

# Saint Jo, Texas

Its  
Founding  
and Its  
Founder

**Saint Jo, Texas, Its Founding and Its Founder, Irby Holt Boggess**

# **Irby Holt Boggess**

A North Texas Pioneer

**Presented to the Daughters of the Republic of Texas  
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By D. A. Sharpe  
Aurora, TX

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## IRBY HOLT BOGGESS

*Born November 5, 1835, Died December 4, 1914*

**By Dwight Albert Sharpe**

Aurora, Texas

**C**aptain Irby Holt Boggess was born at Boggess Crossroads, Meigs County, Tennessee, November 5, 1835, the 11th of 13 children who were the issue of Abijah Boggess (November, 1795 - March 5, 1884) and Susan Jordan (November 5, 1796 - December 12, 1866). He was the first cousin, three times removed of my wife, Suzanne Margaret Boggess Sharpe. He was the grandson of "sometime" Methodist preacher, the Rev. Bennett Boggess and his wife, Vashti Jane Fowler Hubbard Boggess of Virginia. They had migrated to Tennessee. This Boggess line is traceable back to Robert Boggess, an English immigrant who disembarked from a ship landing at Lower Norfolk County, Virginia in 1656, along with his wife, Mary, and a son, John. Robert's will, which was probated in Northumberland County, Virginia in 1662, is located in the Virginia State Archives, Richmond, Virginia.

Boggess remained under the parental roof up to the time of his marriage to Mahala (Rhoda) Rebecca Neil on February 3, 1859 in Meigs County, Tennessee. He had been reared on his father's plantation and had acquired a liberal education, attending the common schools, and later attending Mars Hill Academy, Mars Hill, North Carolina. When he married, he began farming on his own account near the old homestead, where he remained until the opening of the Civil War in 1860.

Private Boggess initially served in Captain Bly's company, and subsequently was made commissary of the regiment with the rank of captain. He was attached later to McKenzie's Cavalry. He was taken prisoner near Strawberry Plains in 1864, and held for eight months. A finger

## **Saint Jo, Texas, Its Founding and Its Founder, Irby Holt Boggess**

was cut off, and he suffered a bayonet wound in the side while trying to escape from prison. He was freed in a prisoner exchange, rejoining his command near the Tennessee-Virginia border, filling out the war experience as a scout for his regiment in Northern Tennessee.

Captain Boggess then went to Mississippi, being employed as an overseer for a large plantation. He later engaged in merchandising for two years before moving on to Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where he continued merchandising and engaged in auctioning.

It is said that Captain Boggess left Tennessee to come to Texas, because he had shot and killed a man in Meigs County. It is unclear whether this alleged incident was before or after he spent the above time in Mississippi and Murfreesboro, Tennessee. He made a complete break with his Tennessee wife.

He came to Texas in 1869, settling at the head of Elm Creek on land he purchased in Montague County, and on which he erected a double log cabin. This was about 80 miles north of the Dallas and Fort Worth area. It was near the crossroads of two significant paths of commerce of that day. First was the famous Chisholm Trail for cattle driving from Texas to the Kansas City stockyards. The other was the California Trail, the stagecoach and personal travel trail surveyed by the federal government, beginning at Saint Louis, Missouri, and going out through El Paso, on to California, where gold had been discovered circa 1849.

Captain Boggess brought with him supplies especially usable by cattle drovers, hauling them regularly for several years from Jefferson, Texas. His place was the only stopping place for a great distance around, and he received liberal patronage. These patrons were provided with blankets and sleeping areas on the counter and the floor. He later established another supply house at the Red River station, known as the "Last Chance." Both of these mercantile locations prospered, and he continued successfully to handle cattle, buying and selling large herds, which he drove to the north.

## **Saint Jo, Texas, Its Founding and Its Founder, Irby Holt Boggess**

In good time, he was instrumental in securing the establishment of a Post Office at the head of Elm Creek. However, his having been an officer in the Confederate Army prevented him from receiving a Postal Commission to operate it. He did have in his employ one James Gordon who had been a Federal soldier, who thus served as Post Master.

His strategy was to purchase broken down cattle from drovers, and feed them into good condition, a strategy from which he prospered. He pursued these endeavors until about 1879.

Settlers in this part of Texas were sparse when Captain Boggess arrived. Very few Indian raids occurred after he came, as most of them had been driven to the North into what was the Oklahoma Territory. In 1872, he formed a business partnership with Joe Howell, purchasing together some three hundred twenty acres from the A. Ketchum (sic Kitchen) survey. They then platted the town of Saint Jo, which is understood to be named after this Joe Howell. The town square was bordered by Main and Broad Streets, and crossed by streets named after these partners, Boggess and Howell. Meigs Street, of course, derives its name from the Tennessee County of Irby Boggess' birth.

One story of folklore was about when Captain Boggess was attacked by Native Americans between the Red River station and Saint Jo. Captain Boggess took refuge behind a cabin door of Bois d' Arc (pronounced Bo dark) wood. The door shielded him from the attackers' bullets, as the rest of the cabin did not withstand the shots. He retained the life-saving door and later had it used as a lid for his coffin. The Bois d' Arc tree is that knurled old tree which produces those "horse apples" or the big green inedible apples, which are found across the Southland. It was used extensively for fence posts, due to the sturdy nature of the wood and its resistance to rot from moisture and attack from other wood-destroying phenomenon of nature. The American Indians used it extensively as wood for their bows. In fact, it is claimed that the name of the tree comes for that use (see interesting article on the Internet (<http://www.smu.edu/~anthrop/boisdarc.html>))

It is told that Joe was an abstainer from alcohol, a life style Captain Boggess did not share. When Captain Boggess wanted to name the new town after his partner, he thought it would sound appropriate to name the

## **Saint Jo, Texas, Its Founding and Its Founder, Irby Holt Boggess**

new town, "Saint Jo," because Mr. Howell's lifestyle was so saint like. This writer does not know why the "e" was dropped from Joe in naming the town.

In the work of improving the town, Captain Boggess gave real estate lots for the building of churches and to people who would erect substantial buildings thereon. He built a stone storehouse in 1873, which became named the Stonewall Saloon, after Stonewall Jackson, whom Boggess admired. It was Saint Jo's first permanent building, and was built of native stone. It served the cattle trail drivers of the Chisholm Trail with a saloon, complete with sleeping quarters on the second floor. Prohibition came to the County in 1897, and the building became a bank. This building was restored in 1958 during the Montague County Centennial as its original saloon character in museum form. The Texas Historical Survey Committee awarded an official "Historical Marker" to the saloon in 1967.

Captain Boggess, and his partner, Joe Howell, also built a stone storehouse for their business, and they prospered, both in stock raising and in the mercantile business. He again was instrumental in securing a Post Office when one was established for Saint Jo. This time, he was able to serve many years as Post Master. The assumption as to why he then could qualify is that Congress, sometime in the 1870's, pardoned most of the Confederate soldiers.

A very enterprising and progressive businessman, he added to his lands until he owned extensive tracts, including three large farms and much town property. He served Montague County in the early days as the Notary Public in order that legal transactions could be properly recorded.

A June 6, 1881 entry in Irby Boggess' Diary indicated he was starting on a trip to visit his father in East Tennessee, whom he had not seen in 14 years. This diary was in the possession of David and Lina Boggess of Saint Jo in 1976

Later, Captain Boggess built a commodious two story frame residence on the same tract of land where he lived, and from that place can be seen the old cabin. He continued merchandising until 1887, when he turned to real estate dealing and the management of his properties.

## **Saint Jo, Texas, Its Founding and Its Founder, Irby Holt Boggess**

Captain Boggess married three times. In Tennessee, he married someone whose name we do not have, but the marriage apparently ended shortly. Second, he married Rhoda Neil (05/13/1841 - 10/15/1897), the Tennessee born daughter of Pryon and Elizabeth Neal, a leading farm family there. Their two children were John Bennett Boggess (12/10/1859 - 06/09/1912) and Susan Neil Boggess (1863 - ?). John became a prominent merchant, farmer and Post Master in Tennessee, and Susan married James Acton Gallaher, who was from California. Rhoda, a devoted follower of the Baptist Church, is buried in the Decatur Cemetery, Meigs County, Tennessee. At one point, she filed for and was granted an uncontested divorce from Irby. John Bennett Boggess did appear in the 1880 census as a resident in Montague County, Texas.

Captain Boggess' third marriage was to Kentucky born Barbara Allen McLane, daughter of Alexander H. and Mary A. Cates McLane on December 22, 1874 in Montague County, Texas. That family had come in 1870 to Tarrant County, Texas, then came north to Montague County in 1873. Irby and Barbara Boggess gave issue to seven children, three of whom died either at birth or within two years of birth:

Vina Holt Boggess, 10/30/1875 - 06/18/1877, is buried in Pioneer Cemetery, Saint Jo, Montague County.

Abijah Alexander Boggess (known as "Bige") 06/15/1877 - death date unclear, married in West Texas, was a banker in Gainesville, Texas and operated a hardware business in Saint Jo. He is buried in Pioneer Cemetery.

Eliza Barbara Boggess ("Pert") was born January 4, 1880. She married three times: Otis Rector, 08/20/1897, Montague County, one child, divorced; Arthur D. Hyde, 04/10/1904, Montague County, 1 son, divorced; and E. B. Stuchel.

A stillborn child was issued May 7, 1882, and is listed in the family Bible of Irby H. & Barbara Boggess.

Irby Stonewall Boggess, 04/11/1883 - 06/18/1884, is buried in Pioneer Cemetery.

## **Saint Jo, Texas, Its Founding and Its Founder, Irby Holt Boggess**

Jordan Crump Boggess ("Jerd"), 03/11/1886 - 12/18/1949, died in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and was buried in Pioneer Cemetery in Montague County, Texas.

Temple Houston Boggess, 05/11/1888 - 03/25/1922, married Evelyn Cooper, issued two sons, and was divorced. Temple was shot in the back on the Saint Jo Town Square by the Sheriff, and is buried in Pioneer Cemetery. Mr. Boyd Whitson (Born in Saint Jo, 1901), Curator of the Stonewall Saloon Museum, told this writer in 1986 that he probably is the only remaining witness to that shooting. The story goes that Temple, a large and rough man, became ill tempered easily when intoxicated. While in that state, he took actions, which caused the sheriff to seek his arrest. This arrest was resisted, Temple attempted departure, and the sad results came to a climax. Temple had a son, Cecil Boggess, who still resided in St. Jo in 1986, who would be about 73 years old then.

Barbara Boggess was a member of the Christian Church. Irby Boggess was a staunch advocate of democracy, but was never an aspirant for office, though he accepted the nomination as Sheriff and served briefly.

Irby Boggess had two younger sisters who also migrated to Texas, settling in near by Paris (Lamar County) Texas. Susan Ellen Boggess was born June 9, 1838 in Meigs County, Tennessee. She married William P. Moore in Meigs County on July 15, 1854. He served in the Confederacy and both died and are buried in Lamar County, Paris, Texas.

Texannah S. Boggess (Texas "Teck") 02/13/1842 - 06/16/1873, was born in Meigs County, Tennessee, and was married to J. Alexander Cate, who later became mayor of Paris, Texas. This writer possesses a photograph of this couple.

Captain Irby Holt Boggess, a man of pioneer spirit and successful industry, represents the flair of new life on the Texas frontier of those late 1800's. He died December 4, 1914, and is buried in Pioneer Cemetery beside his second wife.

NOTES on Documentation for this paper are on the next page.

## **NOTES ON ORIGINS OF THIS PAPER:**

The heart of the paper telling of Irby Boggess' history and feats as a citizen of Saint Jo was taken from a copy of a series of biographical sketches of early Saint Jo pioneers, which is on display at the Stonewall Saloon Museum in Saint Jo, Texas. Irby Boggess was apparently still living when the paper was originated, as its writer claimed he "still owns three large farms and some town property." This surely means it was written prior to 1914, the year of Irby's death. The author is unknown today.

On December 20, 1986, I visited the Stonewall Saloon Museum with my father-in-law, Thomas Shelton Boggess, Jr., a native of Macon, Mississippi, who is a first cousin, twice removed, of Irby Boggess. Irby's grandfather, the Rev. Bennett Boggess, was T. S. Boggess' great great grandfather. We interviewed Mr. Boyd Whitson, the curator of the Museum, who reported his age as being 85. He'd been raised in Saint Jo, but spent his adult life away, coming back for retirement. He'd served as curator for almost a decade. We also visited some Boggess gravesites and spoke with other people in the town.

**To be fair, here is another story of origin what has credence.**

## The Beginnings of St. Jo, Montague County, Texas

### FROM THE HANDBOOK OF TEXAS ONLINE

ST. JO, TEXAS. St. Jo is at the intersection of U.S. Highway 82 and State Highway 59, near the Cooke county line fifteen miles east of Montague in extreme east central Montague County. It was founded in 1849 by Ithane and Prince Singletary, whose fruitless search for gold in the area encouraged them to relocate to Whitesboro. About 1851, however, the Singletarys returned to their original settlement, calling their home Head of Elm, after its location near the headwaters of the Elm Fork of the Trinity River. This location received considerable use by various United States Army expeditions. Capt. Randolph B. Marcy camped in the area in 1849 with a surveying crew. Five years later, Capt. John Pope and his crew camped at Head of Elm as they surveyed the area for a proposed federally sponsored railroad across the region from Arkansas. In 1855 Col. Albert Sydney Johnston camped there en route to west Texas. By 1870 the community was considered for the location of the county seat but lost out to more centrally located Montague in 1858. Cattle drives on the Chisholm Trail likely spurred Head of Elm's growth. By 1871 seven business establishments, five of them grocery stores, operated locally. In 1872 a group of local promoters, led by Irby H. Boggess and Joseph A. Howell, purchased a 640-acre tract that included the Head of Elm settlement. The following year they surveyed and laid out a town site on this property. The community's present name was reportedly suggested by Boggess as a reference to the abstemious Howell. A post office, operating under the name St. Jo, opened in 1873, when the community had a number of houses, a general merchandise store, and two saloons. St. Jo grew rapidly after 1873, achieving a population of 500 by 1886, when it incorporated. The community then had two steam-powered cotton gins, a number of gristmills, and a weekly newspaper. During that same year the Gainesville, Henrietta, and Western Railway extended tracks through the town. By 1890 St. Jo had a population of 1,000; by 1900 it had fallen to 825. Through most of the twentieth century St. Jo experienced steady growth. Its population rose to 985 by the mid-1920s; ten years later the town had fifty-five rated businesses. In 1926 oil was discovered just across the county line in Cooke County, and local hay and asphalt production prospered. By the late 1940s St. Jo had 1,010 persons and forty-eight businesses. Its population increased to 1,147 ten years later, and then declined somewhat, reaching 1,067 during the late 1960s. The number of businesses in 1957 was thirty-nine. In the mid-1970s the town had a population of 1,105 and twenty-seven businesses. In 1989 it had 1,717 people and twenty-four businesses. In 1990 the population was 1,048. The population dropped to 977 in 2000.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Guy Renfro Donnell, *The History of Montague County, Texas* (M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 1940). Jeff S. Henderson, ed., *One Hundred Years in Montague County, Texas* (St. Jo, Texas: Ipta Printer, 1978).

**Saint Jo, Texas, Its Founding and Its Founder, Irby Holt Boggess**

THERE ARE THIRTEEN GENERATIONS of Boggess folk in America in the records of this line the Boggess name. Here is a synopsis of them to this writer's family, showing also the off shoot Irby Holt Boggess takes through his father in the 7<sup>th</sup> generation. Irby sits in the 8<sup>th</sup> generation:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Generation Robert Boggess, born England, entered America 1656, died 1662  
2<sup>nd</sup> Generation Henry Boggess, born England, died America, 1685  
3<sup>rd</sup> Generation Henry Boggess, born 01/26/1680, died 1727  
4<sup>th</sup> Generation Bennett Boggess, born 1703, died circa 1744  
5<sup>th</sup> Generation Henry Boggess, born 1740, died 1813  
6<sup>th</sup> Generation Bennett Milton Boggess, born circa 1765, died 1831  
7<sup>th</sup> Generation Bennett Boggess, born circa 1795, died 05/25/1842  
Abijah Boggess, born 11/1795, died 03/05/1884  
8<sup>th</sup> Generation Thomas Shelton Boggess, born 04/13/1836, died 01/23/1888  
Irby Holt Boggess, born 11/05/1835, died 12/04/1914  
9<sup>th</sup> Generation Thomas Shelton Boggess, Sr., born 11/27/1883, died 09/01/1964

The following are all still living

- 10<sup>th</sup> Generation Thomas Shelton Boggess, Jr., born 03/30/1912  
11<sup>th</sup> Generation Thomas Shelton Boggess, III, born 08/28/1941  
Suzanne Boggess Sharpe, born 04/02/1938  
(Suzanne is this writer's wife)  
12<sup>th</sup> Generation Thomas Shelton Boggess, IV, born 04/10/1967  
Frances Barton Boggess-Gallegos, born 03/08/1963  
Taylor Marcus Sharpe, born 01/26/1965  
Tiffany Lenn Sharpe, born 08/04/1966  
Todd Wittman Sharpe, born 01/26/1969

**Saint Jo, Texas, Its Founding and Its Founder, Irby Holt Boggess**

13<sup>th</sup> Generation      Thomas Shelton Boggess V, born 1994  
Lindley Loraine Gallegos, born 1994  
Sarah Rachel Gallegos, born 02/10/1996  
Bennett John Boggess, born 02/28/97  
Adela Maria Gallegos, born 1998  
Davis Calvin Boggess, born 1999  
Katherine Michelle Westmoreland, born 1999  
John David Westmoreland, born 2000  
Lily Taylor Westmoreland, born 2002  
Sarah Todd Westmoreland, born 2002  
Katie Elizabeth Boggess, born 2002  
Luke Maxwell Sharpe, born 2006  
Samuel Lee Westmoreland, born in 2007

Ms. Shirley Charlton of Chattanooga, Tennessee has enhanced this paper from the original sketch by my adding oral tradition gathered from my visit and making use of genealogical research provided me in the past. Her materials included notes from her personal interview with David and Lina Boggess in Saint Jo in 1976.

I owe my discovery of Saint Jo's relevance to my wife's family name of Boggess to Mr. Ben (Bennett) Boggess of Dallas, Texas, who urged me to visit the town. He, like T. S. Boggess, is related to Irby as a first cousin, twice removed. That means that T. S. and Ben are 3rd cousins. Suzanne, my lovely wife, is related to Irby Holt Boggess as a 3<sup>rd</sup> cousin, once removed.

Photographs of Boggess Crossroads, Meigs County, Tennessee where Irby was born, and photographs of the gravesites where his parents are buried are in my files. It is my hope that this revision of Irby Holt's biographical sketch will enhance the enjoyment of those interested in the history of Saint Jo and those interested in the Boggess family line. It is written especially to be made available for distribution at the Stonewall Saloon Museum. Thank you for your attention.

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