Guide

to

HOUSTON-BAINES CORRESPONDENCE
1857- 1860

Archives of the Big Bend
Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library
Sui Ross State University
Alpine, Texas
Margaret Moffette Lea, daughter of a Baptist minister, married Sam Houston, twenty-six years her senior, in 1840. Out of respect for her, but only after careful consideration, Houston joined the Baptist church in 1854 at the height of his political career. When Margaret M. Houston, widowed in 1863, asked William Cary Crane to "write the life and edit and publish the literary remains of her husband," her only requirement was that he include at least one chapter about General Houston's religious character. In his chapter, Crane quotes two ministers, one of them George Baines.

George Washington Baines was born December 29, 1809, in North Carolina. In 1850, the Baptist minister settled his family in Huntsville, Texas, where his lifelong friendship with Houston began. While pastor at Anderson, Texas, he also was editor of The Texas Baptist, a newspaper founded in 1855. It is with George Baines, editor, that Sam Houston differs in the letters written in 1859-60. The friendship evident in the letter to George Baines, minister, in 1857, is strained but not broken by the events of 1859.

George Baines was president of Baylor University for two years during the Civil War, then served in several other capacities with the Baptists of Texas before retiring from the pastorate at Salado in early 1882. He died December 28, 1882 at the home of his daughter Anna. A son, Joseph Wilson Baines, was father of Rebekah Baines Johnson, mother of Lyndon Baines Johnson, 36th President of the U.S.

In 1883, another of the minister's sons, George Washington Baines II, preached the first sermon in Murphyville (later Alpine), Texas, and from 1904-1907, pastored the First Baptist Church in Alpine. His son, George Washington Baines III, banker and civic leader of Alpine, was the town's mayor from 1928-1934.
PROVENANCE OF THE LETTERS. The copy photographs which make up this collection were donated to Sui Ross State University in 1980 by Dr. Clifford B. Casey, long-time history professor at the university and author of the histories of Alpine, Brewster County, and the University. These copies of the letters may have been made in 1955 when Dr. Casey arranged for copies to be made for the Baines family. At an unknown time, probably in 1934, the Baines family of Alpine donated the original letters to the West Texas Historical and Scientific Society, a non-profit organization then housed on the campus of Sui Ross State Teachers College in Alpine, Texas. For more about the Society, see Collection 31: West Texas Historical and Scientific Society Papers.

Transcriptions of the letters follow in this guide as the handwriting is very difficult to read. Words in brackets in the transcription are those of the archival assistant explaining gaps or indicating illegible words. Many stray marks are omitted in the transcriptions. The four letters (copies, 341 leaves) are housed in a single archival envelope.

Gaylan Corbin  
Archival Assistant  
May 30, 1997

SOURCES:

Crane, William Carey. Life and Select Literary Remains of Sam Houston. Dallas, Texas: William G. Scarff & Co., 1884

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS

In 1835, Sam Houston was a signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence, Commander-in-Chief of the Texas forces at the Battle of San Jacinto where Santa Anna was captured, and first elected President of the independent Republic of Texas. In 1846, Texas having become a state in the last days of 1845, Houston was elected to the United States Senate, where he served as senator from Texas until he was inaugurated Governor of Texas in December of 1859. Houston opposed secession and retired to his farm near Huntsville when the people of Texas voted to secede in 1861. He died in 1863.

The first of the letters in this collection was written during his unsuccessful campaign for the governorship in 1857. Houston instructs Baines to send the note evidencing a debt of $300 to Mrs. Houston. As Houston was frequently absent from home, Margaret Houston at times managed their two large farms and made loans from the surplus profit.

The other letters were written just before his inauguration in 1859 and in the press of his first days as Governor in 1860. They express Sam Houston's displeasure with Baines's "implied endorsement" in his newspaper of accounts of the Battle of San Jacinto critical of the conduct of Colonel Forbes and Sam Houston. The accounts were published by Willard Richardson, editor of the Galveston News, who in his newspaper had opposed Houston in his campaigns for governor and for senator and on his stands against slavery and secession. Forbes had assisted Houston in negotiating a treaty between Texas settlers and the Cherokees in 1835 and was commissary general of the Texas Army at San Jacinto in 1836. Forbes sued Nicholas Descomps Labadie, a member of the medical corps at San Jacinto, for libel over his account of the battle published in the 1859 edition of the Texas Almanac. The Texas Almanac was published by Willard Richardson. On February 28, 1859, Houston delivered a speech before the Senate "refuting calumnies produced and circulated against his character as Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Texas." (Crane, p. 578)
Huntsville
23 Nov 1857

My Dear Brother Baines,

You will find enclosed your note, and if you will renew it for the same amount of $300, and send it to Mrs. Houston I will be obliged to you. You perceive that I knock off the interest for six years at 8 percent per annum amounting to one hundred & forty Dollars. This I am not loth (sic) to do, as you have the luck to minister to congregations who think you can afford to preach to them gratis. If you [do] not devise some plan to change their practices, they will think that you ought to pay them a good salary for attending church, when they could stay at home, on Sunday, and thereby [be?] in greater readiness for the week’s work! I am not [alluding?] to charity, tho I think the scriptures enjoin that, as [one?] of the brightest Christian [traits?] of character, but I allude to plain old fashioned honesty, of paying what they subscribe! They ought to know that paper currency will not pass in Heaven. It must be the coin which is only issued from an honest heart. Cotton fields and cotton bales will find no market in Paradise!

Mrs. Houston unites in affectionate regards to Sister Baines, yourself & family.

Truly Thine

Sam Houston
Dear Bro. Barnes,

I take the liberty of enclosing a letter addressed to Bro. Baines, which you can open and read. Then seal it and hand it to him. I am anxious to know that he has received the letter. For I have understood within a few days that Bro Baines answered a letter written to him thro his newspaper and said in his publication that if persons would point out any exceptionable parts in the Almanac he had no doubt but what Mr. Richardson would correct it. Assuming thereby that if others as well as myself, are slandered, and Bro. Baines in the Baptist organ of Texas publishes the slanders and recommends the wretched mass of calumnies, the injured party must appeal to his slanderers for redress. This I protest against! Bro Baines can see if he reads the Times and other papers that the slanders of Col. Forbes were admitted by Labadie & Richardson! Yet a year after that he is thankful for a new batch of slanders. Does bro Baines suppose that I am going to him or Richardson cap in hand and implore them to do me and other men justice. I have been a subject of constant abuse ever since Richardson commenced his Editorial career in Texas.

His object has been, manifestly, to destroy my influence, encourage Mexico in her annoyances, and to discourage emigration, and rather than fail in my ruin he was willing, nay, anxious to destroy the country. These are some of the facts. And I have this further remark to make. If the organ of the Baptist Church in Texas is to be made a conduit for all the filth that my defamers may fabricate and collect to deluge this community, I am resolved that I will wash my hands of offense.

Bro Barnes, I can see no other course for me to pursue, than the one I have adopted. Thy Brother,

Sam Houston

I. W. Barnes, Esq.
Anderson
From

Sam Houston

Independence

8th Nov 1859

Brother Baines:

Being about to leave for Austin, to be absent a few days, I cannot feel that I am doing justice to myself & family without addressing you on a subject interesting to both of us.

About a year since, Richardson issued what he entitled "The Texas Almanac," which you were pleased to recommend and thereby endorsing its contents, which abounded in gross slanders of myself and other persons. You were, I am informed, written to by at least one member of our church, Bro. [McCleary?], in relation to your recommendation of the abuse and falsehoods propagated by the publisher of the almanac. This I only learned within two days and today I have learned [that this morning (struck over)] that you were spoken to by several members of the Baptist church at this place who [had (struck through)] called your attention to the articles in your paper a year ago. I did not regard your former notice, presuming that you had not read the "Texas Campaign (or "Sanjacinto") by Dr. Labadie and that you were ignorant of its contents. Your attention having been called to the matter, I overlooked the subject. Things have now assumed a different character, and demand of me a different course. Whatever your estimate of the slanders may be and the object of the writer or the justice of the assaults are matters which I refer to you and our Creator, as I have no right to sit injudgement upon any man's conscience, and can only judge of [men's (struck out)] his actions. I claim no exemption from the frailties of humanity, nor do I debar anyone from the strictest investigation of my conduct & actions or publishing whatever is true about me. Truth is one thing and falsehood is another: Now in all kindness, I will ask you, Have you rec'd "Sherman's reply" as it is called & the certificates accompanying it? If so, I will be happy if you will be so kind as to let me know the fact!

I have to inform you of a fact which may be of some use and it is this. One of the Firm of "Richardson" was expelled from the Masonic Lodge at Galveston for immoral conduct. He took an appeal to the Chapter, or Grand Lodge, at Crockett, and the decision of the Lodge at Galveston was affirmed as I am assured. Taking a view of (sic) all the facts & circumstances of the whole matter I feel it due to myself as well as
my family to return your paper, and request of you to send my entire account, and I will credit it on your note. You need not suppose this is the result of passion or personal dislike. It is for higher purposes. What must be the feeling [of my] family and friends were they to read these publications & then turn to your paper, as the organ of Baptist denomination in Texas and find that you had recommended & virtually endorsed using slander either against good men or myself? This originating with men who are dishonored, so far as cowardice & theft can disgrace men, and one of the fraternity reeking with dishonor, has little to recommend it.

With these facts & circumstances before you, I can only add, that I leave the reparation due me to [your] sense of manly and Christian duty. I have not made it a subject of complaint and have only called the attention of but two members of the church to the subject.

It will afford me pleasure to receive, if I am spared, on my return, a reply to this letter. Truly Thine
Rev'd GW Baines

Sam Houston
Austin
6th Jan'y 1860

Dear Bro Baines.

From time to time since the receipt of your [welcome?] letter I have intended to write but as you see it has been deferred until now, and even now I take time from business hours to write you.

Your letter as far as you were concerned was all right but really I can see no perfect vindication for your Partner unless he did not know the Richardsons. One had got out of a charge of felony by the interferences of friends and the other is now indicted in Galveston for immoral conduct after having been expelled from the Lodge of Galveston and that judgement affirmed by the Grand Chapter at Crockett. These are the men whose slanders were impliedly {sic} endorsed. They are the men [who are?] to give moral tone to society. I am [very? {page torn}] happy, Bro Baines, that your skirts are clear of this matter. I do not wish to reflect [word smeared] any [one?], but had the explanation made by Mr Wilson, as well as I recollect, for the paper is not before me, been placed on other grounds, I had been quite as well pleased with it as what I was.

Mrs. Houston has not enjoyed an hour's health since she came here and I am fearful the climate will not suit her. She has recovered from the injury sustained by the upsetting of the carriage. Our [babe?] Willie has not been well! Today he is better.

Mrs. Houston unites in kind regards to Sister Baines, yourself and family. I will be happy to hear from you.

Truly thine
Sam Houston

Revd G. W. Baines

Give our regards to Cousin [Fran?] [Parton?] & family.