

## Coker Cemetery History #6

by Bob Battaglia

Just about 165 years ago, **John Coker** fought at the Battle of San Jacinto where Gen. Santa Ana of Mexico was defeated. The Texans avenged the defeat at the Alamo. As many of us know, Y.P. Alsbury recorded the story in a letter to Hon. Jesse Grimes in San Antonio in 1857. It was then printed in the 1861 edition of *The Texas Almanac*, pages 55-58. A foot-note to the article states: "I, John Coker, of the County of Bexar, State of Texas, have no hesitation in stating, that the material facts in the preceding narrative are correct. Signed this seventeenth day of January 1858....John Coker." In later reprints of *The Texas Almanac*, it appears in the 1861 volume, starting with page 435.

Some highlights of the story are as follows: "On the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> of April, 1836, Capt. Karnes' cavalry company, commonly called 'Deaf Smith's Spy Company', were drawn up, in line, on the edge of Gen. Houston's position. As well as I can recollect, we were between 30 & 40 strong. The Mexican Cavalry, whom we fought the evening before, at that moment were drawn up, in line, on the south of our position, about 600 yds distant. I think they were from 60 to 80 strong. ....While sitting in our saddles, **John Coker**, my left file-leader, made the following remark, and the suggestions following:

'Boys, before many hours, we will have one of the damndest, bloodiest fights that ever was fought and I believe it would be a good plan to go and burn that bridge, so as not only to impede the advance of reinforcements to the enemy, but it will cut off all chance of retreat of either party.' The proposition was seconded by the whole company, when Deaf Smith proposed to go and see the General, and get his approval to the enterprise."

The story goes on to say Gen. Houston approved the plan and Deaf Smith returned to his group and asked for 6 volunteers. The narrative continues: "I will mention the names of all who joined Deaf Smith in the enterprise; yet before doing so, beg leave to state, that I differ from the opinion of my old friend, "**Uncle Jack Coker**", as we called him, as to the name of one of the party, but having implicit confidence in Uncle Jack's honesty, I am willing to risk his statement, and give the names as he has set them down: **Deaf Smith, Denmore Rives, John Coker, Y.P. Alsbury, ? Rainwater, John Garner, ? Lapham**; seven in all."

Without trying to present the whole story here, the narrative goes on to tell how they proceeded to burn the bridge and return safely. A very interesting insight into those days.

For his participation in this battle, **John Coker** received the bounty land we are all familiar with in San Antonio. The State of Texas Historical Marker was placed on his gravesite in 1968. There is a document in the Texas State Archives Library where John Coker applied for reimbursement for having his horse shot during the actual Battle of San Jacinto, which implies that he was in the final charge against the Mexican Army.

**John Coker** also received land patents in Bandera Co. (640a) and in LaSalle Co (640a) in 1838 and 1841 respectively. He sold the Bandera Co. land to **Malcolm Gillis** for \$400 in 1859. It was located on the northeast bank of the Medina River. I have not looked at LaSalle Co records to learn disposition of that land.

In those early days in Texas there are several "sightings" of **John Coker**, other than the Battle of San Jacinto. First he signs in on Stephen F. Austin's Application Book in Feb. 1834, stating he was single, wanted land and was a blacksmith. There are some books that have stated John's father was with him. I have seen the Application Book and there is no mention of a father. Further, since his mother, **Dicey**, is shown in the 1810 Laurens SC census as head of the household, we assume her husband had died by 1810.

The 1840 Texas Census shows a **John Coker** in Bexar Co. as an "agent", which probably had to do with getting his bounty land surveyed and recorded. In 1846 "Republic of Texas Poll Lists" shows a **John Coker** in Austin Co, just northeast of Houston; reasons unknown. In 1860, **James Laurens Dial** wrote his brother..."The Cokers who live on the Salado somewhere in the vicinity of San Antonio, I have never seen one of them since I have been in the country, except **old Jack**, nor indeed heard from them." James Dial was living in Guadalupe Co (Seguin) at the time. Research has shown that James Dial regarded Old Jack and Joseph as "near kin".