

Spencer Townsend Town Promoter

Spencer Townsend was born April 4, 1806 in Marlboro Co., South Carolina. Prior to arriving in Texas, Townsend lived in Georgia.

Townsend moved to Texas prior to 1836 and in 1839 married Louisa Dillard in Crockett, Houston County, Texas.

Townsend purchased Lot 7 in Block 8 and Lots 6 & 7 in Block 12 from Lavaca County on October 19, 1848.

Louisa Townsend was the recipient of a gift of land. Alexander J. Shannon gifted Lots 2 – 7 in Block 8 to Louisa for “\$1.00 plus the love and affection for her and for the only and separate use of Louisa”.

On May 25, 1850, he purchased Lots 6 & 8 in Block 13 and Lot 3 in Block 17 from James Watts.

In May 1850, Spencer Townsend sold the county a log house, formerly used by him as a store house, for \$25.00 to serve as a courthouse. Later that year in the 1850 census he was listed as an innkeeper and merchant.

While Townsend was a foundation piece in the success of Petersburg, he and his neighbors did not always see eye to eye.

In April 1851, it was reported by several newspapers that the building used as a courthouse at Petersburg, Lavaca County, was consumed by fire on the 6th around 12:00 am. The building, which was being used as a courthouse, church, school house, County Clerk’s office and Sheriff’s office, was entirely enveloped in flames and in a few hours was totally consumed.

That following November, Petersburg petitioned the state legislature to make the town the permanent county seat. During this time, local newspapers reported that the courthouse was not the only thing on fire; that quarrels in the area grew with such bitterness and intensity that it reverberated throughout the county.

It was primarily a fight between Arthur Sherrill, the town donor, and Townsend, the local storekeeper, and their respective followers. Reportedly the feud became so strong that few persons were even visiting Petersburg.

Before the fire in April, the county had allocated \$800.00 for the construction of a new building to serve as the courthouse. Spencer Townsend secured the contract and carpenters Thomas Saunders and John Wuneburger built the new courthouse.

On August 6, 1851, Spencer and Louisa sold Lots 2, 4 & 5-7 in Block 8 to Ernest J. Jourdan (Jordan) being the same property upon which the Spencers resided.

On September 5, 1851, Spencer Townsend sold to Thos. E. Cherry Lots 4 – 6 in Block 13 located on the south side of the courthouse square “in consideration of the love and affection I have towards Mrs. Charlotte Cherry”. On November 3 of the same year Cherry sold the exact same property back to Spencer Townsend. Then, Spencer sold the exact same property to Mrs. Charlotte E. Cherry on January 9, 1852.

In the March 6, 1852 edition of the Texian Advocate was an ad announcing that James L. Cherry (the brother of Thomas E. Cherry) was now running the house and tavern formerly occupied by Spencer Townsend.

On June 6, 1854, Sheriff McKinney received a capias for the arrest of Townsend. McKinney attempted to serve his with the capias issued by the clerk of the district court of Houston County, Texas at Townsend’s store in Petersburg. Townsend pulled a pistol and thwarted McKinney in his attempt to arrest him. At the time McKinney sought to arrest him, Townsend for nine years had been a fugitive from Houston County, where in the town of Crockett he was charged with shooting William Ferguson in the back with a double-barrel shotgun. Ferguson died three days later.

Townsend was indicted for the assault on Sheriff McKinney, and it was not until July 1857 that he was arrested at Columbus. At the time he was confined to his room by an attack of apoplexy, which later proved fatal.

Spencer Burton Townsend died on December 12, 1857 and is buried in the Shiloh Cemetery in Lavaca County, Texas.