

HEDGECOXE WAR  
THE COLONY, TEXAS

Historical Narrative researched and written by Lawrence M. Martin for Texas Historical Commission THC  
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## THE HEDGECOXE WAR

In 1847, Henry O. Hedgecoxe, an Englishman, was appointed agent of the Texas Emigration and Land Company, more popularly known as The Peters Colony. (1) His function was to survey and process land claims of immigrating Colonists, issue certificates of ownership and in general, oversee the Company's interests in Texas. Hedgecoxe's sarcastic attitudes and somewhat confusing role as agent of both the Company and the State of Texas, combined with agitation created by land speculators, resulted in what has become known in Texas history books as the Hedgecoxe War. (2)

In reality nothing more than a one-day armed uprising, the Hedgecoxe War consisted of a group of men under the leadership of John J. Good, of Dallas, riding from Dallas to the Hedgecoxe land office. Their intentions were to seize the Peters Colony land records and to depose Hedgecoxe as the Company's agent. (3) Warned in advance of their intentions, Hedgecoxe and/or his clerk, S. A. Venters made off with the papers, or at least with some quantity of them. (4) Hedgecoxe went to Bonham (5) and thence to Austin (6). The raiders rode to "Hedgecoxe's home on Rowlett's Creek, in Collin County. The mob then went to the office and burned it, and were furious because they could not find the original land papers." (7) Some portion of the papers were in fact confiscated by the Dallas group of raiders and deposited in the Dallas County Court House. (8)

The raid occurred on July 16, 1852. The exact location of Hedgecoxe's office and store has not, until now, been definitively established. (9) However, a close study of a variety of sources and a collating of the references in those sources now makes it possible to establish a very close approximate location. A number of references place the office in the now-vanished communities of Bridges Settlement or Stewartsville. It appears that these two were in fact one and the same, in that at the outset of colonization in 1843, the first recorded settlement was Bridges Settlement. (10) It was here that the Peters Colony land office and settler's store was established in 1844. At that time it was determined that a town name was needed. Stewartsville was selected and Bridges Settlement ceased to exist. (11)

Reference to the office being located in this area also can be found in Jackson's "Sixty Years in Texas" which states that the office was in Denton County near Stewartsville. (12)

In "History and Reminiscences of Denton County," a number of references place the land office in the southeast corner of Denton County, (13) e.g., "This rapid settling here was caused by Peters Colony establishing their land office in the Bridges Settlement on Office Branch in 1844..." (14) "Yes, I remember Henry O. Hedgecoke, (sic) agent for Peters Colony...The office was located about two miles east of Higgins Crossing on Big Elm", a statement attributed to Jesse P. Loving. (15)

Another very important reference in Bates is: "Mr. Oliver Hedgecoke was in charge of the office. At Office Branch, sometimes called Stewartsville, he had a considerable number of surveyors...and also a settlers store. This was probably two miles west of the present town of Hebron, and just west of Tom West survey." (16) This statement is attributed to a James P. Bates, who continues to describe the incidents of the Hedgecoxe War and finishes by stating, "These facts were related to my father (W. H. Bates) by Judge (S. A.) Venters in my presence." (17)

Still another reference occurs in "The Lusty Texans of Dallas", which states that...a company of armed men under Captain J. J. Good marched from Dallas to Stewartsville. Hedgecoke and Venters ran away from this show of violence, taking what papers they could..." (18)

The references to the office being located "west of the Tom West Survey" and "east of the Higgins Crossing at Big Elm" cited above need to be explored. By referring to the attached map, Chart No. 12, Ownership Map, Denton County, it becomes apparent that the central point of these two references is property owned by Henry Hedgecoxe. The small creek indicated as ending at the northern border of the Hedgecoxe tract and moving east from there is Office Branch and is so known today. The attached U. S. Geological Survey map shows the present situation of Office Creek.

It might be wise to pause here to consider the name of the creek. Creeks and rivers in Texas, and in America, have always been named after description of the creek, events which happened on the creek, or functions which occurred around the creek. No reference in any books indicated any other reason for Office Creek to be so named. Interviews with the oldest available residents of the area know of no other reason for the name, other than that the Peters Colony office was located on it. Thus, another block falls into place in building a case for this as being the location of the office.

The major participants in the Hedgecoxe War were Henry O. Hedgecoxe, S. A. Venters (1822-1881), and John J. Good.

A complete history of the Peters Colony would be necessary to retell all the reasons for the ultimate raid on Hedgecoxe's office, the so-called Hedgecoxe War. The causes go back to the origins of the Texas Emigration and Land Company and the grants given to it by the Republic of Texas.

The immediate causes, however, can be related. On February 10, 1852, the State Legislature passed a law relating to the satisfaction of the Company's land claims in the Peters Colony area. It was felt by many colonists and exhorted by many non-colonist speculators that the Company claims infringed on the colonists individual claims. To aggravate the matter, Hedgecoxe issued a proclamation explaining the law in such an arrogant and autocratic way that misinterpretation of the law by the colonists was inevitable.

On July 12 and 13, 1852, a self-appointed committee forced its way into the land office and examined the records. The committee then reported to a mass meeting in Dallas that Hedgecoxe was planning to defraud the colonists. Many agitative speeches were made at that meeting; resulting in the raid on July 15 and 16. (19)

As pointed out above, Hedgecoxe and/or Venters, having been alerted to the intentions of the mob, made off with either some or all of the records. Some papers of some kind were confiscated by the mob, who then returned to Dallas where they "met a brilliant reception from the citizens of Dallas County, at whose expense we have been feasting and revelling...and still the excitement is up." (20)

Obviously, a great deal of fear and confusion developed among the colonists concerning the validity of their claims as a result of the confiscation of the land office records. Willis Stewart, one of the principal<sup>es</sup> of the Peters Colony (and for whom Stewartville had been named) offered to serve as an intermediary for the colonists and spent a good deal of time with the General Land Office in Austin attempting to clarify the claims. (21) Finally, on February 7, 1853, the Legislature passed an act which allowed the colonists to file their claims directly and individually with the General Land Office rather than through the Colony. This act was ultimately converted into the western world's first complete "homestead law", thus setting the stage, through the actions of the Peters Colony and the colonists, for what is still today an important piece of land law in the United States. (22)

Based on the foregoing, and the importance of Peters Colony to the settling of North Central Texas, and because the site of the so-called Hedgecoxe War has never been positively located, the need of a Texas Historical Marker is certainly justified.

It is proposed that the marker be placed in a soon to be developed park located at the intersection of Alta Oaks Lane and Colony Boulevard, in a new unincorporated residential development known as The Colony, being developed by Fox & Jacobs, Inc., of Carrollton, Texas. This park is located approximately 1/2 mile from the intersection of Office Creek and State Highway 423, and will be the approximate center of a community now inhabited by just 35 families but within the next 10 years to include about 30,000 inhabitants. The Colony was so named in commemoration of Peters Colony, in the belief that so important an enterprise in Texas History, should have a living monument.

## Footnotes and Bibliography

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2. Webb, Walter Prescott, The Handbook of Texas, Austin, The Texas State Historical Association, 1952, Vol. I, p. 793.
3. Ibid, p. 793.
4. Bates, Ed. F., History and Reminiscences of Denton County, Denton, McNitzky Printing Co., 1918, p. 352.
5. Webb, Vol. II, p. 367.
6. Connor, p. 142.
7. Ibid, p. 352.
8. Ibid, p. 142.
9. Ibid, p. 142. (Connor says, "Hedgecoxe's office, which was apparently located in or adjacent to his home".)
10. Webb, p. 366.
11. Ibid.
12. Jackson, Rev. George, Sixty Years in Texas, Wilkinson Printing Company, 1908, p. 155.
13. Bates, p. 6.
14. Ibid, p. 14.
15. Ibid, p. 339.
16. Ibid, p. 352.
17. Ibid.
18. Rogers, John Williams, The Lusty Texans of Dallas, New York, E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1960, p. 65.
19. Connor, pgs. 134, 135, 136, 139, 140.
20. Ibid, p. 142, quoting a letter from J. J. Good to the Northern Standard.

21. Ibid, p. 149, 150.

22. Ibid, p. 154.

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Chart No. 12, Ownership Map, Denton County, Texas, Mitchell Map and Drafting Co., Dallas, 1970.

Geological Survey Map, Department of Interior, 1968.

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