

THE CITY OF SWEENEY AND HOW NAMED

The city of Sweeny is located in the Imbra Keep Sitis or League, one of the original land grants in Stephen F. Austin's first colony in Texas. Imbra Keep received this grant in 1824 through the political influence of Jared Groce, the wealthiest man in Austin's colony who was favored by Austin as Groce received ten leagues rather than one. Keep was associated with, and worked for, Groce, mainly as a purchasing agent that acquired goods and supplies in other states, shipped them by boat from New Orleans to Velasco, then up the Brazos to Groce's plantation near today's Hempstead. Mr. Keep was a widower with a small son, who did not actually live on his land, but complied with the laws of ownership by building a log cabin and clearing a small amount of farm land. His league fronted on the San Bernard River so he had available water and boat transportation.

To the northwest of his land were the bordering ~~to~~ grants of Charles Breen and David McCormick, who were developing their plantations as their new homes, although Keep spent his time mainly in Velasco, Brazoria, Marion, and Washington as a dealer in shipping and merchandise. Due to an argument with Groce over a ship-load of damaged cargo he was bringing from New Orleans, Keep and Groce ended up with conflicting lawsuits which ended their relationship. Keep gave Martin Varner the authority to sell his land and he left the colony. About this same time (around 1828), Charles Breen also ~~decided~~^{decided} to leave and listed his land for sale.

A prosperous operator of five businesses in Tennessee — each with a grist mill, blacksmith and wheelwright shop, and general store — John Sweeny became interested in the new land of opportunity that so many Tennesseans were talking about — Texas. He traveled by boat down the Mississippi River to New Orleans, then across the Gulf to

Velasco, and up the Brazos River to Marion (today's East Columbia) in 1828. While staying in Marion, he traveled over the area and visited various places that were for sale, and made arrangements with the agent for Charles Breen to purchase one half of the Breen League. He returned to Tennessee, sold his land and his businesses, gathered his belongings, slaves, and family and started in a covered wagon caravan in 1832 for Texas. They traveled down the Natchez Trace to Natchez, Mississippi, crossed the state of Louisiana, and arrived in Texas in early 1833, making their new home in the log house built by Charles Breen. Since there were nine children, and another born in 1834, the house had to have rooms added to accommodate the large family.

The In the Keep League was broken up into smaller tracts and sold to various owners over the years. John Sweeney purchased one eighth or a 555 acre strip (that joined his land) on the northwest side that gave him additional farm land and an outlet to the San Bernard River. R. D. MacDonald, a realtor from Houston, purchased quite a large tract of this land (that included the new railroad station called "Adamston") after the railroad was constructed through this area in 1905. Travis Smith of Marion (East Columbia) who owned several cotton gins and stores, purchased 40 acres across the tracks from the new depot and moved one of his gins to this site, and built a store there in 1908-09. When completed, he set aside one corner and applied for a Post Office to be located in his store. This was granted July 23, 1909 and William L. Sweeney, a grandson of John Sweeney, Sr. was appointed as the first Postmaster. He told the representatives of the Post Office Department that the name "Adamston" meant nothing to the local citizens as most of them were family members living on the strip Sweeney

plantations in the area, and he would like to have it changed. He was given permission to select a new name, and he named the Post Office "Sweeney" after his grandfather, John Sweeney, Sr. Thus the name "Sweeney" for the ~~new~~ soon to be town.

(This information was told by W. L. Sweeney to Charles and Marie Ellis, who moved here in 1912, as to how the community was named.)

Land sales were not going as well as R. D. MacDonald had hoped, so he sold a large section of acreage to a developer who specialized in starting new towns, Herbert D. Hurd, president of "Burton D. Hurd Industrial Land Company." The land was surveyed in 1910, mapped and platted, and sales begun in 1911 of both town lots and surrounding 10 acre vegetable farm plots. A few families came and located in Sweeney in 1911 and 1912, and the new town ~~was~~ continued to develop and grow through the years. It has never been a large city (current population in 1997 estimated at 3,500) and it has seen a change in economic growth. Starting as an agriculture and ranching community, the discovery of a vast oil field in 1934 with the construction of a gasoline plant and a refinery during World War II, and later a very large refining and chemical complex has altered the area into an industrial development with very little farming and ranching remaining.