

Matthew Simeon Greer

By William N. Greer



Matthew Simeon Greer — last child of Nathaniel and Nancy, thus nicknamed "Babe" — was born in Washington Co, Texas, April 15, 1845. Except for a brief sojourn in Utah — he lived all his life in Texas. His earliest memories would have been of life on their farm just west of Brenham. When only seven, he was baptized into the Mormon faith with most of his siblings while they resided at Port Sullivan in Milam County.

As a child of nine, he is said to have been at the signing of the Bosque County charter under the "Signing Oak" in Meridian on July 4, 1854. If true, this might have been with his father — exploring up the River Brazos, getting a feel for the land west of his Navarro County tract which was surveyed in 1847.

Babe was ten years old when the family migrated to Utah, having converted to Mormonism a couple of years before. The following winter was terribly severe and several members of the family decided to return to Texas. This included Babe.

After the return to Texas, Babe got his schooling at Fort Graham in Hill Co.

Like his brother Stephen "Cate" Decatur, Babe served in the Civil War as a Ranger on militia duty along the western frontier — primarily guarding against Comanche raids. On April 20, 1863, he enlisted as a private in Capt M. B. Lloyd's Company E of the Mounted Frontier Regiment, under Colonel J. E. McCord. Soon he joined Cate at Camp Colorado, about 100 miles west of Kimball. Evidently Babe participated in several scouting exercises because a few days before Christmas of that year, he was ordered home on leave to procure another horse — his existing mount having been "ridden down". That possibly ended his service because good mounts were hard to come by during the war — and Col. Buck Barry had issued a Special Order, just two weeks earlier, directing that poorly mounted men were to be excused from service.

On July 5, 1866, he married Susan V. Phelps who died childless of unknown causes. Then on March 25, 1871, he married Sophia Elizabeth Lane (whose photograph appears on this page), the third Lane sister to marry a Greer brother. Ironically her father, James Addison Lane, was the Justice of the Peace who had performed Babe's first wedding. The Justice of the Peace for this second ceremony was Henry De Cordova, son of Jacob De Cordova, a good friend of the Greers and the most renowned land developer in Texas.



James Lane had brought his family from Georgia to Texas around 1846, buying land in Washington Co. from Babe's elder brother Gil in 1850. The Lane family also adopted the Mormon faith, but did not start for Utah with the Greers. In 1856 when the Greers returned from

Utah to settle in Bosque Co, they met the Lanes on the trail. The Lanes were influenced by the Greers' reports of severe winters in Utah and thus accompanied the Greers back to Texas.

In 1867, Babe acquired half of his late father's land from his mother for just \$1.00 due to the affection that she held for him — apparently because he was the youngest and least established of her sons. He would later sell that land, making his lifelong home in Bosque Co. along Plowman Creek where in 1871 he and his brother Bill purchased a site from their brother Gil.

In 1868, Babe began clerking in a store in Kimball, later buying the business. He prospered along with the town. Perhaps influenced by his father's ferry experiences, he (it is said by some) was one of several men who, each in his own turn, operated the Kimball ferry. Each of these enterprises flourished from the numerous cattle herds that traveled the Chisholm Trail from south Texas to Kansas.

Following the death of his first wife, Babe tried a brief stint of teaching at an unidentified rural site in Hill Co, some students crossing the Brazos by boat to attend. [Read an account by one of his pupils.¹]

In the late 1870s, Babe sold his Kimball store and moved his family out west near Thomas Lacy and "Uncle H," but he was unhappy with the Arizona land which he had acquired, site-unseen, and he abruptly returned to Texas. At various times he, like many locals, would speculate in land and cotton futures. After the town of Kopperl came into being in 1881, he and a partner opened Porter, Greer, & Co, the town's first mercantile establishment which he operated until his retirement in 1896. After his death on June 21, 1915, a local newspaper noted, "He was so well and favorably known here that we do not hesitate to say that he will be as much missed as any man in the whole country."

After Sophia died on August 4, 1926, her obituary stated, "No one is better known here than she and her family — and have the friendship of every one who ever knew them. To know this good woman was to love her."

1) My Third Teacher by Sallie G. Reed

In the spring of 1868, Uncle Babe Greer, papa's youngest brother, decided he'd try teaching school. He had a house of his own, a log cabin he had built to live in, but his wife died before they moved into the house, about a year earlier, and it had not been used.

His brothers, Papa and Uncle Gill, both had children who needed to be in school and there were several neighbors' children, too, I think about 20 in all, who would go to school, and there was no teacher, so he decided he would do what he could. I stayed at Grandma's and went with Uncle Babe and the school house was on the east side of the Brazos, near Mr. Phelps, Uncle Babe's father -in-law's home.

I really don't remember much about this school, except some of my own performance. I am rather sure I was in a class by myself and had recited the last lesson in the Third Reader and he turned me back to the beginning and told me to learn the Punctuation marks.

I knew them by heart, as we used to say, so I laid my book on the bench and sat down on it. Made it as conspicuous as I possibly could that I was not studying.

Presently Uncle Babe said "Sallie, you'd better study that lesson," after a little while, waiting for me to get to work. He said, "Sallie, if you don't know that lesson, I'll whip you."

I thought I just knew that wasn't so, he was joking. Uncle Babe wouldn't whip me. That was unthinkable.

We had lived in the same home most of my life up to then. He had stayed in our home and gone to school in Ft. Graham or we had lived in Grandma's home, and he had never even threatened to whip me.

No, Uncle Babe wouldn't whip me. That was unthinkable.

When he called me up to recite the lesson, I pretended I did not know a comma from a period; just tangled my definitions as foolishly as I could.

He still gave me another chance, sent me back to my seat to learn my lesson.

Still I did not open my book, just sat there and looked around and he called me up again, this time really aggravated with me. When I played silly again, he decided he had to whip me, even if he did not want to so he used the switch and he was not over-tender about it.

Then he sent me back to my seat to learn that lesson: after I had my howl, I really was shocked that he DID WHIP ME, and I think he was a little surprised himself, he called me up again, and I hadn't ever opened the book during the whole procedure, I spanged away, and recited that lesson on punctuation like one saying his A. B. Cs. And Uncle Babe said "Well! Why didn't you do that at first?"

I said "You said you'd whip me, and I didn't think you would."

"Well! I am glad I did," he said and I was rather glad to know he had the grit to do as he said. I had more respect for him after that: knew I could depend on him to do what he said.

In the fall after my spring round with Uncle Babe, mama heard of a spinster, a Miss Penix, who thought she would like to try being a governess, so she employed Miss Penix. She could no more get Effie to learn her letters than I had and' she could not teach me anything about arithmetic.

I learned the multiplication table very promptly after I got a book and wanted to learn division, so I could use my slate and pencil and get on into my book.

I think Miss Penix did not know much more about Division than the man who applied for a certificate while I was still in school. When Simon Lumpkin, who was a member of the examining board, asked this man. "What is Division?" he said "It is the act of running one number through an other." Simon said, "Well! What sort of a hole does it make?"

In those days, anyone who received Free School money, must have a certificate in the county he taught in and lawyers and business men around the county site usually served as examiners, assisted by a convenient teacher most of the time.