A look at the early history of Montgomery

Editor's Note: *Today's column is the first in a series about the history of Montgomery as the city prepares to celebrate its 175th anniversary on July 7. Columns on Montgomery's history will continue each Sunday in the Trends section through June 24.*

SONYA**CLOVER**
Montgomery history

On Saturday, July 7, the city of Montgomery will celebrate its 175th birthday. On this day, Montgomery will embrace its pioneer heritage, the founders and those who continue to build on their foundation.

The day will be filled with activities for the entire family and Montgomery invites you to join in the fun!

This is the first of four articles written on the very early history of Montgomery.

On May 20, 1825 Stephen F. Austin obtained from the government of the State of Coahuila and Texas a contract for the introduction of 500 families. This was Austin's second colony and was to be completed within six years. Under the 1825 contract, Empresario Stephen F. Austin granted land on behalf of the Mexican government to a number of colonists in 1831.

Some of the settlers in Austin's Second Colony received leagues of land in what is today western Montgomery County. A league of land contained 4,428.4 acres. The early settlers who qualified and received a league of land included the following individuals: Mary Corner, James Pevehouse, Archibald Hodge, James Hodge, Owen Shannon, William C. Clark, William Landrum, Zachariah Landrum, William M. Rankin, Noah Griffith, Benjamin Rigby, William Atkins, Jacob Shannon, Raleigh Rogers, John Corner and Anne White.

John Corner received his league of land on May 10, 1831. The John Corner League is very important to this history because the town of Montgomery will be founded on the John Corner League six years later.

Mexican land grants were not actually free. There were a number of costs and fees associated with "clearing land." As an example, in Owen Shannon's title the fees were in the neighborhood of $125. That was a large amount of money in 1831 and many did not have enough money for the costs and fees. There was a way for landowners at that time known as "clearing on the halves" or "clearing land."

It had nothing to do with clearing trees or brush. Many settlers who came to Texas had waited for years to get their land grants in Austin's Colony. By the time the Empresario had the deed papers ready, the settlers were often out of money when it came time to pay the costs and fees. Enterprising businessmen with ready cash would offer to pay these closing costs on behalf of the settlers in return for a portion of the league of land the settler was to receive. Typically the person "clearing the land on the halves" got half of the settler's land.

On Jan. 1, 1831, William C. Clark purchased 600 acres of land from John Corner in the northwest corner of the John Corner league. Later in 1837, the town of Montgomery will be founded on 200 acres of this 600 acre tract.

On Sept. 15, 1835, 17 days before the Battle of Gonzales, William W. Shepperd purchased those 200 acres of land from William C. Clark.

Montgomery developed from Lake Creek Settlement

***Editor's note:** In preparation for the city of Montgomery's 175 anniversary on July 7, Sonya Clover is writing a series on Montgomery history. This is the second column in the series that continues Sundays in June.*

SONYACLOVER
Historic Montgomery

This is the second portion of the early history of Montgomery.

Most of the information documented in these articles is from an unpublished document written by Kameron K. Searle, J.D. He has graciously shared his information on the early history of Montgomery.

In 1835, William W. Shepperd built a house and a store on the 200 acres of land he had purchased from William C. Clark. This was the first trading post or store in the Lake Creek Settlement. His store was known as "the store of W. W. Shepperd on Lake Creek."

Shepperd's store became a meeting place and community center for the residents of the Lake Creek Settlement. The store was located on a creek that would later become known as Town Creek. W. W. Shepperd lived on these 200 acres with his wife, Mary Steptoe Shepperd and his children: William W. Jr. Jacob, Julia, Sidney and Wesley.

Shepperd also operated a gin and a stockyard. There were also slaves and slave quarters there. Later in July of 1837, the town of Montgomery, would be founded on these 200 acres.

At the beginning of the Texas Revolution, the Lake Creek Settlement was located in the political subdivision known as the municipality of Washington. At the Convention of 1836 at Washington, Texas the delegates unanimously declared Texas' independence from Mexico on March 2, 1836.

Photo by Sondra Hernandez

A historical marker on FM 2854 just south of Texas 105 marks the homesite of Dr. Charles B. Stewart, the first delegate to sign the Texas Declaration of Independence. Many historians have credited Charles B. Stewart with having designed the Lone Star Flag of Texas and Texas State Seal in Montgomery in 1839.

A number of men from the Lake Creek Settlement fought in the Texas Revolution in 1835 and 1836. Lake Creek Settlement resident, John Marshall Wade, fought in the Battle of San Jacinto and manned one of the famous "Twin Sister" cannons sent to Texas from Ohio. This is the battle in which Texas won her independence from Mexico.

STEWART

Prior to the Convention at Washington-on-the-Brazos in 1836, Dr. Charles Bellinger Stewart had already served in the provisional government of Texas as the first Secretary of State. Stewart had also devised the first seal of Texas by pressing a button into hot wax to make an impression of a lone star on official government documents.

On March 1, 1836 the Texian Independence Convention began at Washington. Stewart was the first delegate to sign the Texas Declaration of Independence. The Alamo fell on March 6, 1836. On March 8, 1836, Judge James Hall authorized W. W. Shepperd of Lake Creek to celebrate a contract of marriage between Charles B. Stewart and Julia Shepperd.

Stewart left the Convention at Washington on March 8, 1836 and traveled to the Lake Creek Settlement. On March 11, 1836 C. B. Stewart and Julia Shepperd were married at the house of W. W. Shepperd. Following a short honeymoon and with the Mexican army searching for the Government of Texas in order to eradicate it, C. B. Stewart returned to the convention.

On March 17, 1836, the last day of the Convention Stewart signed the Constitution of the Republic of Texas. Following the burning of San Filipe and the Texas Revolution, C. B. Stewart moved to the Lake Creek Settlement.

Many historians have credited Charles B. Stewart with having designed the Lone Star Flag of Texas and Texas State Seal in Montgomery in 1839.

First version of county was larger than Delaware

Editor's Note: *This is the third of four articles telling of the history of Montgomery as organizers prepare to celebrate the town's 175th anniversary on July 7. The final column in the series runs on June 24.*

SONYA CLOVER
Historic Montgomery

This is article three in a series of four on the early beginnings of the city of Montgomery.

Kameron Searle's material has been invaluable in the chronological history of Montgomery.

Following Texas independence, the Lake Creek Settlement found itself located in Washington County which was divided into six large political precincts. One of the precincts took its name from the Lake Creek Settlement. On July 8, 1837, the Telegraph and Texas Register newspaper in Houston published an advertisement submitted by the partners in the development of the town of Montgomery.

W. W. Shepperd and J.W. Moody had founded the town of Montgomery in the middle of the Lake Creek Settlement. In the advertisement, Shepperd and Moody made a couple of bold predictions. First they predicted that a new county would be created in the next session of Congress; and second, they predicted that the town of Montgomery would be the county seat of the newly created county.

The entire political might of Washington County west of the Brazos was brought to bear in opposition to it in a petition presented to Congress, and it all still happened just the way Moody and Shepperd planned it. In fact it was even more impressive as the new county also bore the name of their town.

The act creating Montgomery County was passed and signed into law by President Sam Houston on December 14, 1837. The question of 'who the city of Montgomery is named after' has been discussed over the years.

Mr. Searle has presented one possible scenario gathered in his research. Montgomery County was named after the town of Montgomery. The town of Montgomery was named after Montgomery County, Ala. and Montgomery County, Ala. was named after Sam Houston's commanding officer in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, Lemuel P. Montgomery.

The other viewpoint will be discussed in a later article. The new county of Montgomery was huge: larger than the state of Delaware. It included three precincts: the San Jacinto Precinct, the Vi-

Courtesy photo

A Texas historical marker near Montgomery's community center on FM 149, celebrates Montgomery County's history.

esca Precinct and the Lake Creek Precinct. It is important to remember that the town of Montgomery was developed by W. W. Shepperd in two phases. The first phase was what has been referred to as the old town of Montgomery "under the hill" and the second phase was the new town of Montgomery "on the hill."

The county seat had been located in the original town of Montgomery under the hill before the first Montgomery County Commissioners' Court meeting held on March 1, 1838.

At this meeting, W. W. Shepperd would donate a one half divided interest in 200 of the 212 acres to Montgomery County. The County Commissioners accepted the land donation and moved "the place" of the town of Montgomery from the 200 acres of land under the hill to the 200 acres of land on the hill.

Montgomery set to celebrate 175th anniversary July 7

Editor's Note: This is the fourth of four articles on the history of Montgomery leading up to the city's 175th anniversary celebration on July 7 in the town.

SONYA**CLOVER**
Historic Montgomery

This is the fourth article concerning the beginnings of the town of Montgomery. Saturday, July 7th will be the 175th birthday of Montgomery, Texas. Plan to visit Montgomery on the 7th and take part in the celebration. I am indebted to Kameron Searle for his valuable research concerning the beginning of the Lake Creek Settlement and the town of Montgomery.

In 1839, W.W. Shepperd sold the town of Montgomery, Texas to James McCown for $8,000.00. The sale included the land that composed the town of Montgomery under the hill developed in 1837 and the land that composed the town of Montgomery on the hill developed in 1838. James McCown paid for the town of Montgomery in two installments. The first was in cash and the other half in a different way. Due to the devaluation of the Republic of Texas currency, bartering once again became the basis for many transactions. James McCown transferred the ownership of seven of his slaves to W. W. Shepperd concluding the sale of the Town of Montgomery. The area around the town of Montgomery was still called the Lake Creek Settlement for years following the creation of the Town of Montgomery and Montgomery County. In the July 2, 1845 edition of the Montgomery Patriot newspaper published by John Marshall Wade, Alexander McCown placed an advertisement for the sale of lots in the town of Montgomery in which he mentioned the Lake Creek Settlement.

SALE OF LOTS IN THE TOWN OF MONTGOMERY

The undersigned respectfully informs the Public that he has had the town of Montgomery re-surveyed and is now ready to make sale of Lots to those willing to purchase.

The lands surrounding Montgomery, known as the Lake Creek Settlement, being of such a rich and fertile character, and having a rich and industrious population, it is destined to be, in a short time, a town of considerable importance.

Montgomery is the county site of the most flourishing, populous and intelligent county in the Republic. It is situated on an elevated ridge, which divides the waters of the San Jacinto River and Lake Creek. In point of health, Montgomery is not inferior to any place in the world, lying in the same latitude.

A plan of the town can be seen at the Clerk's Office, in the town of Montgomery.

On February 26, 1848, the Town of Montgomery was incorporated by an Act enacted by the Second Legislature of the State if Texas. The corporate limits of said town shall extend one half mile in every direction from the center of the public square.

This series of articles chronicles the early beginnings of the town of Montgomery. The town's history is rich and full of many historically important people in the development of the Republic of Texas and in the future – the great State of Texas.