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Monumental Texas

The International Boundary
Marker in East Texas

Statues at the
State Capitol

Trabajo Rústico Sculpture
of Dionicio Rodriguez



Above The International Boundary Marker, also known as the Republic of Texas Granite Marker, in the center, is located the Louisiana-Texas border and delineates the boundary between the Republic of Texas and the United States. The granite pillar was placed at this location in 1841. Photograph courtesy of Atlas Obscura.

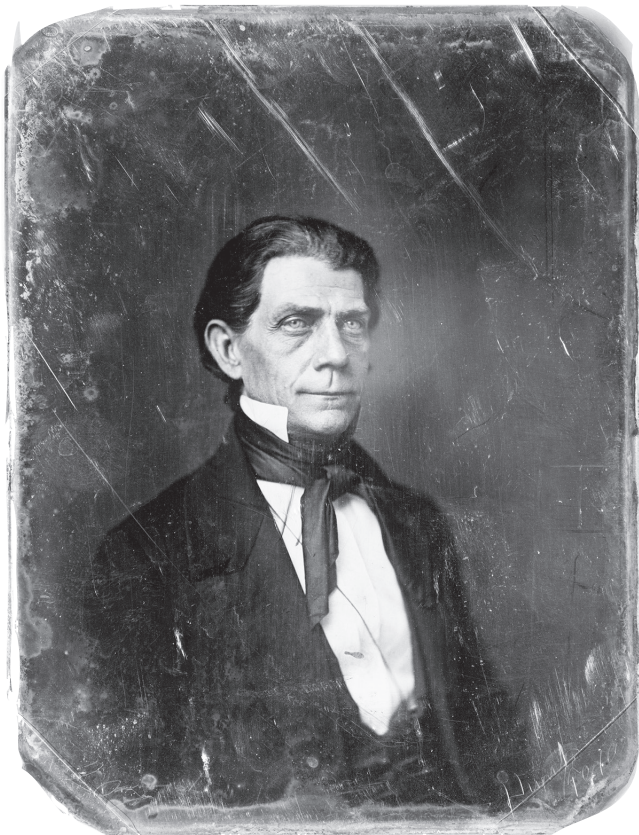
Opposite: The stone monument is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the surrounding two acres were deeded to the Texas Historical Foundation (THF). Photograph courtesy of Atlas Obscura. Original in color.



A ONE-OF-A-KIND MARKER

BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF TEXAS
AND THE UNITED STATES

BY D. CLARK WERNECKE, PH. D.



though not without debate as to whether or not Spain should also cede Texas to the United States.

While the treaty made clear that the Sabine and the 32nd parallel north to the Red River was the boundary, it left a lot of hazy detail. Rivers change course and can be problematic borders. The Adams-Onís Treaty stipulated the western bank of the Sabine as the boundary, while the 1811 Act of Congress and the Louisiana Constitution specified the middle of the river. Should a line drawn in the river be midway between the two banks or one following the deepest channels of the river?

Following Mexico's War of Independence, the United States signed the Treaty of Limits with the United Mexican States in 1828 utilizing the same language as the Adams-Onís Treaty for Texas's eastern boundary. This pact was reaffirmed by the two nations in 1831 and 1835.

POST-TEXAS REVOLUTION

After the Texas Revolution, the new Republican government sent Senator William H. Wharton to Washington as minister plenipotentiary (the title of ambassador was not used until 1893). Wharton's instruction from Secretary of State Stephen F. Austin was explicit: his first mission was to pursue annexation but, should the United States decline, then he was to seek a treaty of amity, limits, and commerce.

While annexation was the goal, the new government of Texas was also anxious to clarify the eastern border for other practical reasons. First, there were both rumors and some direct representations by the United States that the Neches, rather than the Sabine, should be the eastern border, and Texas did not want to surrender any of its territory. There were also reasons of commerce. Planters in the state were trying to ship their crops, cotton and sugar, to market, but any ship coming down the Red River crossed into undisputed U. S. territory and by doing so, was subject to

Just off a quiet farm-to-market road in East Texas there is a small sandy pull-off often used by passing trucks. Near there, under the shade of the tree line, is a nine-inch rectangle of granite about five feet high that tells an extraordinary Texas history story. The sides of the marker are engraved "U. S.," "R. T.," and "Meridian boundary, Established A. D. 1841." This inconspicuous stone designates the international boundary between the Republic of Texas and the United States and is the only such marker in the country today.

EARLY HISTORY

The eastern border of Texas was well known long before the Texas Revolution. When France sold the Louisiana Territory to the United States in 1803, the French foreign minister was asked about the location of the western boundary of Louisiana and replied, "I do not know. You must take it as we received it." This confusing state of affairs was corrected by the U. S. Congress when it passed an act in 1811 allowing the people of Louisiana to form a government and constitution as a state, and then again in the Louisiana Constitution of 1812. The western border of Louisiana was to be the River Sabine.

This was formalized in international law with the Adams-Onís Treaty in which Spain also relinquished its claims to Florida. The agreement was quickly signed and ratified by the United States in 1819, though Spain, for political reasons, postponed confirmation for two years. That delay required the U. S. Senate to ratify the agreement again, which it did,



federal tariffs, duties, and fees. The other route from the north to the sea was the Sabine, but Texas representatives in Washington told the U. S. State Department that “complaints have been made, and begin to be frequent, of seizure and destruction by the authorities of the United States of the produce of Texas in its transit above and below Nacogdoches.”

Memucan Hunt, Jr., with credentials as minister extraordinary, was sent to Washington in December 1836 to assist Wharton in his work. The political situation in the United States was

a delicate one for Texas to traverse. Northern states were suspicious of the southern slaveholder’s motivations in supporting Texas statehood. President Andrew Jackson had previously offered to buy Texas from Mexico and was rebuffed. Jackson had also sent an agent to Mexico whose clumsiness and bribery left the Mexican government rightly suspicious. In addition, the Texas Revolution had been led by Sam Houston, a known protégé of Jackson’s. The president spelled out many of these issues in an address to Congress in December 1836

and also made it clear that it would be easier for all if Texas came to terms with Mexico or was recognized by some other nation before the United States. Minister Plenipotentiary Wharton thought the chance of annexation was very low and that there was a high probability of civil war in the United States should that occur.

While Jackson had distanced himself from the

decision by deferring to Congress and stating the case for delay, Wharton, Hunt, and friends of Texas in Congress pressed ahead. In February 1837, the House of Representatives recom-

mended recognition, and in March, the Senate approved the measure. In his final act as president, President Jackson appointed a chargé d’ affaires to the Republic of Texas, recognizing sovereignty.

After being assured of this recognition, Wharton resigned his position and headed home to Texas, with Memucan Hunt assuming his role. Given the political climate in the United States, the question of annexation was obviously going to be delayed at best, so Hunt concentrated on getting the United States to agree on the border as a preliminary to a commercial treaty. Texas Secretary of State Dr. Robert Irion sent instructions that a border treaty should be governed by the Adams-Onís Treaty and subsequent agreements with Mexico, with the border beginning at the mouth of the Sabine, following the river until it intersected the 32nd degree of longitude, and then north to the Red River according to John Melish’s map of 1818. Hunt tried to hasten a decision by informing the U. S. Secretary of State John Forsyth on August 4 that Texas had already appointed a border commissioner and that he hoped the United States would do so soon. In fact, this was not true. President Houston was not authorized to appoint a commissioner until later in September and, when he did not promptly act, the Texas Senate reauthorized the appointment of the survey commissioner on December 1.

Houston gave Hunt complete powers to negotiate an agreement, which he presented to the U. S. State Department. Secretary Forsyth tried again to make the argument that the Neches was the eastern boundary, but Hunt stuck to his instructions and pointed out that the treaties with



Opposite page, top: Memucan Hunt, Jr., represented the Republic of Texas in negotiations with the United States to establish a boundary between the two countries. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Opposite page, bottom: This detail is from a map of the United States drawn in 1818 by John Melish. The map was recognized as the final authority on the establishment of the Republic of Texas boundary. Photograph courtesy of the Tennessee State Library and Archives. Original in color.

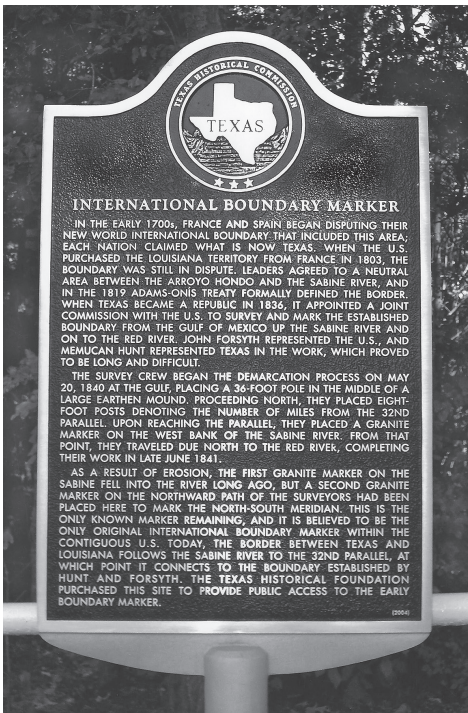
This page, above: This boundary commission map shows the offset and position of the granite boundary marker (black circle). Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Geography and Map Division. Original in color.

Treaty Language

Article III of the Adams-Onís Treaty determined the boundary between the Republic of Texas and the United States thusly:

“The boundary-line between the two countries, west of the Mississippi, shall begin on the Gulph of Mexico,

at the mouth of the river Sabine, in the sea, continuing north, along the western bank of that river, to the 32d degree of latitude; thence, by a line due north, to the degree of latitude where it strikes the Rio Roxo of Nachitoches, or Red River.”



Left: A state historical marker (left) and road sign (right) provide visitors to the remote Panola County location of the East Texas boundary marker with important details regarding the importance of the site. The surveying process was filled with multiple challenges and took two years to complete. Both photographs courtesy of the Texas Historical Foundation.

Thank You, But No

The Texas appointments to the boundary marker commission were somewhat embarrassing. In December 1838, under pressure from the Texas Senate, Shelby Corzine was confirmed as commissioner. Unfortunately, no one had consulted Corzine, who declined to serve. In his stead, Charles Taylor was proposed but never acted on by the Senate. Three weeks after being notified by the U. S. regarding their appointments, Texas announced that Branch T. Archer would be the commissioner, C. R. Johns the surveyor, and Hamilton Bee the clerk. Archer also refused the nomination, so Isaac Jones or David Sample were proposed, along with a new surveyor George W. Smyth. Jones also turned down the appointment, even though the date for the meeting in New Orleans was quickly approaching. Lieutenant Colonel P. B. Dexter of the Texas Army was empowered to act on Texas's behalf at the gathering and was told to defer to Jones or Sample, should they show up. ■

Spain and Mexico were explicit regarding the Sabine. Finally, on April 25, 1838, Forsyth and Hunt signed a Treaty of Limits calling for the appointment of commissioners and surveyors who would meet within 12 months at New Orleans. While the U. S. moved quickly on designations, assembling an entourage was not easy for the Republic, which attempted six times to appoint a commission (see sidebar).

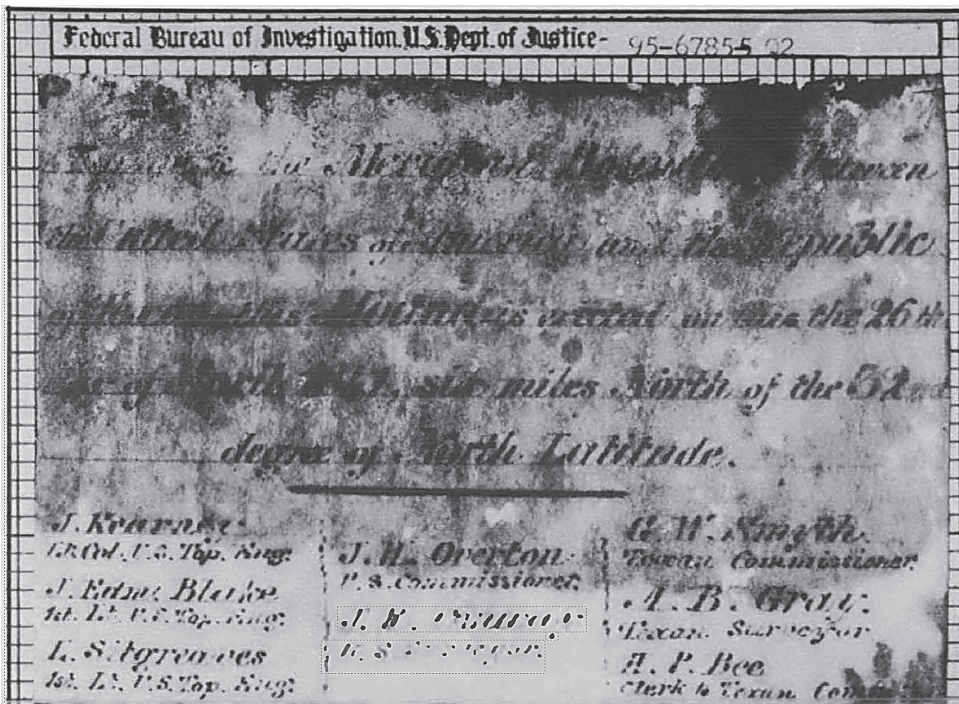
Finally, though, the commission, led by representatives John Overton for the U. S. and Muncan Hunt for the Republic of Texas, was organized in New Orleans on August 8, 1838, and resolved to meet at the mouth of the Sabine.

The group did so on November 12, 1838, at Green's Bluff (modern-day Orange, Texas). Even then, there were problems to be resolved before surveying could begin. First, the American topographical engineer came equipped with astronomical instruments to ascertain the latitude and longitude, but the Texas commission did not have access to such devices. Overton tried once more to insist on the Neches as a boundary, but Hunt's arguments and the observation that the Neches ran to the northwest convinced Overton that the Sabine was the proper border. The last major hurdle came about because neither Texas nor the United States could find a copy of Melish's map on which the previous

treaties had been based, and Overton and Hunt were at odds about the location of the boundary. Finally, the Republic of Texas conceded to the U. S. in order to finally establish the borderline. In 1848, the United States Congress changed the boundary to the center of the river, and 125 years later, in 1973, the revision was upheld by the country's Supreme Court.

The commission finally started survey work on May 21, 1839, erecting a mound 50 feet in diameter and seven feet high with a 36-foot pole in the center where Sabine Lake emptied into the sea. Hunt was still incensed with what he thought was betrayal of Texas's rights to the Sabine and threatened to quit over the point. Rather than slow down the border demarcation any longer, Texas President Mirabeau Lamar replaced Hunt as commissioner with George Smyth on May 22. By June 6, the commission had reached Logan's Ferry (modern-day Logansport, Louisiana), but money had run out. Also, the hot summer—and the diseases that season brought—was approaching, so they adjourned once more.

Returning in the spring of 1840, the commission found the Sabine completely flooded. Daunted but not deterred, a solution was proposed to move the work forward. The group would survey a line north from their camp on the bluffs and then return west to intersect the 32nd



Left: An old parchment, containing the names of the survey crew members and site coordinates, was found inside of a bottle buried at mile marker six. Upon removal in 1941, it was sent to the FBI for study. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* 10(11):24-25.

half miles north of the extant granite marker), they unearthed an intact bottle. That item and the parchment within were sent to the FBI's crime lab, which successfully removed and unrolled the scroll.

The granite pillar north of Logansport marks that moment in time when, in 1841, surveyors from the two nations set about to establish a firm boundary agreement. With the exception of the granite block that may or may not have shown where the 32nd parallel actually intersected the Sabine, this is the only still-standing permanent marker—all others being of dirt and wood. To ensure that the importance of the marker would never be forgotten, Louisiana's DeSoto Parish Historical Society erected a fence and a plaque at the site in 1976, creating a small park. That same year, the marker was also named a Historic Civil Engineering Landmark by the American Society of Civil Engineers. One year later, it was added to the National Register of Historic Places and the surrounding two acres deeded to the Texas Historical Foundation (THF). In 2003, the boundary marker was named a Texas State Antiquities Landmark.

The tiny park is still a quiet spot on the side of the road, but the THF is working with preservation partners to enhance the site and finally give this historic monument—and the story behind it—recognition that is justly deserved. ★

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parallel, which they assumed would be above the flooded area. The intersection, however, came in on low, swampy ground around Garrison's Creek. Using a compass, the team cut a line north to the first higher ground they could find, which was two miles and 1,998.5 feet north of the Sabine. There, on April 23, 1841, they erected the granite marker that still stands today. The plan was to wait for the river to recede, and then survey back to the south to find the actual intersection with the river. Interestingly, the official maps of the commission show another granite block marking that junction, but the journal record of the commission makes no mention of ever returning to this spot.

For two months, from April 24 to June 24, 1841, the boundary commission worked northward designating their progress with mounds 15 feet in diameter and five feet high, placing an eight-foot wood post in the center. At each of these markers, they buried a bottle containing a parchment with the names of the men representing the two countries as well as the site coordinates. In 1941, the State of Louisiana re-marked the border with Texas and revisited a number of these mounds, finding several broken bottles, and at one located at mile six, (about three-and-a-

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