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Governor James Allred and the San Augustine Rangers

by Shelly A. Crittendon, Collections Manager
and Rusty Bloxom, Research Librarian

By the time James Allred was inaugurated Governor of Texas on January 18, 1935, the Rangers, as an organization, had suffered under the administration of Governor Miriam “Ma” Ferguson. In 1933, at the beginning of her second administration, all forty-four Rangers were fired for supporting her political rival.



English



Ferguson appointed Rangers as political favors and doled out Special Ranger commissions to hundreds of unsavory types.

During this same period of time, the United States was in the midst of the Great Depression. Several major cities were racked with crime and corruption. Out of the nationwide spotlight, the citizens of San Augustine County, in deep east Texas, had endured years of abuse and terror.





Left: Ranger Dan Hines with unidentified man

Right: Captain J.W. McCormick

The McClanahan-Burleson gang, under the rule of Charles “Charlie” McClanahan, older brother Wade and Wade’s son, Wade, Jr. and Joe Burleson had been appointed Special Rangers by “Ma” Ferguson, and they took full advantage of that title. During their reign, the McClanahan-Burleson gang intimidated, assaulted, robbed, extorted and murdered many of San Augustine’s residents, including black sharecroppers and tenant farmers who were not afforded the same protections as whites in the Jim Crow south.

The Burleson-McClanahan gang continued to firmly enforce their own rule of law in San Augustine until Governor James Allred was inaugurated on January 18, 1935. He immediately canceled all Special Ranger commissions and dismissed all but three regular Rangers, Roy Aldrich, Sid Kelso and Fred Holland. Governor Allred appointed a new Ranger force, many of whom had served as Rangers prior to the Ferguson administration. Several newly-commissioned Rangers arrived in San Augustine only days later with Captain J.W. McCormick at the helm, as well as Rangers Dan Hines and Leo Bishop.



Texas Ranger Leo Bishop with Texas DPS vehicle

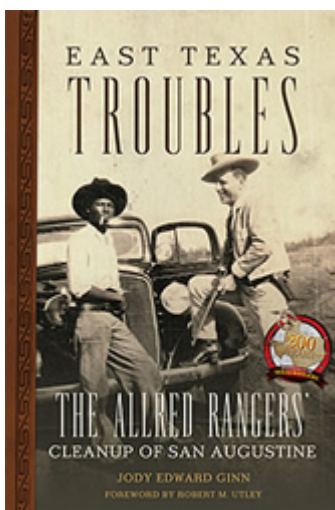
By the time Governor Allred sent his Rangers into San Augustine, the Ranger force had almost 20 years of experience cleaning up crime-ridden communities. As oil was discovered in north and east Texas, dozens of boomtown sprouted across the state, attracting not just oilfield workers, but armies of shady characters. Illegal gambling, bootlegging and prostitution were the norm in these boom towns, and the Texas Rangers had established tried-and-true methods for dealing with them. Their tactics were not subtle.

When the Rangers arrived in San Augustine they made their presence known. They looked the part in their ten-gallon hats and cowboy boots, carrying their Winchester rifles, with pistols prominently exposed in holsters. They announced their presence, openly confronted known gang members and stripped Ferguson-appointed Rangers of their revoked commissions. Within days, the citizens of San Augustine were put at ease. The Rangers protected victims and witnesses and sought justice for victims in the black community who were especially vulnerable and quickly gained their trust. The Rangers publicly arrested miscreants and set up informal headquarters in popular cafes and stores. Within days, they had made a noticeable difference in the town. Justice was swift. Ranger Dan Hines was stationed in San Augustine along with Ranger Leo Bishop, and under the leadership of Captain McCormick, law and order there had been reestablished by the end of 1935.





Exhibit at the TRHFM about Governor Allred and the San Augustine Rangers

**Suggested Reading:**

East Texas Troubles: The Allred Rangers' Cleanup of San Augustine
by Jody Edward Ginn

In *East Texas Troubles*, Ginn presents a riveting account of a little-known but murderous clash between the forces of good and evil in a backwoods county during the 1930s. The vicious McClanahan-Burleson gang ruthlessly dominated the population of San Augustine, audaciously committing robbery, extortion, assault, and murder – until confronted and overwhelmed by a no-nonsense detachment of recently reorganized Texas Rangers.

- Bill O'Neal

Author of *Encyclopedia of Western Gunfighters*
and *War in East Texas: Regulators vs. Moderators*

To read more about *East Texas Troubles*, please visit [our Bicentennial Publications](#).

To purchase *East Texas Troubles*, please visit [our Gift Shop](#).

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Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum

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9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Last guest admitted at 4:30 p.m.

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or Northbound (from Austin) Exit 334B in

Waco, Texas, midway between Dallas/Fort Worth
and Austin.



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