

[Mr. R. A. McAllister]

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[??] FOLKLORE — White Pioneers

Miss Effie Cowan, P. W.

McLennan County, Texas,

District No. 8

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Interview with Mr. R. A. McAllister, [Odds?], Texas.

“I was born in 1865 near the present town of Odds, but at that time was just an open range country. It is located half way between Marlin and Groesbeck, on the road which connects the two towns. My father was William B. McAllister. He was born in South Carolina, a son of Andrew McAllister who came to America from Ireland in the days before the Revolution.

“Father came to Texas in 1853 and located on the strip of land known as Blue Ridge, come eight or ten miles from Marlin, Texas. He lived there a few years and moved to the present Odds community in 1856. Here he married my mother, Mary Erskine, who was a daughter of Hugh and Jane Erskine of this community and who came to Texas with my parents. To my father and mother were born sever children, all of whom lived to reach maturity and had families of their own. There were three boys and four girls, namely: Margaret, who became Mrs. Z. T. Todd of Falls County; Mary Ann, wife of T. H.

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Hammond; Olive, wife of [.] J. Walker [of?] Falls County; and Lizzie, wife of J. H Sundy. The boys were Hugh (who moved to the Indian Territory before it became the State of Oklahoma), and myself. All have passed away but my sister, Mrs. Walker and myself. [????????]

“My father's family were of the old school Presbyterian denomination, and he belonged to the Blue Ridge and later the [?] Church, was an elder in the Church from the time I can remember. The first church which we attended was the first church organized in Falls County. 2 This was a non-denominational church located at Salt Branch.

“The first Presbyterian minister to preach to the Odds Church was named Jones, and he went from house to house. The first Methodist that I remember was Rev. J. [C.?] Jordan and later Rev. Sanders. And for the Baptist, Rev. Willingham, who was an evangelist. Before the Baptists had a church, either on the Ridge or in the Odds community, they went to Marlin to hear Rev. Z. [.] Morrell who organized that church on April 10, 1852, just one year before my father located in the Blue Ridge settlement. I have heard my father speak of the charter members of that church, who were A. B. Ewing, L. S. Barton, Nancy Dobbs, and [Margay?] Morgan; a Mr. and Mrs. Prewitt, and their one servant.

“The first Presbyterian church organized in Falls County, was across the Brazos River two miles east of the present town of Durango at a place known as Carolina, and was organized by John Balsch, on November 12, 1853. As it was the only church of my father's faith in the county, we sometimes attended church there.

“The pioneer schools were supported by private donation, the first in the county being held at Coleman's Prairie, three miles south-west of Marlin, with J. [W.?] Jarvis as teacher. The early school buildings were made of logs. Marlin, the county seat of Falls County, was just a cross-roads village when my father came in 1855. In 1856 Green and Bartlett had a hardware store, and so did Boles and Company. The latter store was the first brick building to be erected in Marlin. And until the new City Hall was rebuilt, it was used as the City Hall.

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The first 3 court-house was built by Francis Fredro. This was one large room built of split logs with a ground floor. The old court-house was replaced by a two-story cedar building in the early fifties and this was burned in 1868. They had a Union Church in Marlin which was used as a school building during the week; this building was located about 250 yards west of the present court-house.

“After father moved to the Odds community in 1856, I remember that there was a one teacher school about three miles south of us, where I attended and my teacher was named Miss Mollie Sanders. I was a small boy then. There was a school which served the Odds community, in 1880, taught by Rev. John Soders on what was called Rocky Island near the T. [.] Garrett home about a mile south of the present town of Odds. Among the first teachers were Jeb Long, Mrs. Price, Solon Bunn and later A. C. McDaniel who taught for ten or twelve years. Some of the trustees were A. C. McDaniel, John Erskine, J. C. McKinley, Jim Brady and later on Tom Garrett.

“The first school was built on the present site of Locust Grove School about 1890. The original building being rebuilt. This is on the Odds-Groesbeck road. It is called the Locust Grove School and the present teachers [areMr.?] and Mrs. J. A. Byrd and Miss Dimple Miles. The present trustees are R. R. Erskine, G. [.] Small and Carl McAllister. All descendants of the early pioneers. It was about this time that a church was built at the present site of Odds. Mr. McDaniel and Tom Garrett helped to organize the Methodist Church. It was under the 4 Thornton charge. The Baptist denomination organized several years later. Ellsbury Criswell was Church Clerk. The membership in both churches was small, but they were in earnest and believed in having the benefit of the schools and churches close by. The younger generation had the benefit of the religious and educational advantages at their door.

“Father was a stock man. We did not raise cotton at all those first years of my boyhood. There was some stealing of the young calves on the range. The unbranded calves or yearlings were called mavericks. In that day it was not really thought to be stealing, the

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range was free and therefore the stray yearlings were supposed to belong to the first man who branded them. The cattle were taken to Marlin, after the Houston and Texas Central Railroad was built from Houston to Waco, and shipped to the markets. Before that time, the men would go in together and drive their cattle up the trails to the market as in Abilene and Kansas City.

"I do not remember the exact year, but I was a boy about twelve years of age and was working in the field thrashing grain. It was in the middle of the afternoon and the sky all at once became dark and no clouds to indicate rain, we rushed to the house, the chickens all went to roost, and we could not at first think what in the world it meant. We children were scared and thought the world had come to an end. It was dark as the darkest of nights. My oldest brother was out on the range hunting cattle and when he saw it, he had but one thought and 5 that was to make it to our uncle [Jeems'?] before the end of the world came. But after awhile the sun came out and father said it must have been the sun in eclipse. In that day we had no weather forecasts and did not know when to expect these things.

"It was in the fall of 1877, that the grasshoppers came thro' our community and the sky was again darkened for two or three days. They were in great droves and destroyed the grain and damaged the bark of the trees, they left their eggs and the next spring they hatched out and the gardens were ruined from them. When they grew wings they left. They came with a September equinox storm.

"In the earlier days the land produced far more abundant crops than it does now. It was expected after we commenced to raise cotton that at least a bale would be harvested to the acre. The insects had not gotten a start and the soil had not washed away. If we had the coil conservation in those days our production now would have been a different story and the land in much better shape . The open spaces in the Odds community in the early days was covered with mesquite trees. It was considered Prairie land, altho' the terrain is hilly and rolling. Prairie fires must have prevented the growth of trees in days gone by. A few trees dot the community here and there and if they could talk, they could tell many

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a story of picnics and happy days of the young (now the old) generation. Up at Buffalo [Mott?], where the cowboys used to camp, and rest in the heat of the summer sun, many a boy's name with the initials of his sweetheart was carved on the 6 trees.

"In [?], Mr. [???] of Marlin and Bill Cooper owned a gin in our community. I can recollect taking the cotton to the gin, where it was unloaded from the wagon, and baskets were used to carry it to the gin stands. This was before the invention whereby the cotton was carried to the stands by conveyors or wind blasts. It was not only work to carry the cotton to the gin stands, but it was very uncomfortable at times. Stinging scorpions were bad and many times the carrier was stung by them.

"I recollect one time the late [Whit?] Criswell decided to play a prank or the man hired to carry the baskets to the gin stands. He found an extra large stinging scorpion, clipped his tail and said, "Now watch!" whereupon he dropped the tail in the workmans open shirt. Of course the workman gave out a long range of bad words when the stinger took effect but the funny part was that Whit Criswell gave a yell at the same time, a lizard had stung him just below the right eye!

"Speaking of jokes when boys and girls got together and did not have the benefit of picture shows and radios, as well an automobiles to help pass the time, they found other amusements some times in jokes on each other. One instance was when the following boys and girls were picnicking around the rocks at old Buffalo Mott. In the group were Irma Ship, now Mrs. R. [.] Carter; Oscar and Frank McKinley, Beulah and Amelia McKinley (the latter now Mrs. Turner Criswell of Marlin); John, Jim and Lee Brady and others. 7 Lee Brady (now vice-President of the First National Bank of Mart), became dissatisfied because the others would not play the games he wanted to play. he assumed a downcast attitude and told the crowd that he had as soon kill himself as not. He disappeared from the crowd and a little later they heard groans coming from a grove of small trees nearby. Some of the boys and girls went to investigate and there lay Lee Brady with what looked

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like blood all over his shirt and face, around his throat and collar—with a bloody knife across his chest.

“With wells of surprise and horror every one ran frightened to break the news of the tragedy. Lee had to run like the devil to keep up with them to stop the news from getting back to the old folks, since the boys and girls were really frightened out of their senses. Lee had only faked the stunt by using poke-berry juice to resemble blood.

“This is my father's diary, written when he was in business in the Stranger-Odds community. The first pages read as follows;

“Monday, December 25, 1848—Myself, A. Stevenson, [Wm.?] R. Erskine and John Todd went to Broadway bottom and split out some buggy spokes and it rained all day. We stayed all night at Erskine's.

“Tuesday, 26th—clear in the morning, but clouded up in the evening. “Myself [Wm.?] R. E., A. S. and I. T. went to the sewing at John Stevenson's this evening but part of us left after supper and went to Andersons to a dance. Stayed all night at A. Todds'.

“Wednesday, 27th—It rained all day today. I stayed in town 8 and spent the night again at Todds'.

“Thursday, 28th—A little cloudy and cold. I came home this morning Myself, A. S, and I. T. started serenading and gathered a crowd and had a frolic at Mrs. [.] Smith's. It rained all night and we played all night. Misses N. S., [.] D., M. [.] E., M. E. K., I. [?], [B. S.?] [.] S. were the crowd of girls.

“Friday, 29th—I came home this morning. It was cold and rained all day.

“Saturday, 30th—I came home this morning and went to Dr. Anderson's today. Returned home and again went to Uncle James Todd's.

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"Each day is more or less of a routine nature until starting again on):

"Monday, January 8th, 1849—I went to Anderson's to the clerk's election. I also went to Mr. Bailey's this morning.

"Sunday, January 14th, 1849—I went to Broadway to preaching today and Mr. Carlile preached from the 8th verse of the 49th Psalm. I went with Margaret home and stayed all night at Todd's.

"Monday, January 15th—I stayed all day in the village trying to get a negro boy for mother. I bargained for Henry, a yellow boy, today.

"Tuesday, January 16th—I went to B. Erskine's last night and stayed all night. I came home this morning and went to work.

"Wednesday, January 17th—I made a pair of cart shafts for 9 D. Brown on account today etc.——.

"Saturday the 20th—I went to the election today; we elected I. B. Moor Captain——, (here the records become illegible at the bottom of the page).

"Monday 22nd—I worked today and went to Anderson and stayed all night and heard a temperance lecture by Mr. Duryee.

Elsewhere in the book this notation appears: Something uncommon:

"April 15th, 1849—A considerable snow fell today.

"April 16th.—A heavy frost this morning. Also on the 17th, 18th and 19th.

"Father's Diary was not kept up but the names in the book to whom the blacksmith work was done are of interest. Some of these names dated for the years 1848 to 1854-55 are

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those of the following: Elias Pool, James Long, [.] R. Todd, Robert Todd, J. D. Erskine, Jesse Brothers, Dr. Pouncy, Rv. B. Erskine, Mr. Wells, Moffett, [.] L. Kilpatrick, [.] Sparks, A. H. Morrell, John Todd, James Guffye, W. Gaimpson, H. Steele, Col. Goudy, T. Garrett, Samuel Bell, Thos, Garrett, E. Thompson, David Barclay, James Stevenson, E. P. Stevenson, Larkin Rogers, [.] G. Hunnicutt Other names in the list of customers were names of residents all along the Blue Ridge settlement: Willaby Sparks, James McGhee, L. Edwards, Isaac Hason, Henry Rogers, Garrett Long, Wm. [?], M. L. Edwards, Mr. Vinson, John Hodge, G. B. Duncan, Isaac Smith, Robert Smith, R. Keogans, John Henefee, Granville Rose. Other names in this day book for work done by my father were Alexander Hodge, John Mitchell, Mathew Sparks, Dr. 10 Forbes, John Ferguson, Mr. Farris, Jesse Corneilson, John Rogers, Mr. Kendall, Dutch George, Henry Woodland, G. [.] Duncan, Milliford Long, R. S. Springfield, B. Y. Bennets, Wilkins.

“This day book shows that branding irons were in use then (1848-1856) The words “pinchers, staple, clevis, horse shoeing, buzzard plow, re-rim wheels, hooks, chains, ox-tongues, filling wagon wheels mend spur, sharpen plow, fit head or barrel, sharpen maddox, set of chair-frames, ragwheel and catch for loom chimney irons, were all used in describing the work done.

“In the day book are receipts of accounts paid by my father as well as those he received. One receipt is a final payment on the estate of Wilburn Jones, and reads this way:

“Received from [.] S. McAllister the sum of \$20.00 same being the amount in full of all demands in favor of the estate of Wilburn Jones deceased. May 10, 1860.”

“Our forefathers were not without their feelings of sentiment and in view of the shortage of song books, in the back of his day book are the following songs written in his own handwriting: “Remember Me”, “Will you love me then as now?” “think of Me”, and a few other popular songs of the day.

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“The book reveals the lives of the working world in the accounts, as well as my father's own life—as evidenced by his diary, and the finishing touch with the longing common to all the world, to be remembered when 'Time will be no more'.”