

BONNELL, JOSEPH (1802 - 1840). Joseph Bonnell, an Army officer during the Texas Revolution, son of Charles Bonnell and Mary Brehault Bonnell, was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on August 4, 1802.¹ Joseph entered the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York in 1821 and graduated on July 1, 1825 in the 37-man West Point Class of 1825.²

On April 23, 1831, Lieutenant Bonnell, stationed with the 3rd Infantry Regiment at Fort Jesup, Louisiana, married Anna Elizabeth Noble in Adams County, Mississippi.³ He brought his bride to Fort Jesup, near the US border with Mexico.

In 1835, 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 ultimately went to the U.S. Supreme Court.⁴

Major General Sam Houston, Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces in Texas, selected Joseph Bonnell to be his Aide-de-Camp.⁵ This appointment was approved by the Governor and General Council of Texas by Resolution on November 22, 1835.⁶ Joseph Bonnell was commissioned as a Captain in the List of Officers in the Regular Army of Texas which was issued March 10, 1836.⁷ This list contains such famous names as Travis and Fannin.

Prior to the Battle of San Jacinto, reports of an Indian uprising in Texas had been widely reported.⁸ On April 7, 1836, two weeks before the Battle of San Jacinto, US Major General Edmund P. Gaines selected Joseph Bonnell to go alone into Texas to persuade the Caddo Indians to remain in peace.⁹ The Caddo Indians were formidable because of their influence with other tribes.¹⁰

Bonnell reached Caddo villages in East Texas on April 11, 1836 and found them empty of men. Bonnell reported that “The squaws stated that the warriors had all gone to the prairies in consequence of what Manuel Flores had told them, viz: that Americans were going to kill them.” Flores, an agent of Mexico, had urged the Indians to join him in fighting Americans in Texas. Bonnell subsequently

found Caddo Chief Cortes and negotiated with him to have the warriors return to their villages and live in peace.¹¹

Joseph Bonnell's successful mission with the Indians prevented General Sam Houston's Army from being ambushed by a surprise Indian attack as it proceeded from its encampment on the west bank of the Brazos River opposite Groce's Landing on its march toward San Jacinto. Joseph Bonnell did a great service for Texas during its war of independence.

General Sam Houston's only weapon during the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836 was a sword given to him by his friend, Joseph Bonnell.¹² Joseph was the only individual who was a regular army officer in both the United States Army and the Texas Army at the same time. He is unique in Texas history.

In the summer of 1836, when General Houston returned to his home in Nacogdoches after convalescing from his San Jacinto wound, he found his friend Joseph Bonnell in Nacogdoches, assigned there by the U.S. Army to help Texas with Indian problems.¹³ Joseph's friend, Albert Sidney Johnston, was also in Nacogdoches to confer with Houston about joining the Texas Army.¹⁴ Bonnell and Johnston were Cadets together at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York.¹⁵ Bonnell was a Cadet officer while Johnston was a Cadet Sergeant.¹⁶

Johnston entered the Texas Army as a private and rose in rank to become the Commanding General and later the Secretary of War of the Republic of Texas. In 1839, before the new capital of Texas was established in Austin, Secretary of War 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."¹⁷ The mountain on the Colorado River was important to the Texas Army as a high ground defensive position when establishing the Republic's new capital of Austin.

Captain Joseph Bonnell died on September 27, 1840 at the home of his brother, Samuel Bonnell, in Philadelphia.¹⁸ He is buried in Philadelphia's Laurel Hill Cemetery.¹⁹

¹ Application letters of Joseph Bonnell on file in the United States Military Academy Library, West Point, NY 10996.

² Register of Graduates, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, published annually by the Association of Graduates.

³ Marriage License, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

⁴ U.S. v. Brooks, 51 U.S. 445, 449 (1850).

⁵ Butler-Gunsaulus Collection, Box 2, Folder 48, Houston, Samuel to Joseph Bonnell, November 22, 1835, Special Collection Research Center, University of Chicago Library, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637.

⁶ Gemmel, Laws of Texas, I, 905-1062; John Holmes Jenkins, III, Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836, Presidial Press, Austin, 1973, Volume 9, page 385, Document 4366.

⁷ Alex Dienst Papers, 2.325/v.5, University of Texas at Austin; Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 5, page 42, Document 2287. Bonnell is incorrectly spelled “Bonnel” or “Bonnsel.”

⁸ F. Todd Smith, The Caddo Indians, Texas A&M Press, College Station, 1995, page 128; John H. Reagan, “Expulsion of the Cherokees from East Texas,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1, July 1897, pages 38-39; Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 5, page 144, Document 2370, Raquet to Chairman, March 19, 1836; Volume 5, page 153, Document 2388, A. Hotchkiss Report, San Augustine, March 21, 1836; also see Volume 5, pages 429-430, Document 2703, Depositions of C.H. Sims and William Sims, April 11, 1836.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ The Caddo Indians, supra, page 127.

¹¹ This entire paragraph taken from the 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; Bonnell’s deposition on Manuel Flores is at U.S. and Mexico, 1828-1838, supra, H.E.D. 351, 1838, 811-12; Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 7, page 148, Document 3416, Bonnell deposition.

¹² Charles Edwards Lester, The Life of Sam Houston, J.C. Derby publisher, 1855, page 153; at <http://www.kbsb.com/reward/The_Live_of_Sam_Houston_p153.pdf>.

¹³ Paul N. Spellman, Forgotten Texas Hero, Texas A&M Press, College Station, 1999, pages 20-23; James L. Haley, Sam Houston, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 2002, page 161; Papers of the Texas Revolution, supra, Volume 7, page 484, Document 3738, Bonnell to Gaines, Nacogdoches, July 19, 1836; United States and Mexico ... (Wash., 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., H.E.D. 351, 1838), 796-97; Volume 8, page 71, Document 3826, Menard to All, July 30, 1836; United States and Mexico ... (Wash., 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., H.E.D. 351, 1838), 800.

¹⁴ Charles P. Roland, Albert Sidney Johnston, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1964, 2nd printing 1990, page 54.

¹⁵ Register of Graduates, supra. Joseph Bonnell, Cullum No. 418, graduated with the Class of 1825 having 37 graduates. Albert Sidney Johnston, Cullum No. 436, graduated with the Class of 1826 having 41 graduates.

¹⁶ USMA Post Orders, Vol. 3, 1823-1825, June 25, 1825, 1st Class Cadet Bonnell to Cadet Lieutenant; 2nd Class Cadet Johnston to Cadet Sergeant Major.

¹⁷ Letter from Albert Sidney Johnston to George Hancock of Louisville, Kentucky, April 21, 1839, Albert Sidney Johnston Papers, Folder No. 14, Tulane University Library, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁸ *North American Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, September 29, 1840, page 2; *New York Herald*, September 30, 1840.

¹⁹ On Memorial Day weekend of 2005, an Honor Guard of his former unit, the 3rd Infantry Regiment (“Old Guard”), now the ceremonial unit at Arlington Cemetery, gave Captain Joseph Bonnell, United States Army, full military honors to dedicate his grave marker and historical marker.