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Part 1, April 13th, 1951: Early Local History by Hollis (*EDITOR'S NOTE: This story of early pioneer days in this part of Texas was given to The Meteor by Mrs. Daisy Bartee. The writer of the story, W.B. Hollis, was a brother of Mrs. Bartee's mother, Mrs. Della Hollis Horn.*)

I was born in the state of Tennessee on the ninth day of September, 1834. My father came to Texas in the fall of '37. We traveled by private conveyance and crossed the Trinity River at Robin's Ferry, where the San Antonio and old Laberdee roads intersect. From there, we took the San Antonio road west, encountering no settlements until we reached Rogers Prairie. Here, we found old Uncle Steve and Uncle Bob Rogers, as they were called.

The next settlement was on the Navasota River, where we crossed at what was then known as Tinnin Crossing, named after a man living just beyond the river. It is now called the San Antonio Crossing. Further ahead, a man named Wheelock lived at what is now Wheelock, which was our next settlement. From there, we turned up the Brazos River and stopped just below the falls. A fort once stood at the falls, but it had been captured by the Indians in the spring of '37. In that wilderness, we halted, our closest neighbors being the wild Indians. Surrounded by the war whoop, the howling of wolves, and the bellowing of buffalo, we formed a settlement—some standing guard while others worked.

I myself held a gun and stood watch while my father chopped, though I was still quite young. We children were taught to always remain vigilant. Our settlement was known as the Darton settlement, consisting of five or six families and several young men. Among them was Judge Keelo, who lived and later died just beyond the Navasota River in Robertson County. Tragically, the Bartons were soon killed by the Indians, along with Taylor and one or two others, leading to the scattering of our settlement. The Indians took all our horses, leaving my father with only one.

We retreated down the Brazos and stopped near what is now Calvert on the Central Railroad. Our only neighbor was a man named Tidwell, who lived about a quarter of a mile from us. He was killed sometime in July that year. Tidwell had been near his house all day, only to be attacked by the Indians in the evening while plowing his garden. They surrounded his home, cutting him off from his family before killing him and taking his family prisoner. He had four children, the youngest only six weeks old, which the Indians killed on the second or third day. They tied his wife astride a horse, securing her feet beneath its belly, and placed the children up behind them. As they passed by our yard gate, they took our last horse, leaving us stranded, five miles from our nearest neighbor.

We could see the events unfold at Tidwell's house, but my mother was sick in bed, and my father, fearing an attack, fortified our home with a young man named Springfield. Prepared for battle, they watched as the Indians passed without stopping. My siblings and I were placed in the fireplace for safety. When my sister began to cry, Springfield panicked and wanted to silence her, but my father reassured him that the Indians were unlikely to charge a fortified position. Once it was dark, my father moved us into the cornfield to hide, while Springfield traveled five miles on foot to Mr. Stroud's house for help. They arrived later that night with horses and took us to safety. Rangers stationed further down the

Brazos at Nashville were notified and set out in pursuit the next morning, but they never caught the raiders.

The next day, my father returned to help bury Mr. Tidwell. Before he fell, he had pulled three arrows from himself, with three more still lodged in his body. He had made several attempts to reach his house but was cut off until they killed him. His family was eventually rescued by friends from a trading house on the Red River.

Afterward, we moved to Stager Point, near Wheelock, where we had spent the winter of '39 and the summer of '40. In the fall of '40, we relocated to Montgomery County, settling near a place called Danville. There, we lived deep in the woods, our nearest neighbors being three to five miles away. My father built a cabin and, in the spring of '41, planted corn. Without a plow or a horse, he burned off the field, made holes in the ground with a hand spike, and dropped the corn, covering it with his foot. He kept the mutton cane knocked down with a stick, which was the only cultivation the crop received. After the bears and raccoons had their share—an amount not to be underestimated—we had enough corn left for bread the next year.

During our first year, my father walked three or four miles to earn our bread, carrying it home on his back. Since mills were scarce, we initially relied on a steel mill in our settlement, turning it by hand like a coffee grinder to make meal. While living near Tidwell's former home, my father burned out the end of a log to create a mortar, setting the other end in the ground with a lever and pestle to pound our own meal. After moving to Montgomery County, we grated meal for several years. My father fashioned a grater from a piece of tin, boiling corn overnight and letting it sit until just before use. This process made it grate like fresh corn. I still recall the excitement when we finally ground our first sack of meal on a proper mill.

In March of 1842, the Mexicans surprised San Antonio and captured the district court during its session. A heavy draft was issued, and my father was called to serve. He left my mother and me surrounded by wolves, bears, and panthers, which were numerous in the area. I was only eight years old then. He arranged for a young man named Marlin to stay with us part of the time.

(To be continued.)

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Part 2, April 20th, 1951 Early Local History by Hollis *(EDITOR'S NOTE: This story of early pioneer days in this part of Texas was given to The Meteor by Mrs. Daisy Bartee. The writer of the story, W.B. Hollis, was a brother of Mrs. Bartee's mother, Mrs. Della Hollis Horn.) (Continued from last week.)*

I will now tell you how we got our shoes and clothing. Every family had their own tanyard and their own grindstone. I, with my father's help at night, managed to remove the seeds from as much

cotton as my mother could spin the next day. When she had enough thread, she would weave it into cloth. One new suit was about all we could afford at a time. We would go to bed early on Saturday night while Mama washed and dried them.

We made our shoes at home. Before I was ten years old, I could already make a good shoe. When we had no better option, we would take cowhide, turn the hair inward, and fashion what we called moccasins. Hats were made from coon skins—the nose forming the front and the tail hanging down the back. It would be quite a spectacle to see boys wearing such outfits in town nowadays.

We moved from Danville, Montgomery County, to a place near Old Waverly, Walker County, known as the Winters settlement. There was quite a large family of them, most already grown, with some of the boys having families of their own. They had settled there before 1836, and four or five of them fought in the Battle of San Jacinto. That section was called the Big Thicket, and we lived there for several years. I attended school for a month or two each year in a small log cabin. Our seats were pine poles split open with wooden pins stuck into them, and we had a dirt floor.

We left that place in the winter of '50 and moved to Huntsville, Walker County. When we first settled on the Brazos, it was part of Robertson County, stretching from the Brazos to the Trinity. Huntsville was one of the most developed places in the state. It had two good schools, and construction had begun on the penitentiary. Unfortunately, I became crippled in the spring of '51 and suffered from poor health for several years. Although my father had moved for the benefit of education, school was of little use to me because I could not endure the confinement.

In the winter of '55, we moved to Madison County, settling in what is now called Hollis. This section was sparsely populated, with only four or five settlements on Sand Prairie. There were only six to eight settlements along the Springfield Road between Sand Prairie and Anderson, and the road to Madisonville—eight miles away—had no settlements at all. I have lived to see Madison and Leon counties transform, dotted with houses, farms, and thriving towns.

The first court in Madison County was held under a post oak tree in April 1853, where Madisonville now stands. I traveled to Centerville in the spring of '56, and between Rogers Prairie and Centerville—15 miles—there was only one settlement, on Boggy, where a man named Chatam lived.

During the years 1838, 1839, and early 1840, the hardships of early settlers were severe. Seldom did a week pass during the summer and fall without depredations by the Indians. My father had to move

twelve times in one year to escape attacks. Money was scarce, and Texas currency dropped until it was worth only ten cents on the dollar. In the early forties, our currency consisted of livestock—a cow and calf represented a five-dollar bill, a heifer yearling was worth two dollars, and a male yearling was used for small change.

Many settlers fortified themselves in blockhouses. These were built with two stories using large logs. The upper story was constructed after the lower level reached a little higher than a tall man's head. Logs for the upper floor were cut five feet longer than those for the lower. The upper portion was built two or three feet larger than the lower and then floored with puncheons. There were port holes in the extended floor so that defenders could fire downward if the Indians reached the walls, preventing them from setting the building on fire. Sometimes, two or three families would share one blockhouse for protection.

As previously mentioned, we found the Rogers family already settled in Rogers Prairie when we arrived. They had come to Texas in 1832. Robert Rogers initially stopped in eastern Texas but moved in 1834, settling along the creek just above what is now Rogers Prairie.

(To be continued.)

Part 3, May 4th, 1951 – Early Local History by Hollis

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This story of early pioneer days in this part of Texas was given to The Meteor by Mrs. Daisy Bartee. The writer of the story, W.B. Hollis, was a brother of Mrs. Bartee's mother, Mrs. Della Hollis Horn.) (Continued from last week.)

Steven Rogers, Robert Rogers' brother, settled between the Little and Big Brazos in 1832 and stayed there until 1834, when he moved back to Rogers Prairie and settled at what is now known as the Flood Place at the east end of the prairie. For some time, there were no other settlements near Robert Rogers, who lived to a good old age and passed away on his homestead—the place where Captain Nixon now resides. Over the years, he was frequently robbed of his horses by the Indians.

In 1840, the Indians attacked a family named Gregg on the San Antonio Road, just beyond the west end of the prairie. They were traveling west when the attack occurred. The Indians killed all but a Black man and woman, two or three of the children, and one young man who was shot in the back but soon recovered. These survivors made their way back to Robert Rogers, who took them in. The Indians plundered their wagons, seized the teams, and then moved on. The remains of the deceased were brought to Rogers Prairie Cemetery, where they were buried—the first graves placed there.

In April of 1841, Robert Rogers' son Stephen, who had just reached adulthood, was killed by Indians late in the evening within 250 yards of the house, now Captain Nixon's home. His father was not present at the time, but his eldest brother, Albert, witnessed the attack. Albert grabbed a gun and rushed to his brother's rescue, only to realize the weapon was unloaded. He hurried back to retrieve another gun, but by the time he returned, the Indians had already killed and scalped Stephen and were fleeing with stolen horses. Albert fired at them, believing he may have wounded one based on their reaction.

The Indians had come for the horses, which were desperately trying to return home. The attackers successfully cut them off. Stephen Rogers was out in the prairie, three to four hundred yards from the house, and attempted to reach safety, but the Indians intercepted him.

Years earlier, there had been no settlements north of Rogers Prairie, stretching between the Navasota and Trinity rivers all the way to the Indian Nation. What a transformation in the last forty years—cities now flourish, and the “iron horse” runs through this part of Texas instead of roaming buffalo and Indigenous war parties. For a long time, no wagon roads existed except for the old San Antonio Road.

During those early years, our court was held at Wheelock. After Leon County was organized in 1846, the courts moved to Leona before the county seat was finally established in Centerville. By 1853, Centerville had become a thriving town, with three or four general stores, a drugstore, and two respectable hotels. However, I later saw a time when there was not a single hotel in town, and if you wanted a meal, you had to go to a Black-operated restaurant to get one.

Texas had few preachers in its early days, and settlers seldom heard religious sermons. But as more people arrived, the Lord sent ministers to Texas, and the state became renowned for its deep Christian faith and its many capable preachers. However, pioneer ministers endured considerable hardship.

(To be continued.)

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In 1846, the Reverend Z.N. Morrell, a Baptist preacher, was appointed by the Domestic Missionary Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. He accepted the challenge of ministering north of the old San Antonio Road between the Trinity and Brazos rivers. At the time, he lived in Milam County and officially began his mission work in January.

Morrell traveled miles to Leona, where he preached in a simple shed on the first Sunday of every month, leaving a standing appointment for that same time. His next stop was Springfield, fifty miles away, and his third monthly appointment was forty miles beyond that. Altogether, he rode one hundred miles each month, visiting scattered settlements and never missing a sermon, despite the perils of frontier life.

His travels frequently required him to swim across the Little Brazos and Navasota rivers and several other streams between Leona and his next location. At any moment, he risked being ambushed by an Indigenous warrior lurking behind the trees, ready to claim his scalp. This gives some idea of the incredible endurance required by early Texas preachers.

Z.N. Morrell was one of the first Baptist ministers in Texas, arriving in December of 1835. He shared stories of his travels with me, recalling one particular journey. He was part of a group of six men—a doctor, two lawyers, and three others. Many professional men at the time believed that if they could just get to Texas, they would become prominent figures. Morrell said his companions had similar notions, but their mindset shifted upon arriving in Nacogdoches, in East Texas.

As they neared the Neches River, they encountered a company of soldiers returning home from battle. Following customary practice, they designated one of their party as their spokesperson, who greeted the soldiers politely: *"Good morning, gentlemen. You seem to be traveling eastward, perhaps in pursuit of enlightenment. We, on the other hand, come from the east and are headed westward. We would love to hear the latest news from the west. Why don't we all dismount, let our horses graze, and chat for a while?"*

The foremost soldier wore a coonskin cap with its tail draping down his back, a rugged coat, a shirt stained like the muddy terrain of West Texas, and a pair of rawhide moccasins with the hair turned

inward. His feet rested in rawhide stirrups. He readily agreed and invited the travelers to make themselves comfortable. They engaged in lively conversation, and the lawyer in Morrell's party expressed doubts about whether international law justified Texas' revolt against Mexico.

In an instant, the Texan soldier—whose forehead and eyes reflected remarkable intelligence—engaged them in a legal debate that was far too complex for a preacher accustomed to cane-brake discussions. The Tennessean lawyer soon realized that Texans were more than capable of debating such matters, and the group continued their journey westward.

Later, the lawyer admitted that Texans were the smartest men he had ever encountered. Back east, there was a prevailing assumption that Texas lacked intellectual talent, but the reality proved otherwise. In fact, he declared that, pound for pound, Texas had more talented individuals than it does today.

The End