

## **A Mystery No More – Yes, Mark Belt Was A Man**

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Anyone who has read any Pearland history knows that prior to the Polish nobleman, Count Witold von Zychlinski, founding the town of “Pear Land” in 1894, there had been a post office established in 1893 with the name “Mark Belt”. The earliest history of Pearland came from stories written by Mrs. Emma Coppinger, Mrs. Julia Hunter and Josie Frankenberger Heflin. Josie Heflin stated that “mail service came to Pearland in 1893 when it was still called Mark Belt for a resident of the town.” That was about the extent of any discussion about Mark Belt, the man. As years passed many became skeptics thinking Mark Belt was more likely a railroad term. It seemed to make sense that Mark Belt was a railroad term given to the area since a switch and makeshift station were built by the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe railroad when completed from Alvin (then called Mustang Station) to Houston in 1882. When the first post office in the area was established in 1893, as Josie wrote, it was designated Mark Belt, Texas with a Mr. J. T. Lacy being the first postmaster. Apparently the siding and switch was called “Mark Belt” from 1882 up until Witold von Zychlinski founded the old Pearland townsite on September 26, 1894.

So as time passed and not a trace of anyone named Mark Belt showed up in any written documents, more and more people leaned to the railroad term theory. That is until recently when Pearland Historical Society member Dwight Bittick in doing some Pearland historical research made a startling discovery. What Dwight found was a brief quip in the “Galveston Daily News” on March 16, 1887 which stated “Mark Belt of Mark Belt, Texas” had checked into the Tremont Hotel. At last, proof in writing that Mark Belt was a real, live person who lived in Mark Belt, Texas. This was just the beginning of Dwight’s extensive research; and he along with another Historical Society member, Tom Hunter up in Denver, Colorado, have come up with a pretty thorough, interesting and fascinating story about a man whose full name was Marcus Lindsey Belt.

Who was Marcus Lindsey Belt? Why was he in this area in the 1880s? Where did he go and what happened to him after he left? Unlike Count Zychlinski, about whom nothing is known after his leaving Pearland, Dwight and Tom have turned up a ton of very interesting information about our Mark Belt. Let’s start with “who was Mark Belt.” He was born in Lebanon, Kentucky in 1837, the son of Dr. William M. and Mildred Belt. He died at his home in Higginsville, Missouri in 1921. In his obituary, it was stated “he was a man of remarkable activity and a vigorous constitution.” When you read his life story, you will probably agree this is a gross understatement. In 1859 he went to Colorado and was a Pikes Peak prospector when the Civil War broke out. He returned to Missouri and joined the Confederate Army and continued in service throughout the war rising to the rank of Captain. His Father joined the Union Army, probably in Kansas, and was killed in the war.

During the war, Captain Belt associated with some very notorious characters. He was a known bushwacker and was in the same Confederate regiment in which the James Brothers rode. He was also apparently a friend of the notorious outlaw Cole Younger. Tom Hunter found a story in the Higginsville newspaper which told of Younger, after he got out of prison, stopping by Higginsville to see his good friend Captain Mark Belt referring to Mark as “one of the old boys.”

After the war, he seemed to be quite an entrepreneur. He clerked in St. Louis for awhile, opened a general store in Dover, Missouri which he operated for 12 years then becoming a railroad contractor furnishing supplies along the Missouri Pacific Railroad in Missouri. He also had contracts with the Frisco Railroad. The town of Belton, Missouri was named in honor of Captain Marcus L. Belt.

Following his railroad experience, Captain Belt, came to the Pearland area as Superintendent for the Brazoria Land and Cattle Company of Missouri. The exact dates he was in this area are unknown; but it is known he returned to the Higginsville, Missouri area in 1888. Dwight found documents which revealed that at times Mark Belt's son, Mark Belt, Jr. , was also in this area apparently working as a cattle buyer. The Brazoria Land and Cattle Company of Missouri owned huge tracts of land. One document Dwight found while searching old Brazoria County maps and other documents reveals that the Brazoria County Land and Cattle Company owned tracts of land from Liverpool to Clear Creek. One quote in one of the documents also talks of the establishment of a ranch house and a switch which was secured from the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railroad. One would make the assumption this was the headquarters where Captain Mark Belt lived.

Since we now know Mark Belt was back in Missouri in 1888, it is easily understood why those Pearland pioneers who came to Pearland in the 1890s never wrote anything about Mark Belt except to say Mark Belt was named for a man named Mark Belt.

So what did Mark Belt do when he returned to Missouri? In 1888 he returned to Higginsville, Missouri and began to develop a coal business there. He organized and built the Rocky Branch railroad connecting various coal mines in the Higginsville area. He was instrumental in establishing the Confederate Home and was the first Superintendent of the Home. He served on the City Council of Higginsville and also was elected Mayor. He was married in 1856 to Mollie Burton. They had four children including Marcus L. Belt, Jr. After his first wife died, Mark Belt married his wife's sister in 1885 and they had two children. He died in 1921.

So now we all know. Yes, Mark Belt was a real person and not a railroad term; and yes, we now know Mark Belt was Captain Marcus L. Belt, a bushwacker who during the Civil War associated with the James brothers, William Quantrill, and Cole Younger. We know that after the war, he returned to civilian life and wound up being a very respected citizen of Higginsville, Missouri even serving as Mayor for a time. The town of Belton, Missouri is named for Mark Belt. Tom Hunter obtained the picture of Mark Belt below. It is a copy of the photograph which hangs in the Higginsville Historical City Hall. Tom is also the person who obtained the picture of Pearland founder Witold von Zychlinski which hangs in the Pearland City Hall. Captain Mark Belt wasn't a Polish Count; but don't you think he would have been an interesting guy to know?

Thanks to Dwight and Tom for all the information they provided about Mark Belt. This is just the first chapter. In their search for the Mark Belt story, they came up with a lot of information about the Pearland area when it was a huge ranching area controlled by a group known as the Brazoria Land and Cattle Company of Missouri. Also there are some more interesting stories about Captain Belt. More to come later.



Captain Marcus Lindsey Belt, better known as Mark Belt, the first name given to the switch at what later became Pearland. He was a Captain in the Confederate Army, a bushwacker, superintendent of operations in Texas for Brazoria Land and Cattle Company of Missouri, a merchant, railroad owner, general entrepreneur, Mayor of Higginsville, Mo. and the man for whom Belton, Mo. was named. No, he was not the founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken.

For more Pearland history, please visit the Pearland Historical Society website – [www.pearlandhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.pearlandhistoricalsociety.org)