

"The history of Brenham and Washington County"

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THE GIDDINGS'

No one family in the history of Texas, from the time it was under Mexican rule to the present period, has planted a higher standard of excellence than that raised and maintained by the Giddings; and no one family in Washington County has been more prominent and influential. Giles A. Giddings, the first of six illustrious brothers, the patriot and soldier, who was mortally wounded at San Jacinto, arrived in Texas in 1835. J. D. Giddings, the Texas Veteran, came in 1838. He was followed in 1848 by James J. Giddings, the civil engineer, and George H. Giddings, the Confederate Colonel. The year 1852 marked the advent of D. C. Giddings, the Confederate lieutenant colonel, the congressman and banker; and Frank Giddings, the physician and surgeon. The Giddings of today is D. C., who is at the head of the vast estate and the private bank of Giddings & Giddings. He is a worthy representative of his distinguished ancestors; and, when his useful life is ended, he will be succeeded by his young son, D. C. Giddings, Jr., in whom the leading characteristics of the bold and enterprising Giddings are very pronounced.

Brenham owes an everlasting debt of gratitude to J. D. Giddings, his brother, D. C. Giddings, and son, D. C. Giddings ; for in every epoch-making event during the past seventy-one years they have been central figures.

JABEZ DEMMING GIDDINGS (J. D. Giddings)

Many bright men helped to form, inaugurate and wield the affairs of Brenham in the constructive period of its history; but to J. D. Giddings, more than to any other man, must be given the credit of having founded the City of Brenham.

Primarily, it owes its very existence to him ; for it was through his efforts that it became the county seat in 1844. His experience as a teacher guided him in the promotion of Brenham's educational interests. He helped the cause of religion by assisting in the establishment of Methodism. With the aid of his brother, D. C. Giddings, he virtually built the Washington County Railroad, Upon his advice Brenham was incorporated. He was a member of the legislature in the reconstruction days, and introduced measures that were beneficial to Brenham. In 1866, in copartnership with D. C. Giddings. he established the first bank. He aided in the removal of the Federal soldiers from Camp- town. He was a leading lawyer.

J. D. Giddings was born in Susquehanna County. Pennsylvania ; James Giddings and Lucy Demming Giddings were his parents. His father first entered the merchant marine, and at 21 was a captain with the full charge of a cargo. A shipwreck off the Carolina coast destroyed the labor of a lifetime. He abandoned the sea and went into the wilderness of Western Pennsylvania and established a farm. His mother was a beautiful character, and her life was spent in rearing her sons and training them to walk in the paths of honor and virtue. She laid the foundations of the excellent educations of her children.

In the spring of 1838, J. D. Giddings came to Texas, seeking information about his brother, Giles A. Giddings, who died from wounds received at the battle of San Jacinto. Giles A. Giddings, being a civil engineer, came to Texas in 1835, to survey a land grant for the purpose of establishing a colony. Twelve days before Sam Houston met Santa Anna his patriotism caused him to abandon the surveying and Indian fighting, in which he was then engaged, and enlist in Company A, Captain William Woods commanding, of the First Regiment of Texas Volunteers, of which Edward Burleson was colonel. The night before

the engagement at San Jacinto Giles A. Giddings wrote his parents a loving letter indicative of sublime courage and an inborn love of liberty. This valuable document reads as follows:

*Texas, Four Miles from Head-quarters.
April 10, 1836.*

Dear Parents: — Since I last wrote you I have been engaged in arranging an expedition against the Indians, who have committed many depredations against the frontier. On my return to the settlements. I learned that our country was again invaded by a merciless horde of Mexicans, who were waging a war of extermination against the inhabitants. A call was made for all friends of humanity to rise in arms and resist the foe. Men were panic-stricken and fled, leaving their all behind them. I could not reconcile it to my feelings to leave Texas without an effort to save it. Accordingly, I bent my course for the army and arrived last evening at this place. I shall enter camp this morning as a volunteer. The army, commanded by Gen. Houston, is lying on the west side of the Brazos, 20 miles from San Fillippe. The enemy is in that place waiting an attack. It is reported Houston will attack them in the morning. What will be the result, or the fate of Texas, is hid in the bowels of futurity. Yet, I think we are engaged in the cause of justice, and hope the God of battles will protect us. The enemy's course has been the most bloody that has ever been recorded on the page of history. Our garrison at San Antonio was taken and massacred ; so another detachment of 700, commanded by Col. Fannin, and posted at La Bahia, after surrendering prisoners of war, were led out and shot down like bears. Only one escaped, to tell their melancholy fate. In their course they show no quarter to age, sex or condition — all are massacred without mercy. If such conduct is not sufficient to arouse the patriotic feelings of the sons of liberty, I know not what will. I was born in a land of freedom, and taught to lisp the name of liberty with my infant tongue, and rather than be driven out of the country or submit to be a slave, I will leave my bones to bleach on the plains of Texas. If we succeed in subduing the enemy and establishing a free and independent government, we shall have the finest country the sun ever shone upon, and if we fail we shall have the satisfaction of dying fighting for the rights of man. I know not that I shall have an opportunity of writing to you in some time, but shall do so as often as is convenient. Be not alarmed about my safety. I am no better, and my life no dearer, than those who gained the liberty you enjoy. If I fail you will have the satisfaction that your son died fighting for the rights of man. Our strength in the field is about 1,500. The enemy is reported 4,000 strong; a fearful odds, you will say; but what can mercenary hirelings do against the sons of liberty?

Before this reaches you the fate of Texas will be known. I will endeavor to acquaint you as soon as possible. I am well and in good spirits, and as unconcerned as if going to a raising. The same Being who has hitherto protected my life can with equal ease ward off the balls of the enemy. My company is waiting, and I must draw to a close, and bid you farewell, perhaps forever. More than a year has elapsed since I saw you, yet the thoughts of friends and home are fresh in my memory, and their remembrance yet lives in my affections and will light a secret joy to my heart till it shall cease to beat. Long has it been since I have heard from you. How often do I think of home and wish to be there. The thought of that sacred spot haunts my night-watches. How often, when sleep has taken possession of my faculties, am I transported there, and for a short time enjoy all the pleasures of home; but the delusion is soon over, and the morning returns and I find my situation the same. Dear friends, if I see you no more, remember Giles still loves you. Give my love to my sisters, brothers, friends and neighbors. I would write more if time would permit, but its fleeting steps wait for none. You need not write to me, as I do not know where I shall be. With sentiments of sincere respect I bid you farewell.

*Your affectionate son,
G. A. GIDDINGS.*

J. D. Giddings' first vocation in Washington County was that of teaching. He was considered a very fine educator. He taught school near Independence, in a log house with a puncheon floor, and numbered among his pupils grown men and women. Before opening school he directed the building of the school house, and was assisted by a few of the students, who helped him operate the whip-saw with which the cedar logs were prepared.

The love of adventure and hunting caused this pioneer to make many excursions into the wilds of the forests. During 1839, while on an expedition of this kind, between Cummings Creek and Ruttersville, he and his companion were chased by Indians and narrowly escaped with their lives.

When volunteers were called for in 1843 to avenge the raids of Vasquez and Woll, and to rescue prisoners held in Mexico, he promptly enlisted in Alexander Somervell's army, and remained until the disbanding of the majority of the soldiers, thus escaping the horrors of the Mier Expedition.

When Congress ordered an election in 1844, for the establishment of a permanent seat of justice for Washington County, J. D. Giddings was vitally interested in the success of Brenham. He traveled night and day, and made speeches in every town and settlement, with the gratifying result that Brenham was elected. The people of the time ascribed Brenham's success to the untiring labors of J. D. Giddings. He cast his lot, heart and soul, with the infant town, and formulated plans for its upbuilding. Realizing that religion was the foundation of good citizenship, his first thought was the establishment of a church ; and he interested the good men and women in this laudable under-taking, to the end that Rev. Robert Alexander responded to an appeal, and the Methodist Church was organized in 1844 in the Hickory Grove school house. A Sunday School was started, and J. D. Giddings was the first superintendent, serving in this capacity until he died. Methodism in Brenham for the first 37 years is closely interwoven with the life of this devout Christian.

When Graham Lodge, A. F. & A. M., was organized, this good man became a charter member. His religion enabled him to fully appreciate the sublime beauties of the Masonic ritual, and at different times he held the highest offices in the three grand divisions of Masonry. In 1848, when the Masons took charge of the Hickory Grove Scho'ol, he was a potent factor in the building of the Masonic Academy and in the introduction of new methods of teaching.

Being sensible of the beneficial effects of railroads, and assisted by his brother, D. C. Giddings, he organized the "Washington County Railroad Company," for the purpose of building a railroad. As promoters of the second railroad to be built in Texas, these patriotic brothers displayed ability, energy and courage in surmounting the difficulties with which they were confronted. To prevent the failure of the enterprise they virtually built the road themselves. It ran from Brenham to Hempstead, a distance of 21 miles. This line was but a short one, yet its construction during these pioneer days elevated the builders to the highest plane of business capacity, and laid the foundation for Brenham's commercial importance.

Following his policy of advocating every measure conducive to the improvement of his home town, J. D. Giddings suggested that Brenham be incorporated, and an election for this purpose was held May 29, 1858, duly incorporating the city.

In 1866, when problems of vital interest to the peace and happiness of the people" of Texas came up for solution in the first legislature to assemble during the reconstruction period, this statesman, as representative, from Washington County, served on many important committees, and was chairman of the judiciary committee. At the close of his term of service he was offered other political honors, which he declined.

Commercial conditions in 1866 made the establishment of a bank a necessity, and J. D. & D. C. Giddings founded the first financial institution of Washington County, under the firm name of Giddings & Giddings. J. D. Giddings was the senior member of the firm.

The encampment of the Federal soldiers at Camp\ATI having become a trouble and annoyance to the citizens, J. D. Giddings, with his brother, D. C. Giddings, was instrumental in having these objectionable soldiers removed in 1869.

In 1844 J. D. Giddings was united in marriage to Miss Ann M. Tarver, daughter of Edmund T. Tarver, a prominent farmer who had moved to the Republic of Texas, in 1841. from Tennessee. Of this union there are only two children living, Mrs. Heber Stone and Charles Giddings. Mrs. Stone's children are Giddings, Heber, Albert, Mary, the wife of R. E. Nicholson, and Louise. At J. D. Giddings' home, a two-story residence constructed of cedar, in North Brenham, the latch string was ever on the outside; and the poor, way-worn traveler, and the famous men and women of Texas, were welcomed alike, with true Southern hospitality. A few years prior to his death, he built the palatial country residence one mile south of the city. The fall of 1844 marked the building of his law office, which was constructed of logs on the spot where now stands the brick building owned by Charles Giddings. Though numbering among his competitors some of the brightest minds in Texas, he achieved signal success as a lawyer. He was a great student, a lifelong hard worker, and an exhaustive speaker, being always prepared. With strict integrity and fidelity to the cause of his clients, he soon had a greater law practice than he could manage, so in 1852 he became associated with his brother, D. C. Giddings; and for many years they were among the most prominent and influential practitioners in the State.

Giddings, the county seat of Lee County, was so named in honor of J. D. Giddings. The Giddings Memorial Methodist Church is a monument to his memory, and tells silently and eloquently of the work he did to advance the cause of Christ.

While he was a teacher of rare attainments, a Texas Veteran of unquestioned bravery, a lawyer of great brilliance, and a business man of sound judgment, it was as a devout Christian that the character of J. D. Giddings shines with great splendor. Into his daily life he carried religion, and in dealing with his fellow men justice was tempered with mercy, for always he followed the lead of the Man of Galilee, who said, "Love ye one another." At the time of his death, which occurred June 25, 1878, following injuries sustained by a fall from his buggy, few citizens in this section of Texas were more beloved and certainly none had truer friends than this noble character. The highest tribute that can be paid a good man when he enters into everlasting rest is to say that he lived and died a Christian,