

JACK COFFEE HAYS AND THE TEXAS RANGERS

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Recently, I was gifted a book that I started to read but quickly put down. The book was full of interesting information and was actually fascinating. But I put the book down simply because I had stumbled across a name and a side story within the book that I just needed to know more about. Before I continue, the book was, *Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History*, by S.C. Gwynne.

The story that caught my attention in the book, belonged to a Surveyor and Texas Ranger by the name of John Coffee (Jack) Hays. And so, my research began.

Jack Hays was born in Wilson County, Tennessee, on January 28, 1817. His father was known to have fought alongside Andrew Jackson and Sam Houston in the War of 1812. From the jump, little Jack Hays was destined to lead. At a young age, Jack Hays left home for Mississippi, where he began his surveying career.

According to *The Handbook of Texas*, Hays surveyed in Mississippi until he heard of the war in Texas. Once learning of the war, Jack Hays joined the rebels in the fight for independence from Mexico.

Hays gained military experience that he paired with his surveying skills and joined a group of men tasked to protect the settlers and surveyors of the Texas frontier. This group of men would later be known as the Texas Rangers.

The settlers and surveyors were originally easy targets and no match for the ruthless Comanche tribes. When survey parties came to survey the frontiers, they were torn apart by the Comanche tribes. The Texas Government asked these “citizen soldiers” to patrol these lands and protect the survey parties and the settlers. These group of men were chosen for their military tactics, leadership quality and their ability to survey. They knew what needed to be done and how to get it done.

In battles, Hays and his men were routinely outnumbered, but their use of revolvers helped revolutionize American warfare. It wasn’t until the Mexican War, that the Texas Rangers gained national attention. During the war, promoted to Colonel, Hays turned these “citizen soldiers” into The Texas Rangers.

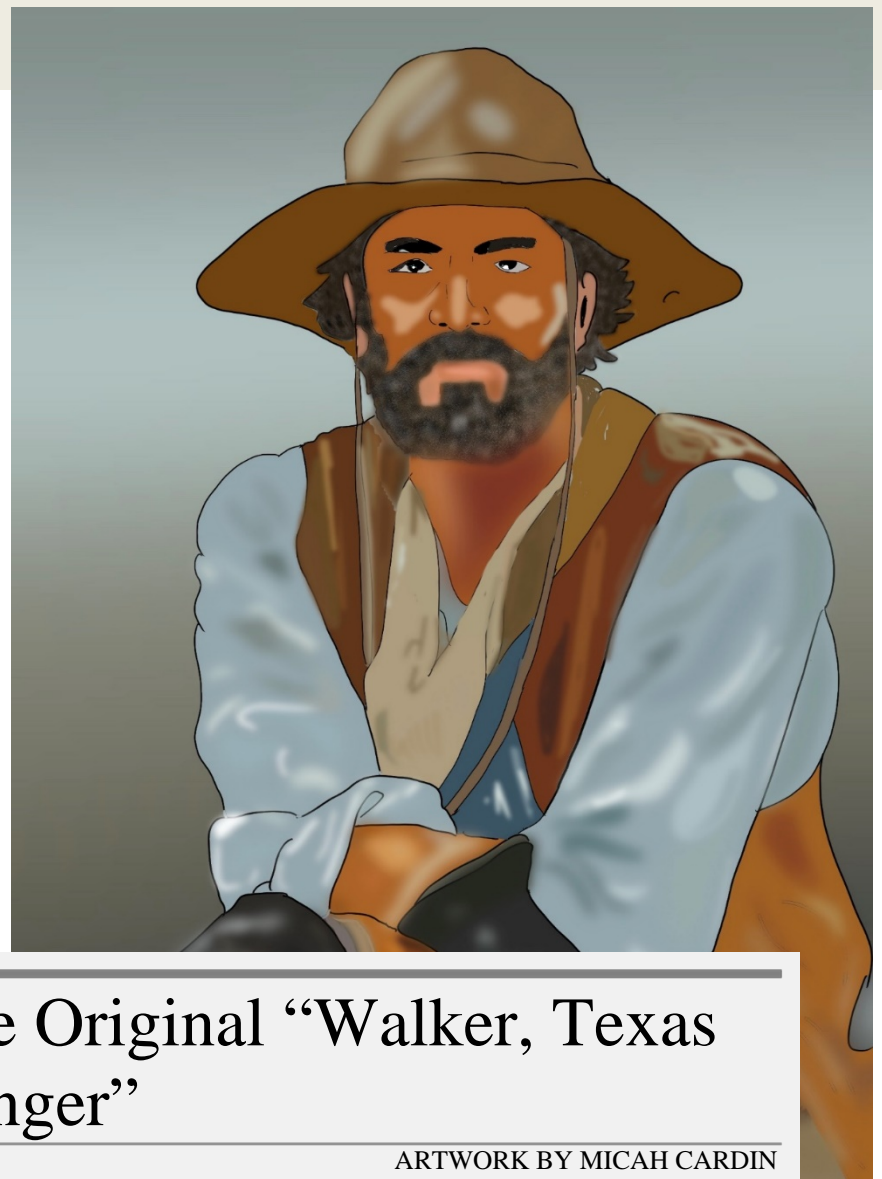
Following the Mexican war, Jack Hays pioneered trails on his way to southern California. He became an essential person to the state of California, being elected sheriff of San Francisco County in 1850 and appointed United States Surveyor General for California in 1853. After Hays passed in 1883, Hays County, Texas, was named in his honor.

Suggestions for Further Reading

S.C. Gwynne, *Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History*, 2010

Walter Prescott Webb et al, *The Handbook of Texas*, 1996

Frederick Wilkins, *The Highly Irregular Irregulars: Texas Rangers in the Mexican War*, 1990



The Original “Walker, Texas Ranger”

ARTWORK BY MICAH CARDIN