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## ANDREW F. SMYTH, JASPER COUNTY BUSINESSMAN AND FARMER

1817-1879

WILLIAM SEALE

When Andrew Farney Smyth completed his training in surveying at the small Presbyterian academy in Moulton, Alabama, he gave his future serious consideration. A close inspection of Moulton and the neighboring towns yielded few, if any, openings for an ambitious young man of seventeen. Most of the people in north Alabama were farmers, and a number of Andrew's friends would undoubtedly work on their fathers' land, which would someday be theirs. But this was not the case with Andrew. Since he could remember, his father had operated a small log gristmill on Big Nance Creek, north of Moulton toward the Rocky Shoals of the Tennessee River. The mill did well to supply family necessities and schooling for the children; in it was no future for Andrew.

Andrew's brother, George Washington Smyth, had faced a similar problem, and in 1830 had gone to Texas. In the five years since, George had written home glowing reports of the Mexican land, commenting at one time that "Cattle require no feeding. . . Hogs require only to be kept gentle. And Horses require feeding only when in actual service." Society, he said, was a "badly organized" mixture of many classes, but time would surely see this difficulty overcome.<sup>1</sup> George had settled in East Texas in Bevil's Settlement, a place of 140 scattered inhabitants, most of whom were from the southern United States. Nacogdoches was some sixty miles to the north, and the settlement was situated in a forty mile area between the Sabine and Angelina rivers.<sup>2</sup> Having married Frances Grigsby, a wealthy settler's daughter, George was, in 1835, occupied with farming and with his growing interest in the politics of this remote end of Mexico.

George's experiences had interested the entire Smyth family, not least of all Andrew. When Andrew's various attempts at getting work failed, he wrote his brother on April 12, 1835: "i wood receive a few lines [from] you with great pleasure i should like you to tell me what would be the prospect for a youth to make a living in that part of the country for it is but a slim chance here."<sup>3</sup> As a matter of fact, Andrew was desperate. His mother had died the previous December, and he saw quickly that his absence from the mill would simplify matters for his father. Perhaps it was the outbreak of hostilities in Texas that postponed his departure through the summer. At any rate, by autumn he was only one of many Americans pondering the trip to Texas; Texas had become a popular topic of conversation in his locality, for it seemed inevitable that a revolution against the Mexicans would break out soon. Here and there, young Alabamans prepared to join the Texas forces. At Courtland, on the Rocky Shoals fourteen miles from Moulton, seventy men had banded together, calling themselves the Red Rovers, anticipating an adventure in Texas.

The Red Rovers did not leave Courtland for a month. In the meantime they camped on the town square, displaying to the whole vicinity their gaudy red jeans and the splendid rifles which had been loaned the company by the State of Alabama.<sup>4</sup>

Andrew and seven of his friends were among the Red Rovers' most ardent admirers—seeing the Courtland company leave only made them regret that they had not gone too. After thinking it over further for several weeks, the eight young men announced to their families that they also intended to go to Texas and fight Mexicans.<sup>5</sup> In December, 1835, they reached the Natchez Trace, and in all probability followed the Trace to Natchez. Then they must have gone west to Natchitoches. From Natchitoches they could have followed the El Camino Real to Nacogdoches, where they arrived in January, 1836.

Andrew's companions were evidently interested only in adventure, for none of them planned to remain in Texas. With Andrew it was a different matter. Before leaving Moulton he had gotten a letter of recommendation from his schoolmaster, and upon his arrival in Texas, probably because he intended to become a permanent resident, he decided to contact his brother before joining a military company.<sup>6</sup> At Nacogdoches the Alabamans heard that the Red Rovers had landed on the coast and were en route to join Colonel James W. Fannin at a place called Goliad. One of Andrew's comrades, James Ellis, decided that he would ride ahead to meet the Red Rovers; Ellis headed toward Goliad, and the remaining seven turned south of Bevil's Settlement.

Andrew was a boy of twelve when his brother left home for Texas. Now, a few months before his eighteenth birthday, he stood a little taller than most, and his lanky frame suggested that he might grow even more. His dark, reddish hair hung almost to his shoulders, framing the ruddy complexion of his face. In their blue eyes and chiseled features the brothers were alike, although George was darker and taller.

Andrew could not have been disappointed in George's situation at Bevil's Settlement. Besides owning a farm, George had been granted the office of Land Commissioner of the Nacogdoches District, which included the settlement, recently renamed Jasper, and there was talk of his being elected to the convention scheduled to meet March 1, 1836, at Washington on the Brazos. Shortly after Andrew arrived, George made a trip to Nacogdoches to bring the land office records to Jasper for protection. Destruction of the land records would dissolve the settlers' claims to their property—hence no precaution was too great. While George was in Nacogdoches he and Dr. Stephen H. Everett were elected delegates from Jasper to the convention. Andrew agreed to remain with George's wife and child while the convention was in session.

George Smyth was among those who signed the Declaration of Independence, although he had previously endorsed a policy of conciliation with Mexico. On March 6 he took time to write Andrew from Washington on the Brazos:

An express arrived this morning from Bexar from Col Travis dated 3rd. Inst, the most important features of which are, that the

Mexican Army under General Seizma [Sesmal], were variously estimated at from 1500 to 6,000 men—that reinforcement estimated at 1000 men had just then arrived & from the rejoicings which were at that moment heard in the city, He judged Santa Anna himself had arrived—the Mexican Army had invested the fort (Alimo) [sic] and were entrenching at every point— The enemy [sic] kept up a constant bombardment— 200 bombs had fallen in the fort without injury to any— Our whole force in the Alimo [sic] amount only to 150 effective men— they have twenty days provisions for their present number— but ammunition scarce— Col Travis says a blood red banner waves from the Church— and Camp in token of the kind of warfare which they intend to carry on against us— he expresses his full determination to hold out to the last and sell his life as dearly as possible—

A select Committee have been busily engaged in drafting a constitution which will be reported tomorrow— there has been some degree of confusion in consequence of the situation of our brave friends in the Alimo [sic] A motion was this morning made to break up the convention and adjourn to Bexar, but was rejected I hope our session will be short—<sup>7</sup>

Had George known the happenings of the day, his worries would have deepened, for on that very morning the Alamo had fallen before the Mexican attack.

George returned home late in the month. Andrew and his friends were among the Jasper Volunteers who prepared to join Sam Houston's forces in early April. Andrew was made First Lieutenant of the company, and on March 27, Palm Sunday, he was on the march, unaware that James Ellis and the Red Rovers were dead at Goliad.<sup>8</sup>

General Houston confirmed the fall of the Alamo to the convention meeting at Washington on the Brazos, and after deserters from Gonzales appeared in Washington several of the delegates left for their homes on the Louisiana border. As Houston retreated eastward news of the retreat reached the settlements and created widespread fear. Settlers loaded their wagons, or whatever conveyances were available, with their belongings and set out toward Louisiana in the hope of reaching the border ahead of the Mexican Army. Before this so-called "run away scrape" got under way George Smyth from his home in Jasper wrote his father saying: "Texas can extricate herself from her enemies if she will do her duty but unfortunately many are disposed to fly from the country rather than defend it."<sup>9</sup> However, when a rumor circulated that a Mexican Army was headed toward Nacogdoches, George joined the refugees across the Sabine.<sup>10</sup> The Jasper Volunteers, hearing the same rumor, turned and rode to Nacogdoches, there to wait for the action which did not come. The volunteers disbanded one month after the Texas victory at San Jacinto; bidding his Moulton friends goodbye, Andrew rode to his brother's farmhouse near Jasper.

Since Andrew arrived in Texas he had been busy getting ready to fight Mexicans, hence had had little time before San Jacinto to consider seriously where he would establish his home. George's success at Jasper and the

fact he had served in a military company there and had made acquaintances surely influenced Andrew to select Jasper as a place of residence. Then he liked the country. He had seen the magnolia and dogwood blooming white in the dark pine thickets; he had walked in the hills and drunk from cool springs. If this was the promised land for others, why should it not be for him as well?

In the Constitution of the Republic, provisions were made for granting land to people as a reward for services or long residence in Texas. For his service in the Jasper Volunteers Andrew was given 320 acres northeast of the Angelina River town of Bevilport, and George claimed a league and labor—4,605 acres—of land down the Neches from Bevilport. Since George had the larger grant, along with two slaves and a little capital to begin with, Andrew set to work helping him to establish his new farm. For the remainder of 1836 and well into 1837 they labored at clearing fields and raising a two-story house of squared logs near Walnut Run Creek. To lend a little elegance to his house, George placed a brass sundial in the front yard.

When the Municipality of Jasper<sup>11</sup> readied itself to become a county, qualified surveyors were invited to apply for the job of boundary-making. Andrew stepped forward with his schoolmaster's letter, and the commissioners gave him the job.<sup>12</sup> The tedious project was completed by the end of the year when President Houston signed the bill which created Jasper County. The town of Jasper was made county seat, and Bevil was renamed Bevilport—both towns were within easy riding distance of the Walnut Run farm. Having accumulated excellent recommendations, Andrew accepted the position of county surveyor in Jefferson County, but on March 10, 1838, he submitted his resignation and returned upriver to establish a claim upon an available one-third league of land in Liberty County.<sup>13</sup> Somewhat more promising than his previous grant, this property was not far from George's farm on the opposite side of the Neches.

George had busied himself with domestic responsibilities since the Revolution; with Andrew's help, he seems to have turned the Walnut Run place into an excellent farm, acquiring more slaves and land as he went along. But George's heart was not in farming. When, in spring 1839, President Lamar offered him the job of surveying the boundary between Texas and Louisiana, he readily accepted. In his brother's absence, Andrew became overseer of George's farms and at the same time managed his own two farms. From this rather secure position he investigated the possibilities for making money in East Texas.

Jasper County, and in fact the whole region, was isolated from Texas trade centers and markets. Even in the most prosperous homes few luxuries could be found; such things were simply not available. A German passing through in 1839 was greeted by a Negro who warned that ". . . only bad whiskey was to be had in Jasper," which about summed up the situation.<sup>14</sup> The problem stemmed from inadequate transportation, particularly on the rivers, since bad roads were common all over Texas. Not having "store-bought" goods was bad enough, but more serious was the difficulty farmers had getting their crops to market. Crops were usually sold to an agent from a Galveston, Sabine Pass, or New Orleans mercantile house. Delivering the crop to market was the farmer's own problem, and the

coastal merchants paid only upon receipt of the commodity. As an overseer, Andrew realized that transportation was one of the conspicuous shortcomings of the new land.

George's official duties were over in the summer of 1841. He returned to Jasper County determined to be a farmer in name only, preferring land speculation and politics as actual occupations. It was not difficult to convince Andrew to remain as overseer of all the farms.

When it was time for spring planting in 1844, Andrew could consider himself overseer of some of the finest farms in the region. He was ready now to get out on his own. Seeing the obvious need for improved transportation facilities, he went to his Liberty County land and built a flatboat, which he towed up the river to Bevilport. As overseer he had doubtless made many connections among the farmers who were willing to give him their business. For one dollar a bale, Andrew would transport cotton safely to Sabine Pass, and if necessary, arrange for having it shipped elsewhere. The farmers' money, minus shipping costs, would be delivered to them as soon as Andrew was home again.

Bevilport, on the Angelina, was the terminal for the flat-nosed, raft-like boat. Andrew and his workers, two slaves hired from local farmers, had to keep their eyes open; the river was full of snags, and mudbanks, which were eternal menace to flatboats. Using long poles, they guided the craft on its lazy way. At night the boat was tied to the riverbank, and the men took turns keeping watch. When the flatboat came into Sabine Lake, Andrew engaged a steamer to tow it across to Sabine Pass. He attended to the necessary business with the merchants, and after selling the flatboat for its lumber, he began the overland trip back to Jasper, sometimes on horseback, sometimes on foot, always cautious to protect the money he carried.<sup>15</sup> This necessitated the building of a new flatboat each spring.

If Andrew had not hit a gold mine, he had at least found a good way to make money. George and his wife Frances were happy with Andrew's business venture but were becoming concerned over his private life. A man of twenty-seven, they said, should have a wife. Andrew might well have known that his brother and sister-in-law had plans for him; they did, and by May 1845 their plans were successful, for Andrew was on his way to Kentucky, where he would visit Miss Emily Allen, Frances Grigsby Smyth's niece.

Emily was eighteen, having spent all her life in a modest clapboard farmhouse on Green River near Owensboro. She was not beautiful, although there was a certain strength in her small, sharp features. She stood scarcely over five feet tall; her dark, thin hair accentuated deep set eyes and white skin, freckled enough to suggest her distaste for sunbonnets. Andrew probably thought he cut a dashing figure in his new Galveston finery, and if Emily was polite, she tried not to let him believe anything else. Andrew left the Allens in late June to visit his father in Moulton. Returning to Kentucky, he proposed to Emily, and they were married in July. For a wedding present, Emily's father gave her a horse, a mule, a cow, and a twelve-year-old slave girl. Andrew, with his bride and her dowry, headed overland for the Republic of Texas.

Andrew and Emily lived with George's family until Andrew could acquire what he considered suitable property on which to establish his home. For Emily there were a great many things to become accustomed to; life in Texas was wilder, more adjusted to the tempo of the land. Andrew became interested in a 1,060 acre tract adjoining Bevilport, and in January 1846 he purchased it, arranging for long term payments. Extending along the Angelina River, this property was not the best in the county, but it had the advantage of a good location, as well as having the last miles of Indian Creek, a clear, strong body of water emptying into the river. At the mouth of Indian Creek Andrew built a cabin and outbuildings. Emily moved in during the month of February; her first child would be born in the summer. It was in that same February that Anson Jones, raising the American Flag, dramatically proclaimed that the Republic of Texas was no more.

Andrew continued his flatboat business, making a profit on each trip. Now he rented the labor of four "Congo Negroes" [slaves] to assist him with building and loading the vessels. So regular had his shipment of flatboats become, at least during the cotton season, that people began to give him lists of drygoods which they hoped he would purchase for them with their cotton money and bring upriver. Andrew quickly saw the commercial possibilities in these requests from his clients. He decided that a dependable keelboat connection between Bevilport and the coast would be a profitable enterprise. Before the summer, Andrew had decided to build such a boat.

A keelboat was more difficult to construct than a flatboat. A keelboat resembled a long oval, pointed at either end; there was a hold and a small cabin above the deck level. A keelboat had other advantages for the sharp bow sliced the river current far more successfully than had the blunt nose of the flatboat, and the rudder made the keelboat more maneuverable. Although some keelboats had sails, it is unlikely that Andrew's did, for the narrow and crooked rivers and thick forests permitted little wind. Hiring four Negro slaves and a white man named Holland, Andrew prepared the lumber and built his boat which he named the *Jasper* and was ready for loading on June 7. To have finished construction so quickly Andrew obviously had given little time to domestic matters—excepting perhaps the birth of his daughter Nancy in May.

On the first trip the *Jasper* took downriver, Andrew was laden with orders for drygoods and household articles. His keelboat and a flatboat were packed primarily with cotton, tobacco, and corn. The downriver trip on a keelboat was not difficult, for unless there was an emergency, only one man was needed, and he stood at the big, awkward rudder. In Sabine Pass, Andrew turned the cargo over to the merchants, sold the flatboat, and began filling his orders at the various stores, always keeping a detailed account of what he bought. If a trip to the market in Galveston was needed, he took the beach coach, dividing his expenses among those who had made the journey necessary. These trips usually required five days.

When the keelboat was loaded, the tedious upriver struggle began. It was a battle against the current. One man stayed ashore holding a rope taut between himself or a tree and the boat, so that progress would not

be lost; the rest of the crew, keeping the boat near the riverbank, pushed with poles, gaining very slowly on their way. At dark they tied up and slept—by dawn they were hard at work again. To reach home would take many weeks.<sup>16</sup>

In his shipping business Andrew came in contact with many river men. River men were seldom a gentle, hearth-loving lot; and on sprees in port they sometimes made every effort to turn a town upside down. Rowdy tales and songs were yelled from flatboat to keelboat as they met on the river, and as often were traded in Gulf Coast saloons over tumblers of "rot-gut" whiskey. One of these songs particularly amused Andrew, and he pencilled it on the back of his account book:

- 1st—My friend is the cause of a great separation  
Concerning the part of a favorite one  
Besides the vexation and a great tribulation  
And they-l all be sorry for what they have done
- 2nd—Farewell to East Texas I am bound for to leave you  
My fortune to try in some foreign land  
My bottles my glasses to my greatest pleasure  
And when we do meet we will join hand in hand.
- 3rd—I'll drink and be jolly and as melancholy  
I will drownd it away in a bottle of wine  
I'll drownd it away in a full flowing gourd  
And play on the fiddle to pass away time.
- 4th—There is gold they do say in the rest of our country  
And money is a thing that ladies adore  
I have money enough to bear my life  
And when it is gone I know how to get more.
- 5th—So fare well to my friends and kind old neighbors  
Like wise to the girl I never more shall see  
This world it is wide and I'll spend it in pleasure  
And I don't care for no one who don't care for me
- 6th—When deathe come for me I'll freely go with him  
I'll pay my last tax and go with him without scorn  
No wife to weep for me no children to suffer  
No one left behind but my friends for to mourn.
- 7th—I'll be honest and just in all my transactions  
What ere I do promise it all shall be so  
And here is a health to all sound hearted ladies  
For it is hard to find one that is constant as snow.<sup>17</sup>

Finally docking the *Jasper* at Bevilport, Andrew would meet his clients and pay them their cotton and other produce money, less the expenses of the trip and purchases made. It was not an easy life, but Andrew, it seemed, anticipated a good future on the river.

Andrew and Emily could not complain of their lives under the Lone Star. They were doing better than Andrew's sister Sarah, for instance,

who had settled with her husband in Cherokee County. Sarah's husband was threatening to return to Alabama, and in 1846, Sarah wrote to her brother:

My health is very badly but my troubles are worse Separation from friends by death and distance proves almost too much for me I have lost my dear little Calcomb he died the 27 July after a painful illness of six days his dear little body lies food for worms in the wild woods of Texas without some alteration I shall soon follow him.<sup>18</sup>

Jasper County, on the other hand, seems to have been prosperous. In 1846 the eastern half of the county was partitioned off and named Newton County; apparently the people along the Sabine and those who lived in the Neches and Angelina valleys could not see eye to eye. In the new Jasper County there were by 1850, 1,235 white residents and 542 slaves.<sup>19</sup>

On his trips to Sabine Pass, Andrew noticed how readily his flatboats sold for lumber on the bald coastal prairies. There was there a need for building materials which the backwoods could supply. After giving the matter much consideration, and after securing a loan from William A. Ferguson, he built a small sawmill on his land at a point where the current of Indian Creek was particularly rapid. By summer 1847 the mill was in operation. Ferguson had close ties with Charles Alexander, a Sabine Pass merchant who provided Andrew with a ready market. With each trip the keelboat made down the Neches Andrew would have at least one flatboat loaded with lumber for market on the coast. For each trip the lumber sales averaged \$175, and the mill did a thriving business locally; so busy was Andrew in the following months that he refused to join the newly organized Jasper Volunteers when they left for the Rio Grande to participate in the Mexican War.

Life for Emily at the cabin was probably lonely. Even when Andrew was at home, except for an occasional "preaching" or a visit from a woman whose husband had come to see Andrew on business, she, her slave, and Nancy had few contacts with neighbors, and there were endless domestic duties. In August 1847 another daughter, Susannah, was born and Emily began to worry about rearing a family so far out in the woods. In later years she recalled that if Andrew was working late she would wait until the children were asleep, and then have the Negroes haul her loom to the mill. By torchlight he would work in the mill and she would weave, thus she attempted to escape the unbearable loneliness of the cabin. Occasionally she managed to visit her aunt at the Walnut Run place, but as her duties multiplied these trips became less frequent. Since George was made General Land Commissioner of Texas in 1848 and was away most of the time, Frances' responsibilities kept her from visiting Emily regularly. By 1849 Emily was determined to build a new house on the property at a place nearer Bevilport and farther back from the hazardous river. Emily had more than once written her mother about the dangerous river and had just as often anticipated the time when they could live on "dry ground." It was not hard to convince Andrew that a new house was needed. Emily selected a level place half way between Bevilport and the Indian Creek Baptist Church, and work began in December 1849. As the new place would be a farm as well as a residence, orchards were planted and out-

buildings built. Andrew allowed his business to prevent him from giving much time to the building of the new home. In July 1850 a son, George, was born, and by the following summer the house was still no further along than the foundation.

During the spring rise of 1852 Emily heard cries from the whirlpool where Indian Creek flowed into the river. Running to the spot she discovered that little George had fallen into the whirlpool; quickly she plunged into the water and pulled him to safety. Ignoring Andrew's protests, Emily loaded her household goods and children into a wagon, and by nightfall the Smyths were settled in a smokehouse, not twenty feet from the foundation of their new house. Andrew now lost no time in readying the house for occupancy. The interior was not finished when he moved his family in, but by Christmas 1852 she was happy in her new home.<sup>20</sup>

Through the 1850's Andrew and Emily participated actively in the social life of the county. Jasper and Bevilport, with their plain white frame buildings and latticed "piazzas," offered the pleasures of town society, while the Smyths now and then held a ball or barbecue at their big dog trot house in the country. Three more children—Araminta, Frances, and Andrew Constantine—were born during the 1850's. Andrew noted many such events in his account books, perhaps because he was proud of these good years, or perhaps for no real reason at all.

The sawmill was the main source of income during the 1850's. Steamboats had made his keelboat an antique overnight, and the lumber from the *Jasper* had been used in building the new house. Andrew bought another slave, hoping to lessen his labor expenses. When his slave fled to Indiana, aided by an "abolition scamp," Andrew decided to operate his business with hired workers.<sup>21</sup> His three remaining slaves were assigned to domestic duties. Although steamboats had replaced the *Jasper*, flatboats were still regularly sent from Bevilport to Sabine Pass loaded with lumber; cotton was rarely aboard. Even though the lumber mill prospered, Andrew was restless to try something new. In late 1855 he built a store at Bevilport. The Sabine Pass firm of William A. Ferguson and C. F. Alexander agreed to stock for Andrew on a commission basis.

Ferguson, early in 1856, made a trip to New Orleans and New York to buy for the new store and ordered some \$7,000 worth of goods. When the shipment arrived at Bevilport Andrew discovered rather than the usual calico, flour, and other staples, a wide assortment of liquors, bolts of silk, anvils, barrels of mackerel, and countless other items not suited to ready sale nor the tastes of backwoods Texans. Worst of all, the goods were billed to "Ferguson, Smyth and Company," a firm which did not exist. Infuriated, Andrew refused to accept the shipment.

The matter was not heard of again until December 1858, when Andrew was advised that the New Orleans and New York firms had filed suit against Ferguson and Smyth. In Jasper on January 10, 1859, Ferguson issued a statement saying that a firm of Ferguson and Smyth had never existed, and that Andrew had not been legally responsible for the shipment. Ferguson agreed to make the statement only if Andrew would assume a part of the debt. Advised by George to accept this offer, Andrew

undertook to pay \$3,000 of the debt as his, and Ferguson signed over some of his Sabine Pass town lots, which he swore were easily worth as much as \$3,000. To his eastern creditors Andrew wrote: "I can assure you that it is an unpleasant thought for me seeing what little I have sacrificed under the hammer to pay intrinsically another man's debt."<sup>22</sup> Fortunately Andrew would soon receive an appointment to estimate the cost of improving the Angelina and Neches rivers. His salary from this project dissolved the bulk of his debt, and the income from the mill had never been better.

Soon after coming to terms with the New Orleans and New York wholesale houses the Smyths were faced with the problem of secession. Neither Andrew or George favored secession, but in the Civil War when the Jasper Volunteer Company rode toward San Antonio, Andrew was again its first lieutenant. George was too old, they said, and by the time the volunteers reached Crockett, Andrew was discharged because of his age, forty-five. He returned home, where, in 1864, he was elected chief justice of Jasper County by a "large majority."<sup>23</sup> In the final months of the war, the people of the vicinity seem to have been gripped by rumor of a Negro uprising. Andrew, as judge, knew of this fear. Valentine Weiss wrote to him from Weiss' Bluff:

Allow me to introduce to you a matter which needs EARLY ATTENTION. There is at this place about Thirty or Forty grown Negro men— apart of which are in my charge in the employ of the Gov't— And as you are well aware the Negroes at this time are not kept under strict discipline— on acct of so many of the citizens being in the army. . . . I therefore hope, that by furnishing you the names of the citizens & soldiers who are at present here on Detail, that you will immediately send us necessary papers for a Patroll— so that we may keep the negroes in discipline, —or otherwise it may come to a bad end.<sup>24</sup>

For the most part, the war years were uneventful for the Smyths. At the end of the war President Johnson asked each southern state to call a convention for the purpose of changing the state constitution so that it would guarantee the war objectives of the United States Government. A convention was called in Texas for January, 1866. George W. Smyth was elected a delegate from Jasper to the Texas Convention. On February 21, 1867, he was found dead in his Austin hotel room. The convention adjourned February 22 to attend the funeral. George's death was unexpected and the Andrew Smyths did not learn of it until after the funeral. Andrew was made the executor of his brother's estate.

In the spring of 1866 Andrew was re-elected to the post of chief justice of the county. His sawmill was no longer as productive as it had been for a steam mill had been built at Ford's Mill (now Evadale) near the best market; and water that Andrew depended on for power was not always dependable, hence he found it difficult to compete with the new mill. At Bevilport and Jasper, however, there was a growing need for merchandise for both citizens and stores. Steamers had almost disappeared from the river, because most of them had been destroyed in Confederate service during the war. Rather quickly, it seems, Andrew became interested again in steamboat trade on the Neches.

When his term of office as judge ended in 1868, Andrew did not seek re-election. Rather, he joined a nearby neighbor Major Elias Seale, and a Mr. Hadnot from Magnolia Springs on a trip to Galveston to investigate the possibilities of buying a steamer. What they returned with was the *Camargo*, a dilapidated square nosed stern-wheeler, which had cost them \$3,000. The vessel was in battered condition, but she was thought to be a bargain at the price. Andrew was to be her captain.

Besides Bevilport, home port, the *Camargo* stopped at all the landings along the river, freighting cotton under the same arrangements as the flatboats had done. With farm produce and passengers to take downriver, the venture was for a time successful for the upriver trip, too, could be made to reap a profit, for there would be merchandise aboard, as well as passengers. The *Camargo* paid for herself within two years, and the owners had no complaints.

By 1871 the *Camargo* was becoming troublesome. Normally she went completely out of control at least once on every trip, often running into the riverbank, spilling bales of cotton and barrels of produce at random. Passengers continually complained of the dirty cabin with its uncomfortable wooden furniture and openly indicated that if a better boat came along they would patronize her. This was a safe threat. In midautumn 1871 the *Camargo* took her final plunge into the riverbank—final, that is, as far as her career with Captain Andrew Smyth was concerned, for he announced calmly that he had cursed her for the last time. If his partners, he announced, did not agree to join him in buying a new boat, he would find new partners.

At Bevilport, Andrew, Major Seale, Colonels P. F. Renfro and C. R. Beaty, James Lee, and Reverend James Bean formed a new partnership. Supplying Andrew with \$9,000 in the form of a letter of credit from Hobby and Post and Company of Galveston, they sent him to look for a boat. The docks at Galveston yielded nothing, nor did those at New Orleans, so Andrew headed up the Mississippi; Major Seale and Mr. Hadnot were meanwhile selling the *Camargo*.

On November 1 at Evansville, Indiana, Andrew saw what he wanted. Her price was too high, but there was no other suitable boat to be had. She was 115 feet long, and had a thirty-two foot beam. Her two levels of decks were well made, and gleamed with a coat of white paint. The upper deck was a line of green doors which led to the passengers' cabins and the saloon. She was a stern-wheeler, and on each side in big letters was painted the name *LAURA*. The cabins were tiny. Down the center of the second level extended the saloon, which was crowded with chairs, sofas, mirrors, tables, and a great mahogany sideboard which served as a bar. The walls were white and green, corresponding to the scheme on the outside of the boat. An uncovered staircase led from the second deck to the spacious cargo deck below. Andrew admired the freight decks and the modern forty-horsepower engine. She was indeed a boat built for the Angelina and Neches, and to be sure, too tempting to pass up.<sup>25</sup> Hobby and Post agreed by mail to finance "anything Judge Smyth elects to purchase." The Bevilport investors were not informed at the time of purchase that they had paid \$11,000 for their new steamer.

Andrew hired a crew of eleven, and loaded the *Laura* with Texas-bound

shipments of furniture, and on November 20 left for home. The partners were aghast at the price of the *Laura*, but the boat proved to be so popular that they soon forgot their worries. She paid for herself by the summer of 1874. From then on the partners enjoyed huge dividends.

As captain of the *Laura* Andrew reaped more than profit. To people near the Angelina or Neches and to many people in Sabine Pass and Galveston, he was the *Laura*. On the Mississippi the *Laura* would have looked silly and small, but on these East Texas rivers she was called "the queen." There were days when the river was still, and the *Laura* slid forward full steam, looking clean and white against the brown water and the lush green of the woods on either side. At other times rain fell so hard that the river could hardly be seen before the bow, and the *Laura* would have to tie up. Andrew loved the *Laura*, the river and the countryside and for the first time in his life he was completely contented.

Andrew continued as captain of the *Laura* until his death in 1879. Surviving him by twenty-eight years, Emily remained at the unfinished house near Bevilport. Today Bevilport is gone, and the Smyth house is one of the few remaining from the old days. At George's Walnut Run farm there is nothing but a historical monument to hint of what was there. The brass sundial lay for years in a clump of weeds only to disappear in recent years. Jasper, the Angelina, and the Neches are different now. Very little remains of the world of Andrew Smyth, but in his letters and papers may still be found fascinating glimpses of what that far-away but fast changing world was like.

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>George W. Smyth to Andrew Smyth, Nacogdoches, April 14, 1833. George W. Smyth Papers, Texas State Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Bevilport was incorporated by the Texas Congress on June 5, 1837. For many years maps of Texas listed Bevilport or Bevil Port which was located on the Angelina River a short distance before its confluence with the Neches. Jasper was some ten miles east of Bevilport.

<sup>3</sup>Andrew F. Smyth to George W. Smyth, Moulton, Alabama, April 12, 1835. Andrew F. Smyth Papers, in the collection of the Estate of William Seale, deceased.

<sup>4</sup>Ralph Steen, *The Texas Story* (Austin, 1961), 122. The loaning of state rifles to the Red Rovers illustrates the interest the state of Alabama had in the Texas cause.

<sup>5</sup>James Edmund Saunders, *Early Settlers of Alabama* (New Orleans, 1899), 66.

<sup>6</sup>Rev. Edward McMillan and John McMillan, A.B., "A Testimony in Favor of Mr. A. F. Smith." Moulton, Alabama, October 5, 1835. Andrew F. Smyth Papers.

<sup>7</sup>George W. Smyth to Andrew F. Smyth, Washington, Texas, March 6, 1836. George W. Smyth Papers.

<sup>8</sup>George W. Smyth Papers.

<sup>9</sup>George W. Smyth to Andrew Smyth, Bevil's Settlement, March 27, 1836. George W. Smyth Papers.

<sup>10</sup>L. W. Kemp, *Signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence* (Houston, 1944), 323.

<sup>11</sup>The municipality of Bevil was changed to the municipality of Jasper, December 1, 1835. H. P. N. Gammel, *Laws of Texas*, I. 946.

<sup>12</sup>Fragments of the field notes from this survey are in the Andrew F. Smyth Papers.

<sup>13</sup>Andrew F. Smyth to the County Commissioners of Jefferson County, March 10, 1838. Andrew F. Smyth Papers. Liberty County extended east to the Neches in 1836.

<sup>14</sup>Max Freund (ed.). *Gustav Dresel's Houston Journal: Adventures in North America and Texas 1837-1841* (Austin, 1954), 60.

<sup>15</sup>Account books and business notes from the Andrew F. Smyth Papers. Hereafter, unless otherwise cited, the information on Smyth's business life comes from the 1842-1879 papers.

<sup>16</sup>Account book, 1846. Andrew F. Smyth Papers.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>Sarah Wallace to Emily Allen Smyth and Andrew Smyth, Cherokee County, Texas, July 14, 1846. Andrew F. Smyth Papers.

<sup>19</sup>*Seventh Census of the United States* (1850), Jasper County, Texas.

<sup>20</sup>Emily Allen Smyth to Nancy Allen, Jasper County, January 20, 1850. Andrew F. Smyth Papers.

<sup>21</sup>M. C. Smyth to Andrew F. Smyth, Mooresville, Alabama, November 4, 1855. Andrew F. Smyth Papers.

<sup>22</sup>Andrew F. Smyth to Betts, Nichols, and Company, et al, Bevilport, June 11, 1859. Smyth's copy is in the Andrew F. Smyth Papers.

<sup>23</sup>Judge Goode to Andrew F. Smyth, Jasper, August 1, 1864. Andrew F. Smyth Papers.

<sup>24</sup>Valentine Weiss to Andrew F. Smyth, Weiss's Bluff, February 20, 1865. Andrew F. Smyth Papers.

<sup>25</sup>Mrs. George C. O'Brien in conversation with the author, Beaumont, Texas, July 10, 1962.