

Evan and Nancy Evans And

While their cousins searched for gold in California, the

(Editor's Note) This article was made possible by Donna M. Hull and Madolyn Frasier. Ms. Hull, of Fresno, California, published the book "Then There Were Three Thousand" in 1975, telling the story of two sisters and their descendants in California and Texas. Ms. Frasier provided the book and other material to The Highlander. Copies of the book are available from Ms. Frasier, Box 91, Marble Falls. Ms. Frasier and the writer of this article, Margie DeSpain, are great-great-granddaughters of Nancy Chambers Evans. JM

Margie DeSpain

SMITHWICK -- Historians note that the discovery of precious yellow metal at Sutter's Mill did much to speed the westward expansion of the American frontier, pushing adventurers and whole families westward in a mad scramble for California gold.

In responding to those first cries of gold from that California creekbed, restless Easterners looked up from their labor on the soil, wiped their brows and wondered if maybe tapping the mineral riches of the West offered an easier way to make a living. At the end of the rainbow.

When news of the strike reached the East, it was enough of a dream to claim the most quickfooted immediately and set off the goldrush.

By 1852, the vision of treasure finally overcame a frontier family from Crawford County, Arkansas, who decided to pull stakes and head for gold country.

The family of Samuel Smoot and Elsie Miller Chambers Harlow Smoot left a daughter, Nancy, and her husband, a Pennsylvania school teacher named Evan Gabriel Evans.

Nancy had married Evan when she was 13. He was the teacher, and most likely, she was a student during their courtship.

Evans had been born the son of German and English immigrants in Berks County, Pennsylvania. The diminutive Evan worked as a youth in the Pennsylvania coal mines before embarking on his teaching career.

Evan and Nancy and their two children watched as Nancy's mother, brothers, sisters and stepfather packed their wagon and prepared to leave for Texas to join the Akers family wagon train for California. Maybe it was because his wife's family had left the Ozarks. Maybe it was the prospect of joining the Texas branch of Nancy's clan that prompted Evan to decide it was time for him to move his family westward. History has lost the answer.

But, at any rate, the next record of the family appears in 1853 in Burnet County, Texas, where a Travis Land district surveyor filed a record of survey certifying Evan's ownership of a tract of land on Post Oak Creek, south of

Smithwick. This is the first record of the Evans family in Burnet County.

When Evans paid his Burnet County taxes in 1854, he owned four lots in the town of Burnet,



Evan Gabriel Evans

Burnet County prospector and pioneer



Elsie Miller Chambers

Nancy Chambers Evans' mother traveled to California in 1852 with her sister and other relatives. She died at Bitterwater, California, in 1878.

several head of cattle and hogs and one horse.

After moving to Smithwick, Evans built up his herd of livestock and started to farm cotton, corn and other grain, but prospecting was in his blood so he tried his hand in Texas.

Evan's talents were well suited to this area. Though extensive mining would not develop until about 13 years later, Evan began working one of several mines in Llano County, probing for gold, silver, copper, iron, lead, bismuth, zinc and other precious or necessary ores. The cry of gold might have echoed most convincingly from California, but its presence was felt strongly along the Colorado and Llano Rivers.

No less a figure than J. Frank Dobie was to eventually cast a veil of golden mystery and intrigue on the Hill Country in his book, "Coronado's Children", which deals with the fabled "Lost San Saba Mine". According to Dobie, a man named Harp Perry came to Llano County in 1865 looking for what he said was a treasure in silver and gold he had discovered 50 years earlier on the Little Llano River. Perry's lost mine was still a mystery in 1870, as it is a mystery today, and might have fired Evan's dream of discovering gold in Texas.

In an 1870 letter to his cousins Harvey and Martha Akers in California, Evan stated, "Since my last (letter) my miners have split up and quit work but I do not know how long they will stay quit. Tigner and Miller of Llano County have struck good ore about five feet from the top of the ground. They smelted 350 pounds of silver, besides some lead, gold and copper." Continuing, Evan wrote, "We have just as good prospects in (Burnet) County as they have in Llano County."

Evan's prospects in Llano and Burnet County seemed better than those of the Akers family in California. At the time Evan sent his letter west, the California branch of the family had abandoned gold mining and returned to ranching.

Though Evan seemed to be having better luck looking for gold than Nancy's California cousins -- though he would never report a strike -- Texans faced a hazard that didn't exist then on the West Coast -- Indians.

Pennsylvania-born Evan might not have known much about coping with hostile savages, but Nancy did. She had learned at her mother's knee the story of her Grandmother Miller, who had been captured in Kentucky by Indians at the age of three. Grandmother Miller had stayed with the Indians until she was 14 or 15 before being recaptured in a bloody battle between her captors and settlers. Found lying on the battlefield with a sword wound in her head, the girl had been taken in by a family whose son was to become Nancy's grandfather.

Relations between Texans and

The Smithwick Gold Rush

These Burnet County pioneers sought their fortune here.

Indians were a bit tamer by the late 19th Century. According to Nancy, the Indians of Smithwick were better at taking horses than scalps.

Writing to her cousins, the Akers, March 14, 1870, Nancy said, "The Indians come down nearly ever light moon and kill more or less every time they come in. They taken horses out of the Boultinghouse field a short time ago. Some think it was white men for there has been a good many horse thieves traveling around over the country."

One morning, Nancy reported, when she went to saddle her favorite pony, a paint, she found the animal dead, an arrow in its side. Indians had scattered corn about to lure the horses away, but her faithful mount had refused the bait and was killed instead of stolen.

By now, Evan and Nancy had nine daughters and a few sons-in-law to care for. Providing food for the table was a chore. Evan produced cabbages, melons, peaches, chickens, eggs, butter and potatoes and, riding

his mule, scoured the area around Smithwick, Turkey Bend and Travis Peak in search of bee trees and bee caves. They said the "little German" knew just when to cut the tree or rob the cave for the very best honey.

Evan continued to plant cotton and corn each year but there

Double Horn, remembers Aunt Ina, Nancy's youngest daughter, and her grandmother driving a hack drawn by horses named Sam and Deck.

Mamie Hall Franck of Post Oak Bend remembers watching her Aunt Ina plowing the field with a team and double shovel.

See related picture page 3B.

were times when the hardships of unseasonable weather and low prices struck hard. Too much rain or too little plagued the farmers and a late frost caused some people to plant a second time in one season.

Evan sold some of his best cattle at one time when prices were at rock bottom, and when he needed money very badly, he was unable to sell any more. Chickens he raised and sold brought \$2.25 a dozen.

Evan died in 1884. The family history of about this period is a part of living memory hereabouts. Nancy's granddaughter, Ethel Hall Boultinghouse of

Mamie could recall seeing Nancy, putting a ladder up to a big live oak tree to gather the eggs of a hen which always made her nest there.

Nancy went everywhere wearing a little black silk bonnet and when she died in 1905, she was laid to rest with the little bonnet on her head.

Evan and Nancy had spent most of their lives in Texas. The almost 30 years Evan lived near Smithwick before his death proved to be longer than he had lived in his birthplace of Pennsylvania. Nancy, before her death, was able to call this her home for almost 50 years. They

are both buried in Smithwick Cemetery.

Nancy's sister, Rebecca "Patsy" Chambers, had been the first white person buried there. Patsy was not well when the family migrated to Smithwick. When passing near the present site of the cemetery, she pointed out the beautiful hillside and asked that she be buried there. The wish was fulfilled in a few short years.

A few descendants of Evan and Nancy Evans remain in the Hill Country, most still living in the Smithwick area. Ethel Hall Boultinghouse, a granddaughter along with great-granddaughters Mamie Hall Franck, Esther Hall Croft and Mabel Hall Wilson all remember "Grandma" Evans stepping lightly about.

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