

Samuel Shupe

by Will Ross

My great-great-great grandfather, Samuel Shupe, was born in 1799 in Bucks County near Reading, Pennsylvania. His parents were Quakers from Holland. Samuel ran away from home at the age of nine. Why he did this I do not know, but it may have been because his religion was so strict.

As Samuel grew older he did many things. At the age of 28, he came to Texas from Tennessee with Green DeWitt, an empresario. When he arrived in Gonzales on March 27, 1827, with 14 head of cattle, he took his place in the history of Texas. He knew many of the people we read about and was right where major events happened. For instance, Byrd Lockhart was the assistant surveyor to the DeWitt Colony. It is reported that in the spring of 1836, Lockhart had been sent from the mission of San Antonio de Valero for supplies. When he returned, he had the grim job of gathering up the charred remains of the dead and burying them. The town of Lockhart, Texas would be named for him in 1848.

I do not know if Sam had an earlier marriage or what his occupation was. At the time he came to Texas, it was being ruled by the Mexican government by a law called The Saltillo Colonization Law of 1825. All foreigners that came to Texas with or without an empresario were welcome. If a man was single, he received 1107 acres or 1/4 league of land. He would be given 3321 more acres or another 3/4 league if he married a non-Mexican woman. But if he married a Mexican citizen, he would be given a bonus of 1/4 of a league. The only cost of the land was 30 dollars. He was promised no taxes for ten years, but he had to be of good moral character, loyal to the Mexican government, and Roman Catholic. However, there were not enough priests to go around, so that one law was not enforced.

Samuel gained a lot more land by fighting. He fought in two of the most historic battles ever fought in Texas. He was honorably discharged from these battles twice and given land by the Texas Republic.

He first signed up to fight on October 3, 1835, the day after the "Come and Take It" cannon incident. His farm was only 18 miles from Gonzales. Records list him as a private in the 2nd Regiment of Texas Volunteers in the 5th Company Infantry under John Alley. He fought in the first Battle of the Alamo against Santa Anna's brother-in-law, General Martin Perfecto de Cos. This was known as the "storming and capture of Bexar." He fought with Colonel Ben Milam, who asked, "Boys, who will go with Old Ben Milam into San Antonio?" For the rebels, this battle was a great victory, and their only casualty was Milam. The Mexicans did not like this uprising because the settlers were supposed to be loyal to the Mexican Government. Four days later, Shupe was discharged and went back to his home. He was given a Bounty Certificate for 320 acres of land from the Texas Republic. Later, he received another 320 acres of land for his service.

I don't have data on what happened to him during the time between the two battles of the Alamo. Before leaving Gonzales, General Sam Houston had ordered the town burned to the ground. His army and the refugees marched east in what was called "The Runaway Scrape." Many of the men he commanded left him to go protect their families. On March 17, 1836, they reached the Colorado River but couldn't cross it because of heavy rains. Samuel joined up with Houston on the next day. On March 21, word was received that Mexican General Joaquin Ramirez y Sesma was camped on the opposite bank only two miles away. At first Houston was ready to make a stand, but when he received word of the Mexican butchery at Goliad, he had to

rethink his plan. He used the time wisely to train the army in the fundamentals of warfare. Long hours were devoted to drilling and rehearsing for battle. Even though Samuel Shupe was a good fighter, there were still those who probably weren't. The troops complained of the rain and the mud, which fueled their anger. They had to make do with the small amounts of ammunition and supplies they had. Even President David G. Burnet urged Houston to attack Santa Anna. In spite of impatient men and political pressure, Houston stayed steady waiting for the right time.

I have no record of Shupe's position in the actual battle, but I know that he fought under Captain Thomas H. McIntire. When Samuel heard the battle cry, "Remember the Alamo, Remember Goliad," he did remember. He was there to avenge the deaths of friends, foes, neighbors, and possibly relatives. For his service, which continued through July 23, Samuel received another 320 acres of land. He was also given a Donation Certificate for 640 acres of land for his part in the capture of Santa Anna.

While Samuel was out fighting for the freedom of Texas, his bride-to-be was in Missouri, married, with two children. In 1837, Patience Wells Sapp (or Stapp), of Welsh parentage, was a widow with one son. She had immigrated to Texas and was living in Lavaca County with her cousin, James Kerr, whose mother was also named Patience Wells. Kerr was quite a businessman and would be very important in the establishment of Gonzales. Later, both Kerrville and Kerr County were named for him. Another cousin, historian, John Henry Brown, was a neighbor.

At this point in history, almost half of the Anglo settlers in Texas were women. Widows and widowers made up about ten percent of the population. Life expectancies were short. Widows headed up one out of three households. Although they held such occupations as storekeepers, ranchers, farmers, and teachers, they couldn't vote, hold public office, or serve on a jury. If a

widow married, her property went to her husband.

As head of her household, Patience had been granted a headright, 1280 acres in Lavaca County. In July 1838 she was married to Samuel Shupe in Jackson County by a man named Elijah Stapp, who had come to DeWitt's Colony in 1830 with eight family members. The Shupes brought a lawsuit against the Board of Land Commissioners of the Republic of Texas in Jackson County. Sam petitioned for 1/3 league of land he felt he had yet to receive for his services. The court granted that to him. He also requested 2/3 league plus labor that was due to him by his marriage. That request was ruled against because the court said that he had inherited her land and was not entitled to any more. To make matters worse, he had to pay the cost of the suit, over \$500. Samuel paid that fee and then appealed to the Supreme Court of Texas. He brought James Kerr and Darwin M. Stapp as securities on an additional \$500 for his right to appeal. This court granted him the land he had asked for, said she could keep her property, and returned the court cost.

This victory was a short one. Sam and Patience would have two daughters, Zerilda and Elizabeth, and no son to carry the Shupe name. In 1847, Samuel got a very deadly illness. On his way by boat to New Orleans for medical care, he died and was buried at sea. Back then, this was done so that nobody else would get the illness. Patience wasn't notified of her husband's death until later because news traveled so slowly. Jackson County records show that on May 17, 1849, she married a Charles Simons. Later, the 1860 Caldwell County census lists her as living in her daughter Zerilda's household, going by the name of Shupe, which is also the name on her headstone. Patience and her daughters sold Sam's Bounty Certificates for Bexar and San Jacinto to James Kerr for \$150. Through the years that followed, bits and pieces of the Shupe land would be sold when times were hard.

Zerilda Shupe would grow up to marry Charles Wesley Dollahite. He and their oldest of six children, 11-year-old Shupe Dollahite, would be killed by Comanches at Birdville in 1872 (or 1870). The Dollahite family had been established a long time in the Brownsboro community. The first school in the area was at Dollahite on Clear Fork Creek above Burdette Wells in 1850. Zerilda would die in Dublin, Erath County, in 1931.

Elizabeth R. Shupe was born in 1843 at old Texana in Lavaca County. She is listed as a charter member of Clear Fork Baptist Church in 1848. In 1860, she would marry 35-year-old Abner Milton Ross, of Scotch-Irish descent. Abner had come to Texas from Missouri in 1859 with his wife Tabitha Bowcher, four children, and maybe slaves, to homestead in the Lockhart area. She died that same year at the age of 33 (30?) of consumption and was the first person to be buried in the Clear Fork Creek Baptist Church cemetery. Abner and Elizabeth, my great-great grandparents, lived on the old Shupe place with his four children and had eight (?) more of their own. The youngest, Charlie Price, was my great granddad. During the Civil War, Abner is recorded as owing \$48.50 for county taxes on 5-lbs. bacon and 43 1/2 lbs. of wool. C.W. Dollahite was also listed for a lesser amount. In 1878, Elizabeth died at the age of only 35. All that is left at the home site is an old water cistern.

Abner then married Ann Storey of Lockhart in 1879. When Abner died in 1881, he was buried in the cemetery at Clear Fork Baptist Church between Tabitha and Elizabeth and with his two babies and his mother-in-law, Patience. With both Abner and Elizabeth gone, one of their daughters, Stella Price Ross, raised the rest of the clan. She became the first teacher in the Brownsboro school. On Easter Sunday of 1997 a woman named Stella Anderson talked to our family when we were visiting Clear Fork Baptist Church. She said her father had so loved his elementary schoolteacher that he had named his daughter for her. Ironically, Stella Ross was

killed in 1919 by a car in front of the Alamo in San Antonio where her own grandfather Samuel Shupe had fought.

Great-Granddad Charlie Price Ross was born in 1877. In 1899, he married a neighbor named Millie Butler, daughter of William G. Butler and Carrie Keese. In the oak tree where he hitched his horse when he came acourtin', we have found square nails and a spike. It has been said that Great-Granddad Ross "bought the farm" twice. First, he left school to work in order to keep the family from losing it when times were hard. Then he worked for many years more to buy it from Stella. Things were never easy through the Great Depression and the drought of the 1950's, but he managed to keep most of it, partly thanks to the discovery of a small pocket of "black gold." My grandpa, Charlie Price, Jr., is one of Charlie Sr. and Millie's six children. He remembers his mother always carried a wooden handled pocketknife she called "old Sharpie." She died in 1949, but he would live to be 94. He once told his oldest son, Clarence, that if he had known he was going to live so long, he would have found a young one and started over. One night in the 1960's, while Great Granddad was living in the retirement home in town, his house burned to the ground. There were no traces of the iron beds, silverware, pots and pans, or other furniture.

Many people have known Dr. Ross. That is because there have been five of them. Great-Granddad's older brother was Dr. Alonzo A. Ross (1868-1957), the old time horse and buggy doctor. He went to Europe to study medicine. He was known to the family as "Unkie." Two of his sons became doctors: Dr. Abner A. Ross, who died in 1985, lived and practiced in Lockhart for many years, and Dr. Raleigh Ross, who died in 1994, was a surgeon in Austin, but lived on his ranch in Burnet. They both loved the land, wildlife, politics and medicine. My uncle, Dr. Charlie P. Ross III ("Choppie" to the family) was Raleigh's surgery partner for 20 years. He lives in Austin and has been very successful in farming and ranching the original Shupe Spanish

homestead. My father, Dr. Claybourne Whitten Ross, has lived and practiced psychiatry in the Rio Grande Valley since 1976. He also loves working on the land and has no problem driving five hours on a weekend to do just that. Together, these two brothers have bought back some of the properties that once belonged to the family.

Before settlers came to the area that would become Caldwell County, the abundance of game and water attracted Native Americans. The main tribes in the area were the Karankawas, Tonkawas, Lipan, and Comanches. After San Jacinto, the Mexican government had its hands full with problems of its own. However, they had no intentions of letting the Texas thing go. To keep the Anglos from getting too comfortable, agents kept the Indians stirred up. In 1838, Comanches kidnapped the two Putnam children and their aunt, Matilda Lockhart, as they gathered pecans near their home below Gonzales. She just happened to be the niece of Byrd Lockhart. Two years and much trouble later, a return was set to take place in San Antonio. As you might expect, it did not go well and the result was known as the "Council House" fight. Most of the Indians were killed and the survivors retreated to the Hill Country to stew. In August 1840, with no warning, they descended upon the Coastal region, plundering and burning as they went along. Knowing the route they would take back to their camps, an ambush was planned. With the help of 13 Tonkawas, a force of 87 settlers waited for their return. Early in the morning, the Indians appeared with their captives and bounty. They paraded across what is known as Comanche Flats in a long line, laughing, singing, and celebrating. It must have been quite a sight to see, as they were wearing all sorts of garments. Even their horses were dressed in the best of yard goods, ribbons, top hats, and umbrellas. They were herding more than 400 stolen mules, cattle, goats and horses and carrying or pulling everything they possibly could. This would so anger the settlers that, when they attacked, they would fight them for three days non-stop

and over 15 miles. This historic event is known as the Battle of Plum Creek and is said to be the last Indian war in Texas, but the harassment would continue for more than 30 years in this area. Many arrowheads, spearheads, and axes have been found on the Shupe farm, which was in the direct path of the battle.

The road from Lockhart to Gonzales ran in front of the original grant property and is now called the Brownsboro road, named for the community started by the Browns. It was "laid off" by dragging treetops over the grass on the prairie with six yokes of steers. The land was mostly open grazing with no brush at all. The deer and wild turkey were plentiful. The first method of public transportation was by stagecoach. What was known as Stagecoach Road runs on the south border of the Butler property. A local station was nearby at Micenheimer's, where teams were changed. The bugle was blown at Plum Creek to signal for the team to be ready. This route was on the old beef trail, the Chisholm, one of the oldest in Texas that went from the Gulf coast to Kansas. From early spring to summer, there would be herds of cattle, horses, goats, sheep, and hogs driven up the trail. Some days a herd would be in sight all day. Some of the cattle were too weak to stand the drive and would "fall out." These were picked up by the local people and were called "road cattle."

The presence of so many cattle actually hindered agriculture because there were no fences to keep cattle out. Stampedes often destroyed property. Soon a man from Lockhart developed a new strain of cotton that thrived in poor soil. The Melbane cotton was drought and boll weevil resistant. As farming spread, fences went up, sparking wire-cutting wars between farmers and cattlemen. Part of the land that once grew cotton is a thick forest today. My great uncle, Clarence Ross, told of working behind mules or a hoe in these fields. Food, clothing and other necessities were freighted by ox-pulled wagon from Indianola on the coast. The roads were so bad at

times that it would take several weeks to make the trip.

Across the creek from the farm is the site of one of the most famous mineral springs in the South. Around 1870, Dr. H. N. Burditt (Burdette) discovered the spring on the Clear Fork of Plum Creek and built a resort with a large hotel. There were dances and baseball games. Healthful water was bottled up and sent all over the nation. Unfortunately, the well dried up and the resort closed in the 1930's. My grandpa, Charlie P. Ross, Jr., told me that when he was a boy, he and a friend would go down to the "bottle pit" and break bottles. At that time, the old hotel was still in business and "Old Lady Farris" (Lillian) would run after them and curse them.

Family cemeteries are very common in this area. The old Teas-Butler cemetery is located on Val and Nancy Gower's place near the Ross farm. Nancy is a descendant of Jesse and Polly Blackwell, who came to Texas in 1844. Their headright borders three sides of the Butler farm. In this cemetery, there are many headstones of the Teas (another neighbor) and Butler families, as well as some folks who we don't know. On the outskirts of the family plots there are crude sandstone markers that can no longer be read. Maybe these were workers, drifters, or poor neighbors who had no other place. My grandpa remembers that when William G. Butler's wife, Carrie, died in 1922, it had been raining. The family was not able to get the wagon to the cemetery so she had to be buried in Lockhart. Even though this was the beginning of the family plot in town, it seems kind of sad for her not to be buried with her husband and some of their children.

It was probably one of the Shupe properties, which was sold to William Butler, originally from Tennessee, who came to Texas from Mississippi in 1845 or 1846. The Caldwell County 1850 census lists him as age 55 with 5 children. The Mortality Schedule of the same year names Martha Butler, age 55, dying after six days of colic. A son, William G. Butler, was 18 at that time. Today, almost 150 years later, my

parents are planning to build a home on this same land. After searching for the choice spot to build, they realized the Butler home was built on the best location. The lumber for this house was most likely grown in the deep South and was said to be shipped through Indianola and brought overland in ox-driven wagons. The fallen boards found are still heavy and have square, hand hewn nails in them. Grandpa Charlie's niece, Mary Lou Jeffrey, used some of these to build a storage building. The bricks from the fireplace were used to build a barbecue pit.

My father, Clay Ross, remembers when he and his brother would "call in" and shoot crows from the top of the old staircase of the dog-run style house. The rock kitchen walls are still there. Stories are told of William Butler's wife, Carrie, and young daughters fighting off Comanches from behind these walls when the men were away. Grandpa Charlie recalls it being lived in by farmhands into the 1950's. The old hand-dug water cistern looks almost like it did when it was used, and many artifacts have been found around the old homestead.

The land is now covered with many plum trees and dewberry and grapevines. Also there is plenty of wildlife. The oil field was very busy on the farm from 1920 until the 1970's. Although the money from it saved Great-Granddad Ross from having to sell during the severe drought of the 1950's, the leftover junk has trashed out much of it. Our family has worked very hard over the last few years to reclaim the land for cattle and crops. So far, the oil companies have been real stubborn and claim no responsibility. We are working with the Texas Railroad Commission and hoping for some help cleaning up the abandoned equipment, leaking tanks, open pits and trash.

Some day we would like to see the land as Samuel Shupe did.

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(Written at age 13, revised at age 14)