

## AN EARLY PIONEER OF WILSON COUNTY

ROBERT CARTER HOUSTON

Death has called to "The Great Beyond" another one of the pioneers who have helped build up Texas and Wilson County in the person of Mr. Robert Carter Houston (1/5/1842 - 11/29/1916). He came to Wilson County with his parents, Ross (1805-1862) and Martha Anville Bumpass Houston (1806-1866) in 1851, but although then but a lad of twelve or thirteen, he has a just claim to the title of a pioneer, for he endured the hardships and trials of the long overland journey in wagons from Lauderdale County, Alabama and of the settlement of his family in what was then a practical wilderness.

The parents of the subject of these memoirs were not only earnest believers in the dignity of labor, but they also maintained that boys should be taught to cook, sweep, sew, wash clothes and iron them. As the good mother said, "A boy may never have to do such things, but if they ever do have them to do, it will help them wonderfully to know how to do them." For the first year or two after the arrival of the Houston family on the Cibolo in this county, there was much work to do. Houses were to be built, land fenced and cleared for cultivation and cattle and horses to be cared for. Robert, fondly called "Bob" by family and friends, did his part in all this industry, and when not at work in the field or woods, he was going to school. In 1859, he and his brother, Samuel Ross Houston, went back to Florence, Alabama and entered the Wesleyan University at that place, entering the Freshman class. The War between the States came in 1861 and caused a general cessation of study among the students. Samuel Ross Houston came back to Texas before his sophomore year was ended, but Bob stayed in Alabama until a company of its citizens organized a cavalry company to serve in the Confederate Army. This he joined and remained a member of, until the Eighth Texas or Terry Rangers, came under command of General Albert Sydney Johnston, when he sought and obtained a transfer to Company G of the regiment, then commanded by his elder brother, Captain William Yandall Houston. Thence forward till the close of the war his career was like that of other cavalymen in active service. That he was brave and gallant and did his duty as a soldier, is amply attested by the esteem in which he was held by the survivors of the regiment. When hostilities ceased, he returned to Texas to find his father had died on December 22, 1862, his mother a widow, the family slaves free, and the country in the so-called process of reconstruction. All that was left was the land and small stocks of cattle and horses, and to these the young man at once turned his attention. On November 6, 1866, his mother died, and in the division of the estate Bob got the home place and a fair pro rata of the land.

November 22, 1866, Robert Houston won the heart and hand of Miss Ellen Brahan, (daughter of Major Robert Weekly Brahan for whom the Masonic Lodge of La Vernia is named.) To the couple were born eight children; Mattie Anville Houston (1867-1876); Mary H. "Mamie" (1869-1958), wife of T. C. McDaniel, Floresville; Roberta B., wife of W. E. Smith, San Antonio; William Sledge Houston (1875-1942) married Miss Annie Brooks and lived at Somerville; Ross W. Houston (1877-1906) married Miss Ossie Trawek; Nell C. Houston (1882-1913); Hal Brahan Houston (1884-1958) married Miss Ella Taylor; and Alma Gertrude (1887-1978) wife of Henry Montgomery, residing in Houston.

Mr. Houston continued to farm and raise cattle and horses until his children got to an age when they must have the advantage of the best schools and then he moved to Floresville,

and in the same or following year, was elected sheriff of the county. The fact that he held that office for three or more terms, is evidence that he was a most efficient officer. Indeed, without disparagement to his predecessors and successors, it may be said that he was the most thoroughly efficient sheriff that Wilson County has ever had. While performing his official duties well and faithfully, he yet found time to aid all with his money, influence and labor in the betterment of the schools of Floresville. To him we are indebted more than to any other person for the Academy which was the nucleus for the magnificent high school building of which we are now so proud. Not only this, but he lent his aid and influence and gave encouragement to every enterprise that would benefit his town, county and state, and was usually a leader in every project of general interest. In short, he was public-spirited and progressive, always ready and willing to do his part and bear his share of the burden of building up the county; liberal in his charities, and they were many, including his contributions to the various churches.

Following his retirement from civil office, Mr. Houston moved back to his farm and again engaged in farming and stock-raising. How many years he gave to that is not remembered, but he finally sold out his holdings in Wilson County and went to Lufkin to live. After staying there a few years, he removed to Somerville, where, as has been announced, he died on the 29th day of November, 1916 after long suffering from a cancer on the face. Thence his body was brought to Floresville and interred by the side of his deceased daughter, Nell, in the Floresville City Cemetery. His request that funeral and burial should be according to the Confederate ritual could not be granted, there being no U.C.V. Camp in Wilson County, but in honor of his memory he was followed to the grave by every ex-Confederate in the town and by many from the county. Not one of these but had some story to tell which showed their appreciation and administration of their departed comrade, and from the heart of each came the tribute, "Honor to his memory; peace to his ashes." J. B. Polley

NOTE: An interesting item from the Floresville Chronicle-Journal, August 8, 1930: Titled "Old Landmark Burns". LA VERNIA, TEXAS July 26, Fire of unknown origin destroyed the Burt Farmhouse, formerly the old Bob Houston home, about three miles east of here. This marked the passing of one of the old land marks, as it was one of the oldest houses here.

Compiled by Shirley Grammer from information in her files. Wilson County Historical Society, 10/08