



Official State Historical Center of the Texas  
Rangers law enforcement agency.

**The Following Article was Originally Published in the  
*Texas Ranger Dispatch Magazine***

The *Texas Ranger Dispatch* was published by the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum from 2000 to 2011. It has been superseded by this online archive of Texas Ranger history.

Managing Editors

**Robert Nieman** 2000-2009; (b.1947-d.2009)

**Byron A. Johnson** 2009-2011

Publisher & Website Administrator

**Byron A. Johnson** 2000-2011

Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame

Technical Editor, Layout, and Design

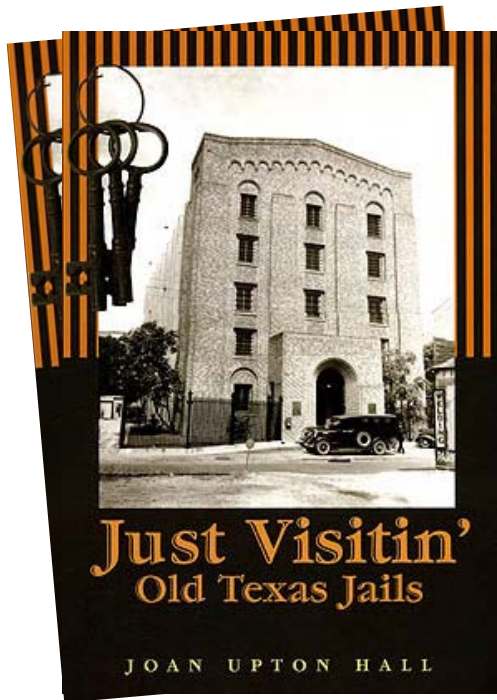
**Pam S. Baird**



Funded in part by grants from  
the Texas Ranger Association Foundation

Copyright 2017, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, Waco, TX. All rights reserved. Non-profit personal and educational use only; commercial reprinting, redistribution, reposting or charge-for-access is prohibited. For further information contact: Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, PO Box 2570, Waco TX 76702-2570.

## Book Reviews



## Just Vistin' *Old Texas Jails*

by Joan Upton Hall

State House Press. McMurry University, Box 637,  
Abilene, Texas 79697. 100 black and white  
photographs, one map. 6 x 9, 200 pp paperback.  
ISBN 978-1-933337-14-2.

[www.mcwhiney.org/press](http://www.mcwhiney.org/press)

### Book Review by Chuck Parsons

Everyone has seen one, many have visited one, and some unfortunates even have to stay in one. For those of us who can visit when we want rather than be confined inside the place, this is a very enjoyable book to read. In fact, even for those who may be confined, it is an enjoyable book to read. Former English teacher, now freelance author, editor, and speaker Joan Upton Hall has visited over forty jails in Texas to discover how they are different, how they are alike, what has made them appeal to historians and preservationists, and what the community has done with those no longer in use.

Each chapter is brief; nearly all have an illustration of the historic jail as it appeared when used as a prison or as it is preserved today. For those of us who appreciate history and realize the importance of preservation, this is a worthwhile book; that it



## Book Reviews

should be required reading for all county commissioners is not too strong a recommendation.

Today, many communities have preserved their old jails and have turned them into useful structures rather than razing them. Two examples are the Archer and Caldwell County jails, both of whom turned their facilities into attractive museums. The one is Caldwell County, located in Lockhart, is the only museum in the county.

Unfortunately, some communities neglect their historic structure to the point of becoming an eyesore or even a danger. Among those jails waiting to be revitalized are the Bee County jail in Beeville, the Burnet County jail in Burnet, and the Leon County jail in Centerville. Although still in existence, these are not open to the public at the present time. At least three jails still stand but are totally falling into neglect—those in Kent, Bowie (New Boston), and Moore Counties. Whether the communities will do anything to preserve them is open to question.

Although author Hall does not preach to the respective populations to have these structures preserved before it is too late, that is the implied message. Even utilizing an historic building for a very unexpected use is preferred to the wrecker's ball. An example is the Hooters Bar & Grill in Selma, located north of San Antonio on heavily traveled Interstate 35. Although never an official jail, at one time the building was used to hold prisoners for booking, when they were handcuffed to the furniture of what once was the city hall. A private owner with a certain acute business sense bought the building and turned it into a Hooters, allowing the visitor to have a "delicious meal inside a jail cell." Author Hall makes no mention of the attractiveness of the wait staff.

A note of caution is in order regarding the section on the Hico County jail. Hico is the community where "Brushy Bill" Roberts lived and is buried. Roberts claimed he was the real Billy the Kid of outlaw fame. Of course, we know he was not. Within the city limits of Hico, however, some claim that doubting the legend that provides Hico with many a tourist dollar is downright unpatriotic. Hall does not stress the false aspects of the Hico claims, and the reader must be warned that accepting that Roberts was Billy the Kid is tantamount to believing Paul Bunyan owned a blue ox and created the 10,000 lakes of Minnesota.

In spite of the facile yet serious read, the book is very informative. Author Hall discusses forty jails in this book, but she has the potential for a series dealing with those of other counties—nearly two hundred more! We hope she continues the series.