

## **DAVID G. BURNET PARK**

The David G. Burnet Park is located east of Houston off Interstate 10. The exit is the same used to get to Four Corners and Lynchburg. From the Crosby-Lynchburg Road, the park is east on Center Street then south on Mable to Burnet Street. Spring Bayou borders the east side of the park.

David Gouverneur Burnet pronounced “burn-it”, according to Texas historian, Margaret Swett Henson, was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1788. Gouverneur was his mother’s middle name. He studied law under his brother Jacob in Cincinnati, Ohio and received a classical education in Newark, then spent some time in New York. He joined Xavier Miranda on his unsuccessful expedition to Venezuela, returning to New York at the end of 1806. About here, history seems to lose track of Burnet for about eleven years. In 1817, he moved to Natchitoches, Louisiana to trade with the Comanche Indians for the next two years. Returning to Ohio he studied law again.

May 1826 found Burnet in Saltillo, Mexico petitioning the Mexican government for an empresario grant, in Texas. He received the grant which authorized him to settle 300 families in northeast Texas south of the town of Nacogdoches. Burnet was to receive 69,000 acres of land from the Mexican state of Coahuila and Texas for these colonists. He spent the next couple of years in Texas trying to develop and refine his grants and in Ohio, in an effort to raise money and enlist colonists. Neither venture worked out very well. In April 1830, the Mexican government passed a law prohibiting further immigration from the United States. Burnet could see no other way out, than to sell his colonization rights to a group of northeastern investors. Both he and partner Lorenzo de Zavala made this move in October of that year.

The northeast investors had formed a new firm known as the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company, which paid Burnet an undisclosed amount of money plus certificates for four leagues of land or 17,713.6 acres, in exchange for his colonization contracts. But the Mexican immigration law of April 1830 prevented him from locating and surveying the land, making the certificates more or less worthless. Before the year ended, December 8, Burnet married Hannah Este in Morristown, New Jersey.

Burnet ordered a steam-driven sawmill, packed his belongings, and moved his new wife to Texas. Upon his arrival at Galveston, early in 1831, he purchased seventeen acres from Nathaniel Lynch at the site of Lynchburg, to erect his sawmill. The mill was about 500 feet north of the original Lynchburg town site, on the eastern edge of the San Jacinto River, at a natural eddy, where the water was calm and free of strong currents. He also purchased 279 additional acres on St Mary’s Bay (now Burnet Bay), about two and one half miles east of Lynchburg, where he erected his home named “Oakland,” made of logs. He soon replaced the log structure with a neat little cottage of dressed lumber. Later, he petitioned the Mexican government for eleven leagues of land, because he had purchased and ran his sawmill for the benefit of the surrounding citizens. Like so many other times in his life his petition was unsuccessful. Shortly thereafter, in June 1835, he put the sawmill up for sale, due to the fact that it was not producing a profit.

Although Burnet was a capable man in law and politics; his policies tended to anger people. He was not elected a delegate to the Texas Convention of 1836 because of his radical thoughts. Over the years, David Burnet had applied for many different important positions without success, and would continue to apply for them in the future years, with similar results. There was one exception however. He attended the Convention to plead before the Consultation of March 1836 for a client, who had been sentenced to be hung. Burnet was very articulate and won clemency for the client, thereby impressing a number of the delegates. When time came to elect an interim president for the new Republic, the delegates declined to name one of their own, and elected Burnet by a seven vote majority.

His tenure as President was from March 1836 until October 22, 1836. During this time he angered General Sam Houston, the soldiers, his cabinet, and the local citizens with his actions. He left the office very embittered. In June 1838 and January 1839, the Burnet's acquired a house in Houston on Travis Street and lots in the towns of Harrisburg and Hamilton. In 1838 he was elected Vice President to Mirabeau B. Lamar, but when he ran for President in 1841, against his old adversary Sam Houston, he was thoroughly beaten.

The Baptist Conference appointed Burnet as Trustee in October 1856 and Burnet continued to hold various minor government positions for the next few years, but was appointed a United States Senator in 1866, along with Oran G. Roberts. Texas had not yet met the conditions to be re-admitted to the Union; consequently the two were refused seats in the Senate of the United States.

David G. Burnet died in December 1870 and is buried in Galveston's Lakeview Cemetery, where a monument was erected to him and his old friend Sidney Sherman in 1894.