

BLANCO COUNTY ARTIFACTS

Was there a way station for the Underground Railroad located in Blanco County?

**By Steve Rossignol
Blanco County Historical
Commission**

We are all familiar with the tales of the Underground Railroad, how enslaved people in the South risked life and limb to escape to the Northern States before and during the Civil War.

Some of us may be surprised to learn that there was an Underground Railroad network in Texas. Maria Hammack, whose research on this subject is

coming to light in a doctoral thesis at the University of Texas in Austin, estimates that before the Civil War between 5,000 to 10,000 slaves escaped to Mexico to obtain their freedom.

And I am fairly sure that most of us would be fairly astounded to learn that there may have been a way station for this Underground Railroad here in Blanco County.

The intriguing evidence for this way station comes from the early letters of Jean Charles Houzeau, a Belgian

astronomer who lived in Texas in the early years of the Civil War and who was forced to flee Texas because of his abolitionist activities.

In a letter dated September 20, 1861 to his colleague Van Bommel in Belgium, printed in the Revue Trimestrielle, and later collected and reprinted as La Terreur Blanche Au Texas (The White Terror in Texas), Houzeau writes of his experience near Smithville in which a group of African American slaves are prompted to escape from

their local overlords. Their plan for escape from Smithville is aided by a local Methodist minister and by Houzeau.

Houzeau relates: "I had promised to assist the runaway slaves, and in the hope of meeting them, I cut through the most deserted and wildest parts of the countryside. I arrived one evening at the edge of a small rugged river, which flows between limestone rocks, resembling ruined castles and dismantled citadels. This white belt of rock walls has earned the stream the name of Rio Blanco. I was hoping to cross the plateau faster by ascending to the source of the river. Oak forests, of a dark color, which contrasted with the bright edge of the water, seemed to continue at any distance. It was therefore not without astonishment, nor without some kind of pleasure that I came across, at the head of water of the Blanco River, an isolated farm, the remotest oasis of the county."

Houzeau was later joined at this "isolated farm" in "the remotest oasis of the county" by the same escaping group of slaves from Smithville, who seem to have known where to rendezvous. This indicates that it may have been a prearranged stop on the Texas Underground Railroad, or perhaps it was an incidental stop: Houzeau relates that the unnamed settler at the farm is not an abolitionist, but offers food and lodging for his unannounced guests.

The escapees were on their way by the next morn-

ing and Houzeau speculated that they "must be free... anywhere in the territory of Mexico."

In 1861 the headwaters of the Blanco River were within the boundaries Blanco County. In 1862 Kendall County was established, whereupon the headwaters of the Rio Blanco would be in Kendall County.

Why would a group of escaping slaves have traveled west from Smithville to escape to Mexico? For a variety of reasons, not the least being that the Eagle Pass/Piedras Negras path to Mexico would have been the shortest route. It would have also been in a less populated area, free from the pro-slavery plantation areas of eastern Texas. And it would have been a friendlier route (the possibility of encountering hostile Native Americans notwithstanding): the German population of the Hill Country was adamantly against slavery and Blanco County voted overwhelmingly against secession in February 1861. The Freethinker German settlements of Sisterdale and Comfort, both militantly political against slavery, would have been along the route.

Another tantalizing clue for the existence of a way station on the Texas Underground Railroad in the Hill Country is given in the autobiography of Dr. Adolph Douai. Douai was an ardent abolitionist and a refugee from the 1848 revolution in Germany. He resided for a period of time in Sisterdale, ten miles as the crow flies from the headwaters

of the Blanco River. Douai remarked: "The Negroes often escaped to us and then easily fled to Mexico."

The Eagle Pass/Piedras Negras crossing into Mexico appears to have been a long-standing route for crossing into Mexico. It was used by the Kickapoo tribe to enter Mexico in 1850, as well as by the Seminoles in the same year (it should also be remembered that there were many escaped slaves assimilated within the Seminole tribe). It had been established as a budding crossing point for escaping African American slaves perhaps as early as 1836, and the travelogue of early Texas explorer Frederick Law Olmstead talks of a colony of freed slaves there in 1857.

In 1855 Blanco County settler and Texas Ranger James Callaghan purportedly undertook a punitive expedition against marauding Lipan Apaches to Piedras Negras and Eagle Pass, but there is ample documentation to suggest that Callaghan was on a mission to recover runaway slaves. Failing to recover any escapees and encountering resistance from the Mexican population, Callaghan burned Piedras Negras to the ground.

The land of the headwaters of the Blanco River were later acquired by Amos Valentine Gates in 1872. Gates was elected Chief Justice (County Judge) of Blanco County on September 21, 1861, the day after Houzeau wrote his letter to Von Bommel. Strange coincidence.

"Musical Finesse in Action!"

To all 4th grade parents, family and friends:
Tuesday, February 25, at 6:30 pm

Blanco Elementary fourth graders invite you to a winter event of singing, instrument play, dance, and movement.

This event will take place in the auditorium.

Your child has been working very hard in music class to prepare for this.

Students may dress casually, but need to wear comfortable shoes as they will be moving around quite a bit.

Students will meet in the gymnasium at 6:10.

It is so important that every 4th grader be present!

You will be thrilled to be an audience for this very talented group of children.
Please come.



The City of Blanco requests the submission of qualifications statements, which will lead to the possible award of a contract to provide professional engineering services for a 1.0 MGD Water Treatment Plant Improvement Project.

Scope of Work: The services to be obtained for the Engineer include project management, owner's representation, contract administration, agency coordination, resident project representation and construction materials testing for a \$5.4M - 1.0 MGD Water Treatment Plant Improvements Project within the guidelines of the TWDB DWSRF funding. The project has been designed and bid with a previous engineer.

Guidelines for Content of Qualification Statements: DO NOT INCLUDE COST INFORMATION with the qualification statement. Responses that include cost or pricing information will be rejected and will not be considered by the City.

Detailed instructions on preparation of the qualification statement must be obtained from the City. For more information on preparing and submitting the qualification statement, contact Mayor Herden (email: mayor@cityofblanco.com). This information should be requested 5 working days prior to the SOQ deadline in order to allow time to prepare the document and comply with the procedures.

Submittal Deadline: Three copies of the qualifications statement must be filed with the City of Blanco (300 Pecan St., PO Box 750, Blanco, Texas 78606) by 2pm March 17th, 2020. Late submittals and electronic submittals will not be accepted.

Minimum Qualifications and Selection Criteria: The City will evaluate the proposals to determine which firm has the best qualifications.

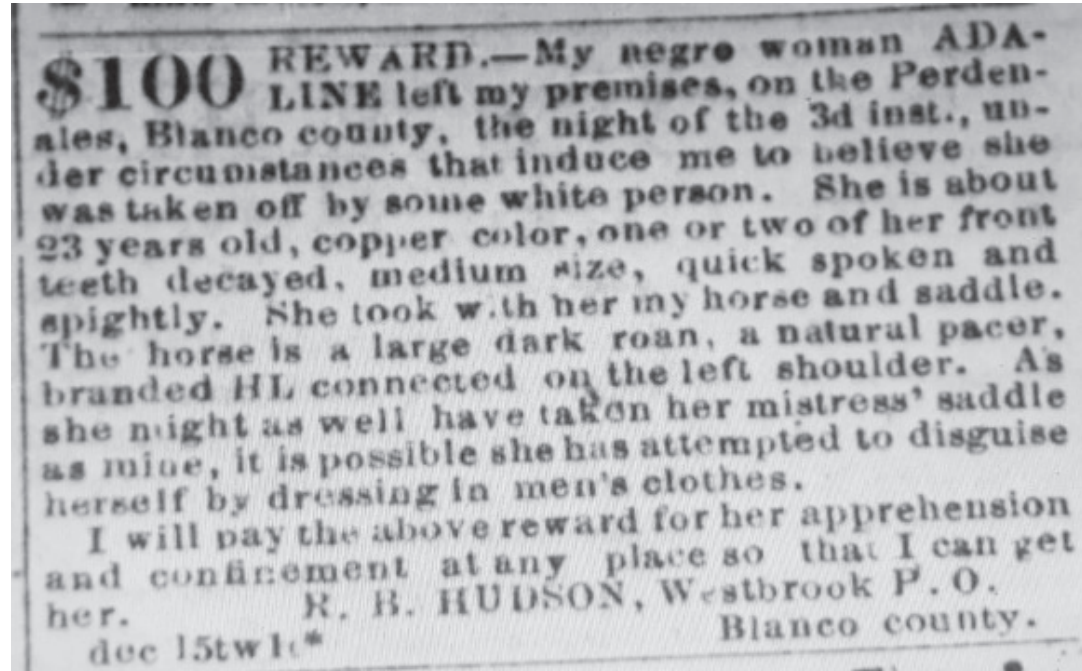
Contract Terms and Negotiation Schedule: The consultant for Professional Engineering Services is expected to negotiate an agreement for services that is acceptable to the City. If an acceptable contract cannot be negotiated, the City may formally end negotiations and begin negotiating with the next highest qualified person or firm.

This contract is contingent upon release of funds from the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB). Any contract or contracts awarded under this Request for Qualifications (RFQ) are expected to be funded in part by a loan from the TWDB. Neither the State of Texas nor any of its departments, agencies, or employees are or will be a party to this RFQ, or any resulting contract.

RFQ's are issued in accordance with Section 2254 of the Texas Government Code (Professional Services Act).

This contract is subject to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program, which includes EPA-approved fair share goals toward procurement of Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise (M/WBE) firms. EPA rules require that applicants and prime contractors make a good faith effort to award a fair share of contracts, subcontracts, and procurements to M/WBEs through demonstration of the six affirmative steps. For more details of the DBE Program and the current, applicable fair share goals, please visit www.twdb.texas.gov/dbe.

The City of Blanco is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap or national origin. Small, minority, and women-owned business enterprises are encouraged to submit proposals.



From the Tri-Weekly Telegraph (Houston), December 15, 1862.

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

As required by Texas Government Code, Notice is given that the Planning and Zoning Commission of the City of Blanco, Texas, will conduct a public hearing at 308 Pecan Street, Blanco, Texas on March 2, 2020 at 6:30 o'clock p.m., and that the City Council of the City of Blanco, Texas, will conduct a public hearing at 308 Pecan Street on March 10th, 2020 at 6:00 o'clock p.m. for the purpose of considering release of easement on the following described tract located within the city limits of the City of Blanco.

Property Owner	Property Description	Property Location
Charles Thomson	Pittsburg, Block 29 & 30, Lot 13 PT Of, acres 5.159	906 Chandler

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE OF INTENTION TO ISSUE CITY OF BLANCO, TEXAS COMBINATION TAX AND REVENUE CERTIFICATES OF OBLIGATION, SERIES 2020

NOTICE is hereby given that it is the intention of the City Council of the City of Blanco, Texas to issue Certificates of Obligation (the "Certificates") of the City in one or more series for the purpose of providing funds for paying contractual obligations incurred or to be incurred for: (i) constructing improvements and extensions to the City's water system (the "System") including expanding and equipping the System and (ii) payment of professional services in connection therewith including legal, engineering, architectural and fiscal fees and the costs of issuing the Certificates. The City Council tentatively proposes to authorize the issuance of the Certificates at its regular meeting place, Byars Building, 308 Pecan St., Blanco, Texas to be commenced at 6:00 p.m., on the 14th day of April, 2020. The City Council presently proposes to provide for the security and payment of the Certificates by a pledge of ad valorem taxes upon all taxable property within the City within the limits allowed by law and from a limited pledge of the City's surplus water and sewer system revenues not to exceed \$1,000. The following information is required pursuant to Texas Local Government Code, Section 271.049(b)(4): As of February 11, 2020 the principal of all outstanding debt obligations of the City is \$10,400,000. As of February 11, 2020 the combined principal and interest required to pay all outstanding debt obligations of the City on time and in full is \$12,689,196. The maximum principal amount of the Certificates to be authorized is \$4,000,000. The estimated combined principal and interest required to pay the Certificates to be authorized on time and in full is \$4,976,445. The estimated interest rate for the Certificates to be authorized is 1.23%. Such estimates take into account a number of factors, including the issuance schedule, maturity schedule and the expected ratings of the proposed Certificates. Such estimated maximum interest rates is provided as a matter of information, but is not a limitation on the interest rate at which the Certificates, or any series thereof, may be sold. The maximum maturity date of the Certificates to be authorized is February 15, 2051.