



ROUND TOP
Historical
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ROUND TOP AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



JOHN RUFUS ALEXANDER & MYERS FISHER JONES

In 1838 John Rufus Alexander came to Texas from Missouri. His emigration seems to have been coincident with that of Myers Fisher Jones who later became his father-in-law. Both, J. R. Alexander and M. F. Jones, became involved in those early days of the young Republic of Texas in protecting and fighting for the freedom recently won at the decisive Battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836. Their names have become inseparable from any vignette of history that describes the early years of the Republic of Texas.

Just as John C. C. Hill, the adopted son of Santa Anna, came from the area later to become Round Top, J. R. Alexander and M. F. Jones also made their homes there. Records are not clearly definitive as to when Myers F. Jones first came to live on the Upper Two-Thirds of the James Winn League, but he was finally successful in purchasing it May 18, 1846. Also, it is known that the area was first referred to as Jones Post Office. M. F. Jones was appointed postmaster on mail route 20 on January 15, 1840.

John Rufus Alexander was one of the volunteers who answered the call in 1842 to protect the Republic from the expeditions and skirmishes the Mexicans were advancing north of the Rio Grande.

Asa Hill and his sons, Jeff and John, also came to help. Many histories have been written about these courageous men, so that won't be included here. This is merely a reminder of the date and time the men

of Fayette County came forward to protect their newly established homes and lands.

The story of how John C. C. Hill became the adopted son of Santa Anna was presented earlier. This is a brief explanation of the Dawson Expedition and the Men of Mier...and how the remains of the Texans who drew the black beans are now honored and immortalized in the beautiful monument high atop the bluff overlooking the Colorado River and La Grange. Proud Texas heritage and a long period of time with many trials finally succeeded in establishing this monument for its heroes. Refer to *Fayette County, Texas-Heritage* Vol. 1, Page 8 for more information on the Monumental Committee.

John Rufus Alexander was one of only five men who escaped from Rancho Salado on February 11, 1843, and made it back to Texas. A first hand account of the Battle of Mier was dictated by him to his son, Rufus McCormick Alexander, who faithfully recorded all his father told him.

The 176 recaptured Texans were returned to Rancho Salado on March 25, 1843, and were met with the order from Santa Anna that one-tenth of them be shot. Monument Hill is the final resting place of the seventeen Texans who drew the black beans. The following synopsis is presented by permission of the Monument Hill State Historical Park.

MONUMENT HILL STATE HISTORICAL PARK

On April 21, 1836, Texas won independence from Mexico as a result of General Sam Houston's forces winning a decisive battle at San Jacinto against the forces of General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. Mexico, however, did not formally acknowledge the Republic of Texas. Under the law of December 19, 1836, Texas claimed the Rio Grande as its western boundary but did not have the population or military forces to exercise control over the land beyond the Nueces River, which was the pre-revolutionary boundary of Texas.

After 1836, conflicts between Texans and Mexicans in this disputed Trans-Nueces area were common. For the next seventy years cattle rustling by both Anglo and Mexican outlaws disrupted ranching operations on both sides of the Rio Grande. Nevertheless, the Federalist Revolution in Mexico (1837-1840) and the war between Mexico and France (1838-1839) were two reasons why there was a relatively long interval of peace between the Texan and Mexican Governments. Once these conflicts were resolved, Mexico could once again turn its attention towards Texas.

The Mexican Invasion of 1842

In February 1842, General Rafael Vasquez led 700 Mexican troops into Texas to attack San Antonio. On March 5, Vasquez and his troops entered San Antonio. After looting the town, Vasquez retreated on March 7. Captain John Coffee Hays, with two companies of volunteers from Fayette County under the commands of Thomas J. Rabb and Nicholas Mosby Dawson, followed Vasquez's retreat but lacked sufficient strength to risk an attack. After being certain that the Mexicans had crossed the Rio Grande, Hays returned to San Antonio. In response to



Monument Hill State Historical Park

the Vasquez raid, there was great public outcry in Texas for retaliatory action against Mexico. By the end of April, however, any official plans for retaliation had been abandoned.

On September 10, 1842, Texan spies reported to a surprised and disbelieving San Antonio that a Mexican force under General Adrian Woll was approaching. On the 11th, this report proved to be true as Woll's army of about 950 men succeeded in capturing the town. Fifty-two Texans, who had taken up arms against the Mexican raiders, were taken prisoner and marched to Mexico. When news of the capture of San Antonio reached Gonzales on September 12, Mathew Caldwell gathered a group of Texans to march to San Antonio. On September 14, the news from San Antonio reached La Grange. There, a group of about 15 men rallied and began to ride towards San Antonio. On the way there they were joined by others until their number was increased to 54. During a brief stop at Nash's Creek, Nicholas Mosby Dawson was elected captain. The group then rode on, arriving in the San Antonio area on September 18. Dawson dispatched Alsey S. Miller and Nathaniel W. Faison to determine Caldwell's position. The two spies returned with the news that the battle was already taking place. After a brief debate concerning whether to go forward or wait for reinforcements, Dawson's men voted to advance.

The Battle of Salado Creek

Arriving to within two miles of Caldwell's position on Salado Creek, Dawson and his 53 men were intercepted by 400 Mexican troops. Knowing that their exhausted horses could not outrun the Mexicans and determined to do what they had come for, the Texans prepared for battle, taking cover in a nearby mesquite grove. The Mexicans stayed out of range of the Texan rifles and soon began showering Dawson's men with deadly cannon fire. With about one third of his men either dead or dying,

Dawson raised the white flag, but when some of his men continued to fire, the Mexican cavalry charged. When the fighting ended a little more than one hour after it had started, 36 Texans had been killed, 15 taken prisoner, and 3 managed to escape. The following morning Caldwell's men came upon Dawson's battlefield. The dead had been stripped of all clothing and many wounds had apparently been inflicted after death. After the scene was surveyed, the bodies were buried in shallow graves.

When Woll's army retreated from San Antonio on September 20, they were pursued by Caldwell and 325 men. Though one short skirmish did occur between the two forces, Caldwell was unable to maneuver his troops into an advantageous position and eventually returned to San Antonio without attacking. Woll finally recrossed the Rio Grande with the San Antonio and Dawson prisoners on October 1.

The Somervell Expedition

Upon learning of Woll's raid upon San Antonio, President Houston called for the assembling of the militias and for their marching to San Antonio to join forces under the command of Brigadier General Alexander Somervell to repel the invaders. Somervell's force of about 750 men left San Antonio on November 25. Throughout its march, Somervell's force was gradually reduced by periodic desertions. On December 8, the Texan army (which now numbered about 730 men) entered the then deserted Mexican town of Laredo. The army resumed its march on December 10. That day, recognizing the discontent of many of his men, Somervell announced that he would allow those that wished to return home to do so. By the following morning, 187 men had chosen to exercise this option. Continuing down the Rio Grande, Somervell's remaining force occupied an area outside of Guerrero on December 15, and demanded horses and other

provisions from local officials. The Mexicans fulfilled only a small fraction of the demand, nevertheless, on December 19, Somervell ordered the Texan troops home. Disgusted that they had not fought the enemy nor taken in enough supplies to return home comfortably, Captains Fisher, Eastland, Cameron, Ryon and Pierson, most of the men under them, and several others, refused to obey the order. About 190 men did straggle home with Somervell, arriving in San Antonio in small groups between January 4 and January 8.

The Mier Expedition

On the evening of December 19, Captain William S. Fisher was chosen to command 308 Texans who remained on the border. On the afternoon of Christmas Day, 1842, they attacked the Mexican town of Mier after being informed by a captured Mexican that Mier was protected by General Pedro de Ampudia with 350 men. The battle continued through the night and into the next day with the Texans having the advantage. On the verge of retreat, Ampudia sent a white flag to Fisher and instructed him that there were 1700 troops in the city and 800 fresh troops nearby and "every Texan should be put to the sword" unless they surrendered. The Texans fell for the ruse and learned only after they had surrendered how close they really were to victory.

As the Texans were marched toward Mexico City, they watched for a chance to escape. Led by Captain Ewen Cameron, 188 Texans made a successful break for liberty from the Rancho Salado on February 11, 1843. Heading for the Rio Grande, about 200 miles away, the group left the road on the 12th in favor of traveling through the mountains. They located a water hole on the 15th, and being in need of food, killed their horses for meat. After this, no more water was found. Within two weeks after their escape Cameron and most of his men had surrendered for want of food and water. In all,

176 Texans were recaptured, 7 died in the mountains, while only 5 reached Texas.

The Black Bean Episode

The recaptured Texans were returned to the Rancho Salado on March 25, 1843, and were met with an order from Santa Anna that one tenth of them be shot. To carry out the order 159 white beans and 17 black beans were placed in a pot. Those who drew black beans were given a chance to write home, then were bound together and shot. One man, J. L. Shepherd, survived the execution, faked death, and crept away under cover of night. He was recognized when he reached Saltillo, however, and shot in the street. While the remaining Texans were being marched towards Mexico City, Ewen Cameron, who had led the escape but drawn a white bean, was ordered shot.

The Mier prisoners reached Perote Prison, near Mexico City, on September 21, and joined the San Antonio and Dawson prisoners already there. As prisoners, about 40 of the Texans died while about 24 managed to escape. On September 12, 1844, Santa Anna issued an order for the release of all Texans. The remaining Mier men had been prisoners for 1 year 8 months and 21 days. Receiving about \$10.00 each for traveling expenses, the released Texans walked from Perote to the port of Vera Cruz. On October 22, they sailed on the schooner Creole, arriving in New Orleans on November 4. From there, 76 of the men booked passage on board the steamer New York and finally arrived in Galveston on November 10, 1844.

Monument Hill

In 1847, during the war between the United States and Mexico, Captain John E. Dusenbury, one of the members of the Mier expedition who drew a white bean, persuaded Major Walter P. Lane to allow him to detour to the Rancho Salado for the purpose of reclaiming the bones of the Texans who had been shot and

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buried there. The remains traveled by ship to Galveston and on to La Grange by wagon, where they arrived in June, 1848. Soon thereafter, a delegation of Fayette County citizens retrieved the remains of Captain Dawson and his men from near Salado Creek and placed them in the Fayette County Courthouse in La Grange. On September 18, 1848, the sixth anniversary of the Dawson Massacre, the remains of these men were given a military burial in a tomb on the bluff overlooking the Colorado River, just outside of La Grange. Sam Houston and a large contingent of dignitaries and citizens from all over Texas were in attendance.

In January 1849, Heinrich Ludwig Kreische purchased the property on which the tomb was located from Carl George Willrich. In 1850, Kreische entered into a contract with the Fayette County based Texas Monumental Committee. He agreed to deed 10 acres of land surrounding and including the tomb for \$100, provided the committee would lay a corner stone for a monument within a period of 15 years. By 1865, the money had not been raised and the land reverted back to Kreische. After Kreische died in 1882, his children made numerous requests for the tomb to be removed from their property, claiming that they were disturbed frequently by boisterous visitors and souvenir hunters who removed bones from the then cracked tomb and scattered them over the ground. In 1907, a .36 acre tract of land around and including the tomb was acquired by the state by condemnation. Damages were assessed at \$350. The Daughters of the Republic of Texas provided the money but the Kreisches refused to accept it. Nothing was done at this time, however, about the deteriorated condition of the tomb.

Louis W. Kemp, a member of the Texas State Historical Association, visited Monument Hill in June 1931. He was upset by the poor condition of the road leading from town to the tomb and the neglected state of the tomb itself.

Returning to La Grange, Kemp told a reporter from a local newspaper that because of what he had seen he intended to try to have the remains of the Dawson and Mier men removed to the State Cemetery at Austin. Kemp's thoughts were published and almost immediately local members of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas took action. They cleared off the ground around the tomb, cemented its cracks and erected an iron fence around it. In August 1933, a contract was signed for a new granite vault to completely enclose the old one. On September 18, 1933, the 91st anniversary of the Dawson Massacre, the new tomb was dedicated. During the Texas Centennial year of 1936, the state provided for the erection of a 48 foot tall monument with a panel of sculptured colored plaster depicting the drawing of the beans and various other incidents of the Mier expedition.

Current historical research has revealed several mistakes on the monument plaques, as well as tomb inscriptions. Specific information is available on request.

In 1956, the citizens of Fayette County donated funds for the purchase of 3.58 acres which was donated to the Parks and Wildlife Department bringing the total acreage of Monument Hill State Historic Site to almost 4 acres. In 1977, the State acquired 36 additional acres on which the Kreische home, brewery and other outbuildings are located and designated this as the Kreische Brewery State Historical Park. Both sites are administered as a single operational unit. Facilities include a visitor center; a self-guided, wheelchair-accessible, interpretive trail which winds through both sites; picnic tables with adjacent barbecue grills; restrooms; and a nature trail.

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