

## THE MAKING OF WILSON COUNTY

Most counties begin with a county seat that remains in the same location. Wilson County had difficulty deciding on a county seat and it moved several times before it settled into a permanent position. The area we know today as Wilson County was a part of Bexar County and the county seat was in San Antonio, Texas. In 1855 Dr. John Sutherland of Sutherland Springs and a veteran of the Texas Revolution, sent petitions to the Texas Legislature asking this body to form a new county from portions of Bexar and Karnes counties. The act to create said county was approved by the Texas State Legislature on February 13, 1860. It was named Wilson County after James Wilson, an Englishman who came to Texas in the 1830s. He survived the ill-fated Mier Expedition and became a state senator. The Texas Legislature defined the boundaries of the county in the **Laws of Texas, Section 1:** *“Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Texas, That all the territory comprised within, the following limits shall be created into a new county to be called Wilson – beginning on the west bank of the Cibolo, at the mouth of the Martinez Creek; thence on a straight line to the north east corner of Atascosa county line, hence south 39 degrees east with Atascosa line to the northwest corner of Karnes County; thence same course continued four and three quarter miles along the said Karnes County line; thence north 51 degrees east to the south-west boundary line, of Gonzales County; thence north 39 degrees west with Gonzales County line to the south-east boundary line of Guadalupe county; thence south with said line to the Cibolo; thence up the Cibolo with its meanders to the place of beginning.”*

The Texas State Legislature appointed Dr. G.J Houston, of Sutherland Springs, to act as commissioner. He was instructed to organize the new county. It was his duty to order an election to elect county officers. The date of this election was to be published in the county. When the returns of the election were in, Dr. Houston was to issue certificates of election to the persons elected and to administer the oath of office to them in due form. Dr. Houston ordered an election for county officers. William Sutherland was elected Chief Justice. The county commissioners and other county officers were elected, and Dr. Houston administered the oath of office to them. The Wilson County Commissioner’s Court met in Creed Taylor’s concrete house in Sutherland Springs. Rent for this court house was set at \$8.50 per month. The commissioners were instructed to establish a jail, a school and provide grounds for a cemetery.

The Texas Legislature stated that the county seat was to be in the center of the county. Sutherland Springs was not in the center and therefore served as temporary county seat until a permanent county seat could be obtained. The Texas Legislature had clearly stipulated in The Laws of Texas, Section 4: *“It shall be the duty of the court of Wilson County to ascertain by means of a plat and certificate from the General Land Office, under the seal of the same duly authenticated, the center of said new county, and select two or more sites nearest the center of said new county, having respect for any donation*

*of land, that may be made for that purpose, as well as convenience of water, and when so selected the Chief Justice of said county shall order an election to fix said county seat."*

In the time frame of Wilson County's creation, the mode of travel was horseback, wagon or buggy. The county seat needed to be in a central location, so that the law makers could travel to it in a timely manner. Floresville was not in existence at that time but Lodi, located on the San Antonio and La Bahia Road, was a thriving, dynamic, trade community on the San Antonio River. It was a larger community and nearer to the center of the county than Sutherland Springs. The court was petitioned to establish the Lodi and Sutherland Springs Road in 1860. It was established in 1861. The well traveled road was a link between these two important communities. The distance traveled from one community to the other was lengthy and several camp sites developed along this road. One such campsite was located on the Coldeway Ranch. It had the space for people in wagons to stop and the necessary water for people and their draft animals. People in wagons, buggies or horseback could camp for lunch or for the night, and ride on the next morning. The county seat also traveled back and forth between Sutherland Springs and Lodi several times.

Wilson County was very new when the American Civil War began. Texas flew the confederate flag and many able bodied men in the county fought under this banner. The Wilson County Commissioner's Court met in Sutherland Springs and the business of the county was carried out. Roads were designated, taxes were paid and court cases were tried. The business of finding a permanent county seat was put on hold. It was not exactly business as usual, but the court did the best it could and waited for the war to end.

The American Civil War came to an end in 1865 and the men who survived it returned to their families, to a weakened economy and a changed governmental structure in Wilson County. Following the American Civil War, Texas was under a "provisional government". Some people called it "carpet-bag government". Actually, the county was under northern rule, and the Wilson County Commissioner's Court met under special orders of the Fifth Military District in New Orleans. The chief justice, now called "county judge" was appointed. The minutes of the Wilson County Commissioner's Court, referred to the court as "the police court". William Longworth was appointed county judge. The issue of a permanent county seat was back on the table.

The commissioner's court had been meeting in Creed Taylor's concrete house in Sutherland Springs until a county seat nearer the center of the county could be established. The court met on March 10, 1866. A certified map had been received from the General Land Office. Nominations of several likely sites were presented to the "Police Court". The site would be decided on by an election. Samuel W. Barker presented for nomination a tract of 200 acres lying near the San Antonio River in the name of his wife, Josefa A. Flores de Barker. John Sutherland offered a tract of old Sutherland Springs. T. J. Peacock offered 100 acres lying near Cibolo Creek. Josefa A.

Flores de Barker's land carried the highest vote of 136. In December of 1867, the court met and after seven long years, Wilson County had decided on the location of a county seat. The new, permanent county seat would be called Floresville after ancestors of Josefa A. Flores de Barker.

Lodi was named the county seat pro tem until the site could be made ready with a new survey and buildings. The records of the Wilson County Court were packed up and hauled by wagon to Lodi. The court met first in Juan Seguin's house. He was paid \$8.50 per month. Finally, the court moved to Pedro de la Zerda's building on Goliad Road. De la Zerda was paid \$8.00 per month for the court house rent. A jail was established in Lodi.

Floresville was surveyed and laid out in blocks and lots. Lots would be sold to raise needed money for the establishment of the new county seat. Mr. Tatum was paid \$72.00 to dig a well. Things looked good, but the county seat was not ready to settle down.

The Wilson County Court records were packed up and transported by wagon back to Sutherland Springs. Facilities at Lodi were deemed inadequate for the approaching spring term of the District Court. However, the court again packed up the records, loaded them into a wagon and they were returned to Lodi by October of 1871. It is not known where the court met during this time.

The Wilson County boundary lines were changed several times. On January 19, 1869, the Texas Legislators passed an act causing parts of Guadalupe County to be attached to Wilson County. They also declared and passed an act that the name of Wilson County would be changed to Cibolo County. The name "Cibolo" was never applied and was soon changed back to Wilson. On March 13, 1874, another act was approved by the legislature to enlarge the Boundaries of Wilson County.

On October 23, 1871, the Wilson County Commissioners designated block # 24, lot 14 as the site for the new courthouse. However, the court house was built on block 11, where the district judge's office is housed today. The process of building a three-room, frame court house began. Finally, on May 28, 1872, Wilson County had a finished court house, and Floresville was established as the permanent county seat of Wilson County. The court invested in a strong, fire proof safe to store the Wilson County records. A jail, built of red stone, was completed in 1875, on the corner of Second and "C" Streets. The court met in the three-room frame court house. As time went on, the court house became too small for all of the court's business and it needed many repairs. In 1883 it burned, but the records, stored in the fire-proof safe, remain with us today.

The county was already planning to build a new court house when the old court house burned. Hearing of the plans to build a new court house, some 200 citizens presented a petition to the commissioners to move the county seat to Sutherland Springs. An

election was held, but Floresville had the high vote. The county seat remained in Floresville.

Famed architect, Alfred Giles, started designing this prestigious building in 1883. Colonel Sidney Mead, who lived in Casa Blanca, former home of Erasmo Seguin, won the contract to build the structure. The foundation was laid by Serafin Lepori, a noted stone mason from Lodi.

A corner stone, showing the names of the architect and builder was laid by the Masonic fraternity on George Washington's birthday, February 22, 1884. The new court house was built of red brick. Today, the bricks are covered with stucco and painted a cream color.

The Wilson County Court House is the only court house designed by Alfred Giles which is still being used for its original function.

Compiled by Maurine Liles from the archives of the Wilson County Historical Society. 8/08 Society web page: [www.wilsoncountyhistory.org](http://www.wilsoncountyhistory.org) 8/08