

Amonett Family Newsletter  
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(Written by Glen Amonett)

This chapter will probably be the longest of the family newsletters. It will be long because it is necessary to include family customs, farming procedures, different locations, family ties and history with the other details about John Alvis Amonett, the subject of this letter and the head of the Texas Clan.

When one man has as much influence on his family as Granddad did, it's only fair to include the characteristics and habits of the man. It wouldn't do him justice to give only the number and names of his descendents, although that would be an interesting letter. Perhaps that would make a good future assignment.

Granddad (John Alvis Amonett) had a strong but likable personality. When one of my daughters was looking at an early picture of him she said, "He looks fierce!" Perhaps so, but he was a good old boy. He was taller than average, with strong features and rather outspoken. He was loved and admired by the family, especially the younger generation. Several of his sons stayed on to farm with him after they were grown. Eventually they all moved away to farms of their own, or to other professions. In Granddad's late years a son-in-law, Bud Stephens farmed his land.

John Alvis Amonett was born March 1, 1873 near Byrdstown, Tennessee. He was the second of nine children born to Willis Amonett and Hannah Elizabeth Jackson. Other children were:

1. LeAnn Alvis - October 4, 1871 (deceased same day)
2. John Alvis - March 1, 1873 to June 28, 1954
3. Mary E. - December 21, 1874 to June 30, 1957
4. Lou Ella - April 3, 1877 to March 22, 1903
5. Martha Loretta - April 18, 1879 to April 20, 1962
6. James J. - October 19, 1881 to February 16, 1963
7. Sallie M. - March 7, 1885 to May 30, 1952
8. Cora B. - July 29, 1887 to November 2, 1949
9. Jasper Lafayette - November 12, 1889 to April 22, 1900

John Alvis was apparently named for his Mothers brother, Alvis Sutton Jackson. He was only six or seven years old when the family moved into a new log

home 5 or 6 miles out of Byrdstown. The old home stood until 1947, when a new home was built on the site.

After completing the local schools in Pickett County, John Alvis attended the Normal School at Jamestown in Fentress County. He taught school in the Moodyville community, sometimes known as the "Head of the Cain".

At the age of 21, Granddad (John Alvis Amonett) married young Octivia Irwin, a girl of 17, on December 27, 1894. Granddad was a bit taller than average and Grandmother was a bit shorter than average. Their children fit into the average size range.

In Tennessee he often chopped timber and put the trimmed logs into the river and made log rafts to float downstream to a sawmill. The hills of Tennessee were covered with good timber at that time. Some interesting stories that he told us kids back in the 30's were connected with this work. He usually had help in making the log rafts, but only one man was needed to ride the rafts downstream to the sawmill, where the logs were sold. It was an overnight walk back home, and Granddad walked fast. I remember walking with him when I was a small boy, and trying to keep up.

Big families were customary in those days. Perhaps Tennessee was getting crowded. The westward movement had been in progress for years as the country expanded toward the West as the need increased for additional land. The westward movement built this nation. Our family's growth was a part of it. Most people were in Agriculture, and Granddad caught a train to Texas to look for land in a new world.

We appreciate the assistance of Granddaddy's niece, Hattie Hill of Allardt, Tennessee for helping with some of the early data.\*

Granddad found what he was looking for in Comanche County, Texas. He bought a quarter section of land in the Bibb Community; some of the best farming land in the county. He then went back to Tennessee for his wife and three children (Instead of writing for them to come as previously thought). At that time only Floyd, Pearl and Leo had been born. Floyd was about seven years old and helped Granddad take care of some livestock being shipped by rail. That paid the railroad fare. Grandmother and the two smaller children rode in the passenger car. There were seven additional children born in Comanche County.

Not long after John Amonett and Octivia came to Texas, her father, John Hardin Irwin, passed away on April 29, 1905. Martelia (West) Irwin (Grandmother's Mother) soon came to Texas and made her home with our Grandparents. She was known as "Grandma Irwin". She had been married briefly to a soldier named

Matheny who was killed in the Civil War. She was still a young woman when she married John Hardin Irwin. Martelia West Irwin was born September 3, 1844 and was only about 20 years old when her first husband - Matheny - was killed in the Civil War. Besides Octivia, there were ten other Irwin children. Octivia was the sixth.

Five of Octivia's brothers and sisters also came to Texas. Aunt Sallie Stovall, Aunt Polly Young and Uncle Bruce Irwin all stayed in Comanche County. Uncle Bruce built a fine rock home on his farm south of Gustine, in the middle 30's. Others:

1. Sarah Jane (Aunt Sallie) married Billy Patton, and later Billy Stovall, who was an early resident of Comanche County, and was in a scrap or two with the Indians.
2. Martha Electra, Sallie's twin, married a Knight and remained in Tennessee. Birth date April 28, 1868. Aunt Sallie died November 25, 1956 and Martha June 6, 1947.
3. Polly Ann (Irwin) Young - April 18, 1870 to Nov. 27, 1939.
4. William Thomas Irwin - July 10, 1872 to May 26, 1948
5. Nancy Elizabeth (Irwin) Garrett - Oct. 9, 1874 to Nov. 4, 1960
6. Almira Octivia (Irwin) Amonett - Feb. 1, 1877 to Nov. 2, 1960
7. John Bruce Irwin - Feb 1, 1879 to May 12, 1937.
8. Scott Ryan Irwin - May 13, 1881 to March 29, 1970.
9. Texie Lee Irwin - April 7, 1884 to May 4, 1904.
10. Elmer Easton, or Easter, - June 6, 1886 to Oct. 21, 1889.
11. Robert Lee Irwin - August 23, 1888 to January, 1972.

Two of Octivia's brothers left Comanche County after a few years. Uncle Scott Irwin spent many years in the Lubbock area, as a farmer first and later as a carpenter. Uncle Bob Irwin was in the Brownwood area for many years.

Farming in Comanche County was good for a while. As the family grew John Amonett bought an additional 40 acres. The family began to mature there and the three older children married there. When Floyd came home from the army in World War I he married Marjorie Crockett. (We've always called her Aunt Mart, and we still do). Pearl married C.K. West, and Leo married Audrey Kee.

Farming was rough after World War I when low prices and poor crops both came about, and the boll weevil destroyed most of the cotton, the chief money crop.

In the early 1920's (I believe it was 1923) John Amonett loaded his wagons for another move. The crop in the field was to be harvested by Leo, A married son (my father) who stayed in Comanche County for a couple of years. When John Amonett prepared to move on west, Grandma Irwin stayed in Comanche County. At that time she had two other daughters and three sons in the area, and she was nearly 80 years old. A few years later she passed away on December 27, 1927 at an age of 83 years.

John and Octivie (her name was sometimes spelled with an "e" settled near Hamlin County. They rented a farm seven miles due west of Hamlin from Doc Pardue. Crops were good but prices were low. One year there was a fine crop of maize but there was no market for it. The maize was used for winter fuel. That area is now an oil field, known as the Pardue field.

The family was maturing fast. John Amonett was only in that area about three years and four of his family married there. Daughter Myrta (we called her Aunt Myrtie) married Marvin Welch, and sons Willis and Posy married two of the Mullins sisters, Alta and Jessie. Daughter Cordie married Bud (F.F.) Stephens. All the new family members were from the Hamlin and Haskell area.

When Doc Pardue acquired additional land in Motley County, he rented it to John Amonett. This was almost another 150 miles northwest, and the wagons rolled again. By this time son Leo had arrived with his family in time to make one crop before going on to Motley County. Most of his sons and sons-in-law farmed at one time or another with John Amonett. The Motley County farm was 960 acres, and in the days of horse and mule power there was work enough for everybody. Motley County was new land, just broken out of native pasture.

The Motley County farm was a busy place for about two decades. Some good crops were made there, and in the late 20's prices were pretty good. Old friends and neighbors and relatives sometimes came to west Texas to help with the harvest. Harvest time lasted several months in those days, because it was all done by hand.

Miss Mildred Cheatham, a young family friend from Comanche County came to west Texas to teach school at White Star, the rural school in the community. While teaching school she stayed with the Amonett's, and three of the grandkids learned their first three R's from her, in 1929 - 1930, Derwood, Dorothy Kay, and Gloria.

People rode horse back to school then. I remember well the line of horses around the school fence during the days when I attended a couple of years later.

John Amonett was often elected school trustee. In three different locations he served a total of 24 years as school trustee. I remember some of his trustee meetings. One time he was returning home at dusk, riding old Nellie. The horse was only walking from the time he came in sight. "Why doesn't he lope the horse?" I asked. Somebody said, "Granddaddy doesn't ride fast anymore." At that time he was in his sixties and a trustee at White Star School.

Many of you knew my Granddad even better than I did, but for a dozen years I saw him nearly every day. Our house was only a hundred yards away when we lived in Motley County, North of Matador.

Matador is in the ranch country, and our family farming operation was surrounded by ranches. We could tell when it was round-up time because the sound of bawling cattle could be heard for miles across the pastures. Some family members at times worked on the ranches, and we had a fair sized family herd of cattle too, and a pretty fair sized herd of horses, mules and riding stock; Nellie, Penny, and our school pony, Trixie. Also Willis's team of horses was named Streak and Charlie. Dad's best mules were Beck and Kate. Tony was a large horse we had.

A number of people were involved in the farming operation, especially before tractors came on the scene in 1937. Mechanized farming reduced the number of work stock to just riding animals.

Hospitality was a family strong point. Old friends and relatives often dropped by. Grandmother always seemed to have plenty of food and often set a "second" table. Most of the food was farm processed, instead of store bought.

When hog killing time came around in the fall there was usually some extra help. Three or four families killed hogs together. It was more of a picnic than a job, but it was hard work. After our family moved away, it was more of a chore for us.

The first "killing" freeze in the fall was the time to butcher the hogs. A relative or two would come over to help. As I remember, we usually killed two hogs for our family meat supply. Granddad killed four or five and Willis killed two. Sometimes during the year we would also butcher a yearling. Pork was salt cured in the smoke house. By the time I got involved, Posy had already moved his family back to Haskell. Those were depression years and nobody had any money, but we ate fairly well.

On hog-killing day, the men got things ready about sun-up. A good fire was the first thing to start under the scalding vat. Granddad wanted the water

temperature just right. When he could barely stand to dip his finger in the water three times in succession, the water was ready, and after that, the hog was dipped and scraped, with the hair slipping easily. The women got involved after the hogs were cut up. They did much of the trimming and salting. It was a full day's job for everybody. Some jobs, like grinding the sausage, were done after supper.

Fresh pork is good eating. Even old Doc Pardue loved to come up and stay a few days in the fall and hunt quail. He loved Grandma's hot biscuits and gravy with fresh pork. Once or twice he ate too much and made himself sick, and had to stay over a few extra days. I never did like that bird dog that he brought for quail hunting, but I was still a small boy. The dog barked at everybody that arrived and I went over there often.

Cotton was a main crop in those days and it was all hand pulled. The closest gin was at Flomot, seven miles away, and about an equal distance to the gin at White Flat in the other direction. Many times I've sat on a wagon piled high with cotton and watched a span of mules "buckle down" to start it rolling toward the gin. Granddad liked kids and sometimes I rode to the gin with him. He also used to keep weights for the cotton pullers. They were paid according to the amount they pulled. Most years it was 50 cents per hundred. One year when cotton could hardly be given away the pulling was only 20 cents per hundred.

Most cotton pullers were migrant workers. Sometimes they were white folks from east Texas or Oklahoma, or Arkansas. Sometimes it was colored folks from some town in east Texas. Occasionally they were Mexicans from the valley. Often we wanted the best hands to come back every year. Do you remember the Hall's from east Texas? They came many times. I remember one husky young white fellow about 23 years of age that usually got more than a hundred pounds at every weighing. One time he weighed in a sack at 126 pounds. Some years school turned out during cotton pulling, so we could all help. We youngsters didn't like that. I never remember Laudane's birthday, but it is during cotton harvest season. On her 7<sup>th</sup> birthday, she stopped by our house on the way to the cotton patch, one bright but chilly morning. She was a happy and cheerful little girl that morning. Granddad had ability with tools. He once had blacksmith equipment, and did most of his own blacksmithing until past middle age. He was pretty good at carpentry too. One time he figured the lumber needed to build a small house and they hauled all the lumber out on one truck. When they were finishing up the building, they found that they only needed one more board, and it was a short one.

Some of Granddad's farming and gardening methods seemed new and different. Perhaps some were customs from his youth in Tennessee. When I was a kid, I've pulled turnips out of storage in the winter months where they had been banked under dry dirt and bundles to preserve them into the winter.

When he or Grandma saved watermelon seed, they were usually put in a cloth and hung outside on the wall up near the eaves, about as high as a man can reach, until the next planting season. The seed kept well and he grew good watermelons.

Some garden crops didn't do well in arid west Texas. The blackberry vines survived several years but didn't produce much fruit. The year he grew syrup cane it was a real success. We hauled the cane to a syrup mill near Turkey and had plenty of syrup for a long time.

His Irish potatoes did well. It was a chilly fall morning when they turned them out onto the surface with a plow. Some of us youngsters were there to help pick them up. A millet crop was tried for a year or two but it was less adaptable than the old stand by crops of Kaffir corn, Hegari, and Maize. The Kaffir and Hegari (we still call it hy-gear) bundles were stacked as high as the barn. Some years we had as many as a dozen stacks about a hundred feet long for winter feed for the livestock.

Granddad was interested in politics. He didn't object to a good argument on the subject, and he knew whereof he spoke. He had a very strong voice. He was patient with his grand children, but has been known to speak quite firmly to his two younger sons - sometimes from across the field.

Eventually all of Granddad's family were grown and gone from home. Floyd, the oldest, went to the oil fields early in his career. He spent a lifetime in that type of work, mostly around Electra, Texas. A son-in-law, C. K. West who married Aunt Pearl, also worked in the oil fields, mostly around McCamey, Texas. Leo (my dad) was a farmer. He farmed with or near Granddad for about 15 years before buying a farm of his own near Petersburg where he farmed 35 years more.

Another son-in-law, Marvin Welch that married Aunt Myrtie (Myrta is the official name, I think) was more interested in trading and sales. Mostly he was in the car business around Abilene for about 50 years. Willis and Posy, the fifth and sixth of Granddad's ten children, married in the Hamlin area and when Granddad moved on they brought their wives to the Motley county farm, but by the mid-thirties both had moved their families back to the Haskell area where their wives were from. Willis lived on the same farm for about 30 years, but Posy moved again. About 1937, he moved to the Farmer community, about 12 miles southeast of Petersburg, where he farmed for more than 30 years.

Bud Stephens, who married Cordie, moved to the Motley county farm when Leo left for the Plains. Earlene, the youngest daughter, married Earl Whitaker and they farmed Northeast of Flomot for about 50 years. They are now retired and live in Quitaque. Clyde married Juanita Amick of Flomot and farmed only briefly. He has been in oil field work for about 35 years, mostly around Lamesa. The youngest son,

Thayne, better known as Red, didn't farm. He spent his working career in the schools. He was a coach, for about a generation at Crowell. Then he was Superintendent at Wellington several years. He moved back to Lubbock schools until retirement. He was well known in the Lubbock area because of a football career at Texas Tech in his college days.

This account began as a narrative about a farmer, John Alvis Amonett, who brought his family to Texas about 80 years ago. Succeeding generations are naturally a part of his story, as well as methods of farming.

When I came home after World War II, Granddad had relocated to Floyd County in the McCoy community about ten miles east of Petersburg. He bought a fine irrigated farm, and he considered it the garden spot of the plains. That farm still has pretty good irrigation water.

We visited with Granddad and Grandmother at Christmas time in 1953, when my family was back here from the coast for a vacation. He and Grandma were mentally alert as ever and we really enjoyed our visit. My children were some of his oldest Great Grand children, and I remember well that he enjoyed visiting with my youngsters. At that time he was 80 years old, and physically strong. I don't remember him being sick a day in his life. He passed away June 28, 1954, at the age of 81 years.

Sincerely Yours,  
Glen Amonett  
RT 1 Box 247  
Petersburg, Texas 79250

\*other help in assembling this data includes several kinfolk. Odessa Irwin McPherson of Lubbock, Troy Pettit of Comanche are two, and Troy Bruce of Brownwood.

Much of the Amonett family background in last year's letter was collected by Mrs. R. Tate Bowen of Laurel, Mississippi. She has since passed away.