

Drought, Blue Devils, and Public Schools: Explore Texas History with LAS

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Texas was suffering from a **severe drought**. Transportation planning, taxes, and public school finance were topics of debate. It sounds familiar – but this was the nineteenth century, not the twenty-first.



In 1883, the 18th Legislature passed, and voters approved, a **constitutional amendment providing for an ad valorem tax for the support of public schools**, but additional legislation was needed.

Meanwhile, the drought exacerbated conflicts between landless cowboys and ranchers who had fenced their land – and occasionally neighboring public land – with **barbed wire**. Desperate to find water and grazing for their herds, organized bands of cowboys with names like Blue Devils and Javelinas took to **cutting fences**, causing millions of dollars of damage.

The conflict between cattle ranchers and fence cutters was reaching the point of crisis; **landowners demanded action**, but there were no laws that would allow an adequate response.

In January of 1884, **Governor Ireland called the Legislature into special session** to address public school finance, fence cutting, and other issues. By the end of the special session, **laws had been passed** to make the willful cutting of fences a crime; to forbid landowners from fencing public lands; to alter the system of school finance; and to improve county roads.



Whether you are interested historical issues, like the fence-cutting wars, or in subjects of recurring interest, like school finance and transportation, the **Legislative Archive System** can help. With the Legislative Archive System, you can search for passed legislation back to 1883 by bill number, session law chapter, and caption.

Additional search options and resources are available for more recent sessions. For assistance using LAS, please contact the library.