

THE SEAT OF GOVERNMENT OF TEXAS.

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I. TEMPORARY LOCATION OF THE SEAT OF GOVERNMENT.

1. SAN FELIPE.

(1) *Seat of Austin's Colony.*

On his way home from the City of Mexico, after having secured a final confirmation of the colonization grant made to his father, Stephen F. Austin called on Governor Don Luciano García at Bexar and informed him of his success. The governor thereupon gave the name of San Felipe de Austin to the town which was to be laid off for the capital of the new colony (July 26, 1823).¹ Baron de Bastrop, commissioner on the part of the government, accompanied Austin from Bexar to survey lands and in union with Austin to issue titles to the settlers. The settlement was found in such disorganized condition, owing to the long absence of Austin, that Bastrop thought it advisable to postpone his work until the next year, when he revisited the colony. San Felipe was founded in 1824, and thenceforth figured as the capital of Austin's colony.²

Located most charmingly on a high prairie bluff on the west bank of the Brazos river, at the head of navigation, it was nevertheless in the very heart of the wilderness and could lay claim to none of the advantages, comforts, or other amenities of civilization associated today with the name of even the smallest village. For many years there was no post office, no school, no church, and the stores, shops and taverns were small and their supplies scanty. What gave importance to the place was the fact that here the public business of the colony was transacted—the laws promulgated, justice administered, land titles issued, and the public safety maintained.

¹Gammel, *Laws of Texas*, I 13, 34.²Holley, *Texas*, 109.

(2) *Seat of the Convention of 1832.*

The disturbances that occurred in Texas during the summer of 1832 made it desirable that a convention of the delegates of all Texas be called. The alcaldes of the municipality of Austin, on August 22, 1832, "therefore recommended, that the people of each Town, Precinct, and Civil District in Texas, elect Five Delegates, to meet at the Town of San Felipe de Austin, on the 1st Monday in October next." The suggestion was adopted and the delegates to the first convention of all Texas assembled in San Felipe, and not at Bexar, which was San Felipe's senior by almost a century, or at Goliad or Nacogdoches, both very much older.

(3) *Seat of the Central Committee, and the Convention of 1833.*

The convention of 1832 before adjourning had made provision for a central and sub-committees. The location of the central committee is not fixed, but from the personnel of that body it is clear that no other place than San Felipe was intended. The central committee was empowered "to call a Convention of Delegates from all Texas, at such time and place as they think proper." In January, 1833, this committee called a new convention to meet at San Felipe on April 1. This convention met at the time and place indicated, and one of its acts was to continue the central committee. A state constitution, too, was drafted, but it did not fix the location of the seat of government.

(4) *Seat of the Department of Brazos.*

It is shown above how San Felipe received its name, how the place was laid out, and how this site received the popular approval by making it the place of assembly for the conventions of October, 1832, and April, 1833. Decree No. 270, of the congress of Coahuila and Texas, dated Monclova, March 18, 1834, finally set the seal of official approval upon the location by designating San Felipe as the capital of the department of Brazos, created by this decree. The chief of the new department was appointed July 8, but, perhaps, a month or two elapsed before he qualified.

(5) *Seat of the General Council.*

From April, 1833, until the appointment of the political chief of the department of Brazos, about the middle of 1834, the central committee at San Felipe appears to have had little to do. This appointment promised to make its services entirely superfluous. However, with the growing importance of the events that were paving the way for a rupture with Mexico, and in view of the inability of the political chief of the department of Brazos to inaugurate any satisfactory policy, the need of a unifying directory of the affairs of all Texas became so great that the old central committee finally shouldered the responsibility of this office and, after a hasty reorganization, under the title of general council, it controlled affairs from the middle of September, 1835, until the meeting of its successor the consultation. The strength of the general council rested on the high character of its membership; its efficiency, on the fact that it represented all Texas. Its headquarters were at San Felipe.

(6) *Seat of the Consultation.*

The need for a general consultation of all Texas had been felt since the middle of June, 1835; various efforts were made to bring it about; but for want of unanimity nothing was accomplished until the middle of August. By the end of July the plans of Santa Anna with regard to Texas were sufficiently well known to unite the people of Texas at least to the extent of being willing to hold a general consultation. A call for the election of delegates was issued from Velasco, August 20th. This plan received the hearty approval of S. F. Austin, when he arrived home from Mexico; and, while he was chairman of the central committee at San Felipe, this committee united in the call referred to above. There was a diversity of opinion, however, touching the place where the consultation should assemble. The people of Columbia, without assigning any reasons, appointed Washington; the people of San Felipe designated San Felipe, and submitted, in a circular addressed to the committee of safety of the various municipalities, the following reasons in support of their selection:

Some diversity of opinion has existed as to the place where the proposed consultation should meet. This place and Washington have been proposed. The meeting of yesterday have preferred this place for the reason that there is a printing press here. The most important public records are here, and the principal political authority of the department resides here. This question will of course be decided by the wishes of the majority, for which reason it is important that you [the committees of safety] will communicate to this Committee what are the wishes of the people of that section on this point.¹

The question of the place of meeting of the consultation was thus referred for determination to the local committees of safety, a step that bears the evidence of fairness and of a willingness to make all concessions, consistent with the general good, for the sake of harmony. This circular was issued from San Felipe on September 13th; the consultation was to assemble on October 15th. Want of promptness on the part of the local committees, however, made it impossible for the central committee to fix beforehand the place of meeting of the consultation. So the question of place virtually resolved itself to this—At what place would a majority of the delegates to the consultation assemble?

The battle of Gonzales, October 2, 1835, interfered with both the election and the assembling of the delegates to the consultation. Many who had been, or who subsequently were chosen delegates had hastened to the defence of their country; and when the time for the meeting of this body approached, they were loath to quit the army for the council chamber. They, therefore, on October 10th, held a meeting in camp at Gonzales and adopted the following resolutions:

Resolved, That the chairman of this meeting [S. F. Austin] be instructed to address the members of the Consultation, requesting all who *can*, to repair to the camp of the volunteers, armed and equipped for battle, and when so assembled, if a war is necessary, to aid in fighting the battles of the country; but, if their services can be spared from the field, to determine on holding the Consultation at such time and place as a majority of the members may agree upon.

Resolved, That, if any portion of the members of the Convention meet at the time and place appointed, and find it impracticable to

¹*Publications of the Southern History Association*, VIII 20, 21.

repair to the camp, as invited in the foregoing resolution, that they be requested, if they amount to a quorum, to adjourn from day to day, and suspend all action until the 1st of November.¹

Austin's letter of next day, transmitting the above resolutions, is addressed "To the members of the General Consultation who may meet on the 15th Instant," but no place is indicated where they are expected to meet.² It was unquestionably sent to San Felipe.³ Was it also sent to Washington?

A small number of delegates gathered at Washington about the time fixed for the meeting of the consultation, and the following letter was written by those from Mina on their way thither:

At Coke's Octr 17th 1835

To the members of
The "Genl consultation" &c.
At San Felipe—

The delegates from the Municipality of Mina have *positive* instructions from their constituents to meet in "consultation," at Washington on Brazos—we expect to be at that place this evening, where we shall remain until we hear further from San Felipe and from Mina— They are persuaded that the citizens of Mina will never approve of holding the "consultation" at San Felipe for many reasons—but more especially as Washington was first named & recommended as the place of meeting— The people of Columbia took the lead & I presume will expect to meet there— The citizens of Washington, we are informed, have made very ample preparations, at a large expense, for accommodating the delegates— The confidence, which has produced such results—in our minds, should be respected—

We shall expect to hear soon from you—that we may determine whether to remain, or to return to our homes—

Very respectfully &c

D. C. Barrett
B. Manlove

P. S. The other delegates from Mina now in the colonial army have been notified of their election & place of Meeting⁴

The following document, which unfortunately bears no date, will

¹*Telegraph*, October 17, 1835.

²Consultations Papers MS. All MSS. to which reference are made are on file in the Texas State Library, unless otherwise stated.

³Address of General Council to People of Texas, October 18, 1835, in *Telegraph*, October 26, 1835.

⁴Consultation Papers MS.

exhibit what was done by the delegates that assembled at Washington :

We the undersigned delegates elected to the General Consultation of all Texas to be holden in the Town of Washington on the 15th day of October 1835. met according to appointment.

Having received the resolutions adopted by the members elect of the General Consultation, the officers of the Army, and People of Gonzales at their meeting held at Gonzales on the 11th Inst. recommending an adjournment of the said Consultation to some future and convenient time. We concur therein ; and recommend that the said Consultation be adjourned until the first day of November next.

We further recommend that the said General Consultation be holden in the Town of Washington as first proposed by the meeting of the Citizens of Columbia and generally approved by the several meetings of the Citizens of Texas.

Jesse Grimes
E. M. Millican
Asa Mitchell
E. Collard

We the Undersigned members of the Genl consultation were not present at the above meeting but concur with those who were there in agreeing to hold the same at Washington on the first of Nov next

A. G. Perry
A. E. C. Johnson
J. L. Hood
J. G. W. Pierson¹

A larger number of delegates, but not a sufficient number to form a quorum, assembled at San Felipe on October 16th. On the following day they adopted the resolutions below and adjourned :

Resolved, That the members present adjourn until the first day of next month, or as soon as a quorum can meet at this place, so as to afford an opportunity to those who may desire it to join the army in the defense of their country.

Resolved, That those who cannot join the army may remain here, with the permission to unite with the Council of Texas,² . . .

From October 17th till the first of November the question of place of meeting remained *in statu quo*. 'Tis true that a number

¹Consultation Papers MS.

²*Journals of the Consultation*, 5.

of the delegates availed themselves of the permission contained in the second resolution above, and joined the general council.¹ On October 19th the general council thus strengthened took the following action:

On Motion of Mr. Perry for the determined place of the meeting of the Genl Consultation on the first of November 1835 of all Texas as follows

Resolved by the Genl Council of Texas that the Genl Consultation be held at Washington on the first of Nov, 1835—first proposed by the Committee of Columbia.

Adopted with one Dissenting voice—²

This gratuitous piece of assumption on the part of the general council, however, appears to have been entirely ignored by all. Those delegates who had assembled at Washington about the middle of October again assembled there on the first of November; those who had met at San Felipe again assembled at San Felipe; the decision of place lay with the delegates in the army. These, at the suggestion of the commander-in-chief and with the approbation of the troops, returned in time to be present at the opening on the first, at San Felipe "the place appointed for the Consultation."³

In spite of this practical decision of the matter, the question was placed before the consultation on November 3d by one of the delegates from Mina, as is shown by the following extract from the minutes for that day:

The House met pursuant to adjournment—and on Motion of R. N. Williamson that the convention adjourn fourthwith from this place to meet at the Town of Washington The Motion being put to the House

Votes in favor of the adjournment	1
" against	40

Resolved unanimously that an express be sent fourth with to Washington requesting the members at that place to repair immediately to this.⁴

The arrival of the members, who had met at Washington, at San Felipe on November 5th marks the termination of dissent upon the question of the place of meeting of the consultation; and no fur-

¹*Journal of the General Council*, in the *QUARTERLY*, VII 260.

²*Ibid.*, VII 265.

³*Comprehensive History of Texas*, I 546, 549.

⁴MS *Journal of the Consultation*.

ther action was taken during the deliberations of this body. However, when it adjourned, it was to meet at Washington on March 1, 1836.¹

(7) *Seat of the Provisional Government.*

The consultation was succeeded by the governor and general council in the management of the affairs of Texas. This body was left free to "hold their sessions at such times and places as in their opinion will give the most energy and effect to the objects of the people, and to the performance of the duties assigned them."² Those who were dissatisfied with the location of the seat of government at San Felipe early made preparations to select some other place. R. R. Royall, in a letter to J. W. Fannin, dated November 15, 1835, writes from San Felipe that, "Where the council will hold its sessions is yet undetermined. I believe it will be in Washington or Matagorda, probably at the latter."³ And Governor Henry Smith took occasion to call the attention of the council to this subject in his first official communication to that body as follows:

It will also become your duty to select some place as the seat of government, at which to hold your regular sittings during the continuance of the present form of government. In doing this you will throw aside all local partialities and prejudices, and fix on that point possessing most advantages, and the best calculated to forward our views by giving promptness and energy to our united actions. I therefore deem it unnecessary to make further suggestions on that subject, and will only add, that a Council Hall, together with other offices for the different departments of government, is indispensable.⁴

The committee on the affairs of state and judiciary, to whom this paragraph of the governor's message was referred, reported on November 17:

Your committee is concerned to see the want of unanimity in this body, upon the proper location of a place where to establish the sittings and offices of the "Provisional Government." Several

¹Article XVII of Plan of the Provisional Government, in *Journal of the Consultation*, 47.

²Art. XIII of the Plan of the Provisional Government, in *Journal of the Consultation*, 46.

³Baker, *Texas Scrap-Book*, 656.

⁴*Journal of the Proceedings of the General Council*, 14, 15.

places have been mentioned as suited to this object, and your committee being unprepared to determine the matter, will briefly submit the representations made to them by different persons.

By some it is contended that the location should be in Washington on the Brazos; this place is said to be situated in a thickly populated country, and most central to the inhabited parts of Texas. It is known that the town is of very recent origin,¹ having few if any suitable buildings or rooms for public business, and no printing establishment. Convenience and retirement are necessary for public officers, in the dispatch of business of the character in which we are now engaged. These objects cannot be expected at present in Washington, hereafter this place will no doubt be fixed upon as the seat of Government.

The inconveniencies and discomforts of our present location are too sensibly felt by every member of the Provisional Government to require any remarks; an excellent and well conducted Press is the only present inducement for continuing in San Felipe:—Mata-gorda and Velasco, destitute of the latter advantage, possess no superiority of convenience for business over San Felipe, and although strongly recommended by some, will scarcely produce any difference of opinion in this body.

Brazoria, with the advantages of a good and well conducted Press, is represented as having a suitable Council-Hall, well adapted rooms, and other conveniences for the dispatch of public business. Its location upon the navigable waters of the Brazos, affords almost hourly communication with the coast, and the distance from the army will make but about a day's difference in travel more than to San Felipe, and about the same to Washington; but the badness of the roads at this season of the year, is said to be a serious disadvantage, if not an insuperable objection.

With these statements your committee submits to the wisdom of the Council to determine the place of its sittings, and the location of the Provisional Government.

Concluding with urging the necessity of prompt decision.²

The Council gave its immediate attention to this subject:

Mr. Houston moved that the Council adjourn, when it leaves this place, to the town of Washington.

The question being taken on the above, and the Ayes and Noes were demanded, the vote stood thus:

Ayes—Messrs. Wharton, Grimes, Barrett, Perry, Parker, Houston, Parmer and Padilla—8.

¹THE QUARTERLY, X 96.

²*Journal of the Proceedings of the General Council*, 20, 21.

Noes—Messrs. Clements, Millard, Hanks, Harris, Wilson and West—6: so the question was decided in the affirmative.

Mr. Houston moved that the Council adjourn to meet at Washington on the 23rd inst., but withdrew his motion, at the suggestion of Mr. Barrett, who offered the following, which was adopted:

Resolved, that an express be immediately sent to Washington to inform the citizens of the removal of the Provisional Government to that place, and requesting them to be in readiness to receive its officers; and also that the fact of its removal be communicated to the army, and to all parts of Texas.¹

Governor Smith stopped the move to Washington with his executive veto, for the reasons that

There is no printing press at Washington, which I deem essential to our business; the public printing has not been yet completed as contracted for, which should be superintended by your body, nor has there been any Legislative action known to me, prescribing or defining the duties of our agents to be sent abroad; their commissions with authority to hypothecate the public lands and pledge the faith of the country, to answer our present emergencies, have not been made out. Commissions granting letters of Marque and Reprisal, have been earnestly solicited, both by our own citizens and foreigners, and as yet, have not been acted on. These are things I deem of the most urgent and vital importance, and should receive prompt attention.

¹*Journal of the Proceedings of the General Council, 21.*

An interesting sidelight is thrown upon this subject of removal in the following extract from a communication to the *Telegraph* of November 21, 1835: "Again there are others who say, 'Let the seat of government be established at any other place than San Felipe. But what has poor San Felipe done to merit the displeasure of these members? Why, in good sooth, there happens to be no corn, at present, to feed the horses of the members, and other accommodations not good, the want of offices, etc. As to the first objection, it is easily answered, as you, Messrs. Editors, can testify. A want of corn and other necessaries, at this time, is occasioned entirely by the absence of men and teams from the vicinity of San Felipe. Perhaps the people, in no section of the country, have furnished more men and teams, in proportion to the inhabitants, than has the settlement nearest to San Felipe. It is well known that within a day's ride of the place, there is an abundance of corn, and potatoes, and everything requisite to furnish a good table; but they are not available, because the owners have gone where duty called them. In short, no help is to be had. The same argument might be offered for the scarcity of servants at the taverns at San Felipe. And would not the same difficulties be felt at other places? Flour and other luxuries brought from abroad might be more readily procured at Velasco or Matagorda, but they would be proportionally more difficult to obtain at Washington. As to offices, I presume they might be obtained at San Felipe, as readily as at any other place. It is true, the Convention hall is not sufficiently large for the number of delegates elect; but the citizens, it is thought, will accommodate the different departments with suitable rooms for our different officers."

Furthermore, I am not apprized that your body has made the necessary arrangements for our comfortable location at Washington. It appears to me probable that more might be lost than gained by the move; be that as it may, the move as contemplated and incorporated in the 6th decree I deem premature, and calculated to produce delay and great injury, as such, I feel bound to object to it. I would beg leave to suggest to your honorable body that, notwithstanding our situations here may be uncomfortable, and none can be more so than my own, still a sense of public duty urges me to earnestly solicit your body to submit themselves to all inconveniences for the present, until the grand and important business of necessity can be accomplished, and they will find me willing to co-operate with them in the selection of any point which they may deem best calculated to promote our own convenience, and advance the public good.¹

An effort was made to pass this measure over the governor's veto, but it failed by a vote of 4 to 8.² In consequence the seat of government remained at San Felipe until about the 22nd of February, 1836.

San Felipe had been the seat of all the important councils of Anglo-American Texas since the founding of Austin's colony. However, with the passing of the provisional government and the advance of the Mexican hordes, its material glory passed away, and it was sacrificed in the defense of the country. No town in Texas counted among its citizenship abler champions of civil liberty, no town had done more to promote the cause of independence; yet independence was proclaimed at Washington. San Felipe was the home of Austin, the Father of Texas, and Travis, the defender of Texan liberty, but neither of them is buried there.

2. WASHINGTON.

(1) *Seat of the Convention of March, 1836.*

Washington is located near the Brazos where this river is crossed by the San Antonio road. It was laid out as a town in the spring of 1835; it was erected into a municipality in July of the same year; and by the spring of 1836 it contained, perhaps, fifty houses.³

¹*Journal of the Proceedings of the General Council*, 37, 38.

²*Ibid.*, 43.

³Holley, *History of Texas*, 118.

Washington was proposed in August, 1835, as the place of meeting for the consultation; a portion of the delegates assembled there about the middle of October and again on the first of November; the general council voted that the consultation should meet there, and the consultation adjourned to reassemble at that point; however, as the consultation never reassembled, this act passed for naught, as did all the preceding acts enumerated above. The provisional government, after failing to agree upon a removal of its sessions to that place, fixed Washington as the place of meeting for the convention which it called to meet in March, 1836.¹ But the course pursued by Henry Smith, after he was deposed by the general council, made it desirable for the provisional government to transfer its offices to some other point. The near approach of the time for the meeting of the convention, induced the general council to choose Washington. The following resolution was adopted to this end on February 16, 1836;

Resolved, That the Council adjourn to meet at the town of Washington on the twenty-second day of this month, and that the acting Governor and other officers connected with the Provisional Government be notified of the fact and requested to remove their offices to that place.²

The general council accordingly assembled at Washington on February 22, but failed to obtain a quorum; the other officers of the provisional government, with perhaps one or two exceptions, had also removed by March 1, 1836.

The convention assembled at Washington and organized on March 1, 1836. For various reasons the convention considered it expedient to terminate the provisional government at once. Before it could organize a government under the constitution, the extreme emergency of the case and the critical situation of Texas made the establishment of a government *ad interim* necessary.

(2) *Temporary Seat of the Government ad interim.*

The constitution adopted by the convention did not designate any place as the seat of government; the only reference to the subject in that document being Section 3 of the General Provisions:

¹*Ordinances and Decrees of the Consultation, Provisional Government of Texas and the Convention which assembled at Washington March 1, 1836*, p. 76; *Journal of the Proceedings of the General Council*, 106.

²*Journal of the Proceedings of the General Council*, 356, 357.

The presidents and heads of departments shall keep their offices at the seat of government, unless removed by the permission of congress, or unless in case of emergency in time of war, the public interest may require their removal.

The inauguration of the new government is best described in the words of President Burnet:

On the evening of the 16th March, a messenger arrived from the west, bearing the melancholy intelligence that the Alamo had fallen, and all within it been massacred. The Convention assembled forthwith, and with some few symptoms of undue excitement, proceeded to the institution of an executive government for the embryo republic. David G. Burnet was elected President; Lorenzo de Zavala, a distinguished Mexican, was elected Vice-President; Col. Samuel P. Carson, formerly of North-Carolina, Secretary of State; Bailey Hardiman, Secretary of the Treasury; Col. Thomas J. Rusk, Secretary of War; Robert Potter, Secretary of the Navy; and David Thomas, Attorney-General.

The inauguration of the new government was completed about two o'clock in the morning of 17th March, the Convention having been in session all night. Mr. Burnet delivered a pertinent address of some length, and on the ensuing day issued a proclamation from which we extract the following: "The government will remove to Harrisburg; but that removal is not the result of any apprehension that the enemy is near us. It was resolved upon as a measure conducive to the common good, before any such report was in circulation, and it has not been expedited by such report. . . . Let us acquit ourselves like men; gird up the loins of our minds, and by one united, prompt, and energetic exertion, turn back this impotent invader; and planting our standard on the bank of the Rio Grande, dictate to him the terms of mutual recognition." Both these documents were published at San Felipe, in fugitive handbills, a very few of which are now extant.

The same express that gave intelligence of the fall of the Alamo, told, also, that Gen. Houston and his little army were in rapid retreat from Gonzales. This was calculated and did contribute to the general excitement. As soon as the ceremonies of the installation were finished, the Convention adjourned *sine die*; to meet no more. The next day the little town of Washington was evacuated, not only by the members, whose services were no longer required, but by every family, excepting one, Mr. Lott's, who kept the hotel. The entire population west of the Brazos was also broken up and fugitive, and panic seemed to rule the day. The President and the Secretaries of War and Navy, remained at Washington three

days longer, occupied in such matters as required immediate attention, when they also, in the afternoon, repaired calmly to the residence of the late Col. Groce, on the route to Harrisburg.¹

3. HARRISBURG.

The considerations that led to the selection of Harrisburg as the seat of government are stated by President Burnet, in his first message to congress, in these terms:

The administration which had been organized at the town of Washington deemed it expedient to change its location to Harrisburg, from which point it could possess an easier access to foreign countries, from whence our supplies of munitions were to be obtained, and a more direct supervision of its naval and other maritime concerns. Such removal was accordingly effected within a few days after the government was created.²

In an address to the people of Texas, published a few months after these events occurred, President Burnet says:

Soon after the retreat of the Army from the Colorado, and its encampment in the dense forests of the Brazos, . . . the Government, then located at Harrisburg, directed the Secretary of War, . . . Thomas J. Rusk, to repair to the Army, for the purpose of conferring with the Commander-in-Chief.³ . . . That officer remained with the army until after the battle of 21st April.⁴ . . .

4. GALVESTON ISLAND.

The narrative of President Burnet continues thus:

The rapid approaches of the enemy had compelled the government to abandon Harrisburg,⁵ but after a transient dispersion⁶

¹*Texas Almanac* for 1860, p. 51.

²*House Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess.*, 13.

³Rusk joined the army April 6.—Brown, *History of Texas*, II 8.

⁴*Telegraph*, September 6, 1836.

⁵April 14 or 15. See: Delgado, *Battle of San Jacinto*, 32.

⁶“Sometimes, when Texas was a moving mass of fugitives, they [the government] have been without a “local habitation” and scattered to the cardinal points: again they have been on Galveston Island, without shelter, and almost without subsistence,” . . . (Burnet’s first message to congress, *House Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess.*, 18.)

It was, perhaps, about this time that President Burnet received the letter from the Nacogdoches Committee of Vigilance, dated April 6, 1836, stating “that under the present exigencies of the Country the most eligi-

they reassembled at Galveston Island, which was then considered the last hope of the defense to Texas. The arrival of the army on Buffalo bayou was made known to us about the 19th of April, two days after the enemy were known to have captured New Washington. On the 17th I had made a very narrow escape, with my family and some others, from the advance guard of the Mexican forces at that point.¹ As soon as we heard at the Island, of the arrival of Gen. Houston and his forces on Buffalo bayou, the steamboat Cayuga was despatched, with a number of volunteers and some provisions for the relief and succor of our brave troops. The Secretary of the Navy was on board this boat. On the 22d or 23d, the steamboat Laura was also despatched with further supplies, and an additional number of volunteers. Mr. Hardiman the Secretary of the Treasury was one of those volunteers. This boat sustained some injury to her boiler and was detained some 24 or 30 hours at Red fish bar, after which she proceeded to the Texian camp. The news of the great battle did not reach me at the Island until the 26th, owing to the inclemency of the weather and the miserable quality of the boat in which the messengers made the trip. A special request was made to me by the Secretary of War, that I would repair to the Camp and as soon as the steamer Yellow Stone could procure a supply of wood, which required four or five days, I set out in that boat, with more provisions, and arrived at the Camp on Buffalo Bayou about the 1st of May.²

5. CAMP SAN JACINTO.

President Burnet continues :

On my arrival at Camp, which had been recently removed further up the bayou to escape the offensive odors of the battle ground, I found the President Santa Anna and his suite occupying the only building in the vicinity. . . .

ble place for the Seat of Government is Nacogdoches, and [that the committee has been appointed] to invite You and all the Officers of the Government to make this Your temporary residence." They set forth the healthfulness of the place, the good accommodations, the ample supplies, and above all the certain, safe and speedy communication with the United States. "Besides it appears to us that in the progress of the war You may be cut off from communication with the army. That they must rally in the woodlands is obvious, and in so doing they approach us and become more remote from your present position" [Harrisburg]. (Seat of Government Papers MS.)

"There was then but one small house on the island." (See: Brown, *History of Texas*, II 55).

¹For the details of this episode, see Geo. M. Patrick to D. G. Burnet, in *Telegraph*, April 7, 1838.

²David G. Burnet to the People of Texas, in *Telegraph*, September 6, 1836.

After the usual ceremonies were passed, I was informed that an Armistice had been entered into between General Houston and General Santa Anna.¹ . . .

Such was the condition of things when I arrived at the camp on Buffalo Bayou. The members of the Cabinet were principally there. The worthy Vice President, Lorenzo de Zavala had preceded me some days. The Secretary of State elect, the Hon. Samuel P. Carson, had been compelled by the infirmities of a delicate constitution, to relinquish the duties and fatigues of office, and he obtained permission to visit the United States. The vacancy was not filled until after the battle of the 21st April, when James Collinworth who had raised his chivalry conspicuous amidst a crowd of heroes, was inducted to that office. Mr. Hardiman, the Secretary of the Treasury, reached the camp before me. The Secretary of the Navy was also there. The Secretary of War, Mr. Rusk, had been in camp for some weeks. Peter W. Grayson, Esq., was invited to and accepted the office of Attorney General, which had become vacant by the premature and accidental death of the Honorable David Thomas, after I arrived at camp.² . . .

Several days had been employed in this negotiation [the treaty with Santa Anna] and it became necessary for the army to move its quarters. A multitude of other concerns required the attention of the Civil Government, and a general dispersion from Buffalo bayou ensued. The members of the administration, with General Santa Anna and most of the Mexican Officers taken in the battle, embarked in the steamboat Yellow Stone, for Galveston Island. The army on the same day took up its march for Harrisburg.³ The Mexican Commissioner, General Wall, was furnished with a safe-conduct from my hand, and with an escort by General Rusk, and set out for the Mexican camp. The steamboat came to anchor at Galveston about sun down of the same day, and Santa Anna with his suite, was placed on board of the armed schooner Independence, under the command of Commodore Hawkins then lying at anchor in the harbor.⁴

¹David G. Burnet to the People of Texas, in *Telegraph*, September 6, 1836.

²Before the President and Cabinet left Camp San Jacinto, when it became apparent that General Houston would have to visit New Orleans to receive proper medical attention, Rusk was appointed to Houston's place and M. B. Lamar appointed to Rusk's place. . . .

³"On the 4th or 5th of May, our army took up a line of march to the west."—*Telegraph*, January 27, 1837; "May 5th, 1836, the President and cabinet, General Houston and Santa Anna and Suite, proceeded on the steamboat Yellowstone to Galveston."—Brown, *History of Texas*, II 55.

⁴David G. Burnet to the People of Texas, in *Telegraph*, September 6 and 13, 1836.

6. VELASCO.

President Burnet says further :

The entire want of accommodation at the Island rendered it necessary for the government to seek some place where the ordinary office business could be transacted, and Velasco was selected for that purpose. Accordingly, in a few days we repaired¹ to Velasco, with the President Santa Anna and his retinue in company. The Vice President had been compelled to leave us at Buffalo bayou, to attend to his domestic affairs, which had been seriously interrupted by the appropriation of his homestead, to the purposes of a hospital for the wounded in the late battle. The Secretary of the Navy had obtained leave of absence—consequently there were present at Velasco, the Secretary of State, James Collinworth; the Secretary of the Treasury, Baily Hardiman; the Sec of War, M. B. Lamar; the Attorney General, P. W. Grayson, and myself.²

Velasco enjoyed the distinction of being the summer resort “of great numbers of visitors from the north of the colony [Austin’s], who came to enjoy the delightful sea-breezes, sea-bathing, and the comforts with which they are everywhere surrounded. Excellent accommodations . . . [could] always be obtained at boarding houses.”³ Here the seat of government of the new Republic, too, was fixed long enough to attain a degree of permanency it had not hitherto known: it remained there till the end of September, 1836. Yet it may be readily shown that even this place was ill provided with the necessary requisites for the seat of government; President Burnet stated in his first message to congress that “never have they [the government] been in circumstances of comfort and convenience suitable to the orderly conducting of the grave and momentous business committed to their charge.”⁴

7. COLUMBIA.

After looking over the various places that might best serve the needs of a seat of government, President Burnet selected the town of Columbia. By proclamation, dated July 23, he called the first

¹May 8, 1836.—Brown, *History of Texas*, II 55.

²David G. Burnet to the People of Texas, in *Telegraph*, September 6 and 13, 1836.

³Holley, *History of Texas*, 121, 122.

⁴*House Journal*, 1 *Tex. Cong.*, 1 *Sess.*, 18.

congress to meet at this place on the first Monday in October, 1836. Columbia, because of its more central location, had for a time been the seat of justice of the municipality of Columbia, but at this time Brazoria enjoyed that distinction. It contained a large hotel building, "besides a building or two constructed while it was the seat of the courts, for a court house, and offices, &c. and a few dwelling houses."¹ More important still was the fact that Columbia had been selected as their place of business by the publishers of the *Telegraph and Texas Register*. We have already had occasion to observe how potent was the influence of this paper in retaining the seat of the provisional government at San Felipe. When San Felipe was about to fall into the hands of the enemy, the *Telegraph* at the invitation of the government followed the latter to Harrisburg. At this place, however, it was overtaken and destroyed by the Mexican troops. No doubt there was some understanding between President Burnet and the publishers when it was determined to re-establish this paper. No one knew better and felt more the great need of a press for conducting the government than President Burnet.¹ The first number of the *Telegraph* to be issued at Columbia appeared on August 2, 1836.

A committee of the business men of Columbia promised President Burnet the following accommodations for the use of the government:

¹Holley, *History of Texas*, 113.

²The experience of Texas during the first year of its existence as an independent power bears abundant testimony to the fact that popular government can not be carried on without the aid of the press. A means of regular communication between the government and the governed is essential to the comfort and welfare of both. "The fact," says President Burnet, "that we have heretofore been deprived of the benefits of a *Press*, the great vehicle of truth and error, is a prominent feature among the many difficulties and embarrassments that have compassed our path from the beginning, and I am persuaded it has contributed much to the censures that have been so liberally bestowed on the present Executive Government." (*Telegraph*, September 6, 1836.) "The situation of our country from the 15th of May till the 1st of August, for the want of a medium for disseminating information is well known, and was by many seriously felt. The operations of government not known by the army and people—reports magnified—want of confidence in the government, which perhaps was in a great measure, attributable to the want of information." (Editorial in *Telegraph*, January 27, 1837.)

Store house formerly occupied by Mr W C White with five rooms	5√
House formerly occupied by J C Cole—Rooms	2
Old Alcaldes office with fire place	1√
Mrs. Sledges 1 Room & Stove	1
Saml. Peebles —2 Rooms with Stoves	2
House of Mr. Beards 20 feet square with stove	1
Mr. Sampson with 2 Rooms and 1 fire place	2
Hendricks Rooms with 2 fire places	2
Mrs. Carson room with stove	1
Col. Eberlys 2 Rooms	2√
All the Chairs and Tables necessary for Both Houses of Congress.	

Sepr. 16, 1836.

W. C. White & Co.
Fitchell & Gill
Jacob Eberly
Geo Brown
G. & T. H. Borden.¹

The *Telegraph* of September 28, 1836, reports:

Yesterday the citizens of this place appointed a committee to prepare the necessary buildings for the accommodation of Congress; and we believe that suitable and convenient rooms will be furnished.

We understand that the citizens of Brazoria are also making arrangements; and all we have to say on the subject is, that we would recommend congress to do its business where the best accommodation is afforded.

The first congress assembled Monday, October 3, 1836. Soon it became manifest that the committee of arrangements referred to above had either failed to procure a sufficient number of houses or else they had not contemplated the increase of offices accompanying the organization of the constitutional government.² On October 22, the constitutional president and vice-president were inaugurated; November 7th President Houston sent the following message to congress on the subject of the proper accommodations for the government:

¹MSS. 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess. State Department.

²*Senate Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess.,* October 11, p. 15; *Telegraph,* November 9, 1836.

Gentlemen :

The important trusts committed to our charge as the representatives of a Nation and the guardians of her free institutions, demand at our hands, the arduous and incessant toils which responsibility and moral consciousness always impose, when they flow in their natural and appropriate channels.

Industry and application, put in requisition by mature judgment, must still be conducted by system, organization and method; for these are necessary, and cannot be attained or exercised without the convenience of houses.

The present position of our Government is one of great inconvenience and absolute embarrassment. We have accommodations for no branch of the public trusts. Congress is itself scarcely provided as a body, with sufficient buildings.¹ No rooms are set apart for the Committees of your body.² No Offices for the Chief Departments of the Executive branch of Government,³ and the personal accommodations of all are very deficient.

The Head of no Department can now transact with convenience the functions devolving upon him. The Secretary of the Treasury, and all his Subordinate Officers, are without rooms and without

¹"The accommodations were meager in every respect, but there was available a commodious house (for that day), with large rooms on the ground floor, separated by a wide hallway, with other rooms for committee and clerical purposes. Each house occupied one of the large rooms. This house at first accommodated the government only in part, other houses being also utilized."—Brown, *History of Texas*, II 99, 100.

"The different governmental bodies of Texas, as the Consultation, the Provisional Government, and the Government ad interim, had met at various points in small frame buildings or shanties, and when the first congress of the Constitutional Government assembled at Columbia, each house had to occupy a small frame building."—Lubbock, *Memoirs*, 48.

²On October 11th, the senate appointed a committee to confer with the committee of arrangements for the purpose of procuring the rooms contiguous to the senate chamber for the use of the different senate committees. When cold weather set in, the senate despatched their door-keeper to Brazoria for a stove. The house of representatives, on November 4th, ordered the "two rooms occupied by the auditor and comptroller, which had been appropriated by the committee of arrangements for the use of this house to be cleared for the special use of the officers and members of this house." They also suffered from cold.—*Senate Journal*, 1 *Tex. Cong.*, 1 *Sess.*, 15, 65; *House Journal*, 1 *Tex. Cong.*, 121, 180.

³October 27th, Mr. Wharton moved to allow the president and his private secretaries to retain possession of their rooms during the secret sessions of the senate; . . . which motion was lost.—*Senate Journal*, 1 *Tex. Cong.*, 1 *Sess.*, 33.

The State Department occupied a small clapboard shedroom, without fire, which in addition served as Austin's bedroom and office. It was the exposure to which he was subjected while working here that brought on the illness that terminated his life.—*Comprehensive History of Texas*, I 590.

any place to perform his highly important business.¹ The discharged soldiers of our Army, are now waiting on great expense for their honest dues at the hands of that Officer. The financial concerns of Government, will be deranged and our credit at home and abroad will be depreciated.

I would call your particular and immediate attention to this subject; and am compelled by my station to suggest that business cannot profitably proceed, unless Congress will adjourn to some point, where better accommodations and greater conveniences can be speedily obtained or buildings furnished at this place.

To induce the meeting of Congress at this point, nineteen rooms for offices had been promised but the pledges remain unredeemed. The pledge given is herewith enclosed.²

Sam Houston.³

It is not surprising that, under circumstances such as are described above, the location of the seat of government at some convenient point early engaged the attention of the first congress. As early as November 2d, the senate adopted a joint resolution providing,

That each house of congress appoint a committee of three, whose duty it shall be to report the most eligible point at which to locate the seat of government of this republic, from and after the adjournment of the present congress, up to the year of our Lord, eighteen hundred and———.⁴

¹"Agreeably to a resolution adopted this morning by the house of representatives," writes a correspondent of the *Telegraph* for November 9, 1836, "a notification has been given to the secretary of the navy, auditor, and controller of public accounts, to vacate the rooms occupied by them, for the accommodation of the clerks of the house; consequently these officers are compelled to suspend business until other rooms can be procured. The rapidly increasing number of certificates of discharged soldiers, and the constant presentation of claims to be audited, imperiously require that the business of the officers of auditor and controller should not be suspended. The number of persons in the service of the government, and the representatives of both houses, besides the influx of strangers visiting the place, is considerable, and affords a handsome revenue to the citizens of this place. I would then, Mr. Editor, suggest to the citizens of Columbia, the propriety of endeavoring to procure houses or rooms for the public business, with as little delay as possible; otherwise, the government will be necessarily compelled to remove to Brazoria, or elsewhere, to meet accommodations to suit their exigencies."

²See page 158 above for a list of the rooms promised. Perhaps only those marked (V) had been placed at the service of the government at this time. The whole expense of providing accommodations appears to have fallen upon the citizens, as congress made no offer to rent buildings. See *Telegraph*, November 9, 1836, and December 13, 1836.

³MS. Messages of 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess. State Department.

⁴*Senate Journal*, 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess., 39.

No record is made of the adoption of this resolution by the house of representatives, but on November 8th, it selected its committee in accordance with the terms of said resolution, and referred to it the president's message quoted above.¹ Both committees reported November 11th that they had failed to agree; the senate committee favored Groce's Retreat, now called San Jacinto; the house committee recommended Nacogdoches. Both suggested that a joint committee be sent to Brazoria "there to enquire into, and learn what description of houses for the accommodation of congress, for offices, committee rooms, and other accommodations, can be obtained, and upon what terms."² Instead of adopting the course suggested, which was in all probability merely another temporary makeshift, the house referred the report "to the standing committee on the state of the Republic, with instructions to report a bill locating the seat of government, by joint vote of both houses."³ In pursuance of these instructions the committee reported, on November 14th, "an act locating temporarily the seat of government," which was passed.⁴

This act of congress made the selection of a temporary site for the seat of government a subject of competition among the various aspirants to that honor. Unfortunately the promises or bids of some of the more important places have not been preserved; the following, however, will serve to indicate their general trend:

(1) *From Columbia.*

To the Hon. the Senate and House of Representatives of the Republic of Texas in Congress assembled:—

The Undersigned most respectfully represents to Your Honle. Body that, in their opinion, no place, for the Seat of Government of this Republic, until the year 1840, is more eligibly situated to subserve the people generally than theirs at Hidalgo— they, therefore, make to your Honourable Body the following Proposal, Viz— The Undersigned will set off 640 English acres of land from their sitio, such as commissioners appointed by Your Hon. Body shall

¹*House Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess., 131.*

²*Senate Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess., 49; House Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess., 146.*

³*House Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess., 147; Flavel, Report of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives, 134.*

⁴*House Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess., 150, 168; Senate Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess., 58, 62.*

select, as nearly in the form of a square as may be done; that the said 640 acres shall be well surveyed and platted, by the Undersigned, at their own expense; that the sd. Commissioners may then select one or two square Blocks on which to erect the Government Buildings—that the whole of the rest shall be laid off into town lots of the most convenient size, as directed by your Commissioners—and that, when so done, the Undersigned agree to convey to the Government a Title for the said two Blocks above-mentioned—and that the proceeds of the sales of all the lots laid off in sd. Town shall be equally divided between the Undersigned and the Government.

Monday, Nov. 28, 1836

Town of Columbia

Very respectfully the Undersigned

Martin Clow & others¹

(2) *From Washington on the Brazos.*

To The Honorable Congress of the Republic of Texas, the undersigned citizen of the County of Washington respectfully represents That he is one of the Proprietors of the Town of Washington, and learning that various places are proposed for the temporary location of the Seat of Government for this Republic until the year (1840) begs leave to represent to your Honorable body that he will give and Grant and Hereby does give and Grant to the Government of the Republic of Texas in fee simple a sufficiency of the freehold within the limits of said Town to be selected (by a commissioner appointed by your Honorable body for that purpose) in the most eligible part thereof, for the erection of such public buildings as may be necessary and deemed expedient on condition that said Town shall at any time within one year from this date become the Seat of Government for this Republic. Your orator would further say, That he is aware that propositions seemingly more liberal have been made by other individuals similarly circumstanced in other Towns; but your orator believing that public convenience rather than *individual interest* to be, the Great end of your deliberations; thus submits, this his proposition to the consideration of your Honorable body. The Town of Washington is situated on the west bank of the Brazos river and is rapidly improving, surrounded by an extensive agricultural population, well watered with springs of healthy and pure water, and in point of locality, more central than any other inhabited Town now proposed to your

¹MS. 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess. State Department.

Honorable body as the temporary Seat of Government for this Republic. Your orator with respect begs audience &c &c &c

Thos Gay

November 21st 1836¹

(3) *From Fort Bend.*

The memorial of Thomas H. Borden and others, to the honorable the House of Representatives, respectfully presents proposals for the selection of FORT BEND as the future Seat of Government.

Fort Bend is situated on a high, healthy prairie, bluffing to the Brazos river; bounded on the north, east and west by the Brazos, and lying open to the refreshing breezes of the south.

Your memorialist begs to call attention to the fact that a steam navigation is regularly established from the mouth of the river, and not obstructed at any season of the year by any ordinary event. This advantage of navigation is not *prospective*,² but in actual operation; nor is there any bar (such as Red Fish Bar,) with occasionally not more than three feet of water, or a reef, (such as that from New Washington to Shaw's at the mouth of the Jacinto river to impede the import of New Orleans produce.

The influx of commerce already established at Velasco from the United States, not equalled in any inlet or harbor of Texas, must always secure, independent of regular freight for Fort Bend, a constant supply of provisions, an advantage not possessed by any proposed location before your honorable house; and in the absence of all supplies from the States, there is no part of Texas, where a town has not been already located, possessing greater internal supplies than Fort Bend, a resident neighborhood of farmers, whose supplies of provisions, butter, poultry, eggs, &c. &c., cannot fail to render the advantages of Fort Bend unrivalled.

Your memorialist further refers to the testimony of of the last fourteen years, for the salubrity and healthiness of the location; no fatal malady having ever prevailed there, and the water is proverbial for its superiority. Your memorialist offers to build suitable houses for the congress and officers of government, and not to be *let at a rental* nor *assessed at a price*, but to be DONATED to the government, as long as they are pleased to use them: and your memorialist will grant lots to persons competent to superintend houses of public entertainment, to be erected under the direction of your memorialist and others. In all of which, he binds himself in _____ dollars; if required, to comply

¹MS. 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess. State Department.

²No boat had as yet ascended Buffalo Bayou to the prospective site of the city of Houston.

with his proposals by the first of April, 1837. Your memorialist has adopted the mode of comparison as that best calculated to narrow the subject of inquiry and facilitate the conclusions of your honorable body on the respective advantages of a suitable location.

I am, gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

THOS. H. BORDEN,

For self and others.¹

A correspondent of the *Telegraph* (November 23, 1836) makes the following interesting comments on the situation. He makes the earliest suggestion of the plan that was adopted in 1839 for defraying the cost of erecting the government buildings. He might also well be credited with planting the idea that matured when in 1875 three million acres of public land were set aside for the erection of the present granite capitol.

Messrs. Editors:—The question is agitated to a considerable extent, what particular point in the Republic is to be fixed upon for the seat of government, and as a natural concomitant, much sectional jealousy has arisen on the subject.

Petitions have been presented to Congress I believe from some half dozen cities, viz. Houston, Matagorda, Fort Bend, Columbia, Washington, Groces Retreat, &c. and, some of those very important cities whose peculiar advantages are so handsomely portrayed upon paper, like paddy's house which wanted nothing but building to make it complete, require nothing but houses to make them what they are represented to be. In these petitions very liberal proposals are made to the government as it regards the erection of public buildings. Indeed the different contending parties interested in the matter all seem determined not to be outdone in their liberal offers. Now believing myself that we could not be better accommodated at present at any of the places spoken of than at Columbia, I would enquire whether it would not be as well to remain where we are during the present session of congress, and for that body to select and set apart a certain portion of the public domain, in an eligible situation for the capital, lay off the ground in town lots and sell them at auction, reserving such as may be necessary for all the public departments. And whether we would not by this means raise a sufficient fund to erect all the houses required and by so doing put a stop to all petitions on the subject

¹Seat of Government Papers. Broadside.

and let the attention of congress be directed to matters of more importance to the country.

The contest closed on November 30th, when the two houses of congress met in joint session for the purpose of fixing the location of the seat of government until the year 1840.

The speaker informed the house that it would be expected the members of both houses of Congress would make such nominations as they might think proper.—Whereupon Mr. Branch nominated the town of Houston, on Buffalo Bayou; Mr. Archer nominated the town of Matagorda; Mr. Hill nominated the town of Washington; Mr. Green nominated the towns of Velasco and Quintana; Mr. Rowe nominated the town of Nacogdoches; Mr. Senator Robertson nominated the town of Hidalgo; Mr. senator Moorhouse nominated the town of Refugio; Mr. Billingsly nominated the place called Fort Bend; Mr. Chenoweth nominated the town of Goliad; Mr. Archer nominated Groce's Retreat, or San Jacinto;¹ Mr. Senator Ruis nominated the town of Bexar; Mr. Geraghty nominated the town of San Patricio; Mr. senator Everette nominated the town of Brazoria; Mr. Senator Grimes nominated the town of Orozimbo.²

The vote, which was taken *viva voce*, may be tabulated as follows.³

Name of Place.	1st Ballot.	2d Ballot.	3d Ballot.	4th Ballot.
Houston	11	17	19	21
Matagorda	8	7	7	4
Washington	7	13	13	14
Velasco and Quintana	3	.....	.....	.....
Nacogdoches	4	.....	1	.....
Hidalgo	1	.....	.....	.....
Refugio	1	1	.....	.....
Fort Bend.....	.....	1	.....	.....
Goliad.....	1	1	.....	.....
Groce's Retreat or San Jacinto.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Bexar.....	3	.....	.....	.....
Columbia .....	.....	.....	.....	1
San Patricio	1	.....	.....	.....
Brazoria .....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Orozimbo .....	.....	.....	.....	.....

¹San Jacinto was the name proposed for the seat of government should it be located at Groce's Retreat.

²House Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 1 Sess., 211.

³The House Journal, 211-213, gives the names of the persons voting for each place at each ballot.

Twenty-one votes being a majority of the vote cast, the speaker proclaimed the town of Houston as duly selected. This decision was embodied in an act, approved by President Houston on December 15, 1836, which declared that "from and after the first day of April next, the seat of government for the republic of Texas shall be established at the town of Houston, on Buffalo Bayou, until the end of the session of congress which shall assemble in the year one thousand eight hundred and forty"; and the president was authorized "to cause to be erected a building for the temporary accommodation of the congress of the republic, and such other buildings as may be necessary for the accommodation of the different departments of the government, at the said seat of government: provided, the sum or sums so expended shall not exceed fifteen thousand dollars."

The location having been made by a bare majority, much dissatisfaction existed with regard to the choice of Houston. President Houston, although he approved the bill, claimed to have disapproved of the location; Anson Jones characterized this act as one of the three that "constituted a perfect 'selling out' of Texas to a few individuals, or, at least, of everything that was available in 1836."¹

Congress adjourned on December 22, 1836, and one would be inclined to suppose that this subject would have been permitted to rest for the time. However, the *Telegraph* of January 3, 1837, finds occasion to make the following editorial remarks:

We have just understood that it is proposed the heads of the departments of our government should remove to Groce's Retreat, upwards of ninety miles above this place. To this remove many objections might be urged. Want of houses and accommodations for the different departments, as well as for persons having business with them. The great distance it would be from the army, the inconvenience which would necessarily attend the navy, auditor's and pay-master's departments, whose several duties are more connected with persons in the lower part of the country.

Intelligence, as well as supplies of provisions, munitions of war, &c. are much easier of attainment near the coast, than at so great

¹Jones, *Republic of Texas*, 18, 19; cf. statement of Thomas J. Rusk, in Weeks, *Debates of the Texas Convention* [1845], 206, and Thos. J. Green, *Reply to the Speech of Sam Houston, delivered in U. S. Senate*, Aug. 1, 1854, p. 60.

a distance from water communication. The objections which have formerly been urged against this place, viz. Want of houses, health and accommodation in a great measure now cease to exist. The breaking up of congress has given us more room. Most of the departments are now accommodated with suitable offices. The health of Columbia during the winter is good, and we can see no possible motive for the contemplated remove, and especially when another to *Houston* must necessarily take place before the government could get settled at Groce's retreat.

8. HOUSTON.

The first notice in print of the town of Houston—perhaps, the first notice of any sort—appeared in the *Telegraph* of August 30, 1836, in the form of an advertisement:

The Town of Houston,

Situated at the head of navigation, on the West bank of Buffalo Bayou, is now for the first time brought to public notice because, until now, the proprietors were not ready to offer it to the public, with the advantages of capital and improvements.

The town of Houston is located at a point on the river which must ever command the trade of the largest and richest portion of Texas. By reference to the map, it will be seen that the trade of San Jacinto, Spring Creek, New Kentucky and the Brazos, above and below Fort Bend, must necessarily come to this place, and will at this time warrant the employment of at least One Million Dollars of capital, and when the rich lands of this country shall be settled, a trade will flow to it, making it, beyond all doubt, the great interior commercial emporium of Texas.

The town of Houston is distant 15 miles from the Brazos river, 30 miles, a little North of East, from San Felipe, 60 miles from Washington, 40 miles from Lake Creek, 30 miles South West from New Kentucky, and 15 miles by water from and 8 or 10 by land above Harrisburg. Tide water runs to this place and the lowest depth of water is about six feet. Vessels from New Orleans or New York can sail without obstacles to this place, and steamboats of the largest class can run down to Galveston Island in 8 or 10 hours, in all seasons of the year. . . . Galveston harbor being the only one in which vessels drawing a large draft of water can navigate, must necessarily render the Island the great naval and commercial depot of the country.

The town of Houston must be the place where arms, ammunition and provisions for the government will be stored, because, situated

in the very heart of the country, it combines security and the means of easy distribution, and a national armory will no doubt very soon be established at this point.

There is no place in Texas more healthy, having an abundance of excellent spring water, and enjoying the sea breeze in all its freshness. No place in Texas possesses so many advantages for building, having Pine, Ash, Cedar, and Oak in inexhaustible quantities; also the tall and beautiful Magnolia grows in abundance. In the vicinity are fine quarries of stone.

Nature appears to have designated this place for the future seat of Government. It is handsome and beautifully elevated, salubrious and well watered, and now in the very heart or centre of population, and will be so for a length of time to come. It combines two important advantages: a communication with the coast and foreign countries, and with the different portions of the republic. As the country shall improve, rail roads will become in use, and will be extended from this point to the Brazos, and up the same, also from this up to the headwaters of San Jacinto, embracing that rich country, and in a few years the whole trade of the upper Brazos will make its way into Galveston Bay through this channel.

Preparations are now making to erect a water Saw Mill, and a large Public House for accommodation, will soon be opened. Steamboats now run in this river, and will in a short time commence running regularly to the Island.

The proprietors offer the lots for sale on moderate terms to those who desire to improve them, and invite the public to examine for themselves.

A. C. Allen, for A. C. & J. K. Allen.¹

August 30, 1836.

The town of Houston had not been selected by either half of the joint committee appointed to select a site for the seat of government. Houston appeared, however, among the competitors, when it was determined to locate the seat of government by joint vote of the two houses of congress. The proposals of A. C. & J. K. Allen are represented to have been "replete with most cogent reasons for the selection of the town of Houston."² John K. Allen was a member of the house of representatives from Nacogdoches. The selection of the site, the naming of the place, the presentation of the advantages of Houston, and the success in securing the temporary

¹For a brief sketch of A. C. & J. K. Allen, see Lubbock, *Memoirs*, 45.

²Falvel, *Report of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives*, 1 *Tex. Cong.*, 1 *Sess.*, 157.

location of the seat of government constitute a high testimonial to the shrewdness, sagacity and enterprise of the promoters of the city of Houston. It marks the beginning of one of the few successful speculations of this kind, so numerous in that day. The meagreness of information in regard to the new city appears from the care with which the proprietors define its location.¹ Not a building marked the town site when the seat of government was located there.² The first lot was sold on January 19, 1837.³ These facts may have proved an advantage rather than a disadvantage. The town certainly had no old enemies; no tangible objections in the form of insufficient accommodations were present; and the possibilities of the future were no doubt duly magnified.

The government was to have removed to Houston by April 1, 1837; but for want of the necessary buildings the executive departments were not transferred from Columbia until April 16th.⁴ No mention of the removal is made in the *Telegraph*, for the reason, perhaps, that the *Telegraph* and the government made the trip to Houston in the same vessel. If so, they did not arrive at their destination until April 27th—only a few days before the meeting of the adjourned session of the first congress, May 1st. In consequence of the late removal the reports of the several departments were not ready for presentation to congress until May 19th.⁵

Prior to its removal, the *Telegraph* stated: "We are highly gratified in stating that the process of building is rapidly advancing at Houston; the offices intended for the reception of the several departments of government, will soon be completed; the building also intended for our press is nearly finished."⁶ However, on reaching Houston a month after, it had this to say of its new office and of the government building: "like others who have confided in *speculative things*, we have been deceived: no building had ever been nearly finished at Houston intended for the press; fortunately,

¹See paragraph three of the advertisement above.

²Lubbock, *Memoirs*, 46.

³Statement of James S. Holman, agent for the proprietors of the town site, in *Telegraph*, August 12, 1837.

⁴*Telegraph*, March 17, 1838.

⁵President's Message, in *House Journal*, 1 *Tex. Cong.*, 1 *Sess.*, 44, 47.

⁶*Telegraph*, March 21, 1837.

however, we have succeeded in renting a shanty, which, although like the *capitol* in this place,

‘Without a roof, and without a floor,
Without windows and without a door,’

is the only convenient building obtainable,”¹ . . .

It will be remembered that \$15,000 had nominally been placed at the command of the president with which “to cause to be erected a building suitable for the temporary accommodations of the congress of the republic, and such other buildings as may be necessary for the accommodation of the different departments of the government.” This sum, even had it been available, which it was not,² was entirely inadequate to meet the purposes apparently contemplated, in view of the high prices of labor as well as building materials.³ However, it is probable that it was never the intention that the president should have the buildings referred to erected. The Messrs. Allen certainly offered to construct them;⁴ and Mr. Borden, in his proposal of Fort Bend, suggests that the buildings so erected were to be rented or else “assessed at a price” at which they should be purchased by the government.⁵ So, too, Mr. Lubbock in his *Memoirs* states that

The Allens had undertaken to provide a capitol building at Houston, but fearing they might not have it ready for the meeting of Congress on the 1st of May, erected on Main Street a one-story building covering the front of an entire block. At one corner of the block a large room was constructed for the Senate, and at the other corner a larger one for the House of Representatives, and the space between partitioned off into rooms for the department offices. Col. Thos. W. Ward was the capitol contractor under the Allens. The work was not begun till the 16th of April, but it was pushed with such energy that the capitol, though not finished,

¹*Telegraph*, May 2, 1837.

²“The demands on our Treasury, since the adjournment of Congress, have been great, without the means of meeting them,” . . .—President’s Message, May 5, 1837.

³Lubbock, *Memoirs*, 47, 54; *Telegraph*, May 2, 1837.

⁴“Mr. Branch read further proposals from Mr. Allen binding himself in the sum of ten thousand dollars, or such bond as Government may require, that all necessary buildings for congress, and the clerks shall be erected by the first of April, 1837.”—Falvel, *Report of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives*, Nov. 21, 1836, p. 161.

⁵Page 163 above.

was far enough advanced to accommodate Congress and the heads of departments. Accordingly, on May 1st, the adjourned session of the First Congress met in the respective chambers,¹ "fitted up and furnished for business."

The last statement—"fitted up and furnished for business"—must be considerably qualified, else the reader will be misled. For instance, J. J. Audubon notes in his diary on May 4, 1837:

Meanwhile, we amused ourselves by walking in the capitol, which was yet without a roof, and the floors, benches, and tables of both houses of congress were as well saturated with water as our clothes had been in the morning.²

Again, the official record of the proceedings of the house of representatives for May 10, 1837, says: "The members assembled according to adjournment, but owing to the storm of the preceding night, and the insufficiency of the building, the floor being flooded with water, and the hall unfit for the transaction of business, on motion, adjourned until tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock."³ May 15, an effort was made in the senate to have a special committee appointed "to obtain a room for the senate to meet in the present session."⁴ And on May 20, a motion was made in the house to have Major Ward, the contractor, discontinue "such labor on this house as disturbs the deliberations of congress during the hours of its session."⁵

Nor was congress worse situated than the various departments of the executive. Neither was the want of accommodation experienced alone in the transaction of official business. The new city did not possess the conveniences required by the members of congress and the visitors who had business with the government. The discomforts that resulted from this situation, together with the dissatisfaction over the original choice of Houston that still lurked in many minds, presented a source of discontent and a fruitful soil for all sorts of plans in regard to the future location of the seat of government. The consideration of these plans will form the subject of a subsequent paper.

¹*House Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 2 Sess., 1; Senate Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 2 Sess., 1.*

²Quoted by Lubbock, in his *Memoirs*, 53.

³*House Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 2 Sess., 20.*

⁴*Senate Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 2 Sess., 10.*

⁵*House Journal, 1 Tex. Cong., 2 Sess., 51.*