

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Today in Texas history
Mason County Courthouse Burns

By Bandera Spirits of Texas

On Jan. 21, 1877, the Mason County courthouse burned, destroying all early county records, including those pertaining to the Mason County War. This deadly episode began as a feud over cattle rustling, but grew into a conflict between the Anglo and German elements in the community.

The violence began in February 1875, when a mob took five suspected cattle thieves from jail and killed three. Shortly thereafter, another suspected rustler was killed by 12 men with blackened faces, prompting his friend Scott Cooley, a former Texas Ranger, to seek revenge. Cooley and his men, including Johnny Ringo, killed at least a dozen men, whereupon Maj. John B. Jones and 20 or 30 Texas Rangers were sent to quiet the difficulties.

Jones searched for Cooley and his followers without success before discovering that some of his rangers were former comrades-in-arms of Cooley. After Jones discharged them, Cooley fled into Blanco County and died a short time later.

A few people were eventually arrested, but most of the cases were dismissed. After many months of violence, a strained peace returned to Mason County in the fall of 1876, but the courthouse fire ensured that many of the details of the Mason County War would remain unknown.