

AN EARLY HISTORY
OF WALKER COUNTY, TEXAS

by

John W. Baldwin, 1922

A THESIS

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AN EARLY HISTORY
OF WALKER COUNTY, TEXAS

A THESIS

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by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

This thesis represents an attempt to trace the early history of the County of Walker in East Texas from its beginnings up to approximately the year 1900. The county itself was created by a legislative act passed for that purpose on April 6, 1846, but our story must begin before that time. Walker was originally a part of Washington County, but was included within the boundaries of Montgomery County as created in 1837. White settlers began to come into the region even while Texas belonged to Mexico, the first known settler in the Walker County area being Christopher Edin-
burgh, who came here in 1824.¹

¹ Personal Interview, T. B. Edinburgh, Huntsville, Texas. Mr. Edinburgh is a grandson of Christopher Edinburgh.

These early settlers were not the first, however, to visit what is now Walker County. Spaniards and Frenchmen had crossed the county long before, and there were also quite a few Indian inhabitants of the area. The town of Huntsville, present county seat and one of the first

settlements in the county, was established primarily for the purpose of trading with the friendly Indian tribes in the vicinity.

Organization

The first four chapters of this investigation deal with matters of general consideration in connection with the county. Chapter II deals with geography and topography of the county, the early Spanish and French activities in this area, and the Indian inhabitants. The creation and organization of the county are considered in Chapter III, in which a detailed tracing of the legislative acts pertaining to county boundary adjustments is undertaken. These various laws are quoted in part, in order that the reader might more closely follow this development and thus see how the present-day county attained its shape. A map accompanies the text to show these changes. Chapter IV includes early industry and occupational activity, and the development of transportation, involving a study of navigation on the Trinity River, early county roads and stage lines, and the coming of the railroad to the county.

Following these chapters are studies of the various towns and settlements of the county. Those communities which are still in existence at the present time are

discussed first, with Huntsville, since it is the largest and also the county seat, being given the most consideration. Waverly, New Waverly, Phelps, Dodge, and Riverside complete the list of larger present-day communities.

Cincinnati, Tuscaloosa, Newport, Carolina, and Elmina are the more important "ghost" towns of the county. These were once flourishing communities, but have now ceased to exist. The first four of these towns were important ports along the Trinity River, and owed their existence to the riverboat trade. As such trade steadily decreased, chiefly because of the coming of the railroad, the towns decreased in size and finally vanished altogether. Elmina, on the other hand, owed its growth and development to the lumbering industry, and when most of the suitable timber in the area was used up, the town rapidly declined.

This study will include such things as the early beginnings of the towns, the first settlers, early businesses, development of educational facilities, and growth of churches.

Need for this Study

Any inhabitant of a county should attempt to become better acquainted with the background and history of the region. Such a knowledge leads to a greater feeling of

pride in its development. The persons who know the story of the beginnings of the county, who are acquainted with its progress, and who are aware of the problems along its path of development are more likely to take an interest in its future growth and prosperity. They will wish to do their part in promoting those things which will work for the best interests of the county and its citizens.

There is, in addition, the pure pleasure that may be derived from obtaining glimpses of the early days of our modern communities and the people who began them. Walker County is especially rich in historical interest. It is located in one of the oldest settled areas of the state, and boasts of such famous citizens as Sam Houston, hero of the Texas war for independence, President of the Republic of Texas, Governor of the State, and United States Senator from Texas; and Henderson Yoakum, who wrote one of the first histories of the state while living at his residence southeast of Huntsville, the ruins of which may be seen today.

Most of the citizens of Walker County who have been here for any length of time are familiar with various stories connected with its history, but there has been no attempt to bring together these accounts so that they can be preserved. As time goes forward, records and other sources of information become more difficult to uncover, or cease to exist. When old settlers who have spent their lives in the county

are gone much of the history they have made will go with them. Some of the persons interviewed in seeking information for this study have expressed regret that they made no attempt to record some of the things told them by a grandfather or some old settler of the county, who is now dead. Often some book or paper has been sought which is known to have been in existence but which cannot now be located. These things need to be collected and recorded so that they will not be lost. This thesis is an effort in that direction.

Methods of Investigation

The following are the chief sources of information which have been used in the preparation of this paper:

1. Courthouse records: Deed records, proceedings of the county commissioners court, and probate records were the chief types of county records studied.
2. Personal interviews have been conducted with some of the older settlers in the county, or with their descendants, or with individuals who have occasion to possess particular knowledge of phases of Walker County's background.
3. Newspapers: The main source has been The Huntsville Item. Another Walker County newspaper, The Huntsville Banner, has been used to some extent, but copies

of this paper are very scarce, since it ceased publication in 1849. Various other newspapers have also been used.

4. Statute books have been used in tracing down specific legislative enactments pertaining to the county or to communities within the county.

5. Private documents, such as letters, family histories, and diaries, have been used to some extent.

6. Various secondary sources have also been used, in order to cover areas about which original documents and records have not been located.

7. Visits to important sites within the county have been made, in order to determine locations and observe the layout of the land, particularly in connection with the "ghost" towns discussed. Cemeteries located in the various communities have also provided much information about the early residents.

8. Church records have been studied in order to trace the organization and growth of the various denominations.

Related Studies

Several studies having to do with some phase of Walker County's history have been made. Perhaps the best over-all

account may be obtained from T. C. Richardson's East Texas, Its History and its Makers, in which he gives a historical survey of each county.

In 1948 the Huntsville-Walker County Chamber of Commerce compiled An Economic, Educational, and Social Community Survey, which gives valuable statistics on various resources of the county, along with other economic studies, a treatment of schools and educational facilities, and social considerations.

Other studies are concerned primarily with communities within the county, Huntsville in particular. Mrs. I. B. McFarland wrote A History of Huntsville in an historical issue of The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941. Mrs. Davis Cox wrote Sam Houston Normal Institute and Historic Huntsville Through a Camera, published in 1899, which includes a history of the first twenty-year period of Sam Houston Normal Institute and an account of many of the early settlers and leading citizens of Huntsville. The book has many excellent pictures of early homes in the city, street scenes, and well-known personalities of Huntsville, accompanied by short biographical sketches. A Sociological Study of Huntsville was written by Logan Wilson as a thesis for the University of Texas, in 1927.

Two other theses written at the University of Texas

have dealt with educational aspects of Huntsville. David Edison Bunting compiled A Documentary History of Sam Houston Normal Institute, and Boyce Smith wrote on Andrew Female College, an early Huntsville school located on the present site of the elementary school.

Two other communities of the county have also been studied. Mrs. Henry Lewis has written Retrogression of a Rural Community, a research paper prepared in the Education Department of Sam Houston State Teachers College, which deals with the history of Waverly, an old settlement in the southern portion of the county, about ten miles east of New Waverly. Mrs. Verna M. Morley of Navasota has prepared a pamphlet on the Dodge Community History. This work is in the form, for the most part, of a study of the early families settling in the Dodge region.

CHAPTER II

THE LAND AND ITS EARLY INHABITANTS

Geography and Topography

Walker County is located in the Southeast Texas timber country, which is a western extension of the Atlantic Gulf Coastal Plain. The rolling terrain of the county is characteristic of the region. The land is hilly in some places, but there are also stretches of prairie,¹ with the

¹ Huntsville-Walker County Chamber of Commerce, An Economic, Educational, and Social Community Survey, 1.

altitude varying from 200 to 450 feet above sea level. There is an average annual rainfall of about forty-four inches, with the temperature averages of fifty degrees in January, eighty-three degrees in July, and a mean annual temperature of sixty-seven degrees.²

² Texas Almanac, 1954-55, p. 616.

The county is well drained by the Trinity River to the northeast and the San Jacinto River in the southern portion, and by the many creeks and streams which empty into the rivers. There are four main creeks emptying into

the Trinity. These are: Bédias Creek, which forms the northwestern boundary of the county; Nelson Creek; Harmon Creek; and Carolina Creek, in the eastern part. Other lesser creeks which join the San Jacinto River are Mill, West Sandy, East Sandy, and Robinson Creeks. In addition there are many smaller streams located throughout the county.³

³ General Highway Map of Walker County, prepared by the Texas State Highway Department, 1952.

The soils found in the county vary from the sands and clays of the piney woods to rich alluvial deposits in the lower areas. Different types of soils are found in many small areas, and often several types may be found on just one farm.⁴ Walker County soils are generally low in

⁴ Miss Cornelia McKinney, "Huntsville Yesterday and Today for Biology Students." (Unpublished)

fertility, as a result of low mineral content, lack of organic matter, and thinness of top soil. There is a deficiency of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potash, as well as various other elements.⁵ Clays found in the county consist

⁵ Chamber of Commerce, Community Survey, 5.

primarily of Fuller's earth, found in the Riverside area in the northeastern portion of the county; bentonite, found north of Huntsville and also near Dodge; ceramics, found on the banks of the Trinity River five miles east of Riverside; brick clay, found two miles north of the town of New Waverly in the southern portion of the county; and volcanic ash, north of Huntsville.⁶

⁶ Ibid., 5.

The principal types of trees found in Walker County include loblolly and short-leaf pine, several varieties of oaks, sweet gums, sycamore, elm, and cedar. The county today has approximately 318,900 acres of forest land,⁷ and

⁷ Ibid., 4.

in earlier days had much more. The "Big Thicket" of Texas used to extend into the eastern edge of the county. The following description of the area as it existed in 1856 gives a clear picture of this portion of the country:

In 1856 there was in Texas a region known as the "Big Thicket," which was composed of portions of Walker, Polk, and Montgomery Counties. It was rightly named, for on every side the bushes and trees rose around you almost as a solid wall.

Deer were especially plentiful in the county. Herds containing as many as forty were reported seen by some of the early-day settlers, in the vicinity of the site of the old town of Cincinnati on the Trinity River.¹⁰ Even today,

¹⁰ Personal Interview, L. B. Baldwin.

that area has an abundant supply, and is a very popular spot with the deer hunters each season. A salt lick, located in Huntsville in the early days, at the present site of Greene's Sinclair Service Station, was also a place often frequented by deer. When some of the Huntsville citizens decided they would like to have deer meat for dinner, it was usually very easy to go down to the salt lick and shoot one.¹¹

¹¹ McKinney, "Huntsville Yesterday and Today for Biology Students."

Another interesting story is told of the wild life in the county. Large numbers of passenger pigeons used to migrate through this area, occasionally in such great masses as to resemble dark clouds. At night so many of them would sometimes roost on tree limbs that the limbs would break from their weight. At such times they provided easy targets

for hunters.¹²

¹² Ibid.

Indian Inhabitants of Walker County

One of the early Indian tribes inhabiting this region had the name of Ceniz. Their lands covered a fairly large area, mostly that portion lying between the Trinity River, or the Trinidad, as it was then called, and the San Jacinto River, in present-day Walker, San Jacinto, and Montgomery Counties. Most of their villages were located along the Trinity, which the Indians called Arcokisa. One of their main villages was located near the site upon which was later established the Walker County river port of Carolina.¹³

¹³ Henderson Yoakum, History of Texas (facsimile edition), I, 380 (map).

A description of the homes built by this tribe is very interesting. "Their cabins are fine, forty or fifty feet high, of the shape of bee-hives. Trees are planted in the ground, and united above by the branches, which are covered with grass. The beds are ranged around the cabin, three or four feet from the ground. The fire is in the

middle, each cabin holding two families."¹⁴

¹⁴ Quoted in Yoakum, History of Texas, I, 28.

The Ceniz Indians were distinguished for their hospitality and gentleness of disposition. They raised a great deal of corn, by which they were enabled to sustain a large population. The Ceniz were also great traders, and obtained, largely from the Comanches--who in turn had gotten them from Spaniards--horses, money, silver spoons, spurs, and clothing.¹⁵

¹⁵ Ibid., I, 36.

This tribe was first discovered in 1686, by the French. The Ceniz continued to live in the area for approximately one hundred years, but their nation was finally utterly destroyed, about 1730, in a great battle on the banks of the Trinity with other tribes which had come into the area after being pushed westward from the Mississippi by American expansion.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid., I, 36.

Another tribe to be found within the area now comprising Walker County was the Bidai. They lived in the northwestern portion of the county along the present Bedias Creek, which was named for them. Their principal village was located at the point where the creek empties into the Trinity River. The Bidai Indians were a rather backward people in comparison with many of the other tribes. They lived in wretched huts and made very little effort at cultivating the land, depending almost entirely upon game and fish for their existence. Their numbers were kept thin by pestilence and frequent raids by other tribes.¹⁷

¹⁷ Rex Strickland, "Moscoso's Journey Through Texas," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XLVI, 135.

Within the past year, two skeletons were uncovered on the ranch of R. E. Samuel, of Huntsville. Experts from the University of Texas who examined the skeletons believed them to be those of two Bidai Indians. It was thought that an Indian burial ground might possibly have been located, but, as yet, no other remains have been discovered.¹⁸

¹⁸ Personal Interview, R. E. Samuel, Huntsville, Texas.

The Comanche Indians also played a part in the

history of Walker County. They were a nomadic and essentially warlike people, and roved from place to place looking for game and for weaker tribes upon which they could prey. They frequently raided the villages of the Bidai Indians and also the early Spanish settlement of Bucareli.¹⁹

¹⁹ H. E. Bolton, Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century, 119.

The Comanches were allies of the Ceniz, and carried on a great deal of trade with them, and with other tribes in the vicinity. Huntsville served as a trading point between these western Comanche tribes and Indians of the eastern portion of the state. (The Bidai, the Alabama-Coushatta, the Neches, the Nacogdoches, and other tribes brought their pottery, pelts, pine knots, bear grease, bear and beaver hides, pecans, and hickory nuts to trade for buffalo, deer, and antelope robes, mustang ponies, and other goods brought by the Comanches, the Lipans, the Tonkawas, and various other tribes from the plains.)²⁰

²⁰ Personal Interview, J. L. Clark, Huntsville, Texas.

Another tribe of Indians had a village located about two miles south of Huntsville, on the old Sterne property.

Many pieces of pottery and arrowheads can be found in that area even today. Stories have it that this was a Cherokee village, but there is no evidence to substantiate this.

Spanish and French Exploration
of the Walker County Area

There are, of course, differences of opinion over the exact routes of many of the early explorers in Texas, but there is much evidence to support the belief that the land which came to be Walker County played a large part in both the Spanish and French explorations of the state.

The expedition of the Spaniard Hernando de Soto, after his death, entered northeast Texas about 1542 under the leadership of Luis de Moscoso. According to Dr. Rex Strickland, this expedition penetrated to East Central Texas, as far as what is now Walker County. The main body of the party camped to the north of the Trinity River, in the southern portion of the present County of Houston, but the expedition's scouts, who had been in advance of the main body, crossed to the other side of the river and captured three or four of the Indians living in that area. These captives are believed to have been Bidais.²¹

²¹ Strickland, "Moscoso's Journey Through Texas," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XLVI, 135.

Moscoso later sent ten men across the river on swift horses with instructions to travel as far as they could in eight or nine days to see if they could find provisions with which to re-supply the expedition. This they did and came upon some poor Indians who withdrew into wretched huts as they approached. A few of them were taken captive, but no one could speak their language, so the Spaniards could not get desired information about the surrounding territory. No supplies could be gathered from this village, as the Indians had few possessions. Discouraged with their findings, Moscoso and his men returned to the Mississippi River from whence they had come.²²

²² Ibid., 133-135.

The Spaniard, Gil Ybarbo, established in 1774 the settlement of Bucareli on the Trinity River. Some historians place this site on the land now covered by the R. E. Samuel ranch in Walker County, while Bolton states that it was farther north, near the Robbin's Ferry crossing point on the Trinity. In either case, this would place it in the Walker County area, as the county when first organized reached to Robbin's Ferry. The settlement was within two leagues of the main village of the Bidai Indians, which was

located near the mouth of Bedias Creek.²³

²³ Bolton, Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century, 117.

Bucareli was made up of families who were exiled from their homes at Los Adaes by the Spanish Governor Ripperda. One purpose for its establishment was as an outpost for the protection of Spanish territory from the French.²⁴

²⁴ Ibid., 116-117.

The settlement thrived during its first year or two of existence, and finally grew to a settlement of approximately four hundred people. In 1777 Ybarbo reported that there were fifty houses, the total population of the community being 347; of these 125 were men, 87 women, 128 children, and five slaves. There were also many Bidai Indians living in the neighborhood.

The land was found to be fertile, and good crops were produced. The Indians were very friendly and aided the settlers in their labors. It seemed, from all indications, that a successful and permanent settlement had been established, but such hopes were short-lived. Comanche Indian tribes learned of the prosperity of the town and began to

raid it, killing many of the residents and destroying much property. The friendly Bidai, although willing to assist the Spaniards in fighting the enemy, were no match for the fierce Comanches.²⁵

²⁵ Ibid., 432-435.

Finally, Ybarbo and his people felt that they could not hold out against the raiders any longer, and in 1779 the Spaniards abandoned the settlement and moved to the Nacogdoches area.²⁶

²⁶ Ibid., 120.

Another Spaniard, Alonzo de Leon, who was sent out with a military expedition to look for survivors of the La Salle party, laid out the La Bahía Road in 1689, which crossed through the Walker County area.²⁷

²⁷ Yoakum, History of Texas, 380 (map).

The French explorer Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, is believed by E. W. Cole to have passed through the Walker County region, traversing the entire length of the county from the southwestern to the northeastern corner.

Cole claims to have traced, on foot, the entire route of this expedition, and to have found every landmark mentioned in the diary of Henri Joutel, historian of the La Salle expedition.²⁸ Cole was aided in his efforts in tracing the

²⁸ E. W. Cole, "La Salle in Texas," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XLIX, 482-500.

route through Walker County by several of the county's citizens who were familiar with the terrain.

According to Cole, La Salle crossed what is now the Walker County boundary from Montgomery County at a point a short distance from where the town of Shiro is now located. He went in a northeasterly direction and crossed the San Jacinto River at a great circular bend in the upper west branch of the river. From there he continued northeast, going through the area where Crawford's Lake is now to be found. He crossed White Rock Creek and then came to Nelson Creek at a flat rock crossing a short distance above the mouth of Town Creek. From there he went directly to Wyser's Bluff on the Trinity, crossed the river, and then passed on into Trinity County. He was murdered fourteen days later at a site in Cherokee County.²⁹ La Salle's Walker County route

²⁹ Ibid., 489.

is shown in Figure 1.

LA SALLE'S ROUTE
ACROSS WALKER COUNTY

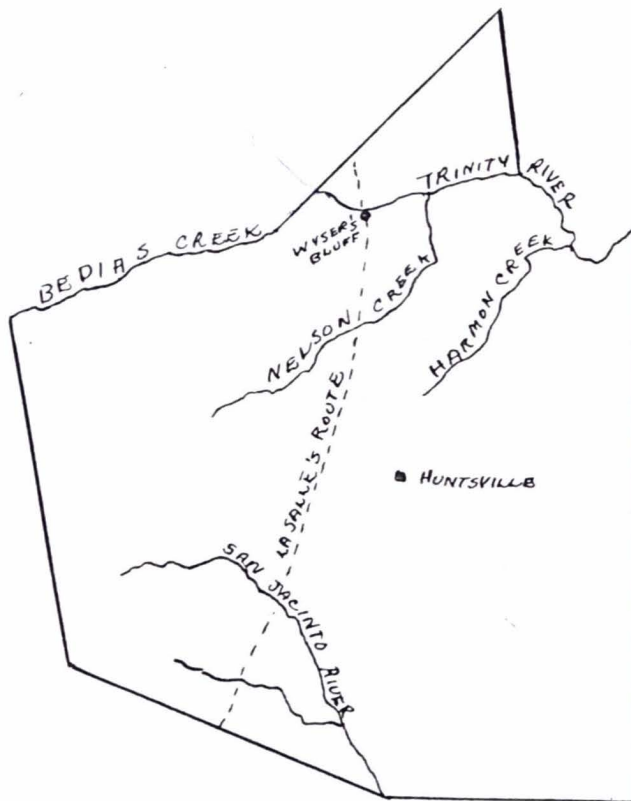


Figure 1

CHAPTER III

CREATION AND ORGANIZATION

Texas, while still under Mexican rule in 1831, was organized into three departments. These were Bexar, Brazos, and Nacogdoches. The people in the northern portion of Stephen F. Austin's colony, located in the Brazos department, desired that a municipality be created at the town of Washington. They submitted a petition to that effect to the political chief at San Felipe, James B. Miller. The petition was granted, and an election was held on July 16, 1835, for the selection of officers.¹

¹ Charles F. Schmidt, History of Washington County, Texas, 7.

The municipality of Washington later became the County of Washington, and its boundaries were fixed by the Congress of the Republic of Texas, on December 14, 1837:

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Republic of Texas, in Congress assembled, that all the districts of the country within the following described boundary be, and compose the county of Washington, (to wit:) beginning at the mouth of Caney Creek on the west bank of the Brazos river, then up the said creek to its northwestern source, thence in a western direction, to the southeast corner of the league of land granted Hensley on

Mill creek; thence west to the ridge dividing the waters of Cummings creek, of the Colorado, and the waters of New Years and Yegua creeks of the Brazos; thence north along said ridge with the eastern boundary of the counties of Fayette and Mina to the Old San Antonio Road; thence east with said road to the Navasota river; thence down said river to its mouth; thence down the river Brazos to the place of beginning.²

² H. P. N. Gammel, Laws of Texas, II, 748.

Out of the original County of Washington there were carved several other counties, among them being that of Montgomery, created in 1837. Finally, by an act of the legislature of the new State of Texas, approved on the sixth day of April, 1846, the County of Walker was created, with its territory being drawn from Montgomery County. The boundary of the new county was set as follows:

. . . Beginning at Robbins' Ferry on the Trinity, where the San Antonio road crosses the same; thence, with the said road to the north-east corner of a survey of land in the name of L. G. Clepper; thence, in a straight line to the South Bedai Creek, to a point where the La Bahia road crosses the same; thence, in a straight line to the north-west corner of a survey of two-thirds of a league of land in the name of J. H. Collard; thence, in a straight line to a point on the San Jacinto river, three miles below the mouth of East Sandy creek; thence, east to the line of a new county to be called Polk; thence, with the lines of said county to the Trinity

river; thence, up the middle of said river to the place of beginning.³

³ Ibid., II, p. 1357.

The act designated the town of Huntsville as the county seat, and directed the commissioners court of the county, at its first term, to appoint five commissioners to ". . . procure a deed or deeds to so much land as they may deem necessary for the erection of a court house and jail,"⁴

⁴ Ibid., 1357.

as long as the county was not compelled to pay for the lands so secured. Pleasant Gray, founder and first settler of the town of Huntsville, and his wife, deeded, for a one-cent consideration, 50,625 square feet of land in the town for the use of the public for the construction of a court house. This Public Square was bounded by Cedar Street on the north, Main Street on the east, Spring Street on the south, and Jackson Street on the west.⁵

⁵ Deed Records of Walker County, Book A, 59-60.

The first commissioners court met on July 27, 1846, in the upper story of the Harvey Randolph house, which was

used as a court house until a new one was completed in 1853. In the meeting were J. Estill, first Chief Justice (now called County Judge) of Walker, who served from 1846 to 1847; Isaac McGary, first County Clerk; and the first commissioners: Collard, Mitchell, Robinson, and Tucker, all of whom served from 1846 to 1848.⁶

⁶ The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

In 1860 contracts were awarded for the erection of a new court house, with the contract for the carpenter work going to James Logan for \$5,770 and the contract for the brick work going to Monk and Halmark for \$7,500. The Civil War interrupted construction and the original contractors died before completion of the building. In 1868 a contract was let for its completion, which was accomplished in 1870. The court house burned on January 1, 1888. The contract for the present Walker County court house was let in that same year to D. N. Darling, of Palestine, Texas, for a price of \$20,495. The building was completed in March, 1889.⁷

⁷ Ibid.

Following Gray's grant of land for the court house, Henry Sheets and his wife, Nancy, of Huntsville, for a one-cent consideration, gave land to the county for the erection of a jail. A committee was appointed in November, 1846, to superintend construction of the jail. The Huntsville Banner advertised for bids, and the award was made to John Besser, for \$350.00. The jail building was completed in October, 1847.⁸ ✓

⁸ Ibid.

Walker County was named in honor of Robert J. Walker, a Democratic senator from Mississippi, who, in 1845, became Secretary of the Treasury under President James K. Polk. While serving in the Senate, Walker had introduced a resolution acknowledging the independence of Texas, which was adopted and approved by President Andrew Jackson, on March 2, 1837. Walker was also very active in promoting the annexation of Texas to the United States.⁹ ✓

⁹ Z. T. Fulmore, The History and Geography of Texas as Told in County Names, 221-223.

Citizens of the county later regretted the honor paid him, however, because of the stand Walker took against the

Confederacy. This led to the passage of a joint resolution by the Texas Legislature on December 16, 1863, which declared:

Whereas, it is the opinion of many persons in and out of the County of Walker, in this State, that said county was named in honor of one Robert J. Walker, then a distinguished citizen of the State of Mississippi, and who had rendered himself popular with the people of Texas by his warm advocacy of the annexation of Texas to the United States; and whereas, the said Robert J. Walker, ungrateful to the people who honored him, and nurtured him in political distinction, has deserted that people, and is now leagued with Abraham Lincoln in his vain efforts to subjugate the Southern States, now struggling for their liberties and independence, thereby rendering his name justly odious to the people of Texas and the Confederate States of America; therefore,

. . . Be it resolved by the Legislature of the State of Texas, that the County of Walker, in this State, be, and the same is, hereby named Walker County, in honor of Captain Samuel H. Walker, the distinguished Texas Ranger, who fell in Mexico, while gallantly fighting for the rights and honor of the State of Texas, and that henceforth no honor shall attach to the name of Robert J. Walker, in consequence of a county in this State bearing the name of Walker.¹⁰

¹⁰ Gammel, Laws of Texas, V, 753.

There have been three changes in the original boundary of Walker County as set in 1846. The first of these changes

was upon the creation of the County of Madison in 1853. The act of the Legislature declared the Madison County boundary to be as follows:

. . . Beginning at the mouth of Bédias creek on the Trinity river, and running up the main Bédias to a point where the line between the counties of Grimes and Walker crosses the same; thence by a direct line to the northwest corner of a tract of land in the name of B. Q. Hadley, on the Navasota river; thence up said stream to where the San Antonio road crosses the same; thence running with the south boundary of Leon county to the southwest corner of Alce Garrett's survey; thence on a direct line to the north-east corner of Hiram Walker's survey on the west bank of the Trinity river, and thence down the river to the place of beginning.¹¹

¹¹ Ibid., III, pp. 1294-1295.

The effect of this act on Walker County, then, was to withdraw from its area that portion lying between the Old San Antonio Road and Bédias Creek, with the creek becoming the northwestern boundary.

A portion of Trinity County ". . . beginning at the mouth of a small creek known . . . by the name of Chalk creek, thence running due North to the Houston county line, thence with said line to its corner on Trinity River near Calhoun's Ferry, thence down said River to the beginning

corner. . ." was detached and added to Walker County in March, 1858.¹²

¹² Ibid., IV, 926.

The Trinity River had been the northern boundary of the county, but this act extended the county line to include a small area above the river.

Finally, in 1870, the Legislature passed an act creating San Jacinto County, a portion of which was taken from Walker, thus cutting off the northeastern portion of the original Walker County. As provided by the act, San Jacinto County was to take the following shape:

. . . beginning in the channel of Trinity river at a point opposite the mouth of Carolina creek, in Walker county, running in a due line from thence to the head of the east branch of Peach creek, in Montgomery county, thence down the channel of said Peach creek to a point parallel with the thirtieth parallel and twenty miles north latitude, in said Montgomery county; thence on a due line through one corner of Liberty county to the channel of Trinity river, at the same point where the present southern line of Polk county crosses the channel of said Trinity river; from thence up the channel of said Trinity river with its meanderings to the place of beginning. . . .¹³

¹³ Ibid., VI, 253.

Thus the present-day boundary of Walker County was established. Figure 2 illustrates these changes. The county, as it now stands, contains an area of 786 square miles.¹⁴

¹⁴ Texas Almanac, 1954-55, 616.

BOUNDARY CHANGES
OF WALKER COUNTY

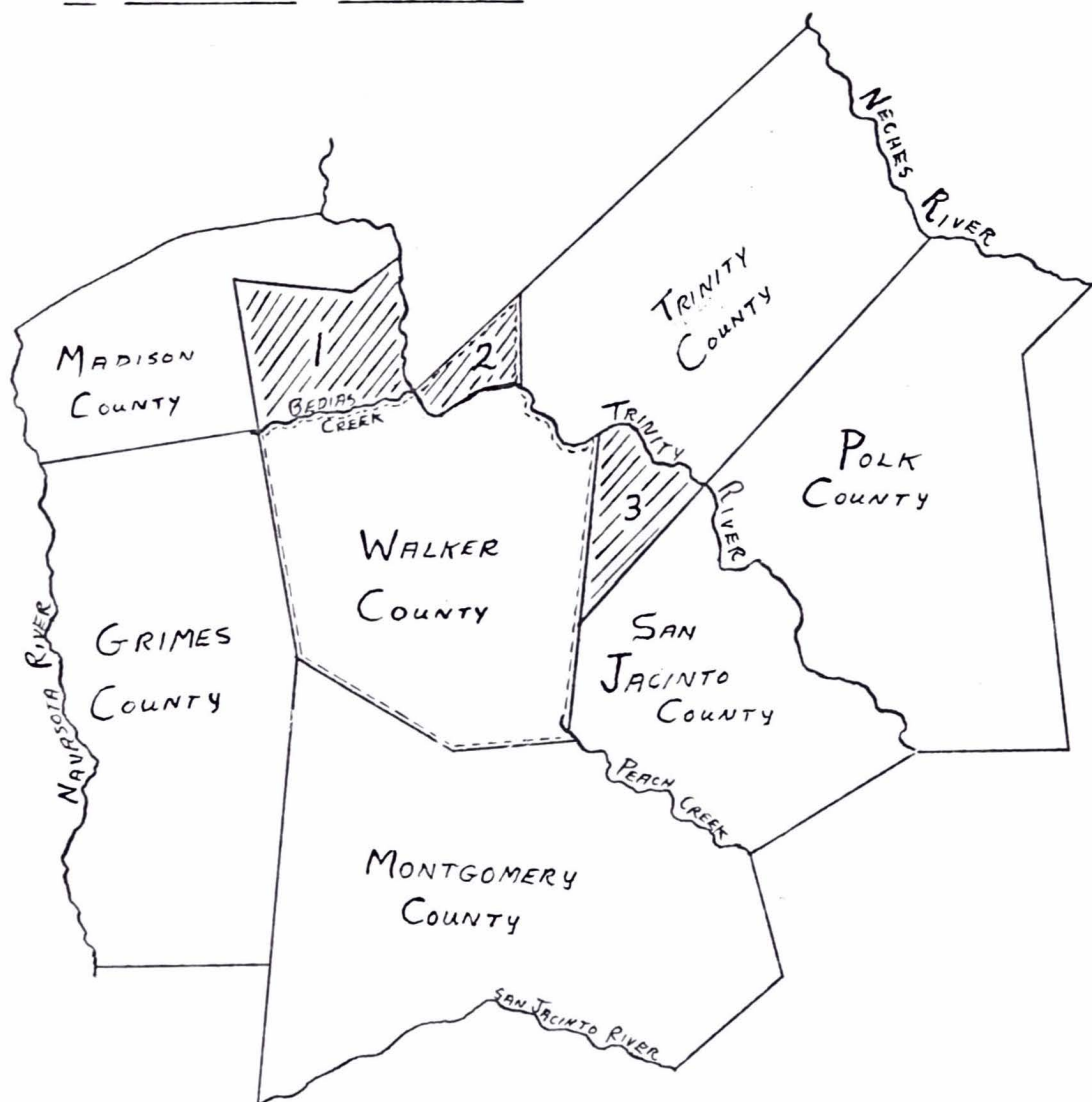


Figure 2

PRESENT BOUNDARY _____

AREA GIVEN TO MADISON COUNTY - 1853 _____

AREA ADDED TO WALKER COUNTY
FROM TRINITY COUNTY - 1858 _____

AREA GIVEN TO SAN JACINTO COUNTY - 1870 _____

1

2

3

CHAPTER IV

EARLY TRANSPORTATION AND INDUSTRY

Roads and Stage Lines

The history of transportation in Walker County dates back to the period of Spanish activity in Texas. Henderson Yoakum, in his History of Texas, states: "In old times there were three well known crossings on the Trinity: first, the upper crossing, at the present town of Magnolia-- the oldest road in Texas; second, the middle crossing at Robbin's Ferry, established in 1689, by De Leon; and third, the lower crossing at Liberty, established in 1805." As it was originally set up, the Walker County boundary reached to Robbin's Ferry, and the trail which Yoakum mentions was the La Bah^ua Road. After crossing the Trinity at the northern part of what later became Walker County, the road ran in a southwesterly direction and crossed the San Jacinto River. Most of the distance covered by the road between the two rivers, then, was within the Walker County boundary as established in 1846. At a later date the Old San Antonio Road also crossed the Trinity at Robbin's Ferry, and the act creating the county designated this road as the northern county boundary. A third road, the Contraband Trail, crossed the Trinity at a point near the old town of Carolina,

in Walker County, and continued in a westerly direction to join the Old San Antonio Road.¹ It was used as a route to

¹ Henderson Yoakum, History of Texas, I, 380.

by-pass the Spanish authorities along the official road. In later years the section of the Contraband Trail lying between the Neches and Brazos Rivers came to be known as the Cushatti Trace, named for the Cushatti Indians who used the trail in their hunting expeditions to the west of their village, which was located in what is now Polk and Tyler Counties.²

² T. C. Richardson, East Texas - Its History and Its Makers, p. 1292.

When settlers began coming into the future county site in the 1830's, the roads became more numerous but travel over them was very difficult. They were really little more than trails from which the brush had been cleared. When stages began to travel over them the passengers often had to assist in prying the vehicles out of the mud, using fence rails.

During the days of the Republic of Texas a large portion of the commerce was carried by freight wagons, usually drawn by three to eight yoke of oxen, or less often

by horses or mules. The use of oxen had several advantages: their hoofs did not sink into the mud as readily; the purchase price of a yoke of oxen was about forty or fifty dollars, as compared with three or four times as much for a pair of draft horses; and the oxen could subsist almost entirely on prairie grass. For these reasons horses were used mostly for stage coach service, rather than freighting.³

³ William R. Hogan, Republic of Texas, 66.

By the time Walker County was organized the following principal roads existed in the area: Huntsville to Swartwout; Huntsville to Washington; Huntsville to Cincinnati; Huntsville to Houston; and Cincinnati to Montgomery. During the period of the Republic the county courts and the commissioners were authorized by law to construct and maintain the roads within their own counties, and they had the power to require all free males between the ages of eighteen and forty-five and all slave males between the ages of sixteen and fifty to work on the roads in the precinct in which they lived.⁴ This practice was continued after Texas became a

⁴ Ibid., 59-60.

state, and even into the early 1900's.

In 1856 Frederick Law Olmstead, a citizen of one of the northern states, traveled through East Texas to secure information for his book, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States. Of the state, he had this to say:

Texas has but two avenues of approach--the Gulf and Red River. Travelers for Gulf counties and West enter by seas, for all other parts of Texas, by the river. The roads leading into the state are scarcely used, except by residents along them and herdsmen bringing cattle to the New Orleans market. The ferries across the numerous rivers and bayous are so costly and ill-tended, the roads so wet and bad, and the distance from steam-conveyance to any vigorous part of the state so very great that the current is entirely diverted from this region.⁵

⁵ Quoted in "Some Phases of Transportation of Early Days in East Texas," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

Olmstead, in the same book, gives a map of Texas showing the principal roads. Those shown to pass through Walker County were: a road branching from the San Antonio Road, about halfway between San Augustine and Nacogdoches, which ran to LaGrange, passing through Huntsville; a road from Burkeville to Huntsville; and another from Clarksville, via Huntsville, to Houston.⁶

⁶ Ibid.

Mamie Wynne Cox, in an article for an historical issue of The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941, lists the following early roads of Walker County:

1. Post Road - This was a stage coach road which crossed the Trinity River at Wyser's Bluff, in the northern part of the county.

2. Contraband Road - This road, not to be confused with the Contraband Trail mentioned earlier, ran in a south-westerly direction from Huntsville to Houston. It was a densely forested road used for the purpose of avoiding Federal authorities in the hauling of contraband cotton at the close of the Civil War.

3. Telegraph Wire Road - This was a stage line passing through Huntsville on the way to Houston. The road was so named because a telegraph line was strung along its side, and some of the old insulators which held the wire may still be seen fastened to trees along the way. The road had a stage stopping-point at Stubblefield Lake where the passengers rested and the horses were changed.

4. East-West Road - Most of this road followed what is now Highway 190, but at that time it also went by Raven Hill, Sam Houston's country home.

5. Four Notch Road - This is said by many to be the oldest road in the county. It ran in a southeasterly direction across the county, crossing the railroad about two miles south of Phelps. Some of the trees along this road still show the four notches used in marking the route, from which the road got its name.

It was over these roads that the stage coach lines ran and the products of the farmers of the county were hauled in to markets.

Trinity River Traffic

From the beginning of the settlement of Texas until the middle 1870's, and in some cases even later, the Trinity River served as an important means of transportation and commerce. River boats were put into use and made journeys from coastal ports into the interior of the state, carrying passengers and supplies, and returning with products to be sold, particularly cotton. Farmers from all over Walker County and other surrounding areas would bring their ox and mule wagons, loaded with products, to the chief river ports in the county--Tuscaloosa, Cincinnati, Newport, and Carolina.

Early navigation of the Trinity was accomplished with old-fashioned steamboats, very much like those on the

Mississippi, although somewhat smaller because of the narrowness and, in many places, shallow water of the Trinity. These boats operated up and down the river, despite the many hazards produced by river snags, sand bars, and other obstructions. River traffic was irregular, however, with the Trinity often being too low for any but the smallest of boats to attempt passage.

Although steamboats were used for most of the trips up and down the river, other types of boats, such as the batteau, were employed. These boats were constructed of rough planks and were propelled with poles, the steering being done with a long oar or sweep at the stem. The keel-boat was similar to the batteau but was better constructed and was sometimes pointed at both ends. It was often used to carry passengers as well as freight. There was a cabin running the entire length of the deck, and propulsion was by poles or sweeps. The flat-boat, propelled in the same manner, was designed only for the one-way trip down the river. It was generally used only for freight, but sometimes carried passengers.⁷

⁷ E. H. Brown, Trinity River Canalization, 133-136.

Although the Trinity had been used in earlier days by the Indians and the Spaniards for the transporting of goods,

the first extensive navigation did not begin until the 1830's, and reached its peak in the 50's and 60's. One of the earliest known steamboats operating on the river was the Branch T. Archer, which ascended the Trinity in 1838. It encountered difficulty in making the trip and was forced to lay over in one of the ports to wait for higher waters.⁸

⁸ Telegraph and Texas Register, June 9, 1838.

The Vesta, the Scioto Belle, and the Ellen Frankland also operated on the river during this earlier period, about 1843 or 1844. A Galveston paper reported that the Vesta had just returned from Alabama on the river with a full cargo of cotton, and that there was enough cotton yet remaining up the river to keep both the Vesta and the Ellen Frankland employed in bringing it down for several months.⁹

⁹ Civilian and Galveston Gazette, October 28, 1843.

Wrecks among the boats in the river traffic were not uncommon, as there were many hazards in navigating the stream and the bay from the mouth of the river to Galveston, not to mention the defects of the boats themselves. The Ellen Frankland was wrecked in 1844 in a storm in Galveston

Bay, with a loss of its cargo of 180 bales of cotton.¹⁰

¹⁰ Civilian and Galveston Gazette, April 20, 1844.

The Sarah Barnes was also wrecked at about the same time, with the loss of its cargo. In the spring of 1853 the Fanner and another boat were racing for the wharf at Galveston, when the boiler of the Fanner exploded from overheating. Several passengers were killed, among them George Hunter, a prominent citizen of Cincinnati, Walker County.¹¹

¹¹ History of the Hunter Family, in possession of Willene Story, of Tyler, Texas.

The Scioto Belle was an important Trinity River packet, which took over much of the activity of the Ellen Frankland. The following advertisement appeared in the Civilian and Galveston Gazette on May 11, 1844:

Regular Trinity Packet - for Liberty, Swartwout, Cincinnati, and Alabama - The substantial steamer Scioto Belle, E. Jones, Master, for freight or passengers, having good accommodations. Apply on board.

Another advertisement on November 18, 1843, announced that ". . . the fine, light draught and very substantial steamer Lady Byron, S. W. Tichenor, Master. . ." would depart for

Alabama and all intermediate landings shortly, and that all persons desirous of shipping goods should apply aboard.

The Mary Clifton operated about the year 1854. It was a large steamboat built to carry a load of 2,500 bales of cotton, but, because of its size, was often forced to wait in various ports for the river to rise before being able to continue. There were several smaller boats, however, which had little difficulty in keeping up a fairly steady operation on the Trinity. Among these were the Guadalupe, the Kate, the Early Bird, the Vesta, and the Belle of Texas.¹²

¹² Brown, Trinity River Canalization, 35.

Other boats not previously mentioned which navigated the Trinity at various times were the Ruthven, Mustang, Grapeshot, Orleans, Justice, Brownsville, Pioneer, Friend, Correo, Trinity, Wyoming, Victoria, Brazos, Star State, Nick Hill, Hays, Washington, Buffalo, Texas, Wren, Black Cloud, Mary Conley, Mollie Hamilton, and the Ida Reese.

Occasionally steamboats were able to get all the way up the river to Dallas, but ordinarily the most distant point was Alabama, or a port by the name of Magnolia, which was located near the present city of Palestine. Even below these points travel on the river could hardly be described

as regular, because it depended on rains and the subsequent rising and falling of the water, but, even so, steamboat travel was an important method of transportation in early Texas. Walker County is on the lower section of the river, which was more easily navigated. The county had four thriving and prosperous towns which owed their existence to the river trade, as was well illustrated by their complete demise following the coming of the railroad to the area and the resulting cessation of the steamboat traffic.

Coming of the Railroad

The Houston and Great Northern Railway Company was chartered by the Texas Legislature in the year 1866. However, it was not until the year 1870 that actual construction was begun, with the line reaching Phelps, in Walker County, on the way to Palestine, on March 1, 1872.¹³

¹³ S. G. Reed, A History of the Texas Railroads, 315.

In those days it was the custom in railroad building for towns to pay a bonus to the railway company for the privilege of having the line go through the town. When the main line of The Houston and Great Northern was being built through Walker County, the company requested a \$25,000 bonus from Huntsville before agreeing to lay the track through the

city. Many of Huntsville's citizens favored paying the money, but the majority of the townsfolk did not, fearing that a railroad might bring undesirable elements into the town and also take money out of the community. As a result, the Houston and Great Northern Company by-passed Huntsville.¹⁴

¹⁴ Mae Wynne McFarland, "A History of Huntsville," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

After finally realizing the necessity of having a railroad, the citizens of Huntsville organized the Huntsville Branch Railway Company, for the purpose of building a "tap" road to the main line at Phelps. This cost the city \$125,000, and the resulting tap line provided only limited service. The Houston and Great Northern Company built the branch line, which was completed in March, 1872, and merged with the Houston and Great Northern the following year, in May, 1873.¹⁵

¹⁵ Reed, History of Texas Railroads, 316.

Upon the completion of the tap line, Huntsville held on March 26, 1872, a gala celebration in conjunction with the arrival of the first train. A ceremony was held during the day, featuring an address by William Walter Phelps, a

member of the United States Congress from New Jersey. That night there was a banquet and a ball at the court house to round out the day's activities.¹⁶

¹⁶ The Houston Chronicle, March 26, 1922.

New Waverly, Phelps, Dodge, and Riverside, all of which are towns within Walker County, owe their existence to the railroad, and were established with its arrival. Four other towns in the country, as mentioned earlier, eventually vanished as a result of the introduction of the railway. These were the river ports which had grown up as a result of the steamboat traffic on the Trinity. The railroad replaced river transportation in Texas by providing a regular service which the steamboats could not promise and lower rates which the riverboat owners could not match. The river ports gradually dwindled away after having their chief means of livelihood cut off.

Industry in the County

Agriculture has long been the leading industry in Walker County, and by far the major portion of the county income came from that source prior to the twentieth century. Cattle raising, however, was also popular with many of the early settlers, and the excellent grazing areas throughout

the county enabled them to increase the size of the herds that many of them brought to Texas. A count in 1850 revealed that the county had approximately 24,000 head of cattle, but as the wealthy slave owners from Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, and Mississippi began coming in larger numbers, the number of cattle began to decrease. The Federal Census of 1850 showed Walker County to have a population of 3,964 persons, of whom 1,301 were slaves. The slave population more than doubled within the next five years, reaching 2,765, with most of the larger plantations having thirty or more slaves each. As was usually the case when the plantation type of development began to greatly increase, cattle raising decreased in the county over the same period, and there were only 12,000 cattle in 1855.¹⁷

¹⁷ Richardson, East Texas - Its History and Its Makers, p. 1293.

Most of the slave owners coming to this region were of a scholarly, religious, and aristocratic ancestry, and their first efforts were lent to the establishment of schools, churches, and plantations. They brought with them many capable house-servants and slaves trained in the farming of such crops as cotton and corn. Finding that from one-half to one bale of cotton could be produced per acre in

the rich soils of the area, cotton consequently became their money crop, with other crops raised only for home consumption.¹⁸

¹⁸ Personal Interview, Miss Harriet Smith, Huntsville, Texas.

In addition to farming and cattle raising, the timber industry was of prime importance in the county. Many saw-mills began to appear in the area to supply lumber for the frame houses which replaced the original ones built of logs. Beginning with a saw-mill established by William Viser, in which the lumber was sawed by hand, the industry grew steadily as a result of the coming of more up-to-date machinery and a greater capacity for turning out larger quantities and better grades of lumber.¹⁹

¹⁹ Personal Interview, P. H. Singletary, Huntsville, Texas.

There were, besides the three mentioned, other types of industry within the county, though they were of a lesser importance. Some three or four tan yards were established in the county, and numerous cotton gins appeared in the surrounding areas, with many of the larger plantations having their own gins. Two cigar factories were located in

Huntsville: one, operated by J. B. Jones, was located on what is now Avenue L, near the present location of the Life Theatre; the other, owned by Peter Gilbert, was located on the property now owned by Mrs. T. S. Williford on Avenue I. Both of these men had their own plantations and raised their own tobacco.²⁰

²⁰ Ibid.

Huntsville also had two brick yards, one of them located at the penitentiary, and the other on the present Avenue J near its junction with Highway 75. The Smith Brothers owned the latter, and made the bricks used in the building of "Old Main," the administration building at Sam Houston Normal Institute, in 1888.²¹

²¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER V

HUNTSVILLE

Huntsville, the county seat and the largest town in Walker County, is older by about eleven years than the county itself, as it was established in 1835 by Pleasant Gray, who came here from Alabama while the area was still within the Washington County boundary.

Gray first arrived at the future townsite in 1830 or 1831, and camped near a spring which was located just north of the present site of the Post Office. Finding the neighboring Bidai Indians to be friendly and desirous of trading, and because of the area's similarity to his native Alabama countryside, Gray decided to eventually settle here and make this his permanent home. With such a plan in mind he returned to Alabama to get his family and to make preparations for the move to Texas.¹

¹ "Huntsville - Our Historic Little City," published by The Huntsville Item, 1926, p. 1.

Gray returned two or three years later, accompanied by his family and his brother Ephraim. On the northeast corner of what is now the court house square, near the spot presently occupied by the Walker County Hardware Company,

Gray built his home. While living there Pleasant Gray's wife, Hannah, had a fourth child, David, who was the first baby to be born in Huntsville. Across the street from his house, near where the court house now stands, Gray built another log cabin which served as a trading post.²

² Dabney White, "Watch Walker County Grow," The Houston Chronicle, April 16, 1927.

On November 20, 1834, Gray wrote to the Mexican Government of Coahuila and Texas, and presented to it the following petition:

To the Honorable Special Commissioner of
the Enterprise of the Citizen Jose Vehlein:

I, Pleasant Gray, a native of the United States of the North, present myself before you, with due respect, and say: That attracted by the generous provisions of the colonization laws of this State, I have come with my family, consisting of my wife and three children, to settle myself therein, if, in view of the attached certificate, you should see fit to admit me in the class of colonist, conceding to me one league of land in the vacant tracts of said enterprise. Therefore, I supplicate you to be pleased to grant me the favor which I implore, for which favor I shall live forever grateful.

Pleasant Gray³

³ Deed Records of Walker County, I, 160.

A decree ordering the land survey was issued a few days later, on November 24, but it was the following year, on July 10, 1835, before Gray was granted possession of seven square miles of land.

(Gray's trade with the Indians was very successful, and his profitable business soon attracted other settlers to the new town, which he named after his native city of Huntsville, Alabama. The settlement was laid off into blocks covering an area of one square mile. The streets were: from north to south; Milam, Fannin, Cedar, Spring, Lamar, and Tyler; and from east to west; Travis, Burton, Main, Jackson, Bell, and Farris.⁴

⁴ McFarland, "A History of Huntsville," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

An extensive campaign was carried on to attract settlers from the United States, with advertisements of the new town being carried in Alabama and New Orleans newspapers and tacked up in the offices of Mississippi River steamboats. One traveler told Judge J. M. Smither, a former District Judge of the Twelfth Judicial District of Texas, of having seen, in 1837, a handsomely gotten up plat of the "City of Huntsville, Texas," on the Steamboat Oliver Byrne

No. 2, on the Mississippi.⁵

⁵ J. M. Smither, "Early Reminiscences of Huntsville," contained in Mrs. Davis Cox's Sam Houston Normal Institute and Historic Huntsville Through a Camera, 57.

Huntsville was incorporated by act of the Congress of the Republic of Texas, January 30, 1845, which read in part, as follows:

Section 1. Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Republic of Texas in Congress assembled, That the citizens of the town of Huntsville in Montgomery County be, and they are hereby declared a body corporate and politic under the name and style of the corporation of the town of Huntsville, who shall have power of suing and being sued, pleading and impleaded, and to hold property real and personal within the limits of said corporation, and at their pleasure to sell and dispose of same.

Section 2. Be it further enacted, That the corporate limits of the said town shall extend one-half mile in every direction from the centre of the public square.⁶

⁶ Gammel, Laws of Texas, II, 1103.

The act also provided for the election of a mayor, six aldermen, a collector or Constable, and a Treasurer and Secretary. Another act was passed in January, 1852, to

re-incorporate the city.

Pleasant Gray sold his trading post in 1846, as he was no longer able to take care of it. Two years later he left Huntsville headed for California on a prospecting tour, but died before reaching Santa Fe. Although newspaper accounts attributed his death to cholera, another version was circulated among Huntsville's citizens. It seems that Gray admired a horse owned by an Indian chief in this area, and offered to buy the animal, but the Indian refused to sell. A short time later the chief was found murdered, and the horse appeared in the possession of Gray, but no proof could be found that he actually had anything to do with the crime. The Indians had no doubt about the matter, however, and were reported to have followed him after he left for California and killed him for revenge.⁷

⁷ Personal Interview, L. B. Baldwin. (As told to Baldwin by J. Robert King, Sr., early Huntsville resident.)

Huntsville's first frame house was constructed in 1841. This was the Globe Tavern, which was located just north of the present office of the Huntsville Item and across the street from the Methodist Church, on Avenue L, or Jackson Street as it was in 1841. The lumber for the building was sawed with a rip saw by William Viser, who had

also sawed the lumber for the first frame house in Memphis, Tennessee.⁸

⁸ Harriet Smith, "The Beginnings of Huntsville."
(Unpublished)

The Globe had an outstanding reputation as a hostelry and was a favorite stopping place for many travelers passing through Huntsville, especially in the early 1850's when the city was headquarters for the East Texas Stage Coach lines, with some ten or twelve coaches arriving daily. The inn provided some type of entertainment every day of the week for the enjoyment of its customers and citizens of the town. It was also an ideal gathering place for politicians, who often stopped there seeking an opportunity to influence the crowds that frequented the place.⁹

⁹ "Huntsville - Our Historic Little City," a pamphlet published by The Huntsville Item, 1926.

The first store building in Huntsville, other than the trading post, was built by Gray close to the spring where he camped on his first visit to this area in 1830, between the present county jail and Aaronson Brothers Dry Goods Store. The building was constructed of logs, and was rented to Thomas Gibbs and Gardner Coffin for two dollars

and fifty cents per month, for the operation of a mercantile company.¹⁰

¹⁰ Mrs. I. B. McFarland, "A History of Huntsville," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

The Keenan House was built in 1848 on the corner of Spring and Jackson Streets, where Goolsby Drug is now located. The main building with its stables to the rear occupied one quarter of the entire area of the block. The establishment was a very commodious old-time country tavern, with a reputation for its delightful Southern cooking and excellent service, usually rendered by well-trained negro slaves. The food and service, along with the wide, cool verandas and spacious rooms, made the Keenan House extremely popular with the traveling public. The hotel burned in 1859 and was never rebuilt.¹¹

¹¹ Cox, Sam Houston Normal Institute, 59.

Another hotel, the Eutaw House, was constructed in 1850 on the corner of Jackson and Spring Streets, at the present location of the Wood Tire and Supply Company. It was owned and operated by B. S. Wilson, who named it for his former home town in Alabama. For fifty years this

building provided Huntsville with another well-kept and popular hotel and house of entertainment.¹²

¹² Smither, "Reminiscences," Sam Houston Normal Institute, 59.

Huntsville's first brick store building was built in 1846 or 1847, and belonged to A. McDonald. The next brick store was built in 1850 by Robert Smither and Brothers, on Jackson Street. This building burned in 1854, but was re-built the following year. Robinson, Singletary, and Company erected the next store, on Cedar Street; followed by stores belonging to J. M. and L. C. Rountree, on the corner of Cedar and Jackson Streets; T. and S. Gibbs, on Cedar; Randoph and Son; and J. C. and S. R. Smith and Company. Other brick stores were built after the Civil War, replacing many of the wooden structures which burned from time to time.¹³

¹³ Ibid., 62-63.

The first record of a scheduled mail service for Huntsville was that of a Star Route operated out of Houston via Huntsville to Cincinnati on the Trinity River, in 1839. This route was served by stage coach, except in inclement weather, when several weeks sometimes elapsed before the

coach could get through.

Neither envelopes nor postage stamps were used at this time; the paper was folded and sealed with wax, while the amount of postage was written on the letter by the postmaster and collected from the addressee when the letter was delivered. The postage rate for letters was twenty-five cents per sheet.¹⁴

¹⁴ Personal Interview, L. B. Baldwin, former Postmaster of Huntsville.

The only lighting in early-day Huntsville was by lamps and candles, and when the citizens went out after dark many of them carried lanterns. Street lights were not installed until sometime in the late 1870's, when lamps were put on the four corners of the Public Square. The water supply for the town came from shallow wells, cisterns, and springs found in the area. There was no fire department in the town, and in the event of a fire a bucket brigade had to be formed to extinguish it. A fire cart was purchased and a volunteer fire department was finally formed, with the following article appearing in the Huntsville Item of February 9, 1856, to announce its first meeting:

FIRE! - We are requested to say the Huntsville Fire Company will hold their first

meeting on Monday, the 11th instant, at two o'clock P.M. in the court house, for the purpose of electing officers, and transacting other business relative thereto. All who feel interested are invited to attend. . . .

The ringing of church bells and the firing of pistols provided fire alarms for the community, calling out the citizens, who always turned out in force regardless of the time of night or condition of the weather.¹⁵

¹⁵ W. H. Woodall, "Memoirs of W. H. Woodall," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

Huntsville's early streets were so muddy in the winter that there was very little other than foot travel over them. The stores had broad plank galleries in front to make it easier for the customers to get inside. At one time after the advent of the railroad, the streets were so muddy that freight coming in on the trains had to be carried to the stores in wheelbarrows. Country people who came into town for provisions or to sell wood drove as many as ten oxen to a wagon, in order to pull through the mud.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid.

✓ Pleasant Gray was responsible for the town's first cemetery. In 1847 he deeded to the town, in consideration

of one dollar, and his ". . . regard for the health, prosperity, and success of the people of Huntsville and its vicinity. . ." land for ". . . the purpose of a place of burial free to all persons and for no other purpose." The plot fronted on Milam Street (now Ninth Street) and reached as far as Travis Street (Avenue I) on one side and Houston Street (Avenue H) on the other.¹⁷

¹⁷ Deed Records of Walker County, Book A, 209.

The eastern section of the cemetery was reserved for colored people and most of the slaves brought by the early settlers were laid to rest there. Additional acreage was acquired to the east of the colored section, and the cemetery was extended until it finally reached the old Steamboat House where Sam Houston died. Mrs. W. W. Adickes willed funds for the purchase of more land, and the Steamboat House was purchased and removed from the spot, the site becoming the Addickes Addition of Oakwood Cemetery.¹⁸

¹⁸ McFarland, "A History of Huntsville," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

Huntsville has many prominent men from its early history whose graves are to be found in Oakwood Cemetery.

Among them are: General Sam Houston; Colonel Henderson B. Yoakum, who wrote one of the first histories of Texas; L. A. Abercrombie, a legislator, who, along with Colonel W. G. Grant and others, helped to locate Austin College in Huntsville; Mrs. Daniel Baker, wife of Dr. Daniel Baker, who secured money for the building of Austin College in Huntsville, and for whom Daniel Baker College at Brownwood was named; Professor A. E. Thom, acting president of Austin College, 1857-1858; Dr. R. M. Ball, first president of Andrew Female College; Captain Tom J. Goree, a member of General Longstreet's staff in the Civil War; Dr. J. A. Thomason, a prominent Huntsville physician and planter; William Barrett, who fought in the War of 1812, the Black Hawk War, and the Mexican War, and who was the architect of the old Austin College Building; Reverend Weyman Adair, the first Cumberland Presbyterian minister in this section of the state; Erasmus, Robert, and Williamson Wynne, early planters and slave owners; Dr. Charles Keenan, who was appointed by the United States government to remove the Indians from Alabama and Florida to the Indian Territory; Dr. Rawlings, an outstanding physician in early Texas history; Dr. Samuel McKinney, president of Austin College, 1852-1853 and 1862-1871; George Fitzhugh of Virginia, a noted sociologist and economist of the Old South; James A.

Baker, prominent lawyer and judge; Rufus Heflin, well-known educator; and many other pioneer citizens of Huntsville and Walker County who played such important roles in the development of this area.¹⁹

¹⁹ Huntsville, Mt. Vernon of Texas, a pamphlet published by Sam Houston State Teachers College, 7.

The cemetery also contains the graves of seven Union soldiers--Captain Stewart and six unknown--who died while being held prisoners-of-war in the State Penitentiary at Huntsville. A few of the slaves buried in the colored section are: Aunt Jane Ward, slave of Colonel Grant; Josh Houston, bodyguard of General Sam Houston; and Hiram Jones, a slave who became a prominent politician after the Civil War.²⁰

²⁰ Ibid.

A great many of the monuments in the cemetery have on them the death date of 1867, bearing witness to the terrible extent of the yellow fever epidemic which swept through Huntsville in the late summer and early fall of that year. An account by George Robinson in The Huntsville Item provides a vivid description of the epidemic:

A gentleman named Mynatt came up from below about the 4th of August, with well-marked symptoms of the disease, and on the 9th died at one of the taverns. Some of our citizens, who had been residing below, with several who had gone down for a few days, and some new-comers came up about the same time as Mr. M. Soon after, Mr. Wanekeey, who was of the number, but had not been further than Houston--where the disease was not the epidemic--took the fever and in about four days died. His was a clear case of "black vomit," according to the writer's information. Then Mr. Fancher, a young lawyer, died on the following day--as clear a case as Wanekeey's, but he had not been below. He had been exposed to the sun, however, a great deal, and as he told the writer, had overheated himself by a ride of ___ miles; then dressing a lot of lumber for a school room he was having erected. That night he went to bed sick. Indted sic no one dreamed of its existence here at that time. After death, his skin turned yellow as a pumpkin. There was a rumor of his having visited Mr. Mynatt during that gentleman's illness; but this the writer can not verify, nor does he know what effect it would have on the case, as doctors say the only danger of contagion is by sleeping in the same atmosphere with patients. Per contract Col. J. C. Rawl and Captain B. F. Wright, who both came to town early in the epidemic, but saw no cases, went to their homes and died in a few days of the disease, as I have understood, and how Fancher died the next day after Wanekeey with black vomit.²¹

²¹ The Huntsville Item, February 5, 1898. Reprinted from a pamphlet published by Robinson in October, 1867.

The fever spread rapidly, and few houses were left

uninvaded. As in the earlier epidemic at Cincinnati, in 1853, panic spread among the people in the town, and many families resorted to flight to neighboring communities, hoping thus to avoid the terrible disease. Others, however, fearlessly stood their ground and helped in fighting the sickness.²²

²² Ibid.

The doctors in Huntsville seem to have worked tirelessly to administer to the sick and bring the disease to a halt. Doctors Markham, Momand, Oliphant, and Prince, of Huntsville, along with Doctors Haslea and Williams, from Galveston, all had the fever themselves, but recovered. Doctors Kittrell, Moore, and Baker, however, died of the disease. Dr. Keenan was the only physician who did not contract the fever, as he had perhaps built up immunity to it in the Cincinnati epidemic. In addition to the doctors, credit was due to many individuals from Cincinnati and New Orleans, who had had the fever and survived, for their invaluable assistance in caring for the sick.²³

²³ Ibid.

Frank Creagner owned a steam sash factory in

Huntsville, but the factory was used for another purpose during the epidemic. According to Robinson: "The bulk of the last houses of the dead have been made there; and doubtless the speed with which they were made when ordered has added much in stopping the spread of the dread contagion." Terrible as was the epidemic in Huntsville, there were fewer deaths in proportion to the population than in most any other place struck by the disease that summer. The greatest number of interments on any one day was ten, out of a population of about fifteen hundred persons in the city.²⁴

²⁴ Ibid.

Times in Huntsville were difficult in the late 1860's and in the early 1870's. The Civil War had just ended when the yellow fever epidemic struck. Such a combination was enough to deal any town a very hard blow, but Huntsville had been a prosperous little community; and, although greatly staggered, it began a slow period of recovery. The city and county government were, following the war, in the hands of carpetbagger rule. Voters from all over the county had to come into Huntsville to cast their ballots on election day. They stood in line at the polls, which were guarded by Negro soldiers. No one was allowed to hold office who had not signed the "Iron Clad Oath" of the carpetbagger. In 1872,

although Huntsville had a white mayor, C. E. Chambers, the entire city council was made up of Negroes, as well as the county commissioners court.²⁵ Church records of this period

²⁵ Woodall, "Memoirs," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

show that Negroes had membership in the various denominations along with the whites. The Methodist Church listed over one hundred colored persons as members of its congregation.

More prosperous times, however, soon began to dawn on Huntsville. The branch railroad came to the city in 1872, and Huntsville became a rather important trade center for the surrounding area, as well as a busy cotton market. A cotton wharf was established in 1872, and by the year 1899 Huntsville was shipping out about 20,000 bales of cotton annually. The establishment of Sam Houston Normal Institute in 1879 greatly added to the importance and prosperity of the city. By the turn of the century Huntsville could boast of having over forty business establishments and a population of approximately 2,500.²⁶

²⁶ Cox, Sam Houston Normal Institute, 99.

Social Life in Huntsville

The social life of Huntsville revolved to a great extent around the educational institutions of the town. Commencement exercises of such schools as Austin College and Andrew Female College were great occasions, as were their other activities. Picnics and church festivals also did their part in adding to the recreation for citizens of the town. Another popular source of entertainment was provided by occasional troops of players who gave performances in the court house, and in later years at the Henry Opera House, located over the department store of Major John Henry, where the Cafe Raven is presently located. It was well used by traveling entertainers, as Huntsville was the main stop on the railroad between Houston and Palestine. They usually played to a full house.²⁷

²⁷ M. H. Rather, "The Old Henry Opera House," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

Huntsville had its own dramatic club for a time, which staged such presentations as "Everybody's Friend," "Loan of Lover," "Lend Me Five Shillings," "Robert McClaire," and "To Oblige Benson."²⁸

²⁸ Mrs. R. S. Rather, "Social Life in Huntsville," East Texas Historical Association Bulletin, XXI, 28.

Weddings were also great occasion for feasts and general merrymaking, particularly in the earlier frontier days. A description of one wedding which took place near Huntsville back in the days of the Republic tells of singing and dancing to numbers such as "Rosin the Bow," "Jin Aong Josey," "Zip Coon," and "Roaring River." The wedding celebration lasted all night for the younger folks, who continued their singing and dancing until the festivities were brought to a halt by breakfast the next morning. The older folks and the mothers with babies departed about midnight, however, with Negroes going ahead of them with fire pans to light the road.²⁹

²⁹ William R. Hogan, The Republic of Texas, 117-118.

The Texas Prison System

The Texas Legislature passed, on May 11, 1846, an act directing the appointment of three commissioners ". . . whose duty it shall be to select a proper site whereon to erect a State penitentiary, having regard to health, materials for building, the importation of machinery tools, materials to be wrought or manufactured, and for the transportation of articles made or manufactured by the convicts, to a market

for the same."³⁰ Huntsville was the site selected, and

³⁰ Gammel, Laws of Texas, II, 527.

records reveal that this land was purchased, as authorized by the act, from Grace McGary, Robert Smither, and Pleasant Gray, all for the sum of \$493. Upon this land most of the buildings of the present Huntsville prison now stand. The permanent record of operation of the penitentiary began in 1849, when the log prison had only three prisoners.³¹

³¹ "The Walls - Texas Penitentiary at Huntsville," contained in the Huntsville-Walker County Chamber of Commerce publication of Huntsville, The Mt. Vernon of Texas, 1938, 21.

The first inmate of the prison was a man named William G. Sansom, of Fayette County, who was convicted and sentenced to three years for cattle theft. The second convict was Stephen P. Terry, sentenced to ten years for a murder committed in Jefferson County; and the third was Thomas Short, a youth of nineteen, sentenced to a term of two years for stealing a horse in Washington County. The fortunes of these first three prisoners are worthy of note: Sansom was pardoned by Governor Bell on September 14, 1850; Terry, the murderer, died of gunshot wounds while still a

prisoner, on September 28, 1851; and Short served his full term, being discharged on November 7, 1850.³²

³² Ibid., 21.

The log building was soon replaced by a more permanent brick structure, and state prisoners were transferred from jails in the different counties to the Huntsville prison. An \$18,000 appropriation was made in 1849 for the purchase of new machinery for the manufacturing of wool and cotton goods at the penitentiary, and \$104,526.00 was appropriated for maintenance, to come from proceeds of sales of goods and articles manufactured there rather than from the State Treasury.³³

³³ McFarland, "A History of Huntsville," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

The prison contained inmates of all ages and both sexes. The most common form of punishment used, when some of the prisoners misbehaved, was confinement in stocks. The prisoners were given various types of work to do; many were hired out for domestic and farm work, railroad construction, mining, and manufacturing. The prison had a furniture plant, textile mills, iron foundry, brick kilns, and buggy

and wagon works. The institution contained a library, and classes in various subjects have been conducted since 1871, when they were started through the efforts of Colonel G. W. Grant.

Within a period of about ten years after its establishment, the penitentiary seems to have reached the peak of its production, with wool and cotton goods becoming the principle products. The superintendent of the prison, James Gillaspie, reported in 1859 that 5,632 spindles and 200 looms, with other necessary tools were capable of producing 12,000 yards of cotton goods daily, using fifteen bales of raw cotton. The average production required 120 bales of cotton and 6,000 pounds of wool per month, from which could be made approximately 92,000 yards of finished cloth. During the Civil War the prison was called upon to supply materials for the Confederate Army, but could not completely fill the tremendous orders placed by the government.³⁴

³⁴ Ibid.

A legislative enactment of 1871 required that the Governor of Texas lease out the operation and control of the penitentiary to private concerns, through means of published advertising. The lease plan was to last for a period of not less than ten years, nor more than fifteen, with the

State giving full and complete control to the lessee, retaining, however, the right to make use of inspectors to check on the operation of the system.³⁵ The introduction

³⁵ Gammel, Laws of Texas, VI, 916-918.

of this method brought about many undesirable results: the death rate among the inmates doubled in only two years time; many abuses of the prisoners appeared; medical attention for the convicts was sadly lacking; and the number of escapes greatly increased, from fifty in 1871 to 382 in 1876. The first of these leases was revoked in 1876; and, although other leases followed, greater care was taken in each case to prevent inhuman treatment of the prisoners.³⁶

³⁶ "The Walls," Huntsville, The Mt. Vernon of Texas, 21.

In later years the legislature adopted a plan whereby the Huntsville plant was to be the central unit of the Texas Prison System, to which would be added a series of prison farms operating in nearby counties. The first of these was the Harlem Farm; followed by the Imperial (now known as the Central); the Clemens; the Wynne and the Goree Farms (for women prisoners), both located in Walker County just outside

of Huntsville; the Ramsey; the Darrington; the Blue Ridge; the Eastham; and the Ferguson Farm.³⁷

³⁷ Ibid., 22.

Huntsville's Early Newspapers

The first newspaper ever published in Huntsville was The Montgomery Patriot, Huntsville being in Montgomery County at that time. The first issue appeared in May, 1845, but the paper was suspended the following year. The Huntsville Banner, begun in 1846 by General Francis L. Hatch, took its place. The Banner was published every Saturday morning, and subscription rates were two dollars per year. The office of the paper was located on Jackson Street, now Avenue L. Isaac Tousey and T. Gibbs were the Walker County agents for the paper, and James W. Moore was the traveling agent. The last issue of The Banner was in 1849.³⁸

³⁸ McFarland, "A History of Huntsville," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

A religious weekly, The Texas Presbyterian, an organ of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, was the next paper to make its appearance in the city. It was first established

in Houston, in 1846, by Reverend A. J. McGowan, but was moved to Huntsville after about one year of operation, and continued there for approximately ten years. Reverend Weyman Adair was the editor.³⁹

³⁹ Boyce O. Smith, A History of the Andrew Female College, 20.

The Union Advocate was published during the 1856 campaign of the "Know-Nothing" Party, a violent anti-Catholic group; but the paper lasted less than a year, as the "Know-Nothing" movement failed after its defeat in the campaign for the presidency.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ McFarland, "History of Huntsville," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

George Robinson founded The Huntsville Item in 1850, after having come to Texas from Liverpool, England. The first office of the paper was located on Spring Street, over what is now the Felder Dry Goods Company, which in those days was occupied by Dr. J. H. Morgan, a dentist. Several changes in location had to be made, however, because of fires. Publication of The Item has not ceased since that time (except for a few weeks after each of several fires), which makes the paper the oldest weekly newspaper in Texas

with continuous publication.⁴¹ Fires in 1892 and 1902

⁴¹ "Huntsville - Our Historic Little City," The Huntsville Item, 6-7.

destroyed the files kept by The Item office up to that time; thus it is difficult to find copies prior to this other than a few intermittent issues in various state libraries and in the Library of Congress, in Washington, D. C.

Editor Robinson was considered one of the ablest newspapermen in Texas, and at one time The Item was voted as the outstanding newspaper in the state at a meeting of over fifteen thousand citizens of Texas, whose purpose was that of ". . . ascertaining what paper in Texas was the most ably conducted and printed, in order that the patronage of the citizens might be properly devoted to the building up of at least one 'great' paper."⁴² The Huntsville Item was

⁴² The Huntsville Item, March 12, 1853.

declared to have been chosen by a large majority of those present.

It is interesting to note some of the news items and advertisements published in The Item during its first few years of publication. A few of these have been selected at

random and quoted:

Issue of October 4, 1851:

The Eastern stage whilst coming in on Wednesday evening last, about a mile from Huntsville, was run away with by horses, causing it to be upset, and severely injuring a Miss McCleuny, a passenger from Houston County.

Issue of December 6, 1851:

Escape of Convicts

On Thursday afternoon, the officials of our State Penitentiary were aroused to activity by the attempted escape of convicts. Dr. Jesse Kirby has made several attempts to escape. A short time ago he ran off with the ball and chain attached to him, but was soon caught. On last Thursday evening he cut his chain, by the use of his pocket knife, and was about to leave, but was discovered before he was able to run off very far. The guards fired at him and wounded him very severely. . . . He now lies in the Penitentiary in a very precarious condition, supposed to be insane.

On the same day, another convict named Richard Bennett, effected his escape. He was sent from Shelby County for having perpetrated murder in the second degree. A reward of \$100 has been offered for his apprehension.

Issue of January 8, 1853:

Our latest advices from the Trinity are that it is again falling and three boats detailed in the river, on the up trip.

Issue of January 22, 1853:

On the 13th inst., the legislature saw fit, among other matters, to go into the election of U.S. Senator. Gen. Sam Houston was the only candidate in nomination, yet the vote was not unanimous. It stood-- Houston 65; Hemphill 14; Smythe 1.

.....

The Southern Mail came in on Tuesday, very bulky. It is the first one we have had for about eighteen days. The creeks have been so high, it has been impossible to get through. We learn, however, from Mr. Viser, who returned from the Bedias on Wednesday, that the creek is nearly fordable, and the Trinity falling fast. We cannot have everything to suit, or the Trinity would stay up and the creeks down.

List of advertisers, Issue of February 5, 1853:

W. B. Clark -- Teacher of Music, Dancing,
and Etiquette
P. Finch -- Huntsville Male Academy
Binford and Company -- merchants
J. A. Cabiness and F. Mersfelder -- merchants
J. H. Morgan -- dentist
Wiley and Baker -- attorneys
Richard Rawls -- saddle and harness factory
Kittrell and Myers -- druggists
W. A. Leigh -- attorney
Wright-Edmundson -- land buyers
P. J. Simons -- Huntsville Exchange Grocery
H. N. Compton -- carriage and wagon shop
Groves and Mayo -- wagon and carriage makers
Rogers and Perkins and Co. -- hardware
Keenan House
Globe Hotel
John McCreary -- Land Agency

Issue of February 5, 1853:

Dancing, Waltzing, and Etiquette

W. B. Clark has the honor of presenting his compliments to the ladies and gentlemen of Huntsville and vicinity, and would inform them that he has engaged the room over Mr. Walker's store on the northeast corner of the square, where he will be pleased to impart the above science to all intrusted to his care. . . .

For terms and particulars, please call Mr. Clark at the Keenan House.

The Item remained in the possession of the Robinson family for more than fifty years, being operated after the death of George Robinson by his son, Fred. The paper was sold in 1902 to J. A. Palmer, who continued publication under the same name.⁴³

⁴³ "Huntsville - Our Historic Little City," The Huntsville Item, 7.

CHURCHES OF HUNTSVILLE

Baptist Church

The First Baptist Church of Huntsville was organized on September 16, 1844, at the Dean School House, by Z. N. Morrell, its first pastor, and by Elder Thomas

Horsely. The school house was located at the northwest corner of the present wall of the penitentiary. The first book of minutes of the church begins thus:

At a meeting held in the schoolhouse in the town of Huntsville, Montgomery County, Republic of Texas, on Monday the 16th day of September, A.D., 1844, for the purpose of organizing a Baptist Church, the following proceedings were had, to wit:

After divine worship by the Reverend Benjamin Fry, the meeting was called to order by Elder Z. N. Morrell who invited all persons present, who wished to become members of the church about to be organized to take seats, and also invited visiting brethren to sit with us.

Reverend Benjamin Fry, chairman of the committee, heretofore appointed to draft an abstract of principles, reported the "Articles of Faith". . . .

At the end of the proceedings "Elder Z. N. Morrell then closed the organization by prayer and declared the same duly organized in accordance with the usages and customs of the Baptist Church."⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Huntsville Baptist Church Record, 1844-1890, I, 1-6.

Other points in the vicinity of the school house also served as meeting places until the first church building was dedicated, in 1851, by Dr. Rufus C. Burleson, President of

Baylor University, who also dedicated the second church building, forty years later, in 1891. General Sam Houston and Margaret Houston were among the early members of the church, placing their membership in 1855.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ E. C. Boynton, "Data on Churches of Huntsville," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

The Baptist Church began with only eight members, and by 1896 it had reached an enrollment of 144 members. Z. N. Morrell was the first pastor, serving until 1845; he was followed by J. W. D. Creath and S. J. McClenny, joint pastors, 1849-1859; George W. Baines, 1850-1851 and 1859-1860; L. G. O'Bryan, 1860-1864; Jones Johnston, 1864-1865; and A. E. Vandivere, 1865-1867.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The First Methodist Church

The congregation of the First Methodist Church came into being in the early 1850's, but the first church building was not erected until 1857, with the Reverend A. Davis as pastor at that time, and Thomas and Sanford Gibbs, Robert and Williamson Wynne, and Dr. J. A. Thomason serving on the

Board of Stewards. The dedication sermon was given by the Reverend Robert Alexander. A second building was erected in 1888,⁴⁷ and a third following a fire in 1911 which

⁴⁷ Cox, Sam Houston Normal Institute, 97.

severely damaged the old building. This third church building also burned, in 1918, and the present building was constructed the following year.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Boynton, "Data on Churches," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

The First Presbyterian Church

The congregation of Huntsville's First Presbyterian Church was organized by the Presbytery of Brazos, with Dr. Daniel Baker as Moderator, and Dr. Samuel A. Moore, Elder, in June, 1848. Prior to the building of a church, services were held in the court house; in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church building, which was the first church ever erected in Huntsville, having been constructed in 1849; and also in the chapel of Austin College. A lot was purchased in 1855, and the First Presbyterian Church building was erected in 1856, which building served until 1899. In that year a new church was constructed, which lasted until 1956, when a third church

was begun.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Episcopal Church

The Episcopal congregation came into being prior to the Civil War, but no building was erected until after the war. Services were held at various times in the old Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Huntsville Oddfellows Hall, and in the court house. Some of the more prominent early members of the congregation were: Judge and Mrs. James Smither; the George Robinson family; Mrs. Thornton and family; Mr. and Mrs. Rome; and Professor W. A. Hooks.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The first Episcopal Church building was dedicated in 1868, and was called Saint Stephen's Church. Reverend W. R. Richardson, Rector of the Parish at that time, was instrumental in raising funds for its erection.⁵¹

⁵¹ Cox, Sam Houston Normal Institute, 97-98.

First Christian Church

Reverend Joseph Addison Clark organized the First Christian congregation in Huntsville on January 1, 1854. It was for a time served by several different preachers, the first regular pastor being Reverend Benton Sweeney, who was a teacher as well as a minister. Later preachers were John T. Poe and Judge Joab H. Banton. Prominent members of the congregation were Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Bush; Dr. Joseph Baldwin, President of Sam Houston Normal Institute; J. Lyle Smith; and H. C. Wright.⁵²

⁵² Boynton, "Data on Churches," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

SCHOOLS OF HUNTSVILLE

Milton Estill, a Cumberland Presbyterian minister and later Chief Justice of Walker County, conducted the earliest school known in Huntsville, holding classes on weekdays and religious services on Sunday.⁵³

⁵³ McFarland, "A History of Huntsville," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

The first real educational institution in Huntsville was named the "Huntsville Academy," but was known to the

citizens of the town as the "Old Brick Academy." It was built by voluntary contributions of the townsfolk in the year of 1845 upon a five-acre tract of land deeded by Pleasant Gray, for a one-cent consideration, to William Viser, Thomas Gibbs, W. M. Barrett, F. L. Hatch, and M. C. Rogers, trustees of the school, ". . . for purpose of having the said academy built and for the purpose of education in general."⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Deed Records of Walker County, II, 433.

The academy was incorporated the following year. The charter began as follows:

To Incorporate the Huntsville Academy

Section 1. Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Texas, that the present trustees of the Huntsville Academy in the town of Huntsville, and the county of Walker, be, and they are hereby constituted a body corporate and politic, under the name and style of Huntsville Academy, capable of suing and being sued, pleading and impleaded, of holding property real and personal, of selling, conveying and performing all things whatsoever that they deem beneficial to said institution and laws of the state; Provided, that the real and personal property acquired by said corporation shall not at any time exceed twenty thousand dollars.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Gammel, Laws of Texas, II, 1371-1372.

The site of the Huntsville Academy is now within the walls of the Texas Penitentiary. Some of the early members of the faculty at the academy were: Dr. Sam McKinney; Mrs. M. L. Branch; Mrs. James A. Baker; and Miss Melinda Rankin.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ H. F. Estill, "Huntsville: Historic City," Texas State Historical Association, III, 265.

For a time the school admitted only boys, but later took in girls, changing its name to the "Huntsville Male and Female Academy." Under this name an advertisement appeared in The Texas Banner, which declared: "The next session of this institution commences May 31, 1847, under the charge of G. H. B. Grigsby, (late of Virginia), assisted in the female department by Miss Melinda Rankin, (of New Hampshire)." The tuition fees, ranging from \$7.50 to \$20.00, were also stated. A final change created the "Huntsville Female Academy," and boys were no longer admitted.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ McFarland, "A History of Huntsville," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

A legislative act dated March 16, 1848, provided for the incorporation of the "Huntsville Male Institute," and named Thomas G. Birdwell, Benjamin S. Wilson, George W.

Fourth Class Ethics, political economy, 17.50
 astronomy, mathematics,
 Ancient languages, Ancient
 geography, and mythology.

When not advised by parents, the instructors will assign pupils their studies.

G. W. Rogers, Secretary.

Austin College

At a called meeting of the Presbytery of Brazos, at Washington, in June, 1849, Reverend Daniel Baker, Reverend J. W. Miller, and W. C. Blair were appointed as a committee to examine the territory between the Brazos and the Trinity Rivers for the purpose of deciding on the location of a Presbyterian college. The report of this committee recommended Huntsville as the most desirable site for the school. Daniel Baker was appointed financial agent, to arrange for the raising of funds to build the college.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Miller, Robert Finney, "Early Presbyterianism in Texas as Seen by Reverend James Weston Miller, D. D.," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XIX, 167-168.

While in Huntsville for the holding of a religious meeting, Baker broached the subject of the proposed college to some of the prominent citizens of the town, inquiring if they desired the establishment of the school there. A town meeting was called, and great enthusiasm was expressed for

the idea. General Houston was even reported to have voiced the opinion that it would be a greater advantage to Huntsville to have a Presbyterian College located there than to have the city made the seat of government for the state, for which it had been previously considered. Subscription papers ". . . for the erection and support of a college by the Presbyterian Church, at or within a mile of Huntsville, Texas, to be called Baker College," were circulated in the city, and soon some eight thousand dollars worth had been subscribed. Baker respectfully declined the honor of having the college named for himself; instead, it came to be called Austin College, in honor of Stephen F. Austin.⁶¹

⁶¹ Daniel Baker, Life and Labours of Daniel Baker, 389-390.

The act of incorporation of Austin College, approved on November 22, 1849, made Daniel Baker, Sam Houston, Robert Smither, J. Carroll Smith, Henderson Yoakum, John Branch, John Hume, Hugh Wilson, James W. Miller, Joseph McCormack, Anson Jones, Abner Lipscomb, and Joseph W. Hampton the trustees of the college, which was ". . . to be established in or near the town of Huntsville in Walker County and to be incorporated by the name of Austin College."⁶² The first

⁶² Gammel, Laws of Texas, III, 674.

meeting of the Board of Trustees was held in Huntsville on April 5, 1850. Daniel Baker was chosen as president pro-tem, and served until the Reverend Samuel McKinney was elected President of the college, and ex-officio president of the Board. Baker, in telling of the selection of the site for the school, said:

. . . At this meeting of the Board the site for the college building was fixed upon. Two places had been offered--Capitol Hill, on the south, and Cotton-Gin Hill, on the north of the town. I had, in my own mind, fixed upon the latter place, and supposing there might be a few votes against it, and wishing the vote in favour to be recorded as unanimous, I rose up and made a speech, stating how important was unanimity in the case before us, and expressing a desire that when the will of the majority was ascertained, the minority would yield with good grace. . . . Well, the vote was taken, and lo and behold, Capitol Hill carried the day by an overwhelming majority! . . . I complied with my own prescription, and swallowed it down.⁶³

⁶³ Baker, Life and Labours of Daniel Baker, 429.

Classes were first held in the Huntsville Academy building, but on Saint John's Day, Tuesday, June 24, 1851, in conjunction with a program by the Masonic Grand Chapter of the State, then in session at Huntsville, the cornerstone was laid for the new Austin College building. Aldolphus

Sterne, appointed by the Masons as Marshall of the Day for the occasion, described in his diary the activities of the day, which included a large scale public dinner and a ball at the court house that night. Sterne formed the procession at the Public Square, and marched up to Capitol Hill and the building site.⁶⁴ The day being extremely hot, with little

⁶⁴ Excerpts from the Diary of Adolphus Sterne, Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XXX, 61-62.

or no shade, General Houston held an umbrella over Dr. McKinney, who made a speech of dedication.

In addition to the other academic courses offered at Austin College, there was a Law Department under the supervision of Royal T. Wheeler, of the Supreme Court of Texas, and Henderson Yoakum. Distinguished lawyers of Texas frequently gave lectures at the college; among these was Abner S. Lipscomb, a trustee of the college who had previously been a member of both the Alabama and Texas Supreme Courts.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ McFarland, "A History of Huntsville," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

The War between the States took a great many of both students and faculty away from the college to serve in the Confederate Army, but the school managed to stay open, with

the smaller boys still attending and the older teachers conducting the classes. In 1876, however, the college ended its existence in Huntsville, and was moved to Sherman, where it still operates.⁶⁶ Presidents who served the college

⁶⁶ Ibid.

while it was located in Huntsville were: Dr. Samuel McKinney, 1850-1853 and 1862-1870; Reverend Daniel Baker, 1853 until his death in 1857; Reverend J. W. Miller, 1857-1858; Reverend R. W. Bailey, 1858-1862; and Dr. S. M. Lockett, 1870-1877.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ J. J. Lane, History of Education in Texas, 89.

Andrew Female College

Andrew Female College was incorporated by act of the Texas Legislature on February 7, 1853, which named Andrew J. Wiley, Francis A. McShan, Robert Wynne, J. Carroll Smith, C. H. Keenan, Henderson Yoakum, Daniel Baker, Williamson Wynne, Anthony C. Parmer, D. J. Ransom, Andrew J. McGown, Pleasant W. Kittrell, and Micajah C. Rogers as a Board of Trustees.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Gammel, Laws of Texas, III, 18.

The act further stated:

Section 3. Said Female College shall be located at the town of Huntsville, and shall be under the supervision and patronage of the Methodist Episcopal Church South; provided, that no religious test shall ever be required of professors, tutors, or students in said institution.

The college was named for James Osgood Andrew, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The doors of the institution were opened on the sixteenth day of May, 1853, with Dr. James Follansbec as the first president. Arrangements had been made by the Board of Trustees to use the Huntsville Academy building until suitable college buildings could be constructed.⁶⁹ A three-story building to house the college

⁶⁹ Smith, Andrew Female College, 47.

was soon completed, having been financed through funds donated by citizens of Huntsville. It was located on Cotton-Gin Hill, on the present site of the Huntsville Elementary School. In 1855, a new, two-story building was erected, situated in the center of a densely shaded campus and enclosed by a four-foot wall. Entrance to the school grounds was by means of stiles.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Ibid., 35-36, 44.

The college was organized into preparatory and collegiate departments. The preparatory department consisted of the Elementary, Juvenile, and First Class, while the Collegiate Department had the usual Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior departments. The scholastic year of the college was divided into two sessions: the first one beginning on the first Monday in September and ending on the last day of January; the second beginning on the first day of February and closing on the fourth Thursday in June.⁷¹

⁷¹ Ibid., 49.

Classes were conducted in such subjects as English, mathematics, the classics, natural science, modern languages, drawing, penmanship, and religion. The diploma, signed by the president of the college and members of the Board of Trustees, conferred upon the graduate the "Title and Degree of Mistress of Polite Literature."⁷²

⁷² Ibid., 53-55.

A gradual decline brought about the end of Andrew Female College, in 1879. Public schools in Texas had been ever on the increase, and there was no longer a great need for the denominational colleges which had played such an

important part in early Texas education. The year 1879 also marked the beginning of Sam Houston Normal Institute, which attracted many of the students who might otherwise have attended Andrew Female College. The property of the school was acquired by the City of Huntsville, and was used for public school purposes.⁷³

⁷³ Ibid., 89.

Mitchell College

Taking the place of Austin College, following its removal to Sherman, was Mitchell College for boys, held in the old Austin College building, which was purchased by the Methodist Church for that purpose, in 1877. The school was named for Reverend Mitchell of the Huntsville Methodist Church, who made numerous trips to secure funds for the operation of the college. Professor R. O. Rounsavall, a former member of the faculty of Andrew Female College, was in charge of the institution, which only lasted for a very short period.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ McFarland, "A History of Huntsville," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

Bishop Ward Normal
and Collegiate Institute

Presiding Elder C. W. Porter of the Methodist Episcopal Church established the Bishop Ward Normal and Collegiate Institute for Negroes in Huntsville, in 1883. The Board of Trustees consisted of thirty Negroes, among them being Memphis Allen, Alex Wynne, Will Mills, Strother Green, and William Kittrell. The faculty was composed of well-informed, conscientious Southern Negroes, such as C. W. Luckie, who was later principal of the Huntsville Negro School and also a professor of English at Prairie View College. The school was forced to close after a time because of lack of funds.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Sam Houston Normal Institute

Colonel G. W. Grant, Sam R. Smith, and Judge Benton Randolph were members of a committee sent to Austin by the citizens of Huntsville to tender to the state the site and building of the old Austin College, which had been purchased by the town, for the erection of a state college to be called Sam Houston Normal Institute, in honor of General Sam Houston. Colonel L. A. Abercrombie of Huntsville was at

that time a member of the Texas Senate, and with the help of Judge J. R. Burnet and Colonel Charles Stewart, he was able to put a bill through the legislature providing for the erection of the college,⁷⁶ which was then approved by

⁷⁶ Cox, Sam Houston Normal Institute, 5.

Governor O. M. Roberts, on April 21, 1879. The act read, in part, as follows:

An Act to Establish a State Normal School

Section 1. Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Texas, That there shall be established in this state, a state normal school, to be known as the "Sam Houston Normal Institute," in honor of Gen. Sam Houston, the father of Texas; and said institute shall be located at the college formerly known as the "Austin College," at Huntsville, in Walker county; provided, that the citizens of Huntsville shall, within sixty days from the passage of this act, convey to the state for the purpose of said school a valid title to said Austin College, and the grounds belonging thereto; said conveyance to be approved by the governor and attorney general.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Quoted in D. E. Bunting, A Documentary History of Sam Houston Normal Institute, 36-37.

A supplementary act, passed on June 23, directed the State Board of Education to accept possession of the land offered

by Huntsville, and, as soon as the town's citizens made a guarantee of a valid legal title to the land, to take steps to organize the new school and open it to students.

Dr. Barnas Sears, General Agent of the Peabody Educational Fund, was instrumental in getting the new college underway. His visit to Texas and the resulting promise of aid from the Peabody Fund for the establishment of such an institution helped to spur the legislature into action. Sears made the nominations of H. H. Smith of Houston and Bernard Mallon of Atlanta, Georgia, for the position of first principal of the college, with the State Board of Education making the final selection, by choosing Mallon.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Ibid., 44, 62.

On October 10, 1879, President Mallon opened the first term of Sam Houston Normal Institute in the former Austin College building. The faculty at that time consisted of President Mallon, Professor O. H. Cooper, Mrs. Isabella Mallon, and Mrs. A. A. Reynolds. Mallon entered upon his new duties with enthusiasm and expressions of hope for the future, but on October 21, only eleven days after the opening of the session, the first president of the institution died. He was succeeded in office by Professor H. H. Smith, Superintendent of Public Schools in Houston, whose daughter, Mrs.

Fannie Whitesides, was also elected to the faculty as assistant.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Cox, Sam Houston Normal Institute, 11.

The first few terms of the new school were marked by a rapid turnover of the faculty. Mrs. Mallon, widow of the late President, resigned at the close of the first term. Mrs. M. I. Allen and Miss L. W. Elliott were elected to the faculty in 1880, while at the end of the second term, the resignations of President Smith, Professor Cooper, Mrs. Whitesides, and Mrs. Allen were tendered. In the fall of 1882 Dr. Joseph Baldwin was chosen to fill the vacant Principal's position, and Professors C. P. Estill, I. R. Dean, H. C. Pritchett, and Miss Olivia Baldwin were chosen as assistants. Also in that year, Judge Benton Randolph was made treasurer of the Local Board of Directors of the college, which consisted of L. A. Abercrombie, Dr. T. W. Markham, and Colonel G. W. Grant. H. F. Estill was chosen, in 1882, to fill the vacancy created by the death of his father, C. P. Estill, as a teacher of English language, literature, and Latin. Many other changes took place in the next few years, bringing to the faculty such outstanding teachers as Miss Bertha Kirkly, beginning in 1891, Miss Augusta Lawrence, in 1894, and others who put in many long years

of faithful service to the institution.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Ibid., 13-14.

The growth of the school was rapid, causing a demand for greater facilities. The twenty-first Texas Legislature appropriated, largely as a result of the efforts of Colonel L. A. Abercrombie, forty thousand dollars for the erection of an additional building, the cornerstone of which was laid on September 23, 1888. The new building, now known as "Old Main," was completed and dedicated at the opening of the twelfth session of the school, on September 23, 1890.

By 1899 the number of graduates of Sam Houston Normal was 117, as compared with seventy-seven in 1884, and thirty-seven for the first graduating class. Total enrollment for the year 1899 was 479 students. The faculty at this time included: H. C. Pritchett, President; H. F. Estill, teacher of Language, and destined to be the fifth president of Sam Houston; Miss L. W. Elliott, Literature; Miss Lulu McCoy, Reading, Drawing, and Methods; J. L. Pritchett, Mathematics; Robert B. Halley, Physics and Chemistry; Walter M. Coleman, Physiology and Natural History; Miss Annie Estill, Gymnastics; Miss Bertha Kirkley, Assistant in Latin and History; Miss Sue Smither, Assistant in Mathematics; Mrs. Rosa Buchanan, Grammar and Rhetoric; Miss Ida Lawrence, History

and Geography; Mrs. Mary Abercrombie Finch, Music; Miss Anna C. Loring, Assistant in Drawing and Elementary Mathematics; Miss Augusta Lawrence, Assistant in Natural Science and Geography; and Miss Ellas Smither, Assistant in Texas History, and Librarian.⁸¹

⁸¹ Ibid., 14-28.

Figure 3 illustrates many of the points of interest in early Huntsville, as discussed in this chapter.

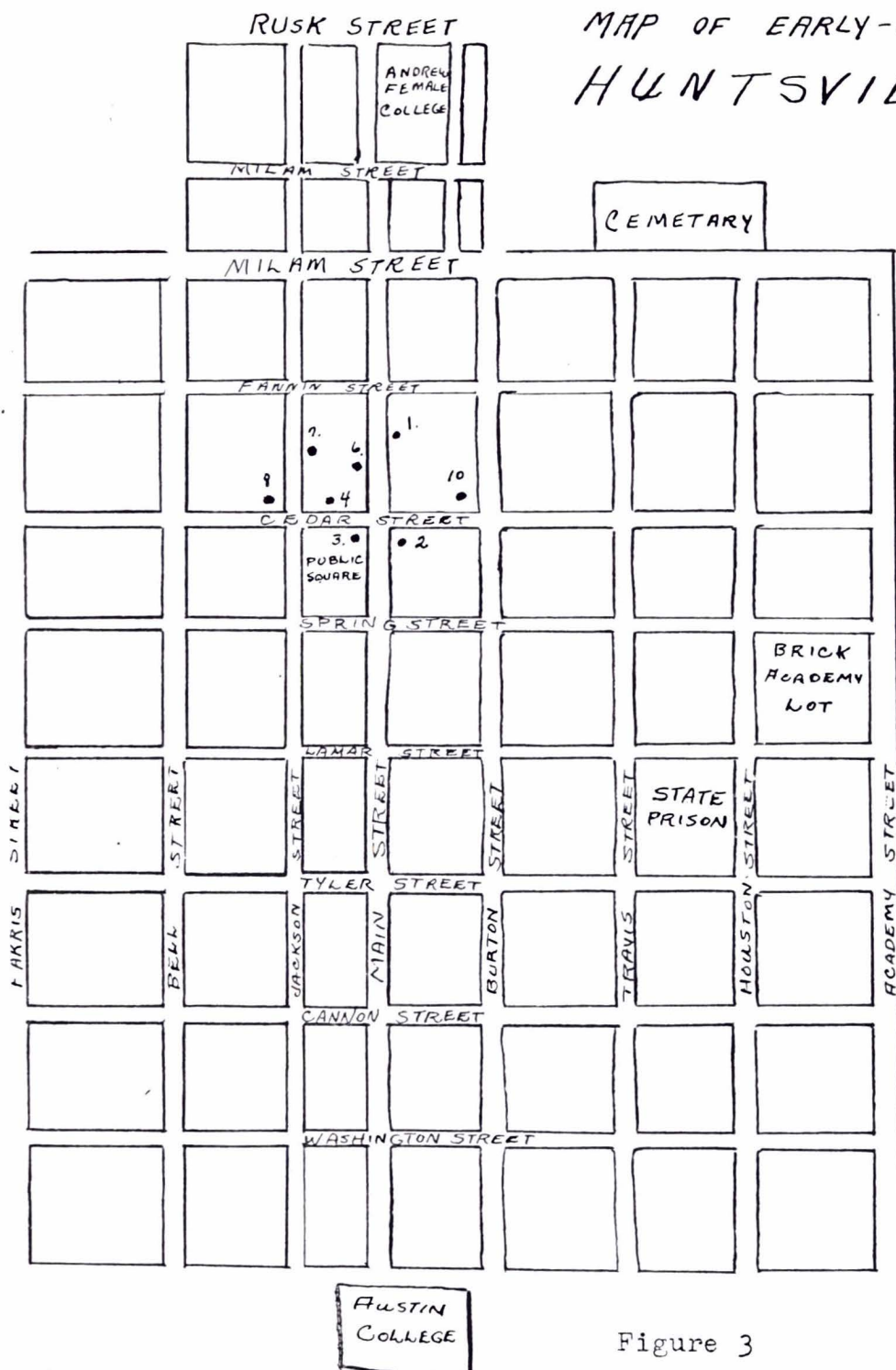


Figure 3

1. PLEASANT GRAY'S FIRST CAMPSITE
2. PLEASANT GRAY'S HOME
3. PLEASANT GRAY'S TRADING POST
4. HUNTSVILLE'S FIRST MASONIC LODGE
5. HENRY OPERA HOUSE

6. GIBBS STORE - FIRST STORE IN HUNTSVILLE
7. GLOBE HOTEL
8. EUTAW HOUSE
9. KERNAN HOUSE
10. CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CHAPTER VI

OTHER WALKER COUNTY SETTLEMENTS

The towns to be considered in this chapter are Waverly, New Waverly, Phelps, Dodge, and Riverside. There are a great many other communities in the county of lesser size, with many of them having histories dating back to the very early years of the county, but it is not the purpose of this investigation to make the extensive survey which would be required were they to be included. Rather than ignore them completely, however, they are here mentioned by name, with the possibility that some have been overlooked:

Bath	Hawthorne	Pine Hill
Boswell	Loma	Pine Prairie
Crabbs Prairie	Moores Grove	Pine Valley
Goshen	Mossy Grove	Round Prairie
Gourd Creek	Oak Grove	San Jacinto

Waverly

Waverly is located in the southeastern corner of Walker County. Today it is little more than a "ghost" town, with only a few houses still there, but it was once a prosperous community. The town was named by Maxey Lewis, an early settler, for Sir Walter Scott's Waverly Novels, which

he was so fond of reading.¹

¹ Personal Interview, Mrs. G. B. Oliphant, Huntsville, Texas.

The first man to come into the Waverly vicinity was James W. Winters, who arrived from Alabama in 1835. He cleared land and built a house, with the assistance of some friendly Indians in the neighborhood.² Next came Colonel

² Mrs. H. E. Lewis, Retrogression of a Rural Community, 4.

John C. Abercrombie, who made a preliminary visit to the Waverly area searching for a suitable location to settle and secure land. Abercrombie was also from Alabama, having made the trip to Texas on horseback in 1850.³ The year

³ Minnie Fisher Cunningham, Crossing Over (Unpublished), 1.

1851 saw the departure from Alabama of Hamlin Lewis, Maxey Lewis, Robert Lindsay Scott, John Elliott Scott, Doctor Townshend, and William Lovett, in addition to many other planters and a great number of slaves, on their way to settle in the Waverly region. The party traveled by the

land route, riding in carriages, buggies, wagons, and on horseback. While passing through New Orleans many of the group were stricken with cholera and died, among them Hamlin Lewis, Townshend, and the two Scotts. The remaining members of the party reached Waverly safely.

In 1851 William P. Fisher, his sons Horatio and Lorenzo, Dr. J. A. Thomason, and several friends came to Texas with a view to buying land, and purchased several hundred acres in the Waverly area of Walker County. Two or three years later they moved their families to Texas, having sent the overseers and slaves prior to that time for the purpose of hewing and dressing logs and constructing houses. In 1856 Dr. John Fletcher Fisher, son of William Fisher, moved to Waverly to settle, after having made previous trips to visit his father.⁴

⁴ Mrs. J. A. Hill, History of the Fisher Families (unpublished), in possession of Mrs. G. B. Oliphant, Huntsville.

The main industry of the Waverly area was cotton farming, as might be expected from the type of men who settled the region. The climate was mild and humid, and the long growing season with the hot summer days, yet plenty of rainfall, was ideal for that particular crop. The settlers brought many slaves with them, and soon had large and

prosperous plantations in operation, with many of them having a great number of slaves. In addition to cotton, each plantation produced other crops and products needed to make them as nearly self-sufficient as possible. There was an abundance of meat, vegetables, meal for making bread, fruit, eggs, butter, and milk. The surrounding woods abounded with game, and wild fruits, berries, and nuts.⁵

⁵ Lewis, Retrogression of a Rural Community, 8-9.

A necessary part of each plantation was the cotton gin. The gin-houses were constructed of large square logs hewn from timber cut in the surrounding woods. The gin was operated by wooden-gearred machinery, with each gin also having a cotton press made of wood. Power for the operation of the gins was supplied by mules or oxen, and a good day's ginning usually produced about three bales. Some of the cotton was retained on the plantation to take care of the needs of its inhabitants, but most of the crop was sold.⁶

⁶ Ibid., 10.

Waverly was surveyed in 1858 by John R. Johnson, surveyor of Polk County, and the town was marked off into blocks. The streets of the town were North, Main, Concert,

and Amity streets, running from north to south; and College, Commerce, and Forrest streets, from east to west. The town was incorporated and the papers recorded on July 10, 1858.⁷

⁷ Deed Records of Walker County, Vol. E, 148.

In the earlier period the town of Waverly was very prosperous. Several stores and businesses were to be found there, and the town was proud of its Waverly Institute, a school incorporated by an act of the Texas Legislature on August 29, 1856. It was so successful that Waverly soon became a noted educational center, with many students attending from the surrounding counties and some even farther away.⁸ Colonel John Hill of Waverly was instrumental in

⁸ Personal Interview, Minnie Fisher Cunningham, New Waverly, Texas.

bringing teachers to the community to operate the school. The first teachers were: Miss Shakelford, from Louisiana; a Mr. Davis; and Professor C. Gustave Fitze, teacher of music.⁹

⁹ Lewis, Retrogression of a Rural Community, 15.

Waverly Institute was actually composed of two school

buildings. One was the Female Academy, located on the northwest corner of College and Amity streets, while the Male Academy was on the northwest corner of College and Concert streets. Both were constructed of logs. During the Civil War the two academies were combined, with the old Male Academy building thereafter serving as a church.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid., 17-18.

The courses taught in the school included the ordinary courses taught in that period, such as grammar, arithmetic, science, Latin, Greek, and French. The school was divided into four classes, with the tuition charged ranging from ten dollars for the first class to twenty dollars for the fourth class. The school also conducted classes in music, with the students choosing from the piano, guitar, violin, flute, or brass instruments. Tuition for the music classes was thirty dollars.¹¹

¹¹ Ibid., 16.

Friday afternoons were set aside at the Institute to give the students opportunity to demonstrate to their parents the skills acquired during the week in declamation,

composition, and music.¹² At the close of the first music

¹² Personal Interview, Minnie Fisher Cunningham.

session conducted by the school a concert was presented, on July 4, 1856. The program was divided into three parts and lasted several hours. Part I was called "Half-past 3 P. M." (from the hour at which it started), and consisted of nineteen selections of songs and piano music. Part II, called "Early Candlelight," included some violin numbers; and Part III, designated as "Evening," contained eighteen selections using various instruments. Some of the students participating were Julia Bass, Mary Baldwin, Sarah Hill, Emily Powell, Mary Matthews, Lizzie Elmore, Ruth Scott, Clara Scott, Hester Spiller, Ellen Bayne, Sam Scott, Joseph Elmore, Ella Scott, Emily Howard, W. B. Scott, and R. Lewis.¹³

¹³ Copy of the Program of the Waverly Institute Concert, July 4, 1856, in possession of Minnie Fisher Cunningham, New Waverly, Texas.

The main church groups in Waverly consisted of Methodists, Presbyterians, and some Episcopalians. Dr. James E. Scott, a Methodist preacher, built a church for his congregation at the corner of Main and College streets. The Presbyterians organized their church under the Presbytery

of Brazos, and held their first regular services in 1860, with R. H. Byers as the first pastor. The Episcopalians did not have regular services, but conducted them occasionally in the Methodist Church building.¹⁴

¹⁴ Lewis, Retrogression of a Rural Community, 13-14.

Following the Civil War Waverly began a period of decline. When the slaves were freed there was insufficient labor to work the plantations, so the farmers tried to organize a company for the importation of Polish immigrants, who would work the plantations in return for advancement of transportation costs in coming to this country. The scheme was somewhat like the old indentured servant system of colonial times, except that the Polish immigrants were to be paid salaries, and were to repay the funds advanced for transportation. The plan did not succeed, and only six immigrant families were ever brought over.¹⁵ In addition

¹⁵ Ibid., 20-21.

to the labor problems, the land had been worn out by careless use.

The final blow to the prosperity of the community came about by failure to permit the Houston and Great Northern

Railroad to build a line through the town. The citizens feared that it would be against the best interests of the community, and, as a result, the track was laid ten miles to the west of Waverly. Most of the families then moved from the dying town.

New Waverly

The town of New Waverly had its beginning with the sounding of the death knell of "Old" Waverly. The Houston and Great Northern Railroad Company, unable to obtain the land in the vicinity of Waverly through which it had originally intended to built the new line, was forced to lay it instead approximately ten miles west of Waverly, at which point they erected a station. The building was known as "Waverly Station," even though it was several miles from the community of that name. When the area around the station began to be settled, a post office was established and was called "New" Waverly, to distinguish it from the post office in the older community. Finally, to avoid the confusion of having a Waverly station at New Waverly, the station took the name applied to the post office.

Many of the first residents of the new railroad town came from the older community to the east, which could no longer provide a living for all of its citizens. Among

these were the A. T. Hill family, the Traylors, the R. A. Thompson family, the J. A. Hill family, and some of the Fishers.¹⁶ Other settlers living in the New Waverly area,

¹⁶ Ibid., 23-24.

some of whom had been there long before the town ever came into existence, were the Powells, the Scotts, the Harts, the Clarks, and the Bass, Spiller, and Derry families. Most of these people owned farms in the vicinity of the new town.¹⁷

¹⁷ Personal Interview, Felix Hardy, New Waverly, Texas.

The first store to be established in the new settlement was operated by John McGar, and carried general merchandise. Other stores were run by J. C. McKibbin; J. R. Hill, who had a grocery business; S. Brown, general merchandise; a store run by a Mrs. Gatz; and a dry goods store by a Jewish man named Strange. A hotel for the accomodation of any train passengers who stopped over was operated by a Mr. McKeen.¹⁸

¹⁸ Personal Interview, A. C. Kmiecik, New Waverly, Texas.

The first cotton gin in New Waverly, other than those on individual farms, was established by J. R. Traylor, and was hand-operated. A more modern gin was later built and operated by Mike Skropenski.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid.

The Protestant church groups existing in the community were primarily Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptists. The establishment of church buildings was not accomplished for some time, but most of the denominations used the one-room school for their services.²⁰

²⁰ Personal Interview, Felix Hardy, New Waverly, Texas.

A map of New Waverly filed in the Deed Records of Walker County, on February 2, 1881, showed the town to be divided into about ten separate blocks, all east of the railroad track. The streets were called Front, Elmore, Fisher, Walker, Gibbs, and Sleight. One of the oldest roads in the state, from Swartwout to Longstreet, passed through New Waverly, over Fisher Street. Another road went to Huntsville, and a third to Willis. These were the only roads of any importance in the early community, although there were

others leading to nearby farms.²¹

²¹ Ibid.

In 1872 a number of Catholic families immigrated from Poland and settled in the vicinity of New Waverly and Danville, which was a farming community located about four miles from New Waverly. Father Orzechowski built a Catholic Church in Danville, but it was closed a few years later by his successor, Father Victor Lincki, and a new church was begun in New Waverly to serve the Catholics of the area. Father Lincki was called away before the church was completed, but his successor, Adam Laski, finished the church and also constructed a small rectory. Laski's successors were Fathers Polyanski, Wilnimowicz, Grabinger, Litwora, and Jacob Chalearz. In 1892 the Reverend Theodore Jarron was appointed to the church, and under his administration the church was improved and a Catholic school built.²²

²² History of St. Joseph's Parish, (unpublished), in possession of A. C. Kmiecik, New Waverly, Texas.

Phelps

Phelps got its name from the Phelps-Dodge Corporation that financed the building of the Houston and Great Northern

Railroad through the area. It was the plan of the railroad company to have towns placed about eight miles apart along the track between Conroe and Trinity. This plan was originally carried out and the designated location of Phelps was at first midway between New Waverly and Dodge, about eight miles distant from each. The town was laid out and begun at the point where the old Black Jack Community is now located. When Huntsville built its branch railroad line to connect with the main line it was thought that the connecting point would be a better location for a town site, so Phelps was moved there in 1872 or 1873. The families at Phelps still bury their dead in the Black Jack cemetery, as no other has been established in Phelps itself.²³

²³ Personal Interview, P. H. Singletary, Huntsville, Texas.

From the beginning, the main source of revenue in Phelps was from the passengers for the railroad who came there from Huntsville to catch the main line trains. The "Huntsville Tap Line" did not operate at night; consequently, the persons desiring to catch main-line trains often had to go several hours ahead of time and then wait in Phelps until their train arrived. A large hotel was built, and it carried on a rather prosperous business with these guests who had

difficulty in making connections. Besides the hotel there was, in the early years of Phelps's existence, a general merchandise store, run by Ed McGar, and another store operated by a Mr. Edmunds, who was also the agent at the depot. A post office was established at an early date, and the first postmaster was a Mr. Winters. A one-room frame building was erected to serve as the Phelps school house and church combined, with the various denominations all holding their services in the same building.²⁴

²⁴ Personal Interviews: Mrs. L. R. Swearingen; Mrs. J. B. Wooten; Mrs. Ella Sloan--Phelps, Texas.

As time went on more families moved into the area, and farming and cattle raising came to be the principle industries of the region. Lumbering was also undertaken, and two sawmills were established, one in Phelps itself and another, Sloan's Mill, about three miles from town. The mills prospered, causing an even greater growth of the town.

Some of the early settlers of Phelps were the Watsons, the Fergusons, the McGars, the Sloans, the Edmunds, the Hardings, the Cauthens, the Lessers, the Traylors, the Stricklands, and the Sebruns.²⁵

²⁵ Ibid.

Charlie Sebrun, who ran the hotel, had quite a reputation, not only as a hotel man, but for his occasional escapades with firearms as well. There were few of the annual Fourth of July barbecues that were not enlivened by a shooting scrape in which he was involved. On one such occasion, when the dancing was at its liveliest and the colored orchestra was rendering appropriate music, Sebrun opened fire and killed a man right by the band stand. The musicians, with instruments dangling from cords around their necks, lost no time in getting back to the passenger train that stood waiting on the track some two hundred yards away.

Later, in the twentieth century, with the development of better roads and highways, the branch line from Huntsville ceased to do as much business as formerly, and Phelps began to lose much of its patronage. The two old saw mills of the town eventually closed, causing a further decline of the community. Today, Phelps has lost the glamour and size of its earlier years, but it still remains as a fairly substantial farming community. The railroad still runs through the town, but Phelps is no longer the important stopping point it once was.²⁶

²⁶ Personal Interview, P. H. Singletary, Huntsville, Texas.

Dodge

Although Dodge did not become a town until the Houston and Great Northern Railroad built its line between Houston and Palestine, in 1872, it is one of the oldest settlements in the county. William H. Palmer settled in the Dodge area in 1825, with his wife, after coming here from Tennessee. Palmer was followed in 1830 by William H. Barker from Monroe, Louisiana. Barker was a grandfather of the late Dr. Eugene Barker, a well-known Texas historian at the University of Texas. Next came John Roark and his family from Tennessee, followed in 1834 by John Carothers, who received a league of land from the Mexican government on which the town of Dodge was later laid out. By the time of the Battle of San Jacinto the community was a thriving settlement, and a few of the settlers of the area fought in that engagement.²⁷

²⁷ Verna M. Morley, Dodge Community History, 1-4.

During the years of the Republic of Texas the community continued to grow and prosper. Among the settlers coming were James Gillaspie, Haden Watts, Green Webb, Russell Roark, and others, whose posterity was to give the historic town of Dodge most of its families of later years.²⁸

²⁸ Personal Interview, William Watts, Huntsville, Texas.

An interesting story is told about Russell Roark, a dealer in livestock. He fell in love with Sarah Ann Palmer, daughter of William Palmer, the community's first settler and a proud and successful farmer. When Sarah Ann's father refused to let her marry a "horse-trader" she and her beau eloped, riding all night on muleback to find a preacher to perform the service. In due time they were forgiven by the girl's father, and remained all their lives in the Dodge community.²⁹

²⁹ Morley, Dodge Community History, 5.

When the railroad was laid through the settlement in 1872 the name of Dodge was given to the community. Like Phelps, it got its name from the Phelps-Dodge Corporation, the company that financed the building of the railroad. The story most commonly told about the naming of the town is that the name signifies that the railroad "dodged" Huntsville and went through Dodge instead, when Huntsville's citizens refused to pay the bonus asked by the railroad for putting the line through their town, but the story is without foundation.³⁰

³⁰ Personal Interview, L. B. Baldwin, Huntsville, Texas.

Dodge was chiefly a farming community at first, and in the earlier days most of the farming was done on large plantations with slave labor. Later, cattle raising came into prominence, and eventually the lumbering industry began to figure in the development of the community. Several saw-mills were established near by to take advantage of the abundant timber to be found in the region.³¹

³¹ Personal Interview, William Watts, Huntsville, Texas.

Other than those already mentioned, some of the early heads of families of Dodge were DeWitt Carter, Justice of the Peace, and also a school teacher; Buck Webb, a farmer; Jim Vann; Jim Jeffries; E. T. Josey, who operated a grist mill; Jim Burke; Joe Wooten; Bob Weisinger; Jim, Lewis, and John Morse; Doctor Randolph; Doctor Love; Doctor Hale, who ran the drug store; Ab Wyatt, the saloon keeper; and others.³²

³² Ibid.

The citizens were, for the most part, a very religious group, and churches in the community were well attended.

For their social activities the people of Dodge often had all-day singings with "dinner on the ground," dancing,

parties, baseball games, and horse racing. The main event of the year was the Fourth of July barbecue, which brought in people from all of the surrounding counties.

While most of the citizens of the community were quiet, law-abiding people, Dodge did have its occasional moments of excitement. On several occasions, young men of the town who had partaken of a little too much liquor in Ab Wyatt's saloon were known to have ridden their horses into the church house while services were being held.

The people of Dodge are justly proud of their history and heritage, this being evidenced by the fact that the annual Dodge reunion of families and former citizens brings several hundred people together at each such meeting, some of them coming hundreds of miles to attend.³³

³³ Ibid.

Riverside

The town of Riverside lies in the northeastern edge of Walker County, on the Trinity River. Although there were several families living in the area at an earlier date, a townsite was not actually designated until the building of the Houston and Great Northern Railroad. On March 18, 1874, the railroad company filed for record in the court house of

Walker County the following instrument:

State of Texas
County of Walker

Know all men by these present, that the Houston, Great Northern Railroad Company has this day filed a map of the town of Riverside, in the county of Walker, State of Texas, in the office of the clerk of the District Court of said county for reference. The said town of Riverside is situated on the John J. Porter League on the west side of the track of the Houston and Great Northern Railroad and consists of eight blocks, numbered consecutively from one (1) to eight (8) which are subdivided into lots of the dimensions given on the accompanying map. And the said company hereby gives, grants, and dedicates to the public use all and singular, the streets and alleys as the same appear on said map and not otherwise. . . .³⁴

³⁴ Deed Records of Walker County, Book 0, 161-162.

The town failed to develop as expected, however, and a short time later it was re-designated, this time consisting of only one block, but other blocks were eventually created.

For many years there was no railroad bridge crossing the Trinity River at Riverside. Those trains coming from the south would discharge passengers at Riverside, back up to a turntable located at Dodge, and then make the return trip to Houston; while those coming from the north would also discharge passengers at Riverside (across the river

from the town), back up to a turntable located at Trinity, and then return to Palestine. A ferry operated at Riverside carried the passengers across the river so they could continue their journey. This break in the rail line worked to the advantage of the town. A large hotel was built to accommodate the overnight passengers, and several stores were opened to take care of their other needs. C. E. Heald opened a saloon and a livery stable, while his wife ran the hotel. A Mr. Bethea put in a grist mill, and a drug store was established, as well as several merchantile businesses.³⁵

³⁵ Personal Interview, Mrs. Helen Waltermann, Riverside, Texas.

While the town in general prospered with the coming of the railroad, there was one project which had to be abandoned. This was an oil mill being erected on the banks of the Trinity, to serve the riverboat trade. Realizing that the railroad would seriously reduce the steamboat traffic, the mill construction project was abandoned before completion. The remains of this old brick building can still be seen on the river bank.³⁶

³⁶ Personal Interview, Mrs. Dave Dominey, Riverside, Texas.

Riverside also grew into a prosperous farming area, and at one time held the distinction of being a very important cotton market, but the town began a period of decline. A contributing factor to this was the building of a new railroad bridge across the Trinity, so that the passengers no longer had to stop over in Riverside. At the peak of its growth the town had a population of approximately 400, but by 1890 it had been reduced to 178.³⁷ In later years, with

³⁷ Richardson, East Texas - Its History and Its Makers, p. 1296.

the establishment and operation of a Fuller's Earth plant in the town, a small measure of the former prosperity returned, but that industry itself has since suffered a decline.

Riverside may boast of having had hardy pioneers of good stock, who believed in the importance of adequate schools and churches. The first school house was opened in 1875, and a Baptist and a Methodist Church have existed there since the early days.³⁸

³⁸ Personal Interview, John Weinzerl, Riverside, Texas.

Among the early settlers who now rest in the Riverside Cemetery the following families are represented: the

Wilsons; the Kellys; the Vickers; the Traylors, the Koehls, the Werners, the Warrens, the Rigbys, the Domineys, the McClintocks, the Burkes, the Fitzgeralds, the Healds, and many others. Most of the people who make up the present population of Riverside are members of these old families.

Not far from Riverside there was once located one of the oldest plantations in the county, established by the Thomas family. It was situated on the banks of the Trinity, and maintained its own landing for shipping cotton. Two cemeteries remain on the old site today, with one containing members of the Thomas family itself, and the other containing graves thought to be those of slaves.

CHAPTER VII

GHOST TOWNS OF WALKER COUNTY

Walker County has five ghost towns which were once flourishing and prosperous communities. Four of these were located on the Trinity River, in the northern part of the county, and owed their existence to the steamboat traffic on the river. They were: Cincinnati, Newport, Carolina, and Tuscaloosa. The fifth, Elmina, was located in the southern part of the county, about one mile north of the present town of New Waverly. It was at one time a busy lumbering community. These are the five ghost towns to be considered in this chapter, although there are others, but of lesser size and importance when they existed.

Cincinnati

Cincinnati was founded in 1837-38 by James C. DeWitt, and was an important port until it was ravaged by the yellow fever epidemic of 1853. It was at that time almost wiped out, but later regained a portion of its importance, only to die once again as a result of the decline of steamboat traffic on the Trinity, which had brought it into being in the first place. By the year 1884 the population of the area was given as thirty-five, and even these few people gradually

left, until today there are no residents at all to be found at the location of the former town, which once numbered as many as five or six hundred people, and was even larger than Huntsville in the earliest days of the two settlements.¹

¹ W. R. Webb (ed.), The Handbook of Texas, I, 347.

Today the visitor to the site of the once busy shipping port will see very few reminders of the old town; the area is used as grazing land for a large number of cattle. There are a few scattered bricks and stones which were once part of some of the buildings there, but most of such evidence has been removed. There is an old well still to be seen, which was used by the people of the town to supply their water, but it is no longer of any use. A marker was erected by the State of Texas in 1936 to indicate the town site, and to the casual visitor unfamiliar with the area, this marker would be the only thing to show there had once been a town there.

The site of the old settlement is located on a high bluff overlooking the Trinity, from which may be obtained a very picturesque view of the river. Off to one side of the townsite there is an old cemetery, with only a few tombstones remaining. One lot is enclosed by an iron fence, and the graves therein have been better preserved than others within

the once large cemetery area. Traces of some of the old roads leading into the town may still be seen if one looks carefully.

In 1837 H. M. Crabb deeded to James C. DeWitt one labour of land ". . . to be selected by him as his natural headright."² The area DeWitt selected had been granted to

² Deed Records of Walker County, I, 347.

Crabb by the Government of Coahuila and Texas from the allotment of the empresario, Joseph Vehlein, and was located on the Trinity River. Shortly after this grant was made, DeWitt began selling lots in the surveyed area known as the town of New Cincinnati. The area was surveyed by William Charles Brockfield, who was granted five town lots in Cincinnati as payment for his work.³ The town was well laid

³ Ibid., 76.

off and was divided into forty blocks of equal size and five fractional blocks fronting on the Trinity River. One block was set aside as the public square. The streets running to the river were Water, Brookfield, DeWitt, Hall, Commerce, and Grimes streets; and the cross streets were Trinity (nearest the river), Jackson, Richie, Main, Fowle, Walnut,

Milam, and Pen.⁴

⁴ Deed Records, Book D, 186-187.

James DeWitt died in the latter part of 1838 or early in 1839, shortly after getting his town underway. DeWitt's wife, Sarah Ann, married Frederick Pomeroy, a leading citizen of Cincinnati, in 1839. Pomeroy later appointed Isaac Tousey as attorney to settle the estate of DeWitt.⁵

⁵ Deed Records, Book I, 233.

The development of Cincinnati seems to have gotten off to a rather slow start. The town was visited in April, 1839, by Adolphus Sterne, who wrote in his diary: "Mr. Clapp has built a good home for travelers, about eight or ten others smaller; saw only one store. . . ."⁶ When Sterne

⁶ Excerpts from the Diary of Adolphus Sterne, Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XXX, 318.

visited the place again in August, 1843, he wrote: ". . . Cincinnati has not much improved since I saw it last. . . ."⁷

⁷ Ibid., XXXVI, 215.

Miss Melinda Rankin, a resident of Cincinnati, also writes of the slow growth of the settlement during its first few years. She seems to attribute this to a great extent to the poor moral standards of the town, which she thought discouraged others from moving into the area. However, at the time she wrote, she said things seemed to be improving and that the prospects for the town were looking brighter. A building had been constructed which was to serve as both church and school, and this, she felt, would greatly improve the moral and intellectual standards of the community.⁸

⁸ Melinda Rankin, Texas in 1850, 136-137.

It seems that Cincinnati never had a very good reputation for morality, however. In 1868 John F. Kelly, a newcomer from Ireland and an employee of Dr. J. H. Smith, who ran a store in Cincinnati, made several entries in his diary concerning the character of many of the persons with whom he had dealings. As he expressed it: "Oh, Texas, thy youth are truly demoralized." In his opinion; "Very few of them are truly and faithfully honest--very few indeed." In describing what he considered to be the average character of the Texans, Kelly said: "They lack (very much indeed) the experienced ingenuity and skill as well as that indomitable

spirit of go aheadativeness so prevalent in the Northern character. . . . They have been too much accustomed to leading an easy, indolent life, hence their lack for enterprise and haste. . . ." In regard to promises made by Texans, Kelly had this to say: "But, 'Shaw' talk about the people of this state being punctual to what they promise. There is undoubtedly less principle and honour attached to these people in that respect than any I have ever known. May I never experience such a collection of beings in any part of the union. . . ." ⁹

⁹ John F. Kelly, Diary, entry of April 3, 1868.

Frederick Pomeroy and Isaac Tousey seem to have been two of the town's most prominent citizens. They ran a store in partnership, and each owned large areas of land in the vicinity of the town. Pomeroy also owned a ferry, a brickyard, and a tanyard. ¹⁰ A license to keep the ferry was

¹⁰ Personal Interview, Mrs. I. B. McFarland, Houston, Texas.

necessary, for which the operator had to pay twenty-five dollars per year, in addition to posting a one-thousand-dollar bond. The Commissioners Court of Walker County, in 1849, established the ferriage rates as follows:

- (a) Man and horse--from low water to
one-half bank-----10¢
- (b) Man and horse--from half-bank to
bank full-----20¢

Four-horse or ox teams--

- (a) up to half-bank---\$1.00
- (b) above half-bank---\$2.00

Cattle, hogs, horses, or sheep:

- (a) up to half-bank---5¢ ea.
- (b) over half-bank---10¢ ea.

Footmen----- (a) up to half-bank---5¢
(b) over half-bank---10¢

When the water is from hill to hill said ferry
is privileged to charge double the amount of
the foregoing charges for Bank Full.¹¹

¹¹ Commissioners Court Records, Walker County, August
Term, 1849, pp. 10-11.

The ferry was necessary for the stage line, and there were quite a few people living on the other side of the river from the town itself who crossed to trade in Cincinnati. When the water was high there seems to have been difficulty in crossing the river. Kelly mentions in his diary on April 9, 1868, that on that day they had the first customer from over the river since the overflow three weeks prior to that time.

The business establishments in Cincinnati were numerous, in addition to those already mentioned as being operated by Pomeroy and Tousey. Robert and John Matthews were

ginwrights and wagon and furniture makers. An advertisement placed by them in The Huntsville Item on January 29, 1853, gives us a description of their business:

R. & J. Matthews--Ginwrights, Wagon and Furniture Makers. Cincinnati, Texas. . .

Would again inform the planters and public generally, that they have on hand a supply of Gin Stands, which they warrant to be equal to the best and if not proved so, on trial, the money will be refunded. Also, wagons of the most approved style and finish on hand. Wagon repairing, etc. Furniture of their own make, bureaus, bedsteads, folding-tables, workstands, etc. Blacksmithing neatly done.

They also keep a good tavern where travelers can always find every accommodation.

Dr. J. H. Smith erected, in 1853, a new warehouse for the accommodation of shippers and receivers, and also operated a general merchandise store in the community.¹²

¹² Personal Interview, Mrs. I. B. McFarland, Houston, Texas.

George Hunter, mentioned in Chapter IV in connection with the wreck of the Fanner, was a tavern owner in Cincinnati. Adolphus Sterne spoke of having eaten there on his visit to the town in 1843. He ". . . took dinner at Mr.

Hunter's, a tolerable good tavern for Texas."¹³

¹³ Excerpts from the Diary of Adolphus Sterne, Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XXXVI, 215.

Dr. J. H. Morgan was a dentist and surgeon who seems to have divided his time among Cincinnati, Huntsville, and other East Texas towns. The Huntsville Item, February 5, 1853, carried an advertisement of his which stated that he was then in Cincinnati, but would soon return to treat his Huntsville patients.

In December of 1849 Reverend Robert Waters and Miss Melinda Rankin opened a school in the town, known as the Cincinnati Academy. The following article appeared in The Texas Banner on December 1, 1849:

We invite attention to the advertisement of Cincinnati Academy. The citizens of the town have lately erected a fine large two-story frame house. It was built by voluntary subscriptions and the people deserve much credit for it. In this building Reverend Robert Waters and Miss Melinda Rankin propose opening a male and female school on 3rd Dec. prox. Mr. Waters is well known. . . . He is a gentleman of accomplishments and an exemplary minister of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Miss Rankin has established a high character in this state as a teacher. She has had charge of the Female school in this place (Huntsville) for about 12 months and has just closed a session at San Augustine--success and popularity unbounded.

The school was rather short-lived, however. By the year 1851 Miss Rankin was helping Reverend Weyman Adair in his Cincinnati Classical and Collegiate Institute, which prepared older boys for college, but also accepted younger boys and girls. Reverend Adair taught the older boys, while Miss Rankin taught the girls and younger boys.¹⁴

¹⁴ Thomas Campbell, History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 91.

Yellow fever struck Cincinnati in the fall of 1853. By the end of the year the town was reeling from the staggering toll of lives taken. Panic seized many of the people, and most of those who were not struck down by the fever abandoned the town. In September of 1853 a traveler had stopped at the Hunter Tavern after having become sick while returning to his home in Palestine from Galveston. Mrs. Hunter waited on him until he left on the next stage. It was later learned that he died shortly after this. No one knew just what his illness had been, but shortly after his departure Mrs. Hunter was taken with the same disease. The people of the town still did not suspect yellow fever, and several of the women visited her before she died. Thus the fever was rapidly communicated throughout the town with the

aid of the many mosquitos from the muddy river-bottom lands.¹⁵

¹⁵ History of the Hunter and Stevens Families (unpublished), in possession of Willene Story, Tyler, Texas.

An interesting theory held by some of the townspeople as to how the fever got its start was told in The Telegraph and Texas Register of November 4, 1853: A visitor to the town inquired if the source of the fever were known, if it had been brought in from Galveston or Houston. The citizens at that time seemed to be unable to account for its appearance. Some believed that it had somehow started through a dead horse that had been permitted to remain close to the town, the stench of which had been diffused throughout the area for several nights. The sickness had broken out in the vicinity of town nearest the dead animal.

The doctors of the community were kept constantly on the move, trying desperately to halt the rapid spread of the disease, but yellow fever was a relatively new disease in Texas, and very little was known about it. The Negro slaves of the community did not seem to be as susceptible to the fever as did the whites, and they performed invaluable service in caring for the sick.

Cincinnati had been dealt a terrible blow, and it seemed for a time that it was completely wiped out. Very

little is to be found about the town following this tragic year, but it seems to have recovered at least a small portion of its former importance. It was still listed in the 1859 and the 1860 Texas Almanac as being the shipping point for Walker County, along with Tuscaloosa, about three miles up the river. By 1868, according to the diary of John Kelly, previously quoted, Cincinnati was again engaging in a rather extensive trade. He particularly mentions that a fairly large volume of trade had been carried on through the port in the fall of 1867. The entries in his diary make frequent note of the arrival and departure of steamboats, bringing salt and other supplies up the river and picking up cotton and wood to transport downstream. During this period the Justice, the Mustang, the Texas, the Ruthven, and the Early Bird made many stops at Cincinnati.

Despite this promising come-back, the river port was doomed to vanish completely. The coming of the railroads to Texas was more than the steamboats could combat. Cincinnati had been founded with the view to its becoming an important shipping point and trading center, which it did for a time, but with the steamboat traffic almost at a halt, the town had little reason to continue. The river had been its life-line, but with the end of river commerce, there was an end to Cincinnati.

Newport

Newport was begun around the year 1849 by Joseph Werner, a German immigrant who came to America and to Texas while still a young man. He and his brother owned a steamboat, with which they intended to freight goods up the Trinity River to serve the many ports along its banks, but the boat was wrecked in Galveston Bay before it could ever enter into the Trinity trade. After the loss of the boat Werner worked for a time for other riverboat owners, making many trips up and down the river before eventually deciding to settle on the site which was later to become Newport. Werner first erected a log cabin there, and eventually replaced it with a larger and better-constructed cabin, which in turn gave way to a third and still larger house of one and one-half stories, containing eight rooms. All the materials and furnishings for the house--except window glass--were made in the community which had by this time grown up around the house.¹⁶

¹⁶ The Beaumont Enterprise, September 3, 1939, from an article written from information supplied by R. E. B. Werner, son of Joseph Werner.

Newport was located about four miles down the river from the present town of Riverside. The river-port sites

were generally chosen for their geographic positions, and from the standpoint of beauty, health, and safety. The Newport area met these exacting requirements and was located on a high bluff above the banks of the river, yet it provided a good landing place for steamboats. Today the only things to be found on the old townsite are an abandoned Negro shack and a cemetery. Among the graves to be found in the cemetery is that of the founder of the town. The State of Texas erected a marker in 1936 to designate the location of the former town.

At the peak of its growth, Newport had a population of from two to three hundred persons. The town had a post office, two large general stores, a drugstore, warehouses, a blacksmith shop, a woodworking shop, and various other businesses. The woodworking shop and the blacksmith shop were particularly important, for they provided plows, furniture, nails for building, iron tires, horseshoes, and other such articles of great importance to the citizens. The blacksmith was a respected old Negro, who was a slave prior to the Civil War. There was also a school and a church at Newport.

The main purpose of the town, of course, was that of a cotton port. There were two great cotton warehouses, and the farmers of the county and other surrounding areas would bring in their cotton loaded on ox or mule wagons. Newport

had a cotton gin, and a typical scene of the old town was the carrying of the bales down to the river to be loaded on the boats by the deckhands. Some of the riverboats docking at Newport in this period were the Ida Reece, the Mary Connelly, the Molly Hamilton, the Dianna, the Black Cloud, the Early Bird, the W. J. Portevan, and the Fleta. In periods of dry weather, when the water was low and the steamboats could not navigate the river, the farmers had to make long and tedious overland trips in their ox wagons to carry their cotton to markets in Houston or Galveston.¹⁷

¹⁷ Ibid.

Another important business of the town was a freight-ing concern--West, Werner, and Company--operated by Joseph Werner and a partner. Deliveries were made by ox wagons to such surrounding settlements as Moscow, Centralia, Peach-tree Village, Sumpter, Colita, and Mount Hope. Their consignments included casks of bacon, kegs of butter, barrels of ham, barrels of whiskey, kegs of spice, slabs of iron, boxes of snuff, boxes of axle-grease, and boxes of bitters.¹⁸

¹⁸ Personal Interview, Harold Werner, Trinity, Texas.

As a general rule the town was a peaceful and

law-abiding place, but there were occasional fights, and many of the men carried cap-and-ball pistols on their belts. There was no established law in Newport for several years after the founding of the town.

The founder of Newport died in 1872, and was spared the sight of the decay of the town which had meant so much to him. Like Cincinnati, Newport declined with the end of the riverboat traffic, and by the year 1878 the town had been generally abandoned.¹⁹

¹⁹ Beaumont Enterprise, September 3, 1939.

Carolina

Carolina was the oldest riverboat town in Walker County, pre-dating Cincinnati by some two or three years. On January 5, 1835, John H. Cummings received a league of land from the Mexican Government. His survey was located in the extreme northeastern part of the area which was later to become Walker County, and part of the league fronted on the Trinity River.²⁰ At the mouth of Carolina Creek, where

²⁰ Map of Walker County showing early land grants, General Land Office, Austin, Texas.

it empties into the river, the town of Carolina was established. The Trinity makes a decided bend here, and the high bluffs in the area offered a beautiful location for a town which was easily accessible to the water. Carolina was laid out into ten blocks, with three streets running east and west and three running north and south.²¹

²¹ Ibid.

With steamboat travel becoming more popular and the town being the first river port in this area, Carolina enjoyed a rapid growth from the very beginning. Another factor in its advancement was that there were a number of sulphur springs nearby along Carolina Creek. In those days people were of the opinion that sulphur water had excellent medicinal qualities, and soon the town became quite a famous resort for this area of Texas. People came from all of the surrounding counties to cure their ailments by drinking the sulphur water, and different church denominations would often hold their revival meetings there, with four or five counties participating.²²

²² Personal Interview, Mrs. Helen Waltermann, Riverside, Texas.

One disadvantage possessed by Carolina was its poor accessibility by road. What few roads there were usually remained in a very poor state, and were often nearly impassable because of mud. When Cincinnati was established further up the river, it began to take away much of the trade from Carolina, and by 1843 Carolina had declined considerably. A passenger from the Ellen Frankland who stopped at the town in that year found the village to consist of only about twenty houses, and the formerly important "Carolina Hotel, Dry Goods and Grocery Store," was then deserted.²³

²³ William R. Hogan, Republic of Texas, 77.

Thus in a few short years the prosperous little town dwindled away to nothing. Today there is no indication that a town ever existed on the site.

Tuscaloosa

Tuscaloosa was located on the Trinity River about two miles up the river from Cincinnati. It was in the Jonathan S. Collard survey of 369 acres. Gustavas A. Wyser acquired one-half of this property in 1853, after the title to the land had passed through several hands. Wyser's acreage was located on a big bend in the Trinity, and made a good

location for a townsite.²⁴ When Cincinnati was practically

²⁴ Deed Records of Walker County, Book C, 162.

abandoned in 1853 because of the yellow fever epidemic many of the people moved up to Wyser's Bluff, as Tuscaloosa was called at that time. The location of the land made a good landing point for steamboats. This, together with the fact that there was an already well-established crossing at the point on the river, caused the settlement to grow. Although no definite record can be found to substantiate the belief, the town was probably named for Tuscaloosa, Alabama, as settlers from that city were known to have come to Walker County.

When the town was first settled, and then known as Osceola, it was thought that there were great possibilities for mining lignite. The Trinity Mining and Development Company had visions of acquiring riches from this source.²⁵

²⁵ Mrs. I. B. McFarland, "A History of Huntsville," The Huntsville Item, March 6, 1941.

Sam Houston and Henderson Yoakum, thinking well of such possibilities, each bought one-half acre of land in the area.²⁶

²⁶ Deed Records of Walker County, Book C, pp. 187, 267.

Nothing ever came of the project, since, for some unknown reason, the mining company gave up the project.

After the decline of Cincinnati in 1853 Tuscaloosa became the main river port in the county,²⁷ carrying on a

²⁷ Texas Almanac, 1859, 184.

flourishing trade until the coming of the railroad, after which the town gradually dwindled away.

Wyser's Bluff, as it is once again called, continued to be a popular place for the residents of the county after the town was abandoned. Sulphur springs were to be found in the area, and hunting and fishing in that vicinity were excellent. The spot was a favorite camping place for many years.

Elmina

Elmina--named for the El Mina Temple of Galveston--was located about thirteen miles south of Huntsville and one mile north of New Waverly, on the Missouri-Pacific Railroad. Today it is one of the ghost towns of Walker County, with only the vault of an old saw mill which once stood there still remaining to be seen. It is hard to realize that here a few short years ago was a thriving saw mill town, second only to Huntsville in population among the towns of Walker

County.

The town had its beginning in 1870 when Oliphant's mill was erected there. The first residences were those of mill hands, but soon others began to come to establish businesses. The Oliphant Mill was small and had a limited capacity, which kept the town from growing a great deal for the first few years of its existence. The erection of the Walker County Lumber Company in later years marked the beginning of the real growth of the community. The company operated with a personnel of some two or three hundred employees, and these workmen with their families brought the total population of Elmina to over seven hundred persons. All of the workmen's houses were constructed by the lumber company and rented to the workers. There were about 180 residences and buildings combined when the town was at its peak. Besides the houses there was a large mill commissary, a drug store, and a big two-story hotel.²⁷

²⁷ Personal Interview, Mrs. Ewing Bush, Huntsville, Texas. Mrs. Bush's father, R. W. Miller, was once the manager of the Walker County Lumber Company at Elmina.

The workmen at the mill were given time cards each week to show the amount of time for which they were due to be paid. These time cards were returned on pay day to exchange for cash. If, in the meantime, the workers had

purchased merchandise or owed for rent, the cards were punched to indicate the amount that should be deducted from the pay. T. Frank Ferguson was the time-keeper for the mill and did the card punching when the rent was due.

The Walker County Lumber Company discontinued its operations in 1934 because of the fact that timber in the vicinity was becoming scarce, making it necessary to haul the lumber over longer distances and causing the mill to operate at a loss. One by one the houses were sold and moved away from the community until the once busy town ceased to exist.²⁸

²⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY

This thesis has presented an early history of Walker County, Texas, from the days of the Indian inhabitants to the beginning of the twentieth century. The information presented here only "scratches the surface" of the story of this historical county. An exhaustive investigation would require several volumes to record, but an attempt has been made in this work to present the highlights of Walker County's early existence. Material for the work was collected primarily from the following sources: (1) Personal interviews with long-time residents of the county; (2) Newspaper files; (3) County records (chiefly deed records); (4) Private documents and papers; (5) Statute books; (6) Various secondary sources; and (7) Visits to townsites and cemeteries.

Walker County is located in the Southeastern Texas timber region and has a rolling terrain. The generally mild weather found in this area gives a long growing season, conducive to extensive agricultural activity. Early Indian tribes of the county were primarily the Ceniz and the Bidai, but many others came into the area to trade, as Huntsville furnished an ideal meeting-point for the tribes from eastern and western Texas.

There were several explorers crossing the county area, with Moscoso being the first. His expedition reached a point on the Trinity River in the northern part of Walker County, where he camped for a time before returning east. The settlement of Bucareli, established by the Spaniard, Gil Ybarbo, was located in the original portion of the county. It was established in the year 1774, but was abandoned after only a few years because of raids by the Comanche Indians. The Frenchman, LaSalle, is believed to have crossed the entire county area in his last exploring expedition traveling from the southwestern to the northern border before he was murdered. Other explorers were active in the county area, but no definite relationships with the region can be established.

Walker County was originally part of Washington County, and then Montgomery County, being created from the latter in 1846. Later acts by the Texas Legislature gave the northwestern portion of the original area to Madison County, and the northeastern portion to San Jacinto County. A third act added to the county area a small section of land north of the Trinity River, completing the present-day area of 786 square miles.

The earliest roads crossing the county were established by Spaniards in the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries, the main ones being the Old San Antonio Road, the Contraband Trail, and the La Balua Road. With the coming of settlers to the area various others were built, until by the Civil War period there were such roads existing as the Four Notch Road, the Telegraph Wire Road, the East-West Road, the Contraband Road (to be distinguished from the earlier mentioned Contraband Trail), and the Post Road.

Riverboat transportation was extremely important in Texas until the middle of the 1870's. Walker County had four very active Trinity River ports to which the farmers of the county carried their cotton and other products to be transported by the steamboats to markets in Galveston. The Trinity was not very dependable, however. Its waters were often too low to permit navigation, and at such times the farmers had to carry their cotton to market by ox wagons.

The building of the Houston and Great Northern Railroad through Walker County brought about the decline of the river towns, as rail transportation was more dependable than steamboats. The railroad crossed the county from south to north, bypassing Huntsville because its citizens refused to pay a bonus to the railroad company. Huntsville then had its own branch line built in 1872, connecting with the main line at Phelps, but it was later incorporated into the

Houston and Great Northern line.

Agriculture has always been the chief industry of Walker County, followed by lumbering and, to a lesser extent, cattle raising. The plantation system was prevalent before the Civil War, and Walker County was an important cotton-producing region. Other minor industries existed from time to time, among them being tanyards, cigar factories, and brickyards.

The town of Huntsville was established in 1836 by Pleasant Gray, a former citizen of Huntsville, Alabama. The town prospered from the very beginning and soon became noted as an important cultural and educational center, supporting such well-known schools as Andrew Female College, Austin College, and, later on, Sam Houston Normal Institute. The Texas Penitentiary was located in Huntsville in 1849, and has always provided an important source of income for the town and for the county. Huntsville has always been active in the religious field, with the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and other denominations establishing churches at early dates.

Waverly was established in the 1850's by settlers from Alabama, and prospered through extensive development of the plantation system in the area. The town became famous for its Waverly Institute, a very fine school which

operated before the Civil War. The community began to decline following a refusal to permit the railroad to pass through its borders. As a result, the line was laid ten miles to the west of Waverly, and the town of New Waverly was established at that point as a rail station, later developing into a prosperous farming community as well.

Phelps, Dodge, and Riverside were also railroad towns. Phelps was established at the junction of the Huntsville Branch Railroad and the main Houston and Great Northern Line, and the passengers to and from Huntsville often had to wait over in Phelps to catch their trains. Their patronage greatly added to the prosperity of the little community. Dodge, although not actually a town until the coming of the railroad, was one of the first settled areas of the county, the first settler having arrived in 1824. Riverside owed a great deal of its development to a break in the railroad line caused by the lack of a bridge over the Trinity River. The passengers on the trains often had to spend some time waiting over in Riverside before being able to continue their journey. The town declined after a bridge was built across the river, but later revived somewhat with the establishment of a Fuller's earth plant, only to decline once again when the plant itself declined.

There are five major "ghost" towns in the county.

Cincinnati is the most important of these. It was established in 1837 by James C. DeWitt and grew into a very prosperous river port, even larger in the early days than was Huntsville. The town was struck by a disastrous yellow fever epidemic in 1853 and was never really able to recover, although it did continue to carry on a portion of its formerly extensive port activity until shortly after the building of the railroad through the county.

Carolina, Tuscaloosa, and Newport were flourishing river ports for a time, but they also declined when the new railroad forced the steamboats out of the business of transporting the farmer's products to markets.

The final ghost town considered was Elmina, located in the southern portion of the county. It was established in 1870 as a lumbering town, but it did not prosper to any great extent until the small saw mill originally established was replaced by another company with a larger mill. Eventually, however, all of the suitable timber was cut in the Elmina area, and the lumber mill had to cease operation, whereupon the town itself died.

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