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Robert Nieman 2000-2009; (b.1947-d.2009)

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Byron A. Johnson 2000-2011

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Robert Addison Gillespie

1815–1846

By **Steve Moore**



Gillespie County, Texas, is named for Robert Addison Gillespie. Its 1882 courthouse, designed by English architect Alfred Giles, is currently the town's public library and sits off of Main Street. *Photo courtesy of Jim Long, Franklin TN.*

Many a Texas county is named in honor of a Republic-era frontiersman who gave his life to maintain freedom for our Lone Star State. Such is the case of Gillespie County, which lies some seventy miles west of Austin. It is named after a leader known as Ad Gillespie, who made his way to Texas in 1837 and became a businessman before he began riding with the Texas Rangers. He drew his first blood in a Comanche village raid and thereafter fought shoulder-to-shoulder with many legends of the Ranging service.

Robert Addison Gillespie was born in Blount County, Tennessee, on June 12, 1815. Shortly after moving to Texas, he formed a mercantile and land partnership in Matagorda with his brothers James H. and Matthew M. Gillespie. This business, which became known as Gillespie and Brothers, was moved to La Grange in 1839. There, the brothers established a mercantile store and bought Texas bounty-land certificates. Ad Gillespie spent three more years in this business before he began riding with the Rangers.

Gillespie's first documented frontier service was as a member of Colonel John Henry Moore's Ranger expedition into the upper Colorado River regions. When Captain Nicholas Mosby Dawson formed the Colorado County Company on September 20, 1840, Gillespie was elected first lieutenant. The expedition set out from Walnut Creek near Austin and moved up the Colorado River. Discovering a large Comanche village near present Colorado City, Moore's ad hoc Ranging companies made a surprise attack on the morning of October



24. They killed at least eighty Comanches and took another thirty-four prisoner in addition to seizing hundreds of horses and much plunder. Lieutenant Gillespie and the others of Colonel Moore's expedition returned to Austin in early November with their prisoners. None of the participants were ever paid for their service, as President Sam Houston felt that their captured horses more than fairly compensated the men.

Ad Gillespie's next Indian expedition was organized in May 1841 under Majors Mark Lewis and George Thomas Howard. In Fayette, the Fayette Volunteers were organized with Captain Thomas Green in command and Gillespie as his second-in-command. Major Mark Lewis's expedition against "the hostile Indians up the Colorado and Concho [Rivers]" pursued Comanche trails and killed a small number of Indians. Lieutenant Gillespie led one twenty-man detachment in pursuit of Indians on May 20, but the Indians hastily abandoned their horses and fled from Gillespie's party into the cedar brakes. In June, after returning to San Antonio, Captain Green's company joined forces with Edward Burleson to chase after Indian raiders on the Leon River. These Indians were closely pursued but were not brought into close combat. Gillespie and the rest of Green's company were discharged in Austin on August 28, 1841.



Steve Moore
Author

In September 1842, Gillespie participated in the Battle of Salado Creek, in which rebel Vicente Cordova was killed. Late in the year, Gillespie was also a member of the Somervell Expedition, which marched toward Laredo to challenge General Adrian Woll's forces. Those who chose to continue as part of the Mier Expedition (Gillespie not included) were ultimately taken prisoner and held within those men, petitioning for money owed to them for services. Among those former POWs was one William "Bigfoot" Wallace.

Ad Gillespie joined the famed Ranger unit of Captain Jack Hays in March 1843 and served almost continually with the captain until 1845. During this time, he fought in a number of battles and was wounded at Walker's Creek in June 1844. While fighting with Hays's fifteen-man company, Gillespie and fellow Ranger Sam Walker were both run through with lances. Gillespie continued to fight and was credited with firing a death shot at the Comanche chief who was trying to rally his Indians for another charge against the Rangers. San Antonio resident Mary Maverick wrote that after Gillespie's sharpshooting, "a panic seized the Indians, and they fled in the utmost confusion."

In 1845, General Zachary Taylor arrived in Texas. Captain Gillespie commanded a company of volunteers who enlisted into federal service, and his unit helped Taylor in the occupation of Laredo. Gillespie's forty men took the town, seizing twenty-eight Mexican soldiers as prisoners.

During the Mexican War, Captain Hays formed the First Regiment of Texas Mounted Riflemen. Gillespie joined and commanded Company I, which was mustered into service



The common gravesite of Ad Gillespie and Sam Walker in San Antonio.

on August 30, 1846, with Bigfoot Wallace as first lieutenant. With Hays leading the regiment, Company I participated in the assault of Bishop's Palace atop Independence Hill. On September 22, 1846, Gillespie was the first man to reach the summit during this conflict; however, he was mortally wounded in the stomach. As he lay bleeding from a gunshot wound, he passed his sword to Lieutenant G. H. Nelson and said, "Lead the company. I am gone, but Monterrey is ours!" Gillespie then asked his men to prop him up behind a rock so he could do some damage with his revolver while his men advanced.

Gillespie passed away the following day, and his comrades returned his body to Texas for a burial in San Antonio. Years later, his remains were re-interred in the San Antonio Odd Fellows Cemetery along with those of fellow Ranger Samuel H. Walker. Both men had been wounded while fighting at Walker's Creek in 1844.

In 1848, Gillespie County was created, with Fredericksburg as the seat. The county was named in honor of the respected Texas Ranger who had recently perished while heroically leading his company in the Mexican War.

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For more information on Hall of Fame Ranger Sam Walker, click on the links below:

- ◆ [Sam Walker by Robert Nieman \(Dispatch 9, Winter 2002\)](#)
- ◆ [Colt Walker by David Stroud \(Dispatch 2, Winter 2000\)](#)
- ◆ [Sam Walker by Allen Hatley \(Dispatch 2, Winter 2000\)](#)