

# The Fight For The Namesake Of Mount Bonnell

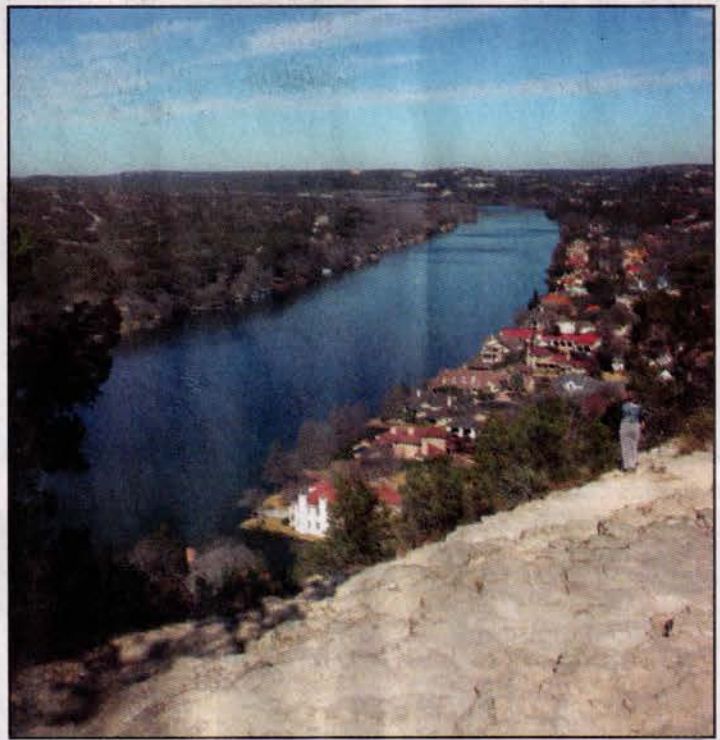
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an aide-de-camp and personal friend to Sam Houston.

(Joseph graduated from West Point in 1825, one year ahead of Albert Sidney Johnston, the Texas Republic's Secretary of War.)

The marker was erected in May 1969 by the State Historical Survey Committee as part of the five year RAMPS (recording, appreciation, marking, preservation, and surveying of Texas history) program tasked with erecting 5000 markers in five years or four per working day.

In October 2004 the Travis County Historical Commission, after hearing the West Point Society's case, voted to recommend to the Texas Historical Commission (THC) that both Joseph and George be included on the marker.



No argument that the view from the top of Mount Bonnell is beautiful and inspiring.

The THC rejected the application in October 2005 without a public hearing, citing a lack of "conclusive" evidence and consultations by unspecified colleagues and historical organizations.

After a number of legal maneuvers earlier in the year, The West Point Society filed a petition in State District Court on September 22nd, 2011 to require the THC to conduct a public hearing on the matter.

The Attorney General's office filed a plea to the jurisdiction approved by Judge Rhonda Hurley on February 9th, 2012 stating that the society's representative had no standing to bring suit.

The West Point Society submitted an appeal on the ruling to the Third Court of Appeals on August 10th 2012, which is where the situation now rests.

Both the West Point Society and the Travis County Historical Society have given

me material backing their side of the case.

To be fair and balanced, I am going to present a few points for each side.

### George's case (from the Travis County Historical Society)

George Bonnell arrived in Nacogdoches from Columbus, Mississippi, in August 1836, with a group of 35 volunteers that he had recruited for service in Texas. General Sam Houston made him a captain of his men and ordered them to remain at Nacogdoches to help secure that area.

Bonnell and his men had arrived too late to participate in the battle at San Jacinto. But while the victory confirmed the new republic, there was no immediate promise that the Texians were in complete control of their destiny.

Peace was not assured until annexation in 1846 and



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the U.S. military victory over Mexico in 1848.

In January of 1840, Bonnell began publication of the Austin Texas Sentinel.

In George's book "Topographical Description of Texas, to which is added an account of the Indian tribes," we find — "Four miles above the city, upon the east side of the river, is a high peak, called Mount Bonnell. From the top of the mountain there is a perpendicular precipice of seven hundred feet down to the water."

The editor of the book, John Henry Brown, was an employee at the Sentinel, George's newspaper. Brown later edited The Encyclopedia of the New West, published in Marshall, Texas, in 1881. His entry for George Bonnell

states: "In his honor, in 1838, General Edward Burleson bestowed the name (yet retained) of Bonnell on the now pleasant resort and beautiful mount four miles above Austin."

## Joseph's case (from the West Point Society)

Joseph Bonnell fought in the war for Texas independence, notably quelling an uprising of about 1700 warriors threatening Sam Houston's small Texas Army as it was closing with the Mexican Army for the Battle of San Jacinto.

In April 1839, Albert Sidney Johnston, another West Point graduate and the Secretary of War of the Republic

of Texas, sent his agent Edwin Waller to central Texas "to commence the building of the city of Austin at the foot of the mountain on the Colorado."

Their contention is that "Johnston had the means, motive and opportunity to name the 'mountain on the Colorado' in honor of his fellow West Point graduate, comrade-in-arms and hero of the Texas Revolution, Joseph Bonnell."

The West Point Society submitted an application in December 2003 to change the marker, contending that "It was named for Captain Joseph Bonnell by Secretary of War Albert Sidney Johnston in June 1839 for his comrade-in-arms when he supervised the construction of the capital and its defenses."

Here are the West Pointers'

words on the crux of the matter. "George moved to Austin in October 1839, began printing the Sentinel in February and published a book in April 1840 stating 'above the city of Austin is a high peak called Mount Bonnell' without citing the origin of the name as he had otherwise done in numerous instances throughout the book. The peak had clearly been named prior to his establishing any reputation of note in the community."

I contacted the Texas Historical Commission, but they declined to comment on the matter since it "involves pending litigation."

Stay tuned — this story isn't over.