

# Marking Fire History in State Historical Markers Of Harris County and Houston, Texas

Compiled and edited by Will Howard, 2014

## INTRODUCTION

**Herein please find the texts of about forty** Texas Historical Commission markers in Harris County that relate to “fire” history. Some markers note a particular fire-fighting unit or station. Most contain a reference to a fire or a burning of structure, mostly churches. A few are connected to home fireplaces and others refer to military applications. The RTHL designation signals that the marker is a “Recorded Texas Historic Landmark,” i.e., a structure of historical significance in itself as well as its historical site use.

**They are arranged** here in the booklet by the significant “fire” date with underlining bringing your attention to the point of interest in time. **They are also indexed** alphabetically by a keyword (often the first) in the marker title. Finally, they are indexed by general category: Fire-fighting units, Church fires, Commercial structure fires, Hospital fires, School fires, Social Club fires, General fires, Fireplaces, Fuel sources, Gun Powder & Armories. This compilation is up to date to almost 2015.

## THE MARKERS

### **Matthew Burnett Homesite - 1836**

East of Telge Rd. on Pleasant Grove St., Cypress, Harris Co Comm Pct 3

Marker Text: Texas army camp - April 16, 1836. Matthew Burnett (1795-1842) and his wife, Sarah (Simmons) (1797-1852), came to Texas from Arkansas in 1831 and settled south of here on Cypress Creek. Their home was near the "Harrisburg Road" which stretched 15 miles northwest to a crossroads at the home of their closest neighbor, Abram Roberts, and, in the other direction, 25 miles southeast to Harrisburg.

The interim government of the Republic of Texas stayed here briefly on March 22, 1836, while enroute to establish the Republic's new capital at Harrisburg. The Texas army, 1100 men under the command of Sam Houston, stopped here about dusk on April 16, 1836, after turning southeast at the Robert's crossroads earlier in the day. During their overnight stay they consumed most of Burnett's livestock and grains, and burned fence rails for fuel. The next morning the Texas army departed for Harrisburg. Four days later, on April 21, they routed the Mexican army at the Battle of San Jacinto, winning Texas independence from Mexico.

Having fled the area in the episode known as the "Runaway Scrape," the Burnetts returned after learning of the victory at San Jacinto. In the late 1830s and 1840s their home became a prominent landmark and well-known tavern on the road to the city of Houston.

## **Samuel McCarley Homesite - 1836**

A J Foyt Drive & FM 2920 (Waller-Tomball Rd), Cypress, Harris Co Comm Pct 3

Marker Text: Texas Army Camp - April 15, 1836 Samuel McCarley (1775-1838), his wife Celia (1794-1873), and their ten children settled near here on Spring Creek in 1831. By 1836 the McCarley home was located on a well-traveled road linking Washington-on-the-Brazos (30 mi. NW) with Harrisburg (40 mi. SE). Their neighbor, Abraham Roberts, lived about three miles east at a fork in the road. One fork led east to the Trinity River and the other southeast to Harrisburg.

On April 15, 1836, the Texas army led by General Sam Houston left camp near the Brazos River and marched east, arriving here at dusk. Overnight, Houston's 1100 hungry soldiers consumed cattle, corn, and bacon belonging to the McCarleys and burned about 4,000 of their fence rails for fuel.

According to post-war accounts, many in the Texas army strongly suspected that Houston was unwilling to engage the Mexican army, known to be advancing toward Harrisburg. On April 16, however, Houston and the Texas soldiers took the Harrisburg Road at the fork and on April 21 defeated the Mexican army at the Battle of San Jacinto to win Texas independence. Samuel McCarley died in 1838 and in 1858 the state of Texas awarded his widow, Celia, \$460 as compensation for damages caused by the Texas army.

## **Old Harrisburg - 1836**

800 blk Lawndale at Frio Houston, Harris Co Comm Pct 2

Marker Text: Early Texas port and trading post. Site of state's first steam saw, grist mills and railroad terminal. Town founded, 1826, by John R. Harris, who was first settler in 1823. Became shipping center for early colonies, established when Texas was part of Mexico, with boats carrying cargo to and from Texas ports and points in the United States and Mexico. Became the seat of government of the Republic of Texas, March 22 - April 13, 1836, when David G. Burnet, President of the ad interim government and several of his cabinet resided near here in the home of Mrs. Jane Harris (site marked), widow of town founder. Here President Burnet adopted the flag for the Texas Navy. In 1835, local resident, Mrs. Sarah Dodson, had made here the first tri-color lone star flag. General Santa Anna attacked the town with 750 Mexican soldiers on April 16 attempting to capture Burnet and his cabinet. The whole town was burned. After Texas gained its independence at nearby San Jacinto, the town was rebuilt and again thrived. The Buffalo, Bayou, Brazos and Colorado, first railroad in Texas began here in 1852 and by the Civil War made the town a Confederate rail center. Became a part of Houston, by annexation, in 1926.

## **New Washington - 1836**

1415 East Main Street & N. Wilson Road, Morgan's Point, Harris Co Comm Pct 2

Marker Text: Located at the junction of Buffalo Bayou and San Jacinto Bay, the townsite of New Washington was settled by Col. James Morgan (1786-1866), who bought 1600 acres of land in the area in 1835. A native of Philadelphia, Morgan had come to Texas in 1830 and served at various times and places as merchant, civic leader, and land agent. While away from his home, serving as a colonel during the Texas Revolution, Mexican troops burned the town of New Washington.

After the war, Morgan and others rebuilt New Washington, and the townsite began to flourish. Morgan realized, however, that it could never compete with the growth of nearby Houston, and during the 1850s he began to promote plans for a channel along Buffalo Bayou that would increase the region's trade potential. That dream was completed in 1876 with the dredging of the Houston Ship Channel by steamship tycoon Charles Morgan.

As Houston continued to grow, New Washington was recognized only as a major bend for the ship traffic along the bayou. Now known as Morgan's Point, the townsite was incorporated in 1949 and stands as a reminder of the early commercial history of Harris County.

## **Texan Capture of Mexican Dispatches – San Jacinto Campaign - 1836**

4900 Bellaire Blvd at Second Street, Bellaire, Harris Co Comm Pct 3

Marker Text: After the fall of the Alamo on March 6, 1836, Gen. Sam Houston led the Texan army in retreat from Gonzales. The Mexican army under Gen. Santa Anna followed eastward from San Antonio. On April 14, while Houston's army was north of him, Santa Anna led a division of his army from the Brazos River near present Richmond to Harrisburg. He crossed present southwest Harris County, then an uninhabited prairie, and reached Harrisburg (12 miles east of this site) on April 15. The Mexicans burned Harrisburg on April 17 and continued marching east.

Houston's army, arriving at Buffalo Bayou opposite Harrisburg on April 18, found the town in ruins, but did not know the whereabouts of the Mexican army. That day, Texan scouts led by Erastus "Deaf" Smith captured three Mexicans, including Capt. Miguel Bachiller, a courier, and a guide in this vicinity. The prisoners and their dispatches revealed the location, size, and plans of the Mexican army. With this vital intelligence, Houston intercepted Santa Anna's March on April 20 and defeated his division with a surprise attack on April 21 at the San Jacinto River. The Battle of San Jacinto ended the Texas Revolution and secured the independent Republic of Texas.

## **Site of the Home of General Sidney Sherman - 1853**

8300 blk of Magnolia Street, across railroad track, Houston, Harris Co Comm Pct 2

Marker Text: Site of the home of General Sidney Sherman 1805 - - 1873, Commander of the left wing of the Army at the Battle of San Jacinto - Member of the Texas Congress, 1842-1843 - - Builder of the first Texas Railroad - - - This house was burned in 1853.

**Mrs. Margaret McCormick Homesite - 1854**  
2012 Miller Cut-Off Road, La Porte. Harris Co Comm Pct 2

Marker Text: On this site on April 21, 1836, stood the home of Mrs. Margaret McCormick whose husband, Arthur McCormick, died here in 1825 - Mrs. McCormick lost her life here in 1854 when the home was burned.

**Sampson Masonic Lodge # 231 A. F. & A. M. – 1860s**  
114 Avenue D, Highlands, Harris Co Comm Pct 2

Marker Text: Henry Sampson (1823-1885) moved to Houston in 1842 from South Carolina and affiliated with the Holland Masonic Lodge in Houston. Along with other leadership roles, Sampson served both as the Worshipful Master of the Holland Lodge and Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Texas. In 1859, sixteen men submitted a petition to Grand Master Sampson to begin a new lodge in Lynchburg, and when the charter was granted on June 16, 1859, the members chose to name their lodge in his honor. The members met at a log cabin constructed specifically for lodge use on property that belonged to the lodge's first Worshipful Master, M. M. Michan. This first lodge was destroyed by fire, and when subsequent lodges in Lynchburg were destroyed by hurricanes in 1875, 1877 and 1900, the lodge was moved to Crosby.

In 1951 Sampson Lodge again relocated to 114 Avenue D in Highlands, and the lodge's activities began to reflect the importance of community outreach. Sampson Lodge recognizes outstanding community members with the Community Builder Award, and members participate in Highlands Clean Up Day, the Highlands Jamboree and parade, the lighting of the community Christmas tree, and the annual Rotarian fish fry. In 1999, the lodge began hosting an annual brisket fundraiser, and proceeds fund numerous local charities and organizations.

Sampson Masonic Lodge No. 231 A.F. & A.M. celebrated its sesquicentennial year in 2009, and continues to preserve, promote, and diffuse the principles of Free Masonry throughout its community.

**Confederate Powder Mill - 1861**  
14992 Brown Road, Spring Creek Park, Tomball, Harris Co Comm Pct 4

Marker Text: Established in 1861. Cannon powder for the Confederate Army was made here until 1863, when the mill was destroyed by an explosion, killing William Bloecher, Adolph Hillegeist and Peter Wunderlich, employees of the mill.

**First Presbyterian Church of Houston – 1862 and 1932**  
5300 Main Street, Houston, Harris Co Comm Pct 1

Marker Text: Organized March 31 (Easter Sunday), 1839, in Senate Chamber, Capitol of Republic of Texas, Main at Texas, by the Rev. Wm. Youel Allen, missionary from the United States, and eleven members. James Burke was elected ruling elder. Services of worship and a