RUNNELS COUNTY, TEXAS
Celebrating 150 Years
A COUNTY IS BORN

Runnels County, named for Hiram Runnels, was founded by the Texas Legislature on 1 February 1858, and was formed out of Bexar and Travis Counties.

Hiram Runnels
Portrait by Hugh Campbell III
While founded in 1858, the county was not organized until 1880 when governance was moved from Coleman County. On 14 April, in a close 30 to 29 vote, Runnels City edged out Maverick as the new county seat.
The early county fathers did not waste any time planning the layout of the newly formed county seat. The county surveyor, Z.G. Taylor, set about the task of laying out the boundaries. Lots along the city’s public square sold for $50 dollars each with all others selling for $25. One month later, in May 1880, officials began work on mapping out roads to places such as Fort Concho, Coleman City and Paint Rock using only “the most direct line and most practical route.”
BALLINGER

Founded in 1886, Ballinger was the product of the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe line expansion. Runnels City, not as well situated with regard to water, lost its bid for the railroad terminal.

The railroad began a concerted advertising campaign that attracted over 6,000 people to the 29 June 1886 sale of town lots. Excursion trains from Dallas offered half price tickets to the event.

Dallas Morning News
26 June 1886
Ballinger

A Lively Sunday in Ballinger.

Special to The News.

BALLINGER, June 27.—The streets were thronged with people to-day, and from the present outlook many hundreds of people will be here on Tuesday.

Notwithstanding its being Sunday, business was carried on as on any other day of the week, saloons and gambling houses being the most prominent places. Many seem to be weak and weary from indulging too much in firewater.

Three sermons were preached here to-day to large and attentive audiences. Rev. Mr. Zioly, of San Angelo, is here to give the young city a religious training, and ere long it will cease to be the rendezvous of the gambler and the squeaking sounds of the fiddle on Sunday morning will die away in the ringing of the church bell.

William Collins will have a preliminary trial on Thursday, July 1, for the killing of the German cook in this town a few days ago.

June 28, 1886
The campaign was a success with over half of the lots selling on the first day. As added insurance that the new terminal town, named for stockholder William Pitt Ballinger, would prosper, the railroad offered a free lot to residents of Runnels City who would move a home, business or church to the newly formed city of Ballinger.
A BIG BOOM FOR BALLINGER.


Special to The News.

BALLINGER, June 30.—The sale of town lots in this place commenced yesterday, attended by fully 5,000 people composed of representatives from nearly every county in the State. R. T. Pencaut, of Galveston, opened the sale at 10 a.m., and from the outset the bidding was spirited, the first choice being bought for $1075, the second $725. The bids were then lively, ranging from $625 to $200 each for business lots, the sale making a great total of $106,000, being double the largest sale that has ever taken place in Texas. Ballinger is certainly a phenomenal success, having established here already 225 business houses, a great many of them being finished buildings.
Ballinger

Early Ballinger Street Scene
In 1888 the county seat was officially moved to Ballinger and construction on the courthouse was completed September 16, 1889 at a cost of $29,015.
Missouri Milling Company, established in 1887, was Ballinger’s first manufacturing business.
The Ballinger Methodist Church, organized in 1886, first met in a carpenter’s shop on Hutchins Avenue. This stone church was erected in 1891.

Members of the First Baptist Church of Ballinger began meeting in 1886 with Baptisms held in the nearby Colorado River. In 1918 the First Baptist Church and the 9th Street Baptist Church merged to form Ballinger Baptist. The name reverted back to First Baptist in 1940.
Increasing numbers of German families migrating into Runnels County necessitated the establishment of St. Mary’s Catholic Church, erected in 1895, and the German Methodist Episcopal Church, shown here in 1900.
David Guion, a Ballinger native and composer of “Home on the Range”.
Ballinger Through the Years

Early Ballinger Brass Band

Gressett and Hicks Blacksmith Shop

Cadets at Bruce Field during WWII
Hatchel was another town that sprang up due to a railroad – the Abilene Southern. The railroad came through in 1909. Soon the community had 7-8 businesses, a depot, cattle pens, a gin, a school and a Baptist church. For a short time, Dr. J.W. Blasdell practiced medicine there before moving to Ballinger.
Miles owed its beginning to the arrival of the Gulf, Colorado & Santa Fe Railroad in 1888. Originally known as Miles Station, the town was named for Jonathan Miles who had made a donation of $5,000 to the railroad when they ran out of funding.
Parade celebrating the completion of the road from Ballinger to San Angelo.

The first post office was established in 1890. In 1908 the name was changed from Miles Station to Miles. Land in the area sold for $.75 to $1.50 per acre.
The first grocery store was located in a box car and was run by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Robinson who came to Runnels County from England.
Early street scene (note cow crossing street)
The First Baptist church was organized and built south of the railroad. That portion of the town was known as “Baptist Hill”. The first school was also located in this area.
Miles Methodist Church

This has been a year of progress for the Methodist congregation. Seventy-eight members have been received since the first of November past, when Rev. C. W. Bardon, the present pastor, came on the field. The Sunday School has been more thoroughly organised, and the enrollment greatly increased, reaching about four hundred now.

The Church edifice has just undergone a general overhauling and remodeling, making it look like a new house. Several hundred dollars were expended in this work to the advantage of the church.

Not only so, but on the beautiful grounds just north of the main building there is nearing completion a modern School and young people's building. Mrs. Dora Ellison, an elected lady of the people.

Miles Methodist Church
A large number of settlers in Miles were of German descent. One such settler was Joe Thiele who built the Miles Opera House in 1904. Thiele worked his way from New York to Texas and acquired a flock of sheep along the way. He selected the Miles area in which to settle down and ranch.
The Opera House was a central gathering place for Miles. In 1930 it was sold and converted into a hotel. In 1950 the Miles Preservation Authority was organized and purchased the building. The building was placed on the National Register in 1976.
Miles boomed during the early 1900s. There were three drug stores, two banks, two barber shops, two hardware stores, a funeral parlor, several livery stables, as well as a depot and a jail. In addition, there were several saloons.

A city ordinance was passed making it a violation for a lady to walk down the east side of the street due to the number of saloons located there.
Trade Days in early Miles

Miles

Early building boom ca. 1904
Norton was named for George W. Norton of Kentucky who purchased land in Runnels County. The town was established 27 November 1894 and became a thriving community. In 1909 Bob Dorsett built a telephone exchange – with five customers.
Norton Gin
Norton Baptist Church
Olfen is located near the Runnels County and Concho County line. In the early 1890s, Germans, who had immigrated to Southeast Texas between 1846 and 1890, looked to West Texas for farmland.
Ed Hoelscher threshing crew near Olfen

Mixing cement with the back tire of a Model-T car ca. 1927
In 1901 Theo Matthiesen and Willy Glass wrote to Bishop Forest in San Antonio asking for permission to build a school that would double as a church.

Work was completed in 1909. Father Frank Maas was the first pastor.
Olfen

School children playing in coal bin

1st First Communion Class

First Olfen graduates
The St. Boniface Church pictured to the right was built ca. 1910 and was the center of community life until it burned in 1921. In less than a year, by the end of 1922, the parishioners had constructed the new building pictured below which is still in use today.

In 1925 the Olfen and Rowena Parishes split.
In 1888 the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe established the Rowena Station House. Predominately settled by Germans and Czechs moving from the central portions of Texas, the town of Baronsville was laid out in 1889 by Paul Baron and bore his name until 1904 when he was persuaded by residents to change the name to Rowena.
The cultural differences in the predominately German settlement became apparent during the first part of the 20th century as pressures mounted for prohibition measures across the nation.
In 1911 Runnels County, by a small margin, voted to go dry. The vote was held several times to accomplish this result as the proposal met with strong opposition from the southern cities, most of which were settled by Germans. In Rowena, a “Liberty Monument” was erected which read, “Here Lies Our Liberty April 28, 1911.” The monument was topped with various alcoholic beverages including beer bottles and glasses of wine as pictured.
Hay harvest near Rowena

Gus Glass with a load of cane
Dr. J. J. Shiller served Rowena and the surrounding area in the early 20th Century and owned Shiller Pharmacy in Rowena.
Rowena Fall Festival

1913
Rowena

Rowena Baseball Team

Early Rowena passtimes...

Fishing party
Rowena

St. Joseph’s Catholic Church

1911

ca. 1930s
Czech Presbyterian

Rowena

Zoar Evangelical

Zoar Church of Christ
The area of present day Winters was first settled in 1880. The town, established later, was named for local rancher, John N. Winters, who donated the land for the first school.

The first Winters Post Office, established in 1891 by Frederick Platte, also served as the general store.
While other towns in the county had railroads and the like, Winters just grew!
The first Winters Brass Band, established in 1901, played for events throughout West Texas. They had a traveling bandwagon drawn by four white horses which was used on their trip to Brownwood to play for the first prohibition campaign in that city.
Winters

Farmers Mercantile

Jeans Company Grocery
Winters Confectionary, 1905

ca. 1908
Winters Methodist Church

WINTERS, TEXAS
SUNDAY, MARCH 27, 1921

OFFICIAL DIRECTORY
Bishop W. N. Ainsworth, Dallas, Texas,
Presiding Bishop.
Thomas S. Barcus, Brownwood, Texas,
Presiding Elder.
Jesse H. Baldridge, Pastor.

BOARD OF STEWARDS
J. W. Monroe, Chairman.
J. H. Fielder, Secretary and Treasurer.
Dr. W. D. Sanders.
W. H. Rodgers.
J. Frank Paxton.
J. M. Skaggs.
J. H. Hall.
J. C. Meredith.
Harris Mullin.
J. P. Knight.
T. B. Young.
Frank Williams.
J. W. Turner.
O. J. Hinds.

TRUSTEES
H. L. Chapman, O. J. Hinds.
Walter Neely, Sunday School Supt.
Roy L. Crawford, Lay Leader.
Mrs. J. M. Skaggs, Cradle Roll Supt.

Winters Methodist Church
built ca 1913
Winters town picnic
Winters

Weighing cotton at Winters
Rogers Hornsby was born in Winters, Texas on 27 April 1896. Like most children his age, he grew up playing baseball. At age 18 he debuted professionally as an under-sized shortstop in the Texas-Oklahoma league. His contract was owned by the St. Louis Cardinals.

In the 1920s, Hornsby was one of the best right-handed hitters in baseball. In 1925 he won the MVP award and hit .403. Beginning in 1927, Hornsby was traded to several other teams. In 1930, he was named manager/player for the Chicago Cubs. He left baseball for good in 1953 and was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1942.
## School Key

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Thank You

Runnels County Historical Commission
National Baseball Hall of Fame
Z.I. Hale Museum and Rock Hotel
Mrs. Robbie Eoff Collection
Mrs. Eva Camanez Tucker Collection
M.E. Sweeney Collection
Bobby and Dolly Airhart

Ruth Cooper
Hugh Campbell
Geneva Russell
Karla Sturm
Kaci Pruser

Glenda Lacy
David Allbright
Venora Brown
Harold Shelburne
Nonie Green
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