

Frontier Times



Henry Nowlin

*Devoted to
Frontier History • Border Tragedy • Pioneer Achievement*

February, 1948

Henry Nowlin Kerr County Pioneer

J. Marvin Hunter, Sr.

The Hill Country section of Texas mourns the loss of one of its prominent and highly respected citizens, Henry M. Nowlin, who passed away at his home in Center Point, Texas, on February 5th. He had reached the ripe age of 87 years and two months, and at the time of his death was the oldest surviving son of a pioneer Kerr county family.

To give some of the antecedents of Henry M. Nowlin, we must reach back into history and bring forth some of the family records, which reveal that James Nowlin came to the United States around 1700 from Ireland to escape religious persecution. It is assumed that he was a Catholic, because Ulster was then ruled by the Church of England. There were three Nowlin brothers who left Ireland together and worked their way across. It is said that they were in bonds for seven years, but they landed free men here and went right to work in the Colony of Virginia, where they landed. James, the younger, the first son of Bryan Ward Nowlin, (Henry M. Nowlin's great grandfather), was born in 1726, and married Lucy Wade in 1750. They had thirteen children. Richard Wade was the tenth child, and the direct ancestor of this branch of the family. Shirod Nowlin, the thirteenth child, died in the United States service at Norfolk, Virginia, in the War of 1812. Richard Wade Nowlin was born October 30, 1778, in Pennsylvania county, Virginia, and married about the year 1800, a young lady by the name of Celia Shelton, who was born in 1784 in the same county. They had fourteen children in all, the fourth son being James Crispin Nowlin, who was Henry M. Nowlin's father. All of these child-

ren grew up to marriageable age, and raised families. The family Bible shows that Celia lived to be almost one hundred years old, and attended the same church seventy-five years.

James Crispin Nowlin, of whom we shall now write at some length, was born April 16, 1817, and first married Miss Ann E. Johnson, in 1836. They had five children. She died in DeSoto county, Mississippi. James Crispin Nowlin married a second time on August 15, 1854, his bride being a young girl named Ann E. Gathings. She bore him five children. The children of the first marriage were Samuel H., Richard Wade, James Crispin, Jr., Lury and Mary (or Molly) Nowlin. The children of the second marriage were Daniel, Henry Moore, Claude, Kate and Dovie Nowlin. These children all attained marriageable age, and all left children, except Henry Moore Nowlin. The descendants of James Crispin Nowlin number more than one hundred and are scattered over the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific seaboard. It is also very definitely determined that a Nowlin, the orthography of whose name is the same as this, was or is of the same original stock.

James Crispin Nowlin's father, Richard Wade Nowlin, moved to Henry county, Tennessee, in December, 1821, and settled on Spring Creek, where he started a wheat and corn mill, apparently the first mill ever known in that section, people coming from as far as twenty miles to this mill. It was put up in 1822. Richard Wade Nowlin and his wife Celia made many changes of location during their lifetime. They left Virginia for the West in 1806, and went to Bedford

county, Tennessee, remaining there a few years; then to Logan county, Kentucky, where they lived for awhile; then farther west to Livingston and Caldwell counties, Kentucky; then on to West Tennessee, and to Missouri. They and several of their children died in Missouri, and Ray county, and are buried in the New Garden cemetery. Richard Wade died in 1850, and his wife, Celia, died in 1860.

In 1823 James Crispin Nowlin attended his first school, about three-fourths of a mile from his father's mill in Henry county, Tennessee. He complained of a very strict tutor there, who believed in "filliping" the children, a manner of punishment by thumping the child on the forehead. In 1834 he went to Hardeman county, where he lived with a brother-in-law, John Sneed, for one year, working for \$50 and three months schooling. In 1836 he made a trip to Mississippi, and worked two months in a dry goods store for a Mr. Curtis at LaGrange, Mississippi, when Mr. Curtis offered him a good salary to run a business for him at Yazoo City, but because of the unsuitable climate the young man did not accept the offer. On his return to Tennessee he helped his brother-in-law, John Sneed, to move to Kemper county, Tennessee. In 1837, he returned to Hardeman county, where he married the aforementioned Ann E. Johnson, and after her death in 1852 he married Ann Gathings, in 1854. They spent the first winter after their marriage in Missouri, where James Crispin killed enough wild geese with a large double-barrel shotgun to make several feather beds. This old shot gun is now on the Nowlin place at Center Point, Texas. In 1855 they came to Texas, first stopping in Gonzales county. They moved to Kerr county in 1856 to what is now the Naylor ranch, across the Guadalupe river, on the north side of its union with Turtle Creek. However, they went

to live in Kendall county, where they stayed until about 1875, at which time it was necessary to get their children into school. They moved to the present Nowlin place on the Guadalupe river, where they built their home, the family helping to erect the house, starting it in 1878. The original flooring and boards are still in the house.

In 1870, James Crispin Nowlin, having taken up the study of medicine and practicing to some extent, was appointed surgeon to a company of Texas Rangers commanded by John W. Sansom and stationed at Camp Verde. In the spring of 1871 the company was ordered to Fort Griffin, and soon after arriving there they went on a long scout to the head of Big Wichita river. In 1872 and 1873 Dr. Nowlin was in command of a minute company. In 1876 he was appointed physician and surgeon for Captain Neal Caldwell's company of Rangers. Dr. Nowlin lost stock while living on the frontier valued at \$13,000, and never recovered an animal from the Indians. He died at his home in Center Point in 1898, at the age of 82 years, and was buried in the Center Point cemetery. His wife passed away in 1925. They were one of the first families to settle in that part of the country, and held on despite Indian depredations. They reared their children to become upstanding, God-fearing, and useful members of their community. When they first settled in Kerr county, there were not many families in that section, but some of the first citizens were the Burneys, Rees, Coldwells, Moores, Connors, Riddleys, and others. Dr. Nowlin donated the parcel of land on which is now located the Center Point public school, and also the land on which the Christian church stands. He received his medical education in Memphis, Tennessee, which profession he followed until his death. There are many improvements still in existence on his beautiful old

home place, the tanning log he built, the rock fences and log fences built under his direction, and in the old home are a number of the cherished treasures of the old days, among them the saddle-bag in which he carried medicines and healing powders. The old spinning wheel stands guard in a respected corner, with many other revered things.

In the fall of 1865 Henry Nowlin's parents, Dr. and Mrs. J. C. Nowlin, with the assistance of kinsmen and hired men, gathered some of their accumulated horse stock and drove them from Kendall county, Texas, to DeSoto county, Mississippi, where Henry Nowlin's maternal grandmother, Mrs. Gathings, owned a plantation. His father had anticipated the ready sale of these horses, but that part of Mississippi had been ravaged by the war, so Dr. Nowlin distributed to his friends and neighbors there many of these Texas-bred horses. When they returned to Texas, his grandmother's family came with them, accompanied by loyal negroes who chose to stay with the family during the war and afterwards. One of the negroes, who was called Bill Gathings, had been the manager of Mrs. Gathings' lands, and after she had become established in Texas this faithful negro and his wife returned to Hernando, Mississippi. As a matter of fact, most of the land owned by Mr. Nowlin's grandmother was given this negro for a home. He is buried on the land and his grave is marked. It is said that during the Civil War, he was instrumental in hiding several bales of cotton in a creek and saved it from marauders.

In 1883 Henry Moore Nowlin, the subject of this sketch, joined his eldest brother, D. C. Nowlin, in Lincoln county, New Mexico. On the trip to New Mexico he was accompanied by George (Pid) Moore, a brother of Jack Moore, who was sheriff of Kerr county for many

years and father of the present Kerr county sheriff. Several others also accompanied him, but we do not have their names. D. C. Nowlin was at that time (1883) county superintendent of schools of Lincoln county, and also followed his profession as civil engineer. Henry Nowlin obtained a school at Old Lincoln Town in the winter of 1883. After his school term was completed, he served as jailor in the old Lincoln county jail. He returned to Texas in the spring of 1885. Due to diminishing range and barbed wire encroachment he gathered his horse stock in Kerr county and drove them to Lincoln county, New Mexico, where he arrived July 4th, 1885. With him on this trip was Neal Welborn, Jim Surber, Abe Piper, and others. Leaving Kerr county they followed the route from Fort McKavett to the Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos river, and made the drive without much trouble, grazing the horses along the route. All of these horses were held, broken and sold in New Mexico. Mr. Nowlin often told of an experience he had on one of these trips when he was driving a herd of horses to market. He had them grazing and suddenly some of them began acting crazy, and began to jump over straws as if they were ditches or gullies, and tried to jump over bushes, or seemed to want to climb trees. Some of their behavior was ludicrous and funny to behold, but it was really serious in its consequences. The horses had eaten the "loco" weed, which is found in parts of West Texas and New Mexico. He had to shoot some of his best horses.

His brother, Daniel C. Nowlin, had entered politics in New Mexico, and it was more or less a "political accident," as he said, that he was elected sheriff of Lincoln county. Conditions there at the time, just four or five years after the Lincoln County War, were turbulent, but on the whole, unromantic at

this time. Henry Nowlin served as his brother's office deputy. Captain Dan W. Roberts, former Texas Ranger captain, was the chief deputy, and Charles Perrey was riding deputy. Daniel Nowlin served two terms as sheriff and tax collector. At that time Lincoln county was the largest county in the United States. It was to be divided into other counties, and the two Nowlin brothers decided to quit politics for the time being, and perhaps move west again. Upon leaving office they used their influence to help elect Captain Roberts sheriff. Then they came back to Texas and resided in San Antonio for a short time. Later Daniel C. Nowlin moved on to Wyoming, where he had been in the early 1870's with a trail herd. Henry Nowlin returned to the old home at Center Point, Texas, and finding his father in failing health he decided to remain there.

Henry Moore Nowlin, the main subject of this sketch, was born December 5th, 1860, on Curry's Creek in Kendall county, Texas, the son of Dr. James Crispin Nowlin and Ann Elizabeth Nowlin. He was a resident of the Center Point community throughout his life, with the exception of the eight years spent in New Mexico during young manhood. He was elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 1900, and was re-elected in 1902, his district being the then 92nd Legislative District, composed of the counties of Kerr, Kendall and Bandera. The 27th and 28th Legislatures in which Mr. Nowlin served were considered to be among the ablest that ever assembled at the State capital. The 27th was during the last two years of Governor Saver's administration, and the 28th was in the first two years of Governor Lanham's administration. Many of the legislators of that period have held other important positions in succeeding years. Mr. Nowlin, although disagreeing with the majority of the legislators in

national politics, was personally popular, and ably represented his district and succeeded with most of his objectives.

Farming and livestock raising were Mr. Nowlin's chief pursuits, but he had engaged in other activities also. One of these was his association with the claims division of the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexican Railway for several years. He enjoyed a wide acquaintance in Southwest Texas, especially in the neighboring counties of Kerr. He was an authority on questions relating to the history of the counties of his section, and knew first hand much of the personal history of the families. Like his father, he was a kind man who loved children and animals. He was devoted to his family and on the death of his sister, Mrs. Kate McElroy, he took her young children under his care and practically adopted them, especially the baby boy, Jim McElroy. He was ever anxious to help the sorely tried in mind and spirit, and had a gentle, affectionate touch with animals placed in his care. Those who knew him best can see in their mind's eye the flocks of sheep and lambs following him around the place, and the little children who all loved him.

Saved By A Rattlesnake

N. H. Kincaid

All afternoon the two cattlemen, crouched in the cane brakes of the Pecos, had kept the Indians at bay. But the redskins' numbers had been increased to over a hundred now, and the men knew themselves to be completely surrounded.

They had left the Goodnight-Loving-Wilson herds two days ago in order to hurry on to Fort Sumner and bid on the government's beef contracts. But they had run into a big hunting party returning