

Box's Fort

this settlement which became known as Box's Creek. The office was discontinued 5 November 1866.²⁵

Commissioners Court Minutes reveal that on 3 October 1846 John A. Box was appointed overseer of the road from Rusk to Houston County, from "the Neches to Shepherd's fence." In April 1847 he asked the Court for permission to turn the road from Rusk to Crockett to prevent it from running through his farm, and it was granted. In August 1848 Beat 7 was organized and he was appointed presiding officer. This would be the same as a precinct. In February 1849 he was appointed overseer on the road from Rusk to Crockett by way of Stinson's Ferry.²⁶

Samuel Charles Box (1811-1862) was born in Tennessee to John Morris Box. He and Margaret T. were married in Blount County, Alabama 16 December 1832 and came to Texas in 1834 with the other Box families, and lived at the Box's Fort. His wife died in a few years and is probably buried there. In January 1840 he married Mrs. Nancy G. Russell. The ceremony was performed by Nathaniel Killough, survivor of the Killough Massacre.²⁷

Samuel C. Box served in the Texas Revolution as private and captain of a Mounted Volunteer Militia unit, as stated previously, then returned to his home at the fort.

The act creating Cherokee County in April 1846 also provided for a commission of eight men to select a site for the county seat. Samuel C. Box and William S. Box were two of them and were present in April 1847 when James F. Timmins signed the deed to them for the 100 acre tract for which he received \$600. The tract had been surveyed and laid out in "Town lots and on which a Town is now progressing cald Rusk the county cite of the aforesaid...."²⁸

Box was a faithful Methodist Evangelical Minister, performed marriages, held funerals, visited the sick and served churches in Crockett, Nacogdoches, and the local districts. In October 1846 he was appointed Justice of the Peace for Precinct 1.

All citizens were required to furnish hands for road work if they lived in two miles of the road, on either side. Samuel C. Box is not on the early lists through 1848. The fort was over three miles from the road and it appears that was where he lived until his death. He and Nancy are on the 1850 and 1860 Federal Census records and were carrying on a large farming operation..

The will of Samuel C. Box was proved in December 1862 by Alexander Black. The widow and daughter Sarah E. C. Harrison were his only heirs. Thomas Singletary became executor and his bond was \$25,000, meaning the estate was valued at \$12,500. Before the estate was settled Nancy Box had married John Hauk and Sarah had married Robert C. Clifton.²⁹

Sarah E. C. Clifton made a will 26 June 1869 which was proved in November 1869. Thomas Singletary, long and tried friend of her father, and her son-in-law John W. Singletary were executors. She named two children by her present marriage, Amanda B. Clifton and Loula R. Clifton, who were to receive 732 acres of land in Houston County in the John M. Box headright derived by her through the estate of her deceased father, Samuel C. Box. Other children from deceased husband John Harrison were Margaret E. Singletary, wife of John W. Singletary, and the minors Mary Jane Harrison and Vincent Harrison. Inventory and appraisalment included tools, cattle, 100 bushels of corn, rails and 1,500 boards. Her

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On the 1850 Federal Census of Cherokee County, John A. was age 42, born in South Carolina; Letty T. was age 40, born in Tennessee. Louisa M., age 21, William C. age 18, and Eunice J. age 16 were born in Alabama. Children born in Texas were Severe D, age 10, Alva A., age 7, Mary M., age 5, and John R., age 3. John A. Box was listed as a farmer, real estate value \$12,000.²³

In 1860 still at home with their parents were Severe D., Alva A., Mary M., and John R. Box, and Margaret E. age 10 and James E. age 7 have been added.

The 1870 census shows John Asbury Box was age 62, Letty T. was not shown, but James E. and Mary M. were in the household as well as William L. Jones with wife Emily J. (nee Box). Mary E. age 10, and a 9 month old baby named Ada F. Mary J. Holmes and one Oliver H. Jones were also enumerated.

The heirs of John Asbury and Letty T. Box got together to settle the estate of their parents.²⁴ The will is recorded in the deed book, not probate records. They said he died 9 January 1871 and that Letty T. Box died 6 November 1867 leaving the following children:

- Louisa M. Box who married Isaac C. Byrd,
- Caroline S. Box who married Henry Clay Hendrick,
- Severe D. Box,
- Eunice J. Box who married Richard Holmes and was his surviving widow,
- Emily J. Box who married James Holmes, now deceased, and who is married to William J. Jones,
- Mary M. Box, an invalid, for whom a guardian was provided,
- James E. Box,
- Susan Jane Box, a grandchild, and only surviving child of William C. Box, deceased,
- Margarett E. Box who married William W. Miles.

The Inventory and Appraisement included

1,032 acres of land in Houston County, part of the head right of his father, John M. Box, recorded in 1853, estimated value	\$ 2,500.00
320 acres in Peter Lovejoy Survey and 177 acres in John M. Box headright, both in Cherokee County and being homeplace	\$ 1,500.00
4,605 acres in Anderson County, a Spanish grant, labor adjoins said league (4,428 + 177) at \$2.50 an acre	\$ 11,512.50

The above clearly indicates where the land of John Asbury Box and that of his father was located.

Susan Jane Box, grandchild, was only given \$10 in the will, but the children decided she should have a 1/9 in and to their one half. The distribution includes an interesting list of perishable items.

About 1845 John A. and Letty T. Box had left the fort and moved to the Peter Lovejoy survey and built their log home. By 1851 it was a voting box, and he was appointed postmaster 17 June 1851 for

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"James J. Box was killed by Kiowa Indians with six shooters and arrows. They scalped him, took his wife and five children, girls I - 14, and one boy, August 1866. The boy and one girl, Laura, died while with the Indians. The others were reclaimed.¹⁸

Even though this happened a few miles across the river, news travelled fast and the captives were cousins to those living at Box's Fort.

Perhaps a bit of family history would be helpful.

Stephen F. Box (1770-1843) and John Morris Box (1780-1842) were born in Laurens County, South Carolina to Robert Box and his wife Mary Williams.¹⁹ He was a veteran of the American Revolution and was granted land in Tennessee in 1783 and moved the family there. A few years later they moved to Blount County, Alabama. The 1830 Federal Census lists several Box families including Stephen F. Box, Stillwell Box, Roland W. Box, and several men named John Box. They heard about the generous land grants in Texas. Their certificates of entry show they were all here in 1834 or 1835. Their long westward journey by wagon and horseback was completed. The Mississippi River and the Sabine River had been successfully crossed. There is no account of the first year on the frontier of Texas, but family tradition suggests the families were together for some time for mutual protection.

James Edward Box (1814-1851), youngest son of John Morris Box, was single when he came to Texas. After the Battle of San Jacinto in which he served, he returned to the Fort for a while then moved to Houston County. In 1840 he married Mary Douthit. Stella Box Hill wrote that he and D. H. Eden drew the first maps of Palestine and laid out and named the streets with the help of John A. Parker when Anderson County was formed. She said these three men supervised the building of the first courthouse and jail in what is now called Old Town. He was also one of the members appointed to locate the county seat.²⁰

On the 1850 Federal Census of Anderson County²¹, James E. Box was age 36, born in Tennessee; Mary was age 31, born in Tennessee. The children William H., age 10, John W. age 8, James K. P. age 6, and Robert D. age 4, were born in Houston County. The baby girl Margaret A., age 4 months, was born in Anderson County.

The boy John W. is the J. J. W. Box (1842- 1913) who married Susan A. Morris. They are said to have been parents of eleven children, seven reaching maturity. One of them was John C. Box (1871-1941). He studied at Alexander Institute near Kilgore, then moved to Lufkin after being admitted to the bar in 1893. Four years later he moved to Jacksonville, was a county judge 1898-1901, was mayor of Jacksonville 1903-1905. He served in the United States Congress from 1919 to 1931. His son, John C. Box, Jr. became a Jacksonville attorney.²²

John Asbury Box (1805-1871) was born in Laurens County, South Carolina to John Morris Box and was enumerated on the 1830 Federal Census of Blount County, Alabama after his marriage to Mrs. Lettice Lou Trap Jones. They came with the other Box families to Texas in 1834. He received a league and labor of land in what became Anderson County but he lived and died in Cherokee County.

His service in the Texas Revolution is hard to separate from that of the other Box men named John. A recent source says he was a member of the First Texas Rangers under Captain S. C. Brown.

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directed Major H. Landers to go to Crockett, have cribs built at Crockett and Fort Houston for the corn and to deliver it to Capt. Box, Commanding, Fort Houston.¹⁰

The Killough Massacre occurred in October 1838 and the Cherokee Indians were removed beyond the Red River in July 1839. Roland W. Box and his brother James Edward Box moved to Houston County and were active in civic affairs.

In 1836 just west of present day Alto and a short distance from Box's Fort, Brooks Williams, another early settler, was scalped by the Indians. He had been "kicked out" of Austin's ¹¹ Colony for gambling. He was a brother to Col. Leonard Williams ¹² who ran the ferry at the El Camino Real crossing on the Neches River. Their sister was Naomi Ware, mistress of their neighbor ¹³ James Bradshaw who was mortally wounded by Isaac Reynolds a few years later. Those at the fort kept a watchful eye out for danger. A descendant wrote that many frightening experiences happened but recalled only one death.

Edna Box Riley wrote that the family arrived in Texas in the fall of 1834 and planted gardens in the spring.¹⁴

"When the corn was ripe for use, the thirty year old John Asbury Box (son of John M. Box, a brother of Stephen F. Box, and a cousin of John Andrew Box, my ancestor) and a friend crossed a ravine to gather corn. An Indian killed the friend. John Asbury made an escape in the tall grass and behind a tree, looking back he saw the Indians scalp his friend. He did not try to return to the Fort until dusk. After dark a group brought the dead man into the Fort where he was buried. A religious service was needed."

She thought this may have been the beginning of the eaching ministry of John Andrew Box. It is also one of several references to a family cemetery at the fort.

One story handed down through the generations is that when there was an Indian scare, the women and children would hide in the cellar under the fort and be very quiet. An old setting hen made her nest there, and once when the family was hiding out, the hen pecked the little girl who promptly screamed that she had been snake bit! A lot of people today are wondering if that little girl was their ancestor.¹⁵

According to another tradition the Box's neighbor Zaccheus Gibbs was scalped in his field in 1842 by raiding Indians while working alone in his field. He was buried at the base of a white oak tree near the bridge where the creek was crossed. For many years the grave could be located, but it has probably disappeared by now. His daughter Mrs. Phoebe (Burtis) Allen was still living nearby on the 1850 census.¹⁶

Another story says that "Not too far from the old Box Fort was a marsh with quicksand. A man by the name of Shorter and his horse died there. Very likely the Indians were after him. The place was afterward called "Shorter's Defeat." This is now believed to be Bedford Shorter, born in eorgia ca 1798, and a veteran of the War of 1812 who is known to have died there in 1866.¹⁷ This may seem a bit late for Indian problems, but a descendant has written:

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Zaccheus Gibbs' survey was described by his surveyor Jeremiah Strode as located "on Aynai Trace 5 miles west of Bowles plantation,"⁵ so Box's Fort would be about the same distance from Chief Bowles Indian village of the Cherokees, a civilized tribe who farmed and lived in log houses and were peaceable. However, renegades and outlaws locally were an ever present threat to white settlers. Also wild Indians that strayed from west of the Neches River into the area were not as friendly as the Cherokees.

On 13 November 1835 just after the Burnham-Box transaction, the provisional government of Texas closed the Mexican land office and it was not reopened until 1838 under the Republic of Texas.⁶ In the interval Texas won its independence from Mexico and the Box men folk were active participants.

Stephen F. Box, brother of John Morris Box, and his extended family later settled west of the Neches River and east of the Trinity River in the part that became Houston County in 1837. Our records afford no day to day account of daily life, but family traditions include horseback riders and covered wagons from Blount County, Alabama. Most believe all the families spent the winter of 1834 at the fort, and possibly 1835. There would always be much visiting and business between the families as there are several deeds on record where they traded land with each other.

Stephen F. Box is said to have furnished supplies for Fort Houston later on. His sons John Andrew Box, Stillwell Box, Thomas G. Box and Nelson Box fought to free Texas from Mexico. They enlisted in Capt. Hayden Arnold's Company of Volunteers in 1836. Their names are on the San Jacinto list, and each one received bounty grants of 320 acres and 640 acres as donation grants.⁷ In January 1871 John Box of Houston County applied for a pension. He was age 67. He said he joined Capt. Hayden Arnold's Company, Col. Sidney A. Sherman's Regiment, 6 April 1836 at Groce's Retreat on the Brazos and went with the army to San Jacinto. After the battle he was brought home sick and remained so several months.⁸ This would be John Andrew Box because John Asbury Box and John Morris Box lived in Nacogdoches County then, presently Cherokee County, and John Morris Box would have been age 56 and died in 1842, before the pension application date.

John Andrew Box (1803-1874), Nelson A. Box (1808-ca 1849), and Rev. Stillwell Box (1810-1870), all veterans of the Texas Revolution, are buried in Box-Beeson Cemetery near Crockett.⁹

Samuel C. Box and James Edward Box enlisted in the same company with their cousins, Capt. Hayden Arnold's Company. James Edward Box is on the San Jacinto list and received donation and bounty land grants. A letter of 6 July 1999 from Jean Carefoot of Texas Archives and Information Service reads:

According to Texas Militia muster rolls, Samuel C. Box served as a Private under Vansickle in the 3rd Brigade, Texas Militia, from 1 July through 5 August 1839. He served as a Private under Capt. James E. Box in the 2nd Regiment of the 3rd Brigade from 14 October 1838 through 14 January 1839. He himself was a Captain of the Mounted Volunteer Militia unit from 7 August to 24 September 1838, serving under General Thomas J. Rusk. The date of the letter quoted in the DRT transcription of correspondence has a date that indicates that the "Capt. Box" referred to would be James E. Box rather than Samuel C.

Samuel C. Box also has a Republic Claim, and is mentioned on an Audited Claim paid to John D. Miller. The letter referred to dated 22 May 1839 from William G. Cooke, "Qr. Mst. Genl &c"

Box Family

Box's Fort By Ogreta W. Huttash

Box's Fort was built for the protection of the Box families who came to the area southwest of present day Alto, Texas in 1834. They came as colonists under the empresario grants to David G. Burnet and Joseph Vehlein, prior to the Republic of Texas, and were entitled to many acres of land. John Morris Box (1780-1842) and sons Roland W. Box, William S. Box, John Asbury Box, Samuel Charles Box, and James Edward Box came to the State of Coahuila and Texas, Republic of Mexico, from Blount County, Alabama. All were married men with families except James Edward Box. Heads of households were entitled to one league of land, 4,428 acres, for ranching and to one labor, 177 acres, for farming. James Edward Box eventually received 1/12 of a league plus an augmentation grant of 1/4 league of land, 1,476 acres in all. Obtaining the land certificates took time, so Roland W. Box purchased one-third of a league from Stephen Burnham, 'an earlier colonist from Tennessee. They arrived late in the year and needed to make ready for the coming winter.

This would be their home base for scouting out the country and selecting their land and conducting their business. In the unsettled times on the frontier, a prime consideration was the safety of the families, livestock, equipment, wagons, goods, tools - every thing they were responsible for. Here the father and brothers of Roland W. Box helped him build the fort on a hill west of a creek later named Box's Creek and about half a mile from the southeast corner of the Zaccheus Gibbs one league grant that straddled Box's Creek.

Their tools were crude but they cut young timbers and placed them among the giant trees growing there to make a very large enclosure or stockade to hold their belongings; and they built a log house dwelling inside it. One rise in the land, a small hill, was used for the back of a building, making a crude hut that had poles and logs for the frame. This building was called a dugout. Boards nailed together were the door.

Wild animals were plentiful and included deer, bear, panthers, wild hogs, wolves, bobcats and squirrels. The creek and river were full of fish so they kept the traps set. Bird traps set near the barn furnished a good supply of birds. Thus began the settlement that grew up around the fort. As many as fifty-two men, women, and children lived there, cleared the land and planted their crops. The fort was their sanctuary when Indians were a menace.²

Stephen Burnham, a bachelor, had come to the State in 1821³ according to his certificate of entry. The Mexican government suspended immigration from 1830 to 1834 and stopped issuing land titles. Mexican land policy was renewed in 1834, so Burnham petitioned the Commissioner of the land office for the Neches District for a land grant and proved that he was eligible for it. The certificate was granted a week later on 12 September 1835. The next step was to hire a surveyor and he hired a neighbor who lived about two and a half miles east of the Neches River, citizen James Bradshaw so he could survey the land provided it was entirely vacant. Field notes were then translated by Adolphus Sterne. Bradshaw wrote the Commissioner that the land measured for Stephen Burnham was three miles east of the Neches and about "3 miles North West of the passage of San Antonio, on the passage (ferry) of Williams." In other words this 1,476 acres of land was three miles northwest of the San Antonio Road, the main artery for travel, and was near the Leonard Williams ferry. The land described was two labors of arable land and the other six and one-third labors remaining were pasture land, for which he paid \$12. For this well located land Roland W. Box paid Burnham \$75, about 20 cents an acre.⁴