

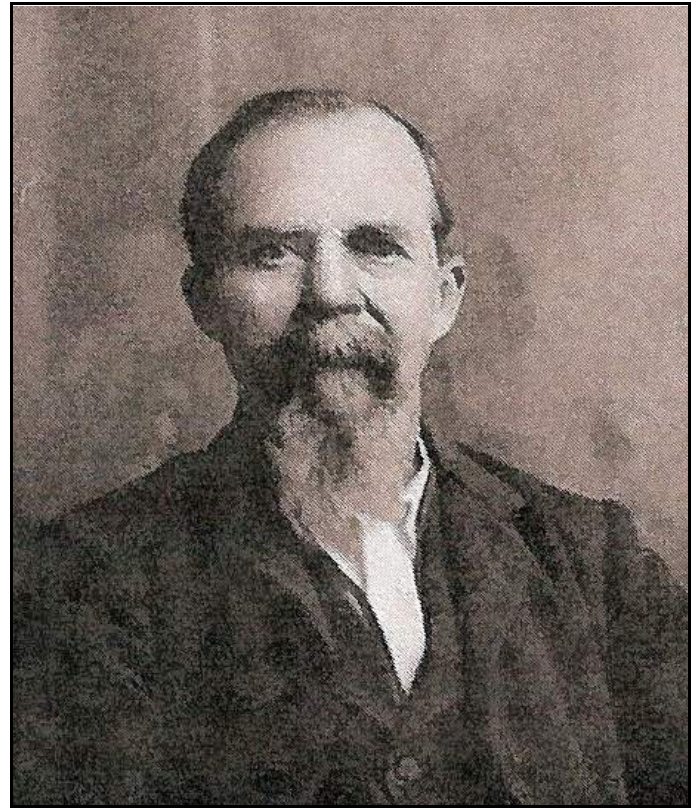
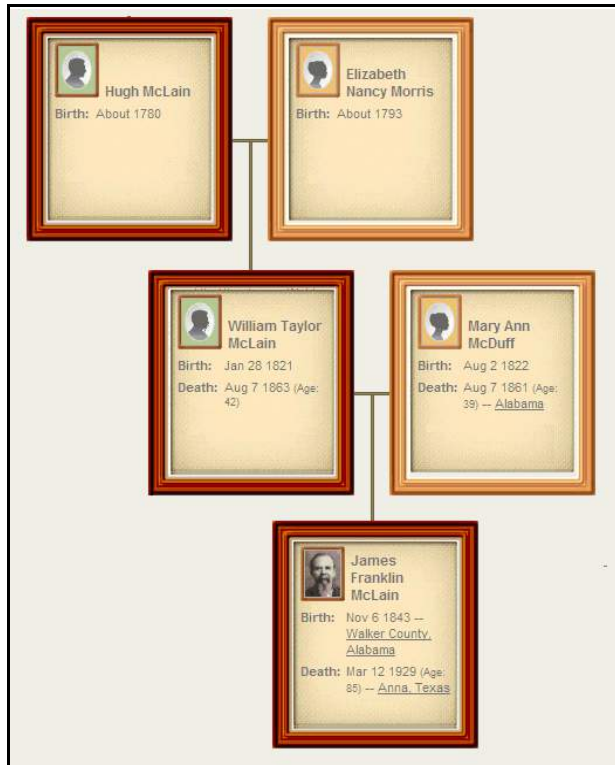
THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JAMES McLAIN



by Gerald G. (Jerry) McLain
Great-Grandson of James Franklin McLain

compiled December 2, 2008

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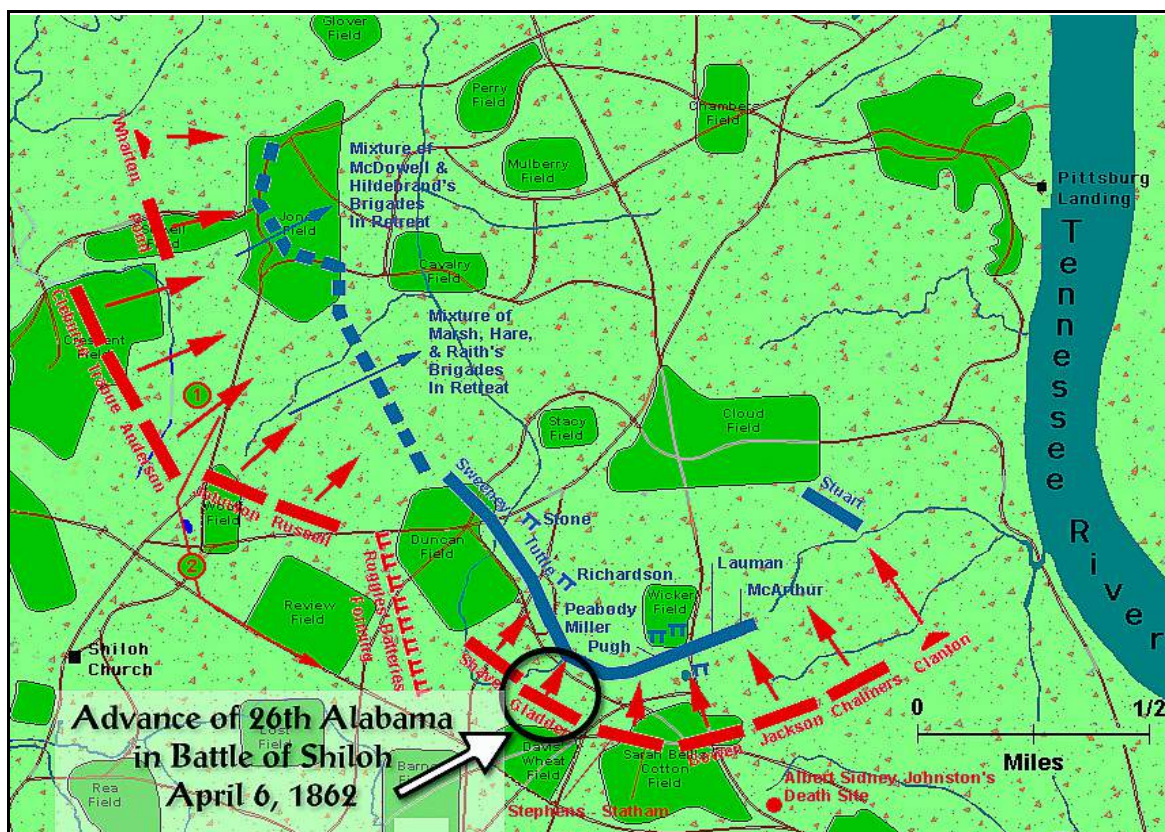
James Franklin McLain was the eldest son of William Taylor and Mary Ann McDuff McLain. His grandparents were Hugh and Elizabeth Nancy Morris McLain. William Taylor was the fourth child of Hugh and Mary Ann and was born in 1821. After William Taylor came of age, he left North Carolina for the Alabama wilderness and married Mary Ann in about 1842. James was born November 6, 1843 in Walker County, Alabama.

He was destined to take part in every major American historical event in the last half of the 1800's. He would go from virtual poverty to one of the wealthiest men of his day. He would move the McLain line from the forests of Alabama to the plains of Texas and he would become the patriarch of a line of McLain descendants that is unbroken today.

James lived an uneventful rural life until, as a young man, his world was turned upside down by the American Civil War. His mother died in 1861, shortly after the beginning of the war. James began his service when he enlisted as a private in Company E/B, 26th Alabama Infantry Regiment.



His unit, also known as the 50th Alabama Infantry Regiment was organized at Corinth, Mississippi, on 3 April 1862, combining two other recently recruited Alabama Infantry Battalions. James was one of the first into the new unit. The unit was sent to Tennessee, under the command of Brigadier General Adley Gladden.



James' first battle with the unit was one of the most significant ones of the Civil War—the battle of Shiloh, April 6-7, 1862. James, as a part of Gladdens Regiment took part in the first assault on the Union troops at Shiloh. With banners flying, the Confederates swept across the open field. The 5th Ohio Battery, Union Army, under Captain Andrew Hickenlooper, switched to canister.

The effect of canister fire was to spray the iron balls in the pattern of a gigantic shotgun. Hickenlooper's guns fired about every thirty seconds and severely punished the Confederate battle line. The Rebel line faltered.



However, under their battle flag, the Rebels made a second charge. The Confederates again stormed across the open field. Hickenlooper later wrote that the Rebel Yell of hundreds of advancing men "caused an involuntary thrill of terror to pass like an electric shock through even the bravest hearts."

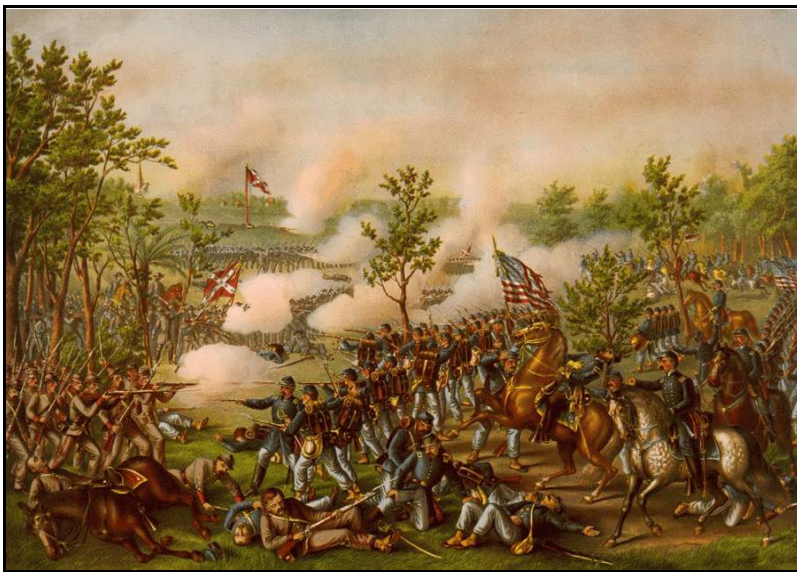


The regiment started with 440 effective soldiers at Shiloh, but was down to less than 150 by the second day, due to casualties, sickness and exhaustion. Gladden himself was severely wounded before the second assault and later died.

After Gladden's death, and the victory at Shiloh, the unit was reorganized to become a part of Hindman's Division, of Polk's Corps.



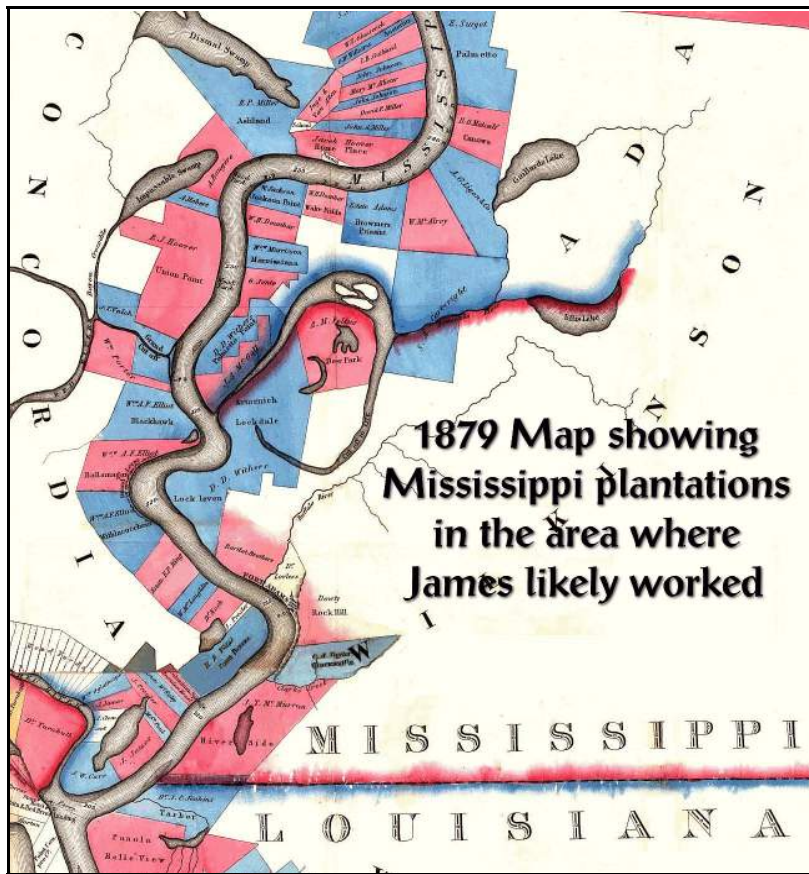
James fought with the unit in the battles of Murfreesboro, July 13, 1862, Munfordville, Kentucky, September 14-17, 1862, Perryville Kentucky, October 8, 1862, Farmington, Tennessee, October 7, 1862, Missionary Ridge/Chattanooga, November 23-25, 1863, and the fighting in Georgia, including the Battle of Atlanta, July 22, 1864. The Atlanta battle, as well as Gettysburg (a battle where James was not present) are considered the turning points in the Civil War.



The last battle in which James took part was the Battle of Selma, Alabama, April 2, 1865, fought only a week before Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant, ending the war. Few of the unit survived to finish the war, but James was one of them.

James was never wounded or taken prisoner, but he saw much more than his share of the horrors of war.

By the time the war was over, there was little left in Walker County, Alabama. In fact, William Taylor McLain passed away in 1863, while his son was fighting in the battle of Chattanooga. James returned home to find both his parents deceased and the general depression of the South after its defeat. He found little reason to stay in Alabama and followed an early McLain tradition. Like his grandfather and father before him, James moved to a new land to the west.



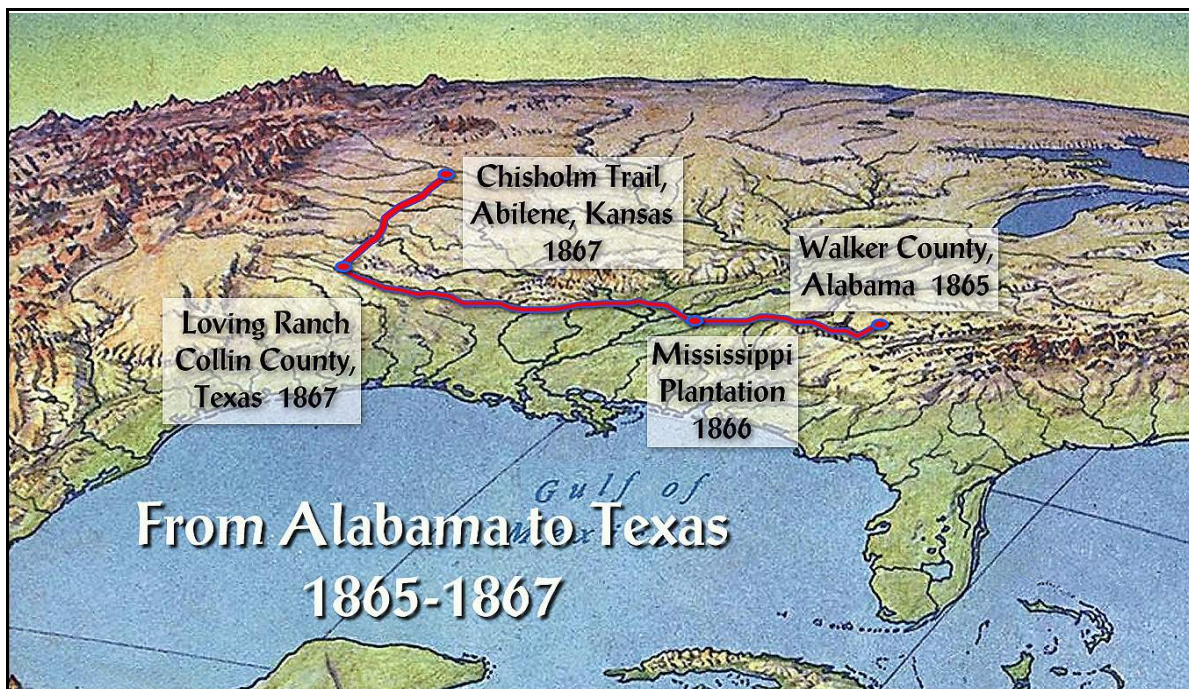
He spent a year at a Mississippi plantation where he worked as overseer. The exact plantation is not known, but it would have been one of the many plantations bordering the Mississippi River (see map section at left).



The job was primarily administration, since postwar Mississippi was trying to adjust to a new economy in the middle of depression and devastation brought by the war. James was involved in the change from slave labor to hired hands and sharecropping, in order to rebuild the land and supervise former slaves and returned soldiers to work side by side in the cotton fields.

He saw the value of cotton but recognized that the work of rebuilding was long and hard. He preferred to work by himself rather than as a supervisor. He longed for open spaces and left the plantation to continue his westward journey.

From Mississippi, he traveled to Texas, looking for work. He found it by hiring on as a cowboy driving cattle on the Chisholm Trail.



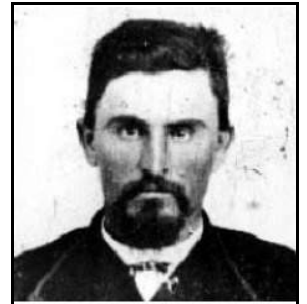


At that time, Texas was in just as dire economic straits as the rest of the South because of the Civil War, but it had a natural resource not found in other southern states. When the Spanish explorer Coronado traveled through the state looking for the fabled Seven Cities of Gold, he left Spanish longhorn cattle. More cattle were left as missions were established in south Texas and Mexico. These cattle bred more than two hundred years to huge numbers in the wild. Texans realized that this resource could be captured and herded up north to railheads and sent back east to be sold at a profit. This had been done on a small scale since the 1840s but became big business as well as the economic salvation of Texas after the war.

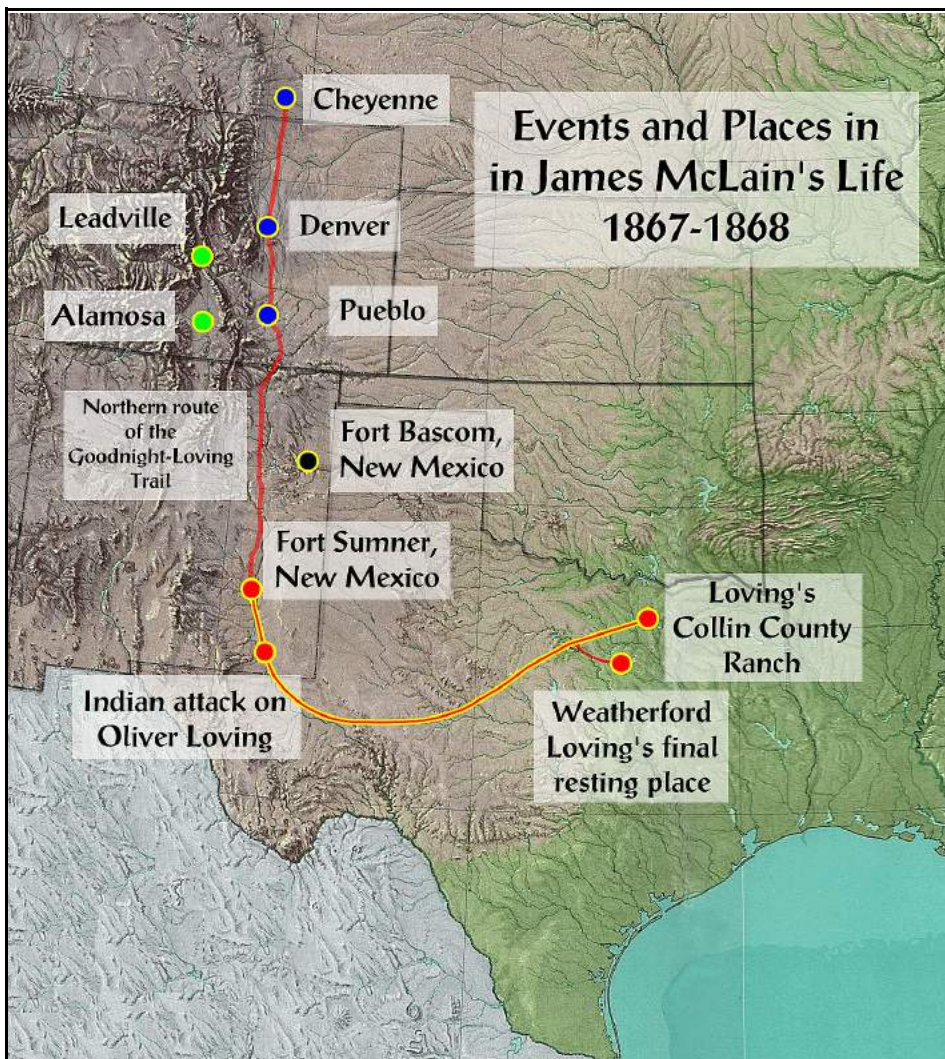


Oliver Loving

James was noticed by Oliver Loving when he signed on to help herd cattle up feeder routes from South Texas. He herded cattle up the old Preston Trail (now U.S. 289 in Dallas and Collin Counties) to the Chisholm Trail which led up north to a huge stockyard in Abilene, Kansas. James enjoyed the life of a cowboy and he readily agreed to work Oliver Loving on his ranch in Collin County, Texas. Loving had teamed up with Charles Goodnight and driven cattle from Fort Belknap, Texas to Denver, Colorado a year earlier.



Charles Goodnight

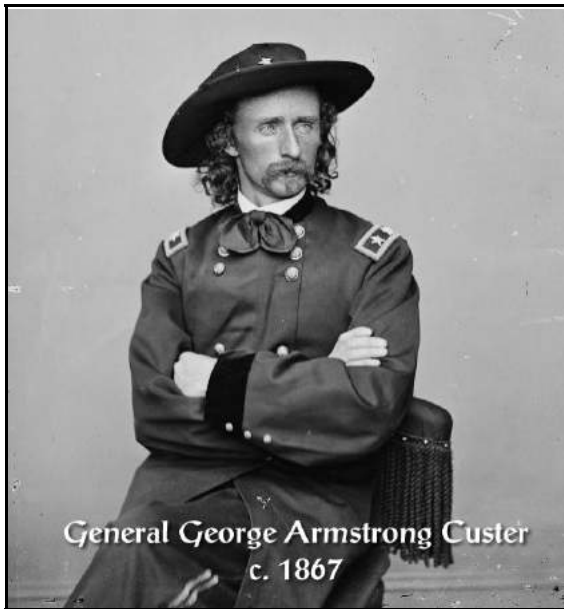


Cattle herding was always a difficult job and it was especially dangerous work at the beginning since the trails required moving through hostile Indian territory.

One of the innovations of which James took part was that of the chuckwagon, a concept invented by necessity on the cattle drive.

In 1867, he was on the second Goodnight-Loving cattle drive where Loving went ahead to scout and was attacked by Indians. Loving was mortally wounded in the confrontation and died in Fort Sumner, New Mexico.

James was involved in Goodnight's decision to bring Loving's body back to Texas, as Loving had requested in a last wish to Goodnight. That wish was fulfilled when Loving was laid to rest in Weatherford, Texas. James was apparently upset over the death of his boss and, during his time at Fort Sumner, looked for a job that might help even the score with the Indians.



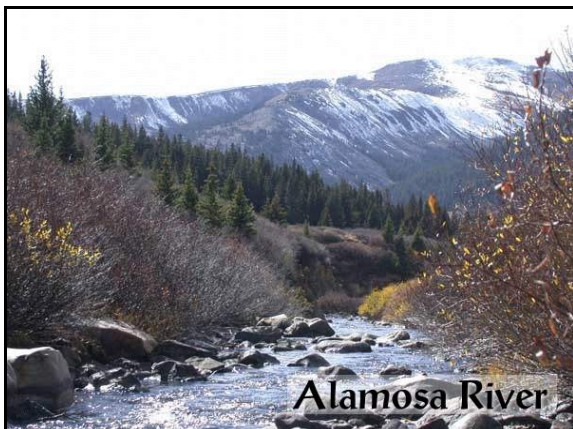
General George Armstrong Custer
c. 1867

He was readily employed by the United States Army as a teamster and scout. He worked for the flamboyant General George Armstrong Custer. James accompanied Custer from Fort Sumner and Fort Bascom, New Mexico on one of his Indian hunting expeditions. James did not stay with the military life for long, probably because he had his fill of soldiering during the Civil War. Custer eventually defeated the Indians in November, 1868, when Cheyenne Chief Black Kettle was killed in the Battle on the Washita River in western Oklahoma Territory. After this battle, the 7th Cavalry was disbanded and Custer headed north to Little Big Horn and into history.

By this time, James began to dream of settling down owning his own place. Of all the land he had seen, he decided that the rich, black soil in central Collin County, Texas would be the ideal spot to settle down. However, he had little money and, for a while, it would remain a dream.



A few years prior to the Civil War, a prospector named William Greeneberry Russell saw a glint in a stream in the wild Colorado territory. He realized it was gold. When he told of the find, a scramble ensued, the like of which had never been seen. Workers, speculators and dreamers from throughout the United States converged on the Colorado territory in what has become known as the Colorado Gold Rush. It continued throughout the last half of the 1800's and stories were told of gold lying in on the ground for the taking.



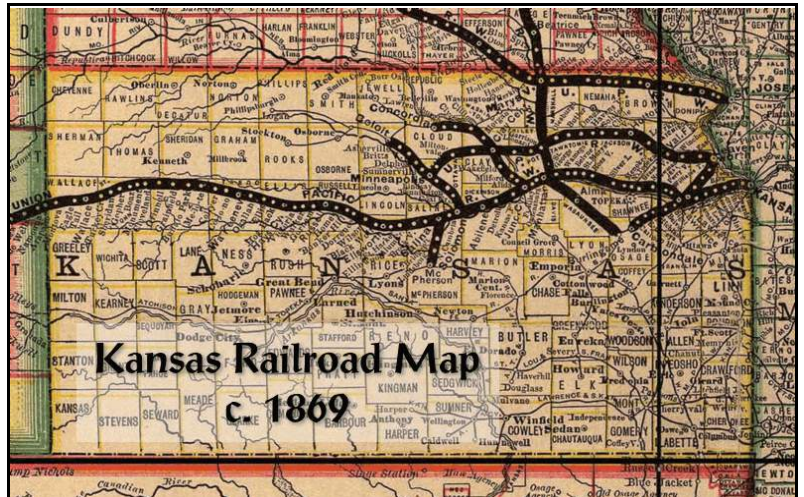
Alamosa River

During his cattle driving and scouting/teamster jobs, James heard of the riches there and decided to try his hand at prospecting. He spent the year of 1868 in Colorado Territory, prospecting for gold. Exactly where he prospected is not recorded, but historical accounts of Colorado gold fields indicate that most prospecting during that time was being done from Leadville to the Alamosa River, so James would likely have searched in that region, but with no success. He decided to give it up and seek less speculative work.



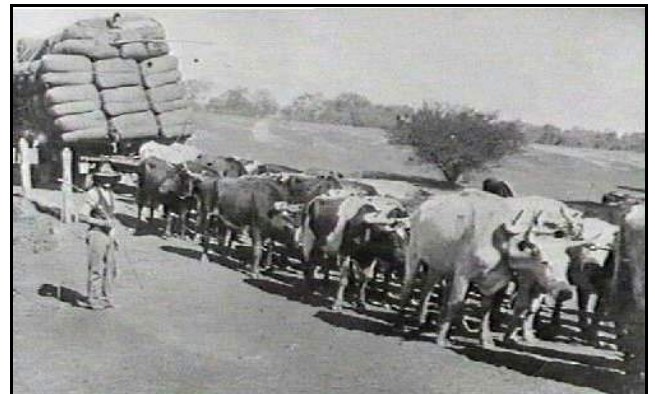
Meanwhile, the United States was completing a project begun during the Civil War—one that was destined to bring the nation together. A transcontinental railroad was being constructed to link the nation from Sacramento, California to Council Bluffs, Iowa and then back east to the Atlantic ocean. The final spike was driven at Promontory Summit, Utah, on May 10, 1869. However, that was only the beginning of the work. The railroad track now crossed the nation, and was extending quickly.

James saw the potential and, tired of prospecting in the barren gold fields of western Colorado, he contracted to help in the building of railroads in Kansas. Maps of the era (see left) show that most tracks were in the eastern part of the state, but James may have been constructing the railroad that led to the west—to Colorado Territory, since he had been there prospecting the year before. He did this for a year, leaving in 1870 with enough money in his pockets to go back to Texas.

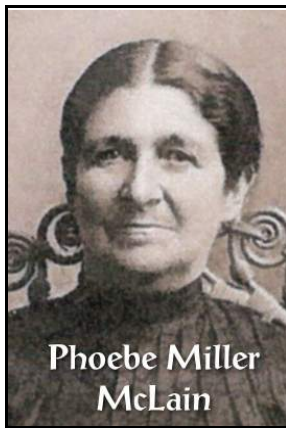


Back in Texas, he went to the largest town near that place he hoped to settle. It was McKinney, Texas.

He bought a wagon and ox team and began hauling freight between McKinney and Jefferson and Kosse, in East Texas. He hauled cotton from McKinney to the gins in Kosse, hauled bales to the port at Jefferson, then returned with merchandise for the local stores.

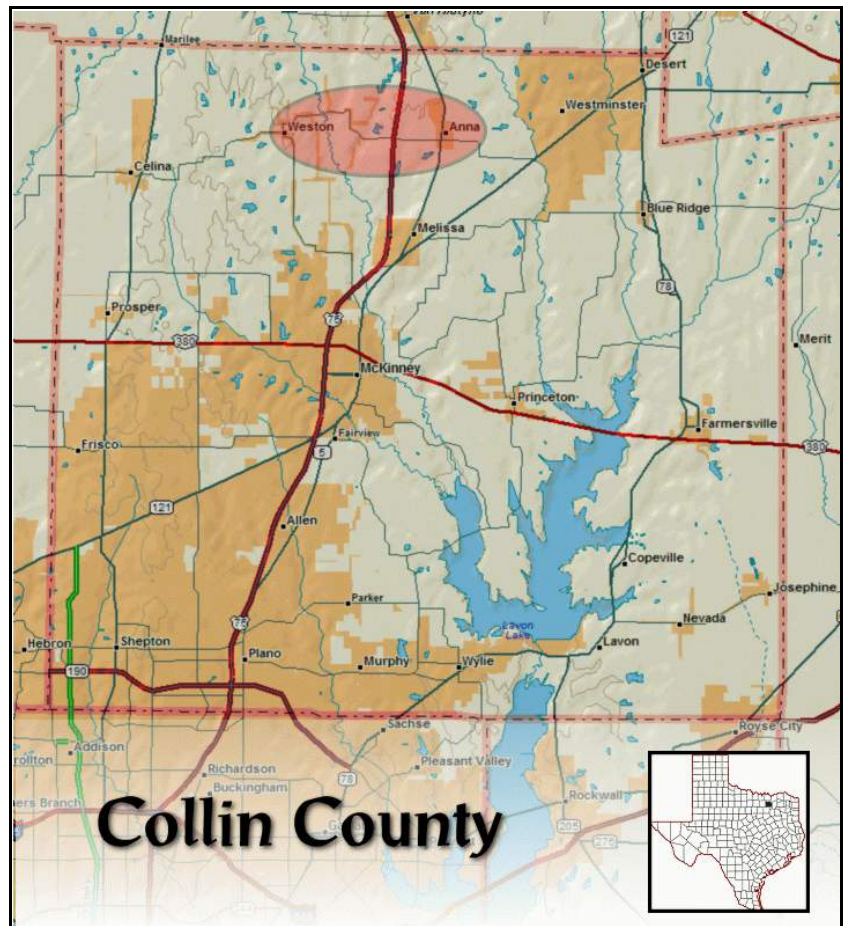


It was with this endeavor that he started to make money and he was able to rent some land near the town of Weston, about twelve miles northeast of McKinney, in 1871. He made a crop and used it to buy his first land, about halfway between Weston and Anna. He moved there in the fall of 1872 and that remained his home for the next forty-one years. In that time, he gradually accumulated an estate and became the owner of about 1,000 acres of land.

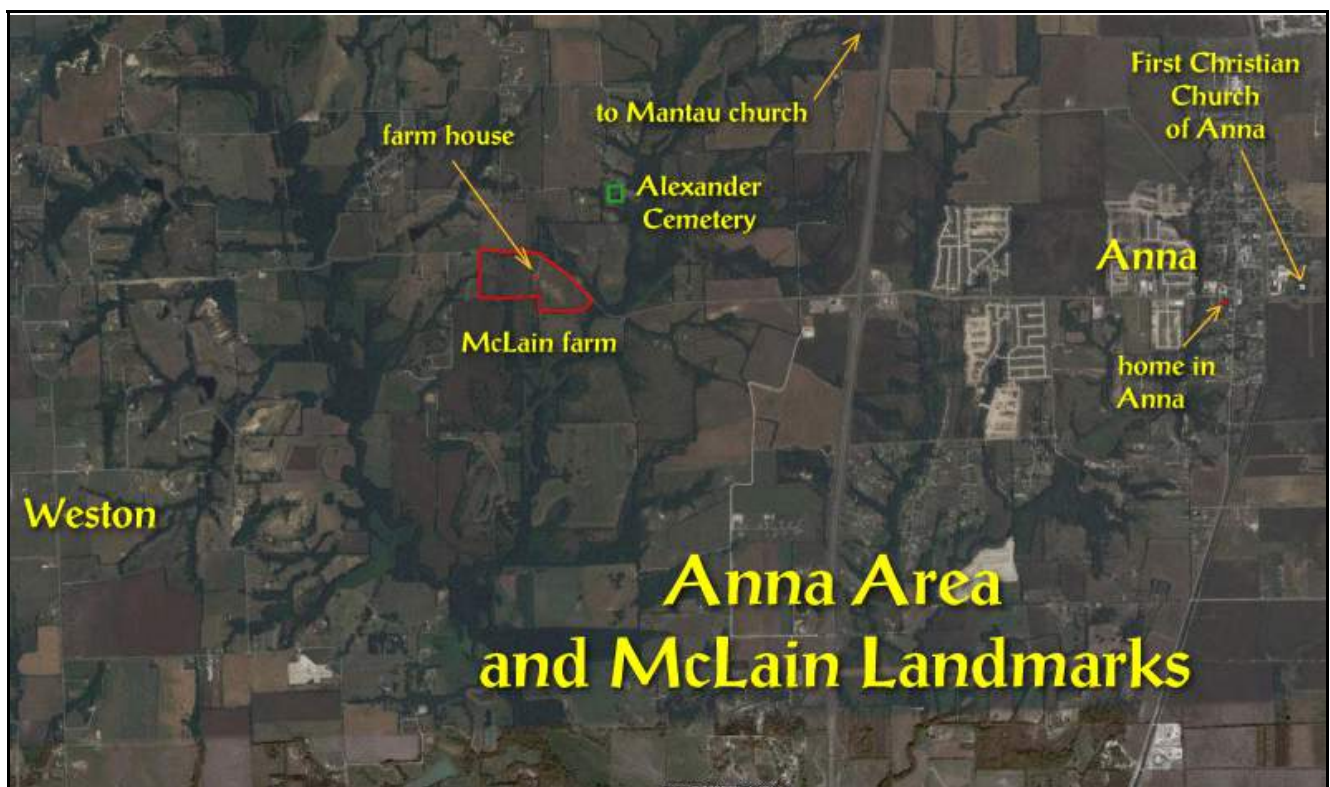


James married Phoebe Miller on November 3, 1872. She was a local girl who had come to Texas from Missouri, and they had six children, one of which died in infancy. They named the oldest Hugh, after James' grandfather in far away North Carolina.

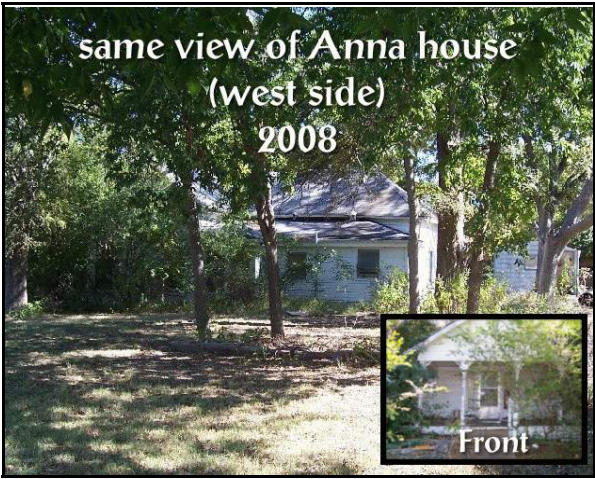
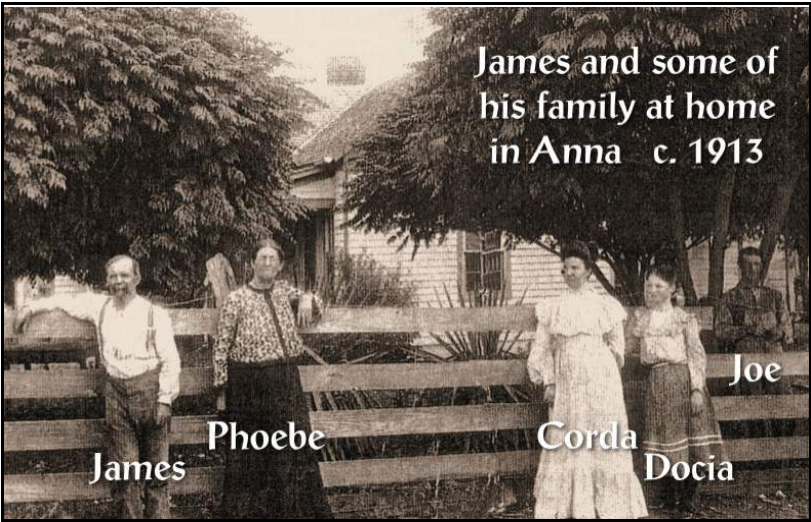
In the later years of his life, James divided the major portion of his land among the children. He and Phoebe moved to Anna in 1913.



James was a Christian, accepting the Lord in 1875 at the church in old Mantau, a few miles north of his home, near Van Alostine. When he moved to Anna, he joined the Christian Church there and served as an elder for many years. He was also a Master Mason and later became a Royal Arch Mason of the McKinney Chapter of the Masonic Lodge.



James was very short in stature. Photos indicate he was about five and one half feet tall. Because of his hard life and adventuring, he was a very conservative man and, despite the fact that he had accumulated wealth, he was very frugal. He was strict with his children and very conservative in his advice on finance.



Two of his daughters (Annie and Docia) and their husbands Frank Welch and Truman Taylor found his ways to be onerous and they sought more freedom, finding it in Foard County, Texas, some 200 miles west, where they joined their uncle Pete (Pete Hardy McLain), James' youngest brother, who had settled near Foard City, five miles southwest of Crowell, some years earlier.



James died on March 12, 1929. Phoebe lived until January 17, 1946, when she died at the age of 98. Their final resting place was Alexander Cemetery, east of Anna and only about a mile from the land he had purchased in 1872.

