

THE CEMETERY

Brackenridge selected this site when his daughter, Elizabeth Ann "Lillie" died. A double row of cedar trees was planted leading from their home to the cemetery. (Two of the original cedar trees and several smaller trees that have come up from seed can be seen along the historic trail.) The second burial in this cemetery was John Adams who died December 22, 1862. Then when wife Isabella died December 19, 1886, her body was brought back to this cemetery to be buried with her husband.

The stone and concrete fence that surrounds the cemetery is about 150 Sq. Ft., 4' High, 2' thick and has no entry gate. George stated, "Don't put a gate. If there is a gate, sooner or later it will be left open and somebody's cows will be eating grass off my grave." So the fence was built as he directed. Then he gave other instructions: no care whatever was to be given to the burial plot, nature was to have free reign. That is one reason the monument is so screened by brush. To Brackenridge's credit, he reserved only the minimum amount of space for himself, enough for his name, date of birth, and date of death.

The remainder is devoted to his parents, his brothers and sisters along with a few notes on his ancestry, appropriate scriptures, and these words that he wanted remembered about John Adams Brackenridge, his father:

*A lawyer, he inspired Lincoln
who heard him in court when a boy.
When a Henry Clay elector, Lincoln came
by his request to speak in his district,
His last case in court was in defense of
Negro slaves accused of killing their master.*

The funeral of George Brackenridge in 1920 and that of Miss Mary Eleanor Brackenridge in 1924 caused a need for extensive arrangements. Stairs were built over the fence for the bereaved to enter the cemetery. A special train was chartered to carry the mourners to Edna, where their chauffeurs who had driven down ahead of the train, met them. The townspeople of Edna put on their best front and the finest automobiles were polished and loaned to take care of those folk from out-of-town who did not send their own machines. Mary Eleanor, who died February 14, 1924, was the last interment in the Cemetery. The funeral of a Brackenridge was a very solemn, momentous occasion for Jackson County.

It was George who had the enormous monument and stone wall erected around the cemetery grounds. The monument is four feet square and ten feet high (This was one of the largest single blocks of granite that has ever been quarried in Texas at that time). On the four sides of the granite block there is a brief history of each of the ten members of the Brackenridge family. When the monument was moved from the railroad station in Edna in 1916, it was a wet year and the massive object had to be moved on log rollers pulled by oxen. The journey required several weeks to complete the 7 mile trip from Edna to its present location in what is now Brackenridge Park.



*Portions of this article were written, in part by Ruthie Menefee. Other sources include writings by Brownson Malsch, Johnowene Crutcher Menger and Marilyn Sibley.
* Excerpts taken from George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist by Marilyn McAdams Sibley

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BRACKENRIDGE FAMILY

Brackenridge Recreation Complex



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is owned and operated by:

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John Adams Brackenridge was born in Washington, D.C., in 1800 and studied at the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University. Following his studies, he migrated to Boonville, Warrick County, Indiana, where he and Isabella Helena McCullough were married April 6, 1827.

They lived in a spacious log cabin on a 100 acre farm where their eight children were born: John Thomas, George Washington, James Madison, Mary Eleanor, Robert John, and Lenora Helena. They also had two more daughters named Elizabeth Ann. The first daughter nicknamed "Lizzie" was born in 1845 and died in 1847, her burial place was in Boonville. The second daughter was born in 1848 and died in 1856, was nicknamed "Lillie".

Brackenridge was a successful and distinguished man in Boonville, recognized as an eminent lawyer and was a founder of the local Presbyterian Church.

Brackenridge, who befriended and helped him, influenced Abraham Lincoln. Impressed by Brackenridge's court defense, Lincoln stated, "He was my inspiration for deciding to become a lawyer.". In his youth, Lincoln's relentless search for knowledge, led him to borrow law books from Brackenridge and the warm friendship formed was destined to outlive the latter. By the time Lincoln moved to Illinois in 1830, he and Brackenridge had established a lasting friendship. Both were members of the Whig Party and worked together to help Henry Clay win the Presidential nomination. After Clay's defeat, the Whig Party dissolved.

In the 1840's Brackenridge felt his income was not enough to support his large family. He practiced law, was in the mercantile business, and dealt in land speculation; but he did not feel he was as successful as he could be. According to his daybook he was worth about \$20,512.00, a sizable amount; but the economy was down in southern Indiana, and his health was failing. For a man nearing fifty with a two-year-old daughter, he was not satisfied with his achievements.

John asked his older sons to assume some of their manhood responsibilities. First he sent George to Texas with merchandise to trade. When George returned to Indiana with a profit, he told his father that land was cheap and thinly populated. He predicted a boom for Texas.

Next, Thomas and a family friend, James H. Bates brought favorable reports from the Texas Coast; so John himself came to confirm what he had heard. He could see the business prospects and was hopeful the Texas climate would benefit his health. John Adams Brackenridge moved his family to Jackson County, Texas in 1852. Two years later, he purchased the Joseph H. Rector League where he selected the site for his Plantation Home.

Business boomed in this area and his mercantile business and his wealth increased. When the family moved to Texas, John had planned to build a home for his family. The first plan he drew for the house was a one story structure, but he increased the size to two stories. He chose for the homesite, a knoll shaded by a mottle of oak trees overlooking, to the East, the thickly wooded Navidad River bottoms. In front of the house the ground sloped off gently, with only an occasional tree to break the evenness of the knee-high grass. The house was located 3000 feet from the Navidad River. (Lake Texana now covers the original riverbed.)

A cistern was used to catch rainwater, which drained off the roof into gutters. The cistern held about 32,000 gallons of water. (Some say the size of a cistern indicated social status). This was the largest structure ever recorded in the Texana area. The top of the enormous cistern is still visible at the homesite, but the Lavaca-Navidad River Authority has covered it with a steel grate. (This grate is for safety purposes, but allows you to see inside the cistern and appreciate the size and number of man-hours required in building the structure). The family sold the house after the Civil War, and the new owner moved it to Edna and converted it into the Emerald Hotel. It burned in a fire that destroyed several blocks of the town.

John Adams Brackenridge helped organize the Texana Presbyterian Church. The original church building was moved to Edna and was used for many things ranging from Church to hay storage over the years from 1859 to 1984 when it was restored and moved to a location near the current Presbyterian Church in Edna. In 2011 it was moved to Brackenridge Park.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, the family was split. Three sons, James, John and Robert, served throughout the war in the Confederate Army; but George, who was attending college in the North, offered his services to Lincoln to serve in any cause that would help the Union.

When the war ended, the younger male members of the family did not return home, but took up various trades. George founded the prosperous San Antonio National Bank and became a noted philanthropist. His gifts of cash and buildings aided schools and colleges. In 1899 he donated 320 acres to the City of San Antonio that eventually became Brackenridge Park.



John Adams Brackenridge's Family Home in Boonville, Indiana



The Emerald Hotel