

COVERT PARK

Over 70 years ago the Covert family of Austin gave the tract of land on which Mount Bonnell stands to the people of Travis County for use as a park. Known as Covert Park at Mount Bonnell, the site was dedicated in memory of the family patriarch, Frank M. Covert, Senior, a pioneer Austin businessman.

In 1972 ownership of Covert Park at Mount Bonnell was transferred from Travis County to the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department. In 2010, Covert Park was adopted by the West Point Society of Central Texas under PARD's "Adopt-a-Park" program.



The original limestone tablet commemorating the gift has disintegrated. The Covert family, working with the West Point Society and the Austin Parks Foundation, has supported the development of a

plan to privately fund the installation of a permanent granite marker celebrating the gift of the park to the people, and to improve the area around the marker with additional funding from the Austin Parks Foundation and Austin City Limits.



Initially submitted to the Parks and Recreation Department for approval in January, 2011, the plan is still under review and unapproved as of March, 2013.

A conceptual design for possible future improvement of the viewing area atop the mountain has been developed by O'Connell Robertson of Austin.



EXISTING VIEWING AREA

IMPROVED VIEWING AREA

West Point Society of Central Texas, Joseph Bonnell, and Mount Bonnell

In 2005 Joseph Bonnell was recognized by the Texas Legislature as a Hero of the Texas War for Independence. An honor guard from the US 3rd Infantry, the ceremonial unit responsible for Arlington Cemetery, led a memorial ceremony for Captain Bonnell at Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia.



In March, 2010, the West Point Society of Central Texas in collaboration with the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum celebrated Joseph Bonnell Day. General Patrick Finnegan, the Dean of the United States Military Academy, spoke in commemoration of Joseph Bonnell's exemplary service to the United States and to Texas.



Also in 2010, the WPSCT adopted Covert Park and assumed responsibility for organizing clean up days staffed by volunteers and supervising recreational events like the annual Austin Oyster Race checkpoint at Mt Bonnell



By January, 2011, the WPSCT raised enough through donations and grants from the Austin Parks Foundation to hire a professional arborist to reduce overgrown vegetation and restore views from the mountaintop, and to propose various enhancements to visitor amenities at the park.



As of March, 2013, construction of an information kiosk, partially funded by the WPSCT and Keep Austin Beautiful is complete. Other privately funded enhancements with a value in excess of \$120,000 proposed in January 2011 by the West Point Society and developed by O'Connell Robertson are still on hold pending approval by the city of Austin.



Mount Bonnell Projects



Joseph Bonnell, West Point Class of 1825
Captain, US Army and Army of Texas
Hero of the Texas War of Independence

The West Point Society of Central Texas

An alumni organization representing over 400 West Point graduates who reside in Central Texas

FOR INFORMATION
CONTACT: frebo3@yahoo.com

March 2013

Visit http://www.west-point.org/joseph_bonnell/

Mount Bonnell in the Handbook of Texas*

"Some sources credit George Bonnell as the namesake for Mount Bonnell on the Colorado River and that Gen. Edward Burleson may have named the mountain in 1838, but other historians have also speculated that the Travis County landmark may have been named for army officer Joseph Bonnell by Albert Sidney Johnston."

*A publication of the Texas State Historical Association. See <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/rjm28>

Mount Bonnell, WPSCT, and The Texas Historical Commission

In 1969 the Texas State Historical Survey Committee, charged with erecting 5000 historical markers in only five years, erected a marker at Mount Bonnell based on two pages of sketchy evidence, attributing the name to George Bonnell, a newspaperman who had arrived in Texas after the war ended, lived briefly in Houston and Austin, and was killed on the Meir Expedition in 1841.

In 2003 the West Point Society of Central Texas requested that the Texas Historical Commission clarify the fact that George Bonnell did NOT fight in the war, and consider evidence that the mountain's name-sake was more likely Joseph Bonnell. That request was denied without a public hearing in 2005.

On August 22, 2011, the West Point Society submitted a request to the THC for reconsideration of the 2005 decision based on a new and extensive study presented in a 26 page narrative history citing 75 primary and secondary sources and endorsed by the Texas State Historical Association, the Sons of the Republic of Texas and the Director of the Texas Military Forces Museum.

On the afternoon of that same day that request was rejected by the THC without benefit of a public hearing, evidently in violation of the Texas Administrative Procedures Act.

As of March, 2013 the issue of whether or not a hearing must be held is the subject of ongoing litigation, initiated by the West Point Society of Central Texas.



BONNELL, JOSEPH (1802-1840)



Joseph Bonnell, an army officer during the Texas Revolution, graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York in the class of 1825. Assigned to Fort Jesup on the Texas-Louisiana border from 1831 to 1838, Bonnell distinguished himself as an official witness to the Caddo Indian Treaty of 1835. He discovered wrongdoing by the U.S. agent and provided a deposition on behalf of the Caddo Indians, which went to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1850 in *United States v. Brooks*.

Major General Sam Houston selected Joseph Bonnell to be his aide-de-camp and commissioned him as a captain in the Regular Army of Texas on March 10, 1836.

Prior to the Battle of San Jacinto, reports of an Indian uprising that threatened the Texas Army reached Maj. Gen. Edmund P. Gaines at Ft Jesup. He ordered Joseph Bonnell to go alone into Texas to persuade the Caddo Indians to remain peaceful. Bonnell found Caddo Chief Cortes and convinced him to have the warriors return peacefully to their villages.

This success prevented the Texas Army from being attacked by Indians on its march to San Jacinto and earned Joseph Bonnell recognition as a Hero of the Texas War of Independence.

In 1839, before the new capital of Texas was established in Austin, Albert Sidney Johnston, then Texas Secretary of War wrote, "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." Though sources have long credited George Bonnell as the mountain's namesake, it is quite likely that Johnston named Mount Bonnell in present-day Austin for his friend and fellow West Point graduate Joseph Bonnell.

In 2012 the WPSCT adopted the city of La Porte, Texas, site of the Battle of San Jacinto, in honor of Captain Joseph Bonnell.

George Armstrong Custer & Mount Bonnell

George Armstrong Custer, West Point class of 1861, won distinction in the Civil War as a cavalry officer. At the end of the war he was assigned to duty in Austin. Custer's wife, Elizabeth travelled to Austin with him. Her *Tenting on the Plains* (1887) presents a charming picture of their stay in Texas. Custer's headquarters in Austin was established at the Blind Asylum, located on the "Little Campus" of the University of Texas.



"In our daily rides we found the country about Austin delightful...Indeed, there was one high hill, called Mount Brunnel, where we had picnics and enjoyed the fine view, far and near, taking one of the bands of the regular regiments from the North that joined us soon after our arrival...The band played the "Anvil Chorus," and the sound descended through the valley grandly. The river, filled with sand-bars and ugly on close examination, looked like a silver ribbon. At that height, the ripened cotton, at certain seasons of the year, looked like fields of foam. The thermometer was over eighty before we left the lowlands; but at the altitude to which we climbed the air was cool."
Elizabeth B. Custer, *Tenting on the Plains* (1887)

<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fcu36>

