

# William Reddick Greer and His Gold

*By William N. Greer*



In DeKalb County, Georgia, on September 2, 1826, Thomas Lacy Greer was born — the third child of Nathaniel and Nancy Greer. By the time he was old enough to start school, the family had moved to Troup County and then across the Chattahoochee into the Alabama lands of the Upper Creek. His earliest memories would have been of his childhood in Chambers County where his father was the first sheriff and then the first state representative.

Tom was 10 when the family moved to Texas. He grew to manhood in Washington County. On occasion, he defended his family and neighbors in the militia we know today as the Texas Rangers, but virtually all such volunteers are unrecorded in history.

In 1846, the Mexican army crossed the Rio Bravo in response to the annexation of Texas into the United States. The U. S. declared war, but many months would pass before it was determined that an expedition to the Valley of Mexico was required to achieve an American victory. A pivotal element of the expedition was Col. Jack Hays' Ranger corps known as the Texas Mounted Volunteers. On May 25, 1847, Tom and his cousin Riley Irvin were among those in Washington County who enlisted in Company G of the 1st Regiment. They assembled in San Antonio and on August 12, left for the Mexican coast by way of Laredo.

Embarking south of Matamoros, the Texans sailed for Veracruz to join the forces of Gen. Winfield Scott. After fighting several skirmishes along the way, the Rangers entered Mexico City on December 6, 1847.

Although the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed February 2, 1848, many Mexicans refused to surrender. On February 17, Tom and 250 other Rangers set out under Gen. Joe Lane in an effort to defeat the rebel factions to the northeast. After wresting control of the town Tulancingo (70 miles NE of Mexico City), the Texans made a night march of 40 miles, arriving at daybreak at Zacualtipan. It was in the battle for this town on February 25 that Tom received a bullet in his chest, a near-fatal wound which removed him from action for the brief remainder of the war. The bullet was never removed. Tom was awarded a medal for his service and cited for his bravery. Both he and his cousin Riley were mustered out of service on May 1, 1848.

Tom accompanied his family to Port Sullivan and converted to Mormonism. He helped his father in various ways and by the time the decision was made to move to Utah, Tom was well-acquainted with family business. On February 15, 1855 he acted as his father's agent in selling a huge tract of land about a month before the family migrated.

After the deadly trek to Utah, Tom kept books at Blair, Greer, and Bassett — a store mostly stocked by the Greer family. Soon the beautiful young Catherine Ellen Camp caught his eye and

they were wed on November 25, 1855. A distant Greer cousin, she was born October 17, 1837, in the town of Dresden, Tennessee.

The Camp family had been Mormons for many years before arriving in Salt Lake City in October, 1850. They had survived persecution in Nauvoo, Illinois, and the killing cold on their exodus west.

In mid-June of 1856, most of the Greers began their journey back to Texas, stopping at Bent's Fort where they met "Buffalo Bill" Cody. Eventually the families reached Hill County, Texas, where Tom and Ellen lived for the next two years. It was here that their first two children were born: Nathaniel William and Thomas Riley.

Early in 1859 the young family rented a farm along the Brazos in Bosque County and then on August 25, Tom and his cousin Riley Irvin bought 320 acres of Brazos River property some 10 miles further down river. The new location along the Brazos was prosperous. Here a third son was born and was named Gilbert Dunlap after his eldest Greer uncle.

Soon the Civil War was under way and before it ended, all of the Texas Greer men had joined the fight except for Tom who possibly was excused due to the Mexican bullet in his chest. During the war, Ellen gave birth to a daughter, Deseret Diannah, and another son, Richard Decatur.

When the war was over and Texas was on the losing side, social and political tribulation set in. Throughout the state, officials who had Confederate military experience were barred from holding office. Tom's non-combatant status probably was a factor in his being appointed Bosque County Judge — a position he was to hold for the remainder of his residence in Texas.

Tom's family grew: a fifth son, John Harris, was born in 1866, then a second daughter, Oasis Ann, in 1867. But as surely as life entered the world, it left. The joy of the arrival a sixth son, James William, in 1870 turned to sorrow with the baby's death in 1871. The next year, Ellen gave birth to their last son, Lacy. Tom had been saddened by the death of Riley Irvin in 1869, then in 1873 Tom and Ellen lost their second son, Thomas Riley, who had been named after Tom's beloved cousin.

While in Texas, the family herds grew large and strong while Tom made many profitable land deals. Although they longed to rejoin their western kin, both physical and spiritual, the way to Utah was menaced by hostile Indians.

Not long after the 1875 birth of daughter Harriet May, the Indian threat abated and in mid-1876 the Greer family and the kindred Phelps family finally left the Bosque and drove toward Utah with almost 2000 head of Texas Longhorns and some 1000 horses. Sickness struck in October and forced them to winter at Medicine Lodge, Kansas, where — on New Year's Day, 1877 — a daughter, Ann Terry, was born.

On April 10, 1877, after suffering from thievery and the betrayal of hired hands, the family resumed their westward drive. At Cherry Creek, Kansas, they encountered other Mormons who

spoke of rich grazing land in northern Arizona and the need for settlers to strengthen the Mormon community there. The Greers altered course. On September 1 they arrived at Tenney's Camp (later renamed Woodruff) on the Little Colorado River with their cattle reduced to about thousand head. They decided to go no further.

For immediate shelter in Tenney's Camp, the Greers occupied an unused blacksmith's shop. Soon they built a stone house close to the fort near the base of the black butte. At the confluence of Silver Creek and the Little Colorado River (about three miles south of the fort), they built a rock line shack that sheltered the older boys who tended herd on the open range. Here the grass stood higher than the stirrups on a horse for as far as the eye could see in any direction.

The Greers immediately assimilated into the community and in 1878, the Territorial Governor John C. Freemont appointed Tom the first Treasurer of Yavapai County. At Snowflake, on August 31, 1878, Tom performed the marriage ceremony for his son Nathaniel and Martha Phelps.

In March of 1878, as Ellen later recounted, Tom moved a herd northwest of St. Johns onto the "French Ranch" of E. Leon Dubois. On December 9, 1878 Tom purchased the property which would one day become the hub of a million-acre ranching empire. It was here (near where the hamlet of Hunt would one day be established) that Ellen would deliver her final child, Margaret Ellen, in 1879. And it was here on July 30, 1881, that the Mexican bullet from so many years before would finally claim the life of Tom — hero, pioneer, and family inspiration.