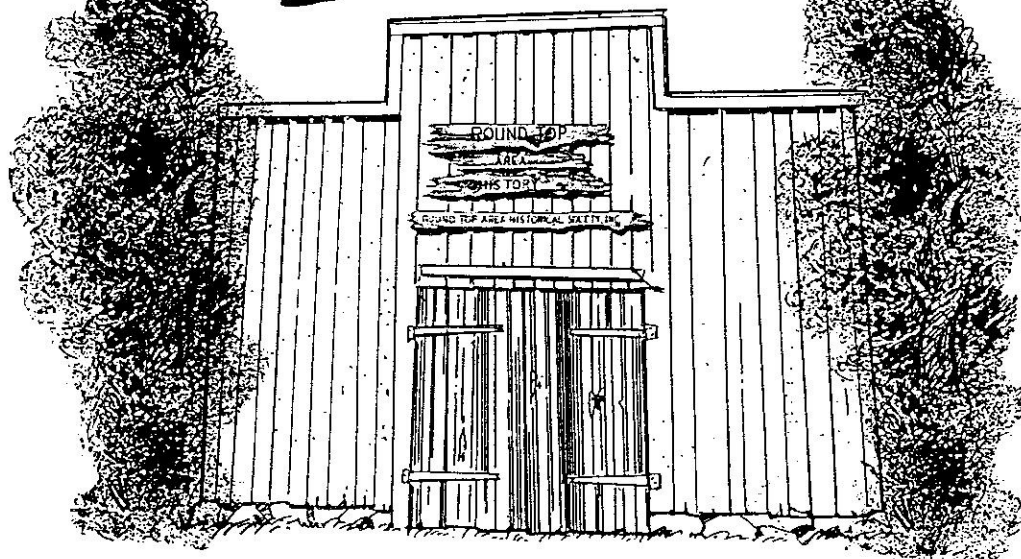




Artifacts



ROUND TOP
Historical
Cultural
Quaint
Unique
Patriotic

Summer, 1994



ROUND TOP AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



LET'S CALL IT "ROUND TOP"

By Herbert L. Diers

If only we knew when or why it became known as Round Top! The name in and of itself begs the question...why is it called Round Top?

Everyone who visits this enchanted "spot on Earth" feels an immediate and unexplainable affinity for her and wants to know more.

Why is it called Round Top? How did it begin? When did it begin and who started it?

Round Top began like so many other towns in Texas...not boisterously proclaiming "this beautiful spot on Earth" as Round Top but simply as a community first inhabited by a family with the surname of Townsend. In the early 1830's it started becoming known as Townsend Settlement because that family was one of the first to settle in the vicinity.

Even before it was called "Townsend" there was an ancient Indian trail running from present day San Felipe to Bastrop, later becoming a stagecoach route.

The Mexican Government granted a league of land to John Shaw on 3/31/1831 on the west side of Cummins Creek across from present day Round Top.¹ Stephen Townsend purchased four hundred acres out of that league from James F. Fisher on 8/4/1835 for \$800.² Those acres extended all the way along the west bank of Cummins Creek from the William Williamson League to the D.E. Colton League.

Other Townsends who were granted land within a few miles of present day Round Top were as follows: William S. Townsend, a cousin to Stephen, who married Mary Burnham, daughter of Captain Jesse Burnham, was granted a quarter of a

league three miles east of Round Top. He built the first building now known as the "S. K. Lewis Stagecoach Inn." Winedale is now on that area of land. William's brother, John P. Townsend, was also granted a quarter of a league adjacent to William's. Nathaniel Townsend's grant of one league was situated one-half mile southwest of present day Warrenton. It included the present day town of Oldenburg. J.T. Townsend's land was located two miles north of present day Fayetteville.

The Stephen Townsend homestead was situated on the four hundred acres west of Cummins Creek, opposite present day Round Top, and overlooking the present day La Grange-Brenham highway.

Soon after the arrival of the Townsend family they established the first church of their Presbyterian faith, later known as Florida Chapel. They named it after Florida, their home state. The church no longer exists, but a cemetery marks the site.³ A Masonic Lodge was organized with Stephen Townsend as the moving spirit. He named it Florida Lodge, Number 46, A.F. and A. M. Stephen was the first Master. The lodge was organized before 1849, probably by 1838, as it was a working lodge under special dispensation. Among its members were the Townsend family and their kin; Asa, Thomas, John P. Townsend, Joel W. Robison, F.M. Johnson and James Goucher. James Goucher and members of his family were killed by Indians in November, 1836.⁴

The postal system of the Republic of Texas began simultaneously with the Texas Revolution. The Post Office Department was established by an ordinance and decree of the provisional

government approved on Dec. 12, 1835. The present day town of Round Top on Cummins Creek in Fayette County was on post route number 15 of the Republic of Texas. Myers Fisher Jones, brother of Postmaster General John Rice Jones, was the local postmaster.⁵ He occupied much of the land. John Rice Jones was granted a league of land on Cummins Creek four leagues south of present day Round Top on 4/16/1831.⁶

Myers Fisher Jones had apparently agreed to purchase the upper two-thirds of the James Winn League somewhere in the years 1838 to 1846, from Samuel M. Williams and Horatio Chrisman. History is silent on these two names, as they pertain to Round Top, other than the deed where Williams finally relinquished title on May 18, 1846.⁷

It's interesting to learn that Myers Fisher Jones sold 254 acres to Stephen Townsend on January 1, 1846 (even before he had clear title from Williams and Chrisman).⁸ All of the 254 acres is in present day Round Top on the east bank of Cummins Creek. The deed reads "Republic of Texas," County of Fayette. Fayette County was established by an act of the Congress of the Republic of Texas May 3, 1838.

An interesting note of history is that the Townsend family had the largest representation at the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836, more than any other family. Members participating in the San Jacinto Campaign were Stephen, Spencer, John P., J.T. and Nathaniel.⁹

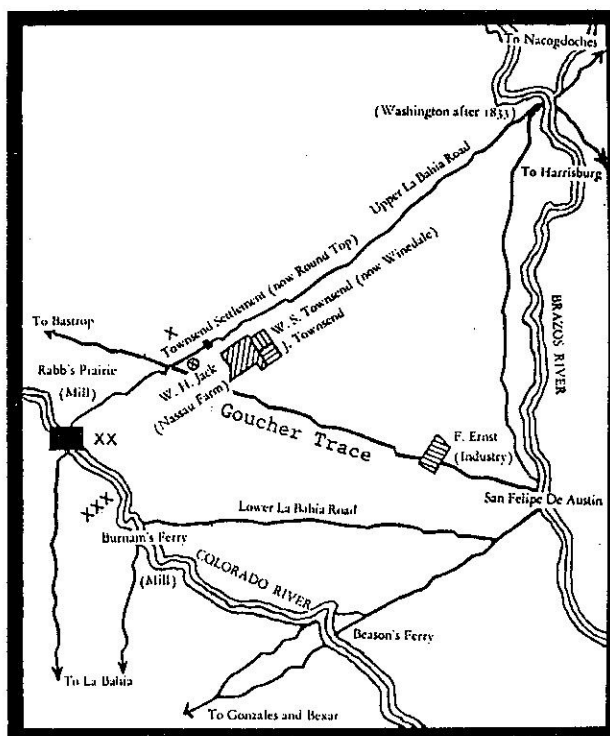
So, one still doesn't know when it became Round Top, but it is known that "Townsend Settlement" and "Jones Post Office" designated the area before it became Round Top. The Indians might have had a name also...could it have meant Round Top in their language? Legend has it that they signaled from this point across to the bluff at LaGrange.¹⁰

Let's just call it Round Top!

¹Deed Records Fayette County, Vol. 4, p. 546. ²Deed Records Fayette County, Vol. C, p. 278. ³Houston Wade, "Fayette County Heroes of San Jacinto," *"La Grange Journal,"* July 25, 1935. John Schroeder, abstractor of Fayette County to Leonie Weyand, August 27, 1935. ⁴Tula Townsend Wyatt, *The Seven Townsend Brothers of Texas 1826 - 1838* (Austin, Texas: Aus-Tex Duplicators, Inc. 1974) p. 273. ⁵W. L. Newsom, "The Postal System of the Republic of Texas," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XX, No. 2 (October, 1916), 103. ⁶Deed Records Fayette County, Vol. 4, p. 946. ⁷Deed Records Fayette County, Vol. D, p. 262. ⁸Deed Records Fayette County, Vol. D, p. 367. ⁹Leonie Rummel Weyand and Houston Wade, *An Early History of Fayette County* (Burnet, Texas: Eakin Press, 1936 p. 30. ¹⁰Melba V. Newton, "Important Pioneer Town Looks Down on Hallowed Trail of Austin," *The Houston Post*, (April 28, 1936).

Townsend Settlement early 1830's (Present day Round Top)

- x Stephen Townsend's Home
- xx La Grange
- xxx Monument Hill
- ⊙ Florida Chapel



Announcements

The By-Laws of our Society provide for an annual membership meeting the second Saturday of September. Everyone is encouraged to attend. The meeting this year will begin at 10:00A.M. in the historical center at Round Top on September 10th.

The By-Laws require any amendment to the existing By-Laws to be voted on by the general membership and passed by a two-thirds majority of the membership present.

The Board of Directors wishes to have the authority to grant honorary memberships in special circumstances and is proposing the following amendment to be voted on at the September 10th meeting.

Amendment 1 Honorary Membership

The Board of Directors shall have the authority to bestow an honorary membership at their discretion. Approval by two-thirds of the directors shall be required for the appointment.