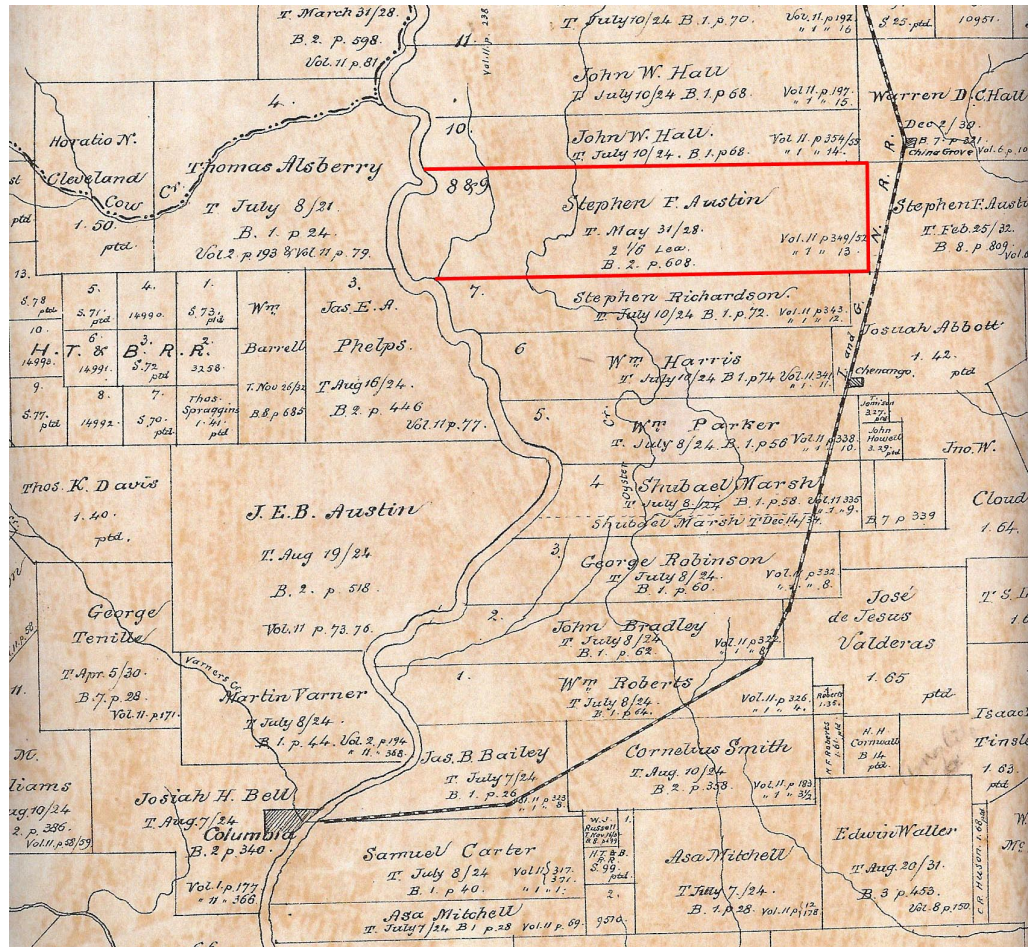


Palo Alto & Buena Vista Plantations Brazosport Archeological Society

The Palo Alto and Buena Vista plantations lie east of the Brazos River on both sides of Oyster Creek above the town of Columbia. In recognition of his financial backing and crucial aid, Stephen F. Austin had agreed to reserve land in his colony for Joseph H. and George Anne Hawkins of New Orleans.¹ Both Joseph Hawkins and his wife died of yellow fever in New Orleans before they were able to come to Texas.² Stephen F. Austin reserved League 8 for himself and deeded League 9 along with other lands amounting to over forty thousand acres over to the Hawkins' heirs in 1832.



Stephen F. Austin 2 1/6 Leagues, Map 1879 The General Land Office of the State of Texas

In 1845 and 1846 Robert and David G. Mills acquired two tracts of land amounting to 3428 acres of land in League 9 which would become the Palo Alto Plantation. The Mills brothers under the firm of R. & D. G. Mills built an empire through merchandising, banking, and cotton

¹ Cantrell, Gregg, Stephen F. Austin Empresario of Texas, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999, pp.80-84.

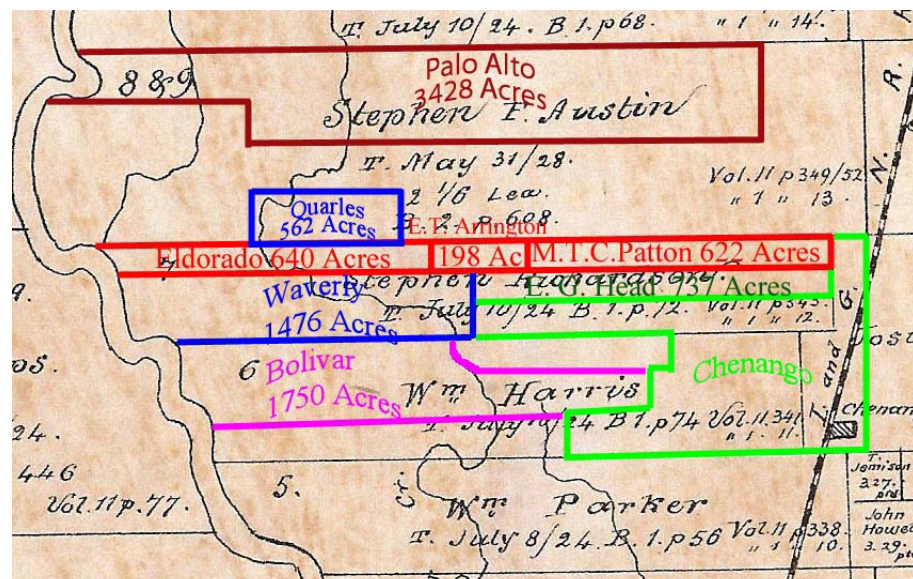
² Joseph H. Hawkins died 1823 and George Anne Hawkins died 1829.

brokerage in Galveston, Texas. During the latter period of the Republic of Texas and the early years of statehood Robert Mills operated their business in Galveston while in Brazoria County David G. Mills managed Low Wood and Bynum as sugar plantations building Palo Alto into a cotton plantation. Later in 1856 the Mills brothers purchased 1111 acres just south, adjacent to Palo Alto in League 8 making the Buena Vista Plantation. The Mills brothers had over 100,000 acres of land and 350 slaves in 1860. Fortunes turned after the Civil War and by 1873 they had to declare bankruptcy. In 1880 David G. Mills was able to acquire Palo Alto and Buena Vista again but by 1883 he sold it to Davis, Brown and Company of Galveston. C. Davis of the firm retained the properties after the dissolution of Davis, Brown, and Company. Equitable Securities Company of New York was entrusted with the property in 1895 for sale.

After the turn of the century Bassett Blakely acquired both plantations for the Chenango Plantation Company. The Chenango Plantation Company sold the property along with several other tracts to the Texas Prison Commission February 1908 to establish the Ramsey Prison Farm which is in operation today.

In 1833 with the division of his property among the heirs of Joseph H. and George Anne Hawkins of New Orleans, Louisiana Stephen F. Austin transferred title of League 9 located east of the Brazos River above the town of Columbia to Edmund St. John Hawkins who had reached the age of 21. By 1837 Edmund St. John, George N., and Norbourne B. Hawkins were deceased and their brother Joseph T. Hawkins with his sister Mary Jane (Hawkins) Davis had inherited the league. In 1841 Joseph and Mary sold ~ 800 acres from League 9 to Leander H. McNeel, who lived at Pleasant Grove Plantation along the San Bernard in the southern part of the county [Brazoria County Deed Records³: B 99/100 & 100/01].

Robert and David G. Mills bought the land from Leander H. McNeel which was on both sides of Oyster Creek in October 1845 [BCDR: B 538]. An adjacent 2578 acres were purchased from Joseph T. Hawkins in April 1846 building the Palo Alto Plantation [BCDR: D133/34].



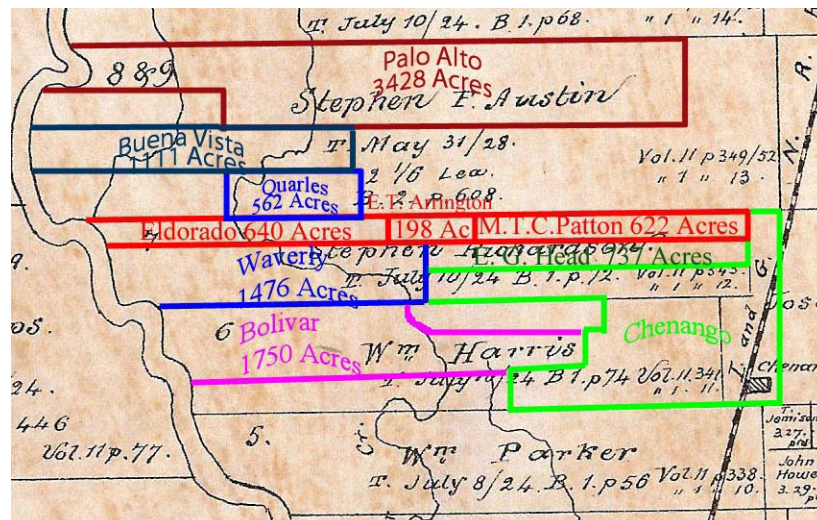
³ Brazoria County Deeds Records designated as BCDR from this point forward.

Andrew G. Mills⁴ came to Texas in 1827 from Kentucky and his brother Robert⁵ joined him in January 1831 moving to Brazoria, Texas. The Mills brothers were initially in the mercantile business in Brazoria where Robert Mills was known as the “Duke of Brazoria”. Both brothers fought in the Battle of Velasco in 1832. They dissolved their partnership, A. G. & R. Mills in December 1834. One of their customers in November 1833 was William Barret Travis who entered in his diary:

28 November
 Bot of A. G. & R. Mills-1 pair pants \$9.
 Pair shirts & 2 pair drawers flannel 2.00
 3 pair socks 2.00⁶

Andrew G. Mills died in at sea 1836 and their younger brother David G. Mills⁷ came to Texas to enter the business under the name of R. Mills & Company. Under the style of R. & D. G. Mills in 1849 their firm moved to Galveston, Texas. They owned two large plantations in Brazoria County, Low Wood and Bynum and in Matagorda County were partners with William G. Warren in the Caney Plantation. By 1852 these plantations were primarily sugar plantations.

David G. Mills lived in a modest three room brick home on Low Wood Plantation while he over looked the agricultural part of the business. Robert Mills managed the merchandising, cotton brokerage, shipping, and banking enterprises building a mansion on ten acres in Galveston, Texas. In the absence of trustworthy banks in the early 1850's, between \$25,000 and \$500,000 in notes on the Northern Bank of Mississippi, countersigned by R. and D. G. Mills, circulated as gold in Texas and Louisiana. Robert Mills and their older brother William Mills⁸ of Holly Springs, Mississippi were also part owners of McDowell, Mills & Company of New York and New Orleans.



⁴ Andrew G. Mills born 1805 Todd County, Kentucky. Parents Adam and Janet (Graham) Mills.

⁵ Robert Mills born March 9, 1809 Todd County, Kentucky.

⁶ Davis, Robert E., ed., *The Diary of William Barret Travis*, Texian Press, Waco, Texas, 1966, p.75.

⁷ David Graham Mills born 1812 Todd County, Kentucky.

⁸ William Mills born 1800.

In February 1856 the Mills brothers purchased an additional 1111 acres adjacent to Palo Alto just south in League 8 [BCDR: G 92/93]. Earlier tax returns indicate the Mills brothers were already paying taxes on this property in 1852. This tract they named Buena Vista Plantation.

By 1860 there were 31 slaves and 10 slave dwellings on Palo Alto. The number of slaves at Palo Alto was significantly lower than the over 300 slaves at the Low Wood and Bynum sugar plantations. The Mills brothers owned over 300 slaves in Brazoria County with 20,189 acres of land according to the 1860 tax record. David G. Mills reported his real estate value at \$364,234 and value of his personal estate at \$250,000.

The Civil War brought different opportunities for those in the cotton and sugar business in Texas. While several of their ships were confiscated by the Confederate government Robert Mills was often in Cuba overseeing the blockade runners smuggling cotton to Havana. R. & D. G. Mills were $\frac{3}{4}$ owner of the *Rob Roy* before being bought out by Captain William Watson⁹. The captain found Robert Mills “a rather close customer to deal with”.¹⁰ John R. Mills¹¹ was a representative of the firm in Galveston and Houston during the Civil War procuring cotton for shipment to usually Tampico or Vera Cruz, Mexico before a final destination in Havana, Cuba.

After the Civil War Robert and David G. Mills tried to keep their plantations in production but were plagued as other Brazoria County planters by the shortage of dependable labor and several years of successive crop failures. In March 1871 they mortgaged Palo Alto and Buena Vista along with all machinery and livestock on the plantations to Edward McDowell and George Haliday of Liverpool, England for \$28,800 in gold reserving their current cotton crop [BCDR: M 419/22]. For the year 1873 the cotton crops were consigned to P. J. Willis & Brother to get operating capital for the year [BCDR: N 692/93]. By December 1873 the company had to declare bankruptcy.

Branch T. Masterson and George Street were appointed assignees by the court and instructed to sell off all the property and personal assets of R. & D. G. Mills, Robert, David G. Mills, and John R. Mills [BCDR: P 131/32]. George Haliday bought all 4539 acres of the Palo Alto and Buena Vista plantations April 1875 [BCDR: P 132/35]. Robert Mills¹² would live out his life in Galveston, Texas.

Henry Charnock of New Orleans purchased the property from George Haliday in October 1875 for \$17,500 [BCDR: P 130/31]. Charnock sold the property to William Arbuckle who was unable to make the payments and the property was seized and auctioned off to Travis L. Smith for \$3000 October 1879 [BCDR: S 226/27]. David G. Mills would again purchase in the Palo Alto and Buena Vista plantation for \$4500 January 1880 [BCDR: S 608/09]. In the 1880 Census David G. Mills was still living in Brazoria County and may have been on the plantation.

In August 1883 Davis, Brown & Company bought the plantations from Mills for \$16,212.86. Mills sold “all the growing crops on the plantation of Palo Alto, all of the farming utensils and mules & c. excepting the mules and stock and implements that were just moved from the Low Wood Plantation to said Palo Alto” [BCDR: V 398/400]. David G. Mills would live in Galveston, Texas until his death February 27, 1885. After the firm of Davis, Brown & Company dissolved C. Davis assumed all the company debts and assets including Palo Alto and Buena Vista [Brazoria County Deed of Trust: A 496/500 & 551/52].

⁹ Watson, William, The Civil War Adventures of a Blockade Runner, Texas A&M University Press, College Station, Texas, 2001, pp. 94 & 140-141.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.140.

¹¹ John R. Mills was most likely a nephew and son of William Mills of Holly Springs, Mississippi.

¹² Robert Mills died April 13, 1888 Galveston, Texas.

After the death of C. Davis the Equitable Securities Company of New York assumed all assets of the estate in Texas and started to sell off a large number of tracts [BCDR: 34 69/75]. May 1905 Bassett Blakely President of the Chenango Plantation Company purchased several tracts amounting to 8450 acres including Palo Alto and Buena Vista for \$42,250. February 1908 the Texas Prison Commission bought 7772 acres for \$107,005.25 starting the Ramsey Prison Farm which is still in operation at this date.

Appendix A Deed Record Palo Alto Plantation

GRANTORS	GRANTEES	Kind of Instrument	Book	Page	Month	Day	Year	Acres	Description
Mexican Government	Stephen F. Austin	Deed			May	31	1828		Stephen F. Austin 2 1/6 Leagues
Stephen F. Austin	Edmund St. John Hawkins	Deed							League 9 division of property to heirs of Joseph H. and George Ann Hawkins of New Orleans
Edmund St. John Hawkins Estate	Joseph T. Hawkins & Mary J. Davis	Deed							League 9
Joseph T. Hawkins & Mary Jane Davis	Leander H. McNeel	Deed	B	99/100	Dec	13	1841	400	\$2000 League 9 both sides Oyster Creek bttm half
Joseph T. Hawkins & Mary Jane Davis	Leander H. McNeel	Deed	B	100/01	Dec	13	1841	400	\$10,000 League 9 both sides Oyster Creek top half
Leander H. McNeel	Robert & D.G. Mills	Deed	B	538	Oct	14	1845	850	\$11,000 League 9 both sides Oyster Creek
Mary Jane Davis	Joseph T. Hawkins	Deed	D	114/16	Feb	10	1846		Mary J. Davis traded her ½ interest in League 9 to her brother for other lands
Joseph T. Hawkins	Robert & D.G. Mills	Deed	D	133/34	April	3	1846	2578	\$11,000 League 9
William Joel Bryan	James P. Caldwell	Deed			Aug	4	1840	1111	
James P. & Anna B. Caldwell with Munson Children	Robert. & D.G. Mills	Deed	G	691/92	Feb	13	1856	1111	\$5000 League 8 upper ½
Robert & D.G. Mills	Edward McDowell & George Haliday of Liverpool, England	Mortgage	M	419/22	Mar	14	1871	4539	\$28,800 gold Palo Alto & Buena Vista Plantations with all machinery & livestock exempting cotton crop note due in 1 year
Bankruptcy Court Galveston, Texas	Branch T. Masterson & George Street Assignees	Decree	P	131/32	Feb	18	1874		Court assigned all assts of R. & D.G. Mills to Masterson & Street for sale
Branch T. Masterson & George Street Trustees	George Haliday of Liverpool, England	Deed	P	132/35	April	22	1875	4539	To satisfy lien of McDowell & Haliday \$34388.77 gold bid by Haliday
George Haliday	Henry Charnock New Orleans	Deed	P	130/31	Oct	6	1875	4539	\$17,500
Sheriff W. H. Sharp	Travis L. Smith	Deed	S	226/27	Oct	2	1879	4539	\$3000 Foreclosure sale lien by Charnock against Wm Arbuckle
Travis L. Smith	David G. Mills	Deed	S	608/09	Jan	22	1880	4539	\$4500
David G. Mills	Davis, Brown & Company	Deed	V	398/400	Aug	9	1883	4539	\$16,212.86
C. Davis et al	Harris Masterson	Deed Trust	A	496/500	Jan	28	1886	4580	
C. Brown & F. B. Weeks	C. Davis	Deed Trust	A	551/52	Feb	16	1886		Dissolved firm & Davis to take over notes & properties
H. Masterson	C. Davis	Release	A	701	Feb	19	1887		
Norman F. Thompson agent	Equitable Securities Co.	Deed	34	69/75	Dec	17	1895		Palo Alto & several other tracts
Equitable Securities Co. New York	Bassett Blakely	Mortgage	66	513/27	May	26	1905	8450	\$42,250 several tracts
Chenango Plantation Company	Texas Prison Commission	Deed	85	501/05	Feb	10	1908	7772	\$107,005.25

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"Schedule 2—Slave Inhabitants in the County of Brazoria, Texas"

Federal Population Schedule, Eighth Census of the United States.

1860 The State of Texas, Brazoria County

"Schedule 2—Slave Inhabitants in the County of Brazoria, Texas"

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1870

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1880

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