

Nesbitt Memorial Library Journal

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Colorado County History*

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**Editor
Bill Stein**

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Richard V. Cook and the Battle of Sabine Pass

Compiled by Ernest Mae Seaholm and Bill Stein

At six o'clock on the morning of September 8, 1863, Captain Richard V. Cook notified his commander, Commodore Leon Smith, that he had received a dispatch from Captain Frederick H. Odum, commander of the Confederate forces at the Sabine Pass, stating that nine Yankee vessels were threatening the fort which guarded the pass. Cook, who had been practicing law in Columbus since 1856, had received his commission on March 22, 1862 and raised a company of infantry in his home town.

Immediately upon receipt of Odum's message, Smith sent Cook and Captain Charles Bickley to the relief of the fort and fired off a dispatch to his own commander chastising Cook for his laxness in dealing with Odum's call for assistance. After the battle was won, Smith and Odum both referred to Cook's participation in the battle in mildly laudatory terms.

An Irish bartender from Houston named Dick Dowling, who was in command of the Confederate batteries at the fort, almost instantly became a great Texas hero. Many years later, in attempts to reflect some of the glory on Captain Cook, one or two of the men who served under him that day wrote three reminiscences of the battle. The first, which appeared in the Weimar Mercury on May 2, 1891, is signed merely "Old Soldier". The second and third, from the Mercurys of October 30, 1897 and December 27, 1902 respectively, are by Benjamin F. Mitchell. These three reminiscences have been reproduced herein in their entirety.

In addition, the editors have included another reminiscence of the battle by John Marshall Carson, who served as a private under Captain Cook, a letter written by Captain Cook shortly after the battle which gives details of

a mild revolt by a militia unit, and a list of the personnel of Cook's company from an 1865 muster roll. Carson's reminiscence, dated September 8, 1909, was addressed to editor of the Dallas Semi-Weekly News. Curiously, neither it nor his cover letter to his daughter mention Cook.

A Little Reminiscence of the Confederate War
by "Old Soldier"

The Neches and Sabine rivers empty into the Sabine lake about the same place, eight or ten miles from the main coast. Sabine Pass is situated about three miles from the coast, on the lake. Fort Griffin is three quarters of a mile nearer the coast.

About the year 1864 there was but one company, mostly Irishmen, stationed at Fort Griffin, one young man, Dick Dowling, in command – "as brave a lad as e'er commission bore, all brightly shone his new steel sabre, a captain's cap he wore." The blockading fleet lying out was immense. One Taylor, a citizen of the Pass, deserted his colors, for some reason, went straight out to the Yankee fleet and informed them of the weakness of the fort, which had but two smooth bore cast guns, carrying cast balls, some wooden guns painted and stuck up for a sham. Very soon the fleet began to reinforce, and Dick Dowling suspected something in the air. Captain R. V. Cook's company of about 40 men was stationed at Grigsby's Bluff, say some 13 or 15 miles up the Neches river. Dowling sent a courier in haste for R. V. Cook's company, which responded, and arrived at the Pass in due time.

The fleet was soon in readiness to storm the fort. The first gunboat to sound the channel was the *Sachem*, being the smallest, with seven rifle guns, well manned and equipped. The next in rotation was the old *Clifton*, with nine guns, (all 32 pounders) manned and equipped; after which came the old *Arizona*, besides others still behind, all in full speed, and firing on the fort and Pass as they ran. Dick Dowling stuck to his post, firing his two smooth-bore guns

as the *Sachem* got fairly opposite the fort. Being considerably lower than the fort, Captain Dowling poured his cast ball in, hitting the *Sachem* plumb in the steam drum, which enveloped the whole vessel in steam and scalded several to death. The white flag was hoisted as soon as circumstances would admit. About the same time Dick sent a cast ball through the *Clifton*, breaking one arm as she was an armed vessel; and in a moment's time another cast ball struck the old *Arizona*, disabling her machinery to some extent, and this vessel also hoisted the white flag and backed off like a turtle off a log. The excitement being so great she soon got out of range and made her escape. About this time Captain R. V. Cook's company hove in sight on an old steamboat lined with cotton bales, which had been lying at the Pass, and took aboard three hundred and seventy-five as fine looking Yanks as you ever saw, well armed and equipped – generals, colonels, captains, etc. All handed up their sabres, guns, etc. with politeness. Some 10 or 12 of R. V. Cook's company carried the 375 prisoners to Houston by way of Beaumont. The Yanks asked the guards where were the soldiers? I told them bravely that we had only about 6000 cavalrymen out in the timber close by. That reconciled them. They could have taken our guns away from us, thrashed us and sent us home. Nothing like being brave, if you are a little scared. Don't you forget that when we hoisted those rifled guns from the *Clifton* and *Sachem* and placed them on our fort – shooting accurately four or five miles – the Yanks looked "a leedle oudt!"

I send you the names of all I can recollect of Captain Cook's company: R. V. Cook, captain; R. W. Putney, 1st lieutenant; Thad. Wright, 2nd lieutenant; Harvey McKinley, 3rd lieutenant; John Carter, John Carson, Buck Perry, J. H. Mullin, Benj. F. Mitchell, Ed. Obenchain, John Eggleston, Steve Connor, A. [Alexander] Besch, Peter Brinkley, Mat. [Madison W.] Townsend, two Rose boys, two Walker boys [Littleton C. Walker and George W. Walker], A. [Amos T.] Goodhue, W. Butterworth, Thos. Harris, James Burns [Byrne], Zuller, [William] Scott, Ligons, John Adkins.

At Sabine Pass
by Benjamin F. Mitchell

I recently saw a statement of Judge [John H.] Reagan in the *Houston Post*,¹ giving the Irish their dues for valor and bravery in the United States and their victory at Sabine Pass. Judge Reagan said his informant was a federal soldier on board the federal fleet, who said there were two companies at Sabine Pass, one consisting of artillery, the other consisting of cavalry.

There was but one company at the Pass, consisting of thirty-eight men, in command of Captain R. V. Cook of Colorado county, Texas. At Fort Griffin, some little distance below, was one company, consisting of forty-two men, principally Irish, in command of Lieutenant R. W. Dowling. Fort Griffin is three miles from the gulf, on the Sabine lake. The Pass is some little distance above that, on the same lake. I was an eye witness and a participant. On the morning of September 8th, 1863, a federal fleet consisting of twenty-two vessels, gun boats, men-of-war and transports, carrying 10,000 men, commenced crossing the bar into Sabine lake, which port at that time was garrisoned with only two companies, instead of three – Lieutenant Dick Dowling in command of forty-two men (artillery) at Fort Griffin, Captain R. V. Cook's company consisting of thirty-eight men (infantry). By two o'clock the same evening the federal fleet had up all steam, made a break to pass Fort Griffin and land at Sabine Pass. Captain R. V. Cook could not have accomplished much with his sharp shooters unless the vessels had passed the fort in a crippled condition. Lieutenant R. W. Dowling, seeing the situation, used a great deal of strategy. He ordered his men to lay low and keep

¹ John H. Reagan's statement was written in Austin on September 16, 1897 and published in the September 30, 1897 edition of *The Houston Daily Post* under the heading "Battle of Sabine Pass: Judge Reagan Addresses Letter to Hon. Pat Walsh About Irish Americans in Texas".

R. V. Cook and the Battle of Sabine Pass

cool. The boats were running at full speed, throwing the balls in every direction. When the *Sachem*, the leading vessel, got in reach of his short ranged guns, he ordered his men to their posts, which they did instanter. In less than twenty minutes they had a ball through the steam drum of the *Sachem*, which scalded a number of the crew to death, while the others were partially scalded. The white flag was run to the top. The *Clifton*, the next larger vessel, was disabled. The *Arizona* also had her white flag, but under the excitement she backed out of range of R. W. Dowling's guns, and made her escape with the balance of her fleeing fleet.

Captain R. V. Cook, tall and commanding in appearance, ordered his men aboard *Uncle Ben* and hove up beside the *Sachem*. He said, "You surrender, do you?"

The answer was "We do."

"Hand in your arms."

They did so instanter, and came aboard of *Uncle Ben* and hove beside the *Clifton* and did likewise. I think we had 200 living federals aboard the *Uncle Ben* besides guns, ammunition, etc. Then hove up the pass, delivered the arms and ammunition at the Pass. Lieutenant R. W. Putney in command, with eight guards, carried the federal soldiers to Beaumont, thence to Houston. Lieutenant R. W. Dowling, a blushing lad of 19 summers, and his forty-one men certainly deserve to be remembered by history for their unflinching bravery and strategic movements. They buckled to 10,000 federals, men of war, gun boats and transports and lost not a single man.

A Reminiscence of the Battle of Sabine Pass

by Benjamin F. Mitchell

I think about June 16, 1863. It occurred. I am no historian, and well that I am not, as historical events are generally flavored to suit the fancy of the writer. I think about the 16th of June, 1863, the battle came off at Sabine Pass. Lieutenant Dick Dowling in command at the fort, with

forty Irishmen on the west side of Sabine Lake, two and a half or three miles from the main gulf. Sabine Pass is a few hundred yards above it. Captain R. V. Cook's company of infantry, thirty-eight men, was stationed at Grigsby's Bluff, on the Neches river, about half way between Beaumont and Sabine Pass. The morning of June 15, 1863, a courier came in from Sabine Pass stating that the blockading fleet was making ready to invade the Pass. Captain Cook and his thirty-eight men went in haste on a forced march; arrived the same day; stopped at Sabine town, a few hundred yards above the fort; found Lieutenant Dowling in readiness; the *Uncle Ben*, a steamboat, fronted with cotton bales, two guns on the upper deck, lying alongside the wharf. The blockading fleet and transport, consisting of about ten thousand men, made a rush about 2 o'clock June 16 for the Pass. Lieutenant Dowling acted wisely; the fleet coming in at full speed and firing rapidly at the fort and the Pass; Dowling had only a few inferior guns, so he ordered his men to lie down under the parapets. As the *Sachem*, the leading gunboat, got opposite the fort he ordered his men to their posts. The first shot went through the steamdrum of the *Sachem*, enveloping her in steam and smoke, scalding several to death. She ran up the white flag. The next shot went through the machinery of the *Clifton*, a larger vessel, breaking her prow. Up went the white flag. The next shot went through the old *Arizona*, a larger vessel. Up went the white flag again, but under the excitement the *Arizona* backed off and got away, leaving the *Sachem* and *Clifton* stuck. Then of all the running of the fleet and transports—they left a blue streak of smoke. Captain Cook ordered his men at the Pass aboard the cotton vessel *Uncle Ben*, hove up by the side of the *Sachem* and asked, "Do you surrender?" The answer was, "We do." "Well, hand in your small arms," which was done in style. Sabers and six shooters of the finest quality, over a hundred fine-looking, well-dressed men, besides those scalded to death. Captain Cook ordered them aboard the *Uncle Ben*, which was done instantler. Then we hove up by the side of the *Clifton* and did likewise, taking

in over one hundred more men, then hove back to the Pass, and unloaded arms. Then Captain Cook appointed a committee of seven to carry the soldiers to Beaumont on the *Uncle Ben*, thence to Houston by railroad, Lieutenant R. W. Putney in command. We had over two hundred men in our charge. When we landed in Beaumont we marched them to a church, placed them inside same, and that night had quite a congregation. In the morning we took them to Houston by railroad. Then returning to the Pass we took thirteen guns off of the *Sachem* and *Clifton* that would shoot correctly steel pointed balls three miles. We pulled the old *Clifton* out and loaded her with cotton. Thought we would run the blockade some dark night and land her in Cuba. Started her out one very dark night. On entering the gulf struck a sandbar and lodged her. Not wanting to leave her in the hands of the enemy, we set fire to her and left. Then came the fun!

Captain Cook, an educated gentleman, and a fine lawyer, as brave as Julius Caesar, did a part of this with his thirty-eight men. Then say they did not participate in the battle! They were part of the machine. How would they have gotten along without us? I have never in history seen where we got any of the credit. Lieutenant Dick Dowling and his men did the shooting at the fort. Captain Cook and his men did the balance, under the fire of the enemy. With long-range guns they shot all over us and round about us, with steel-pointed thirty-six pound balls, but we lost not a single man. Captain Cook's company of infantry was from Columbus, Colorado county, Texas, and known as Company D, [William H.] Griffin's battalion, and a better set of soldiers never graced the Confederate army. Captain Cook was a high-toned gentleman, a scholar and fine lawyer, and did go in haste on a forced march, and did participate in the Dick Dowling success at Sabine Pass. I am not hankering after honors, but do know that Captain Cook's company did participate in the whole proceedings as far as they could go, stood all the dangers, more so than at the fort. We were on the wharf in full view as a target, but stood our ground and

faced the enemy. I know what I am talking about. One of the thirty-eight, B. F. Mitchell, soldier.

Recollections of Sabine Pass

by John Marshall Carson

Dear Sir:

I have noticed a good many writings about the battle of Sabine Pass and a few weeks ago I saw an article from Mr. A. L. Clements, so I thought I would write a little more fully about it. On this day forty-six years ago the battle of Sabine Pass was fought. General [Nathaniel P.] Banks of the Federal Army ordered a fleet around to Sabine Pass, consisting of about six gun boats and transports carrying about five or six thousand troops. The object of the troops was to take Sabine Pass by surprise and then to march through Eastern Texas and connect with his (Banks') army in Louisiana. But Captain [Frederick H.] Odlum's company at the garrison were ready to receive them.

As Captain Odlum was in Houston on furlough the command of the garrison fell upon First Lieutenant Dick Dowling, almost a beardless boy with thirty-two brave Irish in the fort and a detail of ten men out of Colonel W. H. Griffin's Regiment were on the steamboat *Uncle Ben*. I was on the *Uncle Ben*.

Early in the morning the gunboat began to advance and fire on the fort, but Lieutenant Dowling held his fire until the *Sachem* got in good range of his guns at the fort, and at about the first fire, the gun boat *Sachem* was blown up by one of Dick Dowling's guns.

The *Sachem* was enveloped in steam and smoke and when it died down the white flag was seen floating over her. You should have heard the yells that went up from us boys on the *Uncle Ben* as we were steaming under full headway for the *Sachem*. We soon arrived alongside the *Sachem* and took charge of Dowling's victory.

The fleet was still advancing and firing on the fort. The *Clifton* was next in the lead, and as soon as she

got in proper distance, Lieutenant Dowling fixed her by tearing off one of her propelling wheels, so she hoisted the "white flag" and we, after disarming our prisoners on the *Sachem* left a small detail of our men on her to take charge of them and we steamed down by the *Clifton* and brought our boat the *Uncle Ben* alongside of her, and took charge of another one of Dowling's victories, but we did not find such a horrible sight as we found on the *Sachem*. On it we found about thirty men scalded to death and as many more badly scalded. The doctor tried to help them and had emptied fifteen or twenty barrels of flour on the deck and after removing their clothes had them covered with it, but the poor fellows all died. My attention was attracted to one of our men, by the name of Scott, abusing one of the prisoners. I drove him away from the man, telling him how cowardly it was to abuse a prisoner. The prisoner, after Scott left, unbuckled a belt from around him with a very fine pistol, and handed it to me saying "I want to give this to you for driving that ruffian off of me." I found out that he was the engineer of the *Sachem* and was in a dying condition from inhaling hot steam which scalded his lungs so badly he died that night.

The gunboats were still coming in and the next in lead was the *Granite City*. When she got in place where Lieutenant Dick Dowling wanted her, he turned his guns on her and disabled her and up went the white flag on her, but she did not throw out her anchor, and the tide was going out very fast, so she drifted away. The men at the fort wanted to fire on her but Dowling said "No, I could not violate the rules of warfare and fire on a white flag." So we lost her through the bravery and honor of Dowling and the cowardice of the captain of the *Granite City*. After drifting out of the way of Lieutenant Dowling's guns, another gun boat ran up to her and towed her out to sea.

We then with the *Uncle Ben* towed the two gunboats, *Sachem* and *Clifton*, up to the wharf – and oh, what a time we had eating good things and drinking real coffee – the first we had had in a long time. We dug a long

ditch, just above the Doran Hotel near the bank of the pass and buried the scalded men in one long grave or ditch, and oh my, what a fearful task it was to take hold of the scalded corpse, your hands would be full of the skin that would slip off of them.

Night came on and we rushed the prisoners on to Beaumont on the *Uncle Ben* and *Roebuck* before they could find out that we had only forty-two soldiers at the pass, thirty-two brave Irish of Captain Odlum's company and our small detail of ten men of Colonel W. H. Griffin's regiment.

The next morning the fleet had all disappeared except the *Owasco*. I suppose they feared the *Uncle Ben* would follow and capture them. The *Owasco* was the only gunboat in sight, and the name reminds me of the Light House fight near the same place. About fifty of us men secreted ourselves at the place, and stayed a day and night. The next morning Captain [David A.] McDermott of the *Owasco* came ashore with two of three boat of soldiers and landed — advanced to the Light House. When they were within about 100 yards we charged them. Lieutenant Thad Wright and myself were in front of the charge and a running fight issued to the water's edge. We captured all except four or five who got to their boats. But Captain McDermott was killed at the water's edge. I was near him when he was killed. In fact he had surrendered to me. I should like to hear from anyone who was in the Sabine Pass fight.

John M. Carson

Cover letter for the former letter
written by John M. Carson to his daughter, Ginerva,
dated October 2, 1909

Dear Ginerva:

I send you a piece I wrote over a year ago and got my wife to copy it to send it to the *News* to publish. I have changed the dates. You will please send it to the *News* when you get through with it. It seems a long piece but I

abbreviated it as much as possible; could have told a good many instances that occurred etc. When this fight was reported to Jeff Davis he said it was the greatest victory he had ever known in the history of warfare. You can change or embellish on this as you like before you send it to the News so you keep within the facts. This fact has not gone to history as it should. All have ignored Captain Odum and Odum Company, but have it Captain Dick Dowling and Dowling's Company, when Dowling was the first lieutenant of the company. Dowling deserves all the praise he gets except the official name. Dick Dowling was nothing but a little saloon keeper in Houston. I suppose a native of Houston and the *Houston Post* and all Houston will not allow anything to go into print that detracted anything from Dowling which is natural. I am satisfied that the *Post* would not publish this is the reason I sent it to the *News*.

Corinne went back to college yesterday. She came home with my wife from the college and Jim stayed there; he will go to college (A. M.) this year. We have had no rain here yet. Water is getting scarce. We have plenty of drinking water in our cistern is about eight feet of water in it yet. Cotton crop here are reasonably good. I think I will make a good collections. All well and send love. Mail is here. In haste, your Papa.

1. The *Uncle Ben* was a large old freight boat that run from Sabine Pass up the bay and to Beaumont and Orange and up the Sabine and Neches Rivers.

2. The gun that disabled the *Sachem* was fired by the men of the fort that Lieutenant Dowling had charge of.

3. Our regiment was ordered to Louisiana to meet General Banks and his army and I was left at Sabine Pass in charge of the post commissary with a detail of ten men (as I was commissary for our regiment). The *Uncle Ben* had come down with supplies; and when the fight came up I got on the *Uncle Ben* with the ten men and we started down to the fort to meet the enemy. We did not know anything about the approach of Burnside's fleet until it appeared at daylight off the bar at the entrance of the pass coming in to pass the fort.

The fort was about one half way between the town of Sabine Pass and the mouth of the pass. We ran the *Uncle Ben* alongside of the *Sachem* and boarded her and took charge of the prisoners and boat; and a horrible sight it was to see the scalded men dead and dying, and here I found one of our men (Scott) abusing a scalded prisoner and I drew him away and told him if he did not quit abusing the man I would run a bayonet through him. Here my attention was called to some fine sharp shooter's guns at the top of the mast of the *Sachem* and some of our men trying to climb the rope of the ladder up to them, as they were fine guns. Several of the men had failed to get to them, as their head would get to swimming and they would come down and the Yankee prisoners would laugh at them and tell them that a land lubber could not go up that high on a ship's mast. Don Payne, who was the father of Mary Payne of Sherwood, called my attention to the guns up at the top of the mast of the *Sachem* and asked me if I could get them. I said "yes" and started up. It was about 100 feet to the top. They had a small rotunda built up there large enough for about four or five men with long range guns. The Yankees began to laugh at me and said I would up forty or fifty feet and come back, but I continued on to the top. Then our men raised a shout and some of the Yankees hollowed with them at my success. I got the guns and belted three or four of them to me and come back down the rope ladder with the guns, kept one and gave one to Don Payne and to John Eggleston and sent the other one home to my wife. We left a few men on the *Sachem* to take charge of her and then steamed down to the *Clifton* and took charge of her and towed her up to the wharf and then sent the *Uncle Ben* or *Roebuck* back to towed the *Sachem* up to the wharf. By this time it was about night and we put the prisoners on the *Roebuck* and *Uncle Ben* and sent them up to Beaumont. I think there was about 400 prisoners, you can examine the Texas History, I think it gives the number. We are all well and send love. I send the picture by this mail – Papa

I do not like the picture; the man came along the

road and stopped a few minutes and took it without any preparation. I wanted to have my whiskers and hair cut but could not as he would not wait. It was Burnside's fleet, I think you can find out in Texas history. Banks was over in Louisiana on Red River. Mr. Burnside's wanted to land a large crew at Sabine Pass and march through East Texas and Louisiana and meet Banks' army in Louisiana but the defeat at Sabine Pass failed all their plans and saved Texas and Louisiana from a devastation like Sherman made in his march to the sea through Georgia etc. Texas and Louisiana should feel under everlasting obligation to the little squad of Captain Odlum's company of thirty-two men under Lieutenant Dick Dowling and the small detail of Colonel Griffin's regiment of ten men under John Carson on the *Uncle Ben* who defeated a fleet of 28,000 men and drove them to sea.

Letter from Sabine Pass, November 11, 1863
Written by Richard V. Cook to his wife, Eliza²

Dearest Eliza

Your long and very interesting letter of the 1st November came to hand today and be assured it made me very happy. It seems that you did not get my letter of October 26. I am in hopes that it may come to hand. I want you to receive that letter and to let me know when you do get it. I would have written again but we have been hearing a rumor for some time that General [E. Kirby] Smith has ordered General [John Bankhead] Magruder to take all of the old regiments and battalions in Texas and join him in Louisiana. I have been waiting to hear the truth of this before writing so that I might let you know with some certainty my future whereabouts.

Lucket's [Philip N. Luckett's] Regiment, Griffin's [William H. Griffin's] Battalion, [Frederick?] Tate's Militia Battalion and the companies of artillery constitute the

² Captain Cook married Eliza F. Moore on November 29, 1859 in Fayette County. After his death on August 20, 1877, he was buried in the Moore family cemetery in Fayette County.

garrison at this post – about 1500 men in all. The enemy keep five heavy ships blockading the mouth of the Pass. They keep very quiet and I do not anticipate any future attack here. The fortifications are too strong to be taken by any except a large land force. Tate's Militia Battalion is composed of the two cavalry companies from Fayette and Colorado. They got themselves into hot water not long since by refusing to go into Louisiana. Being state troops they cannot of course be ordered out of Texas. But they were called on at Niblets Bluff to volunteer to go into Louisiana for twenty days – being assured by the Confederate authorities that they would be allowed to return to Texas at the end of that time. Colonel [Augustus] Buchel, the commander of the post, giving them his personal word of honor that they should come back in twenty days. But the "melish" refused to go. Dr. [Charles William?] Tait,³ who was major, immediately tendered his resignation to General Magruder stating as a reason for his doing so that he would not command troops that didn't want to fight for their country. Instead of receiving Tait's resignation, Magruder appointed him a lieutenant colonel. Sam Harrington, the adjutant, also resigned. So did Dr. Bob Hicks of Columbus who was surgeon. Finally the "melish" fell out among themselves. Those who were in favor of going to Louisiana accusing those who did not of being cowards. They have raked up a fine quarrel among themselves. To make the matter worse Colonel [A. T.] Rainey made a speech to a large number of militia and regular troops in which he gave Tait's Battalion particular "jesse". They have been sent here to do guard and picket duty on this very unpleasant mosquito coast. They are very wrathful. They abuse and curse Tait at a most tremendous

3 Cook's references to "Tate" and "Tait", are most perplexing. Frederick Tate raised a company of militia in Fayette County and Charles William Tait, who was a physician, raised one in Colorado County. Internal evidence suggests that Cook was writing of only one of these companies, yet he used two different spellings. Since this reference is to "Dr. Tait", he apparently meant Charles William Tait. The reader will have to judge for himself.

rate. Also Harrington. They charge these gentlemen with bringing them over here and other heavy offences. They say that they don't get enough to eat for themselves and horses etc. etc. etc. To us who have been long in the service all this is highly amusing . We draw them out to hear them talk. Before long they will learn to take things easy. Tait's Battalion, I am told, is the only part of the state troops that refused to go to Louisiana. Probably they were all that were called upon. Magruder will remember them and they are destined to have a hard time. Dr. Pope and Larkin Price belong to the Fayette company. I saw the boys yesterday. They all want to go home badly. Ben Breeding who is in the Colorado company says they can do more good at home and that the fighting men have all volunteered long ago. I am afraid he is right.

If we stay here long the soldiers at the fort will be quite comfortable at the fort. When we first came down here the mud and mosquitoes were horrible. But the boys have pulled down the houses in Sabine Pass by the whole-sale and hauled them out and put up a large number of huts and shanties so that there is quite a village around and near the fort. Myself and my company officers have a good tent and we have put a plank floor in it and have built a room to cook and eat in adjoining. Lieutenant Payne is my bedfellow. We have comfortable sleeping arrangements. That blanket your ma gave me is worth a vast deal to us these cold nights. We can manage to spend the winter here very comfortably if we have to stay – only the country is eaten out so completely that we have great difficulty in getting anything but beef and bread to live on. The butter I brought down received a most hearty and smiling welcome from my mess mates who had seen none for months. But it is all gone – having lasted nearly a month. Tell Caroline that her devoted "Garrison" is here. That "he is well and doing well". Fat and hearty but wants to go home badly. Sends his love etc. Henderson is here also. He is cook for the negroes and has a good easy time of it. These negroes say that their time is out – that they were only to go in for six months. I asked

Major [Julius] Kellersburger [Kellersberg] about it and he said that the only way to get them sent home was by having a letter written to Captain H. B. Andrews the Chief of the Labor Department, Houston. Tell your Pa and Uncle Billy about it. Garrison was very short of bed clothes. I gave him one of my own blankets. He was very grateful – having but one of his own and the nights being very cold. He shall not suffer for anything while I am here.

Don't let Johnny forget me. It hurts me to remember how little the child seemed to care for his father when I last saw him. I love him dearly but the poor boy looks on me as a stranger and alien. I have never been with him enough to find a place in his little heart.

My present duties are upon a General Court Martial convened by General Magruder's order. We will be engaged some weeks. I have not been well enough to take my seat in the Court until today. I am no better of my complaint. Some days I am perfectly free of it and feel well. In a few hours afterward I have to lie down. I regret leaving home as soon as I did. Write again my dear wife, very soon and believe me affectionately and truly yours, R. V. Cook

Roster of Richard V. Cook's Company
then identified as

Company A, 13th Regiment, Texas Infantry
Taken from a muster roll dated April 30, 1865,
(Name, followed by date and place of enlistment)

Captain

Cook, Richard V. (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

Lieutenants

Putney, Robert William (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

Payne, Don Fernando (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

McKinley, James Harvey (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

Sergeants

Mullin, John H. (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

Whitehead, John F. (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

Carter, John A. (April 24, 1862, Columbus)

Reminiscences of the Past

Coalson, John K. (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

Wilson, James C. (April 24, 1862, Columbus)

Corporals

McFall, Robert E. (April 24, 1862, Columbus)

Connor, Stephen W. (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

Byrne, James (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

Tanner, Field Archer (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

Privates

Besch, Alexander (April 24, 1862, Columbus)

Bentley, Edward S. (May 12, 1862, Houston)

Brinkley, Peter (April 24, 1862, Columbus)

Baker, George W. L. (April 24, 1862, Columbus)

Boettcher, Clement A. (June 24, 1862, Columbus)

Brady, Thomas (July 20, 1865, Richmond)

Clark, Thomas J. (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

Cummins, David W. (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

Corbett, Christopher C. (October 21, 1863, Columbus)

Carson, John Marshall (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

Campbell, J. C. (January 20, 1865, Richmond)

Davis, Alex W. (May 20, 1862, Houston)

Didrick, Henry (May 1, 1863, Columbus)

Eggleston, John W. (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

Edds, John F. (June 22, 1862, Columbus)

Eakens, John W. (June 9, 1862, Liberty)

Ehlinger, Charles (February 1, 1865, Columbus)

Fay, James (January 20, 1865, Richmond)

Flood, Torance (January 20, 1865, Richmond)

Goodhue, Amos T. (May 30, 1862, Houston)

Howat, William (March 22, 1862, Columbus)

Harris, Thomas P. (March 24, 1862, Columbus)

Haynes, Evander C. (September 25, 1863, Beaumont)

Hillebrandt, Laste (June 12, 1864, Beaumont)

Harold, Thomas (January 20, 1865, Richmond)

Hinds, James (January 20, 1865, Richmond)

Haley, William (January 20, 1865, Richmond)

Hapany, Alex (January 20, 1865, Richmond)

Higgins, Robert J. (May 19, 1863, Sabine Pass)

Journey, John C. (January 22, 1862, Columbus)

Joiner, Robert H. (April 24, 1862, Columbus)
Junker, Christian (May 13, 1863, Bellville)
Loftin, Robert M. (March 22, 1862, Columbus)
Lewis, Thomas H. (June 21, 1863, Fort Grigsby)
Lessing, Joseph (January 16, 1864, Columbus)
Matthews, Thomas M. (April 24, 1862, Columbus)
Miller, Jacob (March 22, 1862, Columbus)
Metz, George (October 23, 1863, Sabine Pass)
Mayes, Joshua Pritchard (May 15, 1862, Houston)
Maxwell, John W. (April 24, 1862, Columbus)
Moseley, Edward H. (May 31, 1862, Liberty)
Mitchell, Benjamin F. (June 14, 1862, Columbus)
Montgomery, John F. (June 12, 1862, Liberty)
McCue, John (July 21, 1862, Houston)
McElroy, William W. (November 6, 1861, Sabine Pass)
Moder, Lewis (January 21, 1865, Richmond)
Murray, Thomas (January 21, 1865, Richmond)
Orr, William (April 24, 1862, Columbus)
Obenchain, Edgar Darius (April 30, 1862, Columbus)
Obenhaus, Charles (March 22, 1862, Columbus)
Pierce, Aaron (May 27, 1863, Fort Ware)
Romans, Andrew J. (June 14, 1862, Columbus)
Russell, James M. (March 22, 1862, Columbus)
Scott, William (December 14, 1862, Houston)
Simpson, Friench (January 2, 1865, Columbus)
Townsend, Madison White (March 22, 1862, Columbus)
Tanner, Frank M. (October 2, 1862, Houston)
Taylor, Green B. (October 28, 1862, Houston)
Thompson, Robert S. (May 28, 1864, Columbus)
Urban, Joseph (June 22, 1862, Houston)
Van Wagner, Rupert (March 22, 1862, Columbus)
Ward, Hewett (March 22, 1862, Columbus)
Wootton, William W. (April 24, 1862, Columbus)
Walker, Littleton E. (April 24, 1862, Columbus)
Walker, George W. (November 17, 1862, Houston)
Wallace, W. C. (December 2, 1864, Rusk)

Died

Whittle, Mastan (September 3, 1862, Houston)

Hospital Care in Columbus

by James H. Wooten, Jr., M. D. and Bill Stein

On February 5, 1880, a fire destroyed the Columbus office of Robert Henry Harrison, M. D., and spurred the opening of the first known hospital in Colorado County. The highly respected Dr. Harrison quickly moved to reestablish his practice and, in fact, to improve upon it. He purchased a two story building, which had originally been built as a hotel, on the southwest corner of Spring and Live Oak Streets and thoroughly renovated it, converting it into a hospital. When finished, it contained four wards for six to eight patients each and ten private rooms.

Dr. Harrison had intended the hospital to be private, but, about two months before it opened, Thomas W. Peirce, the president of the Galveston, Harrisburg, & San Antonio Railroad, arranged with him to use the facility as his company's hospital. When it opened, it was called the Galveston, Harrisburg & San Antonio Railroad Hospital, and the railroad's employees were charged a small fee to contribute to its maintenance. But other patients were also admitted, and Dr. Harrison, as its medical director, retained full control of the facility.

By 1882, the railroad had grown so much that the small Columbus hospital was inadequate and Peirce was making plans for a new one. San Antonio was vying for the facility, and Peirce had already bought land there, but he was still undecided about the final location. He wanted to retain the services of Dr. Harrison, with whom he had become close friends, and Harrison wanted to stay in Columbus. Further, he had been convinced by Dr. Harrison of the health advantages of Columbus over San Antonio. Dr. Harrison had compiled a report demonstrating that of the 1404 cases handled in the hospital's first 22 months of operation, only 26 had resulted in the death of the patient, and of those 26, six had been clearly without hope when admitted.

Peirce favored locating the new hospital in Columbus and cooked up a deal to bring it there. On May 15, 1882, Peirce had asked the city council to close Preston Street between Live Oak and Rampart so that the railroad could build a second track, parallel to its first, through Columbus. The council also received a petition from several citizens that opposed Peirce's request and turned the railroad down. But a week later, on May 23, the council received another petition from its citizens asking that it reconsider the question, and it agreed to do so.

On July 1, 1882, with the question still open, a commission appointed by the railroad to consider the future location of the hospital came to Columbus. Dr. Harrison showed the commissioners the proposed site of the new hospital, blocks D and G of the Jones and Smith Addition, and the commission agreed to construct a \$50,000 hospital on the site provided that two conditions were met: 1. that the city give the railroad the Preston Street right of way, and 2. that the two blocks on which the hospital was to be situated be donated to the railroad.

Almost immediately, a private fund drive to raise the money needed to buy the blocks from their owners, Walter C. Jones and George W. Smith, began. The two men valued the blocks at \$900 each, but asked for only \$600 each, or \$1200. Even at that, many thought the price was seriously inflated.¹ Others felt that the project was Dr. Harrison's alone, and wanted to take no part in it. Collection lagged under the weight of the two objections. Through July, only about \$600 had been subscribed. Then, on August 3, 1882, the *Colorado Citizen* published an editorial which refuted both objections and funding took off. Within

¹ In 1884, two of the six lots in block G sold for \$350 (Deed Book 1, p. 466, Office of the County Clerk, Colorado County, Texas), and one year later, one of the six lots in Block D sold for \$200 (Deed Book 2, p. 186), suggesting that the price of \$1200 for both entire blocks was a very good bargain indeed. Extrapolating from these single lot values, just two and three years later the two blocks would have been worth well over \$2000.

a week the money had been raised.

On August 9, the city council met again and agreed to close Travis Street between the two blocks and to exempt the property and improvements on it from taxation for ten years, provided that the railroad build the hospital on the site. But, whether because the Preston Street request had still not been granted or for some other reason, Peirce was not persuaded and refused to commit to either Columbus or San Antonio.

In the summer of 1883, Harrison took two major steps that indicated he was committed to remaining in Columbus and keeping the hospital open whether or not the railroad continued its affiliation with it. In July, he retired from private practice. The next month, he completed an expansion of his hospital, opening a two story bath house next door. The first floor of the new facility was open to the public, the second, reserved for patients.

The future site of the new railroad hospital had still not been selected by October 1885 when Peirce died in New York, but his death probably ensured that it would not go to Columbus. Still, it was not until June 1887 that officials of the Southern Pacific Railroad, which had absorbed the GH & SA, finally decided to cease their affiliation with Harrison and his hospital in Columbus and to build a new hospital in San Antonio. Undeterred, Harrison announced plans to thoroughly overhaul and modernize his facility and to open it as a private hospital and sanitarium. Soon, workers began adding a third story to the building.

Then, the hospital met an unexpected and rapid death. Shortly before midnight on September 12, 1887, a fire broke out in the hospital's kitchen. The night watchman, after having failed in his attempt to extinguish the flames with a bucket of water, raised the alarm. But not enough men could be roused from their beds in time and the building was soon engulfed in flames. The volunteers, working until dawn, succeeded in saving only a part of the library and in keeping the fire from spreading to neighboring structures. Harrison lost the major part of his medical library and

thousands of dollars worth of instruments and equipment. He had the hospital insured for only \$15,000 and never rebuilt.

For more than forty years after Harrison's facility burned, Columbus was without a hospital. Seriously ill or injured patients that needed hospital medical or surgical care had to be transported by switch engine and caboose to Houston hospitals. Finally, in July 1928, Drs. H. B. Todd of Houston and J. W. Waldrop of Sealy announced that they intended to open a hospital in Columbus. Over the next few months, the two doctors began converting the Delaney Apartment building on the northwest corner of Travis and Bonham Streets in Columbus into a hospital. In October, Waldrop moved to Columbus, hired an experienced hospital matron, and started bringing in furniture and equipment. The new hospital's first patient was admitted on October 26, 1928.

The hospital had only three nurses on staff when it opened and Drs. Waldrop and Todd, who styled themselves Chief of Surgical Staff and Chief Medical Adviser respectively, maintained offices over the First State Bank. Still, in the first few weeks of operation, the hospital admitted several patients and performed about two or three operations a week. Drs. Waldrop and Todd made it clear to other local physicians that the hospital would admit their patients, but few, if any, accepted the offer. It seems there were some concerns about the level of the medical care provided at the hospital. It remained open only a little more than five years. Dr. Waldrop closed the hospital and moved to Houston in late January 1934.

This time, Columbus was without a hospital for slightly less than four years. Robert Harvey Bell, M. D., came to Columbus in the early 1930s to practice medicine.² In 1937, he saw the need for a county-wide medical facility and built a ten-bed hospital and office on the corner of Spring and

² Bell bought his first property in Columbus, a part of block 32, from John Duncan on February 14, 1936 for \$500.

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Bowie Streets in Columbus. The building was wood and stucco, two stories, with six patient rooms, two of them private. Two of the patient rooms were on the ground floor and four, including the two private rooms, were on the second floor. In addition to the patient rooms, the first floor contained Dr. Bell's office, laboratory, and X-ray room, offices for a bookkeeper and receptionist, racially segregated waiting rooms, and a small kitchen. The second floor, which could be reached only by stairway, also contained the operating room, two nurses rooms, and a small screened porch.

Calling it the John F. Bell Memorial Hospital in honor of his father, Dr. Bell opened this small hospital on October 17, 1937 and operated it until he was called into the U. S. Army Medical Corps in May 1941. During World War II it was kept functioning by a committee of concerned citizens.

In August 1941, Clarence Irwin Shult, M. D., came to Columbus to practice medicine. Because of an injury he had suffered at birth which caused one of his arms to be considerably shorter than the other, Dr. Shult had been rejected for military service. When Dr. Bell received his commission, he contacted the Southern Pacific Hospital in Houston seeking a young physician to replace him in Columbus for the duration of the war. The chief of surgery recommended the position to Dr. Shult, who had been resident surgeon at the hospital for the last two years, and Shult agreed to take it. He rented Dr. Bell's home and moved to Columbus.

Dr. Shult, who was a native of nearby El Campo, had not meant to stay in Columbus permanently, and decided to leave when Dr. Willis George Youens returned to Columbus from Arizona in August 1942.³ But Dr. A. J. Brohn, the only other physician in Columbus at the time,

³ Dr. Youens had begun the practice of medicine in his native Columbus around 1909, and continued it, with a brief interruption to serve overseas during World War I, until 1934, when he moved to Arizona to serve as a Civilian Conservation Corps camp physician.

moved to Houston shortly after Dr. Youens' return, and, when Dr. Youens died of a heart attack while picking dewberries on April 25, 1943, Dr. Shult felt compelled by community need to stay. By the time the war ended, Dr. Shult had grown fond of small town life. As Dr. Bell's return grew imminent, Dr. Shult began making plans to move to another small town. But Dr. Bell had decided to return to his home town, Palestine, and offered to sell his hospital and home to Dr. Shult. Dr. Shult readily accepted, completing the purchase on September 28, 1945. He immediately dropped the name John F. Bell Memorial in favor of the simpler Columbus Hospital.

Meanwhile, James Harbert Wooten, Jr., M. D., a native of Columbus, had spent the war on duty with the U. S. Army Medical Corps in Europe. He had been in practice in Fort Worth before the war, but his family had moved back to Columbus in the spring of 1944. In 1945, when Dr. Wooten was home on terminal leave, Dr. Shult offered him one-half interest in the hospital and a partnership in the practice of medicine, and he accepted.

The two physicians entered into a partnership agreement on October 17, 1945. That same day, Dr. Wooten bought an undivided one-half interest in the hospital. The partnership proceed to remodel and enlarge the building to accommodate offices for both physicians and increase the number of hospital beds to twenty with an emergency room downstairs at the Spring Street entrance and an operating room, work room, and autoclave and obstetric delivery and nursery upstairs. An electric elevator – probably the first in Colorado County – was installed to facilitate the movement of litter patients from one floor to the other.⁴ The name of the facility was changed to Columbus Hospital and Clinic. A kitchen and dining room to provide meals for patients and employees on duty was added

⁴ This elevator had been in the Heller Grocery Store building. There it was hand operated. Otto Schobel rebuilt it to include an electric motor.

downstairs on the west side first floor. Also on the first floor were an X-ray dark room, and lastly, a room for clinical laboratory examinations. Each doctor had a consultation room and two examination rooms.

In 1948, the doctors decided to acquire the house and lot owned and occupied by a married couple, A. J. and Rosie Meduna, to the west of the hospital to allow for future expansion. But Rosie Meduna refused to sell the house and lot because she feared her husband would lose the money gambling. Instead, she agreed to trade her house and lot for another of approximately the same size. On December 28, 1948, the Medunas signed their home over to the hospital and received the deed to a house and lot that had been owned by J. L. Drymalla.⁵

The hospital was open staff, that is, any member of the Colorado-Fayette Counties Medical Society could hospitalize patients in it. For several years the Weimar physicians used it, as did Dr. William Thomas "Tot" Youens, a son of Dr. Willis G. Youens, after he began to limit his practice to ophthalmology.

In 1946, Dr. Wooten, a graduate of the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, arranged to become a preceptor for that school and the hospital and clinic began to train senior students of U. T. M. B. The students would rotate from the school for three months for practical clinical training, usually during the summer, then return to Galveston to finish their academic work. The hospital furnished their room and board, and laundry service. In return, they assisted in surgery and obstetrics, worked in the emergency room, and did histories and physicals on the patients. They also accompanied the M. D.s on some house calls.⁶

⁵ See Deed Book 140, pp. 393-399, Office of the County Clerk, Colorado County, Texas

⁶ Some of these preceptees were Theo Painter, Jr., from 1946, Joe Painter in 1949, Maurice Adams in 1951, Sam Copeland in 1952, George Liebes, Jr. in 1953, Norwin Ray in 1958, R. Cecil Marburger and Melvin Miertschin in 1959, and Alfredo Gutierrez, Jr.

Over the years, young physicians would be hired to work on salary with a view toward adding them to the partnership. But, generally, these physicians left after a year or two to go into practice somewhere else or to get specialty training. Among these physicians were Dr. Michael Damiani, Dr. Wayne Steele, Dr. Herbert Alston, and Dr. Pat Wilson. Finally, Dr. R. Cecil Marburger was hired, and he stayed.

A clinical laboratory and X-ray technician was always employed to handle that necessary service. Other essential, but locally unavailable services, were "farmed out". Dr. Violet Keiller, the pathologist at Hermann Hospital in Houston, was hired as the consulting pathologist on tissue specimens and blood seriology examinations. The specimens would be sent by mail or if urgent replies were needed, by special courier, usually a relative of the patient. The results would be telephoned back to the physician. Patients who could not be treated in Columbus were, through an arrangement with Dr. Wooten's schoolmate and friend, Dr. Truman G. Blocker, sent to John Sealy Hospital in Galveston.

Dixie Diefendorfer, who had been an anaesthetist and assistant chief nurse in Dr. Wooten's army hospital in Europe, joined the staff after the remodeled hospital was finished to organize the nursing and anaesthetic departments. In the early 1950s, Wharton County Junior College began a licensed vocational nurses (LVN) training program that operated in conjunction with several area hospitals. The Columbus program, under Diefendorfer's direction, began in 1951.

Through the LVN program, local girls obtained a profession and the hospital was provided with an adequate supply of trained nurses. The first students were taught by the registered nurses and the doctors on the hospital staff. Later students attended classes at the junior college in Wharton. At one time, the Columbus Hospital and Clinic had its own school bus that the girls used to go to classes. Elsie Otto, Dora Conner, Mary Ann Tobias, Louise Georg, Viola

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Muehr, Georgie Mae Stock, Elsie Eggemeyer, Una Mae Coufal, Earline Bauer, Theresa Pustejovsky, Helen Maieketter, and Bernice Gerlich who graduated from the program between 1952 and 1955.

In 1949, a specialist in internal medicine, Dr. Verne F. Goerger, was brought into the partnership. He purchased one-third interest in the hospital and clinic from Drs. Shult and Wooten on August 26 and became a full partner five days later. By 1950 it had become apparent to Drs. Shult, Wooten, and Goerger that the hospital, successful as it was medically, was not self supporting and would never be. The main problem was the disinclination on the part of some already cured patients to pay for the cure. As the bad debts mounted, the doctors found themselves financially supporting the operation of the hospital.⁷ The Columbus Hospital and Clinic Foundation, a tax-exempt entity governed by a board of trustees, was created that February to take over the operation of the hospital. The first board was composed of Drs. Shult and Wooten, Marley Giddens, Otto Schobel, Gus L. Sronce, Jim Willms, and Morris Hodges.

At the first meeting, on April 17, 1950, the foundation agreed to purchase the hospital and clinic from the three physicians for \$203,146.20, the bulk of it to be paid according to the terms of two twenty-year notes. The hospital's administrator, Homer Horton, and the rest of the hospital's staff, were hired by the foundation at their same salaries. In return for a share of the proceeds, the foundation also agreed to attempt to collect the hospital's unpaid accounts. On April 28, 1950, the board met for the second time and hired Drs. Shult, Wooten, and Goerger to work at

7 One of these bad debts directly led to the construction of the Youens Memorial Hospital in Weimar. Dr. Willis G. Youens, Jr. had admitted a patient to the Columbus Hospital. Dr. Shult had once treated the same patient, and she had failed to pay him. The two doctors argued about the case in the hospital's dressing room, argued in fact, so vehemently, that Youens built his own hospital rather than continue to deal with the Columbus facility.

the hospital for a monthly salary of \$700 each.

Dr. Goerger left or was dismissed from the partnership on the last day of January 1952 because of what Drs. Shult and Wooten regarded as a laxness in attending to his duties. One night, a patient who was evidently *in extremis* was admitted to the hospital through the emergency room. The nurse on duty immediately contacted Dr. Goerger, who was on call, and asked him to attend to the patient. When he failed to respond to that and to a subsequent summons, the nurse called Dr. Wooten, who shortly arrived, diagnosed a perforated peptic ulcer (a life-threatening condition), and prescribed immediate surgery. Drs. Wooten and Shult performed the operation with Dr. Goerger assisting as anaesthetist. The surgery made it absolutely clear to all three physicians that the patient would have died without it. Enraged, Drs. Wooten and Shult secured Dr. Goerger's agreement to leave the partnership.

The foundation took less than a dozen years to pay off its notes to Drs. Shult and Wooten. On January 22, 1962, the two physicians certified that they had been paid in full for the hospital and clinic. Two months later, on March 26, 1962, at the expiration of their terms on the board of trustees, they ceased to be members of the board and also ceased to be employees of the foundation.

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