

## More Real History

### - Citizens in Defense of Waller County

Real Texas history isn't just something to play with — it's something you can stand in now. The lands around the Brazos River are steeped in stories of revolution, retreat, and ultimate triumph. Here, you're closer to the origins of the Lone Star State than just about anywhere else.

After the fall of the Alamo on March 6, 1836, General Sam Houston began a bold retreat eastward, leading a ragtag army of Texian volunteers pursued closely by General Santa Anna and the powerful Mexican army. Houston's path brought him to San Felipe, the heart of Stephen F. Austin's Brazos Colony. Realizing the town could fall into enemy hands, he ordered it burned to the ground. Then, leaving a few trusted officers to guard the river crossings, Houston marched his troops upriver to a place called Groce's Ferry.

Here—Houston found more than just a place to regroup. Local landowner Leonard Waller Groce opened his home and resources to the army. He offered shelter, and supplies, and even turned his home into a field hospital. In a remarkable act of patriotism, he melted his lead pipes to make bullets. It was at Groce's Ferry that the Texians received the "Twin Sisters," two small cannons, instrumental in defeating the Mexican army at San Jacinto.

Leonard Groce's contributions to Texas didn't begin with that war. His father, Jared Ellison Groce, was the wealthiest settler in Austin's colony and a pioneer in Texas cotton production. In 1822, he planted one of the colony's first cotton crops. Leonard went on to bring the first cotton gin to Texas and produced the state's first bales. Jared also built Groce's Retreat on a three-acre tract twelve miles south of Navasota. George Childress first drafted the Texas Declaration of Independence at Groce's Retreat. The Declaration was signed at Washington-on-the-Brazos on March 2, 1836. President David G. Burnet and his cabinet stopped at Groce's Retreat from March 18 to March 21, 1836, when traveling from Washington-on-the-Brazos to Harrisburg; so, for three days it was the temporary capital of the Republic of Texas.

Meanwhile, Santa Anna reached San Felipe, only to find it burned and the river uncrossable. Though Houston's forces were only 15 miles away, Santa Anna turned his attention to chasing Texas' provisional government, which escaped through Harrisburg and Galveston.

Back at Groce's Ferry, Houston seized the steamboat *Yellow Stone*, using it to cross the Brazos River and continue east. Today, you can still trace his route. Just outside Hempstead, Houston camped at Donoho Plantation on April 14–15, 1836. One week

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later, on April 21, the Texian army struck at San Jacinto and won one of the most decisive battles in American history though it lasted only 18 minutes. The result was the ending of the Texas Revolution, securing Texas independence and nine years later statehood for Texas.

The final fate of the *Yellow Stone* remains a mystery, but Houston never forgot its role. “Had it not been for its service,” he later wrote, “the enemy could never have been overtaken... It enabled me to cross the Brazos and save Texas.”

Today, you can explore the Brazos Valley and retrace Houston’s journey from San Felipe to San Jacinto. Whether you’re standing where the Texas army trained at Groce’s Ferry, visiting Washington-on-the-Brazos, or the San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site, or walking the battlefield at San Jacinto, you’re stepping into the living history of Texas.

This isn’t just the story of a battle—it’s the story of the grit, courage, sacrifice, and determination that built a republic. This is where real history happened. It’s an enduring legacy, sacred to real Texans. It doesn’t need to be re-imagined as a playground.