

Reconsidering the Historical Marker on Mount Bonnell

CONTEXT

Newly available information justifies reconsideration of an earlier request to the Texas Historical Commission to modify the Mount Bonnell name attribution found on the marker installed on the site in 1969. The issue is summarized in the current entry for George Bonnell found in the Handbook of Texas Online:

*“Some sources credit George Bonnell as the namesake for Mount Bonnell on the Colorado River and that Gen. Edward Burlleson 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.**”¹*

Information principally gathered from undocumented sources in 1969 led to the conclusion that Mount Bonnell was named for George Bonnell (?-1842), author, publisher and militiaman who came to Texas after the War for Texas Independence had ended, moved to Austin in late 1839, and was killed in 1842. More recent discovery of additional information indicates that the mountain was most likely named in 1839 by Albert Sidney Johnston (1803-1862), the Texas Secretary of War², to honor his colleague and fellow West Point graduate³ Joseph Bonnell (1802-1840). Joseph Bonnell was an officer in the Texas Army during the War for Independence⁴, a personal friend⁵ and Aide de Camp to General Houston⁶ (1793-1863), and an acknowledged hero of the Texas Revolution, recognized by the Texas Legislature⁷ for his valor in events leading up to the climactic Battle of San Jacinto.

We have amassed what we believe to be overwhelming and legally conclusive⁸ circumstantial evidence supporting attribution of the name to Joseph Bonnell. The highlights of our findings are listed below and are also discussed in a brief video on the Joseph Bonnell web site at http://www.west-point.org/joseph_bonnell/

OVERVIEW

1. For three years between 1822 and 1825 Joseph Bonnell and Albert Sidney Johnston were both members of the small Corps of Cadets stationed at West Point, the nation's

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first engineering school.⁹ There, Bonnell and Johnston served together as senior members of the Cadet chain of command. Other cadets of that era who went on to serve in the Texas Army were Joseph Cadle, class of 1824, who became a Texas artillery officer, and William Stilwell, who served with Joseph Bonnell at Fort Jesup and commanded one of the Twin Sisters at the Battle of San Jacinto.¹⁰ Also during that time Major General Edmund Gaines, later Joseph Bonnell's Commanding General on the Texas border,¹¹ served as President of the West Point Board of Visitors,¹² a body responsible for annual inspections, interviews, and evaluations of the approximately 180 members of the Corps of Cadets. Sam Houston succeeded Gaines as President of the Board of Visitors.^{13 14} Thus, at the onset of the Texas War for Independence in 1835, Joseph Bonnell, Albert Sidney Johnston, Edmund Gaines, Sam Houston and several other officers in the Texas Army had occasion to have known one another for as much as a decade, or more.

2. Joseph Bonnell was assigned to the US Army garrison on the Texas border at Ft Jesup, LA between 1831 and 1838. In 1835 he was ordered to witness a treaty between the U.S. government and the Caddo Indians and discovered wrongdoing on the part of the U.S. Agent. Lieutenant Bonnell provided a deposition on behalf of the Caddo people which ultimately went to the Supreme Court for review, cementing a relationship of mutual trust and respect with the Caddo based on Bonnell's integrity and honesty.¹⁵

3. In 1836 he began working under the direct command of General Gaines, newly appointed Commander of the Southwest Region headquartered at Ft Jesup.¹⁶ Lieutenant Bonnell became General Gaines' "chief intelligence officer," and was a prominent figure representing the US Government in managing civil and military affairs with tribal people on the Texas-Louisiana border.¹⁷

4. Bonnell's competency and value to the Texas cause was recognized by Sam Houston in 1835 and 1836 by having him appointed to his personal staff as Aide de Camp¹⁸ and commissioned as a Captain in the Texas Army¹⁹ during the War for Texas Independence.

5. Correspondence between Joseph Bonnell and General Houston in 1835 and 1836 documents that they became close personal friends as well as strong professional associates. In a December 30, 1835 letter to Houston marked "private", Joseph Bonnell discusses family matters, expresses regret that he is unable to join Houston as Aide de Camp, and provides extensive guidelines on how to organize and support an army, signing the letter as

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“Your sincere friend, J. Bonnell.” Houston’s letter to Bonnell dated January 2, 1836 has a similar familiar tone, noting that “I look anxiously for you at Headquarters – God speed you I pray – Your friend, Sam Houston.”²⁰

6. Another source documents that the sword carried by Houston at the Battle of San Jacinto was a gift from “his friend” Joseph Bonnell.²¹

7. In 1836 Lieutenant Bonnell was ordered by General Gaines to go into Texas with an interpreter to quell an Indian uprising that threatened the decimated Texas Army as it prepared for the Battle of San Jacinto.²² He found Caddo chief Cortes and determined that they had been incited to rise up by a Mexican agent, Manuel Flores. Lieutenant Bonnell persuaded the Caddo to abandon their intention to do battle with the Texans and return to their villages in peace. His report of that negotiation was forwarded by General Gaines to the President of the United States, Andrew Jackson.²³

8. In 1838 Lieutenant Bonnell was promoted to Captain and reassigned to duty with the 8th US Infantry on the northern frontier of New York State²⁴, where provisions of a new treaty with several Native American tribes were being implemented.²⁵ He died on September 27, 1840 at the home of his brother, Samuel Bonnell, in Philadelphia at the age of 38.²⁶

9. In April, 1839, Albert Sidney Johnston, trained in Topographic Engineering at West Point and then Secretary of War of the Republic of Texas, 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.”²⁷

10. Albert Sidney Johnston, Secretary of War, and Hugh McLeod, Adjutant General, were two of the first residents of Austin. A bronze plaque on the Paramount Theater in downtown Austin marks the location of Johnston’s log cabin. Johnston and McLeod were also the most senior administration officials with formal military training. McLeod, an 1835 graduate of West Point, had served with Bonnell at Ft Jesup. Johnston, with McLeod’s assistance was charged with planning and conducting the defense of Austin employing four companies of troops and available construction workers. Fundamental to planning any military operation is the timely assignment of control measures to key terrain features to include high ground for the purpose of deploying and maneuvering assigned units throughout the area of operations. The “mountain on the Colorado” was key terrain and by necessity would have been designated by an identifying name in the early planning stages.

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11. The service to the Republic of Joseph Bonnell, as a West Point colleague, brother officer in the Texas Army and Aide to General Houston would have been well known to both men. There is no documentation suggesting that George Bonnell was known to either man.

12. As the senior government official responsible for planning and building the city, to be accomplished under the direct supervision of Edwin Waller²⁸, Johnston was obviously in a position to name, or approve the naming, of “the mountain on the Colorado” as well as other terrain features in the vicinity in recognition of colleagues and associates who had rendered valuable service to the Republic, e.g., Waller Creek. By August 1839 the planning of the city was complete. Two months later, in October 1839, George Bonnell arrived in Austin.

13. Thus, based on contemporaneous source materials, Albert Sidney Johnston satisfied the three essential elements required of legally conclusive circumstantial evidence: motive, means, and opportunity, as **legal proof** (*emphasis added*) that he was responsible for naming the mountain in early 1839 in memory of Joseph Bonnell, who had recently left for his new assignment on the northern frontier.

a. MOTIVE: The immediate need to assign control measures to key terrain features, coupled with the recognition of the exceptional service to Texas of a long time colleague during the War for Independence, a friend of General Houston, and brother officer in the US and Texas Armies.

b. MEANS: As the senior executive responsible for building the city, Johnston was in a position to initiate, review and/or approve any decisions made with respect to naming terrain features in and around the city.

c. OPPORTUNITY: Johnston’s ties to Joseph Bonnell had existed since 1822, when he joined Joseph Bonnell in the small company of cadets at West Point.²⁹ There is no evidence that Johnston knew of George Bonnell at any time, before or after George Bonnell’s move to Austin in late 1839.

14. Joseph Bonnell was a hero in 1836. His heroism was acknowledged in a Resolution of the Texas Legislature in March, 2005.³⁰

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Examining the Case for George Bonnell

The current historical marker at Mount Bonnell states that it “was named for George W. Bonnell who came to Texas with others to fight for Texas Independence.”³¹ George W. Bonnell did not fight for Texas Independence, since he did not enter Texas until four months after the Battle of San Jacinto which officially ended the War for Texas Independence.³² Bonnell’s 1837 petition for reimbursement in the amount of \$875 states “that he arrived in Nacogdoches [from Mississippi] about the middle of August 1836.” His petition makes no mention of any “fight for Texas Independence.”

George W. Bonnell was a newspaperman in Columbus, Mississippi at the time of the Battle of San Jacinto which ended the fight for Texas Independence.³³ General Sam Houston wrote his official report of the battle on April 25, 1836, four days after the battle. This official report of the battle had reached newspapers all over the United States in less than two months after the battle.³⁴

A historical marker should not attempt to define an individual's state of mind or intent, nor should these be used as justification for ascribing name attribution. Stating that George W. Bonnell came to Texas to fight for Texas Independence is misleading. It wrongly infers he was a veteran soldier of the war for Texas independence, which is an affront to the memory of the real veterans of the war and their descendants. The misleading nature of the statement on the marker, given as the primary reason that the mountain was named for George W. Bonnell, is sufficient reason to favor correction of the marker.

With a misleading statement as the main reason that the mountain was named for George W. Bonnell, all of the other statements about that attribution become suspect. George W. Bonnell was the only person named Bonnell in Austin from October 1839 through 1840.³⁵ a fact which evidently led to hasty conclusions as to the naming of the peak. Conclusions without any supporting facts may be based on gossip, rumors and legends – but repeating a legend does not validate it.

The references in the files of the Texas Historical Commission for this marker are marked as Job 2755. The primary source for the history supporting this marker is the book by

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Mary Starr Barkley, *History of Travis County and Austin: 1839 -1899*, Texian Press, Waco, 1963. The referenced book was published 124 years after the mountain was named. On page 313, the book states, "The mountain northwest of Austin reputedly was named for him [George W. Bonnell] at the suggestion of a Mrs. Barker, whose name replaced the name Teulon for Mount Barker."

The word "reputedly" means according to reputation or general belief.³⁶ Reputation or general belief is a matter of judgment, which is fallible. It does not provide conclusive direct or circumstantial evidence that the mountain was named for George W. Bonnell. The alleged name switching from Mount Teulon to Mount Barker is another clue as to the accuracy of the reference material. George Teulon became editor of Samuel Whiting's newspaper, *Austin City Gazette*, in 1840, with Whiting continuing as owner and publisher.³⁷ No record can be found of any Mount Teulon. There is not even a street in Austin named Teulon. The timing of this alleged name switching of Mount Teulon and the naming of Mount Bonnell would appear to have had to occur after Mount Bonnell had been named in 1839,³⁸ therefore, this alleged naming incident by a Mrs. Barker is highly questionable. Certainly, it does not prove that the mountain was named for George W. Bonnell.

The second reference in Job 2755 is Anthony Garland Adair's 1956 book about Austin and Commodore Perry. This book was written 117 years after the naming of Mount Bonnell, and makes no comment about the name attribution of the Mountain.

Job 2755's third reference is what the 1969 Handbook of Texas said about George W. Bonnell. At the time, the Handbook of Texas was not on the internet. The entry for George W. Bonnell was found in Volume 1, page 186. It said, "Mount Bonnell, on the Colorado River near Austin, was named for him." This was an unsupported opinion citing no source.

The current Handbook of Texas Online, to its great credit, no longer includes that statement.

In summary, Job 2755 in 1969, used as a basis for justifying the content of the current marker, offered no direct conclusive evidence that Mount Bonnell was named for George W. Bonnell. This fact should be considered in the light of the Texas Historical Commission

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Guidelines for Historical Research (THC/Revised 9/2001) which caution that "The use of poorly documented secondary sources may inadvertently perpetuate erroneous information."

The Handbook of Texas suggestion that Edward Burleson may have named the peak for George W. Bonnell in 1838 is not supported by any available primary sources. The peak obviously had no name in April 1839 when Albert Sidney Johnston 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."³⁹

According to the Handbook of Texas Online, Edward Burleson was fighting Cherokee Indians in July 1839 and December 1839, making only a brief appearance in Austin on October 17, 1839 when the government of the Republic arrived.⁴⁰ Burleson had no occasion to name terrain features in the Austin area for any reason. The defense of Austin was in the hands of Secretary of War Johnston and Adjutant General McLeod. In any event, there are no credible sources providing evidence that Burleson named the peak for anyone.

George W. Bonnell was no more than one of a number of Indian Commissioners appointed by President Sam Houston, to include George W. Bonnell, Holland Coffee,⁴¹ Joseph C. Eldridge,⁴² Nathaniel Robbins,⁴³ Charles H. Sims,⁴⁴ and Jesse Watkins.⁴⁵ Appointment as an Indian Commissioner was scant justification for becoming the namesake of a mountain.

Local historian John Henry Brown (1820-1895) noted that Edward Burleson had named the mountain for George Bonnell. Brown was not in Austin in 1839 when the city was being built and the mountain was named. He was living with his uncle, James Kerr, on the Lavaca River.⁴⁶ Thus, it is unlikely that he had firsthand knowledge of events in Austin in 1839. He moved to Austin in 1840 to work on Jacob Cruger and George Bonnell's Texas Sentinel newspaper thereby raising the possibility of a conflict of interest and bias in the name attribution. Brown did not, nor could he have provided, any direct conclusive evidence that the mountain was named for George W. Bonnell.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence that the mountain was not named for George W. Bonnell may be found in his book, "Topographical Description of Texas to which is added an

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account of the Indian Tribes,” published by Clark, Wing & Brown in April 1840.⁴⁷ (The book was reprinted by the Texian Press in Waco in 1964.) An article in the Texas Sentinel on April 1, 1840 said that the Texas Topography book is available at the newspaper office.⁴⁸ Therefore, the book was actually printed prior to April 1840, presumably in March 1840.

In his book, Bonnell stated that “above the city of Austin is a high peak called Mount Bonnell.”⁴⁹ This is the first time that the name of the peak is mentioned in print. Thus, the peak was named at some time prior to April 1, 1840. George did not mention who named the peak or for whom it was named, which is most significant. Had he known that the peak was named for him, he most likely would have made such a claim. But if he claimed it without knowing for whom it was named, he would be risking immediate exposure to ridicule, loss of reputation, and the discrediting of the facts in his book if some contemporary individual in Austin (like Albert Sidney Johnston) had stepped forward at the time to disclose that the peak had been named for someone else. The conclusion from this circumstantial evidence is that George W. Bonnell, himself, did not know in March 1840 for whom the peak had been named – since elsewhere in his book he identifies the sources of 15 other place names, e.g., Rutersville was named for Bishop Ruter.⁵⁰

Place Names explained in “Topographical Description of Texas”⁵¹

Page	Source of Name
12	Alabama creek derives its name from the name of village at its source.
24	Owners of the town of Bath changed name to Carolina.
44	Tenoxtitlan was an old Mexican fortification.
46	Teha Lanna means the land of beauty.
47	Milam was formerly known as Viesca.
49	Red Fork river is named for the red lands which color the water.
57	Columbus is named Montezuma on the maps.
58	Rutersville was named for Bishop Ruter, its founder.
64	The mountains near Austin are called the Colorado mountains.
78	Valle de Flores is named for the thousand varieties of wild flowers.
79	Enchanted rock is named for Indians dancing to the Great Spirit.
83	Lengthy story here on how the Brazos river got its name.
85	Lands above the Colorado received name of “the desert.”

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- 93 La Bahia changed its name to Goliad, a place of strength.
107 Uvaldo valley was named for Spanish Colonel Uvaldo.

George W. Bonnell put an advertisement in the Austin City Gazette newspaper on January 29, 1840 stating that the printing press belonging to Jacob Cruger and him had not yet arrived in Austin due to muddy roads between Houston and Austin.⁵² Although some records say that the Texas Sentinel began on January 15, 1840, it did not begin then due to the fact that the press had not arrived by January 29, 1840. The Texas Sentinel, co-owned by George W. Bonnell and Jacob Cruger, could not have become operational until February 1840.

Since the Austin Texas Sentinel newspaper began publishing in February 1840, and since the name “Mount Bonnell” was in his book published in April 1840, George W. Bonnell could not possibly have been co-owner of a newspaper more than a couple of weeks before the peak was acknowledged by him as already having been named, ignoring the time it took to write the book. A few weeks is not enough time to build a reputation as a newspaperman for whom a mountain is named. It is reasonable to conclude that the mountain was named before George W. Bonnell became co-owner of a newspaper in Austin.

There have been a number of anecdotal accounts of how the mountain was named. One of the earliest was an anonymous, rambling, reminiscence in the May 7, 1876 Galveston (TX) Daily News. Entitled “Journalists of Austin in 1840,” it suggests that Mount Bonnell was named after the editor of the Texas Sentinel and Mount Teulon was named after the editor of the Austin (TX) City Gazette. The article’s author claimed to have been in Austin in 1840. The author stated, “I had been told that the two mountain peaks, Mount Bonnell and Mount Teulon, were named for the two editors.”⁵³

An account of what he “had been told” at some unspecified time, by an unspecified informant, reported by an unidentified columnist nearly four decades after the mountain was likely named is tenuous evidence at best, if not hearsay.

In 1839, when Mount Bonnell was probably named, the only newspaper owner,

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publisher and editor in Austin was Samuel Whiting whose prominence and reputation would have been much more deserving of the naming. And George Teulon only became editor of Whiting's newspaper in 1840. Jacob Cruger, co-owner of the Austin Texas Sentinel in 1840 was not mentioned.

In the 1880s John Holland Jenkins (1822-1890) wrote his recollections and stated that Mount Bonnell was named after George W. Bonnell. Jenkins lived in Bastrop while George W. Bonnell lived in Austin.⁵⁴ It is unlikely that Jenkins had firsthand knowledge of events in Austin.

Francis Richard Lubbock (1815-1905) published his memoirs in 1900, some six decades after the peak was named. Lubbock also claims that Mount Bonnell was named for George Bonnell. Lubbock and Bonnell both lived in Houston,⁵⁵ and knew one another. After George W. Bonnell moved to Austin in late 1839, Lubbock continued to live in Houston until 1857, 15 years after Bonnell's death. At that time, Lubbock moved to Austin as the Lieutenant Governor. Lubbock did not live in Austin while George W. Bonnell was in Austin and was unlikely to have firsthand knowledge of events in Austin. Lubbock may have believed the mountain in Austin was named for the person he knew in Houston; but, that is not evidence of the naming of the mountain.

Many years later both James Mulkey Owens (1863-1913) and Nat Q. Henderson (1891-1962), an Austin newspaper reporter, also made the fundamentally unsupported claim that George Bonnell was the namesake for Mount Bonnell.

In conclusion, while many hearsay accounts abound, there is no conclusive evidence-- either direct or circumstantial-- to support the contention that the peak was named for George W. Bonnell. As mentioned above, THC Guidelines warn that "The use of poorly documented secondary sources may inadvertently perpetuate erroneous information."

George Bonnell: Additional Considerations

Although he is still recognized as the author of the first definitive account of Texas geography, George Bonnell's career in Texas journalism, politics and military adventure was

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relatively brief and inauspicious. He arrived in Texas in 1836 with a company of volunteers some months after the war had ended. In 1837 he lived in Houston, and during Sam Houston's first term as president of the Republic was appointed as a Commissioner of Indian Affairs. In June 1838 he wrote a report to Sam Houston on the status of relations with the Indians.

Unlike Joseph Bonnell, who had established excellent relations with the Caddo and others, George Bonnell advocated extremely harsh, brutal, and vindictive policies towards tribal people, writing, "Most of the Indian tribes in this Republic have manifested much hostility to the white inhabitants....They should be taught distinctly to understand that any depredation will be punished, and that there will be no avoiding the just retribution of their crimes. ...It is in their power to detect the offenders, and if they fail to do it, **we should demand an equal number of their people for instant execution. ... Or we might demand and retain as hostages the children of some of the principal families.**"⁵⁶

These vicious and violent racist sentiments, although consistent with Bonnell's reputation as an "eccentric" and "untamed" brawler⁵⁷ are completely incompatible with Sam Houston's views, who later wrote, "...I will punish any man who does injustice to the Indians...I have known them from my boyhood. They are a brave, honest, upright people."⁵⁸

George Bonnell's racist views, his personal prejudices, and his sometimes violent disagreements with others, including Sam Houston, hardly qualify him to be honored as the namesake of a national landmark of the Republic.

In November 1838, with the rank of Major, George Bonnell led a brief and ill-fated militia campaign against the Indians.⁵⁹ Charged with a responsibility to locate the enemy and engage in battle, George Bonnell prematurely ordered his unit to withdraw from the field and return to Houston.⁶⁰ Immediately thereafter the infamous Morgan Massacre of men, women and children took place in the area from which George Bonnell had withdrawn.⁶¹

Captain Joseph Daniels of the Milam Guards – a more experienced officer serving under Bonnell - had recommended that the operation continue into January 1839, writing that "...the country had not been sufficiently scoured...but Bonnell, however, ordered a retreat

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home, and so it happened the murder of the Morgan's family took place....”⁶²

Following this debacle George Bonnell moved to Austin on October 17, 1839. Having evidently lost his appointment as a Commissioner of Indian Affairs and with the rank of private in the Travis Guards,⁶³ he reverted to being a publisher, printer, and author.

He later took part in the ill-fated Santa Fe expedition and was imprisoned in Mexico until the summer of 1842. He returned to Texas and joined the Mier expedition. On December 26, 1842 Bonnell was assigned to a position on the Rio Grande. Captured while retreating from that position, he was shot by a Mexican soldier on or about December 27, 1842.

Sam Houston commented on George Bonnell in a letter to his wife, written in January, 1841, in which he referred to the newspaperman as “...former editor of the ‘Centinal’...that abused me so much!”⁶⁴ George Bonnell reportedly “loathed” Houston, and his newspaper, the Sentinel, was the official publisher of anti-Houston sentiment.”⁶⁵

Until recently the ownership of the land on which Mt. Bonnell stands had not been identified. While George W. Bonnell claimed to own land on the west side of the Colorado River opposite Mt. Bonnell⁶⁶, ownership of the 320 acres of land on which Mt. Bonnell stands originated with Bounty Certificate No. 9179 issued by Secretary of War A. Sidney Johnston on May 24, 1839 in Houston to Texas Army veteran Albert Sillsbe for service between June 30, 1836 and September 30, 1836.⁶⁷ Sillsbe made his claim of 296.13 acres of Mount Bonnell in the General Land Office files, Patent 333, Volume 73A, Abstract 744, Bastrop Bounty 221. The land was surveyed by John Harvy, a Bastrop County Surveyor, in December 1839 and apparently stayed in the Sillsbe family until Frank Covert Sr. acquired it some 100 years later.

A September, 1840 court order directed a sheriff's sale of George Bonnell's interest in a ten acre lot to satisfy a debt owed to Thomas Ragsdale.⁶⁸

As a concluding note, in August 2008, the Joseph Bonnell family organization offered a reward for conclusive evidence that Mount Bonnell was named for George W. Bonnell.⁶⁹

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No one has attempted to collect the reward.

The Summarized Case for Joseph Bonnell: Hero of the Texas Revolution

Joseph Bonnell was a West Point graduate, a colleague of Albert Sidney Johnston, and Hugh MacLeod⁷⁰, an officer in the Texas Army, a personal friend of Sam Houston and a Hero of the Texas Revolution who played a key role in events leading up to the Battle of San Jacinto.

As a Lieutenant in the U.S. Army, Bonnell was stationed at Ft Jesup, LA on the Texas border between 1831 and 1838. During that time he played a highly significant role in Caddo Indian affairs in East Texas.

In November 1835 Sam Houston had Lieutenant Bonnell assigned to his personal staff as Aide de Camp - and shortly thereafter made him a Captain in the Army of Texas - while he continued to serve in the U.S. Army. In 1835 and 1836 Joseph Bonnell exchanged personal and professional correspondence with Houston, advising him on military affairs and giving him the gift of a sword, the only weapon carried by General Houston at the Battle of San Jacinto.

But the real service that Joseph Bonnell provided to Texas was in 1836 on the eve of the Battle of San Jacinto, when reports indicated that 1,700 Indians threatened to attack the decimated Army of Texas⁷¹ as it prepared to engage the Mexican Army in the final battle of the revolution. Bonnell, accompanied only by an interpreter, was ordered to travel into war torn East Texas and meet with the Caddo to negotiate a truce to prevent an attack on the fledgling Texas Army.⁷² The ability to convince the Texas tribes to remain neutral in the Texas War for Independence from Mexico was crucial to the Texas Army's eventual success at San Jacinto.⁷³ For that action, Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell later earned the recognition of the Texas Legislature as a Hero of the Texas Revolution.⁷⁴

General Gaines sent the report of Lieutenant Bonnell to the U.S. Secretary of War to

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be forwarded to President Andrew Jackson, expressing the hope that the President would approve of the general's conduct regarding Lieutenant Bonnell.⁷⁵ Bonnell's report is now filed in the executive documents of the United States Congress.

Albert Sidney Johnston: Building the City of Austin - 1839

There is no direct evidence regarding the naming of Mount Bonnell. The circumstantial evidence discussed in this narrative supports the conclusion that it was likely named by Albert Sidney Johnston in 1839 for his colleague Joseph Bonnell – Hero of the Texas Revolution, Officer in the Texas Army, and esteemed personal friend and Aide de Camp to General Houston, and not named for publisher, author and militiaman, George Bonnell.

According to the best available contemporary primary source the peak had no name in April 1839 when Albert Sidney Johnston 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.”⁷⁶

“The building the city of Austin” would undoubtedly entail the creation of appropriate maps of the area – and according to the Smithsonian Institution treatise on Cartography Concepts at <http://www.edgate.com/lewisandclark/cartography.html> a major step in developing the uncharted frontier was “selecting and applying geographical names that identify relevant features, landmarks, and places.” By defining the location of the city of Austin with respect to “the mountain on the Colorado,” Johnston confirms the relevance that he attributed to it, and thus it’s need for a name.

As the senior government official responsible for “building the city of Austin at the foot of the mountain” Johnston clearly had the professional qualifications, the motive, the means, and the opportunity to name the mountain in 1839 for Joseph Bonnell.

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HISTORICAL/CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Although the only Texas history the rest of the world may recall is summed up in the phrase “Remember the Alamo,” what may be more significant to Texas and Texans are the ensuing attainment of independence from Mexico and the establishment of the Republic of Texas, both achieved against the overwhelming, unfavorable odds at the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836. Suffering the effects of a string of bloody defeats on the battlefield, decimated and outnumbered, the victory of the Texas Army stands as a brilliant example of the ability of determined leadership, steadfast troops, and tactical surprise to overcome extreme adversity and a numerically superior but overconfident enemy force on the battlefield.

If the tribal uprisings in April 1836 had not been quelled by Joseph Bonnell, an attack by 1700 Indians on the much smaller Texas Army as it regrouped and prepared to meet the Mexican Army at San Jacinto could have been catastrophic. As a minimum, the timing and location of the final battle with the Mexican Army would likely have changed. The Texas Army would have undoubtedly suffered casualties in doing battle with the Indians, and the Texans’ ability to fight the Mexican Army could have been fatally impaired.

History documents that Joseph Bonnell, acting alone, was able to pacify the leadership of the Indian uprising, and thus prevent what might have been a fatal blow to the Texas Army and the loss of the War for Independence. History documents that Sam Houston led his army to victory bearing the sword that his friend Joseph Bonnell gave him, and history also documents that in 1839 Albert Sidney Johnston had the motive, the means and the opportunity to name Mount Bonnell to honor the memory of his heroic comrade in arms as he managed the “building of the city of Austin at the foot of the mountain.”

Although George Bonnell played no part in the fight for Texas independence, he was a respected author⁷⁷ and became a well-known resident of Austin for several years following the war. His military experience in the militia was unfortunate and ultimately fatal, yet as years passed, his was the name – that of a prominent resident of Austin from 1840 to 1842 - recalled as the “reputed” namesake of the mountain. This despite the fact that George

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Bonnell never made such a claim!

One must ask if, faced with such an opportunity to name the most conspicuous terrain feature in Austin, it is more likely that Albert Sidney Johnston (who had the means, the motive, and the opportunity to do so) would have in mind a heroic comrade in arms who he had known for fifteen years or would he have chosen to honor a newly arrived or prospective resident of the city who played no role in the establishment of the Republic?

The newly completed research documents that there is substantially more reason to believe that Joseph Bonnell was the namesake for Mount Bonnell rather than George Bonnell.

According to a plaque installed at Prince Edward Gate on Gibraltar an earlier inscription on the wall there read:

***God and the soldier all men adore,
In time of trouble and no more,
For when war is over and all things righted,
God is neglected and the old soldier slighted.***⁷⁸

Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell has been slighted long enough. It is time for Texas to recognize his heroic action in support of the Texas victory at San Jacinto. His close personal and professional relationship to General Houston, combined with his association with Albert Sidney Johnston, Hugh McLeod, William Stilwell, and others as brother officers in the Texas Army makes Joseph Bonnell a more likely namesake for Mount Bonnell in Austin than George Bonnell – and that by his conspicuous silence on the matter, George Bonnell effectively denied the possibility that the mountain was named for him.

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³ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁴ John Holmes Jenkins III, *Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836*, Volume 5, (Austin: Presidial Press, 1973) 342, Document 2287, List of Officers.

⁵ John Holmes Jenkins III, *Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836*, (Austin, Presidial Press, 1973) Volume 3, Document 1654, 369-370. In this December 30, 1835 letter, marked "private", from Bonnell to Houston, Joseph Bonnell discusses family matters, expresses regret that he is unable to join Houston as Aide de Camp, and provides extensive guidelines on how to organize and support an army, signing the letter as "Your sincere friend, J. Bonnell." Houston's letter to Bonnell dated January 2, 1836 has a similar familiar tone, noting that "I look anxiously for you at Headquarters – God speed you I pray – Your friend, Sam Houston."

⁶ The Republic of Texas, *Journal of the Proceedings of the General Council of Texas*, (San Felipe de Austin, 1836), 33. <http://tinyurl.com/2dr9drc> (accessed January 10, 2011).

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⁸ *Michalic v. Cleveland Tankers, Inc.*, 364 U.S. 325, 330 (1960). Also *Rogers v. Missouri Pacific Railroad Co.* 352 U.S. 500 (1957) citing *The Robert Edwards* [a ship], Savage, claimant, 19 U.S. 187 (1821). **“Circumstantial evidence is not only sufficient, but may also be more certain, satisfying and persuasive than direct evidence.”**

⁹ Jack Reed, Foreword to *West Point in the Making of America* (Irvington, NY: Hydra Publishing and Smithsonian Institution, 2002), 9.

¹⁰ Cullum, *Register*, p.64,323. <http://tinyurl.com/6cjt6f6> (accessed January 29, 2011).

¹¹ John Holmes Jenkins III, *Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836*, (Austin, Presidial Press, 1973) Volume 5, Document 2529, 288-289.

¹² Annual Report of the Board of Visitors to the United States Military Academy made to Congress and the Secretary of War for the year 1824. <http://digital-library.usma.edu/libmedia/archives/bov/V1824.PDF> (accessed January 28, 2011)

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¹⁴ Annual Report of the Board of Visitors to the United States Military Academy made to Congress and the Secretary of War for the year 1826, p. 16, <http://digital-library.usma.edu/libmedia/archives/bov/V1826.PDF> (accessed February 24, 2011)

¹⁵ F. Todd Smith, *The Caddo Indians*, Texas A&M Press, College Station, 1995, 121.

¹⁶ Stephen L. Moore, *Savage Frontier: Rangers, Riflemen, and Indian Wars in Texas, Volume I, 1835-1837* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2002), 164.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ John Holmes Jenkins III, *Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836*, (Austin, Presidial Press, 1973) Volume 9, Document 4366

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Volume 5, 42.

²⁰ Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, Volume 3, 369-370.

²¹ Charles Edward Lester, *The Life of Sam Houston*, (New-York, Boston, J. C. Derby, Phillips, Sampson & Co, 1855), 153.

²² Letter of April 7, 1836 from Major General Edmund Pendleton 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.

²³ Report of Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell to Major General Edmund Pendleton Gaines, April 20, 1836, U.S. Serial Set, Microfiche 4904, United States and Mexico, 1828-1838, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, No. 332, House Documents, Volume 12, Number 351, Fiche 9, Document 351, 774-775.

²⁴ Cullum, *Register*, 284. <http://tinyurl.com/6cjt6f6> (accessed January 29, 2011).

²⁵ United States, *TREATY WITH THE NEW YORK INDIANS, 1838*. January 15, 1838. 7 Stat., 550. <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/vol2/treaties/new0502.htm> (accessed January 27, 2011).

²⁶ Death Notice, *The National Gazette and Literary Register* (Philadelphia, PA) September 28, 1840. Bonnell had been granted a four month leave “for the benefit of his health” on July 16, 1840: *Military Intelligence, Army and Navy Chronicle* (1835-1842), July 16, 1840, 11, 3, *American Periodical Series Online*, page 46.

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- ²⁸ Ernest William Winkler II, *The Seat of Government of Texas – The Permanent Location of the Seat of Government*, Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Volume 10, Number 3, January 1907, 216, 227,235.
- ²⁹ Cullum, *Register*, 284, 291. <http://tinyurl.com/6cjt6f6> (accessed January 29, 2011).
- ³⁰ Texas House of Representatives. *A Resolution Paying Tribute to the Life of Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell, Hero of the Texas Revolution*, 79th Regular Session, 2005, HR615 <http://tinyurl.com/46qx363> (accessed January 29, 2011).
- ³¹ Marker of the State Historical Survey Committee, Job 2755, May 15, 1969, located at 3800 Mount Bonnell Road, Austin, Texas
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- ³³ L. W. Kemp, "BONNELL, GEORGE WILLIAM," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbo17>), (accessed February 19, 2011).
- ³⁴ GenealogyBank.com, Historical Newspaper Archive, Last Name: San Jacinto, Include key words: San Jacinto, Date 1836: Baltimore Gazette & Daily Advertiser, May 18, 1836; Enquirer, Virginia, May 31, 1836; Nashville Banner & Whig, June 6, 1836; Southern Patriot, South Carolina, June 7, 1836; Macon Weekly Telegram, Georgia, June 9, 1836; Albany Evening Journal, New York, June 13, 1836; Vermont Gazette, June 14, 1836; Sun newspaper, Massachusetts, June 16, 1836; Portsmouth Journal of Literature & Politics, New Hampshire, June 18, 1836. Also The Pennsylvanian, June 11, 1836, Box 1, Folder 13, San Jacinto Collection, University of Houston.
- ³⁵ First Census of Austin, Austin History Center.
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- ³⁷ "AUSTIN CITY GAZETTE," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/eea12>), (accessed February 19, 2011).
- ³⁸ George W. Bonnell, *Topographical Description of Texas to which is added an account of the Indian Tribes*, Clark, Wing & Brown, Austin, Republic of Texas, April 1840, 66.
- ³⁹ Johnston Papers, Tulane University Library, New Orleans, Louisiana, Folder 14, Letter from Albert Sidney Johnston to George Hancock, April 21, 1839.
- ⁴⁰ Helen Burleson Kelso, "BURLESON, EDWARD," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbu40>), (accessed February 21, 2011). The Handbook of Texas Online states that Edward Burleson was "in command of the ceremonies" establishing Austin as the capital of the Republic of Texas; whereas, Ernest William Winkler, II, "The Seat of Government of Texas, The Permanent Location of the Seat of Government," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Volume 10, Number 3, January 1907, page 216 and page 227, states that Secretary of War Albert Sidney Johnston was in charge of the ceremonies.
- ⁴¹ Morris L. Britton, "COFFEE, HOLLAND," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fco12>), (accessed February 21, 2011).
- ⁴² L. W. Kemp, "ELDRIDGE, JOSEPH C.," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fel04>), (accessed February 21, 2011).
- ⁴³ Robert Bruce Blake, "ROBBINS, NATHANIEL," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fro07>), (accessed February 20, 2011).

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- ⁴⁵ Cecil Harper, Jr., "WATKINS, JESSE," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fwaac>), (accessed February 13, 2011).
- ⁴⁶ Erma Baker, "BROWN, JOHN HENRY," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbr94>), (accessed February 20, 2011). The Texas Sentinel newspaper in Austin was not started until 1840.
- ⁴⁷ George W. Bonnell, *Topographical Description of Texas to which is added an account of the Indian Tribes*, Clark, Wing & Brown, Austin, Republic of Texas, April 1840, in the Center for American History, Sid Richardson Hall.
- ⁴⁸ Texas State Archives, microfiche newspaper collection, Austin Texas Sentinel, April 1, 1840.
- ⁴⁹ G.W. Bonnell, *Topographical Description*, 66.
- ⁵⁰ G.W. Bonnell, *Topographical Description*, 58-59.
- ⁵¹ G.W. Bonnell, *Topographical Description*
- ⁵² Texas State Archives, microfiche newspaper collection, Austin City Gazette, January 29, 1840.
- ⁵³ Anonymous, "Journalists of Austin in 1840," *Galveston News*, May 7, 1876, 1.
- ⁵⁴ Thomas W. Cutrer, "JENKINS, JOHN HOLLAND," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fje05>), (accessed February 22, 2011).
- ⁵⁵ Louis Mitchell, "LUBBOCK, FRANCIS RICHARD," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/flu01>), (accessed February 18, 2011).
- ⁵⁶ Report of G. W. Bonnell, Commissioner Indian Affairs, Third Congress - First Session. Houston: Telegraph Power Press, 1838. http://historical.ha.com/common/view_item.php?Sale_No=6003&Lot_No=76110 (accessed January 27, 2011).
- ⁵⁷ John Melton Wallace, "George W. Bonnell, Frontier Journalist in the Republic of Texas" (master's. thesis, University of Texas, 1966) Preface, iii. Wallace also reports two fist fights George W. Bonnell had in Houston in 1838.
- ⁵⁸ Jennifer Gauntt, *Sam Houston Biography*, (Huntsville, TX: Sam Houston State University, 2010) http://www.shsu.edu/~pin_www/samhouston/HouNat.html February 3, 2011).
- ⁵⁹ Steven L Moore, *Savage Frontier Volume II 1838-1839*, (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2006), 92.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 135-136.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 137-138.
- ⁶³ Steven L. Moore, *Savage Frontier Volume III 1840-41*, (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2006), 18.
- ⁶⁴ Sam Houston to Margaret Houston, Galveston, 19 January 1841, in *The Personal Correspondence of Sam Houston 1839-1845*, ed. Madge Thornall Roberts (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1996), 72.

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- ⁶⁵ Marshall De Bruhl, *Sword of San Jacinto: A Life of Sam Houston*, (New York: Random House), 272.
- ⁶⁶ John Melton Wallace, "George W. Bonnell, Frontier Journalist in the Republic of Texas" (master's thesis, University of Texas, June 1966), 36.
- ⁶⁷ Texas General Land Office website, <http://tinyurl.com/4m77ryw> (accessed February 23, 2011).
- ⁶⁸ Notice in the *Austin City Gazette*, September 16, 1840: "By virtue of an execution to me directed by B. F. Johnson, a Justice of the Peace in and for said county, I have levied upon and will expose at public sale, for cash, at Lamar Moore's Auction Store, on the first Tuesday in October next, all the right and title that George W. Bonnell has in and to the following property, viz: Out Lot No. 10 in division B, in the City of Austin, containing ten acres, to satisfy an execution in favor of Thomas Ragsdale. Wayne Barton, Sheriff, By J. M. Long, Deputy Sheriff, September 4, 1840."
- ⁶⁹ The Bunnell/Bonnell Family Organization, *Bunnell/Bonnell Newsletter*, Volume 22, Number 3, August 2008, http://www.kbsb.com/reward/BNL_Newsletter_080905-1915.pdf (accessed February 23, 2011).
- ⁷⁰ Cullum, *Register of Graduates*, 284, 291, 493. <http://tinyurl.com/6cjtpf6> (accessed January 29, 2011).
- ⁷¹ Deposition of C.H. Sims, April 11, 1836, Papers of the Texas Revolution, Volume 5, Document 2703, 429-430.
- ⁷² Letter of April 7, 1836 from Major General Edmund Pendleton Gaines to 1st Lieutenant Joseph Bonnell
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- ⁷⁵ Letter from General Edmund Gaines to Secretary of War, Papers of the Texas Revolution, Volume 6, pages 150-151.
- ⁷⁶ Johnston to George Hancock of Louisville, KY, April 21, 1839. *Albert Sidney Johnston Papers, Folder Number 14*, (New Orleans: Tulane University Library.)
- ⁷⁷ Thomas W. Streeter, *Bibliography of Texas, 1795-1845*, (Morristown, NJ: Thomas W. Streeter, 1960)
- ⁷⁸ Virtual Tourist, *Gibraltar Travel Guide, Forts/Batteries/Castles*, http://cache.virtualtourist.com/2214284-Forts_Batteries_Castles-Gibraltar.jpg (accessed February 28, 2011).