

Coldspring

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Coldspring, the County Seat, is older than its County. In 1847 it was a Polk County Post Office, located closer to the Trinity River and named COONSKINS. Shortly afterwards, location and name were again changed to FIREMAN'S HILL. Cold Spring (old spelling) was finally formally established in 1850 and named after the many natural springs in the surrounding area. Later, the old name had to be yielded to another community with older claims to it. Not everybody has yet got used to the name of "Coldspring", although the change took place around the turn of the century.

A Methodist Church existed in 1848, when it received a gift of land from Frederick H. Rankin. The Coldspring Baptist Church is about as old. About the same time, Henry F. Gillette established an Academy at Fireman's Hill. He had, prior to this, established Baylor University at Old Independence. He married Lucinda Maxcey, a Coldspring girl, and chose to come here when he was discouraged with the infant university at Baylor. Rankin, Gillette, and Henderson Yoakum were all members of Coldspring's Mt. Moriah Lodge #37. This Masonic lodge used the upper story of his academy for their meetings. After establishment of Coldspring, the Lodge purchased this building, moved it to a new site and Gillette built a new school building on a site which overlooked the town.

Coldspring was originally located in a lovely valley bordered by a deep canyon. It was platted into 14 blocks, including the original courthouse square. A two story wooden courthouse was erected in 1871. Until then, the wide central hall of the Carnes Hotel had served as a courtroom. Sam Houston, himself once maintained an office there. The first county clerk was Dick Johnson. His office was located in the brick vault building which housed and protected the county public records, and which was destroyed by its owner in 1980.

A disaster visited the flourishing little town in 1915 when a fire reduced the last wooden courthouse in Texas to ashes. The wooden grand jury building also was on the square and the building of the Knights of Honor was also destroyed, others were damaged. Among the firefighters was a man who was awaiting execution, having received the death sentence for murder. His bravery caused influential citizens to intervene with the Governor and they succeeded in having his sentence commuted to life in prison. The public records tell this dramatic story, amplified by the memory of some of the citizens who were children or teenagers in 1915. The Commissioners Court decided to build a new stone building for its courthouse on higher ground. It was completed by 1918 at a cost of \$80,000. In 1950, the Courthouse was remodeled, the remodeling costing some \$60,000. And about 1976, the Courthouse received a facelift, which was much needed as well as air conditioning and other improvements. These were paid from revenue sharing funding. With the relocation of the Courthouse, visitors no longer visited the old town and it languished until 1923, when the entire town had moved up the hill to settle once again around its Courthouse, leaving only the old brick vault and the county jail in the valley below. The townspeople liked their Courthouse square and remodeling and new construction was largely done with careful consideration of the looks of the town. A historic district ordinance passed by the City Councils helps. Visitors are enchanted as they step into Coldspring stores and walk up and down the

sidewalks around the square. The town is bustling with its schools, courthouse, stores, banks, shopping center and other activities and is right in the last quarter of the 20th century, while retaining some of the flavor of a bygone time for all to enjoy.

In 1969 following the example of its sister town, Shepherd, Coldspring decided to become an incorporated city. The order declaring election results is recorded in Volume 115, Page 89, et seq., Deed Records of San Jacinto County Texas. R. S. "Bob" Brown was the city's first mayor and succeeded by John T. Sewell. Other mayors included Larry Browder, Fred M. Arneson, Billy Green Sewell, and R. E. "Bob" Brumley. Mayor at time of this writing was James H. Sewell. The three hard working city secretaries were Betty Lois Hollis, Gladys C. Lake (who served two terms), and Beth West, who was City Secretary. Robert F. Atkins served as City Attorney. Population at time of this writing was about 500.