

Early History of Montgomery, Texas As Reported in Primary Sources

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The early history of Montgomery, Texas can be found in numerous primary sources in courthouses and archives in Montgomery County and around the State of Texas. “A primary source is a document, image, or artifact that provides evidence about the past. It is an original document created contemporaneously with the event under discussion. A direct quote from such a document is classified as a primary source.”¹ “Primary sources were either created during the time period being studied or were created at a later date by a participant in the events being studied (as in the case of memoirs). They reflect the viewpoint of a participant or observer. Primary sources enable the researcher to get as close as possible to what actually happened during an historical event or time period.”²

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 1831.³ Settlers who received Leagues of land (4, 428.4 acres) in this area included: Archibald Hodge, Mary Corner, James Pevehouse, 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.⁴

John Corner received his League of land on May 10, 1831.⁵ The John Corner League is important to our study because the town of Montgomery will be founded there in 1837.⁶ 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.⁷ Jacob Shannon, an early settler, referred to this area as the Lake Creek Settlement in a document as early as 1833.⁸ This area was also commonly referred to as the Precinct of Lake Creek, the District of Lake Creek or simply Lake Creek.⁹

In 1831, William C. Clark purchased 600 acres of land from John Corner in the northwestern part of the John Corner League.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² The settlers knew Shepperd’s store as “the store of William W. Shepperd on Lake Creek.”¹³ Shepperd’s store was also the first post office in the settlement.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ It was a common practice to name new towns in the early Republic of Texas for well-known places back in the United States.¹⁶ W. W. Shepperd and J. W. Moody named the town ‘Montgomery.’¹⁷

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? Previously, 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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 1812.²⁰ Sam Houston

(the President of Texas in 1837) fought as an officer with Lemuel Montgomery in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.²¹

On July 8, 1837, the names “Montgomery” and “town of Montgomery” appeared in print for the first time in an advertisement in the *Telegraph and Texas Register* newspaper published in Houston, Texas.²² In this July 8, 1837 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” [county seat] of the new county.²³

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.²⁴ 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, 1837.²⁵ The county of Montgomery took its name from the town of Montgomery.

Shortly after the Montgomery County was created, the first county seat of Montgomery County was located at the original site of the town of Montgomery that had been founded in July of 1837. 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 1838.²⁶

It is very important to note here that the town of Montgomery was developed in two phases. The first was the “old town under the hill” along the creek that became known as Town Creek (founded by Shepperd in association with Moody in July 1837). The second was the “new town on the hill” (developed by Shepperd between Feb. 26 - March 1, 1838).

As we have seen, the original town of Montgomery was founded where W. W. Shepperd lived and operated his store on the two hundred acres of land that Shepperd had purchased from William C. Clark in 1835.

Shortly after the selection of the original town of Montgomery under the hill as the county seat, W. W. Shepperd bought 212 acres of land from John Corner on February 26, 1838.²⁷ These 212 acres 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.²⁸ At the same time the Commissioners voted to move “the place of the town” to these 200 acres of land.²⁹ 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. Shepperd³⁰ W. W. Shepperd sold the town of Montgomery to James McCown in October of 1839.³¹ The sale of the town was concluded in 1840 when McCown paid the remaining balance due of \$4,000 by transferring the ownership of seven slaves to W. W. Shepperd.³² In 1848, the town of Montgomery was incorporated.³³ To learn more about the early history of Montgomery and see scans of the primary documents cited in this paper, visit http://texashistorypage.com/Early_History_of_Montgomery_County,_Texas.html.

A history, whose author draws conclusions from other than primary sources or secondary sources actually based on primary sources, is by definition fiction and not history at all.

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- ¹ Robert C. Williams, *The Historians' Toolbox: A Student's Guide to the Theory and Craft of History*, (2007, Armonk, New York, M. E. Sharpe), 56.
- ² University of California Berkeley Library, *Finding Historical Primary Sources*, "What are Primary Sources," Retrieved November 25, 2010, <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/instruct/guides/primarysources.html>
- ³ *An Abstract of the Original Titles of Record in the General Land Office, Printed in Accordance with a Resolution of the House of Representatives, Passed 24th May 1838*, Houston, National Banner Office-Niles & Co., Printers, 1838, pages 2-3, 12-13, 20-23, 28-29, 36-43, 46-47.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 12-13.
- ⁶ Deed from William C. Clark to Wm. W. Shepperd, 7 February 1838, Montgomery County Deed Book A: 29-32, Conroe, Texas. "Montgomery" Advertisement, *Telegraph and Texas Register* newspaper, 8 July 1837, Vol. II, No. 25, page 3. Warranty Deed from William W. Shepperd and Mary Steptoe Shepperd to James McCown, 14 Jan. 1840, Montgomery County, Deed Book E, 255-258, Conroe, Texas.
- ⁷ Land Transaction J. M. Springer to Thomas Chatham, January 13, 1834, *Stephen F. Austin's Register of Families*, Texas General Land Office, Book 2: 7. Also see http://texashistorypage.com/Lake_Creek_Settlement.html.
- ⁸ Articles of Agreement from Jacob Shannon to Rutha Miller, 11 August 1833, Montgomery County Clerk, Deed Book N: 254, Conroe, Texas.
- ⁹ Deed from Margaret Shannon to Charles Garrett, 17 September 1835, Montgomery County Deed Book F: 65-66, Conroe, Texas. Affidavit of Raleigh Rogers, April 21, 1837, Texas State Library and Archives, "Republic Claims," Claim #: 954, Reel #: 89, Frame: 544, Austin, Texas. More than 70 primary source documents have now been located that prove conclusively the existence of the Lake Creek Settlement.
- ¹⁰ Deed John Corner to William Clark, 15 September 1835, Montgomery County Deed Book B, pages 317-319, Conroe, Texas.
- ¹¹ Deed from William C. Clark to Wm. W. Shepperd, 15 Sept. 1835, Montgomery County Clerk, Deed Book A: 29-32.
- ¹² See letter Edmund B. Stewart to Mrs. J. W. Brosig, 7 July 1922: "W. W. Shepperd was the first to have a store at the old town of Montgomery under the hill."
- ¹³ Deed from William Busby to William F. Bowen, 18 June 1837, Washington County Deed, Book A: 177, Brenham, Texas. Deed from William M. Rankin to Daniel L. Richardson, June 1837, Montgomery County Clerk, Deed Book F: 12-14, Conroe, Texas.
- ¹⁴ James M. Day (comp.), *Post Office Papers of the Republic of Texas, 1836-1839*, (2 vols., Austin, Texas State Library, 1966), I: 66, 70-71 and 168.
- ¹⁵ *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 8 July 1837, Vol. II, No. 25, p. 3. For a much more detailed description of the founding of the town, see http://texashistorypage.com/Indian_Trading_Post_-_Montgomery,_Texas.html.
- ¹⁶ As an example, Huntsville, Texas was named after Huntsville, Alabama.
- ¹⁷ Prior to advertisement in the *Telegraph*, the settlement where the town of Montgomery was founded had been known as the Lake Creek Settlement, District of Lake Creek, Precinct of Lake Creek or simply Lake Creek and the specific location where the town was founded had been known as "the store of William W. Shepperd on Lake Creek."
- ¹⁸ Texas State Library and Archives, Box 100/1359.4. Moody was nominated by President Sam Houston for Auditor and approved unanimously by the Senate on 20 Dec. 1836. See http://texashistorypage.com/John_Wyatt_Moody.html.
- ¹⁹ Montgomery County, Alabama, *Original Minutes Montgomery County Court, Alabama Territory 1818*.
- ²⁰ Marquis James, *The Raven: A Biography of Sam Houston*, (New York, Bobbs-Merrill, 1929), page 33.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 8 July 1837, Vol. II, No. 25, p. 3.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ Washington County legal documents, Text, [1837]; digital images, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph32375>; accessed November 28, 2010), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Star of the Republic Museum, Washington, Texas., Sequences 3-8. The originals are located in the Star of the Republic Museum, Washington, Texas. Also see *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 16 December 1837, Vol. III, No. 1, p. 1.
- ²⁵ H. P. N. Gammel (comp.) *Laws of Texas*, (2 vols.; Austin: Gammel Book Co., 1838), II: 33-34. "An Act Creating the county of Montgomery."
- ²⁶ Mary Corner to Julia T. Stewart, 18 February 1838, Montgomery County Clerk, Deed Book A: 11-15, Conroe, Tx.
- ²⁷ Deed from John Corner to Wm. W. Shepperd, 26 February 1838, Montgomery County Deed Book A: 21-28, Conroe, Texas.
- ²⁸ Donation from W. W. Shepperd to Montgomery County, 1 March 1838, Montgomery County Clerk, Deed Book E: 285, Conroe, Texas. Also see the "Plan of the town of Montgomery, January 1, 1838." A copy of this original plot or map of the town of Montgomery (front and back) is available for viewing at the Nat Hart Davis Museum in Montgomery, Texas. See the reverse of this map for the original donation from Shepperd to the county.
- ²⁹ *Minutes of the Montgomery County Commissioners' Court, 1838-1845*, Montgomery County Clerk, 1 March 1838, p. 1.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ³¹ Release of Mortgage W. W. Shepperd to James McCown, 20 Nov. 1840, Montgomery County Deed, Book F: 1-2.
- ³² *Ibid.* These slaves were Carter, Syphax, Abner, Caroline, Betsy, Bill and _____ children of Caroline and Betsy.
- ³³ H. P. N. Gammel (comp.) *The Laws of Texas, 1822-1897*, (10 vols.; Austin: Gammel Book Co., 1898), III: 355-356. "Chapter 191. "An Act to Incorporate the Town of Montgomery."