

KENT COUNTY, TEXAS

Kent County was created in 1876 and organized in 1892 from Young and Bexar Territories. It was named after Andrew Kent who died at the Alamo in 1836.

Clairemont was the original county seat. After an attempt to move it failed in 1921 and again in 1923, it was finally voted on and moved to Jayton in 1952 after a contest.

The first called session of the Commissioners' Court was held on the 16th day of November 1892. N. W. Howell was the first County Judge; Robert Goodall was Commissioner Precinct 1 and Marian J. Howard was Commissioner Precinct 4. These are the men that constituted the Court. There is no mention of any other commissioners at this meeting. On the 28th of November, G.W. Underwood was appointed as Commissioner of Precinct 3 and D. L. Flynt as County Attorney. On December 13th, S. S. Snowden was appointed as Commissioner Precinct 2. These men drew \$3.00 per day for their services when they were on duty. The sheriff was always present and court opened by his proclamation. Their first business was to purchase law books, stationary, furniture, etc. According to the minutes, Marian J. Howard, within a short time, was dropped and W. J. Howard was appointed Commissioner Precinct 4. They began to make preparations to build a courthouse.

In 1893, the first newspaper was established. The Kent County Sentinel was the legal newspaper of the county. In May 1893, another newspaper was established and it was called Western Courier. In this same month W. W. Davis, acting as agent for A. L. Rhomberg, was called to deliver a plat of the town of Clairemont. In 1894, another newspaper was printed known as The Two Rivers.

On the 3rd day of March 1893, N. W. Howell resigned as County Judge and A. W. Landers was appointed in his place. Judge Landers was later waylaid, robbed and killed carrying tax money to Snyder on horseback. The Court had temporary quarters in a residence rented from Felix Jackson until the courthouse was completed. A guard was paid to watch over their records, furniture, etc. at night.

In 1894 the courthouse was built along with the jail. Both were constructed of red sandstone rock quarried out of a hill near Clairemont. The cost of the two story courthouse was \$18,000.00. The courthouse was not only used for county purposes. It was used occasionally for a county dance and at night for church services.

The jail was first a two story construction. The upper part afforded living quarters for the sheriff and the bottom for the prisoners. This old jail has held many early day criminals such as moonshiners, cattle thieves, murderers, etc. On one occasion a man was being held for trial in the jail for stealing a horse. He broke out and made his way to the courthouse where he took refuge in the cupola. There he watched to two days and nights. When he became hungry he was forced to surrender for food. On another occasion some 20 cases of liquor was stored in the jail. It afforded such a temptation to some of the citizens that they broke out a window, took a long stick and fished practically all of it out leaving only a few bottles for

evidence. The old jail building still stands with the cell blocks inside. The Commissioners' Court has passed an order that it be preserved for Kent County as a historical site in honor of the early day pioneer enforcement of the law. The Texas Historical Society has also designated the old jail at Clairemont a historical site.

The District Judge came from Snyder once every six months to hold District Court. Judges and prosecutors lives were in constant danger in those days. Cullen Higgins, a District Judge, was killed while sitting in the lobby of the hotel in Clairemont reading a newspaper. Later, a District Attorney was waylaid and killed on his way from Kent County to Anson between Aspermont and Hamlin in the cedar breaks along the Double Mountain River.

When a county commissioner failed to attend Court without a good reason, he was held in contempt and fined \$10.00. Much had to be done after the county government was organized. Wagon roads were established east, north, west and south to the county lines. These had to be surveyed and routes nearest and most practical were cleared across the large cattle ranches without regard to section lines. These roads were mostly on high ground and at the best river and creek crossings available.

The metes and bounds of the county were surveyed twice before the General Land Office in Austin would accept them. The commissioners precincts were reestablished in 1910, and were divided so all four cornered in the center of the courthouse in Clairemont. The sheriff, treasurer, county clerk, and county judge all worked in different precincts within the same building.

From 1876 to 1896 the Mackenzie Trail was the most widely known and important trail in West Texas. Most of the families going west settled along its path. Many Indian graveyards are still located in the county. The trail originated at Fort Griffin in Shackelford County. It extended west across Haskell County and along the Jones County line, middle of Stonewall, and northwest across Kent and Dickens via Soldier's Mound, thence to the battle in Blanco Canyon. It was here that soldiers defeated the Comanche's. A million buffalo hides came east to Ft. Griffin in ox-drawn wagons. Mackenzie ordered some 3,000 Indian horses shot, leaving the Indians to walk back to Indian Territory.

General Ranald Slidell Mackenzie was an officer in the United State Cavalry. He was credited with removing the warring bands of Indians from this part of Texas. The Comanche and Kiowa were the prevalent tribes in the area.

They had little money to spend on roads, so in each community an overseer was appointed by the Court. His job was to see that every man put in so many days throughout each year working the road with no pay. There were subject to a fine if they failed to do so. The road from Girard to Clairemont was established in 1910, and Matt Bingham was appointed the first overseer. J. A. Boland and R. I. Goodall were allowed \$15.00 each for damages and land taken.

In about 1900 there was a brick plant in Kent County. It was located south of Jayton across the Salt Fork River on its bank. It furnished brick for cistern tops, chimneys for fireplaces, and other structures.

In 1903, an election was held to determine whether or not prairie dogs should be exterminated. The results of the election were 38 votes for and 1 against. At the end of 12 months any landowners who willfully refused to kill prairie dogs could be fined \$250.00 per month until they complied.

Wildlife in the county was at its peak. The coyotes were numerous and they were a great menace to the early settlers since chicken was their favorite diet. The Loafer Wolf was here and was larger than the coyote. They preyed upon young calves and were known to kill yearlings as large as 350 pounds. This wolf lost the battle with cattlemen and has become extinct. In addition to the wolf and coyote there were deer, antelope and panther. The bobcat was plentiful then and still exists here. The bobwhite and blue quail were more abundant then.

In 1907, during the month of August, apparently a wave of smallpox hit the county and a strict quarantine was placed on all victims. Dr. P. C. Wray was the Health Officer at that time.

School districts were formed all over the county in every community. The districts were small in area so the students had to walk as far as 3 miles to school. The schools were mostly one-room buildings with one teacher teaching all grades. At one time there were as many as 20 districts in the county.

COMMONS SCHOOL DISTRICTS 1910 – 1929

District 1	Clairemont	District 16	Elkins
District 2	Henson (Center Point)	District 17	Luzon
District 3	Lower Red Mud (Later Red Mud)	District 19	Ellis
District 4	Sims	District 20	Owen
District 5	Cedar Bayou (Formerly Underwood – 1913)	District 21	Lost Lake
District 6	Riverdale	District 22	Antelope
District 7	Clipper	District 23	Higgins - 1913
District 8	Mountain View (Changed to Pirkle – 1913) (Changed to Harmony – 1929)	District 24	O - O
District 9	Ayers (Changed to Rising Star)	District 25	Swenson
District 10	A B C	District 26	Blackwell
District 11	Polar	District 27	Morrison
District 12	Bunker Hill – 1911	District 28	Pursley - 1924 (Originally part of Bond District)
District 13	Girard – 1910 (Later became Girard I.S.D.)		
District 14	Bond (Also known as Bond Chapel)		
District 15	Gilbert (Changed to Durham – 1929)		

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Girard Independent School District

Jayton Independent School District

Beulah School – Colored school located just west of the Jayton School

In 1969 – 70 school year the remaining two schools in the county, Girard and Jayton, were consolidated into one and officially named Jayton – Girard Independent School District.

The City of Jayton was incorporated at an elected held on 11 February 1910. It carried by a vote of 21 for and 6 against. The commission form of government was adopted. Mr. N. E. Porter was the first mayor of Jayton. Joe Jay and W. M. Fulbright were the first City Commissioners. O. C. Lowrance was Judge of the election. On the 7th day of May 1910, an election was held to determine whether the said town of Jayton would form an incorporation for free school purposes. The name of the corporation was the Jayton Independent School District.

In 1917 and 1918 one of the worst droughts hit Kent County and most of all of West Texas. The government passed the Drought Relief Act. The farmers had to have help buying planting seed and feed for horses and livestock. This was administered by the Commissioners Court under the Drought Relief Act.

During the winter of 1918, the worst siege of influenza ever known hit all of the United States. On many occasions whole families would be down at one time. In this case many of them died for need of medical care. The doctors and nurses lost their lives at this time too.

In 1919, Dr. P. C. Wray, was again appointed County Health Officer. He fee was \$1.00 per mile traveled in the actual discharge of his duties, not to exceed the sum of \$41.67 for any one calendar month. This was quite a drop from the limit in the past. Dr. McLaury served many years also.

According to former Kent County Judge, Mr. D. J. Young, religion in those days seemed to be taken more seriously than it is today. Summer meetings were held at a selected spot where there was plenty of stock water and drinking water. A Brush Arbor was built and it was lighted at night with kerosene torches and lanterns. Families would load up in a covered wagon and go camp on the grounds for the entire meeting, which usually lasted 10 days. Members from all faiths in the community would attend – ready at all times to defend their way of belief. Many times there were heated debates over the interpretation of scriptures.

The men who chose the ministry as their way of discharging their obligation to the Lord did so with a deep conviction and prepared themselves at night by a kerosene light. They worked 6 days a week trying to make a living on the farm and drove a tired team of horses to their appointments on Sunday, mostly at their own expense.

The township of Jayton was dedicated in 1907, and Girard in 1910. As the railroad made its way in 1910, these town began to grow. To some it may be surprising to know that at one time from 1920 to 1930 Girard was the largest town of the county. The business section of Girard consisted of 1 bank, 2 hotels, 2 barber shops, 2 dry good stores, 2 lumber yards, 2 drug stores, 5 service stations, 2 grocery stores, a Masonic Lodge, 2 cafes, 2 blacksmith shops, 2 gins, 1 depot, and 1 post office. All of these places prospered until the early 1930's. The coming of the automobile and good roads put most of them out of business.

On the 6th day of April 1921, an election was held to move the courthouse from Clairemont to Jayton. Results were: 344 votes for removal and 273 against. It had to be a two-thirds majority for it to pass.

Twelve and one-half miles southwest of Clairemont there are dugout ruins which stir old west memories. These ruins contain several rock chimneys. Some of the dugouts are still walled with rock. It is believed that this was on the old mail hack run from Colorado City to Estacado – the Quaker Colony on the Plains, via stops at Red Mud, Dockum's Store (Dickens County), Hank Smith's place (Crosby County), and onto the Plains. It was said the overland mail line and or branch stage line changed horses every 20 miles and the map-pin pointing trace of here, Red Mud – Dockum – Hank Smith – Estacado, bears out such a system. There is also a good spring at the ghost community. Nearby stands an old wooden horse trough of the type seen in the western movies. Here, the hack and stage horses watered. The "permanent" residents built a rock walled reservoir that still stands. There are seven or eight graves in a small cemetery and one is marked with a stone-engraved marker. From it you can date this unnamed town. It reads:

Myrtle
Wife of J. S. Vaughn
September 30, 1869 – April 23, 1888

The present courthouse located in Jayton was constructed in 1956 costing Kent County \$400,000.00. This information was compiled from notes of former Kent County Judge, Mr. D. J. Young and notes taken from the minutes of early Commissioners Court meetings.