

JUDGE HENRY J. HUCK

1822-1905

I. CONTEXT

“By the Gulf of Mexico lies the unmarked grave of a dead city, over which the sea weeps in the foamy flakes when the winds rise and landward drive the white capped waves. There lies the grave of Indianola.”¹

The birth of Indianola was a result of the early German immigrants brought to the shores of the Republic of Texas beginning in 1844. Her death was due to her location on Matagorda Bay that was devastated by two major hurricanes, the first in 1875 and the final blow in 1886. During its growth years from 1844-1886, the port city was second only to Galveston, and had a profound influence on Western Texas. The young German community was in great need of leadership to help organize the city and help provide supplies and medicine to the immigrants.

One of the immigrants, Henry (Heinrich) Joseph Huck, who was in New Orleans in 1845, heard of the difficulties of the German colony at Matagorda Bay and wasted no time in helping the German people in need. Having financial resources that he had inherited at the death of his mother, and from his merchant business in London, he purchased sufficient lumber and loaded the schooner, *Native*, with supplies and medicine. In 1845, at the age of 23, he sailed to Indian Point, whose name was changed to Indianola in 1849. The name change was suggested by Mrs. Mary Brown, wife of Victoria’s newspaper pioneer John Henry Brown. Retaining the word Indian and adding the Spanish word for “wave”, *ola*. Mrs. Brown was suggesting that the wave of the future was beginning to sweep over Western Texas from this spot on Matagorda Bay. ²

The winter of 1845-46 was one of extreme cold and heavy rainfall in Texas. Respiratory ailments, cholera, and other diseases spread throughout the unequipped German community. Henry Joseph Huck, with help from a local doctor, supplied them with medicine at no cost. He also gave, without charge, lumber to be used as coffins for the dead.³

In 1846 he was elected the first Probate Judge of Calhoun County, a position he did not seek but was persuaded to be placed on the ballot by the insistence of the immigrants he had given unbounded aid.⁴

Henry Joseph Huck was a pioneer of Western Texas. He spent his years in Indianola serving the community, holding positions as Judge, Merchant, Trustee, Commissioner, Chairman and Director of various organizations. Henry not only loved the people of Texas but loved the country he had become part of and freely served in the Texas Militia for the Confederate States.

Henry was a man of vision, love and hope. His influence in the development of Western Texas is one to be remembered.

II. OVERVIEW

Heinrich (Henry) Joseph Huck was born August 3rd, 1822 at Otenhofen, Baden, South Germany. His father, Hieronymous von Huck of the estate of Neurizer in the same region, married Gertrude Baroness von Sieders (Seithers), of the estate of Otenhofen on Jan 28, 1806. Henry was one of seven children. Henry's mother passed away on April 20, 1836, when Henry was 14 years old. Henry continued his education and graduated from Heidelberg University and with the inheritance from his mother's death, at the age of 17, ventured into the new world. Henry boarded the ship John Wood at the port of Hamburg, Germany and arrived in Newcastle, England on Nov 7, 1839.⁵ It was in London where he would start his merchant business

importing china from Germany.⁶ On Sept 29, 1845, at the age of 23, sailing on the ship Wellington, he arrived in New York City,⁷ and later that same year traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana, and later Indian Point. He opened the first lumberyard at Indian Point, which in 1849 became known as Indianola. In addition to Indianola, Henry J. Huck established his second lumberyard three miles down the bay at Powder Horn Bayou, which became his main yard that supplied his satellite yards in other towns.⁸ As a pioneer lumberman; he imported and exported Florida pine wood from Blackwater and Pensacola. His Texas shipments extended throughout West Texas; from the coast to San Antonio, New Braunfels, Fredericksburg and into the border regions of Mexico. He imported wood from Mississippi and Louisiana, and made extensive shipments of the celebrated Calcasieu lumber.⁹

In 1846, following the admission of Texas into the Union in December 1845, Henry J. Huck was one of the organizers and first probate judge of Calhoun County. In 1852, he was a Trustee of the Indianola and Guadalupe Valley Railroad; in 1853, he was a Commissioner and Director of the Indianola and Victoria Plank and Turnpike Road Company; in 1855, he was a Commissioner of the Powder Horn Bayou and Matagorda Bay Dredging Company; and in 1856, he was a Director of the Western Texas Wharf Company. In 1860, Henry J. Huck was one of 132 Calhoun County businessmen signing a petition to the Governor of Texas, Sam Houston, and calling for a secession convention.¹⁰ Henry J. Huck enlisted 6/27/1861, at the age of 38, in the Indianola Guards Battalion, Texas Militia. In February of 1862, he was a 1st Lieutenant in the 24th Militia Brigade, Texas State Troops and later that same year promoted to Captain of Company A. Near the end of May 1865, Henry J. Huck was appointed Chief Quartermaster of Texas with the rank of Major. In June 1865, Texas surrendered. Henry J. Huck was instructed to

return eastward to Texana, Texas and surrender to the nearest Federal Commander and sign an Amnesty Oath and Surrender Documents.¹¹

After he returned from the war in 1865, he was elected a Commissioner of Pilots at the Port of Indianola, and returned to his lumber business. In 1867, Henry J. Huck served as a Commissioner of Schools at Indianola and a Member of the Board of School Examiners. By 1870, he had expanded his lumberyards to include Victoria, Cuero, Yorktown, Hallettsville and San Antonio. At one time, he was the largest wholesale and retail lumber merchant in southwest Texas. To help move his supplies, he had several 400-ton capacity lumber schooners built, including the ships Ajax and Eddie Huck.¹²

After the 1875 hurricane, Henry was appointed Chairman of the Indianola Relief Association, whose job was to coordinate the receipts and disbursement of funds to the city as the nation responded to the aid appeals.¹³

When the 1886 hurricane struck, the city of Indianola was devastated beyond repair. Henry J. Huck had lost his entire business inventory and main lumber plant in Indianola. He then sold out his holdings and returned to “Edgemont” Mansion near Mount Bonnell, outside of Austin, Texas. The house was constructed of Austin limestone and was one of the finest in the state. “Edgemont” was built in 1855 by Robert J. Townes. Henry bought the property and moved his family to the estate after the storm of 1875, but did not take personal residence there until after the storm of 1886.¹⁴ Close by, the Huck Slough Bridge, which sits along the Mount Bonnell Highway next to its replacement, now displays a “Historic Landmark” medallion. The Huck Bridge was built in 1922 by the Austin Brothers Bridge Company and is one of the few remaining truss bridges in Austin and for many years served as a gateway to Mount Bonnell.¹⁵

Henry J. Huck passed away at this estate December 18, 1905, preceded by his wife, Mrs. Hanna Catherine Rogers Huck, in 1903. The house and much of its original furniture were burned beyond reconstruction in 1956.¹⁶

III. SIGNIFICANCE

Judge Henry Joseph Huck's contribution to the growth of Western Texas tells an amazing story. At the age of 17, he left his birth country of Germany and travelled to London to build his fortune. But, it was for the small community of Indianola, Texas, that he dedicated his life. Henry had applied for naturalization in New York City on October 9, 1843, and took his oath on March 29, 1849¹⁷. He was a pioneer, businessman, husband, father, statesman, soldier, judge, commissioner, educator, director, chairman and leader. His accomplishments gave the German community and the people of Indianola the hope for a better tomorrow. He was instrumental in the development of the railway, roads, housing, hospitals, schools and court system, and was chairman of the Indianola Relief Association. He was a man that was respected and loved by the people he touched. His influence in the building of Western Texas is one for the history books. No other individual contributed more to the building of Indianola.

IV. DOCUMENTATION

¹Henry Joseph Huck Jr., Manuscript, The Passing of Indianola, abt 1907, page 1.

² Brownson Malsch, Indianola Mother of Texas, State House Press, Austin, Texas, 1988, page 36 & 37.

³ Brownson Malsch, Indianola Mother of Texas, State House Press, Austin, Texas, 1988, page 10 & 11.

⁴ Brownson Malsch, *Indianola Mother of Texas*, State House Press, Austin, Texas, 1988, page 14.

⁵ National Archives, London, England, *England Arrivals 1826-1869*, (PRO) FO 83/21-22, Lists of Aliens Arriving at English Ports.

⁶ Jo Ann Smothers, Judge Henry Joseph Huck, Texas State Historical Association, *The Junior Historian*, Vol 20, Number 6, May 1960, page 29.

⁷ National Archives Washington, D.C., *List of Vessels Arriving at New York 1820-1897*, Microfilm Records of the U.S. Customs Service, Record Group 36, Publication M237, 1820-1897, Roll 60.

⁸ Brownson Malsch, *Indianola Mother of Texas*, State House Press, Austin, Texas, 1988, page 325.

⁹ Jo Ann Smothers, Judge Henry Joseph Huck, Texas State Historical Association, *The Junior Historian*, Vol 20, Number 6, May 1960, page 30.

¹⁰ Phillips Clarke Huck, *Ancestors in Gray*, San Antonio Genealogical Society, 1989, page 1.

¹¹ Phillips Clarke Huck, *Ancestors in Gray*, San Antonio Genealogical Society, 1989, page 1-2.

¹² Phillips Clarke Huck, *Ancestors in Gray*, San Antonio Genealogical Society, 1989, page 1-2.

¹³ Brownson Malsch, *Indianola Mother of Texas*, State House Press, Austin, Texas, 1988, page 298.

¹⁴ Jo Ann Smothers, Judge Henry Joseph Huck, Texas State Historical Association, *The Junior Historian*, Vol 20, Number 6, May 1960, page 32.

¹⁵Jim Dobbins, Envision Paper, Austin Texas, Spring 1996, page 5 & 12.

¹⁶Jo Ann Smothers, Judge Henry Joseph Huck, Texas State Historical Association, The Junior Historian, Vol 20, Number 6, May 1960, page 32.

¹⁷Common Pleas Court New York City, Naturalization Records, Bundle 90, Records 51, 51A, 51B.