



Padgitt Saddlery Companies

There was a time when personal transportation (besides walking, of course) relied on horses and mules, buggies and coaches. For decades, local saddle makers enjoyed a thriving business.

Two such companies were Padgitt Bros. of Dallas and Tom Padgitt, Inc. (also known as Tom Padgitt Company Wholesale Saddlery) of Waco. James Robert Padgitt and Mary Jane Bond Padgitt had three sons who lived to be adults. They were Tom (1846 – 1926), William Clinton (1849 – 1909) and Jesse David (1851 – 1948).

In the mid 1850s, the James R. Padgitt family moved by ship from Tennessee to Harris County, Texas. James had promised to write to friends and relatives back in Tennessee about his experiences after he arrived but his letters were not rosy. Though he felt that the area was promising and land was fertile, lawlessness and crime was noticeably rampant where they settled. James wrote of one particular murder that he witnessed and was quoted as adding "I do believe that there is more men and women that will go to Hell from Texas than any one state in the world." Sadly, not long after their arrival, James and the oldest son Robert both died in an outbreak of yellow fever in 1854. At that point, the family then consisted of the mother, three young sons and a daughter named Sallie, born months after James' and Robert's death. In 1859, their mother died in another yellow fever epidemic. The children had other family members in Harris County, including their maternal grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Bond. Tom was 12, Clinton was 9, Jesse was 7 and Sallie was 3. Their maternal grandfather Jesse Bond and an uncle named Tom Bond were already in the saddle business there in Houston.

Though they were orphaned at a young age, the brothers were known to be industrious. A family history says that brother Tom, while still a young teenager, hired a woman to look after his siblings as he took odd jobs to bring in income for his brothers. When they got old enough, each of the boys became apprentices in the Bond family saddle business and lived in the leather shop of their uncle Tom.

During the Civil War, demand for leather goods increased dramatically as the Bond saddle business boomed. A family anecdote adds that at one point, the two oldest boys "liberated" a mule and headed off to join the Confederate Army but they were considered to be too young and were brought back to Houston by their uncle to rejoin the saddle business. For a while during the war, Jesse left the business to sell newspapers on the street. It was the Galveston News, which had relocated to Houston for a time after Galveston fell to Union forces.

After the war finally ended, one by one the brothers launched out and started their own careers. Immediately afterward, Texas railroads began to slowly resume their development which had come to a complete standstill during the war. In Houston the expansion went to the east and to the west. To the north, a major company was the Houston and Texas Central rail line. It was not unusual that mercantile and service businesses would expand to the north as the H. and T. C. lay rails to the next settlements. The Padgitt brothers followed the railroad expansion. Towns where they had businesses included Calvert, Bryan, Waco and Corsicana.

Tom settled in Waco and set up business near the rail lines and the Brazos River. William and Jesse each appear to have worked for Tom for a while, but continued to move north as the H. and T. C. expansion progressed. Tom's Waco business became very successful. He constructed

a building at 5th and Franklin in Waco. Comments about his business note that it became widely known and respected in the United States and abroad. During World War I, the Waco factory supplied saddles and leather goods to British Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery units. One such contract amounted to 2,500 saddles and 300 sets of six-horse harnesses. They also provided similar products to United States and Allied forces.

In 1870 Tom married Amanda Hucherson. After they had been married only a few years, Amanda died along with their second daughter around 1876. Tom then married Katherine Ross, daughter of early McLennan County pioneer Shapley Ross and sister of future Governor Sul Ross. Tom and Katherine had at least six children. Katherine died in 1912 in her early 60s. After Katherine's death, Tom married Fannie Sybert with whom he had a daughter. Tom lived his entire adult life in Waco had a large family. He was a long time member of First Baptist Church of Waco until his death in 1926. Tom and at least a dozen Padgitt family members are buried in the historic Oakwood Cemetery in Waco. The multistory Padgitt factory building in downtown Waco was destroyed in the Waco Tornado of 1953.

Tom had sold his Corsicana business to Jesse when he decided to settle in Waco. Most accounts give 1867 as the approximate date that William and Jesse began working together, but they didn't set up shop in Dallas until around 1884. Their first permanent location appears to have been around what was then the 200 block of Main Street, a three story building near Main and Poydras. They later outgrew it and moved their offices several times, finally to a five story building on Commerce Street, approximately where the Earle Cabell Federal Building sits today.

Their main business was saddles, harnesses, leather goods, hardware and the like. For many years, their business was strong and Padgitt Brothers was one of the major leather goods manufacturers in the country. Comments are noted that even though their territories may have overlapped, there was no friction between the Waco and Dallas businesses. Trademark of the Dallas company was "Bronco Brand," which featured an image of a goateed cowboy wearing rough western clothes riding a Padgitt saddle on a bucking bronc. Besides the Padgitt firm, Dallas was home to at least three other saddle and leather goods companies: Schoellkopf, Tennison and Steinman. As automobiles became more affordable and widely owned, the industry declined. For a while Padgitt made leather coach and automobile interiors. The business continued on for many years thereafter, run by descendants of the founders.

William Clinton Padgitt married Mary Elizabeth Britton in 1870 and the couple had at least seven children. His obituary noted that Clint, as he was known by, gave shares in the business to his six sons and involved them in the business.

Jesse David Padgitt married Carrie Fallon and the couple had at least four children. Jesse was said to have come to his office five days a week and rarely, if ever, took a vacation. His obituary added that he was one of a group of businessmen who subscribed to the initial stock offering that founded the Dallas Morning News.

William Clinton Padgitt, died in 1909 at age 60 and is buried in Oakland Cemetery. About a dozen members of the family are buried there. His brother Jesse David Padgitt died at the age of 97 in 1948 and is buried in Grove Hill Cemetery. Around 9 family members are buried there.

Padgitt Bros. Co.



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