

Joseph Blackstone Leach

Joseph B. Leach homesteaded north of Plainview in 1887 on land where some of his descendants live to this day. He was a cattle rancher, a farmer, an honored citizen, and a Hale County tax assessor.

Joseph Blackstone Leach was born in 1856 in Cass County, Missouri and moved with his parents to Beaver Dam, Kentucky, their native state, when he was eight. He had a few years of school, then farmed with his father. In 1878 he immigrated to Texas with an uncle. Several other members of his family also moved to Texas. After a brief time in South Texas, he moved to Denton County and farmed with one of his brothers. All three Leach brothers soon moved again, along with their small cattle herd — this time to Swisher County, where they settled near a large playa lake for several years.

In 1887 Joseph Leach and his brothers moved to Hale County, and Joseph filed a homesteader's claim on 160 acres of land six miles north of Plainview. Anyone age 21 or over could file such a claim, and the state would give him a clear title after he lived there for three years. A number of other homesteaders filed claims in the immediate area, which was known as Liberty and was not far from Finney Switch.

The Leach brothers built a 14' by 28' sod house and continued their cattle ranching on Joseph's new land, where they found water only 47 feet below the surface. The Hereford cattle they brought with them from Denton County were the ancestors of the herd that the present generations of the Leach family still own. The brothers used horse-drawn wagons to haul freight from Amarillo for Plainview merchants, and they worked on various ranches, including the Circle and the XIT. Joseph also worked as a carpenter in construction projects around the Panhandle, including the Amarillo Hotel and the Hale County Courthouse.

In 1892 Joseph Leach married Pyrena Parks of Crawford, Texas, and the couple moved into the improved sod house, which featured windows, a real door, a floor, and a partition. The couple had one son and, eventually, two grandsons, four great-grandchildren, and six great-great grandchildren. In 1909 the Leaches replaced the sod house with a new wooden house.

A near-fatal hauling accident in late 1893, less than two years after his marriage, left Joseph Leach with a paralyzed right hand and a partially paralyzed right leg. He recovered enough to walk with crutches and drive a buggy, and he learned to write with his left hand. In 1898 he was elected tax assessor for Hale County and served two terms. He used his buggy as his office, and on Saturdays would park it on Broadway and sit there collecting taxes.

Joseph Leach was a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church and served as a steward. He was known for his great faith in the future prosperity of this area.

In spite of his injuries, Joseph Leach continued to play a role in the family's cattle business, which had expanded to include horses and mules. He was known to have a good eye for cattle, and on the day in 1925 when he died, he had observed that a certain young mule was ready to begin being trained.