

# Walter Timms, Texas Pioneer

*by Virginia Finley, Walter's Great-Granddaughter*

Walter Timms was born in Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire, England in 1847. He was the son of Jesse Timms and Harriet Faulks (daughter of Charles Faulks) of Moreton-in-the-March, Gloucestershire, England (near the borough Wiltshire, England). Jesse and Harriet Timms had eight children: Temperance, James, Walter, Thomas, Richard, Henry, Elizabeth, and William.

When Walter was 13 years old (1860), owing to economic conditions, lack of food, etc., he came to America with an aunt on the sailing vessel, *The W.B. Travis*, the voyage taking nine weeks from Liverpool, England to Galveston, Texas. Two weeks into the voyage, Walter fell and broke his leg. The Captain, a typical, hardened old seaman of his day, had the young lad placed on a pallet on the dining room floor, holes cut through the floor and the pallet so that the boy's body could be securely strapped down in an immovable position that could not be wrenched by any lurching of the ship, and a very cruel stretcher made and attached to the broken leg. Walter laid in this torturous position for seven weeks producing a strongly knitted bone but Walter walked with a severe limp.

After going ashore at Galveston, Walter and his aunt traveled up the Bayou to Houston on a small barge. They completed their journey to Kent, Bosque County, Texas by wagon.

(In 1850 the Universal Immigration Company of England purchased 27,000 acres of land from Richard KIMBALL to establish a colony devoted to both agricultural and manufacturing endeavors. The Company laid out a townsite on the west bank of the Brazos. Thirty English families, consisting of 125 people, arrived in the fall of 1850 and in January 1851. They settled in an area between the present-day towns of Kopperl and Kimball under a massive rock formation called Solomon's Nose, on the Brazos River, beginning this idealistic colony of Kent, near Kimball's Bend, when that area of Bosque County was still part of Milam and McLennan counties. The first winter was harsh, causing many hardships that led to a high number of fatalities. Five immigrating families soon abandoned the project and received individual headrights from the state. In 1852, Lieutenant Charles Finch MacKenzie, leader of the colony, and the other colonists abandoned the venture. Some colonists moved to Fort Graham, located across the river in Hill County, which was vacated by the army in November 1853, some colonists migrated separately to other areas, and some moved back to England. The town of Kent dissolved. In the 1970's only ruins of log houses were left at the site. It is now a vanished community.)

Young Walter lived for a year with an aunt and uncle, T. Timms, in Kent, Bosque County, not very far from Kimball. His brother, James Timms, had been sent over previously. Walter was very lame until a strange incident made it possible for him to walk as straight as anyone. He had been helped up on a horse to ride over to a neighbor's, Mr. Baker's--several miles through the woods--to get some mutton that Mr. Baker had just killed. As the boy rode along the trail through the woods, a sudden flurry of quail startled the mare, her plunge forward causing the inexperienced young rider to fall under her feet. In an attempt to become untangled from the frightened boy, the mare kicked him right in the broken leg, so that he fell over on the ground almost paralyzed with pain and the fright that Indians were near by and had caused the quail to fly. But by and by the pain was gone; and when Walter tried to get up to attempt to mount the horse that was grazing near him, he suddenly discovered that he could walk on his leg and was so overcome with joy that he ran up and down the trail screaming, "I can walk!, I can walk!" Leading the horse, he walked on up to the Baker house to show his friends that he could walk as straight as other people.

After the failure of colonizing the town of Kent, Walter and James Timms' aunt and uncle returned to England, leaving the two boys on their own. James Timms settled in or near Mayhann, Bosque County, Texas, where he married Miss Maria Archer and raised a family.

When Walter Timms was fourteen years old he went to work at fifteen dollars a month, driving for Mr. Jacob DeCordova, who owned great tracts of land and was agent for other large tracts, and who went about the country in his buggy looking after these lands. Young Timms stayed with Mr. DeCordova for several years, doing things for him that no one else could do. One of his jobs in the earlier days was riding horseback eighteen miles to Meridian to get Mr. DeCordova's mail. Another of his jobs brought him to Barnard's Mill (near Glen Rose) to have wheat and corn ground into the winter's supply of flour and meal. DeCordova's Bend is named for Jacob DeCordova. Very soon Mr. DeCordova found that young Timms was "as true as steel, and as straight as a shingle", so that he trusted him more and more and put more and more responsibility upon the youth.

After Mr. DeCordova's death, Walter Timms was a trail driver and representative of local farmers and ranchers going up trail with herds of cattle, bringing back the money in gold to pay various ranchers for different amounts of cattle thrown in to these trail drives.

Walter bought an interest in the ferry boat across the Brazos River at Kimball, where the cattlemen, driving cattle up the trail, crossed the river.

(Note: THE CHISHOLM TRAIL path ran from San Antonio, Texas thru Oklahoma and into Abilene, Kansas. Tens of thousands of cowboys drove an estimated 6 million head of cattle and 1 million horses north along the trail that stretches from San Antonio, Texas to Abilene, Kansas. The Chisholm Trail became a main route after 1867, when Abilene, Kansas cattle dealer Joseph McCoy built stockyards at a rail spur. He encouraged ranchers to bring their longhorn cattle north, offering to pay 10 times the going price they

could get in Texas. At the trail's peak use, cattle herds as big as 10,000 head were driven up the trail, although the average herd ranged from 2,000 head to 3000 head.)

Later Timms bought a wagon and four horses and did freighting for several years.

During this time Walter Timms' life was among the real frontiersmen of the new west, and he experienced both the pleasures and the hardships of life.

For several years Mr. Timms was Deputy Constable of Bosque County, and to him was usually given the commission of going out for the most difficult characters. Once he was told to go out and bring in a certain criminal for whose safe delivery \$500.00 was offered.

Mr. Timms took three of his most trusted men and went to the out-of-the-way cabin where a relative of the man lived.

"Now, boys, he's in that cabin. Two of you go in and get him while the other two of us watch outside; he'll be quick about giving us the slip if we aren't very careful."

At the instant that the men's knock sounded on the door, the faint flicker of the candle that had been seen in one room suddenly went out. In a moment, however, the door was opened by the man of the house with, "Who's there?". The men went in and searched the two room cabin and came out with the report that only the family were inside.

"He's in there. You go back and look up the chimney," ordered Mr. Timms. In a few minutes the undesirable citizen was being pulled down by his legs from the rather close quarters of the old rock chimney.

Walter Timms then bought some land and settled down to farm. He had a splendid crop planted and everything in ship-shape order when one night he was wakened by someone shouting his name. Grabbing his trusty gun, he went to the door to inquire what his visitor wished. It turned out to be a Mr. Southern, who had brought a great herd of fine cattle to carry up the trail and wanted Timms to go with him. When Mr. Southern had inquired among cattlemen of the vicinity for a real man that could handle the cows correctly and that could be absolutely trusted, Walter Timms had been pointed out to him as the man he wanted. Mr. Southern had ridden many miles to find Timms. At first the young farmer refused to go, explaining that he had crops just ready to be harvested. Mr. Southern wanted just such a man as Walter Timms, so the pay offered was generous.

Young Timms asked for a few moments to decide; he had a good hired black man on the place and he wished to speak to him. The hired man promised to carry out his employer's directions and to harvest the crops for him, and the former cowman decided to go once more up the trail. As an intimate associate of Mr. Southern, Timms had many interesting and pleasant experiences.

The trip took them up into the western part of Colorado and Nebraska. One early morning when Walter and Mr. Southern, who bunked together and shared the care of the same division of the herd, rose up from their blankets and looked down a draw in the great expanse of the prairie, they saw three young buffalo drinking at a spring.

Immediately the two men were on their horses with six-shooters ready, and that day all

cowmen feasted on young buffalo meat. There had been times, when Walter Timms had first gone up the trail, that he had seen buffalo herds that were so thick that their movements looked as if the earth were moving.

Later, during his life among the frontiersmen of the new west, Walter had many varying experiences, adventures and hardships.

In 1871, Timms married Mrs. Elzey Payne-Lancaster, a widow with two children. Walter and Elzey had one daughter, Lenna, born July 22, 1873. Elzey died during the birth of their second child in 1875 (her death attributed to excessive use of chloroform used by a Saturday night drunken town doctor). After Elzey's death, the children of her first marriage were sent to live with relatives. Walter borrowed money on his farm (recorded in the Survey Book #1 years 1870-1880, Index of Deed Records, where you will find "Headright Surveys" made to Walter Timms) and took his two year old daughter, Lenna, to England where he learned, in the course of two years, the jeweler's trade and the art of fine watchmaking from a man named Leach. Walter regarded Mr. Leach as a very fine, understanding gentleman. After two years in England, being unable to stand the conditions and climate of England, Walter and Lenna returned to Central Texas. In August of 1878, he sold out his holdings in Bosque County and moved in 1879 to Cleburne where he established the firm, W. Timms, Jeweler.

Timms married for the second time on April 13, 1880 to Miss Ada Tracy of New York State. (Miss Ada H. Tracy had come to Cleburne, in 1877 with her brother and sister and brother-in-law, E. R. Tracy and Mr. & Mrs. W. E. Hill. Miss Tracy taught a private school for the two years.) Hattie Ellen, the only child of Walter and Ada Tracy Timms, died in infancy.

Walter's daughter Lenna Timms was married September 05, 1900 to James Benjamin Finley of Hillsboro, Arkansas. His only grandchild, Walter James Finley, was born September 7, 1901. Lenna was widowed in 1906, and she and her son Walter Finley lived with Walter and Ada Timms. Lenna Timms-Finley remarried August 24, 1915 to Charles James Stevenson.

In June, 1900, Mr. Timms retired from the jewelry business and bought the Bostick farm of 320 acres, located 6 miles northwest of Cleburne on the Nolan River. Once more the life of the open was to be his--the life from which he could not get entirely away. A lover of fine horses, he began to breed good blooded stock. He raised a number of colts that he raced at the Dallas Fair and on other tracks. In about 1912, he sold to Mr. Waggoner, of Fort Worth, for \$1,200.00, the mare and colt, Planetta and Clickmaker.

Walter and Ada Timms lived for more than half a century in Cleburne at their home on North Anglin Street, and for over thirty years he drove back and forth daily to his farm. At the age of eighty-five he still drove back and forth almost daily in a two-horse wagon and attended personally to the affairs of the farm. Frequently he was seen on horseback, riding a usually tall black horse. During the fifty-three years since his return from England and settlement in Cleburne, Walter seldom got very far from his jewelry

business in earlier years, or in later years from the management of his farm and horses. There were trips to Dallas with his horses or on other business, and occasional visits back to Bosque County.

October 6, 1913, Walter received his naturalization papers #15400. He made a notation of this in his "Birthday Book of Shakespeare"; the poem for that day was: "WHAT Providence delays it not denies" -*Anthony and Cleopatra*.

Walter Timms, pioneer Texan and retired jeweler of Cleburne, died at the age of 87 years, March 03, 1934, at his home on North Anglin Street, following his wife in death by exactly a week. Both had pneumonia. He was buried in his Prince Albert wedding suit. His wife was buried in her wedding dress February 26, 1934.

Varied indeed were Walter's experiences, and a bit of the frontier history of Texas was interwoven with his life.

#### **Sources:**

Naturalization papers #15400

Bible Record of Walter Timms (picture of original record)

Oral Timms Family History - word-of-mouth by Walter Timms (1847-1935) to Lenna Timms-Finley-Stevenson (1874-1940) to Walter James Finley (1901-1980) to Virginia Mae Finley-Workings (1928 to present) to Douglas Walter Workings (1948 to present).

1860 Federal Census, Bosque Co, TX. 1870 Federal Census, Bosque, Matagorda, McLennan, Navarro Counties, TX.

1880 Federal Census, Bosque Co., Cleburne, Johnson Co, TX.

Article from the Dallas Morning News, Section 4, Features & Book Reviews, Sunday, October 30, 1932: Walter Timms, Texas Pioneer by Frances Dickson Abernathy, 1932

KENT, TEXAS- Bosque County; vanished community

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/NN/rbn11.html>

Kent, TX Curtis Bishop, "Kent, Colony of," *The Handbook of Texas*, Vol. 1 (Austin: TSHA, 1952), 949-950; "Fort Graham," in *The Handbook of Texas*, Vol. 1 (Austin: TSHA, 1952), 626;

Ed Bartholomew, *800 Texas Ghost Towns* (Ft. Davis: Frontier Book Publishers, 1971), 56; 1998-1999 *Texas Almanac*, 153;

See Dorothy Waties Renick, "The City of Kent," *Southwestern Historical*

*Quarterly* 29 (1925-1926). "English Settlement at Kimball's Bend before the Civil War": filed of record in Plat Book #1, in Court House Records of Bosque County, at Meridian, Texas. "English Settlement at

Kimball's Bend before the Civil War". (The town was laid out and plotted by Ervin DeCordova, a brother of Jacob DeCordova, his plat, beautifully drawn).

Kimball's Bend was a trail town at a crossing of the Brazos River.

Kimball Bend, TX; Bosque County; bend 320943N - 72854W USGS

Kimball Bend Park, TX; Bosque County, park 320724N - 0972952W USGS