

Adam Lawrence of New Year Creek

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ADAM LAWRENCE WAS BORN IN LOGAN COUNTY, KENTUCKY, ON October 16, 1799,¹ the son of Joseph Lawrence and the grandson of Adam Lawrence,² a North Carolinian, who was one of the first settlers of Kentucky during the late eighteenth century. This elder Adam Lawrence had participated in the American Revolution during his residence in North Carolina. The Lawrence family had immigrated to America from Saint Albans, England, during the seventeenth century and had settled on Long Island. Distinguished members of this line were William Lawrence, a prominent landowner and patentee of Flushing in the seventeenth century, and Adam Lawrence, high sheriff of the Queens and member of the New York legislature in the eighteenth century.³ Joseph Lawrence began the North Carolina branch of the family in the eighteenth century.

According to family tradition, Adam Lawrence was dissatisfied with a second marriage of his father, Joseph Lawrence. As a result, it is thought that he left his Kentucky home with the connivance of his sisters in 1815, going at the age of fifteen to live with his uncle, Adam Lawrence, at the point where Jonesboro later developed on the Red River.⁴ Adam Lawrence, the uncle, was definitely in residence there as early as the winter of 1815, being the first Anglo-Saxon settler to move across the Red River into the present area of Texas. His place of settlement was oppo-

¹Deposition of Adam Lawrence to Z. T. Fulmore in application for a Revolutionary pension, October 23, 1874 (MS. Archives, Texas State Library); Tombstone, Lawrence Chapel, Williamson County, Texas.

²The will of the elder Adam Lawrence was probated in Henderson County (originally part of Logan County), Kentucky, in September, 1800.

³Benjamin F. Thompson, *History of Long Island* (3 vols.; New York, 1962), III, 600-621.

⁴Adella Alice Layne Landers, a granddaughter of Adam Lawrence, to J. P. L., signed statement, December 27, 1960 (MS. in possession of the writer). Mrs. Landers knew Lawrence during the last years of his life.

site Kiamichi Creek, in a region vaguely defined and consequently disputed for some time between Arkansas and Texas.⁵

Because there was danger that the United States government might give the land to the Cherokee Indians, the settlers of the area sent various petitions to Congress requesting the right of preemption. On them appeared the names of many early Arkansas and Texas pioneers including that of Lawrence.⁶ Numbers of these people later became acquainted with the plans of Moses and Stephen F. Austin, likewise residents of the region, for a colony in Spanish (later Mexican) Texas. Lawrence attached himself to the family of Simon Miller, one of Austin's Old Three Hundred Colonists, and traveled with him to the area of present Washington County, Texas, in December, 1821.⁷ Lawrence and Miller camped on New Year Creek with Austin on the last day of 1821. Adam spent some time at the Miller home in Fort Bend County on the San Bernard River and was listed in the census of 1825 as a farm worker in Miller's household.⁸

As was his wont because of a restless spirit, Adam Lawrence made a trip to North Texas to visit his uncle Adam in the spring of 1826. While they were hunting wild horses with relatives and friends along the Washita River on April 17,

they were attacked by a large body of Indians, supposed to be Osages, dressed in soldiers clothing and armed with bows and arrows and shot guns. Adam Lawrence and his son John Lawrence, were in company with young Adam Lawrence, a nephew of the former. They were attacked on horseback, and pursued a considerable dis-

⁵*Registro de las Familias Introducidas por el Ciudadano Benjamin R. Milam*, quoted in Rex W. Strickland, *Anglo-American Activities in Northeastern Texas, 1803-1845* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas, 1937), 68; Rex W. Strickland, "Miller County, Arkansas Territory, the Frontier that Men Forgot," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, XVIII, 12-34; A. W. Neville, *History of Lamar County* (Paris, 1937); Rex W. Strickland, "Jonesborough," in Walter Prescott Webb and H. Bailey Carroll (eds.), *Handbook of Texas* (2 vols.; Austin, 1952), I, 928.

⁶Petition to Congress by Inhabitants of Arkansas Territory, 1821, in Clarence E. Carter, *Territorial Papers of the United States* (26 vols.; Washington, 1934-1962), XIX, 387.

⁷F. S. Wade, *Tales of Early Days in Texas* (typescript, Archives, Texas State Library); deposition of Adam Lawrence to Z. T. Fulmore, October 23, 1874 (MS., Archives, Texas State Library); Adella A. Layne Landers to J. P. L., signed statement, January 17, 1959 (MS. in possession of the writer); Mary Lawrence Graves to Mattie Abbott, signed statement, July 19, 1911 (MS. in possession of Ralph Abbott, Houston).

⁸Census of Austin's Colony, 1825 (MS., Spanish Archives, General Land Office, Austin).

tance before the two former were overtaken and killed. The latter with great difficulty made his escape, after a long pursuit, in the course of which he received six shot holes through his hunting shirt, but fortunately sustained no other injury. Henry Lawrence, son of George Lawrence, was killed about the same time, while in another direction, in company with Mr. Dewall.⁹

In about 1830, at San Felipe, Lawrence married Sarah Lucinda Miller, the daughter of his old friend Simon Miller, then returned to Washington County and obtained on February 25, 1831, the grant of a quarter of a league of land from the Mexican government.¹⁰ This land was located near the Brazos River on New Year and Cedar creeks adjacent to the lands of Samuel Miller, a brother-in-law of Simon Miller, who also had removed to Washington County by that time, and Gibson Kuykendall. The Kuykendall family, also quite prominent in early Texas annals, had, like the Lawrences, originated in colonial New York and migrated first to North Carolina, thence to Henderson County, Kentucky, thereafter to Arkansas, and finally to Austin's colony. Thus the two families, often connected by marriage, had lived in the same communities for over two hundred years.

Adam Lawrence, like his forbears, was every inch the classic American pioneer. His name is frequently mentioned as being at the head of a group of Indian fighters in the colonial days of Texas and later during the republic. In 1823 and 1824, a severe drouth prevailed over much of Texas, and it was Lawrence who was instrumental in organizing hunting parties to range towards the northeast in search of game to supply the grievous deficiencies in the colony.¹¹ In 1828, he engaged in a battle with Comanche Indians about two miles below the present site of Taylor.¹² Again

⁹*Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock), May 23, 1826. See also D. W. C. Baker, *Texas Scrap Book* (New York, 1875), 342; James T. DeShields, *Border Wars of Texas* (Tioga, 1912), 90; *Biographical Encyclopedia of Texas* (New York, 1880), 284-285.

¹⁰Partition of the estate of Simon Miller, February 26, 1838 (MS., Probate Records of Washington County, County Clerk's Office, Brenham); Grant of a quarter of a league to Adam Lawrence, February 25, 1831, made by Samuel M. Williams for the Mexican government at San Felipe, acting for Miguel Arciniega (MS., Spanish Archives, General Land Office, Austin).

¹¹Wade, *Tales of Early Days in Texas* (typescript, Archives, Texas State Library), 1-2; "The Adventures of Ad Lawrence," in Mody C. Boatright, Wilson M. Hudson, and Alan Maxwell (eds.), *Madstones and Twisters* (Dallas, 1958; Publications of the Texas Folklore Society, XXVIII), 133-135.

¹²*Ibid.*, 135-138; Wade, *Tales of Early Days in Texas* (typescript, Archives, Texas State Library), 2-4.

in 1830, he was the leader of a group of eleven men organized in the neighborhood of San Felipe to pursue a band of Waco Indians. The eyewitness account of one of the participants paints the encounter in vivid colors:

In the month of November 1830, a Chickasaw Indian brought intelligence from the frontier that a party of eleven Wacoes were on their way to the neighborhood in which I resided (22 miles northwest from San Felipe) for the purpose of stealing horses. . . . We learned late in the evening, [that they] were encamped near the residence of James Stephenson, on Caney creek [within the present limits of Austin County]. . . . At the dawn of next day, with a force of eleven men, precisely that of the Indians—we stole upon their camp. . . . The Indians ran and were pursued a short distance by our leader, Adam Lawrence, who reloaded and fired at them again—but further pursuit was prevented by the fall of Young Cooper. . . .

Of the eleven men engaged in this affair only the following names are recollected, viz.: Adam Lawrence, Thomas Stevens,¹³ Adam Kuykendall, Charles Gates, George Robinson, William Cooper, B. Kuykendall.¹⁴

In 1832, there occurred an exploit for which Lawrence is more widely known than for any other in his long career. He was again hunting mustangs in East Texas near the Trinity River when he and his group were astounded to see the "prairie become alive with Indians" who had concealed themselves behind the apparently grazing wild horses. Surprised, the white men took flight, but soon Lawrence, who was ahead of the others, looked back to see that all his companions were down and in the process of being "finished." With an arrow in his own shirt and one in his horse's neck, Lawrence spurred his mare towards the timber of the Trinity three miles distant. Stopping to let his horse breathe, he killed one attacking Indian with his only remaining weapon, a butcher knife. The others continued in hot pursuit until Lawrence had reached the high banks of the Trinity. His own words best describe the rest of the story.

I knew that for miles, up and down, the banks were bluffs and fifteen or twenty feet high. Where I struck the river they were

¹³Thomas Stevens (or Stephens) was a brother-in-law of Lawrence.

¹⁴J. H. Kuykendall, "Reminiscences of Early Texans, A Collection from the Austin Papers, II, Recollections of Barzillai Kuykendall," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, VI, 317-318.

fifteen. I knew if my mare wouldn't take the leap I had to do it without her. She stopped an instant and snorted once or twice; but, hearing the savages yell close behind, she took the jump. Down, down we went, full fifteen feet, plump into the deep water. We both went under for a second, then she rose, and struck out for the opposite bank with me on her back. Poor creature, she got about two-thirds across, and then gave out under me with a groan. I tell you I fairly loved that animal at that moment, and hated to leave her as bad as if she had been human.

I swam the rest of the way and crawled out on the bank pretty well used up. But I was safe. I saw the howling and disappointed savages come to the bank I had left. But not one of them dared to take the leap. And the distance was too great for them to shoot. So I rested awhile and then made the best of my way to the settlement.¹⁵

A unique experience is attributed to Lawrence in 1833. An old Spaniard came to the Lawrence home stating that he was sick and asking to rest there a few days. After a month of somewhat wary hospitality on the part of the family, the partially recovered Spaniard informed his host that he had been one of Lafitte's buccaneers. He explained further that, during Lafitte's "capture on Galveston Island by the U. S. Marines," he and two companions, who had been guarding the treasure, had escaped notice and had subsequently hidden the spoils in two old cannons, one for gold, and the other for silver, which they then buried under a hackberry tree.

The old Spaniard, being the sole survivor, offered to divide the loot with "Señor Lawrence" and eventually make him his heir if Lawrence would provide him a home until his death. The journey in search of the treasure, to which Lawrence agreed, commenced soon thereafter, but on the second night "Señor Adam," after gazing upon the sinister, scarred visage of his sleeping companion and hearing the howling of wolves and the hooting of an owl, looked heavenward and saw the "stars falling in showers." This phenomenon of November 3, 1833, convinced him

¹⁵"Ad Lawrence's Famous Leap" in DeShields, *Border Wars of Texas*, 90-93 (picture of the "Leap" on page 129); Baker, *Texas Scrap Book*, 342-344; *Biographical Encyclopedia of Texas*, 284-285; John M. Hunter, Sr., "The Heroism of Adam Lawrence," *Frontier Times*, XXIX, 143-145; J. Frank Dobie, "Desperate Rides," *Tales of Old Time Texas* (Boston, 1955), 166-169. According to De Shields, "Lawrence's leap is, perhaps, equalled in American annals only by that of Major Sam McCulloch down Wheeling Hill (West Virginia) in 1777."

that his companion was a diabolical visitant, leading him to destruction; consequently, he fled in terror. Sometime later a man who witnessed the Spaniard's death brought Lawrence a package addressed to the pirate's "heir." His wife, Sarah Miller Lawrence, put the bundle away and promptly forgot its location, but Lawrence, having examined briefly the map it contained together with pieces of Spanish gold, set out with his brother-in-law, Lindsay P. Rucker, a surveyor, to find the treasure. This and several other trips were unavailing. At the time of Lawrence's death, however, twenty-eight Spanish gold pieces were found among his possessions.¹⁶

With the possible exception of the above-mentioned expedition, Adam Lawrence was nearly always accompanied by his devoted old slave Jim, who cooked and acted as a body servant. When the Negro died, he was buried in Lawrence Chapel cemetery next to the place where his master was destined to rest. Another old slave often mentioned in Lawrence's annals was Sella, a Negro woman who was brought as a child from Virginia by Simon Miller.¹⁷ Sarah Miller received Sella as part of her dowry when she married Lawrence, and the old Negress lived until after Lawrence's death in 1878.

The clouds of discontent were gradually gathering during the early 1830's, and when the first rumblings of revolution broke out, Lawrence was in the forefront of the fray. In 1835, he joined the volunteer scouting company under the command of William B. Travis and, after various horse-catching forays, took part in the historic siege of Bexar, in December of that year.¹⁸ He was with Houston's army at Gonzales, and, when he heard of the massacre at the Alamo, in which his wife's half brother, Thomas R. Miller, was killed,¹⁹ he hastened home to aid his family in preparations for that great flight before the Mexican advance

¹⁶Wade, *Tales of Early Days in Texas* (typescript, Archives, Texas State Library), 14-16; "The Adventures of Ad Lawrence," in Boatright, Hudson, and Maxwell (eds.), *Madstones and Twisters*, 143-145.

¹⁷Sella is mentioned as an inheritance of Simon Miller in the will of his father, Captain Simon Miller, on June 2, 1784 (MS., Probate Records of Bedford County, County Clerk's Office, Bedford, Virginia).

¹⁸Deposition of Adam Lawrence to Z. T. Fulmore, October 23, 1874 (MS., Archives, Texas State Library).

¹⁹*Biographical Directory of the Texan Conventions and Congresses* (Austin, 1941), 140; John P. Landers, "Simon Miller," *The Texian*, VIII, 1.

known as the Runaway Scrape. While they and the slaves remained at Groce's plantation near Hempstead, he took part in the victorious Battle of San Jacinto, in which his half-brother, Joseph Lawrence, was also a combatant.²⁰ Thereafter he re-enlisted in Captain Henry Reed's company and served therein from June 4 to September 4, 1836.²¹

Besides the headright augmentation of three quarters of a league and a labor of land, which he received in Washington County on January 13, 1838,²² Lawrence was awarded various grants for his revolutionary services. He received 3,273.74 acres of land in Madison County in 1844 and 499.71 acres in Trinity County as a first class augmentation to the former in 1845; in 1848 he was awarded a bounty of 320 acres in Calhoun County.²³

Subsequent to the revolution he had lived for about a year and a half in Burleson County, but in 1838 he followed Yegua Creek to its source in Milam (present Williamson) County and settled at a place known soon thereafter as the Crossroads and later as Lawrence Chapel.²⁴ The land on which he settled consisted of three fourths of a league and a labor which had been granted to his father-in-law, Simon Miller, in January, 1838. Miller died during the following month, however, and some dispute arose. The Republic of Texas awarded the disputed land to Adam Lawrence's brother-in-law, Simon Miller, Jr., on November 20, 1845.²⁵ In the meantime Lawrence had been living thereon. This was a region of which he was quite fond, and it is said that he was the first white man to cross Brushy Creek at the point later known as Lawrence's Crossing.²⁶ There, with the aid of his slaves, he constructed a large double log house of hewn beams, the size of

²⁰Deposition of Adam Lawrence to Z. T. Fulmore, October 23, 1874 (MS., Archives, Texas State Library); Wade, *Tales of Early Days in Texas* (typescript, Archives, Texas State Library), 4-5.

²¹Revolutionary Service Records (Archives, Texas State Library); Muster Rolls of the Texas Revolution (General Land Office, Austin).

²²Headright augmentation of Adam Lawrence, January 13, 1838 (MS., General Land Office, Austin).

²³Land bounties (General Land Office, Austin). Bounties were given only to Revolutionary veterans who had served before or during the Battle of San Jacinto. See Bill Allcorn, *History of Texas Land* (Austin, 1958).

²⁴DeShields, *Border Wars of Texas*, 90.

²⁵General Land Office, Austin.

²⁶DeShields, *Border Wars of Texas*, 90.

which shows that the trees of his day were much larger than the post oak presently growing in the area. The building still stands and is used as a barn by a descendant. On October 12, 1848, Simon Miller, Jr., made a formal transmission of 2,000 acres of this "Miller League" to Lawrence.²⁷

Soon the locality began to thrive because of its site and well-watered, arable land. Lawrence, being a devout Methodist, set aside land for religious worship and soon built a log church on it for the use of early circuit riders. A frame church, about the third to be erected on the spot, is still in use.²⁸ The first person to be buried in the adjacent cemetery was, according to tradition, a child of some travelers who spent the night at Lawrence's home in the late 1840's.

Lawrence was also an active Mason and, in addition to his range brand, which is registered in the courthouse at Georgetown,²⁹ used as his trail brand an unusual Masonic emblem,³⁰ which was later used by his son-in-law, Henry Inlo Layne.

About 1848, Lawrence's aged father, Joseph, came from Kentucky and was reconciled with his son, who had so bitterly opposed his second marriage. Joseph spent the remaining years of his life at Lawrence Chapel and was buried in the cemetery when he died about 1853.³¹

At first there was no school in the area, and the children were sent back to Washington County for their education—in later times to Salado Academy. After about 1850, however, Lawrence hired a teacher to instruct the younger children of the community in the church building.³²

Lawrence became a prosperous farmer and stockraiser in the

²⁷Miller to Lawrence, October 12, 1848 (MS., Deed Records of Williamson County, County Clerk's Office, Georgetown).

²⁸John P. Landers, "Central Texas Pioneer," *Houston Chronicle* (rotogravure section), November 18, 1956.

²⁹Register of Brands, January 27, 1852 (MS., Williamson County, County Clerk's Office, Georgetown).

³⁰John P. Landers, "A Masonic Trail Brand of Early Texas," *Texas Grand Lodge Magazine*, XXXI, 138-139.

³¹Joseph Lawrence is listed with the family of Adam Lawrence in the U. S. Seventh Census, 1850 (Returns of Schedule I, Free Inhabitants, for Williamson County, Texas, microfilm, University of Texas Library).

³²Adella A. Layne Landers to J. P. L., interview, May 29, 1961.

years preceding the Civil War. In 1860, he owned over three thousand acres of land in Williamson County valued at \$3,500, whereas his personal property was evaluated at \$4,000.³³ He owned four slaves, a large number of cattle, and also had acquired about 1,000 acres of land in Comanche County.

His discouragement at the failure of the Southern cause, in which his children and sons-in-law participated, and other changes together with the crowding of newcomers into the area caused him to adopt in 1866 a bold plan which Captain F. S. Wade describes in his recollections:

His children, some of them married, his brethren in the church, and hosts of friends tried to dissuade him from moving in his old age from a good home and an abundance of this world's goods. All was unavailing. In less than a month he had traded his land for one thousand cattle, having about the same number in his own brand. In ox wagons he started for California.³⁴ At El Paso he sold all his cattle except his teams at twenty dollars a head in gold, bringing over forty thousand dollars. That fall he reached Los Angeles and bought several sections of land between the then small town and the Ocean on the San Gabriel River, establishing a stock ranch. Since then this has proven the most valuable land in the U. S. But in a few years the same old trouble overtook him. Settlements began to thicken around him. So he sold again and moved to a lofty valley 80 miles north of Los Angeles and that distance from any neighbor. He moved his cattle. This valley was in the Cascade range of mountains. Here trouble and misfortune followed him. His cattle strayed off; frost came every month in the year; his remaining children married and left him, and worst of all, his loved and trusted wife dear old Aunt Sallie sickened and died. His property was gone and he was left desolate.³⁵

After the failure of his California venture, Lawrence returned to Texas, and, at the suggestion of Captain Wade, applied for a Revolutionary veteran's bond.³⁶ In about 1875, he lived at Law-

³³U. S. Eighth Census, 1860 (Returns of Schedule I, Free Inhabitants, for Williamson County, Texas, microfilm, University of Texas Library).

³⁴In a letter of July 19, 1911, Mary Lawrence Graves, a daughter of Adam Lawrence who remained in California, wrote to her niece Mattie Abbott of Williamson County that her father started to California on May 10, 1866, and "landed" in San Diego on December 18, 1866. (MS. in possession of Ralph Abbott, Houston).

³⁵Wade, *Tales of Early Days in Texas* (typescript, Archives, Texas State Library), 18.

³⁶Deposition of Adam Lawrence to Z. T. Fulmore, October 23, 1874 (MS., Archives, Texas State Library).

rence Chapel in the home of his daughter, Mrs. H. I. Layne, who had remained in Texas because of her previous marriage. The other children stayed in California after his return. Lawrence died on October 2, 1878, at the Layne home and was buried in Lawrence Chapel cemetery.³⁷

Soft-spoken, generous, proud, loyal to friends and family, but quick to anger and restless under restraint, Adam Lawrence was the embodiment of the pioneer type that characterized Texas in the mid-nineteenth century. Of his courage and daring there is no need to speak further.

³⁷The will of Adam Lawrence was probated at Georgetown, Texas, in 1879 (MS., Probate Records of Williamson County, County Clerk's Office, Georgetown).