

King Ranch absorbed older Bobedo Ranch

HARVESTED FROM CORPUS CHRISTI CALLER TIMES

Years before **Richard King** established **King Ranch** there was a large ranch a few miles to the south - the **Bobedo Ranch owned by Manuel Ramirez Elizondo**. The Bobedo straddled the main route from Corpus Christi to Brownsville northwest of Baffin Bay.

The Corpus Christi Star on March 26, 1849 reported: "Our correspondent en route to Brownsville writes from this well-known ranch: The Bobedo is owned by Manuel Ramirez . . . who has 'manadas' of mares for breeding . . . and between 2,000 and 3,000 head of cattle. Yet for all this stock - worth perhaps \$20,000 - he employs only one herder . . . I may as well remark, though, that the extent of the land, embracing 12 leagues, is so great as to isolate his stock from that of others."

(The name Bobedo is a corruption of the Spanish grant, Rincon de la Boveda.)

In April or early May, 1852, Richard King and friends rode from Brownsville to Corpus Christi to attend Henry Kinney's Lone Star Fair. Many accounts say that King camped at a spot on the Santa Gertrudis Creek, where Kingsville is today, and that's where he got the idea of starting a ranch. Another account, however, says King stopped to visit Manuel Ramirez (Elizondo) at the Bobedo Ranch and while there King asked about land for sale.

This story was told by King Ranch vaquero Francisco Alvarado, as related to a grandson, Victor Rodriguez Alvarado. The grandson remembered in his final years what his parents and grandparents told him about the early years of King Ranch.

Alvarado said King asked Ramirez about land suitable for ranching that might be for sale. Ramirez told him about the Santa Gertrudis grant 12 miles to the north. Praxides Uribe of Matamoros claimed title to the grant.

King asked Ramirez to intercede for him and his partner "Legs" Lewis in the purchase of the land. Ramirez agreed. A contract between Ramirez and Uribe in 1854 conveyed the Santa Gertrudis to Ramirez for \$1,800, \$150 per league of land, but no money was paid. It was contingent on Uribe providing papers showing ownership; he refused to do so until he had cash in hand. In 1856, three years after he had begun his ranch, King bought the land for \$5,000.

"In order to build his first houses," Alvarado said, "King went to the Bobedo and got my grandfather, Francisco Alvarado, as workman, to build houses (jacals they were called). My grandfather, my father, and their families also came . . . they made the first houses of wood and dirt with thatched roofs."

King Ranch was built on the knowledge that came from the earlier Tejano ranches in the region, especially the Bobedo.

The Bobedo Ranch was still a thriving, working ranch after the Civil War. What happened to the Bobedo is a puzzle hidden in the pages of history.

In 1874, Manuel Ramirez (Elizondo) died. John McClane, Nueces County sheriff and a friend of Richard King, petitioned the court (the ranch was then in Nueces County) to be named administrator of the estate. McClane was appointed. Of the three appraisers of the estate, at least one was a close associate of King, Reuben Holbein. The appraisers valued the estate at \$56,000; cattle were valued at \$3.50 per head, well below market value. King purchased all the land and cattle, paying Ramirez's sons.

Victor Rodriguez Alvarado in his memoirs noted that the Bobedo cattle were taken to Kansas and sold. "The money he got from the steers was sufficient to pay the entire cost of the ranch. In such a manner, King did his business . . ."

However it came about, the Bobedo was absorbed by King Ranch. In 1907, Theodore Koch bought some 20,000 acres of the old Bobedo from Henrietta King, widow of the late Richard King. Koch laid out new towns he named Riviera and Riviera Beach.

Accusations as old as Texas claim that cunning Anglo land-grabbers used their influence with friends in high places to steal land that rightfully belonged to Spanish and Mexican grantees. No doubt some of that happened, but blatant prejudice frames the issue on both sides. We can't judge what happened by the standards of their time, and it would be unfair to judge it by the standards of our own.

But it is long past the time to either prosecute or defend. Whether land-stealing happened with Manuel Ramirez Elizondo's Bobedo Ranch is certainly open to question. In any event, the younger King Ranch became famous throughout the world, while the story of the older Bobedo Ranch, which showed the way, is almost unknown.

Note: **Memoirs of Victor Rodriquez Alvarado** in an unpublished manuscript were sent to me years ago by Carmel Alvarado of Agua Dulce. Some details of how King acquired the Bobedo Ranch are covered in the book "Tejano Legacy" by Armando C. Alonzo.

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