

Henderson King Yoakum

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Henderson Yoakum was a soldier, teacher, lawyer, and historian. He was a resident of Walker County, Texas, for about eleven years. He was a dear friend of Sam Houston.

Henderson King Yoakum, the eldest son of George and Mary Ann Maddy Yoakum, was born in Claiborne County, Tennessee, 6 September, 1810. He graduated from West Point in 1832, and married Eveline Cannon of Roane County, Tennessee. They became the parents of nine children. The family resided in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where Henderson practiced law and was admitted to the bar.

He entered the military service in 1838, as a colonel in the Tennessee infantry during the Cherokee War. He later served as the State Democratic Senator from Tennessee. He was very interested in the annexation of Texas. In 1845 he moved to Texas and settled near Huntsville, on the Four Notch Road. This area was known as the Shepherd's Valley neighborhood. The road was named Four Notch because someone had cut four notches in the giant live-oak trees at the turn-off for Highway 190, about 3 miles east of Huntsville. Henderson built a house of hand-hewn logs, with a dog-run or open hall. On either side were two rooms. Each of the rooms had a fireplace. Bricks from these fireplaces are now in place, forming a sidewalk, in front of Henderson Yoakum's grave in Oakwood Cemetery. The walk was constructed by Mac Woodward, Jr., as a young boy. He is a direct descendant of Henderson Yoakum.

Yoakum was a member of the Methodist church and a very active Mason. He served as Worshipful Master of Forrest Lodge No. 19 A.F. & A.M., Huntsville, in 1850. Yoakum wrote the charter for the Austin College in 1849, where he taught law and was the college's first librarian. He served as a trustee of the college for seven years.

Yoakum is best remembered for his authorship of the first history of Texas; "History of Texas from Its First Settlement in 1685 to Its Annexation to the United States in 1846." He published this two-volume set in 1855, after several years of work. It is believed that Sam Houston encouraged the writing of this history.

On 30 November, 1856, while in Houston attending a meeting of the Masonic Grand Lodge of Texas, Yoakum was to address the Masons. He took pneumonia and died suddenly at the old Capital Hotel. His body was returned to Huntsville, and buried in Oakwood Cemetery. A Texas Historical Marker was placed at his grave in 1976. The Sons of the Republic of Texas named the local chapter, Henderson King Yoakum Sons of the Republic of Texas, in his honor. The President Houston Chapter, Daughters of the Republic of Texas, placed a Citizen of the Republic of Texas Marker on his grave in 1984. Yoakum was honored in 1876 when a newly formed county was named Yoakum County.