

## AMONG OLDEST

The Texas Almanac lists Montgomery County "in Southeast Texas, largely in the pine belt but with southwest fringe on coastal prairies." Drained by the San Jacinto River, created from Washington County in 1837, organized the same year. Montgomery is one of the most interesting towns in the state. The history there, though some has been recorded by Harley Candy of the Conroe High School, still remains unwritten. Being one of the oldest counties of our state, it's history is almost that of the State of Texas. The old homes, many built a hundred years ago are open every April along with those at Anderson for the "Anderson - Montgomery Trek". This year Mr. Raymond Weisinger, President of the Montgomery Historical Society, tells us the date has been set for April 19th.

Montgomery stories are quaint, depicting a flavor of the south, such as the story of when the boys of Montgomery "ran away" to join the Confederate Troops. Morgan Price was 16. His mother was so distressed, she sent Stith, the young slave, with a feather-bed to catch up with them and see that Morgan was cared for. The story goes that Stith, faithful and loyal, had the care of all seven boys from Montgomery. "They's have starved to death, if it hadn't been for Stith," Mrs. Linda Price laughs and tells the story.

Montgomery being near Huntsville, when Sam Houston was living, there is a record of his attending all the community picnics and other functions.

SIGNIFICANT DATES IN THE HISTORY OF MONTGOMERY

- 1 Dec. 14, 1837 Creation of Montgomery County, Republic of Texas
- 2 March 1, 1838 Contract for Court House, County Seat of Montgomery
- 3 April 4, 1838 Contract for Jail Building
- 4 1839 First District Court heard in Montgomery
- 5 1843 Division of the County (Various dates - 1873)
- 6 May 17, 1889 Records moved to Conroe
- 7 July 2, 1845 John Marshall Wade edits "The Montgomery Patriot"
- 8 1854 Building Boom
- 9 May 10, 1845 Mass Meeting for Annexation to U. S.
- 10 1838 Isaac L. G. Strickland, First Methodist Pastor sent to Montgomery
- 11 1842 Citizens at Montgomery build first Methodist Parsonage in Texas of logs
- 12 July 27, 1851 Dedication of Alexander Chapel, with Pleasant M. <sup>A. B. Kerr</sup>Yell as Pastor
- 13 Dec. 28, 1851 Baptist Church organized, continuous till now
- 14 April 5, 1845 Masonic Lodge No. 25 Organized, with Sam Houston assisting in Organization
- 15 May 1861 Company H, 4th. Texas Regiment, Hood's Brigade, begins enrolling at Montgomery
- 16 1848 State Legislature creates the Montgomery Academy of Montgomery, Texas
- 17 1924 Consolidation of School Districts for High School
- 18 Dec. 13, 1931 Strake discovers oil southeast of Conroe
- 19 Feb. 19, 1949 Opening of Highway 105, and of Montgomery's Community House on spot where old court house, old Masonic Building etc. stood.
- 20 Dec 8 - 1957 Redication of marker to former circuit rider Methodist church -
- 21 April 9, 1959 Restoration of Bronze marker on vault of James Alexander McCowan - Developer of town of Montgomery

A TALK TO THE SENIOR HISTORY CLASS ON THE EARLY HISTORY  
OF MONTGOMERY

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Mary Davis

West of the San Jacinto, Montgomery County was a part of Stephen Austin's fourth and last colony. This extended from the San Jacinto to the Brazos, and on the north, to the old San Antonio Road, north of the present Madison County line.

The colonists came from Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi; they came overland in wagons, several families together, and they were weeks, some perhaps months, on the road. There was no such thing as a good road in those days. They traveled for days in the rain, bogging down in the muddy roads, sometimes having to cut a trail through the forest. There were long days of waiting for overflowing rivers to fall. No matches then, and fires were kindled for their cooking by striking flint rocks together.

Many colonists came early in 1830 and applied at once for their land grants, but it took a long time to survey so much land in a wilderness. It was a year later, in April 1831, before the first grants were issued. The colonists at once got busy, building permanent log houses for themselves and cabins for their negroes. They helped each other hew logs and build houses.

Floors were made of puncheons, which are logs split in half and laid with the straight sides up. Lots of splinters for children's bare feet in those floors, and can you imagine how they ever danced on them? Dancing was their only amusement, and what fun those rollicking square dances must have been, with "Swing your partners," "Balance all," heard above the music of the fiddle and the banjo, played by negro slaves. Sometimes they danced the stately Virginia Reel on those rough floors.

Men and women had to wear Indian moccasins when they couldn't get shoes at San Felipe. For the first few years, nearly all the clothes worn by men, women, and children were of cotton or wool homespun, spun, woven, and dyed by the women; their only lights were tallow candles molded by the women, when they had the tallow, and pine knots in the fireplace. All their cooking was done on the fireplaces, which were wide and deep. Their windows were only wooden shutters.

Conditions were incredibly hard for the first two or three years. They had to go fifty miles to San Felipe for flour, sugar, and coffee, and at first to have their corn ground into meal. The honey they got from bee trees served as sugar. The only food they

did have in abundance was wild game--deer, wild turkeys, squirrels, quail, and wild pigeons, ducks and geese. Sometimes a bear would stray near enough to be shot from the front door, and then there would be bear steak for supper. Wolves and sometimes panthers, would attack the stock at the barns at night. Pioneer life had plenty of excitement.

Although the country was full of Indians, the colonists soon found that they were a friendly tribe. The name of the tribe, Bedias, is perpetuated in the town of that name, where their main encampment was, but they also had a village and burying ground on Caney Creek, about six miles west of Montgomery. These Indians made baskets, moccasins, wooden bowls, and rattan and hickory chairs, which they traded to the settlers. The white boys bought bows and arrows from the Indians and went hunting with them, and they soon became as good shots as the Indians themselves. Every fall and winter, these Indians moved down to the prairies between here and Houston for hunting. The tall grass was nearly as high as a man, and they hid in it to stalk their game.

Once in passing my grandmother's house, some of these Indians went in and sat on her nice, white beds, and, as she was alone with only one or two small children, she dared not say anything. One summer there was an epidemic of typhoid fever among these Indians of the Caney Creek village, and their medicine man treated this by putting the patients on high scaffolds and keeping a dense smoke under them. Tradition doesn't say whether or not any of them survived. Mrs. Wise's father, Dr. Price, wanted to help these Indians, but they said, "Bad medicine--no good doctor."

When the colonists came, they found an Indian trading post on Town Creek, about a half-mile north of the present site of Montgomery. This was owned by Jacob Shannon, the great-grand father of the Shannons now living at Dobbin. These Indians dressed hides beautifully, and Jacob Shannon sold them in New Orleans and brought back supplies for the Indians. Later, he bought supplies for the settlers and once he went to Kentucky and bought horses for them.

This trading post became a meeting place for everyone, a kind of community center. The Shannons say that it was given the name of Montgomery from the family name of Jacob Shannon's mother, who had been Margaret Montgomery. It was called Montgomery, and there was a large enough settlement to be called a town, for the old settlers always spoke of it as "the old town under the hill," and Town Creek got its name from the fact that there was a town there. If we look on this as a town, Montgomery is among the few oldest places in Texas, but historians count its age from 1837, when the new town was founded. This was a municipality, one of the twenty-five original municipalities of Texas. At that time there were already fifteen or sixteen other towns.

Jacob Shannon later removed to his league of land not far from the Caney Creek village, and Miss Lula Shannon tells some interesting stories of the Indians' superstitions. Shannon built here another trading post and a comfortable home with a large fireplace, where on cold winter nights, some of his Indian friends would come to get warm. They thought it bad luck to be in a room with a clock striking, and there was a large eight-day clock on the mantel that struck both the hour and half-hour. Fortunately, the clock gave a little warning signal five minutes before striking. Sitting around the fire in stolid silence, some of them dozing, when the warning click came, every Indian bolted for the door. They stood shivering outside until the last stroke had sounded, when they solemnly filed back into the warm room, to repeat the performance twenty-five minutes later.

The Indians were very superstitious about dreams, deeming them revelations made by their gods. They were afraid to disobey any they thought prophetic; that is, those about any event that they, themselves, could cause to happen. One morning the chief walked into Jake Shannon's store with the announcement that he had dreamed a good dream. "And, Jeek," he said, "you know dreams must come true." "Yes," Shannon agreed, "dreams must come true." "Well," said the Indian, "I dreamed that you give me a suit of clothes and a fine saddle." Shannon knew that he must keep the Indians' friendship, so the chief walked out with the suit and the saddle, which he proudly exhibited to his people. His pride was short-lived, for the white man had a dream. Jake Shannon had long coveted a small piece of land owned by the Indians, which they refused to sell or exchange. One morning, he greeted the chief with the information that he had had a good dream. He told him that he had dreamed that the Indians gave him the land that he had been trying to buy. "And," he added, "you know that dreams must come true." The old chief stood silent. Finally, he said, "Yes, dreams must come true. I'll give you the land." He paused impressively. "But Jeek," he said, "you dream no more, and I dream no more!"

Life became pleasanter for these colonists after the first hardships were over, except for the feeling of insecurity caused by Mexico's attitude. When this reached its climax in the tragic spring of '36, all the men hastened to join Houston's army. When Houston saw that he must continue his retreat to Louisiana, he sent John Mays Springer and his brother, and William Landrum (perhaps others) to take the women and children of this settlement to safety. They left their homes and everything they could not carry, as they thought forever, and joined all the other Texans fleeing over the bad roads to the east. They had just reached the Trinity River, when the courier came with news of the San Jacinto victory and the capture of Santa Anna.

In 1837, an enterprising land owner plotted a town on the present site of Montgomery, and agreed to give one hundred acres of land to

pay for building a courthouse and jail, if Montgomery should be selected for the county seat. It was known that Congress would organize new counties the following winter. The new town very naturally took its name from "the old town under the hill," and a sale of town lots in the new Montgomery was advertised in The Texas Telegraph in July. This was several months before the county was created, yet historians say that the county and town were named for General Richard Montgomery, who was killed at the battle of Quebec in 1775. They also say that Dallas County was named for the vice-president of the United States, but there was a town of Dallas some time before the county was created.

This advertisement of town lots, naming the advantages of the new place, said that the San Jacinto River was navigable up to this point. They must have seen it only during overflows. I have heard that in the years before the Civil War, large boat-loads of negro slaves were brought up the San Jacinto and landed somewhere near the present Willis Road. It was said that an old house with iron rings in the walls, to which the slaves were chained until sold, was still standing about fifteen years ago.

Montgomery County was created December 14, 1837, and it included besides the present county, Grimes, Walker, and Madison. You should look at a map of counties and see how large your county originally was. Montgomery was chosen as the county seat, and from that time, the little town grew rapidly. The court house was a log house about twenty feet square. They shouldn't have had much trouble then in clearing the courtroom of spectators. Sometime in the fifties, this first court house was moved to my grandmother's house (now the Ben Post home) and used as a kitchen.

Montgomery has the distinction of having built and furnished the first Methodist parsonage in Texas, and we should have got a marker to commemorate this during the Centennial year. This parsonage was built in 1842, the church membership donating "land, money, and other property" to pay for it. Local cabinet makers made the furniture, the earliest American type, sturdy, simple, built for enduring service.

One of the first potteries in Texas was on a farm near Montgomery. The remains of the old kiln and a few broken pieces of pottery still mark the location, and, to this day, the little stream that furnished water for it is called Juggery Creek. I have a credely made jar of this pottery, but Mrs. Castle has a beautifully shaped one, evidently for ornamental use. This was given to her father's aunt, who saw it made ninety years ago. Any profits from this pottery probably came from making whiskey jugs for a nearby still. It was lawful then to operate a still.

By 1845 Montgomery was a thriving little town. It had a live newspaper, The Montgomery Patriot, edited and published by John

Marshall Wade. A copy of this paper of July 2, 1845, is in the library of Sam Houston College. This old paper gives the arrival and departure of the mail. This came by stage coach from Houston once a week, and by horseback from Old Washington once a week. Both of those mail routes went through Huntsville to Cincinnati, a port on the Trinity River in the extreme northeastern part of the county. Travellers from Nacogdoches, coming south, were ferried across the river here, and steamboats from the Gulf made regular trips up the Trinity to Cincinnati and to points farther up the river.

The stage coach from Houston brought both passengers and mail, later making three trips a week. The arrival of the stage coach was the most exciting event of the day. The driver blew his musical horn as he came up the Houston Road until it could be heard in town, and he drew up at the hotel with a flourish. Quite often, General Houston stepped out, sometimes with Mrs. Houston, on their way to Huntsville. Once when Houston was a passenger on this coach eighty-six years ago, he introduced Mrs. Dacus' mother to the man whom she afterward married. Her mother and another girl, of course properly chaperoned, were on their way to Huntsville to a big dance that night. Sam Houston must have felt quite comfortable and jolly, because he was wearing carpet slippers and fanning himself and the ladies with a big turkey-tail fan.

Houston used to visit his friend, Thomas Chatham, for bear hunts out toward the San Jacinto at Bear Bend. Once when visiting another friend, a Mr. Rankin, he became quite sick of fever. Like all men who believe in a guiding star of destiny, Houston was superstitious. He told my uncle, Judge Gay, who went to see him, that when he left home, his children and all the little negro children ran down to the big gate, and as long as they could see him they called, "Goodbye, papa!" and "Goodbye, Marse Sam!" He said they had never done this before. Another ominous sign was, that on the way to Montgomery, a rabbit had run across the road in front of him. Judge Gay laughed and said, "Why, General, what possible connection could there be between your illness and that rabbit's running across the road?" But Houston gloomily shook his head and said, "Well, I'd rather he'd have stayed in his hole."

There is no record of the earliest schools, but from the beginning, the citizens seemed to have realized the supreme importance of good schools, and to have planned for them. Quite early, Dr. Arnold donated a lot for a public school, and he also proposed to give a lot in the southwestern part of town for a future site for a female college, as a girl's school was then called. This dream, however, was never realized. There was a possibility at one time, however, that Baylor College might be located a few miles west of Montgomery, in what is now Grimes County.

In the decade from 1850 to 1860, two chartered academies were opened in town, one of them, which had both boarding and day pupils, being privately owned. This was a very popular school until its discontinuance after the principal's death, sometime during the Civil War.

Different teachers, however, taught in the school building until sometime in the early seventies.

The other school, known for forty-one years as Montgomery Academy, was built on the lot given by Dr. Arnold. This was replaced by another building in 1895. Among many good teachers who have taught in these old Montgomery schools, are Dr. John T. Moore of Houston, Dr. W. B. Bizzell, president of the University of Oklahoma, and Dr. Frank Callcott of Columbia University.

As early as 1838, the colonists had religious services, held by a missionary who rode horseback from Nacogdoches. The first missionary was Isaac Strickland, and it took him six weeks to get around to his few appointments in the Montgomery circuit. These first services were held at the homes of the church members, but since they built a parsonage in 1842, presumably they had a church building by that time. They had a local pastor in 1841.

Large church buildings were erected by both the Methodists and Baptists in 1850 to 1852. The bells, then an innovation in new Texas towns, were given by the Willis brothers, pioneer merchants of Montgomery. One of the good pioneer members was reported to have said that if people were so lazy and unmindful of their duty that they had to have a bell to call them to church, that she thought she wouldn't go any more. Despite her disapproval, the old bell of her church <sup>was</sup> survived to call her great-great-grandchildren to Sunday School, and very sweet and clear it sounds on quiet Sunday mornings. And although on ~~the~~ last December midnight <sup>there may be sadness in its tones for the ~~eighty-seven~~ <sup>many, many, many</sup> ~~dead~~ years it has rung out, it still rings in the new year with confidence and promise.</sup>

*more than 100 years*

Montgomery County got a generous share of the tide of settlers that poured into Texas in the late forties and early fifties. These were for the most part well-to-do planters, some of them large slave-owners, and they added much to the prosperity of the town. Montgomery, the only town in the county, was now an important trading center. Long teams of oxen, drawing loads of cotton and other produce, plodded their slow way down to Houston, to become entangled with many other teams on Main Street, so that pedestrians complained bitterly of the danger of crossing the street with twelve-yoke teams of oxen floundering along in both directions. Houston thus had a traffic problem long years before automobiles were dreamed of. These freight wagons brought back loads of all kinds of merchandise, shipped from New York and New Orleans, by way of Galveston. One of the Willis Brothers went to New York every summer for their stock of goods. There was a telegraph line through Montgomery, extending from Houston to Huntsville, perhaps on to Cincinnati and Crockett. At that time, telegraph messages were received on a paper tape, the dots and dashes being perforated by a pencil. A few years ago, old insulators could still be found on trees along the old Huntsville Road, often called the old Telegraph Road.



With the increase of wealth, the exigencies of pioneer life were replaced by the amenities of a more leisurely existence. Living was on a higher plane. Professional men, late comers from the oldest states, lawyers, teachers, doctors, the scholarly type, brought into the new town the culture of the Old South. There was a sprinkling, too, of Northerners, with energy and initiative. Dr. Charles Stewart, prominent in early Texas political life, and the designer of the Texas flag, was a lifelong resident of Montgomery.

Although so remote from cultural centers and new trends of thought, Montgomery had a kind of literary atmosphere; its standards, perhaps, those of the preceding generation. Harper's and the Knickerbocker Magazine were to be found on the parlor tables, although Godey's and Peterson's with their fascinating stories and styles, were more to the ladies' liking. Scott and Thackeray were read, but all were frankly outspoken in their dislike of Dickens. His stories were thought very coarse. The Last Days of Pompeii, The Scottish Chiefs, and Thaddeus of Warsaw were favorite novels. The pronunciation of Goethe's name was a debatable question that was never quite settled, although Gatha, the one given by Professor Charles Jones of the Jones Academy, was preferred to that of the German music teacher who had classes in town.

A finer Polish teacher, well known in the South, came later to teach the Montgomery young ladies, although the playing of one or two of them was often interrupted by the teacher's anguished cries of "Mein Gott!" when his sensitive ear was assailed by discords. Both of these men had music published by Northern houses. The Polish teacher honored Montgomery by writing and naming a composition Montgomery March. This was probably written for some special occasion, such as a big political barbecue, when a brass band led the parade to the grounds, and also played for the ball at the court house that night.

These big entertainments had guests from thirty miles around. Carriages, driven by negro coachmen, came in from Plantersville, Fanthorpe's, Huntsville, Cincinnati, Old Waverly, and from the nearer plantations. Guests from a distance spent the night, or sometimes two or three days, for that was a time of delightful leisure and gracious hospitality.

Weddings were brilliant affairs, and they were always followed by "infairs," which equalled the weddings in splendor of entertainment. This old English custom of the groom's family entertaining for the bride had ceased to be observed in Virginia about the close of the preceding century, but it still survived in Texas. Another old English and Virginia custom, that of naming their country homes, was observed by a few. General Lewis called his home, twelve miles out on the Danville Road, The Elms. This old place, with a ball room on the third floor, is still standing. Another place was named Melrose for the owner's ancestral home in Virginia, which had been named a century or two earlier for Melrose Abbey in Scotland. This lady's social rival, who was the widow of General Memucan Hunt, called her home Malmaison, for the birthplace of the Empress Josephine. This home contained an art

treasure, the bust of General Hunt, modeled in Washington in 1837, when he was the Republic's minister to the United States. This was made by Hiram Powers, the first American sculptor to gain international recognition. It was afterward bought by the state and is now in the Capitol Building.

This old time delightful life was ended by the Civil War. Today it is only tradition, living in the memories of a few persons, to whom its story was told by those who had lived it. But Montgomery is still a pleasant place to live in. The mellow atmosphere of its past invests it with a kind of changeless serenity, and gives to life there a depth and significance unknown in newer communities.