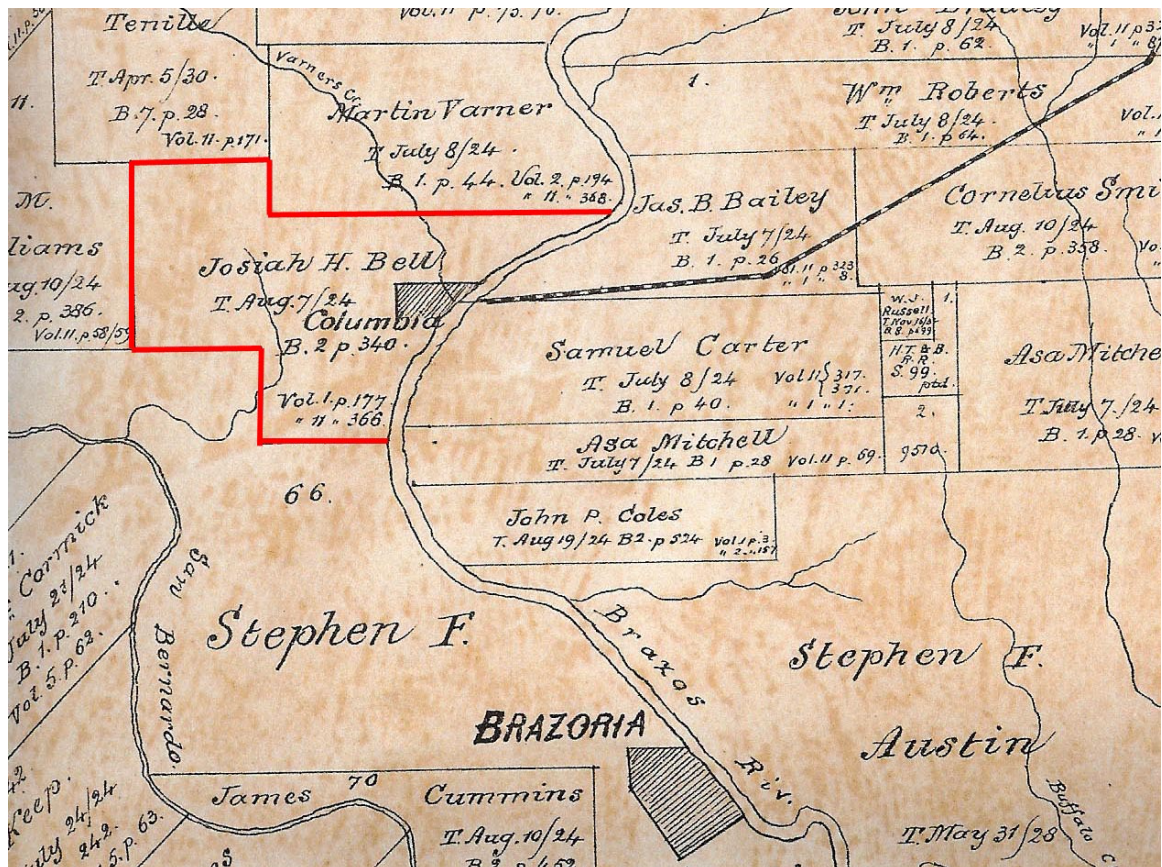


Durango Plantation or Copes Place
Brazosport Archaeological Society

Dr. James Wilson Copes established Durango Plantation after returning to Brazoria County after 1848. The plantation was carved out of land his wife Elizabeth Lucinda Bell would receive as part of her inheritance from the estate of her father Josiah H. Bell. Located on the west side of the Brazos River just below East Columbia the plantation was made up of 685 acres out of the Josiah H. Bell 1 ½ League tract. Copes would operate Durango as a cotton plantation with 10-14 slaves on the property until his death in 1863. After remarrying, Elizabeth L. Copes McKinney transferred ownership of the plantation to two of her sons, James W. and Joseph S. Copes in 1876. By 1883 financial difficulties forced them to sell their rights. John G. Smith & Bro. a local company run by John G. and Travis L. Smith acquired the property that same year. The Smith brothers would purchase another 435 acres adjacent to the property. The lands remained in the Smith Estate for many years. The current owner is Mitigation Strategies.



Josiah H. Bell 1 1/2 League Map 1879 The General Land Office of the State of Texas

Josiah H. Bell received 1½ leagues of land from the Mexican Government located on the west side of the Brazos River along Varner Creek on August 7, 1824. He moved to what was to become Brazoria County in January 1824 and made camp along Bell's Creek approximately two miles from its entrance into the San Bernard River. By the end of 1824 he established Bell's Landing near the confluence of Varner Creek with the Brazos River. The Brazos River was

completely navigable to this point and proved to be a good location for commercial trade. Though most of the old settlers of the area preferred the name "Bell's Landing", Squire Bell named the area located along the Brazos "Marion" (later named East Columbia).

Later at the end of a two mile lane leading from Bell's Landing to the prairie Josiah H. Bell laid out the town of Columbia (later named West Columbia), twenty square blocks eight lots to the block. Walter C. White and James Knight, local merchants under the style Walter C. White & Company, established their business in Columbia at an early date. Bell sold many of the town lots to Walter C. White.

James Wilson Copes, the third son of Rev. Joseph Copes, was born on the 5th November, 1809 Lewistown, Delaware. He studied medicine at the University of Maryland, at Baltimore, received his degree, migrated to Mississippi, and began the practice of medicine within the domain then recently acquired from the Choctaw Nation by the so-called "Treaty of the Dancing Rabbit Creek." In 1834 and 1835 he did a large and lucrative practice in the Yazoo Valley. When the struggle for independence began in Texas he joined the patriot army under General Houston.¹ From the 25th July 1837 until the 1st January 1838 Dr. James Wilson Copes was the Acting Surgeon General for the Republic of Texas Army in Galveston.² Dr. James Wilson Copes married Josiah H. Bell's daughter, Elizabeth Lucinda Bell April 4, 1839.³ Josiah had died May 1838 and Mrs. Mary E. Bell had traveled to Kentucky to bring Lucinda home from Catherine's Convent near Bardstown that same year.

Dr. J. Wilson Copes opened a farm on Bell's Creek, in the southwest quarter of the Josiah H. Bell League, on which he resided with his family.⁴ This may have been the original area Josiah H. Bell had resided in 1824. Dr. J. Wilson Copes was elected and ordained ruling elder and installed as the elder of the Presbyterian Church in West Columbia in 1840.⁵ August 1, 1845 the Columbia Institute opened for the fall term in the Presbyterian Church. Dr. J. Wilson Copes was the superintendent, and stated the school would be moved to East Columbia during the summer of 1845. During the same year Copes was President of the Association of Columbia for the Preservation of Temperance.⁶ In 1845 Dr. Copes removed to Houston, but he returned to Brazoria County in 1848 and sold their former property to Morgan L. Smith and John Adriance to go into the mercantile business at Columbia.⁷ He then opened a new farm below East Columbia. In February 1849 the Josiah H. Bell estate was divided among his wife and his three children living at that time. Elizabeth Lucinda Bell Copes received title to the 685 acres below East Columbia on the Brazos River, 9 slaves, and a lot on Front Street in East Columbia where their cotton press was located.⁸ That same year Thomas P. Copes an older brother of J. Wilson Copes died while in Brazoria County at the home of Madam Bell.⁹

¹ McCormick, Andrew Phelps, Scotch –Irish in Ireland and America, Private Publishing, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1897, p. 121.

² Republic of Texas Pension Records

³ McCormick, Andrew Phelps, Scotch –Irish in Ireland and America, Private Publishing, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1897, p. 118. The date of their license is April 7, 1839 according to marriage records.

⁴ Ibid., p. 122.

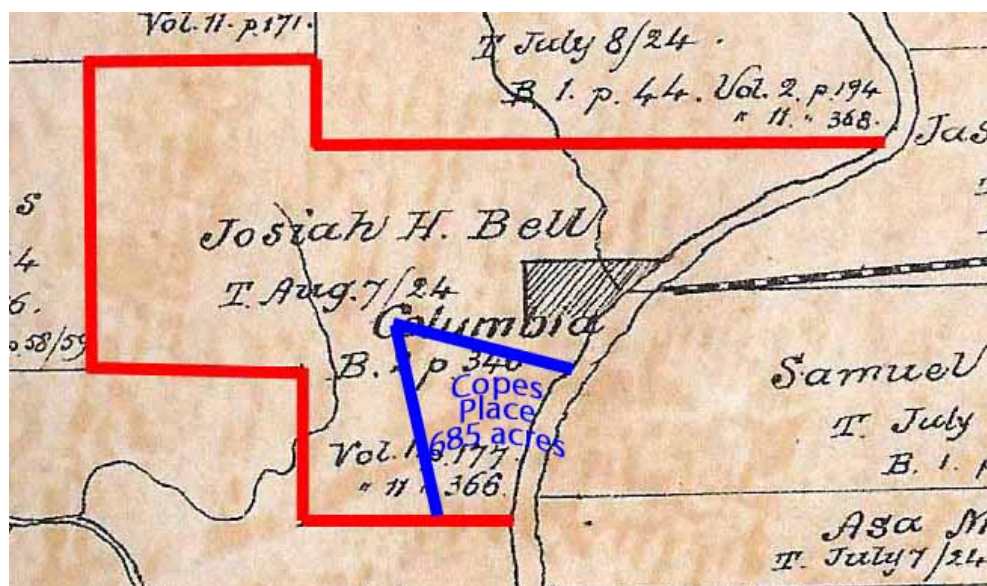
⁵ Ibid., p. 162.

⁶ Creighton, James A., A Narrative History of Brazoria County, Texian Press, Waco, Texas, 1975, pp.191-192.

⁷ McCormick, Andrew Phelps, Scotch –Irish in Ireland and America, Private Publishing, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1897, p. 122 & Brazoria County Deed Records: D 586/87

⁸ Brazoria County Deed Records: E 103/110

⁹ McCormick, Andrew Phelps, Scotch –Irish in Ireland and America, Private Publishing, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1897, p. 120. Thomas P. Copes is buried in the West Columbia Cemetery.



Durango Plantation or Copes Place

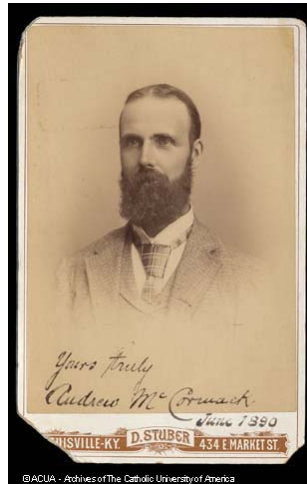
Dr. J. Wilson Copes and Lucinda would build a home and raise their family on their plantation they called “Durango” but was known locally as the Copes Place. The Copes family managed the small cotton plantation with 10-14 slaves from 1850-1860. The 1850 Agricultural Census lists Copes with only 10 improved acres and \$50 worth of farm equipment on the farm. Since the Bell family cotton gin was in the near proximity he may have been able to share expenses with his in-laws. While the 1850 Federal Census lists the Copes family a younger sister Cornelia Elizabeth had died in 1846 while the family lived in Houston (See Appendix A):

J. W. Copes (Physician)	M 41	Delaware
Elizabeth L.	F 30	Louisiana
Josiah B.	M 10	Texas
Mary J.	F 7	Texas
Thomas T.	M 5	Texas
James W.	M 2	Texas
George Ellis	M 25	England
Emma Pepperall (Teacher)	F 21	England
Herman Lamb(Carpenter)	M 30	Germany

The 1850 Slave Census lists 10 slaves on the property.

In September 1859 Mary Jane Copes married Andrew Phelps McCormick whose family had resided west of Columbia in the San Bernard River area. They would raise their family in Brazoria County and Andrew P. McCormick would later become a noted jurist. He married again after the death of Mary Jane in January 1870.¹⁰

¹⁰ Married Louisa Hannah Bell March 1, 1871.



Andrew Phelps McCormick¹¹

By 1860 Dr. J. Wilson Copes had 1535 acres of land, 1/3 interest in Columbia town lots, 14 slaves with 5 slave dwellings, 8 horses, and 20 head of cattle and considered himself to be a merchant-planter according to the 1860 Federal Census and tax records. Though his plantation still operated on a small scale he had hired an overseer:

J. W. Copes	50 M	Delaware
E. S. [L.]	39 F	Louisiana
J. B.	19 M	Texas
T. T.	14 M	Texas
J. Mc. [W.]	12 M	Texas
J. U. [S.]	6 M	Texas
J. C. Girard (Overseer)	38M	Kentucky

With the onset of the Civil War Dr. J. Wilson Copes donated 50 bales of cotton to the Confederate cause.¹² Josiah Bell Copes joined the Columbia Blues a local militia in August 1861.¹³ Dr. J. Wilson Copes died in 1863. His wife and children remained on the property for several years until Elizabeth Lucinda Copes married Dr. Samuel McKinney in 1869 and later moved to Walker County.

In 1876 Mrs. E. L. McKinney transferred ownership of the Copes Place along with some other acreage over to James W. and Joseph S. Copes.¹⁴ Thomas T., James W. and Joseph S. Copes entered into a partnership in 1876 by which they operated the plantation by 1/3's. James W. and Joseph S. Copes were supposed to pay Thomas T. Copes \$600 each from the cultivation

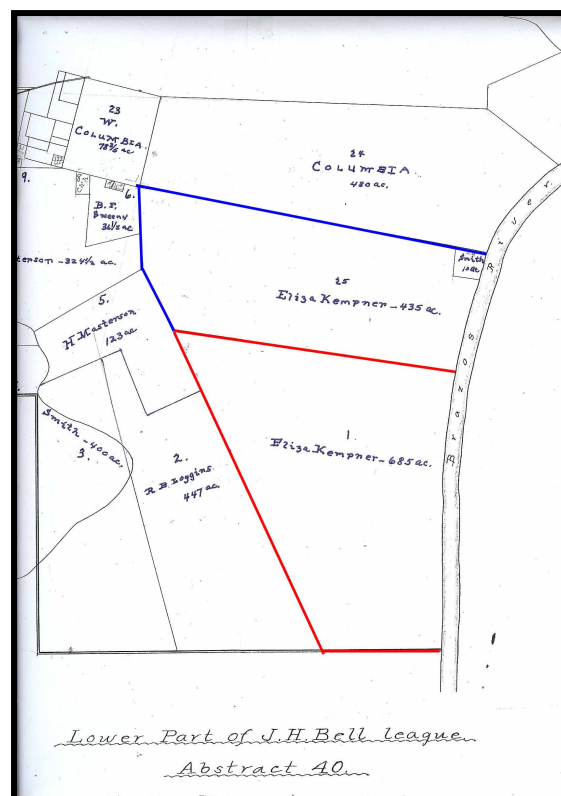
¹¹ Terence Vincent Powderly Photographic Prints, Box 2, Item 69, The American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives OnLine. Although identified as the elder McCormick, this picture shows a man much younger than Andrew Phelps McCormick who would have been 58 years old in 1890. Possibly could be his son Andrew P. McCormick born in 1868.

¹² *Democrat and Planter*, August 13, 1861.

¹³ *Ibid.*, October 22, 1861

¹⁴ BCDR: P 436/37

of crops and raising of horses on the plantation. Also all the expenses operating the plantation were to be divided by 1/3. By the next year James W. Copes had lost his half interest to creditors.¹⁵ In 1879 Mrs. E. L. McKinney bought the half interest back and returned ownership to her two sons the next year.¹⁶ The same year Joseph S. Copes brought suit against Thomas T. Copes for 1/3 of the profits from the plantation. However, the court case was decided in Thomas T. Copes' favor due to Joseph S. Copes' gross negligence in allowing almost half the horses to be lost or gone astray and his inability to pay his portion of the costs to run the plantation¹⁷. By 1882 James W. Copes had defaulted once again while Joseph S. Copes had maintained his financial responsibilities.¹⁸ In November 1882 Joseph S. Copes won a suit against his mother, Mrs. E. L. McKinney for not paying off her note on the 1/2 interest in the plantation she had previously deeded to James W. and Joseph S. Copes.¹⁹ Joseph and his wife Kate sold their half interest in 1883 to Harris Masterson ending the ties of the Copes family with the property.²⁰



Map Courtesy of Brazoria County Historical Museum 94.05.44

John G. and Travis L. Smith local merchants in East Columbia acquired both half interests in the 685 acre tract later in 1883.²¹ In 1887 they obtained another 435 acre tract just

¹⁵ BCDR: Q 444/45

¹⁶ BCDR: S 222 & S 522/23

¹⁷ Civil Court Case 3602 *Joseph S. Copes vs Thomas T. Copes*

¹⁸ BCDR: U 607/08 & U 619/21

¹⁹ Civil Court Case 3933 *Joseph S. Copes vs Mrs. E. L. McKinney*

²⁰ BCDR: V 38/39

²¹ BCDR: V 76 & V 381

north of the Copes Place which made the property extend along the Brazos River all the way to East Columbia.²² In 1899 J. G. Smith & Bro. sold interests in many tracts of land to Eliza Kempner of Galveston.²³

Travis L. Smith still maintained control of the property in early 1900's and his estate since 1932 had owned the two tracts.²⁴ Recently Mitigation Strategies has acquired the ~1100 acres and it may become a wildlife preserve. The location of the home site and slave quarters is not known at present (May 2009) but should be located on the 685 acre tract.

²² BCDR: Z 382/83

²³ BCDR 48 541

²⁴ BCDR: 231 488

Appendix A
James Wilson Copes Family Genealogy

- James Wilson Copes b. November 5, 1809 Delaware (Rev. Joseph Copes & Jenny Wilkins White)
 d. October 8, 1863 Brazoria County, Texas (Buried Columbia Cemetery)
 m. April 4, 1839 Brazoria County, Texas
- Elizabeth Lucinda Bell b. December 22, 1820 Louisiana (Josiah H. Bell & Mary Eveline McKenzie)
 d. December 15, 1893 (Travis County, Texas)
1. Josiah Bell Copes b. November 5, 1840
 m. December 29, 1865 Houston 1st
 Mary Burke
 m. December 30, 1874 2nd
 Leah Emily Bell b. July 19, 1855
 a. Hall Bell Copes b. August 26, 1876
 b. Lucy Bell Copes b. August 17, 1878
 c. Mary Evelyn Copes b. May 19, 1880
 d. Edward Wright Copes b. December 24, 1882
 2. Mary Jane Copes b. August 4, 1842
 d. January 12, 1870 (Buried West Columbia Cemetery)
 m. September 8, 1859
 Andrew Phelps McCormick b. December 18, 1832 (His mother and Madam Bell were sisters)
 d. November 2, 1916 (Waco, Texas)
 a. Joseph Munson McCormick b. May 31, 1860
 b. Lucinda McCormick b. September 10, 1861
 c. Louisa McCormick b. January 3, 1863
 d. Sarah McCormick b. October 9, 1864
 e. Mary McCormick b. October 7, 1866
 f. Andrew Phelps McCormick b. September 8, 1868
 3. Cornelia Elizabeth Copes b. May 13, 1844
 d. August 21, 1846 (Buried West Columbia Cemetery)
 4. Thomas Thaddeus Copes b. November 11, 1846 Houston, Texas
 d. March 18, 1878
 5. James Wilson Copes b. March 7, 1849
 d. February, 1894
 6. Hester Anna Copes b. February 12, 1851
 d. October 11, 1854 (Buried West Columbia Cemetery)
 7. Joseph Stemings Copes b. November 14, 1853
 m. December 17, 1880
 Kate A. McGill
 a. Wilson b. 1881
 b. Lucian b. 1884
 8. Cerrie Campbell Copes b. January 29, 1862
 d. February 2, 1862 (Unknown where infant was buried)



Grave Markers Columbia Cemetery

Appendix B

Copes Place Deed Records

GRANTORS	GRANTEES	Kind of Instrument	Book	Page	Month	Day	Year	Description
Mexican Government	Josiah H. Bell	Deed	ST	159/62	Aug	7	1824	1 ½ Leagues west of the Brazos River on Varner Creek
Josiah H. Bell Estate	Children Josiah H. Bell	Deed	E	103/110	Feb	14	1849	Partition of Land, slaves, property etc. among the children of Josiah H. Bell
Josiah H. Bell Estate	Children Josiah H. Bell	Deed	E	111/14	Feb	14	1849	Partition of Land, slaves, property etc. among the children of Josiah H. Bell
Josiah H. Bell Estate	Children Josiah H. Bell	Deed	E	281/85	Sept	14	1849	Partition of Land, slaves, property etc. among the children of Josiah H. Bell
Mrs. E. L. McKinney Walker Co.	James W. & Joseph S. Copes	Deed	P	436/37	April		1876	685 acres Copes Place + other acreage
Sheriff C. R. Cox	Andrew J. Burke, Jr.	Deed	Q	444/45	Nov	6	1877	\$150 ½ interest of J. W. Copes in 685 acres @ auction
Andrew J. Burke, Jr.	W. H. Crafton	Mortgage	S	155/56	Dec	14	1877	\$150 note due 1 yr. from date his ½ interest in 685 acres as security
Andrew J. Burke, Jr.	J. G. Smith & Bro.	Mortgage	R	641	Feb	25	1879	\$250 note due 1 yr. his ½ interest in 685 acres as security
W. H. Crafton	Andrew J. Burke, Jr.	Release	S	224	Oct	21	1879	Debt paid release mortgage
J. G. Smith & Bro	Andrew J. Burke, Jr.	Release	S	221/22	Oct	23	1879	Debt paid release mortgage
Andrew J. Burke, Jr.	Mrs. E. L. McKinnney	Deed	S	222	Oct	23	1879	\$184 ½ interest in 685 acres
Mrs. E. L. McKinney	W. H. Crafton	Mortgage	T	53/54	Oct	30	1879	Note \$274.50 ½ Interest in 685 acres as security
Mrs. E. L. McKinnney	James W. & Joseph S. Copes	Deed	S	522/23	April		1880	\$50 ½ interest in 685 acres
James W. & Joseph S. Copes	W. H. Sharp	Mortgage	S	569/70	May	14	1880	\$384.05 note due 1 Sept 1880 685 acres as security
James W. & Joseph S. Copes	C.S. Bennett	DT	A	5/6	May	14	1880	\$384 note W. H. Sharp 685 acres as security
James W. Copes	Eugene L. Wilson	Mortgage	T	127/28	Dec	1	1880	\$100 note his ½ interest as security
James W. & Joseph S. Copes	H. Masterson	DT	T	44/46	Feb	25	1881	Notes to J. G. Smith & Bro & W. H. Sharp
James W. Copes	W. H. Crafton	DT	A	90/91	Sept	21	1882	\$550 note to W. H. Crafton his ½ interest as security
Sheriff W. H. Sharp	T. L. Smith	Deed	U	607/08	Dec	5	1882	\$139.55 ½ interest in 685 acres
H. Masterson	W. H. Crafton	Deed	U	619/21	Dec	8	1882	\$200 ½ interest of J. W. Copes
T. L. Smith	W. H. Crafton	Deed	U	618/19	Dec	16	1882	\$140 ½ interest in 685 acres
Sheriff E. N. Wilson	W. H. Crafton	Deed	U	651/53	Jan	4	1883	\$50 the rights of Mrs. E.L. McKinney @ auction
Joseph S. & Kate Copes	H. Masterson	Deed	V	38/39	April	11	1883	\$500 their ½ interest in 685 acres
H. Masterson	J. G. Smith	Deed	V	76	April	14	1883	\$1250 ½ Interest in 685 acres
W. H. Crafton	John G. Smith	Deed	V	381	Aug	6	1883	\$1576 ½ Interest in 685 acres
B. F. Sweeney	John G. Smith & Bro.	Deed	Z	382/83	June	30	1887	435 ac. \$543.25 out of Josiah H. Bell League
J. G. Smith & Bro.	Eliza Kempner	Deed	48	541	April	28	1899	Many tracts
T. L. Smith	Osceola Irrigation Co.	Deed	132	216/18	Nov	10	1915	1132 acres out of Josiah H. Bell League one of several tracts
	T. L. Smith Estate	Deed	231	488	Feb	6	1932	
	Mitigation Strategies							

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