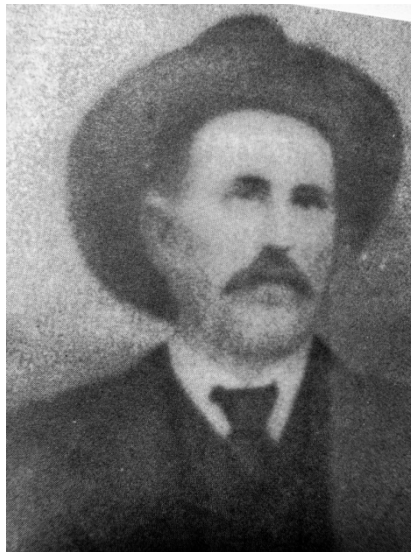


RANSOM FERGUSON JETT



The Early Years

Ransom Ferguson Jett was the oldest of three children of John Jett (b. November 3, 1811) and Jane Swann (Swan) born 1813. Ransom was born on December 10, 1844. His two younger brothers were John who was born August 22, 1845 and Anson L. who was born October 3, 1847. John died early in life on May 18, 1849 leaving Jane (Jenny) as a widow and three small children without a father. At the time of John's death, Jenny would have been 34, Ransom almost 5, John almost 4 and Anson 2. Times were tough and in the future things would get even tougher.

Fortunately, John had not come to Texas by himself and family was around. John's father Stephen had already died about twelve years earlier on May 17, 1837 in Orange County, Texas where the Jetts lived. His wife Sarah Cole Jett lived with one of John's brothers, Absalom Jett who apparently lived close to Jane. Sarah Cole Jett, John's mother, died on December 28, 1851. However, John's brothers and sisters and other relatives lived in the area.

John's brothers, sisters and other relatives included the following:

James Cole (b. 1804-d. Dec. 7, 1864) James married Susan Noland on May 10, 1827. In Jett Trails West on page 26, it is pointed out that the marriage certificate spells Susan's maiden name as "Noland" but her broken headstone in Ryan Cemetery spells her name "Knolen" and at various times and places it has been spelled as "Nolan," "Nolen," "Noland," "Nowlin," and "Knowland."

Elizabeth (b. 1806-d. 1862) Elizabeth's first husband was William Landrum on May 8, 1822. She married her second husband Clark Beach on 1834. She married her third husband, James Berry, on September 27, 1849 in Harris County. Elizabeth had no children.

Jemima (b. 1808-d. 1849). Jemima's first husband was J. McDonald and she had three children by him. Her second husband was Duncan St. Clair who she married in April 15, 1838 in a double ceremony where Absalom Jett married Mary Ann Arthur. Family tradition, according to Jett Trails West (page 162) were that Jemima and Duncan St. Clair were both Catholic. Jemima died in 1849 and Duncan St. Clair in 1850.

Absalom (b. 1813-d. 1880). Absalom's first wife was Mary Ann ("Polly") Arthur who he married on April 15, 1838. Absalom and Polly would have a family of eleven children. His second wife was Elizabeth Reysdel on August 1877 when he was 65 years old. Interestingly, John, Ransom's father, and Absalom had both served together for three months in 1839 in the Samuel Davis Company of the First Regiment led by John C. Neill of the Republic of Texas Militia. Absalom also fought as a member of Captain Benjamin Haris's Company which fought at the Battle of San Jacinto according to Jett Trails West (page 169).

Again, Jett Trails West quotes an undated article from the Orange Leader that Absalom Jett had lost an eye in connection with fighting for Texas Independence and had also fought in the company of James A. Harper of Beaumont. I believe this company was headed for the Battle of San Jacinto but got re-directed to engage in some fighting with Indians who had commenced some attacks in the area. Later, some of the members of the Company including Absalom and Clark Beach the husband of Elizabeth Jett, were charged with escorting some of the Mexican prisoners from the San Jacinto Battle back to the Rio Grande.

Below is a quote by Florence Stratton in The Story of Beaumont at pages 97 and 98:

"G.W. Hargraves, who was captain of a little Beaumont Company of militia in August, 1835, had 62 men under him, twenty of whom took part in the Battle of the Alamo,. He also was at the head of twenty-one volunteers who started to join Houston to stop the advance of Santa Anna, but the battle of San Jacinto was fought before they reached that place, and they were ordered to rout some Indians north of the town. Men who Mr. Hargraves could remember years after who were in his company, were: ...Jim Jett, ____Jett, Clark Beach"

Presumably Jim Jett is our James Jett and the ____Jett is Absalom Jett.

During this period, there were not many people in the Beaumont area. According to Florence Stratton in The Story of Beaumont, in 1837, fifty six jurors constituted the majority of landowners in the area. Some of the people which she lists on page 62 are members of the Jett family including: Duncan St. Clair, James Jett, A.Jett, A. Winfree, John Cole and Clark Beach.

Below is a picture of Absalom Jett.



Absalom Jett

Susan (b. 1814-d. after 1857). Susan married Joseph Oliver Trail LeJeune (also known by the English translation “Young”) who had come from an Acadian family in St. Landry Parish while the Jetts were in Louisiana. In marriage records he is known as Joseph Young. Apparently, he and Susan had nine children. Susan at one point or another lived in Tarkington Prairie, Texas and was a founding member of Oak Shade Baptist Church at Tarkington Prairie.

Therefore, despite the fact that Ransom had lost his father there were other relatives in the area.

In the 1860 Census for Orange County Texas, we find Jane, age 43; Ransom, age 17; John, age 15 and Anson, age 13.

Deaths of Ransom’s Brothers

We know from the 1860 Census of Orange County that Jane Jett who was 43 was living next door to Absalom and his family in Orange County, Texas where Cow Bayou was located. At that time Ransom was 17, John 15 and Anson 13. Anson is shown by various genealogies as dying on January 1, 1862 at age 15 and John dying on December 23, 1862 dying at age 17. Therefore by the beginning of 1863, Jane had not only lost her husband some years previously but two of her three sons. In addition Ransom went from one of three brothers to the only brother.

Although there is no discussion of the reasons for the deaths of the two boys some conjecture may be justifiable. First the Civil War had begun. Texas declared itself independent from the Union on February 1, 1861 and Texas formally joined the Confederacy on March 2, 1861. A number of boys including some in the 13-15 age group joined the Confederacy. It is known that some in this age group had joined Spaight’s Battalion (to be discussed later). Also we know that in mid-1862 a virulent yellow fever epidemic hit the Beaumont area. The epidemic resulted from a British blockade runner the Victoria which had steamed into Sabine Pass carrying infected passengers. The death toll was high causing death

in up to 50% of those who contracted it. All of Company A of Spaight's Battalion which were located in the area had caught the fever (nicknamed "Yellow Jack"). In addition sixteen men of Company B had caught it. Later, in a diary by Sergeant Connor from Beaumont, he noted that the principal business of Company B was 'to bury the dead' from the Yellow Fever Epidemic. Apparently the names of those who died from the yellow fever epidemic were not identified since no muster roll was maintained of any of the soldiers at Sabine Pass area other than some of the soldiers in Company . The city of Sabine Pass was quarantined for a while to stop the spread of the epidemic.

The fever also spread to surrounding communities and cities including Beaumont, Galveston, Houston, and Orange County. There were many deaths and the early records of the members of Spaight's Battalion and others who caught Yellow Fever do not exist or have been lost.

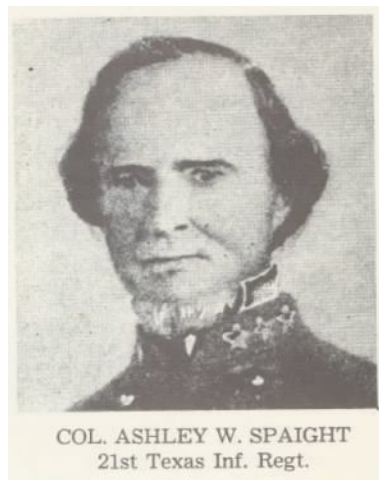
Although we cannot be sure that John and Anson decided to join up with the Confederates, it is highly likely that both were lost due to the epidemic of Yellow Fever especially since the epidemic happened in that area and at the time of their deaths. Further, we have no indications of where their graves are located are other information except that two teenagers during the early years of the Confederacy died.

Again, my conclusions are conjecture but I believe the hypothesis which I described is a reasonable one. Ransom was the oldest of the three and probably was responsible for the farm and for the care of his mother. By mid 1863, Ransom joined the war.

The War Years

We know a little bit about Ransom's war years by looking at his Pension Application No. 20041. We know that he volunteered, that he was not an officer and that he was in the infantry. We know that he served two years having enlisted in Spring of 1863 and being discharged in Galveston, Texas on May 28, 1865. At the time of discharge he was in Company "K" of Spaight's Battalion.

Below is a picture of Col. Ashley Spaight:



Texas did not have many significant battles during the Civil War and most of the fighting was by Texas soldiers who had been transferred to other parts of the Confederacy. Spaight's Battalion was mainly concerned with such items as coastal defense, supporting war efforts and engaged in battles from time

to time in Louisiana, protecting the Sabine Pass and other ports such as Galveston. In mid-1863, Spaight's troops spent about six months being involved in various skirmishes with Union Forces in Central Louisiana. We know that companies C, D, and E commanded by General Tom Green were involved in assisting the confederate forces of General Taylor in Louisiana and participated various union forces against union forces serving under General Nathaniel Franklin including battles at Fordoche Baylou. Company A of Spaight's Battalion participated in two major battles and about 18 skirmishes.

As indicated earlier, part of the activity of Spaight's battalion dealt with the protection of coastal waterways and the protection of important areas such as the Sabine Pass in September 1863 which will be discussed in more detail later.

Also in 1864, Spaight's Battalion was involved in other areas including protecting Niblett's Bluff, Louisiana (just north of Orange County, Texas) and various incursions by Union forces on the Calcasieu River. Some companies of Spaight's Battalion guarded Galveston, Texas and others served on various steamboats, iron-clads and blockade-runners. They also guarded government owned cotton supplies at Orange, Texas and Beaumont, Texas.

Although, there was not much fighting there was a high degree of personal hardship with troops often not being fed for several days, marching through flooded areas, freezing temperatures and a great amount of dysentery and illness, including malaria, measles and yellow fever.

Specifically, we know next to nothing about Ransom's personal experiences during the war.

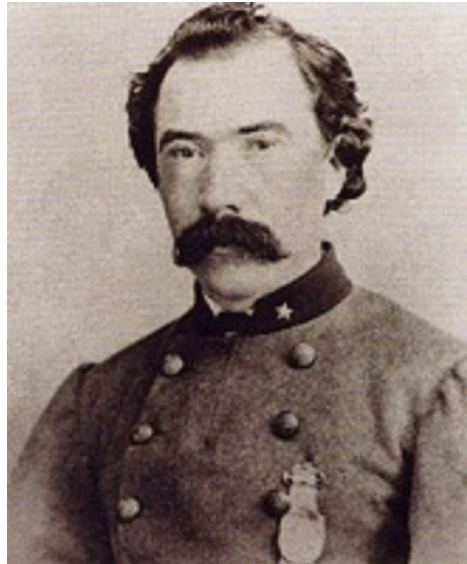
Ransom's war records are easily missed because the Jett name was spelled "Gett" on the Muster Rolls. Pension applications required supporting affidavits of other veterans who had served with you in the War. Ransom had affidavits from Benjamin T. Moore who was in Company "F" of Spaight's Battalion and Edmund Pruett who was also in Company "F" of Spaight's Battalion. Sometimes the records show "R. Jett" and other times "R. Gett" with an alternate name of R. Jett. Ransom is listed under both Battle Units for the 11th Battalion Texas Volunteers and under the 21st Regiment of Texas Infantry.

Spaight's Battalion often went under the nick-name of the "Swamp Angels." Also the cavalry group from Liberty and Chambers Counties went under the name of the Moss Bluff Rebels.

Ransom had two first cousins who also participated in the Civil War. One apparently joined Spaight's Battalion with Ransom and was in the same Company "K" as Ransom. This individual is listed as "S. Gett" or "S. Jett." I believe the individual is Ransom's first cousin, Stephen Jett, from Tarkington Prairie in Liberty County. Stephen was the son of James Cole Jett (Ransom's Uncle) and Susan Knowlen Jett. Stephen was born in 1845 and was about a year younger than Ransom. Apparently, he and Ransom entered the military about the same time and completed their service at the same time, both serving in the same unit.

Another first cousin served in the Civil War and obtained some degree of fame for his service. This was William Jett who was a first cousin of Ransom and a son of Absalom Jett. Instead of being a part of the infantry, William Jett went into artillery. He ended up being a participant in the most significant battle in Texas during the Civil War. William was a participant in the Second Battle of Sabine Pass. In that Battle, a small group of 46 Confederates defeated a much larger incursion of Union forces trying to take control of the Sabine River under General William B. Franklin. The group of Confederates were mostly

Irish and were known as the “Jefferson Davis Guards’ and led by Lt. Richard W. Dowling of the First Texas Heavy Artillery.



Lt. Richard W. Dowling

Below is a monument to Lt. Richard W. Dowling. Ironically, after the Civil War, Dowling would die of Yellow Fever.



Texas Statue to Richard Dowling
And the Davis Guards
William Jett's Name is also
On this statue.

The Davis Guards had spent a great amount of time practicing and through their excellent use of canons they were able to inflict heavy casualties upon the Federal Invasion force forcing the attacking force of 4000 men on 27 ships to abandon the attack and retreat to New Orleans. Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy stated : “Sabine Pass will stand, perhaps for all time, as the greatest military victory in

the history of the world.” (I presume that Jefferson Davis had not heard of such battles as Thermopylae.)

The residents of Houston, Texas made medals for the Davis Guards from silver Mexican pesos. A copy of a replica of the medal is set forth below:



William Jett apparently never married. In the Census of 1900 he is shown as being 56 years old (born in 1844) and roughly the same age as his first cousin Ransom. In the Census he is shown as living with his sister (and daughter of Absalom Jett) Louise Neyland who was 49.

Below is a photo of a grave marker put up by the State of Texas for William Jett in Jett Cemetery:



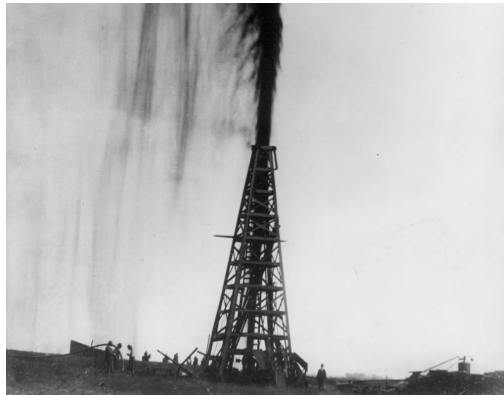
Below is a close up of that marker.



Goodbye Riches and Wealth

The title of this section is facetious and perhaps a bit unkind. Ransom after the war decided to relocate from the Cow Bayou area of Orange County. As a result he sold some of the land on which he resided at 50 cents per acre. Of course, no one knew that the Spanish land grants which the Jetts received had oil under them. Ransom sold his land for fifty cents per acre. Many years later on January 10, 1901, the Lucas gusher came in at Spindletop Oil Dome. This discovery of oil ignited not only an oil boom in Beaumont, Texas but in the world. Unknown to the Jetts and to the many pioneers in the Beaumont/Orange area, the land used for cattle and for farms was sitting on untold riches of black gold. The original land owned by John Jett now is owned by Gulf Oil and has a refinery on it.

Below is a photograph of the Lucas Gusher on Spindletop:

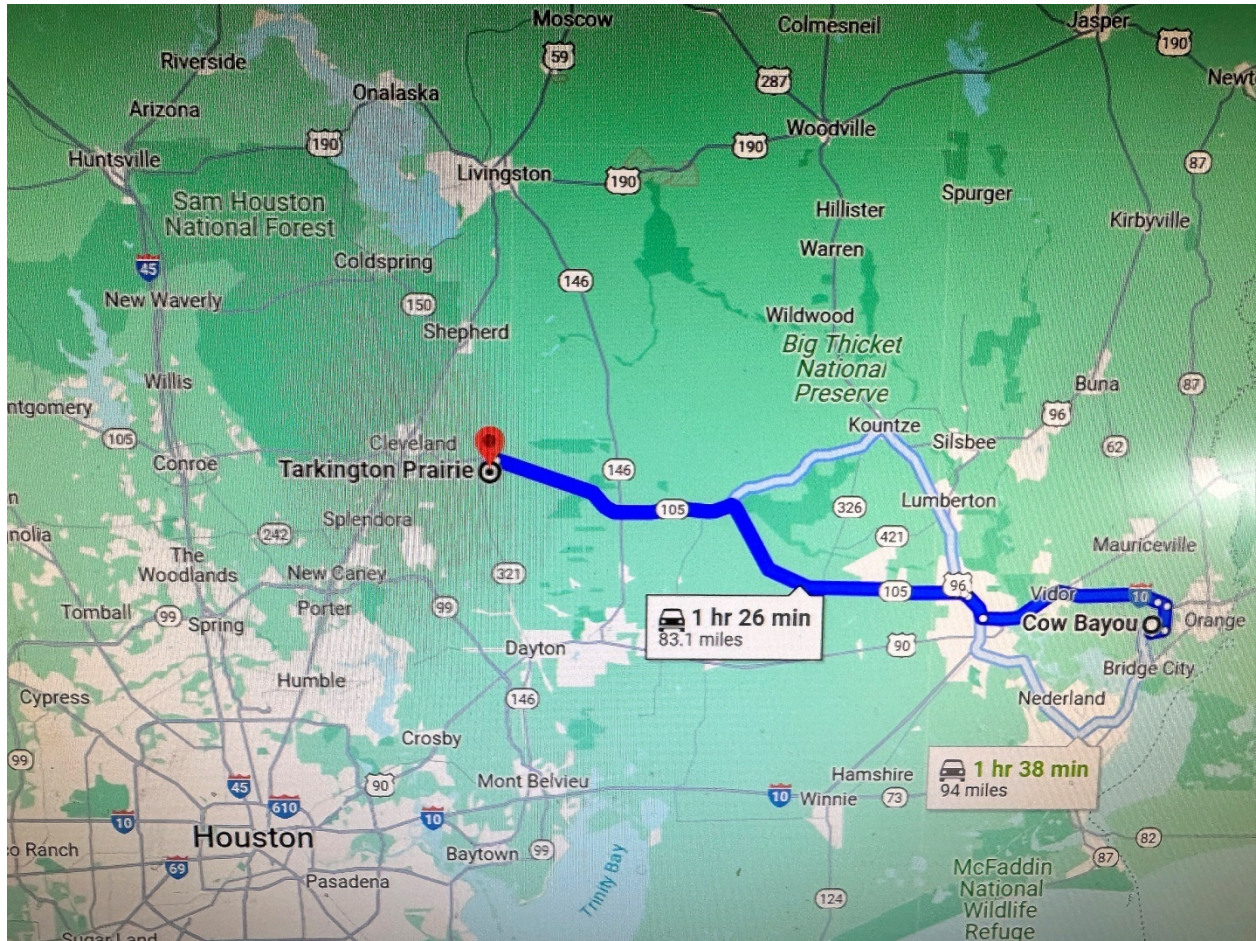


Lucas Gusher
In Spindletop Oil Field
Beaumont, TX

Our family always joked that Rance had lost the oil land in a poker game; however, there is no reason to think that such was the case. Instead, it was sold by Rance after the war and was used to support his family as they moved from the Cow Bayou area to another area that was considered better for farming and cattle raising. Ransom after the Civil War married and moved to Tarkington Prairie.

Tarkington Prairie

Below is a picture of where Tarkington Prairie is located and its location in relationship to Cow Bayou:



Tarkington Prairie is in Northern Liberty County, Texas. Our family would later move from Tarkington Prairie to Dayton, Texas and then to Liberty, Texas. James Jett who was a son of Stephen Jett and brother to the deceased John Jett, lived in Tarkington Prairie. Tarkington Prairie was named after Burton Tarkington who had come to the area from Indiana in 1827. One of the sons of James Jett, Barnabus, married a daughter of Booth Tarkington, Sarah.

Sometime after the Civil War, Ransom and his family, including his widowed mother Jane Jett moved to Tarkington Prairie.

Susan Young (LeJeune in French also lived in Tarkington Prairie was daughter of Stephen Jett and lived in Tarkington Prairie. Apparently, Susan was in Tarkington Prairie sometime before 1857 and was one of the founding members of Oak Shade Baptist Church.

Oak Shade Baptist Church is one of the early Baptist Churches in Texas. The family of Burton Tarkington were members. It was formed by two missionaries who settled in the area, David Fisher and B.I. Wright. The first pastor of the church was Austin Ellis (pastored from 1857-1860) whose family settled in Liberty County in 1836. The pastor in of Oak Shade Baptist Church in 1867 was D.D. Foreman who among other things helped rescue some of the Indians of East Texas from starvation and fever having organized a wagon train in 1851 to bring some of these Indians to Liberty County.

Ryan Cemetery is located at Tarkington Prairie and contains some graves of the Jett family including the grave of Ransom Jett, Jane Jett and her grandson John A. Jett. More about this later.

The Lives and Loves of Ransom Ferguson Jett

After the Civil War, Ransom married Mary Ann Winfree, who was the daughter of one of Ransom's neighbors, Abraham Winfree and his wife, Milly Arthur. Abe Winfree died on August 2, 1865 and Ransom and Mary Ann Polly Winfree got married on May 25, 1866. Ransom was 22 and Mary Ann Winfree was 26.

Mary Ann Winfree was born on November 2, 1845 and died on March 16, 1925. She was also one of my great grand-mothers.

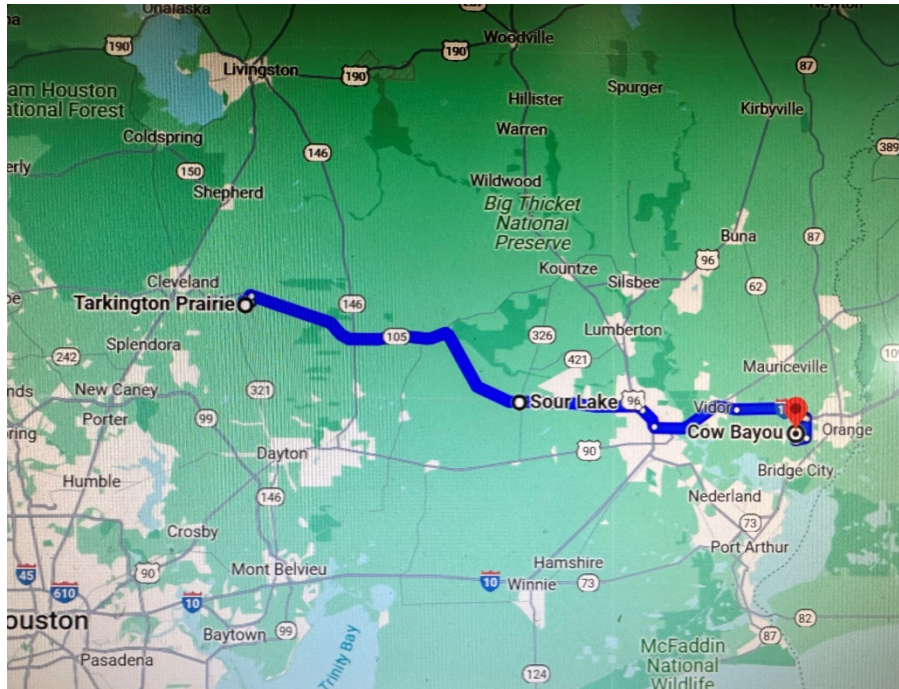
In the 1870 Census for Orange County, we find that Ransom was 27, Mary was 30, their daughter was Fanny was 2 and their daughter Ophelia was 6 months old. Rance's mother, who was 54, also lived with their family as did Mary Mays who worked as a housekeeper and was 20 years old.

A listing of the children of Ransom and Mary Winfree are set forth in the Notes to this chapter.

In the 1880 Census, Rance is still shown as being located in Orange County and shows his occupation as being a Farmer. A list of his family from the 1880 Census is shown in the Notes to this chapter.

To the best of our knowledge, Ransom was not a church-goer and Willis Warren, my grandfather, recalled times when he was taken to a bar and "cussed" for the entertainment of the patrons. Evidently Ransom was a handsome man and well-liked by most of the people who met him. However, not having the constraints of faith, he evidently began to seek for greener pastures as he became older in life. Ransom Ferguson Jett divorced his wife, Mary Ann Winfree, in 1897 in Liberty County. Although divorce was not unheard of, it was still a very rare occurrence at the time. Ransom's next actions were scandalous and talked about by the family in hushed tones for years.

On May 14, 1898, Ransom at 53 married, married Catherine ("Kate") Patterson Booth who was 42 at the time. Ransom and Mary Ann Winfree and their family had been living in Tarkington Prairie. However, Ransom's tale of chasing younger women is not finished yet. Ransom had no children by Kate Winfree. However, he evidently fell in love with Kate's daughter, Florence Emma Booth (b. 1889-d.1925). Ransom divorced Kate Booth in early 1900 and on February 11, 1900 when Rance was 55, he married Florence Emma Booth who was 19 in Hardin County where Sour Lake, Texas is located. Below is a map showing the location of Sour Lake, Texas in relation to Tarkington Prairie and Cow Bayou.



Meanwhile, Jane Swann Jett for a season continued to live with Mary Ann Winfree. In 1900, we find her living in Liberty County (where Tarkington Prairie was located) along with Fannie Jett (Age 32) and a school teacher, John A. Jett (Age 26) and a school teacher, Willis W. Jett, age 24 and a farmer, Ivy, age 21 and a housekeeper and Mabel age 19 who was a school teacher. Also living there was Jane Jett who at that point was 85 years old. In the same year, 1900, Rance was living in Hardin County at Sour Lake where he listed his occupation as a farmer and was renting a farmhouse. Also with him was “Emma” Boothe who at the time was 19 years old.

Ransom and Florence Emma went on to have five children with the last child being born when Rance was 65. The children born to Ransom and Florence Emma are enumerated in the Notes to this chapter. Mary Ann Winfree died on March 16, 1925 at age 85 and her grave stone is located in Huffman Cemetery in Harris Count Texas where she is buried next to her daughter Frances Ann “Fannie” Jett.



Mary Ann Winfree



Tomb of Mary Ann Winfree Jett
And her daughter Fannie Jett

Ransom Ferguson Jett died on April 17, 1928 in Sour Lake, Hardin County, Texas at 83 years old. His wife Florence Emma Boothe Jett died on January 12, 1958 at 76 years old. Both are buried at Pine Ridge Cemetery in Sour Lake, Hardin County, Texas. Below are some photos of the grave markers of Ransom and Florence Jett.



Grave Markers for Rance Ferguson Jett and Florence Emma Jett



Close up of Ransom's Confederate Gravestone
Showing he was part of Spaight's Battalion

Ransom's mother, Jane Swan Jett (and wife of John Jett) died on January 21, 1901 at age 86. She is buried at Ryan Cemetery at Tarkington Prairie, Texas in Liberty County, Texas. Her gravestone is shown below.



Tombstone of Jane Jett
At Ryan Cemetery
Tarkington Prairie, Texas

Although this chapter is about Ransom Ferguson Jett, the back story of his life is even more interesting. His mother Jane Jett suffered loss after loss as a pioneer woman. She saw her husband die on a cattle drive, and two of her three sons die in the early years of the Civil War probably from epidemics and disease. Her ability to support herself during the times was difficult and she was probably dependent to a large part on her relatives. In her last years, she saw her sole living son divorce his wife and then marry a younger woman and then divorce her, in turn, and marry her 19 year old daughter. Shortly after Rance's third marriage his mother died.

Rance, in my opinion, was endeavoring to cope with the issues of growing older and was not ready to "become old." However, enough said on that issue. The choices he made were considered scandalous at that time and perhaps even today. Our family line came through Willis Warren Jett who had been abandoned by his father and raised by his mother.

Rance's first wife, Mary Ann Winfree Jett, was left as a divorced woman, without a regular income and forced to raise a large family. As best we can tell, she did a pretty good job. Three of the members became early teachers in Texas. My grandfather became a fine Christian man and a well-known public figure who was loved by many in Texas.

Many of the descendants of Ransom and Florence also became fine upstanding people and did well in their lives as well. So perhaps as Shakespeare wrote, "All is well that ends well."

My study of Ransom and other Jett's provides with me with a number of lessons. Certainly the flesh is weak and all of us, both men and women, have choices to make and many of those choices are difficult. Further, it seems to me that right choices are hard to make without a deep faith . In a way it seems difficult for any of us to sail through life without leaving some damage behind us. We need prayer and faith to direct us in a good direction and to help us not to hurt and damage others. I think most of the men of our family can see a little of Rance in themselves. Finally, it is very easy to moralize when you have not seen your father and brothers all die at an early age and to be ever conscious of your own weakness and mortality. I am also well aware, that without Rance, I would not be writing this account today. All of that being said, men and women made choices. Rance's son W.W. Jett, although not covered in this book, made a number of good choices that entailed faithfulness to his family, loyalty to his God and service to his community. I hope that I can follow the example of W.W. Jett.