

The Early History of Montgomery, Texas

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The first settlers in what is today western Montgomery County received Mexican land grants in Austin's Second Colony in the State of Coahuila y Texas in 1831. Settlers who received leagues of land (4, 428.4 acres) in this area included: 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. Elias R. Wightman surveyed all of these leagues. Wightman's chain carriers included William M. Rankin, John Corner, William Atkins, Benjamin Rigby, James Rankin, and Mathew Hubert.

John Corner received his league of land on May 10, 1831. The John Corner League is important to this history because the town of Montgomery would later be founded on the John Corner League in 1837. Shortly after the settlers arrived, the lands between the West Fork of the San Jacinto River and the stream known as Lake Creek became known as the Lake Creek Settlement. Jacob Shannon, an early settler, referred to this area as the Lake Creek Settlement in a document as early as 1833. This area was also commonly referred to as the Precinct of Lake Creek, the District of Lake Creek or simply Lake Creek.

In 1831, William C. Clark purchased 600 acres of land from John Corner in the northwestern part of the John Corner League. On September 15, 1835, William C. Clark sold 200 of these 600 acres in the northwestern-most corner of the John Corner League to William W. Shepperd. W. W. Shepperd lived on these 200 acres and established a trading

post/store there in 1835. This was the first trading post or store in the Lake Creek Settlement. The settlers knew Shepperd's store as "the store of William W. Shepperd on Lake Creek." Shepperd's store was also the first post office in the settlement.

In July of 1837, the town was founded by W. W. Shepperd in association with John Wyatt Moody on these 200 acres of land in the middle of the Lake Creek Settlement. It was a common practice to name new towns in the early Republic of Texas for well-known places back in the United States. W. W. Shepperd and J. W. Moody named the town 'Montgomery.'

Shepperd owned all the land and buildings in the town including the houses, the store, the gin, and the stockyard. So what did J. W. Moody contribute to this project? Until recently, historians had overlooked J. W. Moody and his important role in the development of the town. John Wyatt Moody was the First Auditor of the Republic of Texas, and as such, he exercised great control over the financial resources of the Republic of Texas. John Wyatt Moody's role in the development of the town of Montgomery was one of political influence down in the capital in Houston.

Moody was also the key to solving the mystery of how the town of Montgomery got its name. It is extremely important to note that J. W. Moody had lived in and had been the County Clerk of Montgomery County, Alabama for many years before coming to Texas. Montgomery County, Alabama was named for Major Lemuel P. Montgomery who was the first man killed in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend during the War of 1812. Sam Houston (the President of the Republic of Texas in 1837) fought as an officer with Lemuel Montgomery in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.

On July 8, 1837, the names “Montgomery” and “town of Montgomery” appeared in print for the first time in an advertisement in the July 8, 1837 edition of the *Telegraph and Texas Register* newspaper published in Houston, Texas. In this advertisement, Shepperd and Moody stated their expectations for the new town with a high degree of certainty: (1) “It is expected that a new county will be organized, at the next session of congress, embracing this section of country” and (2) “in which event, the town of Montgomery from its central location, must be selected as the seat of justice” of the new county.

A petition dated October 13, 1837 and signed by citizens of Washington County on the east side of the Brazos River requesting the creation of a new county was presented to the Congress of the Republic of Texas in Houston. Just over five months after the town of Montgomery was founded, the county of Montgomery was created by the Congress of the Republic of Texas in an Act signed by President Sam Houston on December 14, 1837. Montgomery County took its name from the town of Montgomery.

Shortly after Montgomery County was created, the first county seat of Montgomery County was located at the town of Montgomery. Montgomery County Chief Justice Jesse Grimes was holding open court, and County Clerk Gwynn Morrison was recording documents in the town of Montgomery as early as February of 1838.

It is very important to note here that the town of Montgomery was developed in two phases. The first phase was the original town site under the hill along the creek (founded by Shepperd in association with Moody in July 1837). The second phase was the new town site on the hill (developed by Shepperd between February 26 - March 1, 1838).

Shortly after the original Montgomery town site under the hill began serving as the county seat, W. W. Shepperd bought an additional 212 acres of land from John Corner on

February 26, 1838. These 212 acres located on a hill were due south and adjoining the 200 acres Shepperd had purchased from William C. Clark in 1835. The first Montgomery County Commissioners' Court meeting was held on March 1, 1838. At this meeting, W. W. Shepperd donated an equal half undivided interest in 200 of these 212 acres of land to Montgomery County. At the same time the Commissioners voted to move "the place of the town" to these 200 acres of land. This was the new site of the town of Montgomery on the hill where the town grew and flourished for many decades.

The first Montgomery County courthouse was a house owned by William W. Shepperd that Shepperd rented to the county. W. W. Shepperd sold the town of Montgomery and the courthouse to James McCown in October of 1839. The sale of the town was concluded in 1840 when McCown paid the balance due of \$4,000 by transferring the ownership of seven slaves (five adults and two children) to W. W. Shepperd. In 1848, the town of Montgomery was incorporated.

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