



WALKING TOUR

Prior to Texas winning independence from Mexico, Huntsville was founded in 1835 by Pleasant Gray. Twelve years later he deeded this land to Huntsville for "a place of burial, free to all persons."

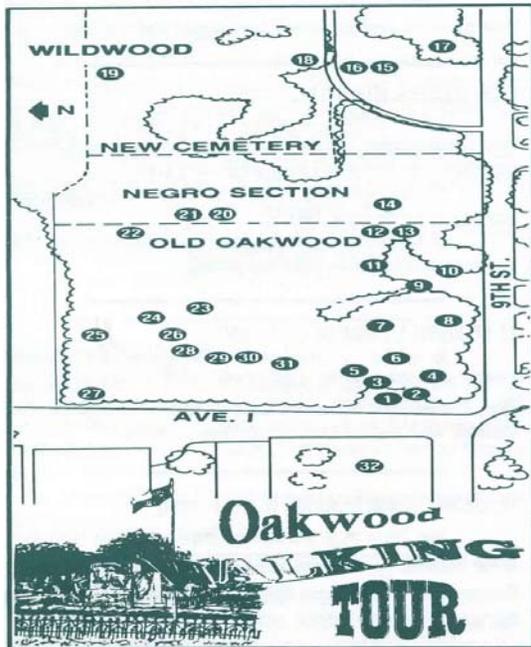
This cemetery however, was in use before Gray's deed and has a stone with the date 1842. Earlier graves were either unmarked or the markers have long since disappeared.

Oliver H. Gray, one of Pleasant Gray's sons, died March 4, 1853 at the age of 18, and is buried in an unmarked grave in Oakwood Cemetery.

The Oakwood Cemetery is the final resting place for many people of historical prominence. This step-by-step walking tour will assist you as you explore our fine heritage. (See Historical Marker)

The Oakwood Cemetery is located a short distance from Huntsville's downtown square. Travel east on 11th Street and turn left on Spur 94, "Sam Houston Memorial Drive," which is Texas' shortest highway.

A map of Oakwood Cemetery is located below.



A publication of the Huntsville Convention & Visitors Bureau Huntsville / Walker County Chamber of Commerce (936) 295-8113

1. GENERAL SAM HOUSTON (1793-1863)

Sam Houston died July 26, 1863 from pneumonia. He was buried the next day in this self-chosen grave, near his friend, Henderson Yaakum. A Masonic funeral was held in the upstairs parlor of the steamboat house, which was then located one fourth of a mile east of this site. His family and close friends walked this distance during the funeral which was attended by few mourners because of his view on secession.

Margaret Lea Houston died of yellow fever in Independence, Texas during the epidemic of 1867, and was not buried next to her husband.

Sam Houston was one of the most controversial and colorful figures in our history. As a great warrior and statesman, he fought in two wars, served as U.S. Senator and Governor for two states and was the first President of the Republic of Texas. Before moving to Texas, he lived with the Indians and was given the Indian name meaning "The Raven." (See Historical Marker)

The executors of Houston's will were Thomas Gibbs, Thomas Carothers, J. Carol Smith and Anthony Branch. All were buried near Sam Houston's grave—he was surrounded by friends in life and is surrounded by them in death. Sam Houston's 200th birthday was officially celebrated on March 2, 1993.

SAM HOUSTON MONUMENT

On the seventy-fifth anniversary of the battle of San Jacinto, the State of Texas erected this monument to the memory of Sam Houston on April 21, 1911.

The Honorable William Jennings Bryan spoke to the hundreds of people in attendance proclaiming General Houston as a national hero as well as a great Texas patriot.

This monument, sculpted by Pompeo Coppini, is of Texas grey granite and represents Houston as the General in command of the Texas Army. On the left is the figure of "Lady Victory" and on the right is "Lady History."

The inscription on the monument's east side was written by Houston's youngest daughter who was in attendance at the ceremony. The wrought iron fence which surrounds the grave site is designed with inverted axes, symbolizing "Peace, the battle is over."

2. THOMAS CAROTHERS (1802-1866)

This early settler received a land grant from the Republic of Texas for land near Huntsville. In 1846, he served with the First regiment of the Texas Volunteers during the War with Mexico. Upon returning, he helped to establish the first main road connecting Huntsville to Houston.

In 1859, he was appointed as the fourth superintendent of the Huntsville penitentiary and lived with his family in the commodious quarters above the general offices of the prison.

As superintendent during the years of the Civil War, Union prisoner-of-war officers were frequent and welcome visitors to his home. He was a first cousin to General Sam Houston.

3. DR. CALVIN S. HAMILTON (1808-1858)

Dr. Hamilton was one of the first physicians to settle in Huntsville and was actively involved in local politics. In 1845, Huntsville was incorporated as a town in north Montgomery County and he was elected Alderman in the city's first government.

A year later, Walker County was established and he was appointed to serve on the Board of Agents to oversee the design and construction of the town's first public building; the county jail completed in 1847.

21. SAMUEL WALKER HOUSTON (1864 - 1945)

Born a year after Sam Houston's death, he was named after the great general by his father Joshua Houston, the trusted servant of the Houston family. Joshua did as Mrs. Houston suggested and educated Samuel Houston at the finest schools. He was a contemporary of Booker T. Washington and studied at Howard University and Atlanta University.

After working at the State Department in Washington, D.C., he returned here and served as publisher of The Huntsville Times newspaper. He is best known for establishing the Houston Institute which was ranked as the best rural high school in the south. He later became principal of Huntsville's first Negro high school.

The Samuel Walker Houston Cultural Center opened in Huntsville in 1991. Located at 341 Old Madisonville Road, it serves as a black history museum.

22. CAPTAIN JAMES T. HUNTER (1835 - 1921)

The family first settled in Walker County in 1837 after moving from Kentucky. His father had served in the War of 1812 and was the co-founder of the Trinity river community, Cincinnati. His mother was the first native to die of the yellow fever epidemic of 1853 which crippled the community, from which it never recovered and is now a ghost town.

At the outbreak of Civil War, the governor appointed James Hunter to form a company of local men to fight. Captain Hunter led over one hundred men from Texas and joined Hood's Brigade in Richmond, Virginia. He was wounded several times before surrendering with General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox.

He returned to Huntsville after the war and owned many successful businesses.

23. REV. SAMUEL MCKINNEY (1807 - 1879)

Born in Hawkins County, Tennessee, his family had come to America for religious and political freedom.

As a devout Scotch-Irish Presbyterian, he received his Doctoral Divinity Degree in 1832 and went west as a missionary to the Indians.

He came to Texas to become the first President of Austin College where he served from 1850-53 and again from 1862-71 during very trying times.

24. REV. THOMAS HENRY BALL (1819 - 1858)

His family were early settlers in Virginia and he, like his father before him, was an ordained Methodist minister. As one of Texas's earliest Christian educators, he joined the faculty of the newly established Andrew Female College and became its second President in 1855. (Andrew Female College was located a short distance west of this site.)

He died of typhoid fever in 1858, just prior to the birth of his son, Tom Ball II, who served as mayor of Huntsville in 1888 and was a congressman. The town of Tomball, Texas was named in his son's honor. (See Historical Marker)

25. CAPTAIN JAMES GILLASPIE (1805 - 1867)

In 1835, Captain James Gillaspie organized forty Tennessee volunteers and came to fight in the Texas Revolution. For over thirty years this brave soldier, at the head of four different companies, fought for Texas under three separate flags (Republic of Texas, United States and Confederate States).

A memorial marker is located just outside the Oakwood Cemetery entrance in honor of his military efforts.

He served as superintendent of the Texas penitentiary, and during his tenure from 1850-58 and again from 1866-67, he helped establish Huntsville as the permanent home of the Texas prison system.

26. DR. PLEASANT W. KITTRELL (1805 - 1867) See Historical Marker

Dr. Kittrell moved his family, along with the Goree family, here in the late 1840's from Alabama. He previously served in North Carolina and Alabama legislatures and was elected to the Texas legislature in 1855 and 1857. Dr. Kittrell was one of the main forces behind the establishment of the University of Texas.

He was one of Walker County's first physicians and was Sam Houston's doctor at the time of the general's death.

When the yellow fever epidemic began, he tended to the sick, contracted the infection and died.

27. UNION SOLDIERS

Eight Union soldiers were stationed in Huntsville during the Reconstruction Period after the Civil War. Within a short period of time, all but one had died of yellow fever.

At the time the gravestones were placed here, their names were unknown. However, it was later discovered that the soldiers buried here were with Company B of the 26th U.S. Infantry and Company H of the 6th U.S. Cavalry

Buried here are Captain James A. Butler, Sergeant Arthur Bolger, Private William Eckhart, Private John H. McBride, Private Patrick Downey and Private Freeman Uphold, leaving only one of these soldiers unknown.

28. EASTHAM FAMILY - pronounced E-SUM

Arthur Eastham (1827 - 1872) moved to Huntsville in 1852 from Virginia. Prior to serving in the Civil War, he was the local sheriff. His brother Byrd Eastham (1835 - 1883) later moved to Huntsville and married Delha Alston (1847 - 1911).

The Eastham families were farmers and owned dry good stores on the Huntsville downtown square. The Eastham Prison Unit is located on one of their farms.

29. JOHN SMITHER (1778 - 1860)

His family were early settlers of the colony of Virginia and John Smither was born only two years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. He was married in 1808 and moved his new family to Tennessee where he was an innkeeper.

In 1839, he moved to the Republic of Texas with his two sons, John R. Smither and Robert G. Smither and settled in Huntsville.

30. ROBERT G. SMITHER (1811 - 1853)

Walker County's early history was shaped by Major Robert Smither, who was a leading merchant and helped in securing the county seat for Huntsville.

He was a major in the Provisional Army of Texas and fought off two Mexican invasions in 1842. He sold the land for Texas's first penitentiary (The Huntsville "Walls" Unit) and helped raise money for its construction in 1848.

As a charter trustee of Austin College, he also served as its first treasurer. He died of yellow fever in Louisiana while travelling home from a business trip to New York. He was one of Huntsville's earliest victims of the yellow fever epidemic.

His infant daughter lies here in the Smither plot with the date 1842—earliest in the cemetery.

31. GENERAL JOHN S. BESSER (1802 - 1893)

Before coming to Texas, he acquired the military rank of Brigadier General in Missouri and served there in the state legislature.

He came to Texas in 1836 with a small band of militia men to join the battle for Texas independence. He missed the action, however, arriving after the Battle of San Jacinto.

He served as a director for the newly established penitentiary and drafted the first rules and regulations for the prison.

As a conservative democrat, he voted against both annexation and secession. He lived a long life and died at the age of ninety-one.

32. GILLASPIE MEMORIAL MARKER (Erected 1937)

Upon the monument appeared the names of the individual soldiers composing the company he commanded in the Texas Revolutionary War, the two companies he commanded in the war between the United States and Mexico and the company he commanded in the War between the States. Some familiar names listed are: James Gillaspie's father-in-law Hezekiah Farris, Henderson Yoakum, Thomas Carothers, Pleasant Gray, L.A. Abercrombie and James Baker.

He joined the U.S.M.C. in 1917 and served with distinction in World War I and World War II. The "U.S.S. John W. Thomason" naval destroyer was designated in his memory. He died in 1944 at the naval hospital in San Diego, CA and is buried here in the Thomason family plot.

He is best known for his authorship of many books including *Job Stuart Gone to Texas* and *Fix Bayonets!* which he also illustrated. His portrait hangs in the Texas Hall of heroes in the capital building.

14. JANE WARD (Born about 1850 - 1931)

Aunt Jane was a freed slave and known as the "Good Samaritan". She is best remembered as the organizer of the annual Juneteenth Celebration on Emancipation Day.

She ran a black boarding house and since there were no hospitals at the time, she cared for the sick in her home.

NEGRO CEMETERY

This strip of land, measuring the full distance of the cemetery's north and south boundaries, has been reserved for negro use since Oakwood's inception. Many slaves brought here by pioneer settlers are buried here in unmarked graves. This section has been closed for many years, yet many of Huntsville's prominent black citizens are buried here.

NEW CEMETERY

Oakwood was expanded to the east of the Negro section first in 1887 and again in 1910 to include land eastward to Avenue F. In 1927 the Adickes Addition of Oakwood was added. The steamboat house, where Sam Houston died, was located on this tract and this historic home was relocated to the Sam Houston Memorial Museum Complex grounds where it remains today.

15. MAJOR THOMAS JEWETT GOREE. (1835-1905)

Upon encouragement from Sam Houston, the Goree family moved from Alabama and arrived in Walker County in the late 1840s. Thomas J. Goree's mother Sarah Kittrell Goree had been the matron of honor at the wedding of Margaret Lea and Sam Houston in 1840 and the families were good friends.

Thomas Goree attended Baylor College in Independence, Tx and earned his law degree in 1859. He served on the staff of the Confederate General Longstreet as a captain for four years until the surrender at Appomattox.

He was the Superintendent of the Texas Penitentiary for fourteen years and resigned in 1891 to run unsuccessfully for lieutenant governor.

The Goree Prison Unit is named in his honor.

16. ELIZA THOMAS "NOLLEY" GOREE (1845 -1929)

Eliza "Tommie" Nolley came to Texas in 1866 from Mississippi to teach at Andrew Female College and later became principal. She and her sister Martha Ann "Nolley" Otey tirelessly attended the yellow fever victims during the epidemic of 1867. Both sisters became infected by the disease; Eliza survived but her sister became a victim.

She married Thomas J. Goree in 1868 and was the grandmother of Colonel John W. Thomason.

17. LEONARD A. ABERCROMBIE (1832 -1891)

Moved to Huntsville from Alabama, admitted to the Texas Bar in 1854. He was a delegate to the Secession Convention and served in the Confederate Army and made rank of Lieutenant Colonel. In 1867 he was appointed Commissioner of the

Texas penitentiary.

In 1879, as a Senator of the twenty-first state legislature, Abercrombie used his influence to establish Sam Houston Normal Institute and later helped get funds appropriated to expand the school with the construction of the Main Building completed in 1890.

18. MAJOR JOHN HENRY (1828 - 1897)

John Henry was born in Canada in 1828 of Irish parentage. He learned the tailoring business in New York and was employed here by the Confederacy to construct uniforms from fabric made at the prison.

After the Civil War he went into the mercantile business and later opened a store on the Huntsville downtown square in 1883. The upstairs became a successful opera house with traveling acting troupes performing there.

The Henry Opera House was open from 1883 to 1913 and was the first theatre to show motion pictures in Huntsville.

*Beyond this point to the east are many additional individuals and families of historic importance, including: Judge James A. Elkins (1879 - 1972), Colonel Andrew T. McKinney (1838 - 1931), Sam Houston Normal Institute President Harry F. Estill (1861 -1942) and members of the Josey Family who were philanthropists and did much to improve the community.

19. MARIAN LEIGH "RATHER" POWELL (1881 - 1974)

Marian "Mamie" Leigh Rather was born in Huntsville in 1881. Her grandfather was John Henry who owned The Henry Opera House, where she attended performances regularly.

She taught at Sam Houston Normal Institute and was the writer of the school song in 1910. She married Judge Ben H. Powell III in 1913 and they moved to Austin in 1920.

She was the first woman elected to the local school board and served as the Walker County chairman of the women's suffrage movement.

RAWLEY RATHER POWELL MEMORIAL PARK

The Powells purchased a large wooded tract to the north of Oakwood Cemetery and dedicated it as a wildwood sanctuary in memory of their second son Rawley Powell who died at five years of age.

They later erected this bronze statue of Christ by sculptor Bertel Thorwaldsen. The original statue is located in a Copenhagen church in Denmark.

20. JOSHUA HOUSTON (1826-1901) See Historical Marker

He was the Negro body servant of General Sam Houston. In 1840, he came into Houston's household from Alabama, where he worked for Mrs. Houston's father.

After the Civil War, as a freedman, he built the first home in the new Rogersville section of Huntsville, where he also conducted a blacksmith shop, wood shop and store.

He helped establish and finance the first negro church, which also served as the city school for negro children. Shortly after the reconstruction period, he was elected Walker County commissioner in 1882.

At the time of Sam Houston's death, Joshua had earned and saved several thousand dollars in gold with the General's encouragement. Joshua went to Margaret Houston's aid and offered her financial assistance during her difficult times. She graciously declined and suggested he save it for his children's education.

4. HENDERSON KING YOAKUM (1810 - 1856)

"Prominent was Henderson Yoakum, lawyer, statesman, and historian until his early demise."

Yoakum moved here with his wife and nine children a little over a decade before his untimely death. In this brief period, he played a significant role in the development of Huntsville.

Henderson Yoakum died of a sudden illness while on a speaking engagement in Houston. He was returned and buried here.

Upon moving to Huntsville in 1845, he helped establish Huntsville as the new county seat of Walker County.

In 1848 he served as one of the first Directors of the newly formed Texas penitentiary. He then was a trustee of Andrew Female college, helped establish Austin College and developed the school's law department, which was the first in Texas.

He is best known as the author of Texas' first comprehensive history, which was published in 1855. (See Historical Marker)

5. ANTHONY MARTIN BRANCH (1823 - 1867)

Came from Virginia soon after Texas annexation. He at once took rank among the State's prominent lawyers, who were by majority living in Huntsville at the time.

When the War between the States broke out, Branch raised and led a company of local men for the Confederate Army. He was elected to the Confederate Congress while still in the field and served from 1863 until the end of the war.

In 1866 he was elected Congressman; but the U.S. congress refused to seat him because of his Confederate service.

The following year the Yellow Fever epidemic claimed over a tenth of the people of Huntsville in only a matter of weeks. Anthony Branch was among those victims and died on October 3, 1867. (See Historical Marker)

6. GEORGE ROBINSON (1820 - 1888)

Known as "Item George", he earned an excellent reputation as the publisher of the **Huntsville Item**. In 1853, the publication was named "the outstanding paper of the state".

He founded the paper in 1850 and his family published the "Item" for over fifty years. The **Huntsville Item** is still in print today. The publication ceased during the Civil War when Robinson enlisted in the Confederate Army in 1863.

George Robinson was born in Liverpool, England and before coming to Huntsville worked at the **Galveston News**.

7. SANDFORD GIBBS (1819 - 1886)

SALLIE E. GIBBS (1844 - 1918)

The Sandford Gibbs family plot lies beyond this wrought iron fence. Their family's continued efforts to influence the beneficial civic, cultural, business and spiritual development of Huntsville has lasted for over a century and a half.

Sandford Gibbs helped establish Andrew Female College, the First Methodist Church and donated the land used by the prison for The Peckerwood Hill Cemetery and for the railroad. He was also a major donor to help establish Sam Houston Normal Institute.

He married Sarah Elizabeth Smith who was known as Sallie E. Gibbs. They had six children with descendants still living in Huntsville today.

Sandford Gibbs actively involved his wife in the company's business decisions. He died twenty years after their marriage and Sallie E. survived her husband by thirty-two years. She was effectively in charge of the family business for many years.

She wisely invested the family estate by establishing the Gibbs National Bank (later became First National Bank) in 1890, and she was one of the first women bank directors in Texas.

She lived a long, prosperous life and died in 1918.

8. THOMAS GIBBS (1812 - 1872)

Thomas Gibbs founded the "oldest business in Texas under original ownership", which he established in 1841 with his first partner Garner Coffin.

Sam Houston was a friend and steady customer and Mr. Gibbs served as an executor of Houston's will.

The home he built in 1862 for his second wife still stands today as the Gibbs-Powell Museum.

He voted against secession; and he and Sam Houston were criticized for their belief in a unified nation.

Thomas Gibbs died in Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1872. His wife sold his interest in the company to Sandford Gibbs. It is interesting to note that none of his descendants share partnership in the company he founded.

9. JUDGE JAMES ADDISON BAKER (1821 - 1897)

Prominent lawyer, businessman and Mason, Judge Baker was among the first trustees for Austin College, as treasurer and helped Henderson Yoakum establish Texas' first law school.

He owned a successful mercantile store on the downtown square and shared a law office with L.A. Abercrombie.

He served in the Civil War under Captain James Gillaspie's Company, called into service by the Confederate Army in 1861.

His great-grandson, James A. Baker was appointed the U.S. Secretary of State in President George Bush's administration.

10. MARTHA ANN "NOLLEY" OTEY (1833 - 1867)

"No human being can come into the world without increasing or diminishing the sum total of happiness." Mrs. Otey wrote these last words to her younger sister Eliza Thomas "Nolley" Goree before she died of yellow fever in October of 1867.

The two sisters came to Huntsville in 1866 from Mississippi to teach at Andrew Female College. A year later when the yellow fever epidemic broke out, they unselfishly chose to nurse the sick.

Martha Ann Otey made the ultimate and final sacrifice for the sake of others during that dreadfully awesome Summer and Fall of 1867.

11. DR. CHARLES G. KEENAN (1813 - 1870)

Born in Tennessee, he served as a United States Army surgeon in the Indian Campaigns before coming to Texas during the days of the Republic. He exhibited great ability in the medical field and in public service as well.

After moving to Walker County, he served in the third legislature and was elected Speaker of the House, 1849-50.

Dr. Keenan was one of the first physicians in Huntsville and one of the only local doctors who survived the yellow fever epidemic.

12. DR. JOSHUA A. THOMASON (1810 - 1894)

He was born in Georgia, reared in Alabama and studied medicine in Kentucky and Pennsylvania. He purchased a large tract of land in Walker County in 1851. Three years later, he moved his family and servants here and developed a fine plantation, which produced cotton, tobacco, cattle and timber.

13. COLONEL JOHN W. THOMASON, JR. (1893 - 1944)

John Thomason, Jr. was born in Huntsville and is the grandson of Dr. Joshua Thomason. After attending Sam Houston Normal Institute he received an Honorary Doctor of Letters Degree from Southwestern University and studied art in New York City.