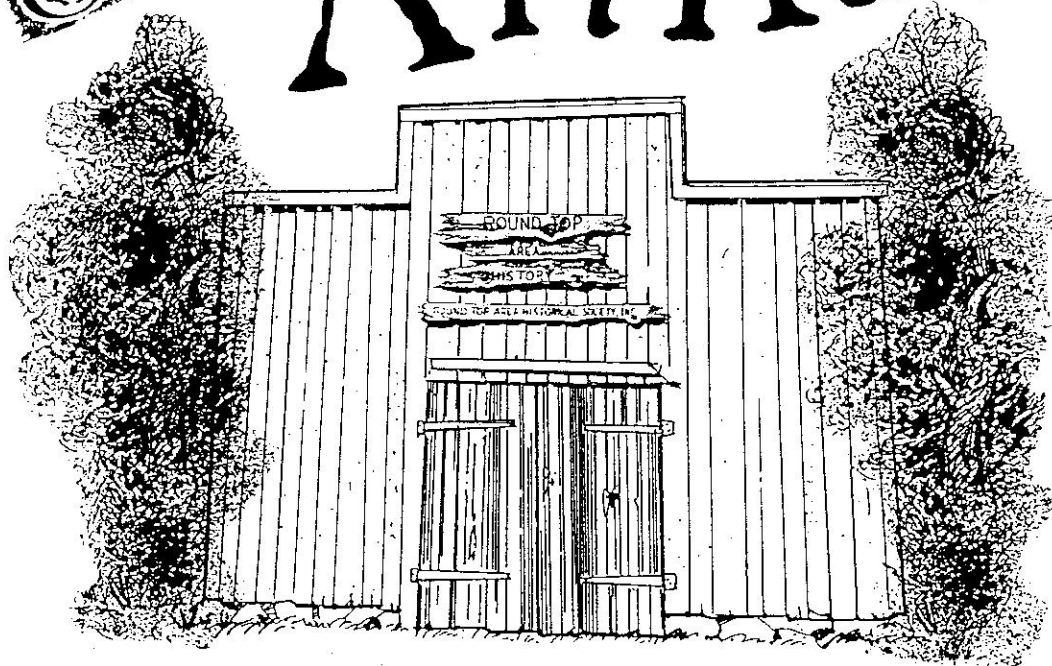


FACTS

Vol. 6 No. 2



Artifacts



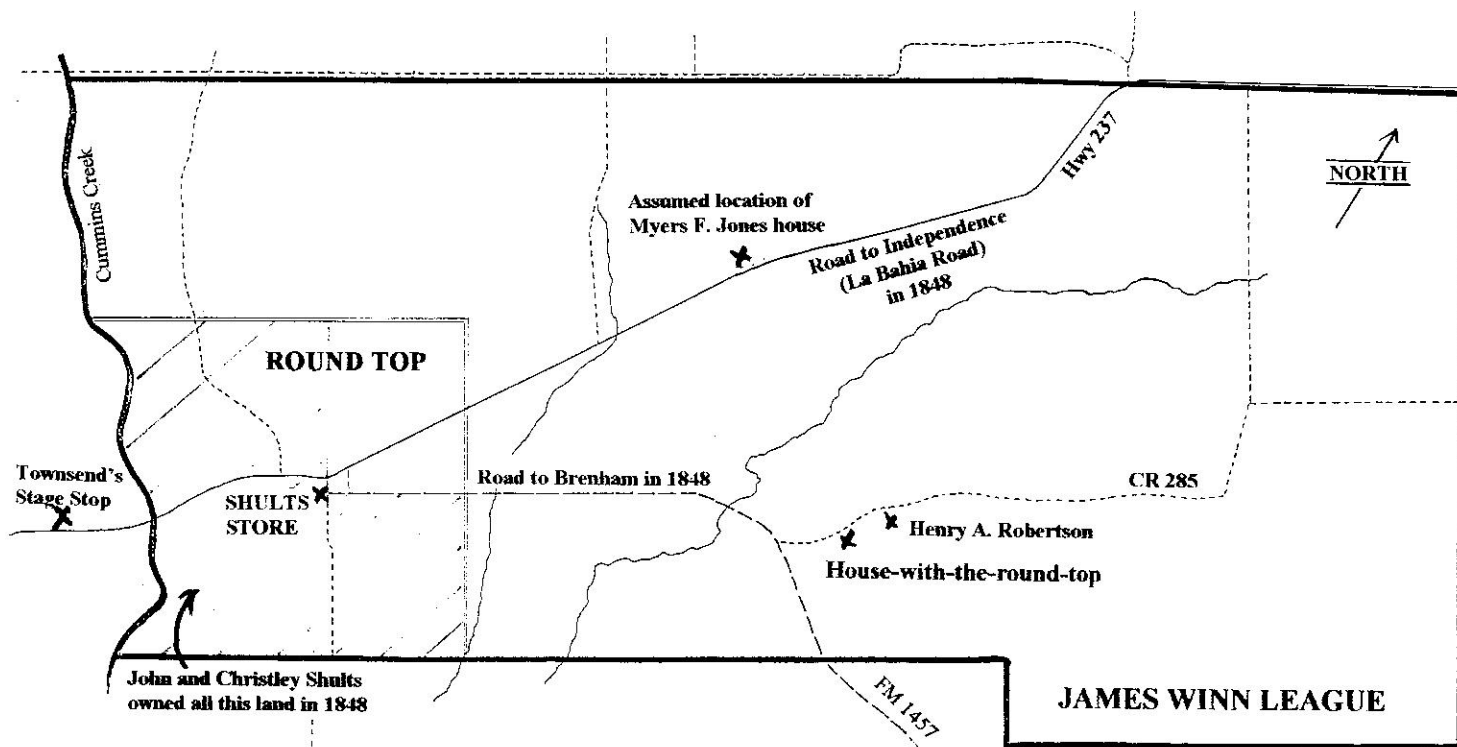
ROUND TOP

Historical
Cultural
Quaint
Unique
Patriotic

Fall/Winter
1999



ROUND TOP AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



THE HIGHWAYS AND ROADS THROUGH
THE JAMES WINN LEAGUE IN 1999

State Highway ———
County Road - - - - -
Farm to Market — — —

AN EARLY HISTORY OF ROUND TOP, FAYETTE COUNTY, TEXAS

BY HERBERT L. DIERS

What is now known as Fayette County was first inhabited by Indians.....the Lipans east of the Colorado River and the Toncahuas west of it.¹ Indian relics that have been found at LaGrange and in the neighborhood of Round Top point to the fact that the Indians had camps at these two places. The Comanche and the Keechi tribes also made depredating excursions through the area which in the early 1820s was frontier country. Aylett C. Buckner, Peter Powell and Jesse Burnham are names of the first white men to settle on the Colorado River. Buckner established himself at the mouth of a creek which later came to bear his name.

When the Texas Revolution began at Gonzales on October 2, 1835, and the Mexican forces had retired to Mexico under the terms of surrender at San Antonio, the Texas Provisional Government was being set up by the San Felipe Consultation. On January 8, 1836, it created the municipalities of Austin and Mina. What is now Fayette County was divided between Colorado and Mina.²

William Menefee and his brother, John, a lawyer, represented the colonists of the present Fayette County. William was a member of the committee to "set forth causes" of armed resistance to Mexico and John was elected a supernumerary of the General Council.³ William Menefee was one of the signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence on March 2, 1836.

As the news of the declaration spread westward through present Fayette County, Captain John W. Smith, on a tired horse, crossed the Colorado at Moore's Ferry and sped east toward Washington-on-the-Brazos, bearing the last appeal for aid from William B. Travis, Texas commander at the Alamo.⁴

After the decisive battle at San Jacinto on April 21, 1836, peace came to the region marred only by an occasional Indian raid. The settlers applied themselves to industry and support of a new sovereignty. John G. Robison, father of Joel Robison, and William Menefee represented the district in the first Congress of the Republic of Texas which convened at Columbia October 3, 1836.⁵

On November 14, 1837, a bill for the creation of Fayette County was presented to the Second Congress on the petition of James S. Lester, Congressman Andrew Webb and Colonel John H. Moore.⁶ On December 14, 1837, *An Act to Establish the County of Fayette* was approved, creating Fayette County out of the counties of Colorado and Mina. (Mina, four days later, was renamed Bastrop).⁷ The new county was

¹ Frank Lotto, *Fayette County...Her History and Her People*, (Schulenburg: Sticker Steam Press, 1902), p. 86.

² Gammel, *Laws of Texas*, I, 1034, Municipality of Austin created March 7, 1827. *Ibid.*, p. 50. Municipality of Mina created April 24, 1834. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

³ Leonie Rummel Weyand and Houston Wade, *An Early History of Fayette County* (Burnet: Eakin Press, 1936), p. 28.

⁴ W.P. Zuber, "Notes and Fragments," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, V(1901-2), 263-266. According to Zuber there were at this time only three houses between Gonzales and Moore's Ferry, from the ferry to Washington "the average distance between dwellings being probably two Spanish Leagues and the settlements being very thin toward the Colorado, but gradually became thicker toward Washington."

⁵ *Inventory of the County Archives of Texas, Fayette County No. 75*, Prepared by the Texas Historical Records Survey, Division of Professional and Services Projects, Work Projects Administration, 1940, p. 8.

⁶ Laura J. Irvine, "Sketch of Fayette County," *American Sketch Book*, VII (1882) p. 40.

⁷ Gammel, *op. cit.*, I, p. 1432.

named for the Marquis de LaFayette, French hero of the American Revolution. An interesting note is that, after 1797, LaFayette retired to the Castle La Grange.⁸ Fayette County was organized on January 18, 1838.⁹

The postal system for the Republic of Texas began simultaneously with the Texas Revolution. A Permanent Council was called by Stephen F. Austin to meet at San Felipe to look after the general administration at the beginning of the Texas Revolution. It was sort of a central committee composed of representatives of several municipalities. It met from October 11 to 27, 1835. The mail was so important to the men of the Permanent Council that one of the first items of business was to establish mail routes. On October 20, 1835, a Mr. A. Thomson made a motion in the Permanent Council that a committee be appointed to look after mail routes. On October 23rd the council went into a committee of the whole on the subject of mails, and, "after due deliberation appointed John Rice Jones II postmaster-general to take charge of the affairs and put them into operation."¹⁰

A General Post Office was established by an ordinance and decree of the Provisional Government and approved on December 13, 1835. The first route was from San Felipe de Austin to the headquarters of the army, to Bexar, to Velasco and to Cantonment Jessup in the United States. By the latter part of 1835 Jones had made contracts for ten routes covering 988 miles. When the First Congress of the Republic assembled, the matter of the post office department was brought before that body, and on December 20, 1836, Congress passed and President Houston approved an act

creating a general post office department.¹¹ It was almost identical to the ordinance of 1835.

In 1840 all but thirty-six routes were abolished in Texas, but four continued by way of LaGrange.¹² On January 15, 1840, a post office was established on the La Bahia Road (in the James Winn League) in the eastern part of Fayette County with Myers Fisher Jones as postmaster. Myers Fisher Jones was a brother to John Rice Jones II. He had come from Missouri in 1838 along with his future son-in-law, John Rufus Alexander. This post office was named Jones Post Office and it was on Route No. 20 from San Felipe to Jones Post Office.¹³ Today, this would be situated about two miles east of Round Top on SH 237 which follows the old La Bahia Road in that area.

Prior to the Jones Post Office in 1840 the general area was referred to as "Townsend Settlement." This was due to the fact that seven Townsend brothers, along with their families, came to Texas, from Florida, in the 1830s. Thomas Roderick and Spencer Burton Townsend were sent in 1826 to investigate the land offers in Texas. They returned with favorable reports, so Thomas Roderick and Stephen Townsend started first in a long train of covered wagons. The other brothers followed as they sold their land. Of the seven brothers, five were issued Spanish Land Grants before 1836. Asa and Stapleton came in 1838 and were issued grants from the Republic of Texas.¹⁴

The only Townsend to own land near present day Round Top was Stephen. He purchased four hundred acres from James F. Fisher on August 4, 1835.¹⁵ This land ran along Cummins

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 103-107.

¹² *Inventory, op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹³ James M. Day, *Post Office Papers of the Republic of Texas 1836-1839*, Texas State Library, Austin, p. 67.

¹⁴ Tula Townsend Wyatt, *The Seven Townsend Brothers of Texas 1826-1838* (Austin: Aus-Tex Duplicators, Inc. 1974) p. xxxviii.

¹⁵ Fayette County Deed Records, Book C, Page 298.

⁸ Z.T. Fulmore, *The History and Geography of Texas as Told in County Names*, pp. 55-56.

⁹ *Inventory, op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁰ Eugene C. Barker, *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* (1916-17), XX, 104.

Creek, on the west side, all the way from the Colton League to the Williamson League.

Stephen and his wife, Sabrina, began operating a stage stand on this land where the La Bahia Road passed through. Stage lines followed the mail contracts and stage stands were needed every fifteen or so miles so horses could be exchanged for fresh ones. The original fifteen postal routes, established in the fall of 1835, were mostly between the more populated communities of Central, South and East Texas. Many of these early routes were served by individuals on horseback. Early stage lines were short, such as the line from Houston to Harrisburg in 1837. Houston had become the population center from which many of the early routes westward began. By May, 1839, a stage line was operating between Houston and Washington-on-the-Brazos. Later that year a line from Houston to Egypt via Richmond and another line between Houston and Austin began operation.¹⁶

There was another stage stand being operated about two miles east of Cummins Creek where the "Old La Bahia Road" crossed Rocky Creek. In 1839 this stage stand and land was owned by John York. The building had an octagonal shaped top.....thus giving the stage drivers the reason for yelling out...."Round Top!"....as they approached. York sold the property to Nicholas Bryan on December 4, 1840.¹⁷ Bryan forfeited the property in a District Court case at which time Wilbur Curtis obtained it in a Sheriff's Sale. Curtis then sold it to Silas Sherman on May 22, 1844.¹⁸ Sherman sold to Henry A. Robertson on April 9, 1845.¹⁹

John G. Banik stated at the Round Top Post Office dedication in 1968, "By the early 1840s three routes of travel converged upon this area from the north and east. One came from

Washington-on-the-Brazos and another route came here from Houston and Brenham, by way of Winedale. These two stage routes stopped at the house with the round top about one and one-half miles northeast of town on what in 1968 is known as the Zuehlke place and across Cummins Creek at the Townsends."²⁰

On July 10, 1835, James Winn sold his league of land. The Upper Two-Thirds was sold to Samuel M. Williams and Horatio Chrisman.²¹ The Lower One-Third was sold to John York.²² As previously mentioned, Myers F. Jones was living on the upper two-thirds of the league in 1840 when the Jones Post Office was established. He apparently was trying to purchase the Upper Two-Thirds League, but due to an earlier sale by Williams and Chrisman to Nicholas Bryan, which resulted in forfeiture and a Sheriff's Sale,²³ Jones was not able to conclude his purchase until May 18, 1846.²⁴

John York exchanged two hundred forty acres of his land on March 10, 1841, with a young man by the name of John Shults.²⁵ As a single man John Shults had been granted one-third of a league (1,476 acres) on August 2, 1838.²⁶ He exchanged his grant for the two hundred forty acres situated on the Lower One-Third League at Cummins Creek.

Texas became the twenty-eighth state to join the Union when President Polk signed the Act on December 29, 1845. United States Post Offices were being established in Texas as early

¹⁶ The Texas State Historical Association, *The New Handbook of Texas* (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1996), VI, 52.

¹⁷ Fayette County Deed Records, Book B, Page 274.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Book C, Page 368.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Book C, Page 448.

²⁰ Hon. J.J. Pickle, "Round Top, Texas, Post Office Dedication, *Congressional Record*, 114, No. 101 (June 13, 1968), 1.

²¹ Fayette County Deed Records, Book D, Page 267.

²² *Ibid.*, Book E, Page 2.

²³ Herbert L. Diers, "Round Top's First Twenty Years," *Facts and Artifacts*, I, No. 3 (Fall, 1994), 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Also, Fayette County Deed Records, Book D, Page 262.

²⁵ Fayette County Deed Records, Book C, Page 282 and Texas General Land Office File #WAS-1-40.

²⁶ Fayette County Deed Records, Book C, Page 282.

as May, 1846. United States postal history records a post office by the name of Round Top established on December 28, 1846, with Mr. Henry A. Robertson appointed postmaster.²⁷ Robertson owned the land and the house-with-the-round-top that was being referred to as "Round Top Place." The second U.S. postmaster, L.H.W. Johnston, was appointed June 15, 1848.

John Shults became the third postmaster on July 19, 1848, at which time he simultaneously moved the location to his land one and one-half miles west and changed the name to "Shults Store."²⁸ Postal history records further reveal that the name was changed back to Round Top at this new location on November 30, 1848.²⁹ A reason for the change has never been found.

Thus, the birthday of Round Top is November 30, 1848, when John Shults named the post office ROUND TOP at this new location.

With the post office being at this new location the village of Round Top began. John Shults had also purchased another two hundred fifty-four acres of land from Stephen Townsend on January 24, 1846.³⁰ Today, this would be north of SH 237 and from Mill Street all the way to Cummins Creek. A deed, Vol. 37, Page 77, in the Fayette County Deed Records, alludes to a survey or plat of Round Top being drawn by William Caruthers on March 21, 1850. It is assumed that John Shults had this survey done since he owned the land, but a copy of the survey has never been located.

A surveyor by the name of F.H. Bell drew a "Plan of Round Top" on February 6, 1854. It most probably followed the same lines drawn by Caruthers.

²⁷ National Archives, Washington, D.C., *Texas Postmaster Appointments*, p. 40.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Fayette County Deed Records, Book D, Page 369.

Melvina A.E.T. and Hugh White purchased the two hundred fifty-four acres from John Shults on May 23, 1851.³¹ On July 22, 1851, they sold Lots 1 & 4 in Block 14 to Charles Bower. This was the first sale of land in Round Top to be sold as a lot or small parcel instead of larger acreage.³² It is interesting to note that the deed states, "in the town of Round Top." Also, the signing was witnessed by William Caruthers and was notarized by H.A. Adams. Edward Henkel, who already owned one hundred fifty-seven acres on the west side of Cummins Creek, bought twenty-five acres from John Shults on November 2, 1852.³³ This twenty-five acres, today, encompasses all of the area known as "Henkel Square" running parallel and south of FM 1457.

Throughout the years of the 1850s, with the heavy immigration of the Germans into the area and the 1860s with the tribulations of the Civil War, Round Top became settled and developed the distinct culture brought along by the Germans. Many of the early settlers moved away, as did the Shults family, and most of the land was bought by Germans seeking their freedoms and establishing farms.

After the Civil War there was a period of time when law and order was severely lacking. Renegades, left over from the war, would come into the area...shooting and causing civil disturbance. The townspeople referred to these groups as "rowdies" and to protect themselves had to form their own guards for defense. This period hastened the idea for the town to incorporate, thus having its own law, mayor and council.

Robert Zapp, a staunch Unionist, along with his family, came to Round Top in 1868. He purchased most of the land once owned by John Shults. He also bought the general mercantile store and business that had been started by Ely W. Tharp and Peter Snook in

³¹ *Ibid.*, Book J, Page 151.

³² *Ibid.*, Book J, Page 78.

³³ *Ibid.*, Book I, Page 152.

1856. The building was situated on Lot 3 of Block 9 and fronted on the public road (LaBahia). Being a man of strong political persuasion, Zapp, a Republican, took an active interest in politics. In 1869, encouraged by friends, he decided to run for the Legislature. He won. As a representative in the Twelfth Legislature he served on many committees. On May 2, 1870, he was appointed to three standing committees; Interior Improvements, Public Lands and Land Office and Printing and Contingent Expenses. On May 6, 1870, he introduced his first bill which was to incorporate the town of Round Top. After its process through committee, etc. it was approved on August 13, 1870.³⁴

The Town of Round Top was now incorporated with its own mayor and four aldermen. It also provided for a town marshall and declared it unlawful to fire any kind of firearm within the limits of the town. Three hundred seven people lived in Round Top, inside the one square mile of the corporate limits, in 1870.³⁵ The first mayor, appointed, was F.W. McGuire. Christian Huth, F. Helmecke, W.E. Jenkins and C. Vogelsang were appointed aldermen and Herman E. Schulze was appointed town marshall.³⁶

Before moving on in time, mention should be made of the ill-fated Adelsverein, an effort by German noblemen to colonize and bring a German Empire to Texas. Although not exactly attached to the area of Round Top, the "Society for the Protection of German Immigrants" purchased the William H. Jack League in 1843 (4,428 acres).³⁷ The Jack League is adjacent to the Winn League to the south. Through a lengthy period of woeful mismanagement the

Adelsverein eventually gave up its holdings to its creditors with one Otto von Roeder becoming full owner of the Jack League.³⁸ No further discussion of the German immigration, the Nassau Plantation or the development of the towns of New Braunfels and Fredericksburg will be treated here as there are many books on the subjects; however, it is important to note that von Roeder did sell eight hundred acres, including the main house and barns, to Peter Carl von Rosenberg in 1850 for seventy-five cents per acre.³⁹ The von Rosenberg family became an influential and prominent family in the Round Top area and, through their acquaintances, must have been the reason for many Germans to settle nearby. This family of ten children multiplied throughout Fayette County and the State of Texas. Peter Carl's second wife, Amanda, with whom he had six children, is often referred to as a "Texas pioneer woman."⁴⁰ Amanda died April 22, 1864, and is buried in the Soergel Hill Cemetery near Round Top. Ernst and Auguste Soergel had purchased eleven acres of land on August 20, 1862, and it is on this land where Amanda is interred. Amanda was a sister to Auguste Soergel.⁴¹ The Richter family gifted additional land at this cemetery plot prior to 1900 and it has been known as Richter Cemetery ever since.

The 1860 census shows there were 129 German farms around Round Top. Many of these German settlers brought the Lutheran religion with them. It is very probable that some of the earliest Lutheran Church services were conducted under the large liveoak trees in front

³⁴ Theodora V. Boehm, *Robert Zapp*, MS, 1992.

³⁵ Robert Zapp, *An Act to Incorporate the Town of Round Top*, Introduced in Twelfth Legislature, May 6, 1870.

³⁶ Town of Round Top, Minutes of First Council Meeting, September 14, 1870.

³⁷ Fayette County Deed Records, Book C, Page 205.

³⁸ Gilbert Giddings Benjamin, *The Germans in Texas - a study in immigration* (Austin: Jenkins Publishing Company, 1974), p. 25. This is one of the most fascinating and scholarly accounts of German immigration to Texas laid out in chronological order with statistical data and an analysis of the way of life including the German culture and character.

³⁹ Alma von Rosenberg-Tomlinson & others, *The von Rosenberg Family of Texas* (Boerne: Toepperwein Publishing Company, 1949), p. 14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

of the Conrad Schueddemagen home built in 1852.⁴² The spiritual needs of these early settlers were being served in the 1850s by Rev. John G. Lieb and Rev. Otto Haun. They organized several small church groups in the area. Rev. Haun is shown as "Pastor of the Lutheran Church at Round Top" in marriage records as early as March 8, 1853.⁴³

Rev. Adam Neuthard served as the first pastor of the Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Round Top. He arrived in Galveston on December 28, 1860, and was in Round Top by January of 1861.⁴⁴ Rev. Neuthard was born in Lauterbach, Baden, Germany. He received his Doctor of Divinity degree from Heidelberg University in 1850 and entered the Lutheran Theological Seminary at St. Chrischona, Switzerland, in 1856.⁴⁵ In 1866 Rev. Neuthard established the first boarding school in Texas and in the same year the cornerstone of the stone building of the Bethlehem Lutheran Church was laid on May 6th.⁴⁶ The Texas District of the American Lutheran Church received the congregation into its membership in 1949. Rev. Neuthard did not belong to the Synod during his years, but the pastors who followed him were affiliated with the First Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Texas. In 1960 another merger changed the name to that of Southern District of the American Lutheran Church.⁴⁷ In 1988, the Bethlehem Lutheran Church became part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which is the merger of the American Lutheran Church (ALC), the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC).⁴⁸

In 1851, on the occasion of the 75th Anniversary

⁴² Rev. Martin H. Obst, John G. Banik & others, *Our God is Marching On* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones, Printers, 1966), p. 25.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Addendum (1991) p. 3.

of the Declaration of Independence of the United States, Round Top celebrated its first Fourth of July. *The Texas Monument*, an early Fayette County newspaper, documented the occasion.⁴⁹ The celebration of this most important date in United States history has continued to be the longest held tradition in Round Top. Now, it is considered to be the longest, continuous observance of July Fourth west of the Mississippi. Speaking before the start of the parade has always been a necessity on any politician's agenda. The year 2000 marks the 150th year of this grand occasion.

Round Top's first public school was established in 1872 when Robert Zapp gave a quarter of an acre of land to the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Texas, and his successors in office, for the use of the Fayette County school district.⁵⁰ A frame building was erected and served as the school until 1912 when a second school building was built near the church. The first school then served as the black school until 1953. This school location now has a marker on East Mill Street across the street from Round Top's new post office.

Round Top celebrated its Sesquicentennial in 1998 with a population of only eighty-one. Often called the smallest incorporated town in Texas, Round Top might be small.....but it is dynamic! The Round Top Area Historical Society refers to it as... Historical... Cultural... Quaint... Unique... Patriotic. It hosts the preeminent antique show in the nation every April and October that in the year 2000 is in its thirty-third year. It was acclaimed one of the "100 best small art towns in America" and is the setting for an annual arts festival every November. Thousands of people come to this small town every Fourth of July to take part or enjoy the parade.....a patriotic observance which in the year 2000 will be Round Top's 150th continuous celebration of this reverent date in United States history.

⁴⁹ John H. Dancy, "Celebration of the 4th of July, at Round Top." *The Texas Monument*. Vol. I (July 16, 1851) 1.

⁵⁰ Fayette County Deed Records, Book Z, 341.

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- ★ Revisualize the history of Texas and especially the Round Top area.
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P.O. BOX 151
ROUND TOP, TEXAS 78954

A NOT-FOR-PROFIT AND INCORPORATED SOCIETY UNDER THE LAWS OF TEXAS.
EDITOR: HERBERT L. DIERS
SUBSCRIPTION RATE: FREE TO MEMBERS. \$4.00 PER YEAR TO OTHERS.

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Round Top makes a special effort to preserve and share the German influence of the early settlers in such forums as Henkel Square and the Winedale Historical Center that is now administered by the University of Texas. It has recently adopted ordinances that are designed to protect, enrich and promote the historical integrity of its buildings and places. The campus of the International Festival Institute of Round Top is just outside the town limits to the north. Begun in 1970, it is now considered one of the major conservatories of the world. It has gained a reputation for excellence in music education and is also a center for broad creative pursuits. It is an important year-round cultural and educational destination for artist, scholar and audience alike.

Round Top, as in anything living, is in constant change. Most of the old historic landmarks have been restored and are being preserved for the enjoyment and edification of future generations. The average age in Round Top is older. The "Texaner" culture is being lost as the percentage of German people decreases. Instead of one hundred percent "Texaner," as it was in 1870, Round Top now is changed ethnically, culturally, linguistically, economically, religiously, educationally, agriculturally.

The Round Topians of today, forever with open arms, welcome everyone.....always eager to share the history and beauty of their little town.

This early history of Round Top has been researched and compiled in January, 2000, from books, references, papers, deeds and documents in the library of the Round Top Area Historical Society
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July Fourth.....2000!

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observance of
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FOR 150 YEARS

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