

Joseph Bonnell

A Texas hero ignored by history

Four remarkable soldiers were in the small village of Nacogdoches, Republic of Texas, during the summer of 1836. It was only a few months after the Battle of San Jacinto in which Texas won its independence from Mexico.

One was Major Hugh McLeod of the Republic of Texas Army, the military commander of Nacogdoches. In March, McLeod had taken a leave of absence as a U.S. Army Lieutenant in the 3rd Infantry Regiment at Fort Jesup, Louisiana to defend Nacogdoches.¹ He never returned to the U.S. Army and was discharged from it in June. Major McLeod was well-known in Nacogdoches.

One was Albert Sidney Johnston who arrived in Nacogdoches on July 15.² Johnston had recently resigned his commission as an officer with ten years of experience in the U.S. Army and had come to Texas to talk with General Houston about joining the Texas Army.

One was Sam Houston who arrived in Nacogdoches on August 1 to be greeted by McLeod.³ Houston was the greatest hero and most prominent individual in Texas at the time, being the victorious general at the decisive Battle of San Jacinto. He had returned home to Nacogdoches after convalescing in New Orleans, then later in San Augustine, from his wound at San Jacinto.⁴

One was Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell, a U.S. Army officer. Bonnell had been sent by the U.S. Army on official business to Nacogdoches to help Texans with the Indian threat.

Joseph Bonnell is an individual who has been lost in history. Although Joseph Bonnell is unknown to the public—even to history scholars—he was well-known to Major Hugh McLeod, Albert Sidney Johnston, and General Sam Houston. These were four old friends and comrades-in-arms.

During the previous year, Bonnell had experienced a series of events like no other military officer. The year before, in July 1835, Bonnell had been an official witness to the U.S. - Caddo Indian Treaty in which the Caddos sold all of their lands in the U.S to the U.S., retaining only lands in Texas which was then a part of Mexico.⁵

In 1835, the exact boundary between the U.S. and Texas was largely undetermined since it had not been surveyed. The 1835 Caddo treaty boundary was an arbitrary line running north and south through the center northernmost tip of Caddo Lake.⁶ The shape of the lake being somewhat like a "W," the arbitrary boundary can be better visualized as a vertical line running through the center of the "W." The Caddo tribe sold all of their lands east of this arbitrary line to the United States. This 1835 treaty boundary line is some seven miles inside the current Texas border. Thus, the 1835 treaty boundary and the remaining Caddo lands were about seven miles inside the present borders of the State of Texas.

The treaty signing did not turn out to be routine. Lieutenant Bonnell asked to read the treaty before the signing, and the U.S. Agent, Jehiel Brooks, refused to allow Bonnell to read the treaty.⁷ This, of course, raised the suspicions of both Bonnell and the Indian chiefs. As it turned out after the signing, a hidden provision inserted by Brooks improperly and unjustly led to the enrichment of Brooks.⁸

From this 1835 treaty incident, the Caddos trusted the honesty and integrity of U.S. Army Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell. Bonnell gave a deposition to be used in a court of law which was favorable to the Indians. Bonnell's 1835 experience with Caddo Indians is recorded in the United States Supreme Court case of *U.S. v. Brooks*, 51 U.S. 445, 449 (1850), the court case against the dishonest U.S. Agent.

Not only were the Caddo Indians impressed with Bonnell, the U.S. Army was impressed. So was "Co-lon-neh," the Indian name given to Sam Houston who had been adopted by a Cherokee Chief.⁹

In the fall of 1835, General Sam Houston selected Joseph Bonnell to be his Aide-de-Camp. The fact that Houston and Bonnell were in different armies was a small detail to them which could be worked out later. On November 22, 1835, the provisional government of Texas issued a Resolution approving this appointment which was signed by the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, making Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell of the U.S. Army the Aide-de-Camp to Major General Sam Houston, the Commander-in-Chief of the forces in Texas.¹⁰ This Resolution was never rescinded or amended.

Joseph Bonnell was so valuable an officer that his U.S. Army colonel refused to grant him a leave of absence to join the Texas Army. In a December 30, 1835 letter marked “private,” Joseph Bonnell explained this to Sam Houston.¹¹ This private letter was no ordinary letter, however. It was a “How-to-start-an-army” letter. It contained detailed explanations and enclosed example documents pertaining to uniforms, military administration, logistical supply, pay, promotions, ordnance, ammunition and rations. This letter was a blueprint for building the Texas Army. Bonnell signed this letter, “Your sincere friend, J. Bonnell.”

On the same day, Bonnell sent Houston a short and concise “official” letter declining the appointment due to circumstances over which he had no control.¹² This official letter was clearly for the public records. Bonnell’s thoroughness in providing two letters demonstrates his bent for efficiency, an attribute recognized and appreciated by his superiors.

On January 11, 1836, General Houston wrote Governor Robinson to urge the appointment of Joseph Bonnell to the rank of Captain in the Regular Army of Texas.¹³ Perhaps Houston thought a commission as Captain in the Texas Army might lure Joseph Bonnell into resigning his U.S. Army commission. It was clear that Sam Houston thought highly of Joseph Bonnell.

The List of Officers of the Regular Army of Texas, issued March 10, 1836, included Joseph Bonnell as a Captain.¹⁴ This list is a “who’s-who” of Texas heroes, with names such as Travis and Fannin.

By the time the List of Officer was issued, some on the list were dead. The Texas Revolution was going poorly. Four days earlier, General Santa Anna’s Mexican Army assaulted and captured the Alamo, with none of the military defenders surviving.¹⁵ From Gonzales, three days after the list was issued, General Sam Houston ordered an immediate retreat of both civilians and military personnel to the east bank of the Colorado River.¹⁶ The ensuing rush eastward was a mass chaos which became known in Texas history as the “Runaway Scrape.”¹⁷

The Mexican Army attacked Refugio in a furious battle on March 14.¹⁸ The Goliad massacre came on March 27.¹⁹ Yet, Texans had problems other than the Mexican Army.

The threat of war between Indians and Texans hung over Texas through most of 1836.²⁰ Prominent members of the convention which declared Texas to be independent on March 2, and which subsequently established a constitution, were against granting land to Indians.²¹ This nullified the peace treaty which Sam Houston had negotiated with the Indians the month before and resulted in the Indians being angry toward Texans.²²

The Kadohadacho Caddo Indians were formidable, not because of the size of their tribe, but because of their influence with other tribes, particularly their traditional ties with the Wichitas.²³ In 1835, Texans had unsuccessfully attempted to enlist the Cherokees and their allied tribes to “act against” the Kadohadacho Caddos, Kichais, and Wichitas.²⁴ Mexicans also realized the influence of the Kadohadacho Caddos with other tribes and had commissioned an agent, Manuel Flores, to enlist Caddo warriors to fight Texans by offers of money and free plunder.²⁵

After the March 2 convention, Indians in Texas seemed to be united against the Texans because of the refusal of the Texas government to recognize land grants to Indians. By March 7, it was reported that Kadohadacho Caddo warriors, along with Nadacos, Hainais, Kichais, and Wichitas, were roaming the area north of the

white settlements in East Texas and stealing horses.²⁶ On the same date, General Sam Houston requested that, for the safety of the frontier, the Cherokee treaty be ratified.²⁷ Garrison Greenwood warned the convention that, unless the convention acted to recognize Indian lands, the frontier faced danger from Indians.²⁸ G. B. Franks warned the convention of Indian depredations.²⁹ These concerns fell on deaf ears at the convention. Houston's treaty with the Indians was not ratified.

Cherokee Chief Bowles assembled his warriors on the San Antonio road, east of the Neches, for the purpose of attacking the Texans if they should be defeated by the Mexican army.³⁰ President of the Republic David G. Burnet commissioned M. B. Menard on March 19 as an Indian agent to secure the neutrality of Indian tribes in general, and especially those moving down from the north.³¹ Significantly, Burnet instructed Menard to avoid any treaty relating to boundaries.

Henry Raguet reported to the chairman of the San Augustine vigilance and safety committee that he believed there was imminent peril of attack from various tribes of Indians.³² Archibald Hotchkiss of San Augustine reported that large bodies of Indians had gathered at the three forks of the Trinity whose known intentions were to make war upon the inhabitants of the frontier.³³

John T. Mason sent a letter to U.S. Major J. S. Nelson at Fort Jesup, Louisiana warning of Indians assembling to attack Texans and requesting, "Is it not in your power to send a messenger to them, particularly the Caddoes, to make them keep quiet?"³⁴ This most interesting request for a U.S. military mission to the Caddo Indians to avert the disaster of an Indian war would later be considered by the U.S. commanding general upon his arrival at Fort Jesup.

From the banks of the Colorado River, General Houston ordered a further retreat eastward on March 26 to San Felipe on the Brazos.³⁵ From San Felipe, Houston retreated north, up and across the Brazos River, to an encampment on the west bank opposite Groce's Landing.³⁶

It would have been foolish for any competent military commander to ignore the Indian threat. If the Indians were to aid the Mexican army, the Texans would be caught between two foes.³⁷ Indians were a clear and present danger to the struggle

for Texas independence. General Sam Houston was valiantly trying to organize his motley rabble into an army at the Brazos River camp during the first days of April 1836. During this same period, reports on Indians continued to pour into various Texas locations and to the U.S. Army garrison at Fort Jesup, Louisiana. William B. P. Gaines traveled to Fort Jesup to carry a letter regarding the Indian threat and to explain the details.³⁸

U.S. Major General Edmund Pendleton Gaines arrived at Fort Jesup on April 4 to take command of the critical international border situation.³⁹ The United States, because of diplomatic relations with Mexico, had to remain strictly neutral. General Gaines could not take any action in support of the Texas Revolution. One of the first actions of General Gaines after reaching Fort Jesup was to send for Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell, the experienced expert in dealing with Indians.

Joseph Bonnell was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on August 4, 1802.⁴⁰ His father died when he was three and his mother died when he was thirteen.⁴¹ He was raised by an older brother, Samuel, who was twelve years older than Joseph.⁴² He also had a brother, George, who was six years older, and a younger sister, Lydia.⁴³

Joseph Bonnell entered the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York on July 1, 1821 at the age of 18.⁴⁴ He graduated four years later in the Class of 1825.⁴⁵ Upon graduation, he was promoted to Second Lieutenant and assigned to the 3rd Infantry Regiment.⁴⁶ Joseph was promoted to First Lieutenant in 1831.⁴⁷ He married Anna Elizabeth Noble in Adams County, Mississippi on April 23, 1831.⁴⁸ Bonnell had served in the 3rd Infantry Regiment for eleven years.

General Gaines ordered Lieutenant Bonnell to go to the Caddo Indian villages of East Texas to persuade them to remain at peace.⁴⁹ This order may have been issued vocally to Bonnell at an earlier date, followed by the written order dated April 7. Verbal orders later followed by written orders were and are standard procedure in the U.S. Army.

Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell was ordered to go by himself on a dangerous mission into a foreign country to quell an Indian uprising. Few military missions

could be so hazardous and difficult. Few officers have ever been assigned such a daunting mission. As for General Gaines, sending a U.S. Army officer across the U.S. border into a foreign country was a most unusual and risky course of action to take.

In General Gaines' written order to Lieutenant Bonnell, the general wanted to know, among other things, whether the Caddo warriors were in Texas, at what place, and what may be their object, their temper, or disposition toward the white inhabitants.⁵⁰ The general asked Bonnell to urge our Red friends to be peaceable, to stay at home, and to not allow bad news or bad talks to disturb them.⁵¹

Bonnell was authorized to employ an interpreter, and the Quartermaster was authorized to pay the necessary expenses.⁵² Surely, this expense authorization would allow Bonnell to purchase horses in the event he did not already own horses or could not borrow two for his mission. A horse was the mode of transportation in the 1830s just as the automobile is the mode today. Bonnell's military training gave him additional familiarity with horses in the event that he would be assigned to horse-drawn artillery or dragoons. Even though Bonnell was an infantryman, there is no doubt that he was also a proficient horseman. Although there is no record that Bonnell used horses on his mission, it is probable that he did.

When Bonnell left on his mission to the Caddo Indians in East Texas, the Texas Army was still in camp opposite Groce's Landing on the Brazos River.⁵³ Bonnell could provide early warning of any Indian movement toward the Texas Army and other intelligence, provided, of course, he was not killed.

Clearly, Lieutenant Bonnell was highly regarded by the U.S. Army and highly qualified for his mission into East Texas. Unbeknown to anyone, when Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell of the U.S. Army set out on his lone mission, he was also, technically and officially, a Captain in the Regular Army of the Republic of Texas and Aide-de-Camp to its Commander-in Chief, General Sam Houston.

In 1836, the Caddo Indians only had land in Texas. The four villages of the Kadohadacho Caddos were at the northern tip of Caddo Lake, just south of the present town of Smithland, Texas.⁵⁴ The Nadaco Caddo village was on the Sabine

River south of the present city of Longview, Texas; and the Hasinai Caddo village was on the Angelina River 15 miles west of Nacogdoches, Texas.⁵⁵ All of the Caddo lands and villages were inside of Texas.

Reports were that the large force of Indian warriors in East Texas was "conducted" and "piloted" by Kadohadacho Caddo Indians.⁵⁶ Considering all of the intelligence available to Fort Jesup at the time, it is probable that Lieutenant Bonnell set out on his mission with Caddo Lake as his destination. Kadohadacho Caddo villages were near the center northern tip of the lake and nowhere else.⁵⁷

During the course of Bonnell's mission into a foreign country at war, concerns about the gatherings and the hostility of Indians continued. M. B. Menard visited Shawnees, Delawares and Kickapoos living 75 miles north of Nacogdoches and found that Cherokees had asked them to take up arms against the Americans.⁵⁸ There were two estimates of the number of Indians which had gathered, both estimates were made in sworn statements, called "depositions" at that time. C. H. Sims, in his deposition, stated that there was a large body of Caddoes, Kechies, Inies, Towackanies, Whacoes and Comanches which he estimated to be 1,700 warriors; that Cherokees had killed Brooks Williams; and that the Cherokees gave every intention of joining the other tribes.⁵⁹ William Sims, in his deposition, stated that he lived near a Cherokee village, that he had no doubt of the hostile intentions of the Cherokees, that he expected the Cherokees to join the other tribes, and that he estimated the number of Indians to be from 1,400 to 1,700 warriors.⁶⁰

With these two sworn estimates as the only intelligence about the number of Indians, a prudent military commander should base plans on a strength of 1,700 hostile Indian warriors. This "army" of Indian warriors was much larger than the entire Texas Army.⁶¹ This gathering of Indian warriors, estimated to be 1,700 strong, was within 75 to 200 miles of Houston's army. Lieutenant Bonnell, himself, noted that an Indian brave had traveled 150 miles in two days across the East Texas terrain.⁶² At that speed, Indians could move to attack the Texas army in a matter of from one day to a little over two and a half days. In less than three days, this powerful Indian force could potentially strike a fatal blow to Houston's tiny army.

General Houston was so concerned about the Indian threat that, on April 13, he took time out of his hectic schedule to write Cherokee Chief Bowl.⁶³ This letter is notable in two respects: (1) It grossly misrepresents the strength of the Mexican army, and (2) It makes a promise which is impossible for Houston to keep. Houston tells Chief Bowl that there are not many of the enemy now in the country. He also says that you will get your land as promised. Included to make the deceptions more acceptable were words of brotherly love. This duplicity was uncharacteristic of Houston. It suggests that the purpose of his letter was to deliberately mislead a potential “enemy” — a sign that the commanding general recognized that the Indian threat to his army was real and imminent.

During the movement of General Houston’s army to the east and the journey of Lieutenant Bonnell to East Texas, Sam P. Carson, the Secretary of State of the Republic of Texas, went to Fort Jesup, Louisiana to discuss the Indian threat with General Gaines.⁶⁴ Clearly, the government of the Republic of Texas considered the Indian threat to be very serious and of the highest priority.

On the way to the Caddos, Lieutenant Bonnell ascertained from many sources that a Mexican by the name of Manuel Flores had been with the Caddos about two months earlier urging the Caddos to join him in fighting the white inhabitants of Texas.⁶⁵ Bonnell later made a deposition regarding Manuel Flores.⁶⁶ This was the same Manuel Flores who, as an agent of Mexico in 1839, was killed by Texas Rangers on the banks of the North San Gabriel River while carrying war supplies to the Indians.⁶⁷

Bonnell reached a Caddo village on April 14, 1836, but found it deserted except for a few children and two or three squaws who told him that all the warriors had gone to the prairies in consequence of what Manuel Flores had told them.⁶⁸ Bonnell proceeded to a second Caddo village about 12 miles away where he found Chief Cortes, “a very intelligent Indian ... said to have great influence with his nation,” and some warriors.⁶⁹ We can only imagine the surprise of the Indians seeing a U.S. Army officer in their midst—in Texas, where the U.S. Army was not supposed to be. Likewise, we can only imagine the bravery of Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell, alone, except for an interpreter, in a foreign country among potentially

hostile Indians.

From the closeness of the Caddo villages, it is reasonable to conclude that Joseph Bonnell met Chief Cortes in one of the Kadohadacho Caddo villages north of Caddo Lake and south of the present town of Smithland, Texas. This was the only Kadohadacho Caddo land and the only Caddo land with multiple villages. Bonnell told Chief Cortes that he came as a friend, that Americans were their friends, and that he wanted the warriors to return to their villages and live in peace and hunt on their usual grounds.⁷⁰ “[T]he Indians appeared very happy and very glad” upon hearing this from Bonnell.⁷¹

Chief Cortes told Lieutenant Bonnell that he would send to the prairies and inform the chiefs and all the warriors of what Bonnell had said.⁷² Bonnell asked Chief Cortes what should be said to General Gaines, and the Chief replied, “Tell General Gaines, the great chief, that even should the Caddoes see the Americans and Spaniards fighting, they would only look on, but not take a part on either side; tell him that I will send and let our chiefs and warriors know what you have said through him.”⁷³

Chief Cortes was glad that Joseph Bonnell had come, for now the Caddos had learned the truth after Manuel Flores had been telling them lies.⁷⁴ Clearly, Joseph Bonnell’s reputation of honesty with the Caddos, which he had earned the year before, paid great dividends for the cause of the Texas Revolution.

Lieutenant Bonnell’s “pow-wow” with Chief Cortes was on April 14, 1836. The Chief sent messengers who would have arrived at the Caddo war chiefs and warriors in the field at least by April 16, the day Houston’s army packed up, left McCarley’s plantation, and hit the road which eventually led to San Jacinto, five days away.⁷⁵

The Indian threat during the Texas army’s critical march toward San Jacinto was substantially abated due to the actions of Joseph Bonnell. He single-handedly defused a massive Indian threat against the Texas Army.

On April 20, 1836—*the day before the Battle of San Jacinto*—Lieutenant Bonnell returned to Fort Jesup from his mission to the Caddo Indians in East Texas to report to General Gaines that the Indians would not make war against the Texans in spite of the best efforts of Mexican agent Manuel Flores.⁷⁶ Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell’s timing could not have been better in helping to prevent General Sam Houston’s small army from being blind-sided by a surprise Indian attack during the Texas Army’s march toward San Jacinto.

On May 2, 1836, after General Gaines learned of the Texas victory at the Battle of San Jacinto, he sent Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell’s report to the U.S Secretary of War for the information of the President of the United States, expressing a hope that the President would approve of his [General Gaines’] conduct.⁷⁷ It is significant that the report of Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell went to the President of the United States and is today filed among the executive documents of the United States Congress. At the time, the exploits of Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell in Texas immediately before the Battle of San Jacinto received considerable notice and attention in military circles, both in the United States and in the Republic of Texas.

Major General Alexander Macomb, stationed in Washington, D.C., was a jealous and severe critic of Major General Edmund Gaines. Attempting to diminish the importance of General Gaines critical assignment at the border during the Texas Revolution, General Macomb claimed that the Indian threat was a fake, using a letter from John Darrington of Nacogdoches as his proof. Darrington’s letter, dated April 10, 1836, invited the Texas government to move to Nacogdoches, but made no mention of Indians.⁷⁸ Darrington’s letter merely alleged that rumors were exaggerated, probably referring to rumors about the Mexican Army and the Runaway Scrape.

Joseph Bonnell had accomplished his mission into Texas in an outstanding manner. His mission rendered a valuable service to the Republic of Texas. Joseph Bonnell should certainly be considered to be a hero of the Texas Revolution. Because he was a U.S. Army officer, he never received the recognition given to Texas soldiers which included land grants and other awards for military service.

Joseph Bonnell had friends and comrades-in-arms in the Texas Army during the Texas Revolution. He had served at West Point with Lieutenant William S. Stilwell, West Point Class of 1827, a Texas Regular Army officer who commanded one of the Twin Sisters artillery pieces during the Battle of San Jacinto.⁷⁹ He had also served at West Point with Lieutenant Joseph Cadle, West Point Class of 1824, a Texas Regular Army artillery officer.⁸⁰

But, after the Texas Revolution, when the U.S. Army dispatched Bonnell to Nacogdoches, Republic of Texas, on official business to gather intelligence about the Indians in the summer of 1836, it was a wonderful opportunity to renew old friendships.⁸¹ Hugh McLeod, West Point Class of 1835, served with Joseph Bonnell in the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment at Fort Jesup, Louisiana. At Fort Jesup, Bonnell and McLeod not only served together, they partied together off duty.⁸²

Albert Sidney Johnston, West Point Class of 1826, had known Bonnell for three years at West Point. Johnston's class had only 41 cadets and Bonnell's class only 37.⁸³ With such small classes, cadets grew to know each other very well after working and living together for three years.

Houston obviously had great admiration for Bonnell, having selected him to be his Aide and having gotten him a commission as Captain in the Texas Army. Bonnell, in turn, admired a general officer so astute as to do that. Bonnell and Houston were close dedicated friends.

Undoubtedly, talk among the four friends—McLeod, Johnston, Houston, and Bonnell—would have gotten around to talking about Indian threats, past and present, for that was why Bonnell was in Texas. M.B. Menard was trying to employ a secret agent to report only to Bonnell or to him.⁸⁴ It would be only natural that when Bonnell's friends—Houston, Johnston, and McLeod—thought of Indians in the future, they would think of Joseph Bonnell.

Houston would become the first elected President of the Republic of Texas. Johnston would rise rapidly in the Texas Army from private to commanding general and later Secretary of War of the Republic of Texas.⁸⁵ McLeod would become Adjutant General of the Republic of Texas.⁸⁶ Bonnell would be promoted to

Captain in the U.S. Army.⁸⁷

Three years after Joseph Bonnell’s mission into Texas, the site of the new capital of the Republic of Texas was selected and work began on the City of Austin.⁸⁸ Edwin Wailer stated, “[O]ur labors were liable every moment to be interrupted by the hostile Indians, for whom we were obliged to be constantly on the watch.”⁸⁹

Secretary of War Johnston had made a military terrain reconnaissance of the new site for the capital as soon as it was selected. In an April 21, 1839 letter to a friend, Johnston said:

“My agent will set off in a few days to commence the building of the City of Austin at the foot of the mountain on the Colorado. His escorts will be sufficient to protect the workmen and materials.”

This communication is very significant. Use of the singular word “mountain” indicates that Johnston had made a thorough terrain reconnaissance of the area, that he had done what military commanders have done for ages — select the high ground for military defense—choose the one mountain which overlooks Austin for the defense of the new capital of the Republic, and that he realized military protection was needed against Indians. Johnston was thinking about Indians. Of what friend would that remind him?

Johnston had personal knowledge of the importance of high ground in Indian warfare. He had combat experience at the Battle of Wisconsin Heights in the Black Hawk Indian War of 1832 and knew the advantages of high ground and the fighting ability of Indian warriors.⁹⁰ A “maxim” of Napoleon was on the advantages of high ground.⁹¹ Johnston was keenly aware of the importance of high ground in the defense against Indians.

In military operations and planning, high ground needs to have a name, for example: Wisconsin Heights. Military high ground has always had a name, otherwise there could be confusion, blunders and disaster. History is filled with names of high ground: Bunker Hill, Cemetery Ridge, Little Round Top, Missionary Ridge, San Juan Hill, Monte Cassino, Mount Suribachi, Pork Chop Hill, Hamburger Hill, to name but a few.

General Johnston was too good of an officer not to have named the mountain he selected for the defense of Austin. He would not send troops to an unnamed and unidentified mountain, thereby risking military disaster. He would not allow subordinates to take that risk, either. No doubt Johnston would be thinking about Indians when he or his next in command, McLeod, decided on the name for the mountain.

The Republic's two top military leaders, Secretary of War Johnston and Adjutant General McLeod, were two of the first residents of Austin.⁹² A bronze plaque on the Paramount Theater in downtown Austin marks the location of Johnston's log cabin. Johnston led the parade on October 17, 1839 which met President Lamar and the rest of the cabinet about two miles beyond the city boundary.⁹³ Both Johnston and McLeod should be considered to be among the co-founders of the City of Austin.

On December 12, 1839, Secretary of War Johnston sent a report to President Lamar outlining the defense of the new capital of the Republic. His report stated that, at this time, there are four companies on the Colorado above this city.⁹⁴ There are two words in this brief report which are significant. First, *four* companies of infantry constitute a relatively large force of battalion size. Second, use of the word *above* suggests that this large battalion-size force was located exactly where it would be expected to be located—on the mountain (1) overlooking Austin, and (2) upstream on the Colorado River.

Although Johnston did not mention the name of the terrain which the battalion occupied, rest assured that it had been given a name for the troops to use. Johnston's penchant for avoiding the written word is illustrated in his response to an inquiry from Captain George W. Cullum who had asked in 1850 for his biography.

Johnston condensed his entire life of 47 eventful years into eighteen handwritten lines.⁹⁵ It was characteristic of Johnston not to put very much in writing. Action was his strong point, not the written word.

The mountain selected in April 1839 by Johnston for the defense of Austin had a name in print one year later. A book published in April 1840 stated:

"Four miles above the city [of Austin], upon the east side of the river, is a high peak, called Mount Bonnell."

Johnston's mountain finally had a published name, Mount Bonnell. That same year, Captain Joseph Bonnell of the U.S. Army died.⁹⁶

Normally, this would be the end of the story of Joseph Bonnell. The reader would assume that Joseph Bonnell, hero of the Texas Revolution, had finally gotten some of the recognition which he so richly deserved, thanks to two of his friends and comrades-in-arms, Albert Sidney Johnston and Hugh McLeod. But, that was not to be.

By the most unusual set of circumstances, the 1840 book which first provided the name of "Mount Bonnell" was written by ...

... a George Bonnell.⁹⁷ This book does not disclose for whom or by whom the mountain was named. This omission strongly suggests that George did not know and was puzzled by this strange occurrence involving his own last name.

The *circumstantial* evidence supporting Joseph Bonnell as the name-sake of Mount Bonnell is extremely strong. But, obviously, Joseph Bonnell never set foot in Austin. George Bonnell was actually *in* Austin, at least for a few months. In fact, the *only* Bonnell in Austin during the first three years of the city's existence was George.⁹⁸

George William Bonnell was a native of Onondaga County, New York.⁹⁹ He was an editor in Alabama and in Mississippi. He traveled to Texas in the summer of 1836. In 1837, he was living in Houston. During Sam Houston's first term as

President, George Bonnell was commissioner of Indian Affairs and advocated a harsh policy against them. In 1839, he moved to Austin where he and Jacob W. Cruger were selected as government printers on December 6. On January 15, 1840, he started publication of the Texas Sentinel, but sold his interest in December 1840. He took part in the Santa Fe expedition [June 1841] and was released from prison in Mexico in the summer of 1842. He joined the Mier expedition and was killed near the Rio Grande, probably on December 27, 1842.

Such are the highlights of the official biography of George W. Bonnell. In addition, George Bonnell's printing press did not arrive in Austin until sometime after January 29, 1840.¹⁰⁰ In 1840, George Bonnell was a Private in the Travis Guards.¹⁰¹ In May and June 1840, George Bonnell was with the Travis Guards at Camp Cazneau, two and a half miles east of the present site of Round Rock, Texas.¹⁰² George W. Bonnell spent only a few months in Austin, even fewer as a newspaperman.

Both Johnston and McLeod died in 1862 as Confederate officers during the Civil War.¹⁰³ Apparently, at some point after the Civil War, someone asked the question, "For whom was Mount Bonnell named?" George W. Bonnell was the only person named Bonnell who lived in Austin during the first three years of its existence. For those without relevant knowledge of military affairs, George W. Bonnell would be a reasonable guess. John Henry Brown, Frank Brown, Mary Starr Barkley, James Mulkey Owens, and Nat Henderson have been some of the writers who have speculated about how and for whom Mount Bonnell was named.

The official historical marker of the Texas Historical Commission on Mount Bonnell states, "Mount Bonnell ... was named for George W. Bonnell who came to Texas with others to fight for Texas Independence." The marker fails to mention the fact that George W. Bonnell did not arrive in Texas until four months after the War for Texas Independence.

Postlude

In 2004, the grave of Captain Joseph Bonnell was found unmarked in Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. On Memorial Day weekend 2005, an Honor Guard from his former unit, the 3rd Infantry Regiment, now the "Old Guard" ceremonial unit which guards the Tombs of the Unknowns in Arlington Cemetery and leads Presidential Parades, gave Captain Joseph Bonnell full military honors to dedicate his grave marker and historical marker.

"May it be said, 'Well done; Be thou at peace' " Captain Joseph Bonnell.¹⁰⁴

Seldon B. Graham, Jr.

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Austin, Texas

February 9, 2006

Endnotes

- ¹ Paul N. Spellman, Forgotten Texas Hero, Texas A&M Press, College Station, 1999, pages 20-23.
- ² Charles P. Roland, Albert Sidney Johnston University of Texas Press, Austin, 1964, 2d printing 1990, page 54.
- ³ Forgotten Texas Hero supra, page 23.
- ⁴ James L. Haley, Sam Houston, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 2002, page 161.
- ⁵ F. Todd Smith, The Caddo Indians, Texas A&M Press, College Station, 1995, page 121.
- ⁶ The Caddo Indians, supra, page 105, map.
- ⁷ The Caddo Indians, supra, page 122.
- ⁸ The Caddo Indians, supra, pages 122-123.
- ⁹ Marquis James, The Raven, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1929, 3rd Printing, 1991, page 20.
- ¹⁰ John Holmes Jenkins, III, Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836, Presidial Press, Austin, 1973. Volume 9. page 385, Document 4366, Resolution approving the appointment of Lieutenant Bonnill [sic]
- ¹¹ Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 3, pages 369-370, Document 1654, Bonnell to Houston, December 30, 1835.
- ¹² Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 3, page 368, Document 1653, Bonnell to Houston. December 30, 1835.
- ¹³ Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 3, page 476, Document 1756, Houston to Robinson. January 11, 1836.
- ¹⁴ Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 5, page 42, Document 2287, List of Officers, March 10, 1836. Bonnell is incorrectly spelled “Bonnell” or “Bonnsll.”
- ¹⁵ Stephen L. Moore, Eighteen Minutes, Republic of Texas Press, Dallas, 2004, page 36. Also see Walter Lord, A Time To Stand, Bonanza Books, New York, pages 154-166; and Jeff Long, Duel of Eagles, William Morrow and Co., Inc., New York, 1990, pages 239-262.
- ¹⁶ Bob Boyd, The Texas Revolution: A Day-by-Day Account, Standard Times, San Angelo, 1986, pages 103-104.
- ¹⁷ Eighteen Minutes, supra, page 58.
- ¹⁸ The Texas Revolution: A Day-by-Day Account, supra, page 104.
- ¹⁹ Clifford Hopewell, Remember Goliad, Eakin Press, Austin, 1998, pages 119-128.
- ²⁰ “Indians and the Texas Revolution” at < <http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/exhibits/Indian/early/pagel.html>>.
- ²¹ The Caddo Indians, supra, page 127.

- ²² The Caddo Indians, supra, page 127.
- ²³ The Caddo Indians, supra, page 127.
- ²⁴ The Caddo Indians, supra, page 127.
- ²⁵ The Caddo Indians, supra, page 128.
- ²⁶ The Caddo Indians, supra, page 128.
- ²⁷ Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 5, pages 17-18, Document 2262, Houston to Collinsworth, March 7, 1836.
- ²⁸ Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 5, page 17, Document 2261. Greenwood to President of Convention, March 7. 1836.
- ²⁹ Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 5, pages 25-26, Document 2271, Franks to Convention, March 8, 1836.
- ³⁰ “John H. Reagan, “Expulsion of the Cherokees from East Texas,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1, July 1897, pages 38-39.
- ³¹ Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 5, pages 140-141, Document 2366, Burnet to Menard, March 19, 1836.
- ³² Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 5, page 144, Document 2370, Raquet to Chairman, March 19, 1836.
- ³³ Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 5, page 153, Document 2388, A. Hotchkiss Report, San Augustine, March 21, 1836.
- ³⁴ Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 5, page 149, Document 2380, Mason to Nelson, March 20, 1836.
- ³⁵ Eighteen Minutes, supra, page 115.
- ³⁶ Eighteen Minutes, supra, page 149.
- ³⁷ “Stephen L. Hardin, Texian Iliad, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1994, page 110.
- ³⁸ Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 5, pages 288-289, Document 2529, Mason to Gaines, April 1, 1836.
- ³⁹ Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 5, pages 373-374, Document 2638, General Gaines to Lewis Cass, U.S. Secretary of War, April 8, 1836.
- ⁴⁰ Application letters and documents of Joseph Bonnell on file in the U.S. Military Academy Library, West Point, New York 10996.
- ⁴¹ Application letters, supra.
- ⁴² Application letters, supra.
- ⁴³ Application letters, supra.

- 44 Application letters, *supra*.
- 45 The Register of Graduates and Former Cadets of the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York.
- 46 Files in the Library of the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York.
- 47 Cullum Files, *supra*.
- 48 Marriage License, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
- 49 Letter of April 7, 1836 from Major General Edmund P. Gaines to 1st Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell, Letters sent by the Western Department, Volume 7, Record Group 393, Records of the U.S. Army Continental Commands, Part 1, Entry 5568, pages 278-279, Gaines to Bonnell, April 7, 1836. Also see The Caddo Indians, *supra*, page 129; and The Handbook of Texas Online, < www.tsha.utexas.edu >, "Edmund Pendleton Gaines."
- 50 Letter, Gaines to Bonnell, *supra*.
- 51 Letter, Gaines to Bonnell, *supra*.
- 52 Letter, Gaines to Bonnell, *supra*.
- 53 Eighteen Minutes, *supra*, Chapter 8, pages 162-189.
- 54 The Caddo Indians, *supra*, page 105, map of Tribal Locations & Treaty of 1835.
- 55 The Caddo Indians, *supra*, page 105, map of Tribal Locations & Treaty of 1835.
- 56 The Caddo Indians, *supra*, page 128.
- 57 The Caddo Indians, *supra*, page 105, map of Tribal Locations & Treaty of 1835.
- 58 Papers of the Texas Revolution, *supra*, Volume 5, pages 429-430, Document 2703, Deposition of M.B. Menard, April 11, 1836.
- 59 Papers of the Texas Revolution, *supra*, Volume 5, pages 429-430, Document 2703, Deposition of C.H. Sims, April 11, 1836.
- 60 Papers of the Texas Revolution, *supra*, Volume 5, pages 429-430, Document 2703, Deposition of William Sims, April 11, 1836.
- 61 Documents of Major General Sam Houston, Commander in Chief of the Texian Army, to his Excellency, David G. Burnet, President of the Republic of Texas, containing a detailed account of the Battle of San Jacinto, John Cox & Co., printers, New Orleans, 1836. General Houston estimated his strength on the battlefield to be 783 men.
- 62 Papers of the Texas Revolution, *supra*, Volume 7, page 484, Document 3738, Bonnell to Gaines, July 19, 1836.
- 63 Papers of the Texas Revolution, *supra*, Volume 5, pages 452-453, Document 2738, Houston to Bowl, April 13, 1836.
- 64 Papers of the Texas Revolution, *supra*, Volume 5, page 468, Document 2755, Sam P. Carson to David G. Burnet, Natchitoches, Louisiana, April 14, 1836.

- 65 Report of Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell to Major General Edmund P. Gaines, April 20, 1836, U.S. Serial Set, Microfiche 4904, U.S. and Mexico, 1828-1838, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, No. 332, House Documents, Volume 12, Number 351, Fiche 9, Document 351, pages 774-775.
- 66 Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 7, page 148, Document 3416, Bonnell deposition.
- 67 The Handbook of Texas Online, <www.tsha.utexas.edu>, “Manuel Flores (? - 1839).”
- 68 Report of Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell, supra.
- 69 Report of Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell, supra.
- 70 Report of Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell, supra.
- 71 Report of Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell, supra.
- 72 Report of Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell, supra.
- 73 Report of Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell, supra.
- 74 Report of Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell, supra.
- 75 Eighteen Minutes, supra, page 222.
- 76 Report of Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell, supra.
- 77 Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 6, pages 150-151, Document 2952, Gaines to Secretary of War.
- 78 Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 5, page 416, Document 2688, Darrington to Bumet.
- 79 List of Officers of the Regular Army, supra; Eighteen Minutes, supra, pages 263 and 313.
- 80 List of Officers of the Regular Army, supra.
- 81 Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 7, page 484, Document 3738, Bonnell to Gaines, Nacogdoches, July 19, 1836; also Volume 8, page 71, Document 3826, Menard to All, July 30, 1836.
- 82 William Fairfax Gray, “Diary of William Fairfax Gray,” <www.smu.edu/swcenter/FairfaxGray/wg_226.htm>, page 76, Wednesday, January 27, 1836, Fort Jesup, Louisiana: At Lt. Macrae’s social party, Gray met Lt. Bonnell and wife. Lt. McLeod has sent up his resignation.
- 83 Register of Graduates and Former Cadets of the United States Military Academy West Point, New York.
- 84 Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 8, page 71, Document 3826, Menard to All, July 30, 1836.
- 85 Albert Sidney Johnston, supra, page 58 and page 82.
- 86 Forgotten Texas Leader, supra, Chapter 3.

⁸⁷ Cullum Files in the Library of the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York; Official Army Register, 1838. Also Louis Pelzer, "Marches of the Dragoons in the Mississippi Valley," State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 1917, page 80: In April and May 1839, Captain Joseph Bonnell traversed the entire 140 mile length of the southern section of the western frontier road from Fort Towson to Fort Smith with fourteen oxen in eight and a half days; Lieutenant Richard H. Wilson, Adjutant, 8th Infantry, "The Eighth Regiment of Infantry," <www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/R&H/R&H-8IN.htm>.

⁸⁸ Ernest William Winkler, II, "The Seat of Government of Texas, The Permanent Location of the Seat of Government," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Volume 10, Number 3, January 1907, page 216 and page 227.

⁸⁹ Seat of Government of Texas, *supra*, page 235.

⁹⁰ Albert Sidney Johnston, *supra*, pages 31-43.

⁹¹ Maxims of Napoleon No. 14, Advantages of High Ground.

⁹² War Department occupied Lot 3, Block 84; the Adjutant General occupied Lot 6, Block 84, in Austin.

⁹³ Seat of Government of Texas, *supra*, page 234.

⁹⁴ Report of the Secretary of War to the President, December 12, 1839, Texas Archives, Box 401-1306, Folder 9.

⁹⁵ Cullum Files in the Library of the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York; Johnston to Cullum, March 14, 1850.

⁹⁶ North American Daily Advertiser, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, September 29, 1840, page 2; New York Herald, September 30, 1840.

⁹⁷ George W. Bonnell, Topographical Description of Texas to which is added an account of the Indian Tribes, Clark, Wing & Brown, Austin, April 1840, page 66.

⁹⁸ Austin census records, Austin History Center.

⁹⁹ This and all other facts in this paragraph are from The Handbook of Texas Online, <www.tsha.utexas.edu>, "Bonnell, George William."

¹⁰⁰ Announcement by George W. Bonnell, Austin City Gazette, January 29, 1840, Texas Archives.

¹⁰¹ John Melton Wallace, "George W. Bonnell, Frontier Journalist in the Republic of Texas," M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 1966, page 30.

¹⁰² Handbook of Texas Online, <www.tsha.utexas.edu>, "Camp Cazneau."

¹⁰³ Albert Sidney Johnston, *supra*, page 338; Forgotten Texas Leader, *supra*, page 180.

¹⁰⁴ A line from the Alma Mater of the United States Military Academy, written by Colonel Paul S. Reinecke, West Point Class of 1911.