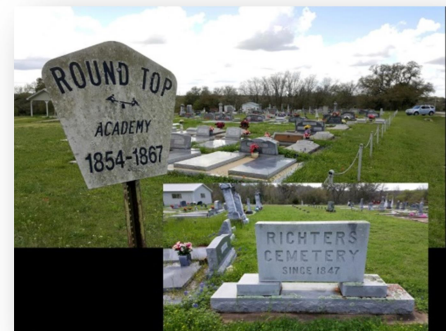


A TALE OF TWO ROUND TOPS

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In the beginning there were two Round Tops. Between 1848 and 1867 or thereabouts, Fayette County, Texas had two settlements, which competed for the same name and were located just 1.8 miles apart. One village, which thrives today, was emerging along the banks of Cummins Creek while another was achieving a less robust effort to the northeast along what is now highway FM 1457 in a locale referred to at the time as Soergel Hill. The location today would be literally on and around Richters Cemetery. The Cummins Creek village or “new” Round Top boasted a population of around 150 people in 1850 but was already moving away from the area’s Anglo plantation society roots into a German dominated community. The Soergel Hill settlement or “old” Round Top was an attempt by the plantation society to establish its own center for education, worship and trade. The Soergel Hill community might have survived had it not been for the outcome of the American Civil War and the demise of the plantation system using slave labor.



“New” Round Top at Cummins Creek began to evolve into an identifiable community when the region’s postal operations were relocated there in the fall of 1848. John Shults, who owned much of the town tract for the Cummins Creek village, was the new postmaster as well, and had the foresight to rustle the area’s postal services away from the Round Top house (RT house) at “old” Round Top to his home property initially and then, after a few months, into what was to become the new Cummins Creek village. Shults, as postmaster, reportedly attempted a name change to that of his own, which was denied, and the Round Top Post Office as originally



In 1848 John Shults, rustled the area’s postal services away from the Round Top house at “old” Round Top to what was to become the new Cummins Creek village. The post office, (circled in red) was built on to the Alex Von Rosenberg dry goods store.

titled was reinstated. “New” Round Top, therefore, got its name not from the RT house but rather from its post office. If John Shults had gotten his way, the Cummins Creek village might have otherwise been named Shultsburg.

In 1849 “new” Round Top experienced an impetus for growth when it fell on the route for an east/west stagecoach mail/passenger service that connected Houston with Austin. Today’s



FM 1457 between Shelby and the Cummins Creek village overlays with much of this stagecoach route. The settlement’s regional status was enhanced further when that segment of the old La Bahia Trail that connected the towns of Burton and La Grange shifted a portion of its route to the east through this emerging German community and established one of the first lengths of what would much later become Hwy 237.

The Round Top name for the Cummins Creek village was not likely an accepted part of the vernacular immediately, especially with the Anglo plantation society. The area for years had been known as the Townsend Settlement, which was officially located about two miles south of “new” Round Top in the area of today’s Florida Chapel Cemetery. However, elements of the plantation community did own property on both sides of Cummins Creek and within the Winn League, where the Cummins Creek village was located. Stephen Townsend, as the founder of the Townsend Settlement, was one of these Anglo property owners with interests on both sides of Cummins Creek. For a brief time he owned 254 acres in the Winn League, which he sold quickly to John Shults in January 1846. A significant portion of this acreage became the western half of the village of “new” Round Top at Cummins Creek.

“Old” Round Top on Soergel Hill received its name because it was literally next door to the Round Top house (RT house), which was owned by Alwin H. Soergel between the years of 1846 and 1875. Alwin lived in the RT house for only a few months and in Texas, less than two years. He returned to Prussia departing from Galveston in September 1847 and left the management of the RT house and its 100 acres to his cousin Ernst Soergel. The Soergel property had been owned earlier by John York, who sold it in 1845 to Isom (Isam) McMillin (McMillon). McMillin kept the property for only a short time before selling it to the newly arrived Alwin Soergel in February of 1846. The RT house was built by John York and probably served as quarters for those who were hired to operate a way station for passing freight haulers or teamsters bringing goods into the central Texas region. “Old” Round Top on Soergel Hill was built in part on a small parcel of what had been the Hamilton Ledbetter plantation where it met the northern boundary of the Soergel property and the location of the RT house. The RT house and its outbuildings, which undoubtedly included a blacksmith shop, would have been an integral part of the settlement site for “old” Round Top. This small community like “new” Round Top benefitted from the increased traffic flow, which resulted from the 1849 stagecoach mail and passenger service between Houston and Austin. “Old” Round Top, however, did suffer

an economic setback, when the RT house was no longer the region's postal center. The loss might be attributed to the October 1847 gun battle at nearby Nassau Plantation that saw Ernst Soergel, as a Nassau assistant overseer, lead a party of Adelsverein advocates to retake the plantation property from illegal occupiers. The gun battle resulted in two deaths, and Ernst Soergel was indicted for at least one of those killings. Although he was finally acquitted, his reputation as manager of the RT house and Soergel property was greatly tarnished.

The Shults and Ledbetter families are among the key players behind the promotion of these two Round Top communities. John Shults was obviously a proponent of "new" Round Top while the Ledbetter family appears to have affiliations with both. The Ledbetters reportedly started the first Fourth of July Parade in the Cummins Creek village in 1851 (or was it in "old" Round Top?). After the untimely death of Stephen Townsend in the Cummins Creek village in 1851, it would appear that Hamilton Ledbetter assumed a more influential role within the plantation society. In 1853 he worked with the trustees of the Florida Chapel Presbyterian Church in the Townsend Settlement for the construction of a new facility called the Round Top Church and Academy. The new structure was completed in 1854; however, it was not built in the Cummins Creek village but rather in "old" Round Top on Soergel Hill located on Ledbetter and Gaither land, which is now the present site for Richters Cemetery. Apparently at this time, Ledbetter and other members of the plantation society were attempting to establish their own center for commerce, education and worship away from the Cummins Creek village. They were also unwilling to relinquish the Round Top name to John Shults and his German dominated community.

"Old" Round Top on Soergel Hill began to wane during and after the American Civil War. By 1867 or thereabouts the Round Top Church and Academy had ceased operations, and its building was eventually removed, raised or destroyed. The community cemetery, which was known at the time as the Soergel Hill Cemetery, was located along the slope of the hill besides the Academy building. The cemetery spread its domain over the former Academy sight and was eventually renamed the Richters Cemetery. Hamilton Ledbetter and one son, William Hamilton Ledbetter, did remain and continued to be viable contributing citizens and represented Fayette County in the State Legislature as Senators. With "old" Round Top out of the way, "new" Round Top on Cummins Creek incorporated in 1870.