

FIRST SATTLER POST OFFICETEXAS HISTORICAL BUILDING

By

L K Walker

The first Sattler post office, a log cabin still in existence in Comal County, bears the name of Texas pioneer Wilhelm Martin Sattler.

Wilhelm Sattler emigrated from Germany with Prince Solms¹ and came to Texas when Texas was still an independent republic.² Prince Solms had his engineer survey the New Braunfels township and lay it out into lots. These were numbered and a public drawing for the lots was held in April of 1845. Wilhelm drew lot number 230 thus becoming one of the founders of New Braunfels, Texas.³

The following year Mr Sattler and his family homesteaded land on the Guadalupe River seventeen miles northwest of New Braunfels. As soon as Texas became a state he contracted with the United States government to establish the first postal system in the area.⁴ Initially he operated the post office from his home but as soon as it was feasible he built the log cabin which became the first Sattler post office building.

In addition to creating the Sattler postal system Wilhelm Sattler was a bookbinder, a judge, and a member of the Texas Land Commissioner's office in Austin. He built three log cabins within a few hundred feet of his large two story home. As a judge he held court in one of the log cabins. Family

history tells of prisoners being brought on horseback to his court.⁵ A second log cabin was used as his office and the third became the first Sattler post office. The first two log cabins no longer exist. However, the post office still exists at its original location and is in very good condition. Mr Sattler's home burned in 1925. It was rebuilt on the same spot and is now occupied by a great, great, great grandson. The home, now modernized, still contains some of the charred timbers from the original home.

The log cabin post office is located about one hundred feet from the site of Mr Sattler's home which is on what is now the L K Walker ranch.⁶ L K Walker is a great, great grandson of Wilhelm Sattler and the property has been in the family without a break for more than 150 years.

The cabin dimensions are twelve by fourteen feet and it has one window. Down through the years some of the chinking between the logs crumbled or flaked off. It was patched some twenty years ago using essentially the same formula as the original; i.e., straw, native caliche, etc. The logs are all original native ashe juniper (cedar) and have not been disturbed. It is not known whether the roof is original or not but it is at least sixty years old with cactus growing on top.

Historical records are inexact as to who was the very first Sattler postmaster. Wilhelm Sattler was unquestionably an early postmaster during at least two periods. Oscar Haas' "History of New Braunfels and Comal County, Texas, 1844-1946"

lists Henry Sattler as the first appointed postmaster in 1856.⁷ Henry (Heinrich) Sattler was Wilhelm's son. He was a Civil War veteran who died on his trip home from the war. He is also listed as a Confederate Sattler postmaster in 1862.⁸ It is possible that Wilhelm Sattler in addition to being a postal contractor also acted as an unofficial postmaster prior to 1856 as the earliest entry in the original post office journal is 1849.⁹ The log cabin is without doubt the first Sattler post office building.

Wilhelm Sattler of the von Sattler family and son of a German baron was highly educated. He spoke and wrote fluently in German and English as well as possibly other languages. The original official Sattler post office journal is in his handwriting in English. The journal escaped the 1925 fire and is in the possession of L K Walker. Mail was brought by stage coach from Austin and San Antonio to the Sattler post office from where it was redistributed by horseback to various small branch post offices. The journal shows that these included Cranes Mill, Smithson's Valley, Spring Branch, Twin Sisters and others.¹⁰ One of the last entries in the journal refers to a coffin for Mr Sattler who died May 10, 1880.¹¹

Upon Mr Sattler's death the post office was moved about four miles to a general store in what is now known as the village of Sattler which derived its name from Wilhelm Sattler. He and his family are buried in the family cemetery about 150 yards east of the post office cabin.

The Sattler history including the postal system is covered very extensively in Mr Alton J Rawe's "History of Sattler and Mountain Valley School, Comal County, Texas". The 320 page book is extremely well documented with a vast array of references. Any attempt to duplicate Mr Rahe's fine work would serve no purpose. The aim of this application and narrative instead is to focus attention on the structure itself, --the log cabin.

The Sattler log cabin is one of the relatively few remaining physical vestiges of an important period in Texas history. It is unique in that it remains located in the exact location where it was originally built, never having been moved. The cabin is central not only to the immediate Sattler area but to a wide expanse of communities throughout the hill country including New Braunfels. The cabin is directly related to the independent republic of Texas, the civil war, the founding of New Braunfels, the founding of Sattler, Texas, and the creation of the first postal system. It is symbolic of the important contribution Wilhelm Sattler made to early Texas history. It is vital that the heritage which this historic structure represents be preserved for future generations.