

Robert Duncn Chapman

A Biography

Robert Duncan Chapman, b. 08-Dec-1839 in Houston Cnty., Georgia, d. 07-Aug-1934 in Houston, Texas. The census of 1840 found Robert Duncan in Houston Cnty., Ga (one year old); 1850 found him in Randolph Cnty., Ga; the 1860 Census of Randolph Ctny Ga. found him, as a clerk, in the home of his father, W.H.J. Chapman, and his mother, Temperance; the 1870 Census of Clay Cnty Ga. found him in Cotton Hill as a dry good merchant, age 30 and his wife, Eugenia, age 22 married with no children; and 1880 found him in Jefferson Cnty., Texas married with 3 children. The 1910 census found him in Dallas, Texas as the head of the household with his daughter, Martha and two grandchildren, Robert Leon Sonfield and George McNeil Sonfield. He served as Captain, Co. E 55th Ga. Regiment C.S.A. & Major Gen. Texas Division U.C.V.

On June 18, 1900, E.A. Blount (whose deceased daughter, Laura, had been married to his son, William McNeil) of Nacogdoches and W.J. Townsend, Sr. of Lufkin, filed a plot plan in Angelina County to establish the town site of Huntington on the Texas and New Orleans Railroad running North from Beaumont. On Saturday, June 22, they conducted a public auction of these town lots. Among the successful bidders were Capt. Robert Duncan Chapman and his brother, Dr. James Herschell Chapman.

Robert is regarded by some as "the father of Huntington." He became the first Postmaster when the job was created on July 23, 1900 and the first to build a store in Huntington; a mammoth general store. Robert's Store was described in the Lufkin Weekly Tribune in 1902 as having an "immense stock of everything you can think of, from a handle to a full stock of goods of any description. He is also, in connection with his son, at the head of the Huntington Piling and Tie Company. In connection with his mercantile business, he also has an undertaking establishment."

The March 28, 1928 edition of the Houston Post-Dispatch reported that Major General R.D. Chapman, commanding the Texas division of the United Confederate Veterans, was appointed by Governor Dan Moody to represent the state at the ceremony unveiling the statue of General Robert E. Lee and his "Old Traveler," at Stone Mountain Georgia, April 9. The statue of Lee and his famous white horse will be unveiled by the Stone Mountain Memorial Association of Atlanta, which invited both General Chapman and Governor Moody to attend. The governor, however, designated the Texas Confederate commander to represent the state.

The August 20, 1932 edition of the Dallas Journal carried a picture of General Chapman, who was then 93 years old, to report that he was in Dallas to visit relatives (his daughter, Mrs. Charles Desel, of Arlington) and speak at a joint meeting of the Dallas Confederate camps. He was quoted as believing that he is the oldest Confederate veteran in this part of the country and possibly in the United States. In addition to his long service in the veterans' organization he reported two other records of which he is proud. He has been a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South for eighty-three years and has held the degree of

Master Mason for seventy-one years. For the last four years he has been commander of one of the three departments of the Confederate organization. General Chapman, a native of Houston County, Georgia, entered the War Between the States as a Sergeant Major of the First Georgia Regiment. Later as a First Lieutenant of the Fifty-Fifth Regiment he participated in Bragg's raid into Kentucky. At the Cumberland River crossing his Captain was killed and he became company commander.

After the raid he recrossed the Cumberland into Tennessee, where his company was captured near Cumberland Gap by Federal troops under command of General Burnside and he was sent to the Johnson Island prison. When his detachment was about to be captured, he buried his sword rather than give it up to the enemy. "I believe that sword, which was one of the most beautiful I have ever seen, is still in the ground there, on the Tennessee side of the Gap," he said. I tried first to break the blade, and when I couldn't, I rammed it past the hilt in the soft ground near a small branch. Then I took a pit of wood and pushed it eight inches below the level of the ground. I have often thought I would like to go back and see if I could find it." Five months later he escaped and returned to Georgia, where he organized a new command and reported to Savannah.

Hard pressed by Sherman's army, his command withdrew with other Confederate troops from Savannah through South Carolina and into North Carolina, where he led them in the last fight of the war at Bentonville, a few days before the surrender.

Twenty years ago (1912) the veteran was a Dallas resident, living in Oak Cliff. For several years he was gatekeeper at Fair Park. During his residence in Dallas he was active in Masonic and Confederate organizational activities.

In Houston, where he makes his home with a daughter, Mrs. George S. King, he is bailiff of the Harris County grand jury, a post he has held for fifteen years (since 1917). The war prevented his obtaining an education for a profession, he said. Toward "what you might say" is the "close of my life," he hopes to receive recognition for what he has accomplished - "a respectable place in life."

"But I believe I'll live to be 100 yet," he concluded. He married Eugenia Alice McNeil, married 21-Nov-1867 in Cuthbert, Randolph Ctny, Georgia.