

HISTORY & FOLKLORE

What Happened After San Jacinto and Texas Independence?

by Bruce Lockett, Texas Historian

The stories of Texas history abound and are told around campfires, in classrooms, and written in history books of which this writer personally has some 60 books. History has been written and re-written of the events up to April 21, 1836. However, there are gaps where the writers left blanks in that history that are only filled by deep research in early Texas historical documents. One of the gaps present concerns the events that took place after the Battle of San Jacinto. If you were to ask 20 people what happened to the Mexican officers and soldiers after the Battle of San Jacinto one out of 20 may know the answer or at least some part of it.

Some of these events have been recorded and handed down to us through history, while some may be of speculation by historians and to this writer the events are clear enough to give us a better understanding of the first steps of the Republic of Texas. It was April 22, a frosty morning on the plains of San Jacinto; the fog lay over the bodies of the Mexican soldiers that had been killed the day before. The ground was soaked with the blood of the defeated enemy and the Texas valiant. The smell of burnt gunpowder still hung in the air. The rising of the sun brought the picture of the remains of those left on the field.

The Texas Army under the leadership of Sam Houston had defeated the self-proclaimed Napoleon of the West, Santa Anna of Mexico. In less than 18 minutes some 600 officers and soldiers of the Mexican army lay dead in the field and surrounding area. The new Republic of Texas, which was birthed at Washington-on-the-Brazos, delivered in the fire of the Alamo and Goliad, had stumbled to San Jacinto to take its first steps of liberty. Some 600 soldiers and officers including Santa Anna had surrendered to Sam Houston and the Texas Army.

The spoils of battle included a treasure chest of silver coins, some 600 ri-

gles, 200 pistols and 300 sabers, along with personal items, uniforms, horses, a cannon, saddles and clothing, along with the responsibility of feeding and moving some 600 prisoners. The treasure was a great gain for Texas but it was a blessing with a burden. Supplies of food and water were needed to keep the Texas Army alert. There were 2,000 Mexican soldiers still under Santa Anna's rule out there somewhere on the soil of Texas. Texas had to move and move quickly.

When Santa Anna was captured he was brought to Sam Houston, who was wounded, under a tree. Many who were present wanted to string Santa Anna up right there for what he had done at the Alamo and Goliad. Houston knew with Santa Anna's presence he could hold off the remaining forces and hopefully get them to retreat across the Rio Grande River. His gamble paid off, and Santa Anna signed a treaty with Texas with the stipulation that all forces would return across the Rio Grande River.

On the night of the 21st of April, all of the Mexican soldiers were herded into a circle and large fires were built around them. Many of the Mexican soldiers thought at first they would be burned alive, the same fate they gave to the dead and dying at the Alamo. It must have been a fearful night as the fires burned around them and they felt that this would be the way that they would die. When morning broke, the smell of the battlefield was beyond breath. The bodies were already beginning to swell and forces were moved to Harrisburg some five miles from the battle site. It was here that the prisoners were loaded onto a steamboat (Yellowstone) and taken to Galveston, Texas, to be held on the Island surrounded by water, with no way of escape. It must be remembered that the Galveston that we had then is not what it is like now. There were very few buildings and a makeshift seaport. The majority of the Island

was sand, heat, and very little water. There was also a fear that the Mexican navy and army might attempt a landing to rescue the Mexican army. Forces in Texas were now split and there were not enough soldiers from Texas to repel an invasion force. On the 16th of August the prisoners were sent to the old 1832 Fort of Anahuac. They traveled aboard the Schooner Kosciusko. It was still believed this location was still too close for an attempt by Mexican forces.

The prisoners and the guarding forces of Texas were further moved to Liberty, Texas, to the Hardin Plantation, east of Liberty, Texas. William Hardin of Liberty was a close friend of Sam Houston and Houston had requested him to take charge of the prisoners. Having several houses on his plantation, all of the officers were kept there under guard by Texas troops. The enlisted men, because all of the slaves had run off because of

Santa Anna, were put into service of working the farms and plantations. Some planted crops, worked cattle, worked as blacksmiths, cooked, cut wood or whatever chore was needed to sustain the farms.

Nearly nine months passed like this, the officers in one place, and the enlisted spread out throughout the community. The burden to Liberty, Texas, to feed and clothe some 600 prisoners was getting more taxing with no help from the Republic. Letters were written from the people of Liberty to Sam Houston that Mexico was no longer a threat and that the soldiers should be returned to Mexico. Due to the fact that Sam Houston had no funds to provide for the Mexican soldiers, the release was granted and on April 25, one year and four days after the battle of San Jacinto, the prisoners were released. While most of the officers returned home, most of the enlisted persons stayed on in Texas and

made it their home.

The old Hardin Plantation was torn down and only a marker shows the spot. It was put there in 1985 to mark the prison camp known today as Mexican Hill.

What happened to those who died at San Jacinto? Here lies an unsolved mystery. Evidence uncovered by the Texas Archeology Study Association based in Vidor, Texas, showed that some 300 to 400 soldiers were killed in Peggy Lake. This is the water basin right behind Santa Anna's camp at San Jacinto. In discussions with the Texas Historical Commission no records are present of the bodies or the weapons ever being recovered from Peggy Lake. Those treasures still remain there some 188 years later.

Technology is just starting to probe the mysteries of San Jacinto. On the site there are five killing fields: the Cannon area, the Gulley, Vince Bridge, the Tree Line, and Peggy Lake. Artifacts

continue to surface with Peggy Lake holding the greatest treasure waiting to be found. It is hopeful that the Texas Historical Commission will pursue these sites and the treasures of Texas will once more be in the hands of Texas for all to see. The pistol of William Travis, the rifle of Davy Crockett, the knife of Jim Bowie: could they be at San Jacinto in Peggy Lake? Time will give us that answer.

But that's another story.

Sources:

Liberty, Liberty County and the Atascosito District, Chapter 9, by Miriam Partlow

Historical marker, Mexican Hill, 2315 Hwy. 90, Liberty, Texas

Diary of Col. Pedro Delgado of Santa Anna's staff, vertical file, Sam Houston Regional Library, Mexican Hill episode

Liberty Vindicator, Liberty, Texas, The Hardins of Liberty, Sept. 27, 1889, by John Henry Brown



From Illustrated Press of Liberty County, Thursday, February 1, 1968 – Snell-Coe Furniture is unloading a carload of appliances this week in Dayton, in the persons of O.T. Ligons and Robert Greer, seen above with cartons of G.E. air conditioners and other units. Robert is the son of Snell-Coe owner J.I. Greer, and helps his parents run the store.

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