

Fennell's diary. The coins are those used in Fennell's day as specie. On the left is one he might have used in New Orleans, a French Ecu, or "piece of eight." On the right is one he might have used in Texas, a Spanish "piece of eight."

An Englishman in "The Texian Service," 1835-1836

James L. Glass

The archives of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, contain the diary of George E. Fennell who came to Texas in 1835 to fight for independence and recorded his movements in a small 3½" x 5" notebook. While not of great historic import, the diary is interesting for two reasons. The first is that it contains a rare, if not unique, glimpse into folk medicine as practiced in North Carolina in the early nineteenth century. The first 18 pages of what Fennell called his "Memorandum Book" contain 11 "receipts" that were given to him by an "Indian Doctor" in December 1834, at Wilmington, North Carolina, in New Hanover County. Most of the plants and herbs used in the recipes are indigenous to the eastern United States and are not found in Texas. An examination of these medical remedies will be published by the North Carolina Folklore Society.¹ An annotated typescript can be found, with the diary, in the HMRC archives, Small Collection No. 88, Box 9, Folder 8.

The second interesting thing about the diary is that it gives us an eyewitness insight into a movement that was important to the Texas revolution: the influx of U.S. volunteers to aid the Texas army. Although that movement is central to an analysis of popular opinion in the South, as well as to an understanding of the military campaign, it was not as large as Texan apologists and Mexican historians would have us believe. Most of the U.S. volunteers died at the Alamo, Goliad or Agua Dulce. The army at San Jacinto was therefore composed primarily of Texas colonists; men who were already residents, or those who received land for their military service and became residents after April 1836. Fennell's diary gives us a clearer picture of the movements of the typical volunteer from the United States in 1835-1836.

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¹James L. Glass, "Eleven Folk Medical 'Receipts' from Nineteenth Century North Carolina," *North Carolina Folklore Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (forthcoming).

GEORGE E. FENNELLS²

Fennell was an itinerant salesman who came to the United States some time before 1834. He was born in Bury St. Edmund's, Suffolk County, England, on December 24, 1787, of good, Quaker parents.³ His father, Matthew, was also a salesman, and his mother's name was Sarah.⁴ He had two brothers, Phillip (b. January 31, 1783) and Richard (b. January 11, 1786), and two sisters who were both named after their mother. This fact indicates that the first Sarah, born on January 31, 1783 as a twin to Phillip, died in infancy. The second Sarah was born on June 9, 1784. After learning of the death of his brother Richard, as we shall see later, Fennell wrote a letter to a brother "Samuel," in which he conveyed his love to his "dear Sister Sarah." Either there was another brother whose birth was not recorded, or Phillip went by a middle name of Samuel. The fact that Fennell's reference to Sarah was singular reinforces the probability of the death of the first Sarah. The excellent penmanship and spelling in George's diary, plus his revealed skills at accounting and school teaching, give evidence that he was well-educated, above the typical level found in Texas at that time.

How and when he came to the United States is not known. His name cannot be found in available immigration and passenger lists of European ships. His movements and habitations are also a mystery, although his diary indicates that he was closely familiar with several families named Cowan, who were congregated around New Hanover and Bladen counties in southern North Carolina. He was in the employ of Thomas H. Cowan and came to Texas in a group of volunteers led by William Jones Cowan from Rowan County, North Carolina. The census records are silent,⁵ largely because the census years were 1830 and 1840, five years on either side of Fennell's known residence date. The 1820 census, however, lists a Thomas Cowan, between 26 and 45 years of age, living in Hanover County with one "foreigner not naturalized living in the

²Pronounced with the accent on the first syllable, according to usage in Suffolk County.

³County Archives, Suffolk Record Office, England. The Quakers, or Society of Friends, were founded in England by George Fox in 1668, and came to America in the seventeenth century. Because they were concentrated in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and rarely found in other parts of the country, George Fennell seems to have adopted Methodism in the United States.

⁴Sarah Fennell died in 1870, at an advanced age. In 1874, her friend and legatee, Sarah Ann Butt, formed a charity to provide homes for "respectable spinsters or widows in poor or reduced circumstances." These are known today as the Fennell Memorial Homes. Amanda J. E. Arrowsmith, County Archivist, Suffolk County Council.

⁵There is a George Fennell in the 1830 and 1840 censuses for New Hanover County, but it is the wrong man. The man listed is over 42 years of age, and has several children and many slaves, totalling a household of 37 persons. The man who wrote the diary was desperately poor.

household."⁶ This could have been Fennell, but his name is not recorded.⁷ He was 33 in 1820, an age compatible with that of Cowan.

Fennell started his journey which eventually took him to Texas on September 25, 1835, at 10:30 in the morning, aboard the British schooner *Nassau*. He was hired by Thomas H. Cowan⁸ to open a store in Selma, Alabama, in October 1835. Goods for the store were purchased by Cowan in Mobile, and arrived on November 7, 8 and 9, with Cowan arriving to supervise on the 8th. In Alabama, Fennell was friendly with other salesmen, clerks and entrepreneurs looking for opportunities. These included Robert Dorsey, Archibald Collins,⁹ John Stanley and Alfred Stanley, who owned a steamboat named *Velocipede*. Unfortunately, business was dismal or nonexistent. Other than an order for shoes on November 9, there were "no invoices" up to November 19, when the goods were "lying still on the counter." Cowan then sent Fennell on a trip to Mobile and New Orleans to drum up sales, but promptly lost his salesman.

After leaving Cowan, Fennell made no further mention of goods and their sale. He applied for a job as bookkeeper for a theatre owner in New Orleans, but it had been taken. Disillusioned and broke (his landlady took his best clothes in lieu of rent), he succumbed to the lure of \$8 per month¹⁰ and free land, and joined a party of men from Georgia who had volunteered to go to the aid of Texas in their fight against Mexico. The group left New Orleans on December 9, 1835, on the schooner *Santiago* which, after a "most tedious passage attended with much suffering," reached Velasco on December 19,¹¹ where Fennell began his Texas experience full of enthusiasm. He "resigned" from the group of Georgians after an unpopular officer was put in charge and joined the regular Texas army. This lucky decision probably saved his life, for

⁶*The 1820 Federal Census of North Carolina*, compiled by Dorothy Williams Potter, Vol. XXVI, New Hanover County (Tullahoma, TN: Dorothy Williams Potter, 1973), p. 46.

⁷Fennell's diary notes that when he was in Wilmington he "had no time to call on Frds. [Friends]," indicating that he lived outside the city.

⁸This merchant might possibly have been the same Thomas Cowan who lived with Fennell in 1820 (see n. 6). Or he could have known Fennell in Wilmington. He may have returned to North Carolina after his business efforts proved fruitless, for Thomas H. Cowan is listed in the 1840 and 1850 censuses as living in Rockey Pt., New Hanover County.

⁹An Archd. Collins is listed in the 1830 Alabama census as living in Jackson, Alabama.

¹⁰Receipt in the Auditor's Records of the Texas State Archives: "Received of W.C. Hudson a draft in my favour for twenty-four Dollars, my pay for three months service in the army of Texas in full, ending 16th June 1836, he acting for the Auditor. June 22d 1836. (Signed) George Fennell (Rubric)." Confirmed by Auditor, A. Brigham, No. 89, Texas State Archives, Austin, Texas.

¹¹For more detailed account of the actions, training and state of mind of the volunteers at Camp Fannin in Velasco, see James A. Creighton, *A Narrative History of Brazoria County, Texas*, Brazoria County Historical Commission, 2d. ed. (Waco: The Texian Press, 1976), pp. 120-123.

the Georgia battalion was annihilated with Col. Fannin at Goliad. He was discharged from the army on January 17, 1836, and moved aimlessly through the country, taking such odd jobs as tending bar and teaching. He reenlisted on March 16, after he heard about the Alamo, in time to join Sam Houston on his march to San Jacinto. Before he left, he gave instructions that his papers and documents were to be sent home in case of his death, with a letter to his executor. This was an intelligent action, because — warfare aside — the average man's life expectancy was about 48.1 years (up to 1900), and Fennell was already 49 years old.

The last entry in the diary reads: "Left with Mr. Cornelius Smith my pocket Book . . . my Memorandum book — & 'The book of Reference and Treasury of Knowledge' . . . to keep . . . in his possession until call'd for . . . with a letter . . . to Wm. McAllis . . . to be sent to him in case of my death."

THE DIARY

Fennell's penmanship was large for the small size of his book, and he resorted to abbreviation extremes. Where some questions may arise, footnotes have been added. We pick up his diary on December 9, 1836, when he left New Orleans for Texas with the Georgia Battalion.

* * * *

Dec. 9th 1835 reached the mouth of the Mississippi on the night of the 10th. inst. & proceeded next day down the River to the Balize¹² & reached the mouth of the River Brassos¹³ in Texas on the 19th. dec. — after a most tedious passage attended with much suffering — Landed at a place called Velasco, joined here by 2 other Companies of Georgians & formed into a Battalion under Capt. W.

¹²The Balize was the chief station of pilots at the mouth of the Mississippi. Two eyewitnesses describe it as follows:

" . . . a cluster of huts called the Balize, by far the most miserable station that I ever saw made the dwelling of man, but I was told that many families of pilots and fishermen live there." Mrs. Frances (Milton) Trollope in *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, ed. Donald Smalley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 4. "From this wretched place — planted in the midst of a boundless swamp or morass — no firm land is in sight, or is within 50 to 60 miles of it. There are about 20 buildings in all, six of which are dwelling-houses. The intercourse between them is carried on exclusively along paths made of planks and trunks of trees laid over the slime in water." *Ibid.*, n. 2, citing Basil Hall in *Travelers in North America* (1829).

¹³People in a new country are faced with a requirement to communicate. In Texas, in 1835, the Spanish name for this important Texas river was "Brazos" with a "z". The soft Spanish pronunciation, to an Anglo ear, was almost exactly "Brassos", and it was thus recorded on maps from the late 1700s to the mid-1800s.

Ward appointed our Major¹⁴ proceeded to a new encampmt. 4 miles up the River on the 24th. dec. (my birth day) now under the command of the Texian Officers — 25th dec. Christmas day — 26th. — 27th Sunday — to Thursday 31st. Friday 1st. Jany 1836. Monday 4th. wrote a letter to Wm. McAllis of Wilmington No. Ca.¹⁵ dated dec. 30. last — (7th.) wrote T H Cowan this day — I took them both to Velasco — Gave Cowan and Allis instructions how to address me & write immedy. put these two letters the same Eveng. on board the Durango as she was going out to Sea — Being like many others, dissatisfied with the conduct of our Officers I with many more the same Evening, quit the Columbus Volunteers under Capt. Wadsworth¹⁶ & joined the Regular Army under Lieut. Chaffin¹⁷ for 2 years or during the War. Abt. this time the Officers came down from the camp & committed violence on some of the Men for leaving the Volunteer Corps — 1 Man was kill'd & others severely wounded — The whole of the Battallion was order'd up to Bell's Landing¹⁸ — 12 Miles above Brazoria — The Regulars march'd to a place call'd Columbus where we

¹⁴Major William Ward, a native of Macon, Georgia, helped recruit and organize the original three companies of Georgia volunteers. See Walter Prescott Webb, ed., *The Handbook of Texas*, (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1952), Vol. II, pp. 861-862.

¹⁵North Carolina.

¹⁶William A. O. Wadsworth, Captain, First Company, Georgia Battalion. "Captain Wadsworth's Company was organized at Columbus, Georgia, [James Walker Fannin, Jr.'s home town], and its actual arrival in Texas preceded by a few days that of Captain Ward's large company from Macon Georgia. Concerning Captain Wadsworth little more has been gathered than that he had more trouble holding his men than did any other captain of permanent volunteers." Herbert Davenport, *Notes from an Unfinished Study of Fannin and his Men*, Brownsville, Texas, June 1, 1936, Texas State Archives, Austin, Texas. Captain Wadsworth, as head of Fennell's group, survived Goliad, survived the battle of San Jacinto, and lived to marry into Mirabeau B. Lamar's family. His Military Service Record No. 113, for services to March 27, 1836, contains a certificate that entitles him "to pay from the date of last payment made to him, to 27th March, 1836, as Capt. . ." He entered the service of the Republic of Texas on the 24th of October 1835. Branch Tanner Archer, Secretary of War, Texas State Archives, Austin, Texas.

¹⁷Chaffin, James A., served in the Texas army from December 19, 1835, to September 6, 1836. Like Fennell, this was his second enlistment. In the Comptroller's Military Service Record (CMSR) #987, it is certified that he served in the army from September 28 to November 23, 1835, just before Fennell met him in Velasco late in 1835. He resigned with Fennell and reenlisted, also with Fennell, to serve from December 19, 1835, to September 5, 1836. He received a headright certificate on February 1, 1838, for one-third league of land in San Augustine County, plus a 320 acre bounty for fighting at San Jacinto. Chaffin got all the land coming to him, and ran a bar in San Augustine until his death in 1879. He was in Houston in 1840, to collect his pay from the War Department for military services to March 27, 1836. CMSR 113: Thomas G. Gordon for Branch Tanner Archer, Secretary of War, Texas State Archives, Austin, Texas.

¹⁸Bell's Landing was named after Josiah Hughes Bell. See *The Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, p. 533.

staid till next Morning — Col. Fanning¹⁹ — having arrived at Brazoria — took the Command & order'd us down again to Velasco — we Embark'd in the Stm. Boat Laura — & got there at Night — The Regulars sent across the River to McKinney's place called Quintanna — where we Encamp'd Thursday 14th. Jany — still here waiting Orders — F. 15th Saty 16th. Sunday 17th. Jany 1836 — This day at Velasco, we declared ourselves free & independent²⁰ of the Mexican Government — and hoisted the Flag of Liberty at Velasco — the device of which is — the word "Independence" in large Characters extending across the top in white letters — with a white Star on a blue ground on the upper Corner next to the Staff & horizontal Red and White Stripes throughout the remaining part²¹ — Arrived today the Steam Boat Yellow Stone from N. Orleans with a number of Volunteers, fired Salutes in honor of the day — left the Army this day by the free consent of our Officers — Lieut. Chaffin (who gave me up my Enlistment paper) & R. Rutledge²² — Both of whom resigned their command — Monday 18th. — sold my Trunk for \$1 — & made a bag & pack'd away all my clothes & call'd on Jim!²³ Chaffin who discharged me in full from the army — started by myself this Eveng a little before Sun Set for Matagorda — Next Morning Tuesday 19th. arrived at the crossing at Bernard River 12 Miles from Velasco, & in the Evening a little before Sun Down, cross'd the River — after laboring on board the Steam Boat Laura & camped same Eveng on the beach 20th. ul²⁴ — in the Morn'g proceeded on & arrd. at the

¹⁹Col. James Walker Fannin, Jr., see *The Handbook of Texas* Vol. I, p. 582. For a different view of Fannin and also a reference to his illegal importation of slaves, see Alex. Dienst, "The Texas Navy: Legislation and Letters of Marque," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XII, pp. 184-186.

²⁰This is simply the enthusiastic response of the assembled volunteers, and not an official declaration.

²¹This design cannot be reconstructed in color, because Fennell neglects to identify the color of the background behind the word "Independence." This is *not* the Johanna Troutman flag of Velasco that was sent overland by stage to Columbia, and thence to Velasco in hopes of avoiding the possible intervention of the Mexican Navy.

²²Richard Rutledge came to Texas as first, or orderly, sergeant of Captain Wadsworth's Company, and was one of the men who "transferred" out with Fennell. He went to Captain Ticknor's Company as third sergeant, after January 19, under the command of Captain William Ward. Rutledge escaped the massacre at Goliad by separating from Ward's command, with a party of seven men, to look for water. His military service record, No. 198, shows that he drew pay for the period of December 20, 1835 to April 1, 1836, and was therefore not at the battle of San Jacinto. He later fought with General James Davis in San Patricio County in 1842. Documents from 1838 and 1842 were notarized in Houston, indicating that Rutledge may have settled nearby. Texas State Archives, Austin, Texas.

²³Fennell seems delighted at no longer having to address Chaffin by his rank.

²⁴Fennell mistakenly wrote "ul", the abbreviation for "ultimo", meaning the preceding month, rather than "inst.", the abbreviation for "instant", meaning the present month.

next crossing when I attempted to swim & cross the curr't.²⁵ but found it impossible — contd. here to strive to pass until nearly famished with hunger & sleeping on the beach until Friday 22 January 1836 — the 23 Jany without a drink of water for most of the time when I was accidentally discover'd by Lieut. Castro²⁶ & 2 others & retaken across the River to the House I first arrived at, occupied by Doct. Appleby²⁷ & his family & most hospitably we contd. there under their kind protection (S 24th. (M 25th) understd. that the Columbus sail'd from Velasco yesterday with 140 Volunteers for Copano — the Invincible gone in to take off the remainder of the Troops — Tu. 26th. — W. 27th. left this place situated at the Mouth of the Bernard River 12 Miles from Velasco & proceeded in a Boat with another Man in compy. up the River — Encamp'd 2 Nights on the beach going up & on Thursday 28th. arrived at Mr. Bell's Landing²⁸ where I was comfortably dined — same Eveng. arrived at Mrs. Lynch's²⁹ Farm — & after an excellent supper & spending a very agreeable Evening retired to a good bed. F 29th. stop'd & took breakfast & proceeded by My self in a Skiff to Mr. Cowan's³⁰ — 5 Miles above (Mrs. Lynch was sick in

²⁵Current.

²⁶No mention can be found of Lt. Castro in the land or military records of the Texas State Archives.

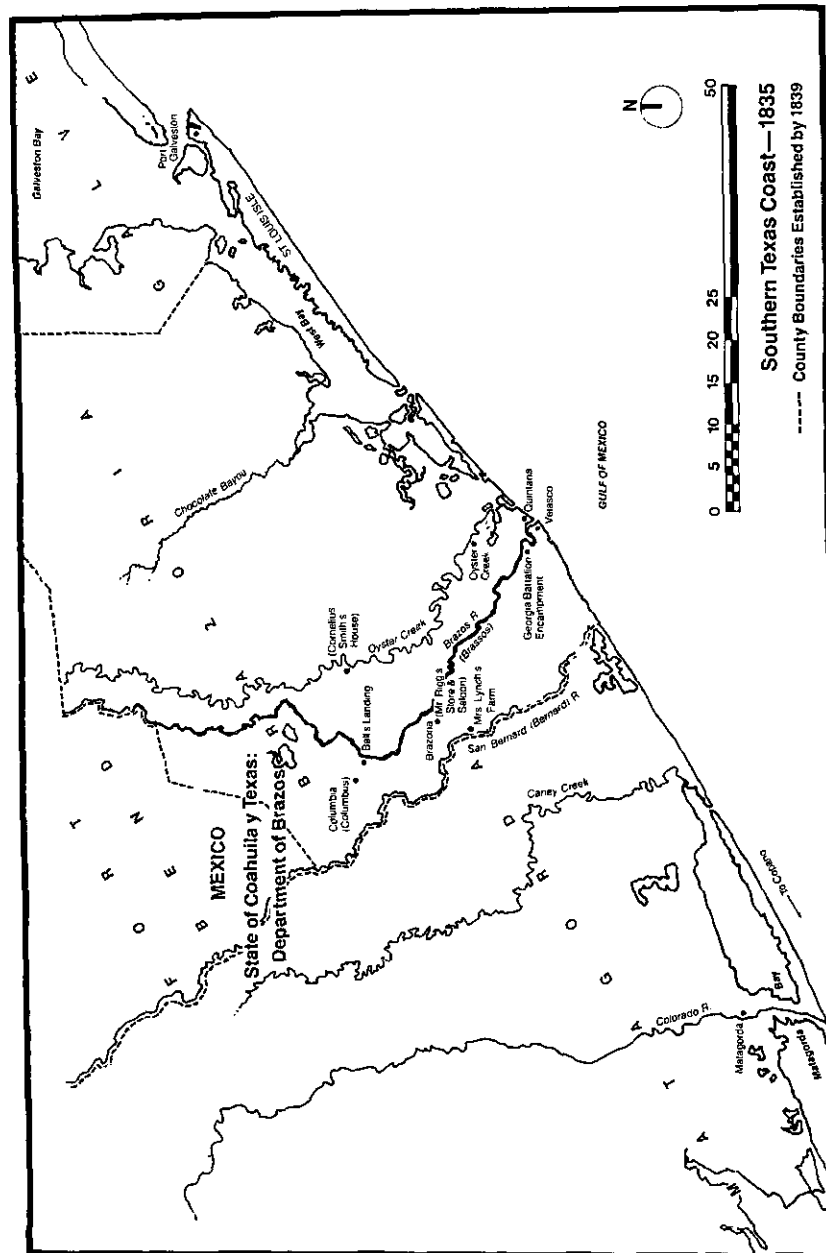
²⁷No record of Dr. Appleby can be found in the Brazoria County Archives.

²⁸Josiah Hughes Bell, one of Stephen F. Austin's original three hundred colonists, developed a plantation on the Brazos River in 1823 that was called Bell's Landing. In 1824, he laid out a town there, named Marion, but the name of Bell's Landing persisted. It later became known as East Columbia when Bell's settlement on the prairie became West Columbia. See *The Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, p. 533.

²⁹Nancy Lynch, widow of Nicholas Lynch, lived on the western end of William Cummings' grant (July 21, 1824) on the San Bernardo River, by consent of the sympathetic owner. No mention of a daughter can be discovered, but her sons are listed as W.C.C., Alvin and Ichabod. Cemetery lists reveal a Parthenia Culberson Lynch, buried in the Confederate Cemetery in Alvin, Texas, who was born on July 10, 1825 and died on October 29, 1915. She would have been 10 years old at the time of Fennell's visit, but would not have had a last name of Culberson. There is no record of her marriage, and Culberson might have been her middle name. After Mr. Cummings' death, his administrator, Pleasant D. McNeel, as guardian of Cummings' only son Samuel, legally ratified Mrs. Lynch's possession of the land (four hundred acres) by conveying it to her in a decree of October 25, 1839. Deed Records of Brazoria County, Book A., p. 326, dated November 15, 1839.

The old Spanish records, No. 167, indicate that Nicholas Lynch, age 41, and Nancy Lynch, age 45, came to Texas from Alabama on March 22, 1828.

³⁰It is odd how the name of Cowan keeps cropping up. William Jones Cowan, Rowan County, N.C., led Fennell's battalion of Georgia volunteers and died with Fannin at Goliad 59 days after this diary entry. The Cowan noted here is probably J. B. Cowan, who was a wagon maker "at his plantation on the Bernardo, three miles from Brazoria." *The Texas Republican* (Brazoria newspaper), September 19, 1835.



Map reproduced by the author showing principal places mentioned in George Fennell's diary.

bed but found her family consistg of a daughter & 3 sons remarkably kind & hospitable) S. 30th. got to Mr. Cowan's this Eveng — & was hospitably recd. (he is fm Bladen Co. No. Ca. — Brother to Genl. Cowan³¹) Sunday 31st. rainy — contd. here this day & pass the time in conversation very agreeably. Monday Feby 1st. left & walk'd to Brazoria 3 Miles — attended the Election³² & voted on the Independence Ticket — Tu 2nd. until Satdy. 6th. nothing important —except this day I engaged with Dr. Hiram Riggs³³ — as Bar Keeper for \$20 pr. month exclusive of Board which he agrees to furnish me & lodging also —observe by the Orleans "Bee" of the 18th. Jany — that the Brig Durango having my two letters on board³⁴ arrived at New Orleans — in 9 days from Velasco being on the 16th of Jany — rec'd \$5.75 for services of Riggs & left him in about 10 days & engaged myself from the 1st March to teach a school at Cornelius Smith's House³⁵ at Oyster Creek 12 Miles from hence @ \$15 for his own Family per Mo. board lodging & washing included — nothing worth noticing occured while in Brazoria — say to the last of Feby. March 1st. At Oyster Creek keeping school at Mr. Smith's with 4 scholars — This day the Convention of Delegates met & unanimously declared the Independence of Texas on the 2nd. inst.³⁶ — Thursday 18th. March — nothing from last date to

³¹No mention of a General Cowan can be found. Muster rolls of North Carolina militiamen detached for service in the war of 1812 list several Cowans, but only one, Richard, is an officer. Fennell may be referring to Col. Robert H. Cowan, who owned the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad Company that was destroyed by fire in April 1845. Col. Cowan settled in Wilmington sometime between 1810 and 1830, and was listed in the censuses of 1830, 1840 and 1850.

³²This was a straw vote taken to guide the do-nothing Provisional Government, under the leadership of Henry Smith and James W. Robinson, in deciding between the "war party" (for independence) and the "peace party" (for *rapprochement* with Mexico). The Provisional Government ceased to function in March 1836. (Brazoria is a town in Brazoria County, but Angleton is the county seat.)

³³Hiram Riggs owned a bar in partnership with Edward Jeffrey in a house on 3½ acres of land owned by Jeffrey and John S. D. Byrom. It was known as lot 6, block 5, and was purchased from F.W. Johnson on December 14, 1830. Riggs bought out Jeffrey on June 7, 1837, two years after Fennell worked as bar keeper. Brazoria County Deed Records, Book A., p. 127.

³⁴These letters, to his former employer and his executor, were obviously important to Fennell. They cannot be located in the Wilmington library or the North Carolina Archives.

³⁵Cornelius Smith was one of Austin's "Old Three Hundred" original colonists. He was married to Elizabeth B. Smith, and they had five boys and four girls: Mary, Margaret, Lutricia, William R., Henry, Gaines, Wesley, James and Elizabeth. He was a farmer. Presumably, one of Fennell's "scholars" was the mother, but unfortunately she remained illiterate until her death, and her legal documents were signed by her mark, an "X". Cornelius died circa 1849, and Guren Hinds was the executor/administrator of his estate, for which service he received \$604.25 on May 29, 1849. District Clerk's Office, Brazoria County. Probate File 486.

³⁶After the Provisional Government strangled itself in February, the Convention of 1836 met at Washington (on the Brazos River) on March 1 and framed the Texas Declaration of Independence.

notice excepting an unfortunate acct.³⁷ of the fall of Sn. Antonio by the Mexicans & the whole garrison kill'd — The Mexicans having previously lost according to statements fm 400 to 500 Men in attempting to take it — Friday March 19th. 1836 — This day relinquish'd keeping School, in order to proceed to join the Army — left with Mr. Cornelius Smith my pocket Book — containing my brothers letters to me from England — also — my Memorandum book — & "The book of Reference & Treasury of Knowledge" — with a letter addressed to him to keep them in his possession until call'd for — also with a letter address'd to Wm. McAllis at Wilmington North Carolina to be sent to him in case of my death —

* * * *

The remaining pages in the book contain notes of expenses, miscellaneous purchases, and costs (as for tobacco, etc.), an incomplete reference to "my wyfe," a notation of a "Camp Meeting — commence on the first day of October," and a reference to Oyster Creek in 1840. The latest date decipherable is 1847. The inside back cover bears the inscription "ASW & GE Fennell — Oct. 21st. 1835 — Wilmington, North Carolina." The end of Fennell's diary leaves us frustrated. Here is a man carefully settling his affairs, walking out to war, and slamming the door in our faces. The scribbled notes at the end of the diary provide sufficient evidence of his survival, but where did he go, and what did he do?

An uncanny coincidence has turned up in a letter, also unpublished, from Fennell to his brother in England. It fills in some missing links and provides further details that round out a picture of a long and rewarding life. The letter was written from New Orleans on November 14, 1836 to Samuel Fennell in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk County, England, and was sent by ship to Liverpool. From it we learn that Fennell fought at the battle of San Jacinto, and this leads to military service records, land and deed records, and biographies.

But first to the letter. Its discovery was uncanny because the revelation of its existence came from its former owner at precisely the same time as when the diary was being resurrected and transcribed for this article. The coincidence also lies in the fact that both documents, written by a man who lived in other states and other parts of Texas, and who even sent one of them overseas, have

that was well-known beforehand and delivered to the Convention by George Childress. It was declared on March 2, when the delegates to the Convention began arriving to sign it. Immediately afterward, the Convention also formed an *ad interim* government and named Sam Houston commander-in-chief of the military forces.

³⁷Account, not "accident".

wound up in different repositories in the same city. The letter is in the Texiana Collection, San Jacinto boxes, Special Collections Department, at the M.D. Anderson Memorial Library at the University of Houston, University Park. It was a gift of Frell Albright and is in the Ola Albright Memorial Collection. A typescript with the letter reads as follows:

To Samuel Fennell Esqr.

The above space is left open intentionally by me, for you to draw the Bill of Exchange in my favor, due me by the Will of my deceased Brother Richard Fennell & to be made payable to Messer. Thomas Toby & Brother³⁸ Merchants in New Orleans whom I appointed my lawful attornies to Act in this case.

George Fennell (Signature)

New Orleans

Nov. 14, 1836

New Orleans Nov. 14th 1836

Dear Brother

On the 12th last I had the pleasure to learn that you had replied to my Letter written probably last September Twelve-months — the reason why I have not obtained intelligence sooner of your doing so, is, that shortly after that time, I left North Carolina & proceeded to New Orleans, where, I was disappointed in meeting with business & pursued my projects to Texas, & joined the Volunteer Army under Genl. Houston against Mexico — Much severity & hardship was endured by a harassing Life of Camp-Duty, fatiguing Marches & occasionally want of Food — until the Struggle was ended for that Campaign on the 21st April last by the Battle of San Jacinto, in which we were signally successful — leaving nearly — 700 dead on the Field & taking about as many more prisoners, including

³⁸Thomas Toby & Brother was legally named Toby and Brother Company. Tom was simply the best known. He and his brother Samuel were made the official purchasing agents for the Republic of Texas in 1836, which meant that they were authorized to be banking agents for Texas to obtain money for the Republic's obligations, to purchase supplies, and to sell 500,000 acres of land at fifty cents an acre, with subagents in eastern cities. With this kind of leeway, and this kind of reputation with government officials, it was only natural that Fennell went to them, both to firm up his land claim and arrange for the necessary funds. This firm is mentioned many times in the primary sources of the period.

their President, Genl. Santa Ana [*sic*], Gos [*sic*; General] Cos, Col. Almonte & many other distinguished Officers — The Mexicans were well armed, possessed the *material* & were very superior to Ourseles [*sic*] in discipline, but so sudden was our charge on their Lines — That they instantly gave way — which account for the immense havoc made among them by Our Army — a little over 600 strong, in the course of 15 or 20 minutes — Our loss in Killed was nothing in comparison — 10 or a dos. Killd & afterwards died of their wounds & I think about 20 Wounded. Among whom was our brave Genl. Houston³⁹ Himself whose Horse was shot under him — So much for the Battle of San Jacinto & its consequences, which, accompanied with a hundred incidents, could enable me to fill this sheet on a subject — But I know how painful it is to your feelings⁴⁰ to learn that I should have been there & engaged in such business — Providentially for me altho exposed to all the inclemency of Weather, walking Sentry night & Day & weeks on a forced march thro' the wilderness & wild Prairies, with the burthen of my Gun & Accoutrements [*sic*] of at least 40 pounds weight — Yet with all this I don't remember experiencing one hour of sickness during that six months Campaign — By joining the Army at that time, I became a Citizen of Texas & am entitled to a third of a League of Land. *Mexican Measure* 1111 Acres besides 320 Acres of Land for being engaged in the Battle of San Jacinto, as a Bounty — the Scrip for which is now in my possession — I obtained an Honorable discharge from the Army of Texas on the 18th June last & a Letter from Mr. Burnett [*sic*] (Then President of the Republic) acknowledging my Rights to Citizenship, & on the 5th July arrived in this City —

³⁹Historians are now more closely examining the role of Sam Houston in the battle of San Jacinto, and correctly point out that a number of contemporary sources, close to the time of the battle, draw Houston's character in a less than favorable light. Perhaps the most charitable conclusion that can be reached would be to describe him as less than enthusiastic about fighting Santa Anna's army. There are convincing arguments on both sides: Houston's own writings in early 1836 demonstrate a strong will to engage the enemy. These, however, could reflect the canny politician's knowledge that they would later be made public. On the other hand, Houston's detractors published sworn statements signed by officers who were at San Jacinto and indicating a definite lack of will, even to the point of cowardice. These could reflect an animosity from potential political rivals. In any event, here is a contemporary opinion by a journeyman soldier who thought, before all the rumors and accusations started flying, that Houston was a "brave" general.

⁴⁰Regrettably, Fennell's sensitivity for his Quaker brother's convictions against violence has robbed us of a "hundred" eyewitness anecdotes about the battle.

It is true, I have since my return supported myself with Credit, but am sorry to inform you, without a permanent situation, & as it is extremely expensive living in this City, I stand in need of all the aid of my Friends — I *sincerely* beg to be affectionately remember'd to my dear Sister Sarah, & Relative & Friends generally — & with *sincere* fraternal regard to You

Remain Your Brother Sincerely

George Fennell (Signature)

Bro — You discover this a mere scrawl [*sic*] — as such — I apologize for the tautology of expression — but indeed its all & truly sincerity — P.S. Since my first Letter of which this is a mere echo, I have the satisfaction to believe that Texas is approaching to the high standard of Republican Sovereignty [*sic*], which I pray God — she may sustain — Commissioners from the City of Mexico have been sent to the Government of Texas — for special purposes & as the liberation of Santa Ana is their object, the probability is we shall thro' the assistance of our very good friend Genl.⁴¹ Jackson, effect an understanding — with the Mexian Flag. our Force is always ready to take the Field — & the moment they make the attempt, our men under their gallant Commanders, will set them at naught. Once more my Love to Sister Sarah & beg her to remember me.

Geo Fennell

I beg you to reply soon & address me to the care of Thos. Toby & Bro — Merchants — New Orleans. [Outside]

I have written one Letter which I send by way of Liverpool dated November 21st. It has New Orleans written above on the blank — but you can easily remedy the error by cutting it off & then you have plenty of room to fill up a Bill of Exchange for any amount *lou please* — adieu

GF''

⁴¹After the battle of San Jacinto, General Santa Anna was sent to Washington, D.C. for an interview with President Andrew Jackson.

G. Fennell

To Samuel Fennell Esq
 The above paper is left open intentionally by me for you to draw the
 Bill of Exchange in my favor, draw me by the Title of my deceased Brother Richard
 Fennell & to be made payable to Messrs Thomas Toby & Brother
 Merchants in New Orleans, when I appoint my lawful Attorneys to Act in
 his Case

New Orleans
 Nov: 14: 1836

G. Fennell

New Orleans Nov: 14 1836

Dear Brother
 On the 13th inst I had the pleasure to learn that you
 had written to my sister written probably last September - The
 reason why I have not obtained intelligence sooner of your doing so is that shortly
 after that time I left North Carolina & proceeded to New Orleans, where
 I was disappointed in meeting with business & pursued my Prospects to
 Texas. I joined the Volunteer Army under Genl Houston
 against Mexico - Much service & hardship was endured by a long
 list of Camp duty, fatigues Marches & occasionally want of Food
 until the struggle was ended for that Campaign on the 21st April last by the
 Treaty of San Jacinto in which we were equally successful - Having
 nearly 700 dead on the spot & taking about as many Prisoners
 including the President Genl Santa Ana, Genl Cos & Almonte

Letter of George E. Fennell to his brother, Samuel Fennell, dated November 14, 1836, from New Orleans.

A more complete picture of Fennell begins to emerge. We learn that his military experience so casually mentioned in his diary, was hard and severe. We learn, also, that he was not a man prone to exaggeration. His offhand estimates of numbers and casualties correspond closely to those given by Sam Houston, although Houston's figures are sometimes disputed. Compare them both:

	Houston ⁴²	Fennell
Length of battle	18 minutes	15-20 minutes
Mexicans killed	630	700
Texans ⁴³ killed	8	10 or a dozen
Texans wounded	23	20
Soldiers in Texan army	783	600

Another coincidence in this astounding chain of discoveries gives us Fennell's paycheck dated June 23, 1836. It is also in the Ola Albright Memorial Collection at the University of Houston. He received it from James D. Owen, army paymaster for the Volunteers, and immediately took it to H.C. Hudson, Controller for the Republic, in the Capitol at Velasco and received his pay of \$24.00. His military service record, No. 527, shows his tour of duty as being from March 16 to June 16, 1836, and he is on the muster roll of Company I, First Regiment of Volunteers, Lt. Colonel Henry Millard commanding. Company I was on the right flank of the Texas forces at San Jacinto. Fennell's prior service, recorded in his diary from January 7 to January 17, is not credited in his service record.

For his service he was awarded Bounty Land and he tells us that the scrip for it was in his possession in November, after his return to New Orleans. His movements after the battle can only be guessed. He received his paycheck on June 23, and cashed it on the same day. He arrived in New Orleans on July 5 and went to Thomas Toby & Brother, appointing them as his "lawful attorneys." He may also have stopped off at Cornelius Smith's house on Oyster Creek to pick up his personal possessions. On November 12 he received a letter from his brother that had been written to him in Wilmington and forwarded to New Orleans. It was probably from this letter that he learned of the death of his brother, Richard. When he replied on November 14, he pencilled in an

⁴²Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker, eds. *The Writings of Sam Houston*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1938), Vol. I, 1813-1836, p. 416.

⁴³Beginning in 1837, the legal name of people living in Texas was "Texian", to counteract such a variety of appellations as "Texassians", "Texonians", or "Coahuiltejanos". Note Fennell's use of "Mexian" instead of "Mexican".

authorization to reimburse Toby that Samuel Fennell could sign and return. He must have been informed of the size of his inheritance (25 pounds sterling), for the authorization was for that amount, to be paid to Toby through Messrs. Harding & Company, London bankers. This action freed Fennell from having to wait in New Orleans until a reply came from London. He seems, however, to indicate that he intended to stay in New Orleans; that the living was expensive, that he was supporting himself with credit while seeking a "permanent situation."

Records of Fennell's ownership of 1,111 acres "*Mexican Measure*" cannot be discovered in the Texas State Archives or the General Land Office. His Bounty Land Certificate for 320 acres, however, can be verified. He apparently sold his grant to James Brent Clark on July 18, 1838, the date of Bounty Warrant No. 3963 for 320 acres made out in Houston by George Washington Hockley, Secretary of War for the Republic, to "J. Brent Clark, assignee of Geo. Fennell." Notations in the diary indicate that he was in Oyster Creek in 1840, and perhaps as late as 1847, although no geographic reference accompanies that date. The historian Louis W. Kemp, who co-authored the book *The Heroes of San Jacinto* with Sam Houston Dixon in 1932, left his papers to the Manuscript Collection of the Texas State Archives. They contain a note that reads: "Mr. Fennell probably left Texas shortly after receiving his discharge from the army since he did not apply for a headright or for the donation land due him for having participated in the battle of San Jacinto. [We now know from his letter that he did apply and received the grants.] Bounty Certificate No. 3963 . . . had been previously assigned to B. Clark." When the book was published, however, he changed the story and wrote that Fennell "settled in Brazoria County after the revolution, and remained there until at least August 1, 1840. On November 4, 1854, he and his wife, Sarah Ross were living in DeWitt County. On that date they sold a tract of land situated in Brazoria County to Thomas K. Davis."

Mr. Kemp was correct the first time and partially right the second. Fennell did leave Texas, but returned to live in and around the Oyster Creek and Harris County region. The confusion over the DeWitt County connection resulted primarily from the slight distinction between the nineteenth century handwritten *T* and *F*. A clerk in DeWitt County, in the 1850s, had the habit of sometimes — but not always — adding a fillup to the curl on the end of his *T*'s, making them look exactly like *F*'s, and it was a George Tennell who married Sarah Ross and lived in DeWitt County at the same time as James Brent Clark.⁴⁴

⁴⁴James Brent Clark figured significantly in another episode of Texas history, in the case of Santa Anna vs. J. Brent Clark, First Judicial District Court of the State of Louisiana, July 24, 1837. Clark had acted as a pawnbroker in accepting a diamond shirt stud for a pledge of 60

In any event, Fennell eventually wound up back in Wilmington, North Carolina. Records in the Office of Register of Deeds of New Hanover County, of which Wilmington is the county seat, show that Fennell died there sometime in mid-1868, at the age of 81. They also show that he was married to a black woman named Margaret Ann Hoster. A deed conveyed by his executor, Richard H. Grant,⁴⁵ bequeathed his property — a portion of block 195 in Wilmington — to his widow and also guaranteed her freedom, testifying that "Whereas the said George E. Fennell, in order to enable his said Executor to carry into effect his intentions of liberating and setting free his wife Margaret [sic] Ann, did in and by his last will and testament, authorize and empower his said Executor to make sale of all his Real Estate and to give the proceeds arising therefrom to the said Margaret Ann, and Whereas the said Margaret Ann, by virtue of the law subsisting is free, Slavery having been abolished in this state."⁴⁶

The serendipitous discovery of all of the documents relating to George Fennell has enabled us to form a more personal portrait of the man and his times. Born into a religious family, Fennell received a good education and followed in his father's footsteps as a salesman. He left England for unknown reasons and settled in North Carolina. He experienced the Texas revolution as it was felt in the United States and as it happened in Texas. After leaving Wilmington his stagecoach from Augusta, Georgia, passed through Milledgeville and Macon at the exact moment when William Ward and the Troutmans were organizing the Georgia Battalion. He was in Montgomery, Alabama, when James Butler Bonham was practicing law and putting together the Mobile Greys for his old school chum, William Barret Travis. He was in New Orleans just weeks after both units of the New Orleans Greys had left for Texas, and when the city was hot with "Texas Fever." And he was on

piastres. A redemption note had been given to Ramon Martinez Caro, a native of Havana and former secretary to the Mexican President, Santa Anna, on October 13, 1836, in French, and signed by Clark. It turned out that Caro had stolen the button from his former boss and got what he could for it. Santa Anna found out, and sent General Gabriel Nunez to investigate the matter at Thomas Toby and Brother. Nunez hired a lawyer named Buchanan to try to get the button back after Clark refused to give it up. The court found for Santa Anna, and Clark was forced to return the "breast pin," together with three hundred dollars in damages and the attorney's fees. See Ralph E. Dittman, M.D., "What Price a Button?", *The Advance* (San Jacinto Museum of History Association), Vol. 2, No. 3 (1982), p. 2.

⁴⁵Deed No. 522, State of North Carolina, County of New Hanover, dated and registered on June 18, 1868.

⁴⁶It is also possible that Fennell was involved in the "underground railroad" efforts during the Civil War to smuggle slaves out of the South. The facts that he was raised a Quaker, that smuggling was largely under the direction of Quakers in Pennsylvania and the Carolinas, and that he was married to a black woman, make the supposition irresistible.

board the very ship that carried James Walker Fannin Jr., William Ward, Burr H. Duval and the 200 men of the Georgia Battalion and the Kentucky Mustangs to their deaths in Goliad and Agua Dulce. It was an age of revolution and Fennell was exposed to it all. His formative years, from the ages of five to twelve, were lived in a world filled with the intrigues of the French revolution, and he was just across the English Channel. George Washington died when Fennell was 12 and Fennell fought with Valley Forge veterans at San Jacinto. When he was 25, the War of 1812 broke out, and one might speculate on that conflict as being the reason for Fennell's journey to America. Mexico revolted against Spain when Fennell was 35, and Thomas Jefferson died four years later. And he lived through the Texas revolution and the Civil War. Five wars in a lifetime, with an average of 15 years of peace in between. The early part of the nineteenth century was a hard time in which to live and George Fennell lived through it with determination, contribution and grace.