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Buck Barry
by Robert Nieman

Buck Barry
Photo Courtesy: Lawrence T. Jones, III
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James Buckner “Buck” Barry was born on December 21, 1821, in the New River, Onslow County area of North Carolina. His childhood differed considerably from most children of his era and area—he received a good education. At least it was a good education for a farm boy in the early 1800s.

In his early 20s, Barry got a bad dose of GTT [Gone to Texas] fever. He traveled to New York and took a ship to New Orleans. From there he booked passage on a riverboat up the Red River. On April 12, 1845, he entered Texas at the booming city of Jefferson. He didn’t stay in Jefferson long. He soon joined another group of young adventures and headed to San Antonio.

In San Antonio, the young men soon found themselves members of Captain Jack Hays’ company of Texas Rangers. Their job was to drive the Mexican Army out of Texas. Word had spread throughout Texas that the Mexican Army had invaded Texas to capture San Antonio and reclaim the Nueches Strip area for Mexico. This strip was the land lying between the Nueches and Rio Grande Rivers. Disappointed at not finding any Mexicans or a fight, Barry mustered out of the company when the Rangers returned to San Antonio and headed back East.

On his way, Barry stopped in Austin. In his autobiography, it is interesting to read his description of the Texas legislature in Austin sleeping on the ground while being protected by a company of Rangers whose duty was “. . . to keep the Indians from scalping the delegates to the convention, although each member was heavily armed and a first-class Ranger himself.”

Still looking for adventure, Barry rejoined the Rangers and headed up the Colorado River for the Lampasas area in search of marauding Indians. Either serving with the Rangers searching for Indians or fighting with the Rangers

during the Mexican War once again under the great Captain John Coffee “Jack” Hays would take up the greater part of Barry’s life for the next twenty years.

In between fighting Mexicans and Indians, Barry found time to settle near Corsicana. A natural leader, in 1849 Barry ran for and was elected sheriff of

Anderson County. After serving two terms, he gave up the sheriff’s office and ran for the office of county treasurer. He was successful in that campaign, and in 1882 he was elected to the Texas state legislature.

With the outbreak of the War Between the States, Barry once again answered the call to arms. On May 7, 1861, he enlisted in the Confederate Army, serving in Colonel Henry McCulloch’s 1st Regiment, Texas Mounted Rifles. For the next four years he rode the Texas frontier, fighting a losing fight against invading Indians. But winning or losing, he continued serving honorably until the end of the war. When the war finally came to an end in 1865, Barry had risen to the rank of colonel.

Like most Texans, Barry found the yoke of the carpetbag Reconstruction Governor E. J. Davis difficult to live under. But he, like thousands of other Texans, continued to live and try to make the frontier a safe place to raise families. Even though frowned upon by officers of the U S Army, Barry and many of his fellow former Rangers continued combating marauding Indians and outlaws.

But fighting Indians and outlaws wasn’t all that Barry did after the war. In 1847, he had married Sarah A’plis Matticks. To their union were born six children, of which only three survived their youth. In 1862 Sarah died. On July 14, 1865, Barry married Martha Ann Searcy and fathered four more children. Throughout his life, Barry always had a great interest in the government, as shown by his terms as a sheriff, a county treasurer, and a state legislator. His final effort came in 1898 when he again ran for the Texas State legislature. But Barry’s time had passed and he was defeated.

Texas Ranger Buck Barry died on his 85th birthday, December 16, 1906. He is buried in a sepulcher he himself had dug in solid rock on a hill about a mile overlooking his home near Walnut Springs, Texas.

