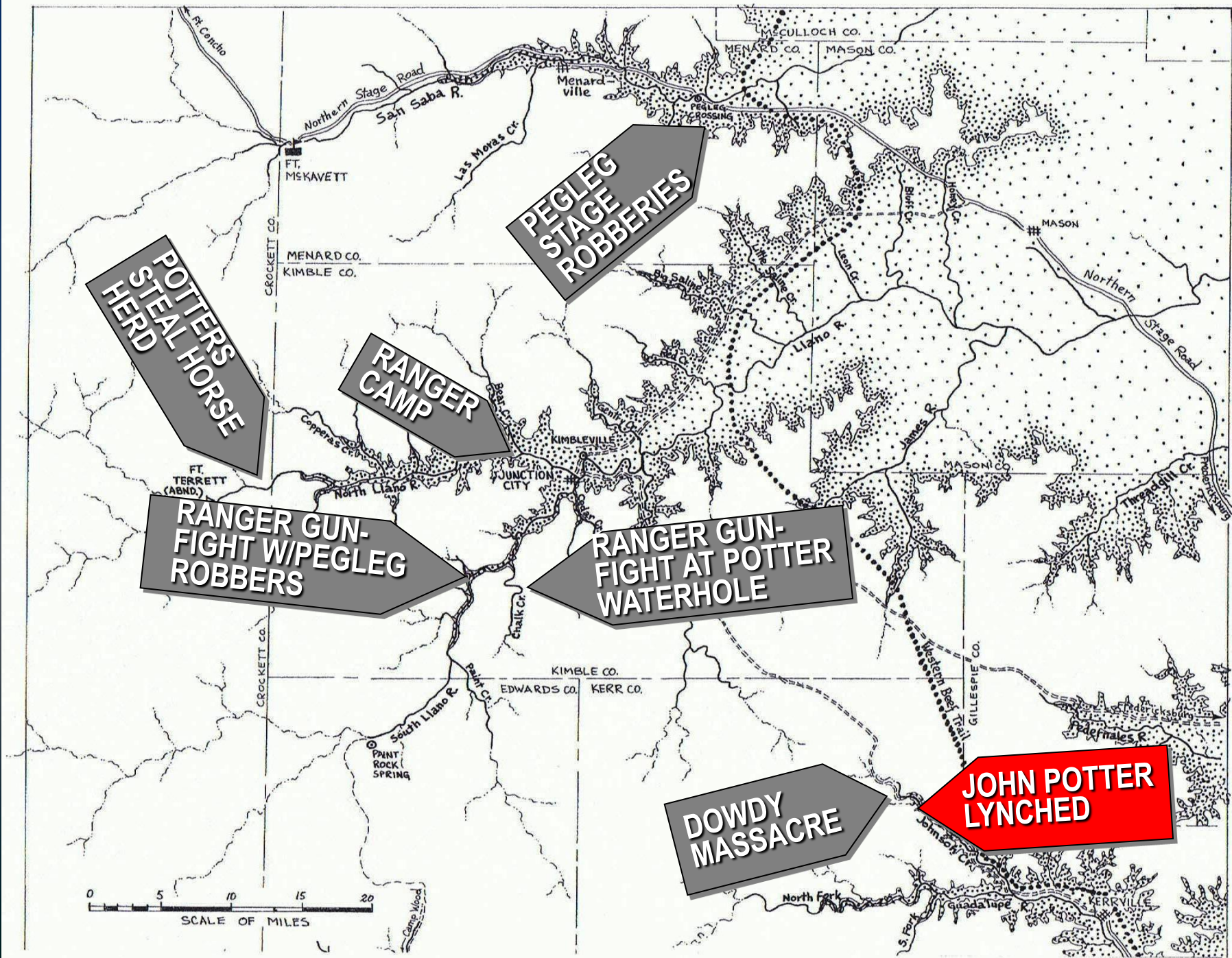


Figure 39: Joe Clements, probably taken in one of the Kansas trail towns, early 1870s. Clements was the Kimble County deputy sheriff from whom the prisoners John Potter and Bill Dunman were taken by four armed and masked men near Mountain Home, Texas, on May 8, 1881. Potter was executed and Dunman released (from Noah H. Rose Collection, courtesy of Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman). Image digitally enhanced (original image available).



0 5 10 15 20
SCALE OF MILES



Figure 41: Tom and Susan Reeves Dowdy, about 1890; Tom Dowdy was acquitted of the murder of the prisoner, John Potter, on May 12, 1883, in the 24th District Court, Kerrville, Texas. Susan Dowdy was a first cousin of the liberated prisoner, Bill Dunman (courtesy of W. C. Dowdy). Image digitally enhanced, with permission.



Figure 42: Richard B. and Lee Ella McKeen Dowdy, about 1920; Richard (Dick) Dowdy was acquitted on May 14, 1881, by instructed verdict from Special Judge Leo Tarleton, of the murder of the prisoner, John Potter, in the 24th Judicial District Court, Kerrville, Texas. According to Dowdy family tradition, Dick Dowdy killed John Potter with a shotgun (courtesy of W. C. Dowdy). Image digitally enhanced, with permission.



Figure 43: Mary Dowdy, about 1878, when she was about 22 years old. She was the sole surviving daughter of the James Dowdy family; after the massacre of her siblings, she lived with her parents until their deaths, and afterward as a recluse until she died in 1945 (courtesy of W. C. Dowdy). Image digitally enhanced, with permission.

DEC. 1886: DUBLINS AND POTTERS PARDONED, RELEASED FROM FEDERAL PRISON!!!

BACKGROUND:

1. July, 1882: Rube Boyce acquitted at retrial when Bill Allison's testimony is discredited.
2. Pardons in related cases when Jury Coercion by Federal Marshals is established (1882-1884).
3. Spring, 1886: Tom Moody (fellow inmate at Chester Prison) confesses to Dec. 15, 1877 stage robbery at Peg Leg Crossing.
4. Dublins & Potters admit to Peg Leg robberies, but not the one they were convicted for.



Figure 44: Mack and Lizzie (Veatch) Potter, probably their wedding photo in late August 1887, when he was about 35 and she was about 15 (courtesy of Mary Lou Midkiff). Image digitally enhanced, with permission.

WHAT BECAME OF THE DUBLINS & POTTERS AFTER PARDONS IN DECEMBER, 1886?

1. BOTH FAMILIES MOVED TO W. TEXAS/ N. MEXICO
2. FAMILY INTERMARRIAGES:
 - Roll Dublin married Lizzie Potter
 - Dell Dublin married Mary Ellen Potter
 - Charley Dublin married Roberta Potter
 - Bill Potter married Maggie May Dublin
3. ROLL & DELL DUBLIN WERE FOUNDING MEMBERS OF FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, MIDLAND, TEXAS
4. ROLL DUBLIN BECAME VP & DIRECTOR OF MIDLAND NATIONAL BANK, DIED A WEALTHY MAN IN 1919

END OF FRONTIER PERIOD, EDWARDS PLATEAU

- 1. IMPOSED ORDER ALLOWS RULE OF LAW**
- 2. RELIABLE WATER ON PLATEAU:**
 - **Cable-tool Drilling to Aquifer**
 - **Windmills Lift Water to Surface**
- 3. BARBED-WIRE FENCING**
- 4. SUPPRESSION OF MEXICAN INDIAN RAIDING**
- 5. RAILROADS (T.P. AND S.P.)**

Influence of Edwards Plateau on Frontier Settlement:

ENDURING VERITIES CONFIRMED

- 1. Establishment of Order precedes Rule of Law**
- 2. Tribalism Resists the Power of the State**
- 3. Clandestine Markets Sustain Criminal Enterprises**
- 4. Geology and Technology Influenced Settlement**