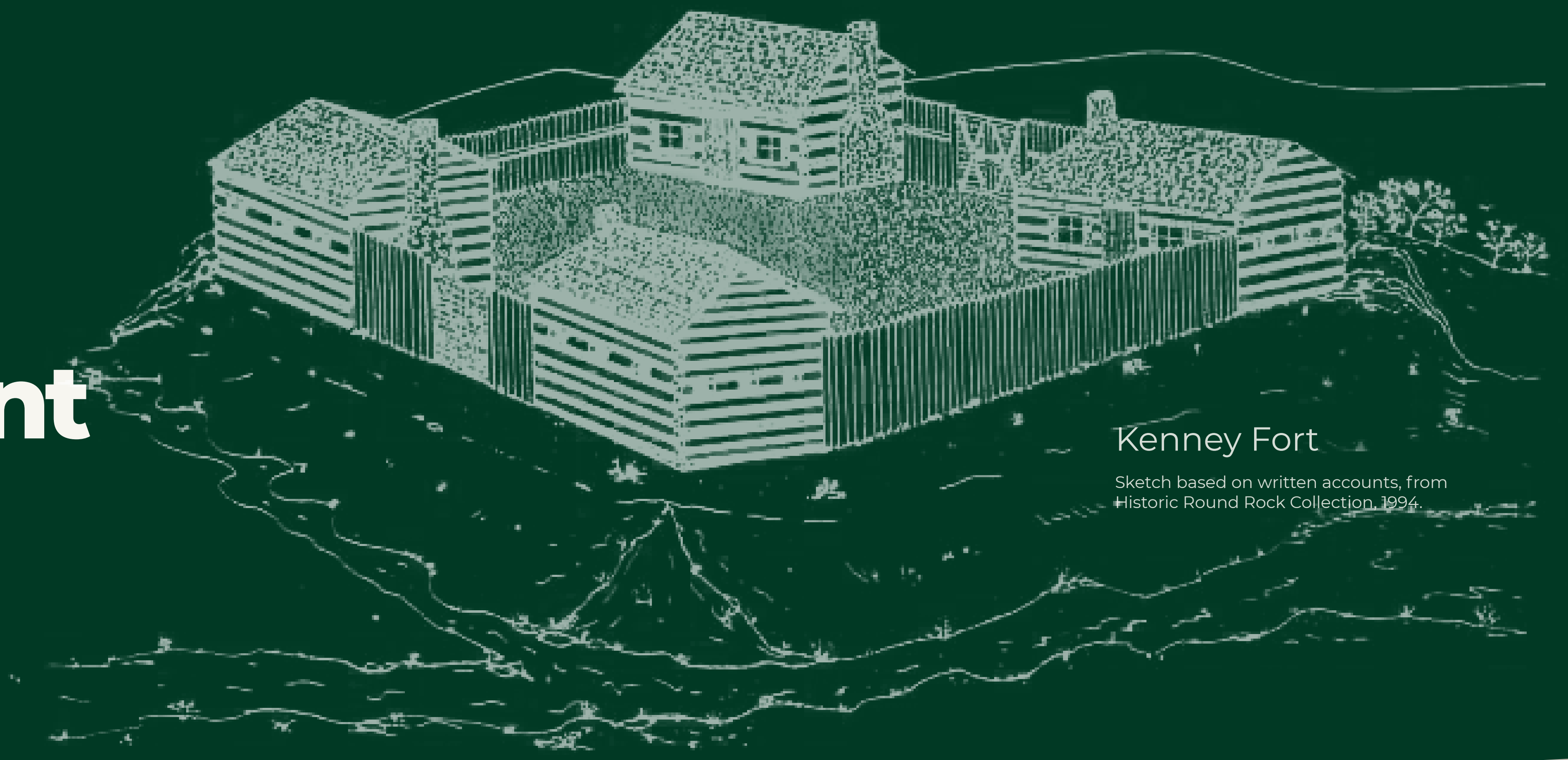


Pioneer Settlement



Kenney Fort

Sketch based on written accounts, from Historic Round Rock Collection, 1896.



Scan for sources and information about Historic Preservation in Round Rock

Early History of the Round Rock Area

The inhabitation of the Round Rock area predates the arrival of pioneers. Starting in approximately 8000 B.C., ancestors of the Tonkawa tribe and other indigenous peoples roamed the area. Until their relocation in the 1850s, the Tonkawa tribe created temporary settlements along Brushy Creek and the San Gabriel River to facilitate their hunting and gathering. From the 1700s until the 1860s, the Lipan Apaches and Comanches also inhabited the area.

In the mid-19th century, pioneers began settling in the area that would become Round Rock. By creating community and providing resources to other settlers, the permanent settlement started to grow. Agriculture brought early settlers to the Round Rock area due to the area's fertile soil and the presence of creeks and trees. The settlers, who were sometimes accompanied by enslaved people, established homesteads and worked the land. Agriculture continued to be Williamson County's main economic driver into the early 20th century.

Pioneer Cabin



"Cabin from the Gabriel Mills Area" is a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL) located in Old Settlers Park. The cabin is one of few remaining cabins from the pioneer period and is typical of cabins built in the area. The cabins were intended to be temporary.

Photo from staff files.

Land Grant System

Mexico and the Republic of Texas granted early settlers land, known as headrights, to incentivize settlement and improvement of the land. The size of headrights depended on marital status and a settler's arrival date in Texas. Those who fought in the Texas Revolution (Oct. 1835 - April 1836) were also paid in land grants, including headrights. To claim a headright, a man would go to the county board of land commissioners to apply for a land certificate, select the land, have it surveyed, and send the field notes back to the land commissioners. If there were no conflicts with other claims, he would receive a patent for the land.

Kenney Fort: Early Settlement After the Texas Revolution

A few early settlers in the Round Rock area were veterans of the 1836 Battle of San Jacinto, which granted the Republic of Texas independence from Mexico. In spring 1838, Dr. Joseph Kenney, a doctor and veteran in the Battle of San Jacinto, Joseph Barnhart, and others built a fort to defend their land claims and push out indigenous populations. The fort, which became known as Kenney Fort, was near the banks of Brushy Creek, between Lake Creek and Dyer Branch at the intersection of the military road from Austin and the Double File Trail. Kenney Fort opened the frontier and provided a place of refuge for settlers, including Jacob Harrell, who would become the mayor of Austin. As a result, many early settlers built homes nearby.

Washington Anderson: Early Industry

The first properties to be claimed by settlers were located along creeks. In 1843, Washington Anderson, another veteran of the Battle of San Jacinto, built a log cabin and the county's first saw and grist mill on Brushy Creek with his wife, Mary. The mill washed away in 1845, causing Anderson and Mary to move from the site for three years while they recovered financially. Anderson provided water to area settlers from his well, known as Anderson's Spring, facilitating area settlement. In 1859, Anderson's slaves completed construction on his new home along Brushy Creek. The home still remains today and is designated as a state and local landmark.



Washington "Wash" Anderson (1817-1894)

Photo courtesy of the Williamson Museum.

The Palm Family



Above: Palm family at the Palm House in its original location at Old Settlers Park.

Photo from UT - The Center for American History. Negative# CN05934. Palm Family Papers Collection.



Above: Anna Palm (1808-1878)

Photo from staff files.

One of Anna's sons built a wood frame house in 1873, where he and his wife raised eight children. The "Palm House" was moved to downtown Round Rock to serve as a museum, and was relocated back to the Palm Farm, now Old Settlers Park in 2024.

Swedish Immigration

Many Swedish immigrants came to the area. Anna Palm was a catalyst for early Swedish settlement of the Round Rock area. In 1848, Anna immigrated from Sweden with her husband and their six sons to America. Her husband passed away shortly thereafter, and in 1853 Anna re-settled with her sons in what would later be named Palm Valley. Anna built a home for her family and encouraged people she knew in Sweden to immigrate to the Round Rock area, establishing the first Swedish community in Texas. Thereafter, many immigrants from Sweden came to central Texas to begin a life in agriculture, as land was cheap, and many Swedes could lean on friends, family, and community members who had already settled there.

Washington Anderson House
Photo from staff files.

