

# BONNEY

INFORMATION  
FILE *Bonney*  
BRAZOS COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM

The town of Bonney grew as a stop on the International & Great Northern Railroad which linked Houston and Columbia and was known locally as the Columbia Tap.

Located on land originally granted to Warren D.C. Hall, and later the plantation of Albert Sidney Johnston, famed Civil War general, Bonney was a station for sugar and cotton plantations.

The town was named for Joe Bonney, a popular conductor on the Columbia Tap. Joe was the conductor, but he was much more than that. As far as the people in the Brazos bottom were concerned, the Columbia Tap was THE railroad and Joe Bonney was the Columbia Tap.

If the train was late, folks would say, "Wonder what's happened to Joe? He's late today."

Or if new equipment was added, someone was sure to remark, "Joe is getting mighty spruced up lately."

Jay Gould and his associates may have owned the stock, but Joe owned the engine, the cars, and the passengers when they were on his train.

Joe ran the railroad in his own way. If he took a notion to take on passengers and freight along at the farm gates and make a rate then and there, it was all right. If he stopped and got off the train, to talk over the fence with some farmer or to see some cowboy about stock matters, it was nobody's business.

Joe was sensitive about the speed he was able to make. The cowboys used to fret him by riding alongside of his passenger cars and conversing with the passengers. And the wood he burned was endless in an effort to go fast enough so that people would not be able to get on and off the train while it was under way.

Perhaps the best of these Joe Bonney stories concerns his encounter with a foreigner. One day the foreigner (that is, not one of Joe's regulars) attempted to board the train in Houston with a dog. Joe told him indignantly that there were no accommodations on the Columbia Tap for dogs. Thereupon the man pulled out a ten-foot length of rope from his pocket and tied the dog to the rear bumper of the train, where he trotted along quite comfortably.

This was an insult to Joe and he conferred with the engineer. The throttle was opened wide. The firebox was crammed with wood to the very door. For an hour the old train made its top speed, and then Joe went back to check on the dog. Sure enough it had disappeared.

Joe, now a little ashamed, reported the animal's supposedly horrible death to the owner. The foreigner (apparently a cockney) took his eyes off the book he was reading and looked up at Joe.

"E's all right," he said, "'e seemed to be getting a bit 'ot and I got a few miles back and tied 'im to the haxle so 'e would be in shade."

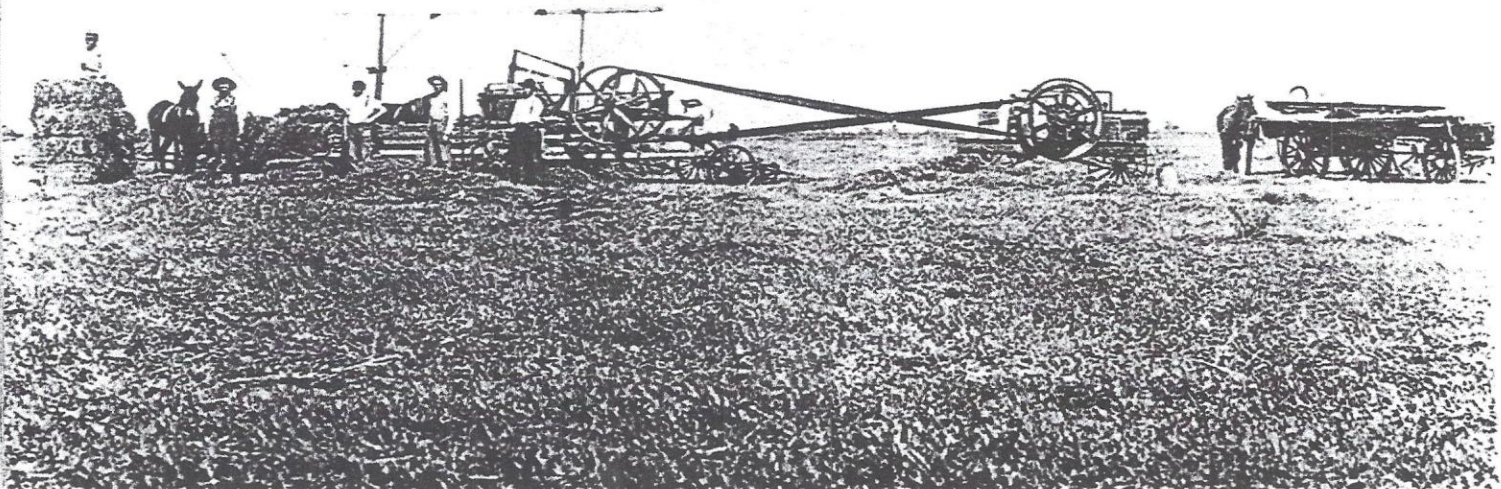
Joe went back, and, peeping over the bumper, saw the dog trot along very leisurely in the shade where the foreigner had tied it. With that, Joe gave up, stopped the train, got off, and brought dog on board himself.

During its last years the Columbia Tap carried only freight, and vice was discontinued entirely in 1956. Bonney is now a small community with a population of 94 and no business establishments.

Catherine Munson Fc

Top: Students dressed for some special occasion posing in front of the Bonney school.

Bottom: Making hay near Bonney in 1910





THE ANGLETON TIMES, ANGLETON, TEXAS

Jul. 7, 1966



## Bonney School

One of the first public schools in the county, the Bonney school was originally built as a private school by residents of the area who pooled their funds. They drove across the unfenced prairie to Alvin to buy lumber, built the school, and again contributed funds -- this time to hire a teacher. The first was a Mrs. McIntyre, who taught for several months and was followed in the post by Walter C. Paulsen. Built about 1893, the school housed students from primary to what would now be high school. Some went directly from the Bonney school to Texas A&M and the "State Normal" at Huntsville. First Board

of Trustees for the Bonney school is believed to have included Louis Wanner, president; F. W. Meyer, secretary; and J. B. Turner. The building also served as community center and worship house, and the youngsters pictured were members of a Sunday School in June, 1909. The building reverted to its original owners when area children began attending school in Angleton, and was later sold to Elmer Cannon. It still stands -- with blackboards in place, though they were painted over, along with the walls. It is now used as a tool house.

(Photo Courtesy Mrs. J.P. Gill)



BONNEY  
BRAZORIA COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM

THE FACTS Edition 3, Section 2 Sunday, August 6, 2000 15

## Village occupies land once owned by Civil War general

By MARIE BETH JONES

Facts correspondent

**B**ONNEY — The Village of Bonney, which was incorporated about 15 years ago in order to ensure self-government, is a residential community with a population of about 226.

Operating with a mayor and council, the village has no marshal or other local peace officer, providing for law enforcement through an inter-local agreement with Brazoria County for service by sheriff's deputies. The village has no property tax, financing its modest expenses through franchise fees paid by Houston Lighting & Power Co. and General Telephone.

Located on FM 521, which serves as its main street, portions of Bonney are crossed by CR 51 and CR 618, with four other streets within the village.

It was originally established in 1892, through filing of a plat for the townsite of "Custer." The name was changed at some point to honor Joe

# BONNEY

Bonney, an eccentric conductor of the Columbia Tap train that once linked up with the International & Great Northern Railroad to Houston.

Land where the village is located was originally granted to Warren D.C. Hall, and a portion was later the site of the China Grove Plantation.

That plantation's most famous owner was Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston, a Texas hero and Confederate general who died in the Civil War Battle of Shiloh.

A portion of the property now within the corporate limits of Bonney was later a part of

the Turner Ranch owned by Frank Turner Sr.

A "big boom" was proposed at Bonney in 1911, when "a large company" acquired about 5,000 acres in the area.

Plans were announced for a development that would include the sale of farm sites, as well as the construction of both a large hotel and a bank.

According to a newspaper article about the plan, stock in this development was already being sold, but the plan never fully materialized.

This was one of several such schemes in that era, during which developers "sold"

Brazoria County to unwary Northerners.

Tired of snow and ice, and believing claims that this was a sub-tropical paradise in which riches would flow with little effort to the enterprising settler, the newcomers found the reality less glowing.

In many cases, those who actually came to the area to live were sorely disappointed by the realization that their "paradise" included mosquitoes, flooding, hurricanes and the ever-present possibility of crop failure.

Even so, a few tenacious settlers remained, forming the nucleus of today's Village of Bonney.

The present economy is based primarily on agriculture, though many of the residents commute to jobs in area industries, and a few commute to Houston to work.

# Bonney

## F. W. MEYER

Frederic William Meyer was born in Hanover, Germany on June 6, 1851 and died at Bonney, Texas, April 21, 1917. He is buried in Sandy Point Cemetary. His lineage includes a relationship with Franz Joseph, an Emperor of Austria and King Hungary, brother of Maximilian, the ill-fated Emperor of Mexico.

He came to America with his parents at the age of 17, July 4, 1868 and settled in Iowa. He became a naturalized citizen. In 1876 he was married to Eliza M. Corrin and had 14 children; 10 lived to adulthood. He came to Bonney, Brazoria County, Texas, in August, 1893 -- bought a large tract of land and remained until his death. In 1911, he lost his companion and the following year married Mrs. Laura Redd of Houston, Texas.

He was the pioneer haymaker of South Texas and was for several years known as "Hay King". He was instrumental in forming drainage dist. #5 of which he was elected Commissioner. He was also Commissioner of Road District #2. He was known to be a fearless, tireless worker from Greater Brazoria County. He also organized the Bonney branch of the Federal Farm Loan Bank and was its' president. He stood for everything that spelled progress for Brazoria County and for the Community.

He was without doubt the most loved and popular man in his vicinity and one who was always ready, at his own expense, to represent the vicinity. It was his desire that this bountiful county be covered with prosperous homes, high class livestock and up-to-the minute farms.



*The Angleton Times*  
*Nov 30, 1967*

## **F. W. Meyer Was Known As 'Hay King'**

A native of Germany who came to the United States at the age of 17, F. W. Meyer was known as the "Hay King" of South Texas for his pioneer hay making efforts in Brazoria County.

Meyer moved from Iowa to Brazoria County in 1892, settling at Bonney, where he acquired large land holdings and began farming. He was the "pioneer hay maker of South Texas" according to a story in *The Angleton Times* in 1917.

His daughter, Mrs. J. P. Gill, recalls that she often delivered samples of the hay to be shipped to prospective customers.

Shortly before Meyer's death, "his persistence earned him a private interview with the Hon. Asst. Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Vrooman, from which much good may come to the farmers and haymakers of Texas", according to a story in *The Times* on April 17, 1917.

*The Times* credits Meyer with being "many years ahead of his time" so that "many failed to understand his deep ideas" and mentioned his "fearless, tireless work for Greater Brazoria County".

Meyer had also organized "the Bonney branch of the Federal Farm Loan Bank, and was its president" and was instrumental in formation of Drainage District No. 5.

FILE *Bonney*  
BRAZORIA COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM



# History of Bonney tied to railroad man

By MARIE BETH JONES

Special to The Facts

One of the things you learn when doing historical research is that wide differences can be found in writers' viewpoints, no matter the subject involved.

A couple of weeks ago I gathered a dozen or so sources to use in writing about Albert Sidney Johnston's tenure at China Grove Plantation.

One of them, written by a long-time Bonney resident, the late Mrs. J.P. Gill, is labeled as a history of that small town, but

**BRAZOS TALES**

Sharing the rich history of Brazoria County

■ See **TALES**, Page 4A

*Bonney*

Brazoria County Museum  
Information Files

## Tales

CONTINUED FROM COVER

begins with a well-written history of Johnston's life on China Grove in the 1840s, then gives other history of the community.

I have every intention of using her information about Johnston in a series, along with that culled from several books, Internet sources and other reference material.

But the other, less detailed information about Bonney reminded me that her reminiscences were another story, and one well worth telling.

Knowing that the Brazoria County Historical Commission and the County Museum had published a book about all the county towns some 20 or 30 years ago, I looked to see what that volume had to say about Bonney.

The two stories could be about two entirely different places. Catherine Munson Foster wrote the article for that book. It covers only Joe Bonney, for whom the little town is named, with a tiny bit about the Columbia Tap Railroad.

Mrs. Gill's handwritten information includes very little about Joe Bonney, saying only that he rented the China Grove Plantation in 1893 or 1894, that he was with the railroad, and that the community was named in his honor.

But her account provides considerably more information dating back to the 1880s and 1890s. She tells about owners of the property, the Bonney school, a store and post office, and a community Christmas gathering, among other things.

Both of the "histories" are accurate, of course, even though they might well be describing different places.

In her history, Mrs. Foster wrote, "The town of Bonney grew as a stop

on the International & Great Northern Railroad which linked Houston and Columbia and was known locally as the Columbia Tap."

She noted that the town was located on land originally granted to Warren D.C. Hall, was a station for sugar and cotton plantations, and was the site where famed Civil War General Albert Sidney Johnston lived.

Describing Joe Bonney as "a popular conductor on the Columbia Tap," she goes on to explain he was much more than that.

"As far as the people in the Brazos bottom were concerned, the Columbia Tap was THE railroad and Joe Bonney was the Columbia Tap," she wrote.

As an example, she said that when the train was late people would wonder what had happened to Joe. If new equipment was added, they would note that Joe was getting "mighty spruced up lately."

She made it clear that although the line might belong to Jay Gould and his moneyed associates, people considered Bonney to be the owner of the line and the train.

Indeed, she said, Joe ran things his own way, from where and when to stop to the fare to charge for passengers or freight. If he decided to get off the train to talk to some farmer or cowboy along the way, she said, he simply did it.

Mrs. Foster admitted Joe was sensitive about the train's speed, however, and that he became frustrated and angry at any imagined slight, such as when people on horses walked their steeds alongside the slowly moving train to talk to passengers.

She also recounted a story about a man who wasn't a "regular" passenger, and who brought his dog aboard.

When Joe objected to the animal's presence inside, the man tied the dog to the car's rear bumper, letting

the animal trot easily and behind the train.

Considering this an insult, Joe conferred with the train's engineer and they took action. After the firebox was loaded with a pile of wood, the old locomotive ran at its top speed for the next hour.

When Joe checked on the dog and found it gone, he offered sympathy to the animal's owner. The passenger was not at all disturbed, however. He reassured Joe that the dog was fine. A few miles back, the animal seemed to be getting a bit hot, the owner said, so he had moved it to a shady spot near the axle.

Checking for himself, Joe found the dog trotting comfortably in the shade. At that point Joe gave up, stopped the train and brought the dog aboard.

During the last years of the Columbia Tap, Mrs. Foster said, it carried only freight. Its service was discontinued in 1956.

Photographs included with this story were more indicative of Bonney's general history.

Among them was a picture of the Bonney school, showing about 20 or 30 students and a couple of adults dressed in their best clothes standing in front of the small frame building.

Three of the photos illustrated Bonney's claim to commercial hay harvesting. One showed a team drawing a wagon load of hay on which a driver and a group of children were seated. Another was of hay-making near Bonney in 1910. The last showed the home of "Hay King" F.W. Meyer, dated in 1903.

Meyer was Mrs. Gill's father, and this residence was her childhood home.

**NEXT WEEK:** Mrs. Gill provides information about Bonney's history.

Marie Beth Jones, a published author and freelance writer based in Angleton, is a member and former chairwoman of the Brazoria County Historical Commission.

april 14, 2014



## Richwood

Richwood, founded in 1957, is primarily a heavily wooded residential community nestled between Lake Jackson, Clute, Bastrop Bayou and SH288-B. The east side of the community is however, coastal plain cattle ranches. It was part of Stephen F. Austin's original land grant and is named after Alfred Freidrich, its original owner. The city is noted for its beautiful parks and community spirit. In 1992, it won the Governor's Community Achievement Award.

### On the cover:

A cannon sounds the opening of the Austin Town Festival, a living history re-enactment of Texas in 1830. (Photograph by Larry Paul)

A decorated buggy participating in an early 1900 May Day parade in Angleton.

Longhorn steers can be seen throughout Brazoria County. (Photograph by Larry Paul)

A spectacular aerial view of Surfside Beach and the Gulf of Mexico.

From the archives of the Brazoria County Historical Museum: "Four women, two children and two BIG fish!" (circa 1900)

*Brazos River County Park features the largest custom-designed playground in the county. It also includes hard surfaced nature trails, and a two-story observation tower.*

## Bonney/ Rosharon

Continue north towards Houston on SH288. North of Angleton, take a scenic country drive along Highway 521 through the communities of Bonney and Rosharon.

**Brazos River County Park**, located on the banks of the river, includes a man-made lake and duck island, and the largest custom designed playground in Brazoria County. Other features of the park include individual tree-shaded picnic sites with grills, group pavilions, one half mile of hard-surfaced trail, and a two-story observation tower. For more information, call (409) 849-5711, extension 1541.

Although this area is now home to a peach orchard, cattle and horse ranches, and numerous rice paddies, in times past it was the site of extensive sugar plantations. A quaint, wooden bridge with an elevated pedestrian

walkway to keep feet dry in times of floods, is located on CR569, just off FM1462 west of Rosharon. It traverses Oyster Creek and leads to the area of one of the most productive of these sugar plantations, the **Halcyon/Coffee Plantation**. This acreage was originally granted in 1824 to Andrew Robinson, one of Stephen F. Austin's colonists. Over the years the acreage was parceled out and exchanged hands. It became, in the 1850's, one of the top ten sugar plantations in Brazoria County. Little remains on the plantation site. It, like others in the county, suffered the ravages of time and hurricanes. However, a brick walkway made of slave-made bricks and a cistern remain. For further information call the Brazoria County Historical Museum at (409) 864-1541.



**BRAZORIA  
COUNTY  
PARKS  
DEPARTMENT**

## Have you been to your parks lately?

- **Quintana Beach County Park**  
Quintana Jetty / RV Camping / 800-872-7578
- **San Luis Pass County Park**  
San Luis Pass & Galveston Toll Bridge  
RV Camping / Cabins / 800-372-7578
- **Surfside Jetty County Park**  
Surfside Jetty
- **Brazos River County Park**  
CR 30 in Planter's Point Subdivision

For more information please call: 409-864-1541  
or 409-265-4261 x 1541 or 409-331-6101 x 1541

- **Hanson Riverside County Park**  
Hwy. 35 & San Bernard River
- **Resoft County Park**  
Hwy. 35 & CR 281 (outside Alvin)
- **Albert Finkle Memorial County Park**  
CR 171 & Chocolate Bayou in Liverpool
- **Buffalo Camp County Park**  
Otter & Deer Trails

