

Gone to Texas

Christine S. Berkland, M.A.

October 2009



DOLores W. REED
11855 Turquoise Ct.
Fountain Valley, CA 92708

Gone to Texas

Wanted! Colonists! Spanish communities in Tejas needed people to serve as a buffer between the French and other intruders and New Spain. Missions with priests, presidios with soldiers and civilian communities were the Spanish solution for settling large and distant areas at the least cost. Impresarios, who were land agents working on behalf of the Mexican government, led the first colonists from the United States to Tejas. The most successful was Stephen F. Austin, an accomplished Spanish linguist, who brought 300 families to his colony. Several other impresarios, like Green DeWitt and Martin De Leon, secured land grants and brought groups in from the United States and other foreign countries as well.

These first settlers followed their dreams to Tejas for the promise of land and new opportunities. Land grants to new settlers of Stephen F. Austin's colonies were made available by the Mexican government to encourage colonists to settle their country. By taking an oath to (1) obey the federal and state constitutions, (2) practice Catholicism, and (3) prove their morality and good habits and establish residency, these settlers could then become Mexican citizens. Many settlers continued to follow their American customs and religious practices.

The settlers, usually from the southern states, brought their cultural practices and ways of living on the land, in hopes of making a new start in the "land of milk and honey." They would put Gone to Texas, or GTT, on their doors or wagons as they headed west. John Yancy Criswell Sr., his wife Mary Eleanor Vannoy, and their eight children (ages 16 to 1 year), emigrated from Barbourville, Knox County, KY, in 1829. Traveling overland by wagon by way of Missouri State, they moved to Texas as members of Stephen F. Austin's Third Colony. They crossed the Sabine River into Texas on 29 Nov 1830, and arrived in the township of Matagorda, TX, in early 1831. John was inspired by the opportunities he saw in Texas, and he came to stay.

In Raleigh Criswell's 1986 book, *Criswell Family Among Early Settlers and Heroes of Texas History*, we have Exhibit E 1, a letter from John Y. Criswell Sr. to Col. Stephen F. Austin dated 18 Jun 1831. The original is held in the University of Texas Archives as part of the Austin Papers. He states that he moved a long way into Austin's colony from KY by land by way of Missouri State and he was "not being pleased with that country," so with his wife, six sons and two daughters he asks for League of Land "no 11." He had bought some town lots and settling there would please him well as he could get timber from there by water. His trade is that of a blacksmith. JYC observes "I am not wealthy, but can say to you I come to this Country Clear of anything Debt or Bad fame." He also says that if he cannot be accommodated with that League he expects to go into DeWitt's Colony to be suited with a League.

The John Yancy Criswell Sr. family, from whom we are all descended, now consisted of John Y. Sr., his wife, Mary Eleanor Vannoy, daughter of William and Mary Vannoy, who went by the name of Eleanor; Leroy Vannoy, age 17; William Vannoy, age 15; Candace, age 14; Mary Jane, age 13; James Henry, age 8; John Yancy, Jr., age 6; Joseph E. age

3; and Andrew Jackson, age 1. John Yancy Criswell Sr. was accommodated with the League number 11 that he wanted, on the west bank of the Colorado River, Matagorda County, TX. Heavy rains those first falls must have made farming difficult. Also, the Colorado River flowed outside its banks. After living on the land the required three years, they moved to higher ground in Fayette County in December 1834. There, they settled in Woods Prairie near Woods Fort, the fortified residence Zadock Woods constructed in 1829. They lived in an area harassed by the Comanche and Tehuacana Indians. The Criswell log cabin was probably located on a rise of ground about 200 yards from the current Old Plum Grove Cemetery on the eastern edge of West Point, TX.

The early settlers buried their dead on their own property, usually on a hill in or near a grove of trees. Information handed down from generation to generation indicates that Eleanor Vannoy Criswell was not involved in the flight known as the Runaway Scrape, which occurred in the spring of 1836. It is not clear exactly when Eleanor died, but is thought to be in early 1835. Hers was the first grave in the cemetery.

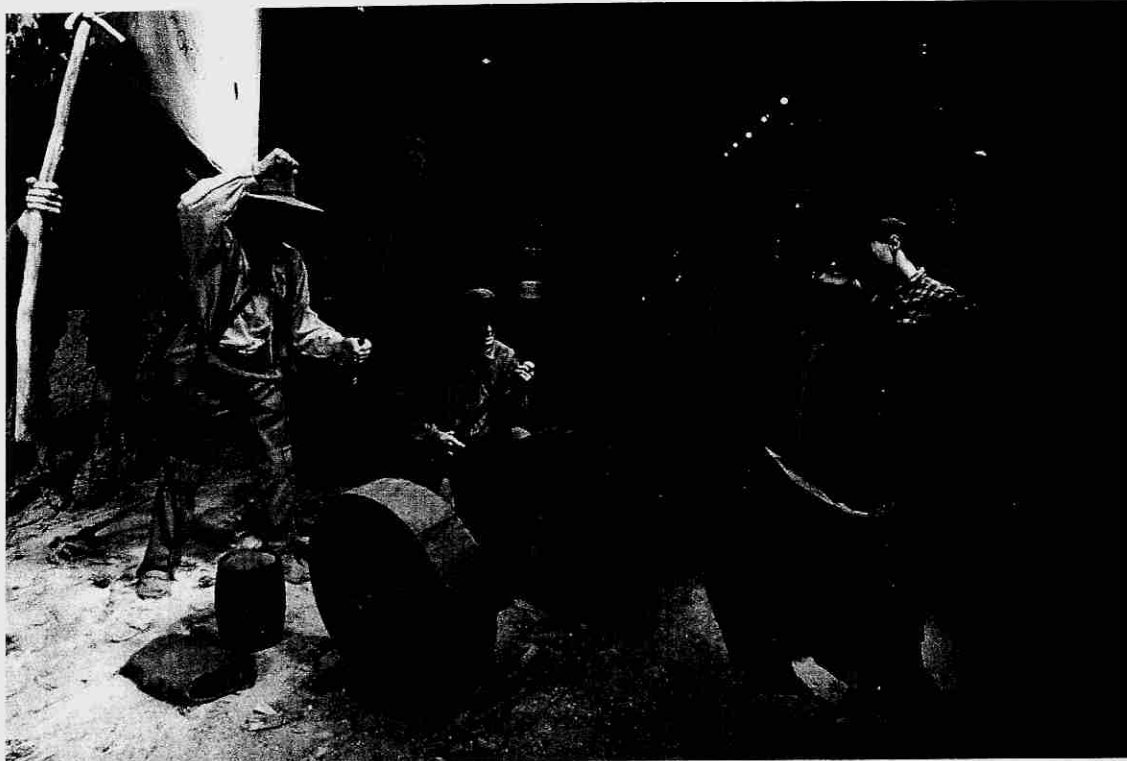


A contemporary stone; note the "S.F.A. Third Colony"

In July 1835, John Yancy Criswell Sr. joined Col. John H.

Moore to go to the aid of Capt. R. M. Colean's Company, which was being attacked by Indians as they were on a mission of peace with the Tehuacana Indians near Parker's Fort. He was a soldier, as well as a planter and blacksmith.

Life was hard, but through hard work and perseverance, early settlers began to develop a regional sense of identity. If they worked hard, were smart and tough, and got a little bit lucky, there were endless possibilities. Settlers agreed to be citizens of Mexico when they came to Tejas because it was a part of the Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas in the 1820's and early 1830s. The situation in Texas was similar to that prior to the American Revolution. Foreign encroachments, Indian warfare and insurrectionary activity all contributed to demographic and economic collapse. Desperate Spanish authorities authorized Anglo-American colonization in an effort to bolster the province and so produced a new set of problems for the Mexican authorities who soon replaced them in 1821.



Leroy and William Vannoy Criswell fought at the Battle of Gonzales, the first battle of the Texas Revolution. This is a diorama in the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin, Texas. Note that the signal cannon in dispute wasn't that large. But the battle was more about freedom and independence.

The Siege of Bexar de San Antonio was the first major campaign of the Texas Revolution. From October to early December 1835, an army of Texian volunteers, including Leroy Vannoy Criswell and William Vannoy Criswell laid siege to a Mexican army in San Antonio de Bexar. There were several skirmishes, and the Texians captured one cannon, resulting in the Mexican army establishing defensive position in the town. Morale was getting low on both sides as the weather was getting colder and the Texian army suffered departures. But they also got reinforcements from East Texas and the United States. There was debate whether to attack. Leroy had received his honorable discharge 24 Nov 1835. However he remained at the camp near Bexar. On 5 Dec 1835, he heard the call from Col. Ben Milam, "Who will go into San Antonio with Ben Milam?" Leroy Criswell did. He and about 300 other volunteers joined Col. Ben Milam's Battalion. Leroy witnessed the death of Col. Milam on the third day of the hardest-fought battle of the Revolution, Dec. 5 - 10, 1835. Leroy was later to name a son, Milam Criswell, after his commander. Col. Ben Milam fell, and hope faltered.

But the Texians prevailed after the hard-fought battle, and the Mexican army withdrew to the south. Most of the Texians, including Leroy and William, went home after the battle, which left San Antonio and all of Texas under their control. The Mexican army sustained many more casualties and rode away in defeat, largely because of the greater accuracy

of the Texan's rifles. There is no record that William was wounded. They both have a discharge date of 13 Dec 1835. On 27 Dec 1835, William and Leroy Criswell issued a draft to cover expenses during the last quarter of 1835, as follows:

The provincial Government of Texas to Leroy and William Criswell; Sept 1835, 3 lbs coffee bought of Tatum & Lee, \$1.00; 5 lbs. sugar bought of Lee - \$1.00; Oct 4, 5 lbs. of sugar bought at Gonzales \$1.00; cash paid out for sapp and corn meal at St. Antonio .75; December 27, two dollars paid a doctor at Gonzales \$2.00, Total \$5.75.

The money was paid to John Y. Criswell Sr. assignee.

Both Leroy and William Vanoy dropped the second "n" about this time, according to Billie Beth Moore, Criswell cousin and Daughter of the Republic of Texas. Leroy was the one who got wounded and needed a doctor. Since he and his family were in the Runaway Scrape, "he didn't have much time to do any serious recovering," Billie Beth wrote in a personal communication.

Criswell Support of the Battle for Independence

On many occasions, the Criswells were called upon to provide food and members for the Texas Volunteer Army. John Yancy Criswell, Sr., served as a private in the Army of Texas in the first regiment of the Texas Militia from 7 Feb to 7 Mar 1836. The first line of defense was Goliad in the south, St. Antonio de la Bexar in the north. Fayette County, where the Criswells lived, was just behind the line of defense.

The Criswell family provided provisions for the Texian Army with receipts signed by, among others, Daniel William Cloud. The following is a document that has been on display within the Alamo Shrine, San Antonio, TX:

Feby 11th 1836

This is to certify that we in behalf of a squad of volunteers traveling to St. Antonio being out of provisions called upon John Y Criswell who fed us in his own house with his own provisions for the night and next morning breakfast, eight of us two meals @ .25 cts. Say five dollars for which the government will no doubt remunerate him We being authorized to draw on said gov. for provisions.

M. Autry
D. W. Cloud
Agents for Squad

The above squad of men perished at the Alamo in March 1836. As 18 movies have been made about the story of the Alamo, we will omit it here. Suffice it to say, about 189 brave Anglos and Tejanos resisted the 13-day siege in a small mission church

against overwhelming odds and were crushed by the Mexican forces of General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. Texian heroes included Davy Crockett, William Barret Travis, James Bowie, James Butler Bonham, all names which grace schools, cities and counties across Texas today. Thank the Lord that neither Leroy Vanoy Criswell nor William Vanoy Criswell were at the Alamo, for Leroy was at home in Fayette County recovering from wounds suffered at St. Antonio de la Bexar, and William did not re-enlist until 24 Mar 1836.

The Runaway Scrape

Many Fayette County families joined the Runaway Scrape after the fall of the Alamo. Even in February 1836 families in San Patricio and other counties fled from their homes as Santa Anna's forces advanced. Some had left in January. General Sam Houston arrived in Gonzales on 11 March 1836 and decided to retreat to the Colorado River.

When this news, along with that of the fall of the Alamo, reached Fayette County, many families there set out on a flight towards the Sabine River. The flight was marked by lack of preparation and panic caused by fear of both the Mexicans and the Indians. Some groups even went into Louisiana. Leroy Vanoy Criswell accompanied his father and younger members of the family while "moving out of the way of the advancing Mexican Army" known as the Runaway Scrape in March and April 1836.

As the Reader Rail in the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum explains,

Civilians Flee, March 1836: As news of the fall of the Alamo spread, thousands of terrified settlers abandoned their homes and ran from the threat of the Mexican army toward Louisiana. The retreat became known as the Runaway Scrape. At Lynch's Ferry at the mouth of the San Jacinto River, more than 5,000 people waited to cross the rain-swollen river, their belongings loaded into wagons, ox carts, or sleds. The government also fled, moving from new Washington on the Brazos River to Galveston, where it narrowly escaped capture by Mexican troops.

John Yancy Criswell, Jr., relates in an article for the La Grange Journal on 20 Dec 1888, 52 years after the fact, the harrowing tale published in the Third Section of David Palik's "Historical Genealogy of Criswell/Creswell Family" of September 2009. One factor is worth pointing out, as JYC writes, "Mrs. O. Fitzgerald and Mrs. Gorham are the only two women that I knew of, who was in our crowd, that was anything like grown." Leroy was wounded from the Siege of Bexar, William re-enlisted and was fighting in the War. There was no mother to help JYC Sr with six children move "out of the way of the advancing Mexican army" with hostile Indians in the path. Candace had to assume her late mother Eleanor's role.

The Criswells crossed the Colorado River at neighbor William Barton's place by floating family members and light possessions across on beef hides sewn together, but were turned back by Comanche Indians. When they were able to get further into southeast Texas, Alabama-Coushata Indians gave them safe passage through their lands and gave them food.

A few from Fayette County went in wagons. Some who didn't have wagons went in ox carts or on sleds of some sort, all drawn by oxen. Some rode horseback. Those who had no transportation, walked, some carrying their clothes on top of their heads. Sometimes they waded in mud up to their shoe-tops, and sometimes up to their knees.



Leroy Vano Criswell, wounded from the Siege of Bexar, helped his father and six younger members of his family move "out of the way of the advancing Mexican Army." Comanche Indians attacked them, but as they got further into southeast Texas, other Indians gave them food and safe passage.

Household items were floated across the rivers. Larger children helped to carry smaller children. There was much sickness and disease.

Many a man sent his family along with others while he joined the army. Others served on detached duty wherever needed. Some were ordered by General Houston to go along with the women and children to protect them. After reaching a safe distance, some of them left in time to participate in the Battle of San Jacinto. Others arrived after the 18-minute battle was over.

Families were carrying their most precious household possessions, but even these became too heavy after days of travel. A silver teapot owned by a family from Gonzales was buried in the mud by the bank of the Brazos River, and dug back up when the news of the victory at San Jacinto allowed them to go home in peace. Many had no home when they returned.

The Battle of San Jacinto

William Vanoy Criswell re-enlisted in the Texas army on March 24, 1836, and was assigned to Capt. Jesse Billingsley's command as a private. William was with General Sam Houston as he led his tired men for days, away from the enemy. He came to a fork in the road. East, and he would be leading them towards the United States and possible help from its army. South, and they would be headed towards battle with General Santa Anna. Without a word, he pointed south. A loud cheer broke out among his men.

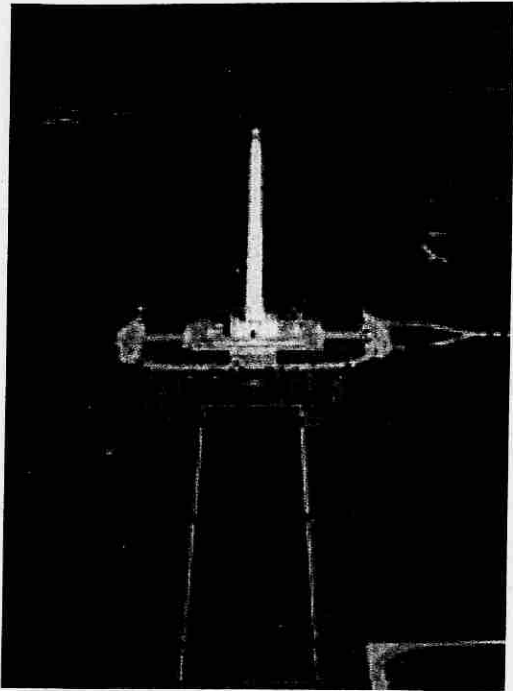
What power rises up from the blood of martyrs! Texians were outnumbered, out-armed, out-trained. But everyone there wanted nothing more than to fight. War seemed to be the only way towards peace. Facing death now, was the only way to life.

The Mexican army was taking a siesta on the afternoon of 21 April 1836, or so the legend goes. Though the rebels attacked on an open plain in broad daylight, Santa Anna was taken completely by surprise. On a slight rise by the San Jacinto River, Mexican's finest soldiers and the Texan rebels met. Santa Anna may have even been with the Yellow Rose of Texas; if you read the words to that catchy tune, it may be about more than you think. The Mexican Army was engaged in battle. With yells of "Remember the Alamo!" and "Remember Goliad!" the rebels roused the Mexican army in 18 minutes. The Texian heart prevailed.

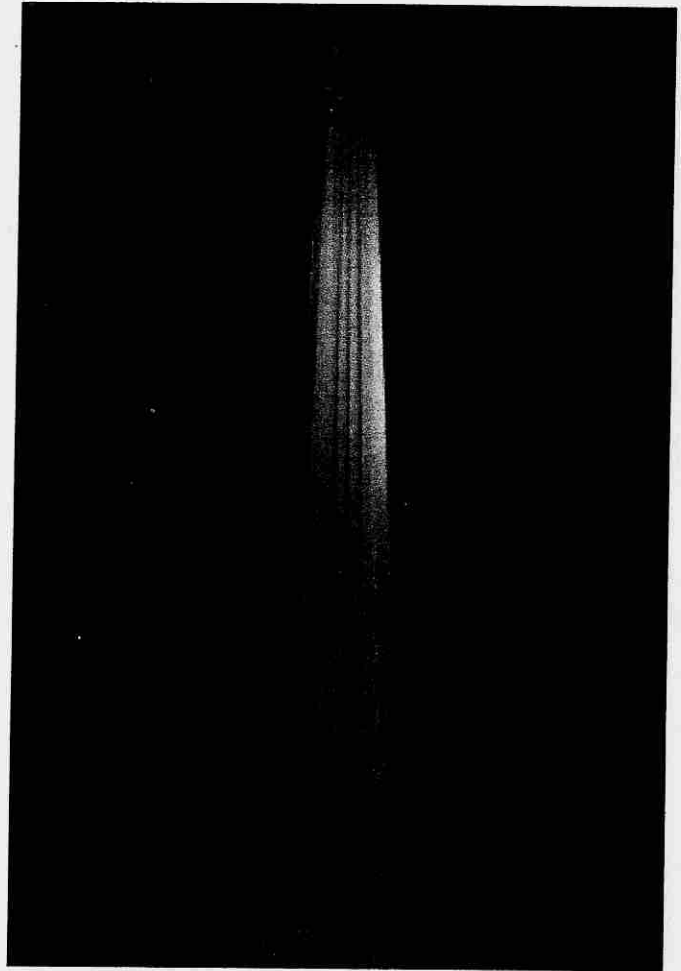
The Mexican army lost 630 men; nine Texians died.

But Santa Anna was nowhere to be found. He escaped the battlefield in a private's uniform. The Texans persevered until they found his own men calling him, "El Presidente!" "El Presidente!" Santa Anna was brought to the large oak tree where General Sam Houston sat, wounded in his leg. General Santa Anna signed the Treaties of Velasco, which ceased and desisted the fighting, retreated the Mexican Army to the south and gave away a third of Mexico. The Republic of Texas was born.

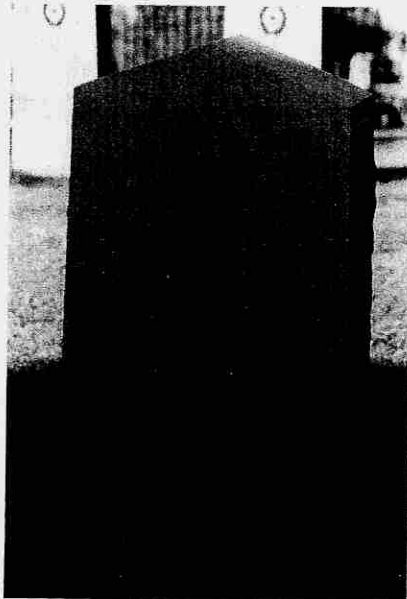
William Vanoy Criswell was not home in Fayette County to help his family move "out of the way of the advancing Mexican army." He fought at the Battle of San Jacinto. Even though his company suffered the most casualties, one killed and six wounded, he suffered no wounds. William was discharged 27 Jun 1836, a hero of the Texas Revolution.



The San Jacinto Monument in La Porte, Texas, memorializing where William Vanoy Criswell and the Texian Army prevailed and the Republic of Texas was born. Yes, it is bigger than the Washington obelisk in Washington, D.C.



At the time of the celebration of the centennial of the Republic of Texas, in 1936, WVC's remains were dug up from his cemetery near Praha, TX, and moved to the Heroes of the Texas Revolution section in the Texas State Cemetery in Austin, within spitting distance of the statue of Stephen F. Austin.



Headstone Text

William Vanoy
Criswell

A San Jacinto Veteran *
Born in Kentucky, April
15, 1815 * Came to Texas
in 1830 * Died in Fayette
County, January 19, 1858

Erected by the State of Texas
1936

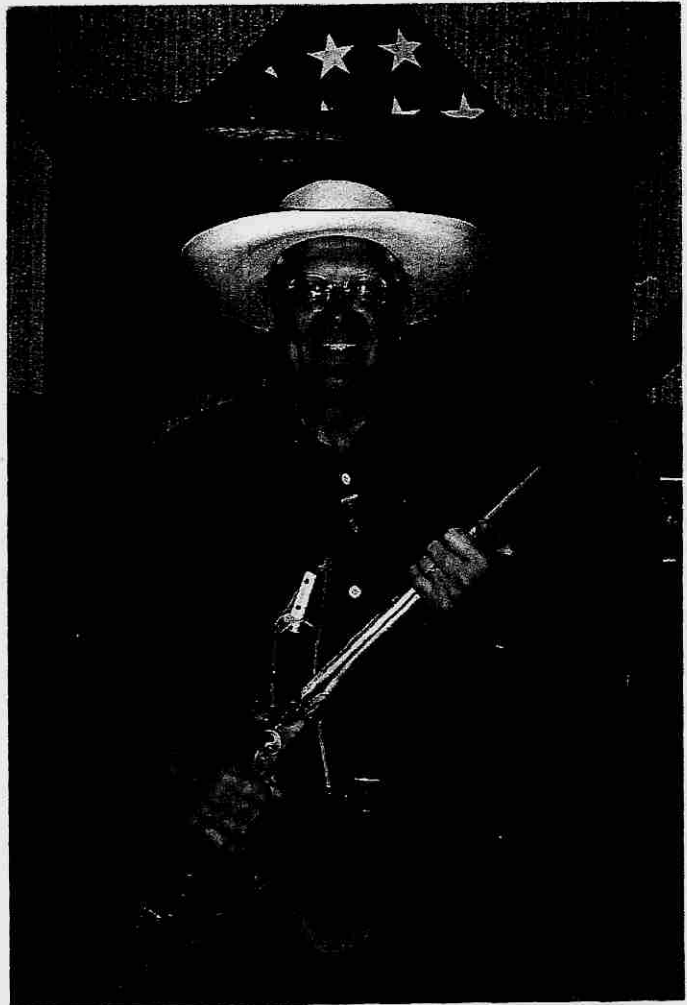
Erich Bloch is a Criswell cousin who as a soldier represents William Vanoy Criswell for the annual Battle of San Jacinto re-enactment. We were going to see this re-enactment last April 24 on a grassy field near La Porte. I called him to make sure that we could meet up. Erich had driven up from Corpus Christi to find that the "battlefield" was entirely under water from recent rains. We were very disappointed. Maybe next year we can see it.

The Republic of Texas

The Republic of Texas was born with the signing of the Treaties of Velasco, but problems began right away. General Santa Anna was allowed to return home to Mexico City, where he was supposed to get ratification of the Treaties he just signed. But he was shamed in his own country, having lost a major battle and the whole of Texas. Mexico never officially recognized the Republic of Texas at this time, although the United States, France, and England did.

Mexico thought the boundary of Tejas and Mexico was the Nueces River, and the Republic of Texas was certain that the boundary was the Rio Grande River. The Mexican government encouraged the natives to cause trouble with the settlers, and there was horse and cattle rustling across the river, from both sides. At least two of the Criswell men became Indian fighters and served the Republic of Texas in that way. Leroy Vanoy Criswell served as an Indian fighter in Col. J. H. Moore's Mounted Rifle Calvary for 50 days through 23 Oct 1838. At the age of 18, John Yancy Criswell Jr. joined an independent company of Rangers and engaged in random Indian fights.

The John Yancy Criswell Sr. offspring settled in and around Fayette County. They moved into the area south of Woods Prairie, which is now a small village called West Point. They married and settled on farms near such settlements as Black Jack Springs, which is near the present-day Muldoon; Oso, which is now Flatonia; Praha; High Hill;

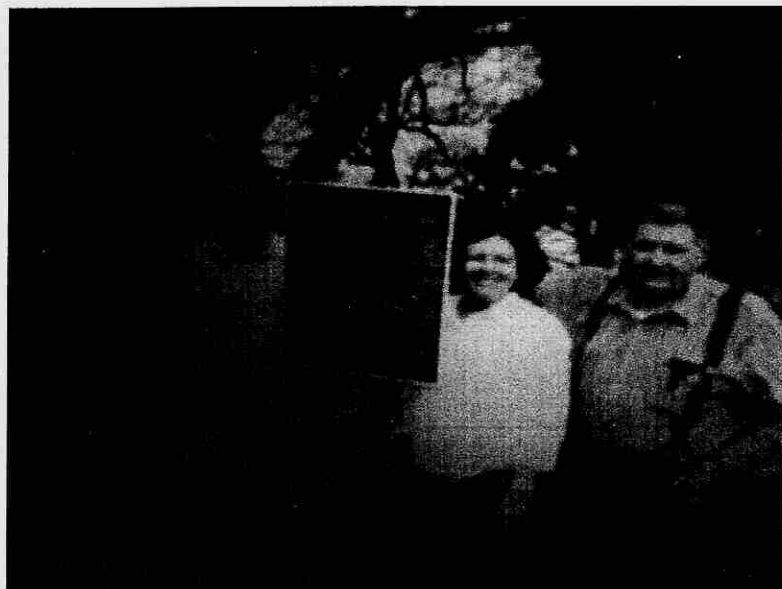


Erich Bloch of Corpus Christi, in his uniform for the re-enactment of the Battle of San Jacinto. William Vanoy Criswell was in that battle, important for its victory meant the Republic of Texas was born!

and Lyonsville, which is now Schulenberg. They are served by the old La Bania Road. The families raised corn, cotton and vegetables. They raised livestock and registered two brands: a stylized "C" and a "JC". Wild cattle, which were actually Longhorns, roamed the Texas prairie in large numbers, and thrived on the land that would not support farming. They were not claimed by anyone, and were killed for table meat.

More of the Criswell Family Story

In March 1839, John Yancy Criswell Sr. made a trip back to Kentucky on business but contracted an inflammation of the lungs and died back home in Plum Grove, Fayette County, on 30 Sep 1839. He was buried next to his wife Eleanor who had died four years previously, in what is now Old Plum Grove Cemetery.



This photo was taken at the Criswell section of the Old Plum Grove Cemetery in West Point, Texas. John Yancy Criswell Sr. and wife, plus other relatives, are buried there. L to R: Chad Criswell, great-grandson of Pugh Criswell; Connie Wirsch and Christine Berkland, great-granddaughters of Effie Criswell Yates; and Roy Woodward, our tour guide with the Marty Stewart hairdo, grandson of John Yancy Criswell Jr.

William Vanoy Criswell served in the Somervell Expedition to repel the invasion of Texas by Mexico led by Gen. Adrian Woll in 1842-1843. Because of his service to Texas, WVC received one-third of a league of land from the Fayette County Board. Later he received 640 acres of land for taking part in the Battle of San Jacinto. He also received 3,250 acres of land for serving in the army from 28 Sep to 13 Dec 1835, and another 320 acres for his service from 27 Mar to 27 Jun 1836.

On 3 Feb 1842, WVC married Mary "Polly" McMicken in La Grange. Together, they had six children: Bettie, Sallie, Mollie, John H., James Yancy, and Lillie. He died intestate on 19 Jan 1858 owning 1050 acres of land. A listing of his estate: horses, oxen, cart, wagon, hogs, household furniture, farming tools, cash, cotton, one Negro man at \$900

and one Negro girl at \$200. Nothing in R.R. Criswell's books tracks the loss or sale of much of this land that WYV used to have.

It mentions that sister Candace Criswell married Lee Frederick Trent Cottle, a descendant of Edward Winslow of the Mayflower. Lee owned 445 acres in Nueces county for work he did as a surveyor. This land was never sold, but was fenced in by the King Ranch. The King Ranch paid property taxes on it for years, and it became part of their enormous ranch. The King-Kleberg family was, and is, so powerful that legal challenge was next to impossible, although litigation is going on today challenging the methods used to acquire land.

Annexation of Texas

The annexation of Texas to the United States was a topic of political and diplomatic discussion after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, and an international concern during the Republic of Texas days. Great Britain encouraged the Republic, not wanting the U.S. to expand further westward, and the U.S. government did not want the Republic to become a satellite of the British government. President Mirabeau Lamar did not want annexation, but President Sam Houston, a friend of U.S. President Andrew Jackson, did. A vote was taken in Texas which resulted in positive action towards annexation. The U.S. government did not want to admit a "slave" state. A State constitution was draw up and ratified by the U.S. Congress 29 Dec 1845. The Republic of Texas was no more.

John Yancy Criswell, Jr.

John was the author's great-great-great-grandfather, so the remaining lineage information is devoted to his line. He was born on 27 Nov 1824 in Knox County, KY. He emigrated with his parents, five brothers, and two sisters to Texas in late 1830, crossing the Sabine River on 29 Nov 1830. He lived in the Matagorda township for three years until his family moved to higher ground in Fayette county. He was 11 years old during the panic known as the Runaway Scrape; but thankfully he survived. He was too young to served in the Texas Revolution, but fought the Indians threatening the settlements at age 18, and helped to repel the Mexican invasion of Texas in 1842-43. In 1845, he entered the service of the Republic of Texas and served in the company of Peter H. Bell.

John Yancy Criswell Jr. and Mary Rebecca O'Daniel married on 2 Dec 1847 in the Woods Prairie Settlement. Six children were born: Martha F., William John "Jack", Mary E., Lucy A., Joel Silas, and my great-great grandfather, Leander "Lee" Harvey Criswell.

According to an Act of Congress in 1875 in "A Texas Scrapbook" compiled by D.W.C. Baker, the "Names of Veterans" included "John Yancy Criswell, emigrated in 1830; in

Indian campaigns from 1838 to 1842, and in P.H. Bell's Rangers in 1845. Residence, Oso, Fayette County, Texas."

As this JYC was in the service after John Yancy Criswell Sr. had passed on, the reference is to John Yancy Criswell Jr. His service record also included that he was a private in Capt. M.B. Gray's Company, Texas Mounted Volunteers. In 1845, JYC Jr. was in a Republic of Texas Company of Rangers under Peter H. Bell, later Governor of Texas.

A drawing of a Republic of Texas Ranger in uniform.



John Yancy Criswell Jr. was near the border at the time of his subsequent enlistment. He enlisted on 21 Jul 1846 at Matamoras, Mexico, and was discharged a year later. He stated in his Declaration for Service Pension: "The space of country in which I served extended between Matamoras and Monterey, principally as guard of trains of wagons." A note from government records states he was absent from muster because he had been left at Corpus Christi to defend the city while the rest of his company, except for the portion left at Corpus, went to reinforce the troops on the line.

When war broke out between the U.S. and Mexico, he joined the company of M. B. Gray of the Texas Rangers and served throughout the war.

He died on 7 Oct 1896 in Waco, McLennan County, Texas, and is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery, Flatonia, Texas. His wife, Mary, died 15 April 1898 in Waco, and is also buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Flatonia.

The Mexican-American War

The Mexico/Texas border dispute began with bloodshed. President Polk claimed that American blood was shed on American soil! Although the Mexican president might have said the Mexican blood was shed on Mexican soil. War was declared over this strip of land between the Nueces and the Rio Grande Rivers in 1846-1848. Also, Mexico had never officially ratified the Treaties of Velasco signed after the Battle of San Jacinto. When war broke out between the U.S. and Mexico, John Yancy Criswell, Jr. joined the company of M. B. Gray of the Texas Rangers and served throughout the war. His younger brother Joseph Eve Criswell fought in this war, too, defending the United States. When the United States won the Mexican-American War, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo determined that the U.S. obtain Upper California, parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Nevada, and all of Arizona and New Mexico. You can thank your ancestors that you are not living in Mexico today!

Lee Criswell

Leander "Lee" Harvey Criswell was born on 25 Dec 1848 at Black Jack Springs, Fayette County, Texas. He married Emma Adaline Neeley on 2 Dec 1872. Their union produced Wallie Amos, who was father to the famous Dr. W.A. Criswell who guided the mega First Baptist Church in Dallas for 30 years; Richard Pugh, who married Lena Parker, second cousin to Cynthia Ann Parker whose story has inspired many a book; Effie Ewing, my great-grandmother, born on 28 Jul 1876 at Lavaca County, Texas; John Lynch, Iva Zella, Lucy Lee, Joel Sidney, Thomas Grover, Dial O'Daniel, Alice Jewel, Charles D. and Mary Frances. Please see David Palik's September 2009 document for an account of Lee's and Emma's lives. They both died in Dumont, King County, Texas, where they were very well-esteemed. Emma's death was on 18 Oct 1922, and Lee's death followed on 15 Mar 1926.



Lee and Emma Criswell

The Civil War in Texas

While most Texans had strong attachments to the Union that they had worked so hard to join, they expressed deep concern over the attacks upon southern institutions by northern political leaders. Although only one Texas family in four owned slaves, most

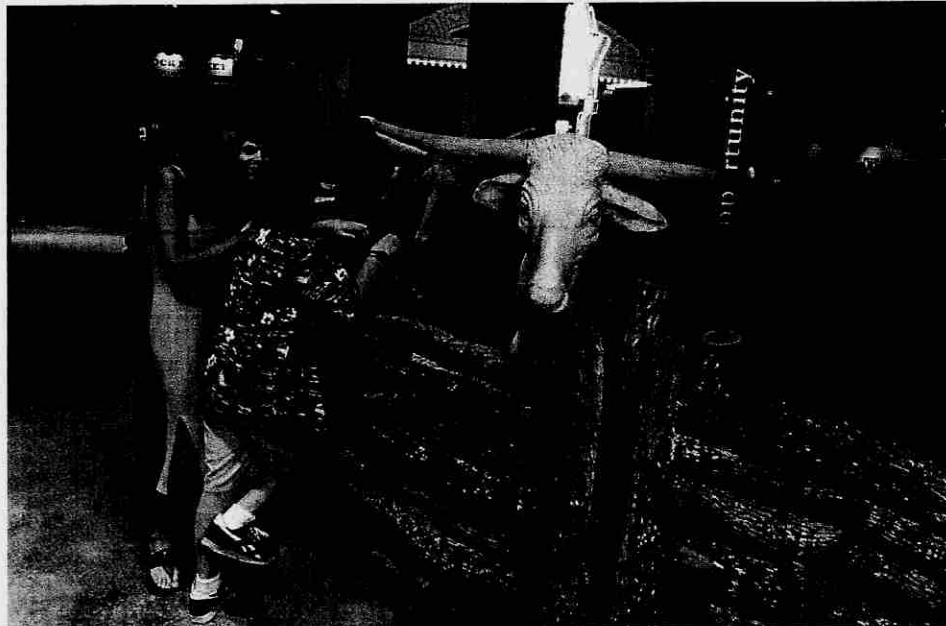
Texans opposed interference with the institution of slavery. Criswell families owned slaves, according to wills and inventories made upon the deaths of Leroy Vanoy Criswell and William Vanoy Criswell. They grew cotton, and the cotton economy depended upon slave labor. The Pin Oak family cemetery in south central Texas that Criswell cousin Roy Woodward toured us through was full of Confederate crosses. It is likely that Andrew Jackson Criswell changed his name to "Jack" because his politics regarding slavery were different from those held by U.S. President Andrew Jackson.

The Great Cattle Drives

In the 19th century, immigrants from the United States joined Tejanos in East and South Texas to try ranching as a livelihood. Some, notably Richard King, carved out large ranches on former Spanish and Mexican land grants. Other ranchers, such as Charles Goodnight, pushed into Central and West Texas in the 1870's. Texas ranching became a unique blend of Spanish and Anglo traditions and practices.

In the mid-1800s, as cities grew in the northern and eastern states, millions of Longhorn cattle roamed freely on open ranges in Texas. Returning Civil War veterans saw opportunities to meet the demand for fresh meat in the northeast with Texas supplies. The Longhorns had no real monetary value until it was learned that they could be driven great distances through drought-stricken areas and survive rather well.

In 1866, opportunists began organizing large-scale cattle drives to railheads in Colorado and Kansas serving city markets. The cattle drives were on! Drives were also made to the grasslands and prairies of the central United States upon which to fatten the cattle. A typical drive took about four months.



A diorama in the Texas State History Museum with longhorns

To succeed on the drives, Texas ranchers and cowboys had to have courage, endurance, skill, patience, self-reliance, and the ability to read a cow's mind. The era of the great cattle drives lasted only 25 years, but it created an enduring legend.

The grandchildren of John Yancy Criswell, Sr., were anxious to "follow the trail" and Criswells were scattered to the far corners of the state and country to escape the hard life of farming on hard soil and in drought-stricken areas. Letters from Tom Menefee Criswell to his brother, David Robert Criswell, give a vivid account of his life as a foreman of the Driskill Ranches. Other family members's letters show the trials of making a living in those days.



Effie Ewing Criswell Yates

I remember my great-grandmother, Effie Ewing Criswell, fondly. The five of us Schneiders would roll up to her white clapboard house in downtown Eldorado, OK, frequently, and would always be welcomed. She was an artist, and filled her home with primitive paintings every bit as good as those of Grandma Moses. She had a tornado shelter filled with canned goodies and spiders. Great grandma Effie married Robert Henry Yates, who was born on 7 April 1874 in Bon Aqua ("good water" in French), Hickman County, TN. They were married, according to the Yates family Bible, in Poetry, Kaufman County, Texas. He was a cotton broker, and she was an artist. Their children were Frederick Lee; Emma Almeida, my lovely grandmother I never knew; Henry Shelly, who I met at family reunions and told me personally how glad he was that I brought my daughter; Charles Davis, Robert Harold, Oliver Lynford and Mildred Frances. I knew my great-aunt Mildred; she was a dear, beautiful lady.

Robert Henry Yates and Effie Ewing Criswell Yates in Eldorado, OK

Robert and Effie had their children, and then he left. I never met him. Effie died on 4 April 1967 at the age of 90. Her obituary in the Eldorado Courier states that she was a member of the Eldorado, OK, community for 70 years, and a charter member of the First Baptist Church. Although her home was always open to family members, the First Baptist Church got it upon her death. She was devout.



A young Effie Ewing Criswell Yates;
note the "Love, Mother"



Emma Almeida Yates Schneider,
Effie's daughter and the author's
grandmother

Emma Almeida Yates was born on 6 Jun 1897 at Bronte, Coke County, Texas. She was a beautiful young woman. She met Harold George Schneider, a rural mail carrier in Eldorado. He was born on 19 Feb 1900 in Minonk, IL. He registered for World War I when he turned 18 in 1918. Almeida and Howard Schneider married in 1918 in Eldorado, OK. They made their home there in Eldorado, and had six boys.

"Death Claims Mrs. Schneider"

My grandmother, Emma Almeida Yates Schneider, died in childbirth after losing a battle with blood poisoning on 22 Jan 1932. She died at the family home just south of Eldorado, OK, leaving her husband and six little boys. The eldest was Maurice, my dad, born on 22 May 1919, who was 12 when his mother died. His brothers were George, Robert, John Eugene "Gene", Ralph and Marion Jack. Marion Jack Schneider died at the age of 4 of pneumonia six months after his mother.

Almeida's premature death meant that we didn't have a grandmother on my dad's side. The five Schneider boys grew up without their mother, but they always had their grandmother, Effie Ewing Criswell Yates. The boys were raised by family members, most often by their grandmother Effie, but not always together. Aunt Minnie from Illinois thought the boys should go into foster homes. The times were tough in the Dust Bowl of Oklahoma in the Depression. The Schneiders lost their farm. Sometimes an Aunt Roberta Yates in Lawton, OK, kept some boys. Maurice worked in a grocery store to help the family, and when he was old enough, worked for the Civil Conservation Corps

making adobe bricks at the Grand Canyon National Park. He earned about \$25 a month, got his room and board, and sent about \$5 a month back home. All five brothers served in the military throughout World War II, in different branches of the service.

Maurice Howard Schneider and Family

Dad joined the Army Air Corps. He met my mother, Constance "Connie" May Oakes, at a dance near Colton, CA, where she was born and raised. He lied to her and told her he was from Texas, not Oklahoma. Mom first told me this when she was 80 years old and I was giving her a tour at the Texas State History Museum. They started dating, and she went to the University of California Berkeley, CA, where she had her tuition, room and board paid. She studied math and music. Maurice was shipped out to Pearl Harbor, and it was bombed by the Japanese. Connie did not know whether he was alive or dead, and she had to take her finals, not knowing.

The good news for us is that he was still on the way to Pearl Harbor, when the tragedy struck. Maurice wasn't already there, so he survived that awful day. They married the following 7 March 1942. Their children were Barbara Jean, born 14 Oct 1943; Kay Maureen, born 23 Aug 1945; and Lynn Christine, born 7 Oct 1948. Dad was career Army, retiring as a Major. He "joined the infantry," becoming a mail carrier for the USPS with a leather pouch. Maurice and Connie divorced after 32 years of marriage, and dad found happiness with second wife Mikki. He died 2 Oct 1985 and is buried at Ft. Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio, Texas.



Parents Connie and Maurice Schneider on their wedding day

Sister Barbara married Larry Swope, and had four children in 12 years of marriage: Thomas Lee Swope, born 16 Sept 1963 in Tokyo, Japan; Richard David Swope, born 16 Oct 1964 in CA; Andrea Lynn "Audi", born 21 July 1969 in Houston, TX; and Robert William Swope, born 8 April 1971. Audi had Zachary Thomas Williams, born on 26 Nov 1991. Barbara married again, to Frank Kramer. The marriage ended in divorce in 1990, with no issue of this marriage. She died 28 March 1994 in St. Louis, MO.

Sister Kay married Bill Chase in Killeen, Texas, in 1966, driving away in a vintage automobile to CO. Her son, dark-red-headed Holden was born 22 Oct 1966; he has married Lisa Marie Wharton on 5 June 2005 and they have two children, red-headed Saiorse Declan Chase, born 25 Feb 2007, and Dax Laszlo Chase, born 1 June 2009. They make their home in Boulder, CO, where Holden is an optical physicist, and Lisa is doing her graduate study in hydrogeology. Kay's daughter Rohan Chase married Jim Brown, and in 1998, red-headed Alia Brown was born.

Lynn Christine Schneider married first husband, Terry Michael Huddleston on 18 Sept 1970 and buried him three years later, 30 November 1973. She married second husband Donald Tydo Virta (Finlander-American) on 18 Dec 1974 in Harker Heights, Texas, and divorced six years later. But the best people happened: Valerie Christine Virta, Ph. D., born 10 Jan 1976 in Killeen, Texas, and exactly one year, one month, and one day later, on 11 Feb 1977, Donald "Donny" Tydo Virta, Jr. My Irish twins.

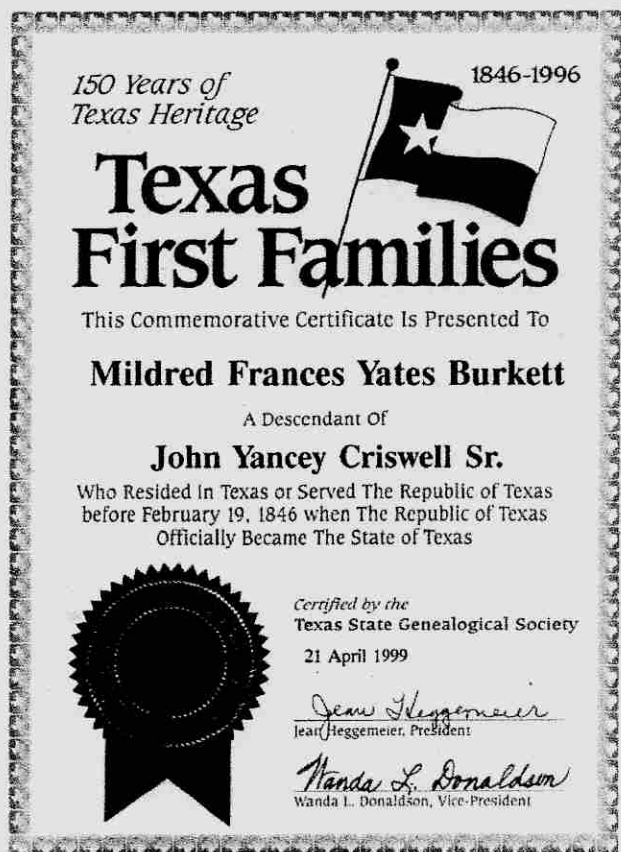
I was single for 24 years, although for 12 of them, I was dating Phil Theodore Berkland, born 2 Oct 1956, in Bemidji, MN. We met at IBM, where we were both software developers. We married 27 Dec 2003, he for the first time, so we had a beautiful church wedding where his father, Lutheran Pastor Ted Berkland, officiated.

Donny married Emily Katharine Van Court on 11 Jan 2006. Donny assumed her name, Van Court. Delightful grandchildren Katharine "Katy" Monica Van Court and Cory Cowden Van Court were born on 1 June 2007 and 8 Dec 2008. Katy and Cory give great joy to Phil and me.

Texas First Families Certificate

On 19 Feb 1996, the State of Texas celebrated its 150th anniversary as a state in the United States of America. The Texas State Genealogical Society proudly offers a commemorative certificate to eligible persons. Anyone directly descended from a Texas resident of 19 Feb 1846 or before, may apply for this permanent remembrance of his or her family history. The applicant must be able to prove descent from the ancestor by an official record or records from each generation, including proof for the applicant. For an application, google "Texas First Families Certificate" and the first entry that appears will be a pdf with the application and instructions.

To the right is an Texas First Families certificate. Mildred Frances Yates Burkett was my great-aunt. All those whose lineage is from John Yancy Criswell Sr and his entire family are eligible.



Daughters of the Republic of Texas

The Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT) was organized by cousins Betty Ballinger and Hally Bryan. They conceived the idea in 1891 of perpetuating forever the memories of Texas pioneer families and soldiers of the Republic of Texas by forming an association of their descendants.

Their objectives include perpetuating the memory and spirit of the men and women who achieved and maintained the independence of Texas. The DRT also encourages historical research into the earliest records of Texas, especially those relating to the Revolution of 1835 and the events which followed; to foster the preservation of documents and relics; and to encourage the publication of records of the service and patriots of the Republic.

Any woman having attained her 16th birthday is eligible for membership, provided she is personally acceptable to the Association and is a lineal descendant of a man or woman who rendered loyal service for Texas prior to the consummation of the Annexation Agreement of the Republic of Texas with the United States of America, 19 Feb 1846. Please contact the Business Office for membership information at 512.339.1997 or email to drt@onr.com

Adina de Zavala, a member of the DRT, called the attention to the Daughters that the Alamo was to be razed for the building of a hotel. Clara Driscoll, another DRT, purchased the property. The State reimbursed her in 1905 and turned the Alamo over to the care of the Daughters. There is a DRT Library in San Antonio available to all researchers and a Headquarters and Museum in Austin, Texas. The Daughters care for The Cradle, the building in Galveston where the DRT idea was conceived, which reflects the original 1800's furnishings. They also care for The French Legation in Austin, constructed in 1840-1841, which housed the Charge d'Affaires for King Louis Philippe of France.

References

- Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum (2001, 2007). Photographs of dioramas, Reader rails, "Highlight the Story". Austin, TX.
- Bloch, Erich (2009). Personal communication by Criswell cousin who annually participates in the Battle of San Jacinto Re-enactments.
- Criswell, Raleigh R. & Bailey, Martha Criswell (1986). *Criswell Family Among Early Settlers and Heroes of Texas History*. Houston, TX.
- Criswell, R.R. & Diggle, S.R. (1957). *Descendants of John Yancy Criswell, Sr. and Eleanor Vannoy*. Clayton Library, Center of Genealogical Research, Houston Public Library. Houston, TX.
- Haley, James L. (2006). *Passionate Nation, the Epic History of Texas*. Free Press, New York.
- The Handbook of Texas Online, Project of the Texas State Historical Association (1997 - 2002). Accessed 23 Sep 2009 at <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook>
- Harvey, Mary Jane (2008). Personal communication by Criswell/Yates/Schneider family genealogist. Houston, TX.
- Harvey, Mary Jane (1997). Texas First Families' Certificate Application, certified by the Texas State Genealogical Society. Houston, TX.
- Marshall, Bruce (1999). *Uniforms of the Republic of Texas and the Men that Wore Them 1836 - 1846*. Schiffer Military History, Atglen, PA.
- Moore, Billie Beth (2009). Personal communication by Daughter of the Republic of Texas # 4621. Ft. Worth, TX.
- Texas State Cemetery Website (2009). Accessed 29 Sep 2009 at http://www.cemetery.state.tx.us/pub/user_form.aspstep=1&last_name=Criswell&Search=Search
- Unknown (Unknown). Spanish Dominions, map, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.
- Woodward, Roy & Delores Woodward Reed (2009). Personal communications by Criswell cousins. Medina, TX, & Fountain Valley, CA, respectively.

