

THE HIBBETTS FAMILY

By Dr. Edgar L. Frazell, M. D.

The name Hibbetts is thought to be Welsh in origin and it was formerly spelled Hybets or some other variation. Over the years it appears that different branches of the family employed different spellings. That employed here is the most commonly encountered and it is the one used by my mother.

Tracing the lineage of the Hibbetts family has not been particularly difficult since numerous old letters exist. They record old Bible entries dating to the time of the American emigration. Marriage contracts have been unearthed. Grave markers exist and probate and census records fill in many gaps. This record is far from complete, however, since it is chiefly concerned with my mother's branch of the family. Sincere thanks is expressed to all who have contributed data to this story. Especial thanks is extended to Mr. Travis Hibbetts who furnished much of the data concerning the early history of the family along with many old letters.

The exact name of the original American patriarch of the Hibbetts family has not been recorded. It is known, however, that he settled in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania area. He was the father of sons Robert and James Hibbetts who spent their early years in that community prior to the American Revolution. Shortly after the death of their father, Robert and James moved to Iredell County, North Carolina. We lose track of Robert at this point since most of his children were girls who married and moved away and have not been traced.

James Hibbetts (1760-1821) married Nancy Crawford (1767-1856) on 7 January 1793. The certificate of marriage was issued in the county of Mecklenburg, N.C., 28 December 1792. She was the oldest child of David and Mary Young Crawford of Caparrus County, North Carolina. David Crawford had migrated to Lancaster, Pennsylvania area from Ireland in 1758. It seems likely that the Crawford and Hibbetts families were acquainted in Pennsylvania and prior to the North Carolina move.

Shortly after their marriage, James and Nancy Hibbetts moved to Smith County, Tennessee where in 1796 he set up a tannery. The place of residence was 7 miles from Hartsdale. They lived and died in this community and grave markers exist. There were 7 children born of this marriage (see family group record) but their descendents have not all been traced. We have incomplete records based on letters on the brothers John Johnson and Joseph Franklin Hibbetts. There is, however, detailed knowledge on my maternal great grandfather Robert Hunter Hibbetts (b. Tenn. 4/16/1797 d. Tex. 3/22/1852) and he and his descendents will be the subject of this study.

Robert Hunter Hibbetts spent his early life in Tennessee where his family and that of General Sam Houston were said to be close friends. He and the general were said to have ridden to Texas on one of the general's trips prior to his final migration. Robert's land grant states that he arrived prior to the Declaration of Independence. This seems to confirm that his arrival with his family during the winter of 1837-38 was his second trip.

Robert H. Hibbetts and Margaret C. Sharp were issued a marriage license in Rutherford County, Tennessee on 28 November 1820. During their marriage Margaret bore ten children, some of whom were born in Tennessee and some in Texas (see family group record). My maternal grandfather, Joseph DeWitt Hibbetts (1830-1903) was one of those born in Tennessee. In a letter to his children in 1900, he recorded his birthplace as Cottongrove, Madison County, Tennessee. He said he was 8 years old at the time of the migration which took place in the winter of 1837-38. The family spent the first year or so in St. Augustine County, Texas in order to be safe from hostile Indians. A few years later they moved west to the banks of the Trinity River which became home. With the exception of his son Joseph Dewitt, most of the Robert Hibbetts family lived and died in Polk Walker and Madison Counties.

Robert Hibbetts issued a first class headright land grant certificate by the board of land commissioners of San Augustine County on May 1, 1838 for 1 league (4428 acres) and one labor (177 acres) of land. The

majority of this land was a long distance away (Fisher County) and it is doubtful that he ever lived on it or used it.

The 1840 Census of the Republic of Texas from Liberty County shows Robert as head of family and the owner of one slave and one carriage. At the time of the 1850 Census he was listed in Polk County. In the meantime he had served a short hitch in the Army for the Mexican War. He enlisted July 11, 1846 and was mustered out October 2, 1846.

Robert and Margaret spent the remainder of their lives in the East Texas area. He was a member of the Masonic Lodge in Huntsville. He died 22 March 1852 and she died 1 May 1872. Both are buried in a cemetery near Rock Prairie, Texas. The youngest son of Robert H. Hibbetts was William Henry. He was born in 1849 and died in 1931 at the age of 102. At the age of 100 he recalled many of his childhood experiences and confirmed the fact that the Hibbetts and Sam Houston families remained on cordial terms throughout their lives.

My maternal grandfather, Joseph DeWitt Hibbetts (1830-1903) was. As previously noted, one of ten children born to Robert Hunter Hibbetts. His letter to his children on his 70th birthday (1900) written from Prairie Lea, Texas describes in some detail early life in the Republic of Texas. Also, as previously noted, he was age 19 and living at home at the time of the Polk County 1850 Census. Just-how long he remained there is uncertain. One gets the impression from scanty references that he may have somehow wandered from the family center in East Texas. At least, he enlisted in the Confederate forces during the War of the Rebellion. Although his military record is missing his application for a Confederate pension is at hand. At time of application, July 22, 1899, his residence was given as Dale, Caldwell County, Texas. He described his health as feeble and he was declared as an indigent farmer. The pension was granted.

In the intervening years he had married Mary Caroline Thankful Dupuy on 10 September 1867. She was the daughter of Dr. Jonathan E. Dupuy who had migrated from Arkansas circa 1866. It is known that the Dupuy family was in Huntsville in January, 1867. They were in nearby Navasota later that year. The location where the marriage took place must have been in Robertson County but this cannot be confirmed. Dr. Dupuy is known to have been living in Navasota that year and there is no evidence that Joseph had strayed far from his East Texas base except during his Army service years.

Destruction of county records by fire is the probable reason for this evidence shortage. Although Dr. Dupuy is recorded in 1870 Robertson County Census, Joseph DeWitt Hibbetts is not. Numerous court records attesting to real estate transactions are available after that date. Joseph DeWitt appears in the 1880 Robertson County Census records with his family.

During his married life Joseph Hibbetts fathered 7 children (see family chart), one of whom was my mother, Mary Matilda (Frazell). She records Joseph Dewitt and his wife Mary Caroline were separated or divorced in 1893.

As far as can be determined, Hibbetts moved to the Battle or Riesel, Texas area where she seemed to have lived with her children. She died of cancer on September 9, 1895. His location after the separation is uncertain. He is known to have been in Caldwell County as late as 1900 where he may have been living with or near his sister (Nancy Elizabeth Hibbetts), Bettie Hibbetts Johnson, who was the wife of a local physician named Isaac Marshal Johnson.

Later he returned to McLennan County and spent his remaining years in the home of his daughter Sallie (Mrs. J. B. Davis). He died of a stroke on August 16, 1903 and is buried in Lone Oak Cemetery. Neither he nor his former wife have grave markers. Their deaths are recorded in family Bible Records.

A family group record shows the order of birth and death children of Joseph DeWitt Hibbetts and his wife, Mary Caroline Thankful Dupuy Hibbetts.