

THE TRAGIC STORY OF PENDLETON PORTER

by Nell Porter Copeland

PREFACE

To understand this story, it is important to know something about what was going on in the 1850's, 1860's and 1870's in the area of Texas just south of the Red River, which included Cooke and Montague counties. The Indians in this area resented being pushed out by the settlers, and the Republic of Texas had dealt with this problem and protected the settlers until 1845, when the federal government took over, not successfully. The situation became worse with the onset of the Civil War in 1861. Not only were there fewer government troops and Texas Rangers available to help homesteaders, but some Union troops were arming the Indians and encouraging raids against the Texas settlers. The settlers were desperate for protection and organized volunteer ranger companies, but neither their efforts, the government troops or the few remaining Texas Rangers were able to stop the raids until about 1872. For a full explanation of these times, see Marvin F. London's book, "Indian Raids in Montague County." The Porter family lived in Cooke County where the situation with the Indian raids was the same.

The story that follows is based loosely on documented facts and eyewitness accounts, but is partly supposition. There is a great deal that is not known, and never will be known for sure, about Pendleton Porter, the Pioneer, and his family.

A marker on the northwest corner of the Montague County courthouse square has a list of pioneers killed by Indians in Montague County and nearby areas in the early days. Included is "Porter Family."



SECTION ONE

PENDLETON PORTER, PIONEER

Pendleton Porter was born to Guinn and Rachel Daugherty Porter on December 18, 1814, the fifth and middle child of this large farm family. The four older siblings were probably all born in Virginia, but Pendleton was never quite sure where he had been born. He thought that he was born in Indiana, but that was impossible as Indiana didn't attain statehood until 1816. Current records suggest that he was possibly born in Madison County, Illinois. In those days, boundary lines changed frequently as new territories, states and counties were formed. One's county or state of residence changed without any change of locality and birth records were non-existent!

By 1820, Guinn and his family, including Pendleton, were in Greenfield in Madison Co., Illinois. Around 1820, another boundary change occurred, and the Porter property and the town of Greenfield became part of the newly formed county of Greene. Pendleton's two youngest siblings were born in Morgan County, formed from Greene in 1823.

By 1835, Pendleton had bought property in the Arkansas Territory and was on the tax list there along with his father. Shortly after Arkansas achieved statehood in 1836, Pendleton married Lydia Wade in Arkansas City in Desha County, but they set up housekeeping in Carroll County, where their first son, George G., was born in an area called Cave Creek. Lydia's father, Elmer C. Wade, was a merchant in Cave Creek.

George's birth was soon followed by birth of Richard Carroll and Laborn M. In 1842, Newton County was formed from Carroll, so the next three children were born in a different county, although in the same location. The first daughter, Missouri J., was born in 1845 and was followed rapidly by William Pendleton, called "Billy," and Isaac N.

Pendleton grew weary of questions about his place of birth and was glad to serve as census taker in Newton County in 1850 and made the decision to say he was born in Indiana, his wife in Alabama, and all the children in Arkansas. He noted that he was a farmer and that his family was living in Jackson Township. There was no question about the information he gave, as Pendleton's handwriting and spelling were excellent! He appeared to be well-educated for that time period.

Pendleton was never quite content in Arkansas, so sometime before 1860, he decided to "go West." He moved his family to Texas, first to Parker County where they "settled on Grindstone" for a while. This probably refers to Grindstone Creek, west of Weatherford, where there was a mill. The next move, further north, was to White Rock in Hunt County. White Rock, originally named Tidwell Creek, had a grist mill in the 1880's, and the presence or need for a mill in the 1850's may have influenced Pendleton's choice of locations. They settled there and were visited briefly a year or so later by the Ely family who had been neighbors in Carroll County, Arkansas. (In 1925 the Ely daughter wrote an interesting article for the "Frontier Times.") Several members of Pendleton's family had moved their families from Arkansas to Texas, mostly to Shelby County in far East Texas, but Pendleton chose to go further west.

After a short time in Hunt County, Pendleton moved westward again and bought or built a grist mill on a spring-fed creek on the western edge of Cooke County, which is bordered on the North by the Red River. His home and grist mill were about 5 miles east of a settlement called Head of Elm, referring to the head of Elm Creek. The town's name was later changed to St. Jo and still exists today. It is actually just across the county line in Montague County. By 1860, Pendleton's mill was functioning and neighboring farmers brought their grain there to be ground. Pendleton, Lydia, Richard, Missouri, Billy and Isaac were all on the census of Cooke County in 1860. (Laborn has not been found on any post-1850 records.)

George had married Martha Jane Hale in Hunt County in May of 1859. Their first daughter, Missouri H. (named for her aunt, Missouri J.), was born in March of 1860. A son, Richard Francis, was born in March of 1861; he was named for his uncle, Richard Carroll. George's family seem to have escaped the census takers in 1860, possibly living with the Hales in Hunt County but moving to Cooke County to be near his parents by the time Richard was born.

SECTION 2

FRONTIER LIFE

Frontier life became even more difficult when the Civil War began. Pendleton's youngest brother (and great-grandfather of this writer), Lorenzo Dow Porter, along with several of Pendleton's nephews, served in the Confederate Army, having enlisted in Shelby County in 1861 and 1862. Neither Pendleton nor his sons enlisted, as they were needed to provide for their families and try to protect them and other settlers against the Indian raids.

Since these frequent raids made raising cattle and crops difficult, the residents of Cooke and Montague counties had to supplement their food supplies by hunting stray cattle and other animals. On October 10 of 1863, Pendleton's sons, George, Isaac and Richard all went to the Red River area to "kill a beef" for the families. Billy stayed home, having been given the job of hauling some fence rails. Pendleton, his wife, and their daughter Missouri were at home. George's wife, Martha, and their two babies were there also, waiting for George's return.

The adults were enjoying a pleasant day playing with the grandbabies, when suddenly, the house was completely surrounded by a large group of Indian warriors. Those in the home had no way to escape or to defend themselves, as the hunters had taken all the weapons with them. Lydia told her three year old granddaughter, Missouri, to lie on the floor "like dead." The Indians forced their way into the house, quickly killed all the adults, took what they wanted and set the house on fire. Missouri and her baby brother, Richard ("Buck") were the only ones alive when the Indians finished pillaging the home and set it on fire. Richard suffered an arrow wound to his neck and Missouri was unharmed, but they were left in the burning house.

During the attack, Billy had returned home with his load of rails on a wagon and was also attacked by the Indians. He was able to escape and hide under the nearby mill. When the Indians left, he ran to the house, although he had many arrow wounds, and found his mother, father, sister and sister-in-law all

dead, and the house on fire. He was able to get the two young children out of the house and took them to the mill. Feeling the effects of his many wounds, he sent Missouri to the spring for water.

George Moore had been a close neighbor of the Porters until he moved his family to St. Jo because of the threat of Indian raids. On that fateful morning in October, he left St. Jo in a wagon to get a load of corn from his farm. As he neared the Porter home, he saw the destruction and saw little Missouri going to the mill with water for her uncle. Mr. Moore put the three survivors - Billy, Missouri and Richard - in his wagon and took them to his home in St. Jo, where they stayed for some time. Billy told them that there was at least one white man with the Indians. (in 1925, Mrs. G. A. Stanley, daughter of George Moore, wrote an article for Frontier Times Magazine describing this incident.)

In 1916 James Knox Porter wrote a letter about the family and ancestors to his daughter Minnie Alma. This excerpt tells about the October, 1863 tragedy (no corrections made):

“Uncle Pendleton, wife Liddy one grown daughter, name forgotten, one daughter-inlaw, and one or two grandchildren, were killed by Indians, in Cooke County in 1863— Two Boys escaped— One Pendleton was shot 13 times, he crawled under the house, and the Indians burned the house, but he crawled out, and was living two years ago. Uncle Pendleton was killed in the house, and his body all burned except his heart, which a Doctor in Gainsville preserved in alcohol— The rest were killed, or thrown into the yard— The house was robbed. Uncle Lewis claimed to have killed 5 or 6 white men implicated with the Indians and located by wearing apparel and bed clothes found in their homes— Besides he killed many Indians and was shot one time— One or two of Uncle Pents Boys were from home, and escaped the massacre — Uncle Lewis claimed to have killed every man implicated except one, and said he would get him if he lived— He died while gone, we supposed, to kill him—”

SECTION 3

THE SURVIVORS - PENDLETON'S LEGACY

George G.: Pendleton's oldest son, George, was not willing to stay in the area after losing his wife, his parents and a sister. He went back to Hunt County, probably to the White Rock area. His children, after staying for a while with the Moore family, went to the home of their grandparents, Tate and Anna Hale, also in Hunt County. A while later, George married Nancy Parker. Daniel, their first son, was born in Arkansas in 1865 according to census records. It is interesting to note that George's brother, Richard, was also in Arkansas, probably from 1868 to 1870. George's three younger children were born in Texas. The 1880 census showed George in Boone County, Texas with Nancy, her daughter by her first marriage, and all four of their children.

Richard Carroll: The second son, Richard, joined the Confederate Army and served in the Frontier Regiment, Company D. He married Martha Elizabeth Logston in McClennan County in January of 1867, and Pendleton G. was born 10 months later. Before the next child's birth in May of 1869, Richard had moved his family to Arkansas, as shown by the 1870 census of Scott County. However, before Samuel was born in 1872, he had moved back to Texas. The last four children were born in various parts of Texas, some listed on the 1900 census of Anderson County, including Missouri (Missouri?) E., born in March of 1880 and not found on any other record. The three youngest children, which included twins, were born in Ellis County. Richard seems to have moved frequently, but Hunt County was nevertheless

an influence on his family, as his oldest son, Pendleton G., was on the census there in 1900, with his brother, Samuel, living with him. In 1920 he was again on the Hunt census, shown as Penny G., with his second wife and six children. Several of Richard's children, including Samuel and Bryan, moved to Oklahoma.

William Pendleton: Billy, after spending some time with the Moore family, also went back to Hunt County. Around 1870, he married Margaret T. and by 1880 he had five children, the two oldest being twin daughters. He had an arrowhead embedded in his hip, and the wound refused to heal until the arrowhead worked its way to the surface and his wife removed it with a knitting needle. By 1900, "W. P. Porter" was on the census with his wife, a teen-age son and a grandson in Indian Territory in Oklahoma. In 1914, his cousin, James Knox Porter wrote in a letter to Isaac that Cousin Will (or Bill) had sent him a picture showing wounds made by the Indians and had "sorter promised" to visit him in Texas in the summer of 1913 but did not show up.

Isaac N: It is not known how long Isaac, about thirteen at the time of the massacre, lived with the George Moore family. In 1870, at age 21, he was living with his brother Billy in Hunt County. By 1880 he had married Sarah Guest and had two children; they lived near Billy. A daughter was born in Hunt County in 1881; sometime after that, Sarah had died and only the youngest daughter was living with Isaac in 1900. In 1914 he wrote to his cousin James Knox Porter from Oklahoma; James replied with a long letter which he sent to Isaac in "Melbourn, OK," but it was returned stamped "no such post office."

Missouri H: George's oldest child, Missouri, lived with her grandparents, the Hales, in Hunt County until she was 17. She married William Marion Littleton in 1877 and had a daughter in 1879 and a son two years later. In 1937, the Greenville Messenger (Hunt County) ran an article titled "Old Timer in Indian Raid" which told of Missouri's close call. At that time she was living in Winchell in Brown County, where her husband had died in 1925 and she died in 1944. In 1910, her son, Mack, was on the census of McCulloch County, but in 1918, when he registered for the draft, he said he was farming in Winchell in Brown County. Winchell is very near the Brown and McCulloch County line. Mack, like his parents, is buried in Cox Cemetery in McCulloch County. Missouri's daughter, Maggie May, married Robert L. Jones. They lived in Chavez County, NM, with their three children; in 1930, only Maggie and her younger daughter were on the census there.

Richard Francis: Richard, referred to as "Buck" in some accounts of the massacre, was the youngest survivor. Like Missouri, he went to Hunt County to live with his mother's parents for many years. He married Mary E. (Mollie) Gardner about 1895. They had four children born in Texas, then moved to Arizona about 1901. Three children were born in Arizona, probably all in Cochise County, where a Gardner family lived next door to them. Richard died there in 1917, but in 1920, Mollie was still there with five of her children, a fourteen year old niece, listed as Gertrude Gardener, and a young "lodger".

Pendleton's family was not the first nor the last to suffer greatly in that time of Indian raids, Civil War and rugged frontier conditions. It was a fearful time in the our country's development. The War ended in 1865, but Indian attacks went on in Texas until at least 1872. It is encouraging to note that, in spite of the tragic events of October 10, 1863, and the memories of that tragedy, all of Pendleton's sons married and raised families in the harsh and demanding frontier lands. And so, Pendleton Porter's legacy lives on!

SOURCES

1. **History of Newton County Arkansas** by Walter F. Lackey, 1950
2. **Frontier Times Magazine**, Vol. 2, No. 12, September , 1925, pp. 34 and 35
3. **Frontier Times Magazine**, Vol. 3, No. 2, November, 1925, p. 10
4. **The West Texas Frontier** by Joseph Carroll McConnell (Downloadable from www.forttours.com/main.html)
5. **Frontier Defense in the Civil War: Texas Rangers and Rebels**, 1992, by David Paul Smith
6. **One Hundred Years in Montague County, Texas** by Jeff S. Henderson (First published in St. Jo, 1978, by IPTA; now online on Ancestry.com)
7. **The History of Montague County, Texas** by Guy Renfro Donnell (written as a Master's thesis; first printed in 1940, reprinted 1992.
8. **The Greenville Messenger**, 27 May 1937, page one article entitled "Old Timer in Indian Raid" (about Missouri Porter Littleton)
9. **Indian Raids in Montague County**, 1977 by Marvin F. London, S.J.T.Printers, St. Jo,
10. **Handbook of Texas Online** (Article on town of White Rock), Texas State Historical Association
11. Census records from Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona and New Mexico
12. Family history notes including a timeline for both Pendleton and his father and letters written by Pendleton's nephew, James Knox Porter, in 1914 and 1916
13. Information shared orally and by email by Max Brown, volunteer at the Old Jail museum in Montague
14. E-mails from Norman L. Newton, Dick Sparkman, Jerry Doughty, Patti Sicking, Stanley Bessent
15. Fort Tours Systems, Inc. (online at: <http://www.forttours.com/main.html>)
<http://www.forttours.com/pages/porter.asp> "Massacre of the Porter Family"
<http://www.forttours.com/pages/bigraid.asp>) "Big Raid into Montague and Cooke Counties"

This writer appreciates the help from all those mentioned above, and congratulates those responsible for the website, Fort Tours, a wonderful resource for anyone interested in frontier times in Texas.

Excerpts from James Knox Porter's Letters

[Excerpts from a letter sent to Isaac Porter, Pendleton's youngest son, by his cousin, James Knox Porter -this writer's grandfather. The letter was returned stamped "no such post office."]

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Dora, Texas May 25. 1914

Mr. Isaac N. Porter: Melbourn, OK

Dear Cousin:

Your Kind letter of May 22, came to hand yesterday. Glad to know you are well, we are all well as usual....

Last year, I had a letter or two from Cousin Will Porter*. Uncle Lewis called him Bill. he sorter promised to come to see me last summer, but failed and I have lost his where abouts. He sent me his picture showing wounds made by Indians. I feel shure our Government will pay you all damages for what the Indians took from you, but it may be a long time about it. I will be might glad to see you next summer. I have always wanted Uncle Pendlton and families full history, especially his frontier history.

**Refers to William Pendleton Porter, Pendleton's son.*

Excerpt from James Knox Porter's lengthy letter of 1916, written to his daughter Minnie Alma in response to her questions about the family; no spelling corrections made.

"Uncle Joe Porters folk lived in and near Shelby County Texas— Uncle Pendleton, wife Liddy [Lydia Wade), one grown daughter, name forgotten, one daughter-inlaw, and one or two grandchildren, were killed by Indians, in Cooke County in 1863— Two Boys escaped— One Pendleton was shot 13 times, he crawled under the house, and the Indians burned the house, but he crawled out, and was living two years ago. Uncle Pendleton was killed in the house, and his body all burned except his heart, which a Doctor in Gainsville preserved in alcohol— The rest were killed, or thrown into the yard— The house was robbed.

"Uncle Lewis claimed to have killed 5 or 6 white men implicated with the Indians and located by wearing apparel and bed clothes found in their homes— Besides he killed many Indians and was shot one time— One or two of Uncle Pents Boys were from home, and escaped the massacre — Uncle Lewis claimed to have killed every man implimated except one, and said he would get him if he lived— He died while gone, we supposed, to kill him—"

[Entire letters available]