

History Question of the Month

Precincts provided pioneer communities with several governmental services. These included justices, constables, poundkeepers and fenceviewers. Of these the Justice of the Peace was the most prominent. What was the Justice's responsibilities and who were the men that served in that capacity for the Butler and Union Precincts?

Answer

Precinct officials were elected officials. The office of Justice of the Peace was the most prominent of the four officials. The other three being, constable, estray poundkeeper and fenceviewer. The Justice of the Peace was directly responsible to the county court or board of county commissioners, the probate court and later the district court. His authority in civil matters included cases involving as much as \$300.00. In criminal cases, his authority generally covered minor breaches of the peace and other misdemeanors. They also held the function of coroner. After the county coroner's office was established, they continued to act as ex-officio coroners. They served as election judges and had the power to supervise local elections. They also had the power to deputize any person to act as a peace officer in the absence of the constable.

Those that served as Justice of the Peace in the Union Precinct were: Willard C. Burgon, Henry C. Mounteer, William Panter, Ishmael Phillips, Silas Richards and John H. Walker.

Those that served in the Butler Precinct were: William C. Gregg, J. J. Harrop, Silas S. Jones, William McGhie, Nathan H. Staker, Zebedee Williams, and John Wood.

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