

Round Top Knows How To Celebrate 4th

For 112 Years, A Grand Tradition

By MARGUERITE JOHNSTON, Post Staff Correspondent

ROUND TOP — The historic old town of Round Top, Texas — population 124 — is getting ready to celebrate its 112th observance of the Fourth of July.

Perhaps the smallest incorporated community in the state with a functioning government, Round Top had its first celebration on July 4, 1851.

But Round Top was not new by Texas standards.

A few German settlers came into Fayette County before the county was organized.

BUT MOST OF the early settlers at Round Top were Americans of English stock — the Ledbetters, Flacks, McGuires, Taylors, Pullens, Hills, Wades, Waldens, Robisons, Gaithers and Townsends among them.

The pioneer settlers had Indians to fight, land to clear and independence to win.

The Townsend family had more men in the San Jacinto campaign than any other family. And Joel Robison was one of the party who captured Santa Anna.

Robison was the only Texan who could speak Spanish, and took Santa Anna up behind him on his saddle for the ride back to camp.

In gratitude, Santa Anna gave Robison a handsomely embroidered vest, which all the young men of Round Top borrowed to wear when they married.

Kit Taylor walked away from his plantation — leaving the chickens, geese, pea fowls, farm implements, horses and cattle untended, leaving the newly freed slaves without leadership or employment.

MOST OF THE American-English planters moved out rapidly after the war, and increasingly the Germans moved in.

The Rev Adam Neuthard, organized a Bethlehem Lutheran congregation of 1866, and the present day massive old stone church with flying buttresses was completed in 1867.

Traugott Wantke built the pipe organ, carving each pipe from the native cedars.

MR NEUTHARD, reputedly a master of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, German and English, opened Round Top's first boarding school.

In 1870, Round Top applied for a charter in a move to throw over carpet bag rule, and in 1877 was incorporated by the legislature.

In the 20th Century, Round Top's young people have gone off to college and to wars. Some come back. Newcomers move in.

The American settlers came to grow cotton on the rich black soil, and established a plantation society.

THEY WORSHIPPED at the Florida Chapel and sent their children to the Round Top Academy on the Ledbetter Plantation.

But in 1842, Count Joseph Boos-Waldeck, a cousin of Queen Victoria, came to Texas as representative of the Adelsverein to settle colonies in Texas.

The Adelsverein paid \$3,321 for 4,248 acres of rich farming land—75 cents an acre. Spending a total of \$22,000, the agent added house, barns and slaves until Nassau Farm was a famous show place.

Ill fated as a project, Nassau became under Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels the scene of horse races and \$15,000 feasts.

Kit Taylor, with 200 slaves, was the largest slave holder in the county.

By 1850, Round Top had a population of 150, two stores, two blacksmiths shops, two taverns, a post office and a line of tri-weekly stages.

It had got its name from a big white octagonal house—Soergel's House—which had a tower on top visible for miles.

BEGINNING IN 1850, the German settlers began buying town lots, and they built houses of stone similar to those they had known in Germany. Ehgott Bauer and Conrad Schuddemagen were the first Germans to buy in town.

At the first Fourth of July celebration in 1851, H. Ledbetter, town marshal, led the procession, and Isaac LaFayette Hill of Round Top, a hero of San Jacinto, gave the main address.

After dinner, toasts were drunk to "The American Union — may we live to see its preservation and that its dissolution may be as distant as the end of time!"

A decade later, Round Top was marching off to join the Confederacy.

The Round Top Mounted Infantry was commanded by Capt G. F. Ernest. The Round Top Guerrillas were under Capt J. C. Gaithers. The present mayor's grandfather was among those who went off to that war, never to return.

Round Top saw no reason to give up celebrating the Fourth of July.

At the war's end, federal troops were stationed in town, and a carpetbag government took over.

To maintain the dignity of being an incorporated city, Round Top must pay for a great many public services which a less independent community might turn over to the county budget.

The city government, the Round Top Rifle Association, and the Do-Your Duty Club keep the town the pleasant, self-sufficient place it is.

OLDEST IS THE government, now composed of Mayor Don Nagel, Aldermen Herman Birkelbach (secretary) Dennis Sacks, Wesley Albers and Bobby Banik. Town Marshal for the past 44 years is Ernest Emmrich.

The Round Top Rifle Association, chartered in 1873, is the chief sponsor with the government of the Fourth of July celebration, parade and barbecue. Wesley Kraus is president, Paul Jaster vice president, Aubrey Markwardt secretary and Johnny Krause treasurer.

The Do-Your-Duty Club, youngest of the three, was founded in 1935 to restore and maintain the public square. Its first president was Mrs Willie Sacks, and the club painted the town hall, planted shrubs, paved the sidewalks, and took on the task of maintaining the streets on the four sides of the square.

PAST PRESIDENTS are Mesdames Lydia Fricks, Stella Schlabach, Delia Sacks, Lydia Nagel, Lucille Birkelbach and Sedie Knutzen.

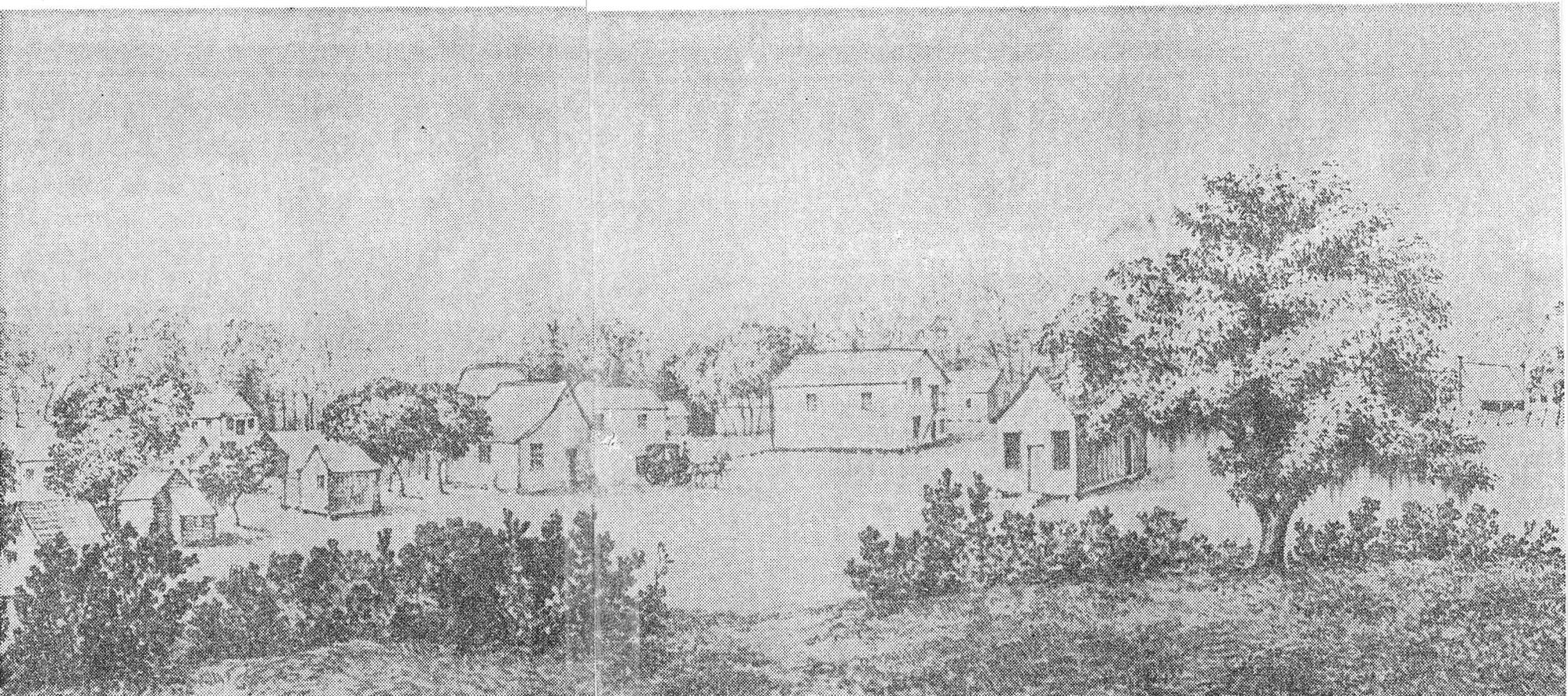
Under the present president, Mrs E. G. Murphy, the 17 members have given bazaars and picnics familiar to women's organizations everywhere to finance essential community projects — including remodeling the fire house.

Almost every one in town is busy now getting ready for the Fourth of July parade which will begin at 10 AM—just as the parade began in 1851. Last year, 218 mounted riders, seven covered wagons, gaily decorated floats, and antique buggies and cars and wagons formed the parade.

Former Mayor J. G. Banik, who as teacher and writer collects Round Top lore, was the speaker.

THIS YEAR THE parade will begin at 10, barbecue will be served at noon at the Rifle Association, a baseball game will be played in the afternoon, and a dance will be held at night.

After 112 years, Round Top knows HOW to celebrate the Fourth of July.



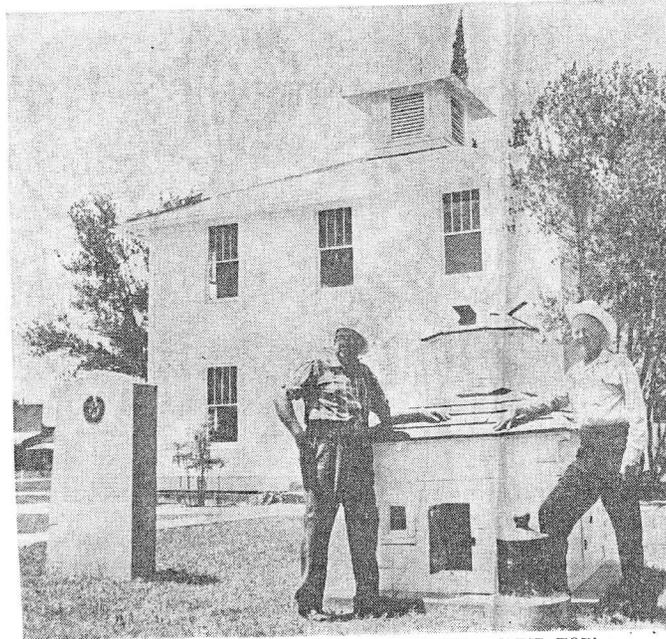
IN THE PEACEFUL DAYS BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR, ROUND TOP WAS A GAY PLANTATION CENTER AND STAGE STOP
This Old Etching Is Owned by John G. Banik, Author of "Houston and Texas Portraits."



AN EARLY GERMAN STONE HOUSE STANDS UNRESTORED
Herman Birkelbach, Marshall Ernest Emmrich, Mrs Erwin Schatte



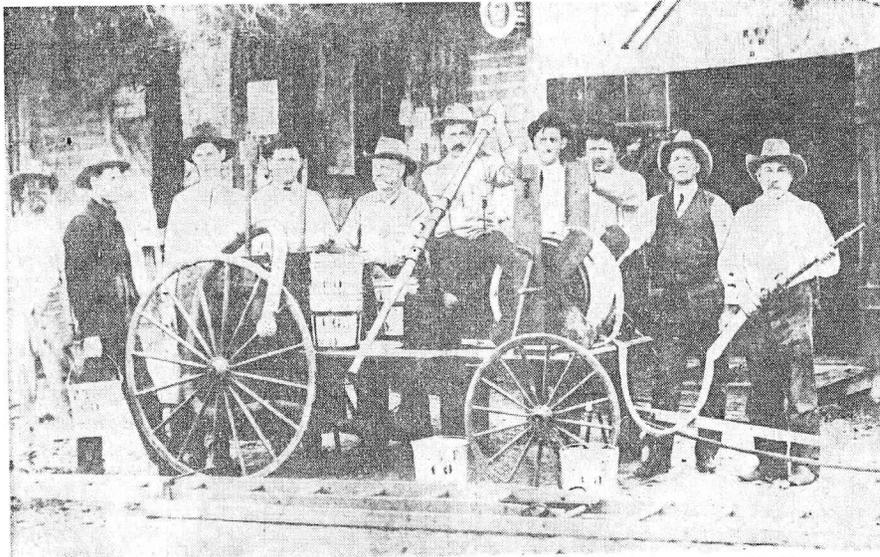
EARLY GERMANS RAN A BREWERY
Bank With Old Brewery Kettle
—Post Photos by Ray Covey



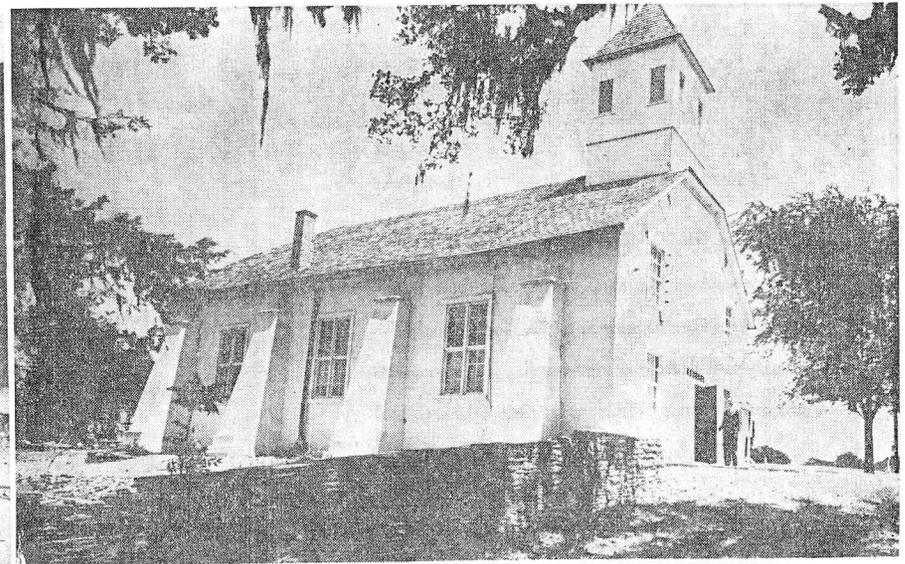
REPLICA OF SOERGEL HOUSE WITH ITS 'ROUND TOP'
Don Nagel, Mayor Since 1956, and Banik, Mayor 1949 to 1952



RIFLE ASSOCIATION OFFICERS TAKE TARGET PRACTICE
Front, Wesley Kraus, Johnny Krause; Rear, Aubrey Markwardt, Paul Jaster



THE ROUND TOP FIRE DEPARTMENT OF 1905 HAD HOSE, BUCKETS, HAND PUMP
The Fire Hall Has Recently Been Remodeled by the Do Your Duty Club



OLD BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH IS NEARING ITS CENTURY MARK
The New Pastor of the Church is the Rev Martin H. Obst, in Doorway