

# Important Pioneer Town Looks Down on Hallowed Trail of Austin

## Names of Families History Books Hold Great Spoken Casually in Cum- mins Creek Village.

By MELBA V. NEWTON.

Like an old war hero nodding in the sun of a peacetime world, Round Top, Texas, looks down in somnolent satisfaction upon the fertile lands of Cummins Creek bottom, indifferent to the years that are chalked against it, hardly aware of its own importance.

Automobiles hum through the tiny town quicker than you can say "Jack Robinson," and trucks rumble along at a frightening speed, but Time, the fleetest tourist of them all, must have looked neither to the right nor to the left as he tore his destructive way along toward greater spoils.

One of the oldest inhabited spots in Fayette county, and regarded by historians as one of Texas' most important pioneer towns, Round Top, which was home to many a hero of the Texas republic, has changed but little through the years. Its oldest buildings are amazingly intact, and the names of families the history books record as pioneers are called casually as the children's children of those early men and woman pass the time of day.

From the edge of Round Top, over the tops of gnarled and aged trees that hug the hillside, one can look south down into the bottom lands of one of the most historically important creeks of Texas—Cummins creek, along which Stephen F. Austin, founder of the first colony in Texas, brought his original 300 pioneers.

### Returned for Rest.

It was in Round Top—then called "Townsend's," that these men built crude homes for their families, and to which those who survived the battles and hardships of early Texas days returned for rest and shelter in the declining days of their lives.

And, when this, the Centennial year has been finished, Round Top and its pioneers will not have been forgotten. It will have, for all time, a granite marker with a bronze plaque dedicated to the memory of its citizens who contributed their services and sometimes their lives to colonial Texas and the republic.

Names of early Round Top men sounds like a roll call of heroes of the republic.

Five members of the Townsend family, for which "Townsend's" was called, were soldiers in the army under Captain Gibson Kuykendall's command, and two, Stephen Townsend and Spencer Townsend, actually participated in the battle of San Jacinto. J. T. Townsend, John P. Townsend and Nathaniel Townsend, through no cause of their own, but because they had been detailed to a camp in Harrisburg, missed this important engagement.

It was behind Joel W. Robison, another "Townsend's" resident, that General Santa Ana rode into the camp at San Jacinto. However, the identity of the Mexican prisoner did not become known until he was recognized as he entered the camp.

### Fought at San Jacinto.

John C. Robison, Joel's father, was one of Austin's men, and came to Texas in 1831. Both father and son fought in the battle of Velasco in June, 1832, under Captain Aylett C. Buckner. Later, John Robison was murdered by the Indians.

Then, there was Isaac Lafayette Hill, who not only fought in the battle of San Jacinto, but who was one of the state's pioneer railroad builders. His grandson, George A. Hill Jr., president of the Houston Oil company, is a resident of this city.

There was McHenry Winburn, who fought in the battle of San Jacinto, and was a member of many important early fighting expeditions.

Fighting Myers Fisher Jones, a brother to John Rice Jones, who was postmaster general of the republic of Texas at one time, participated in all the important Indian campaigns of Fayette county. He served under Burleson and Moore in the Santa Fe expedition, and in the Snively expedition.

John Rufus Alexander, another citizen of Townsend's, lived to survive all other members of the famous Mier expedition. History has it that he escaped from the Hacienda Salado—scene of the famous bean drawing episode—and made his way back aloft to his home in Fayette county. He was one of the five men who escaped from the hazardous imprisonment at Salado.

### Became Coach Route.

One sign of the early habitation of Townsend's—even before it was called Townsend's—was the ancient Indian trail running from San Felipe to Bastrop. Later, it became a coach route, and today it is a road entirely adequate for automobile passage.

There has been considerable dispute over the matter of how Round Top came to be called such. This is probably due to the fact that the town's history may be divided into two definite periods, both of equal importance, but, nevertheless, resembling each other no more than a crinoline frock a shirtwaist dress of the nineties.

One was the period when American colonists, under Austin, were building the republic of Texas. The other was the none the less important period when German settlers poured into the section to build up the present communities which join hands through South Central and Central Texas as staunch, thrifty townships, filled with self-dependent, efficient men and women, whose hardy progeny make fine, red-blooded American citizens.

Round Top, say many of the present "old-timers," was named after a blacksmith shop which was octagon-shaped, with a round top. It was located on a hill about a mile from the present townsite, on the road between Bastrop and San Felipe. It was here that the coach changed horses, to continue on its journey.

Some historians claim, however, that

the place was called Round Top before there was ever the round topped blacksmith shop, and it is their theory that the place was named such from the simple fact that it is, actually, a high table site. It is believed that Indians once signaled from this point across to the bluff at La Grange. This seems quite likely, since Fayette county was a veritable crossroads country for any number of Indian tribes going from north to south. No certain tribe of Indians has ever been identified with the history of the county, but any number of tribes, including the Cherokees, the Comanches and the Karankwas. Indians in the Fayette county section were supposed to be extremely aggressive, and left a trail of white man's blood in their wake as they moved to fresh hunting grounds.

### Into German Community.

It was in the middle fifties that Round Top developed into a German community, after the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas had purchased the old Nassau plantation, two miles below Round Top, in the forties. Much of the German settlement took place between 1845 and 1847. A large body of German noble folk settled on the Nassau lands consisting of 4428 acres which one Count Boos-Waldeck bought for 54,000 gulden or \$22,000, according to Mortis Tilling, in his "German Element in Texas."

Early German settlers whose names go on the Round Top rolls of hardy pioneers include George Fricke, a veteran of the Mexican war, who served under General Winfield Scott; C. E. Bauer, the Weyand family, William von Rosenberg, one Dr. Rankin, the White family, the Taylor family, Colonel I. L. Hill, C. W. Rummel, Ferdinand Kneip, Henry Kneip, Adolph Kneip, Charles Schlegel, Robert Zapp, C. Henkel, one Mr. Weikel, Rev. John G. Lieb and Rev. Adam Neuthard.

It was not until after the Civil war that the need for organization of the little town was felt.

A group of transient Confederate "gorillas," termed by the inhabitants as "rowdies," made a camp in the cedar brakes surrounding Round Top. When they needed supplies, they terrified the citizenry by riding into town, shooting out all the window lights, and holding up the merchants in order to take what merchandise was needed.

At last, the town turned out in a body to elect a mayor, and solve its problem. The mayor appointed buglers to stand on guard, and as soon as the "rowdies" were seen riding into town, the bugles were sounded and every man came to the town square, bringing with him arms. The "rowdies" became less rowdy, and presently moved on.

Mayor A. L. Krause told, in a recent interview, of having heard a Round Top pioneer mention that Union soldiers were stationed there following the war between the states. "He even told me that two of them were buried on my land, but I did not believe it until I found the graves down in the field on day recently," he said.

### Carried Six Shooters.

Carl Bauer, of Carmine, who is entering his ninetyeth year, was a carpenter who built many houses in and around Round Top. Smiling at his recollections as he sat on his front porch on a sunny day recently, he pointed out that "those were pretty tough days. A man carried his six shooter right out in the open, and didn't make any bones about it. I call to mind I almost had to use mine once, when a man got a grudge against me and threatened to kill me the first time he saw me. I met him one night at a dance hall, and I said to one of the boys that I'd better be getting along, since it was late. I got out in a hurry. And that night, the man who was after me killed a negro. I guess he was just thirsting for blood."

Along in 1837, recalled Louis Rummel, postmaster of Ledbetter, who "remembers when," a planter's son walked into a Round Top store and asked for a suit of clothes.

"Boss said not sell anything on credit," Clark F. Groeter told him.

The youth snapped out his gun, promptly shot Mr. Groeter, and—got the suit of clothes.

"It is kind of a free feeling you get," said the white-haired Mr. Rummel thoughtfully, "when a place gets so old you can begin to talk about things that have happened in a free manner. It used to be these things were so new we were kind of afraid to discuss them much."

Round Top was not only notable as the home of brave pioneers who cut the logs for the first houses, and fought battles for the independence of Texas' people.

It was the seat of the first boarding school in Texas, and a religious and educational center that was outstanding in this section of the country in the sixties and seventies.

### Church Was Built.

The spiritual and cultural guiding hand of the community was Rev.

Adam Neuthard, whose name will ever be spoken lovingly among the Round Top folk, and whose influence impresses itself, like a firm but kindly hand, upon the life among the townspeople to this day.

It was he who organized the present congregation. Under his guidance, the church of white limestone, which still stands, was built and dedicated.

According to the church records, which have been translated from the German by the present pastor, Rev. Walter Kralik, in 1856, Rev. John G. Lieb, a pastor of the First Evangelical Lutheran synod, brought together a group of Lutherans into a congregation known as the Lutheran St. John's church, and they held their meetings several miles south of Round Top.

In 1861, the Rev. Mr. Lieb accepted a call to the congregation of an adjoining town, and the St. John's congregation extended a call to Rev. Adam Neuthard. He served that congregation until 1865, when he moved to the town of Round Top, the larger part of his congregation following him. Here they founded the Evangelical Lutheran Bethlehem congregation, which exists to this day. This congregation was founded in January of 1867, but even before this time, the cornerstone of the church had been laid, in May, 1866.

In May, 1867, the church building was begun. It was dedicated in October of the same year. The church building cost \$2400, then a considerable sum, and, despite the fact that the German folk were poor at the time, they gave liberally, and it was not necessary to borrow more than \$500 for the completion of the building.

Rev. Adam