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The Road from Nacogdoches to Natchitoches: John Sprowl & the Failed Fredonian Rebellion

BY RICK SHERROD

A bit more than one hundred miles of the old El Camino Real separated Natchitoches, the most important nineteenth century town in northwest Louisiana, from Nacogdoches, the oldest continuously inhabited city within the current borders of Texas. The story of each city’s founding is rooted in a fascinating (if fanciful) Caddo legend about twin brothers. To forestall any future conflict between the families of his two sons, a Caddo chief instructed the twins to depart their tribal home on the Sabine. The brother “Natchitoches” traveled three days toward the rising sun while the other twin, “Nacogdoches,” journeyed three days to the west. In each respective location, both men raised their families and developed settlements. With sufficient insulation to prevent frictions over rights to hunting grounds, “the two brothers remained friendly and the road between the two communities was well traveled.”

Regular movement between the two settlements continued long after the Indian population of the area had vanished. In the early-1820s, when the steady acceleration of Anglo settlement of Texas began, a flood of migrants traversed El Camino Real, the traditional route to Mexico. That road ran from Natchitoches, across the Sabine, through the Ayish Bayou district (today’s San Augustine), and on to Nacogdoches, before turning toward San Antonio and then across the Rio Grande. Travel between these urban centers increased as years passed. It was common for migrants to Texas—especially those who settled in the northeastern portion of Béxar District in the state of Coahuila y Tejas—to oscillate between Mexican and American territory.

Both Moses and Stephen F. Austin used Natchitoches as a base from which to launch their colonization efforts. Some travelers came to settle northeast Texas, others to locate 150 miles down El Camino Real in the Austin

Rick Sherrod is an educator and social studies department chair at Stephenville High School.
Colony. In both locations, many put down roots and stayed. A smaller number retraced their steps back to Natchitoches, some so doing after being expelled by the empresarios from their respective adopted homes, and others taking flight following failed attempts to cast off Mexican rule and establish independent principalities. The road to successful Texas independence ended at San Jacinto when Sam Houston's vengeful troops overwhelmed the Mexican army along the banks of Buffalo Bayou. Along that figurative road there were numerous way stations. Invariably, Natchitoches became a staging ground for revolutionary undertakings.3

In northeast Texas, there were three failed attempts to create sovereign polities—the 1811-1812 Gutierrez-Magee filibuster out of Louisiana; Dr. James Long’s 1819 expedition, also entering Texas from the Pelican State; and a late 1826, early 1827 revolt centered in Nacogdoches and supported by the Ayish Bayou settlement some thirty-five miles to the east.4 This last-named dress rehearsal for the Texas Revolution sprang from a local power struggle over who would govern the Edwards colony. The Edwards brothers—Haden and Benjamin—largely directed events, but some twenty-eight supportive lieutenants played an important role in the revolt that deeply troubled both Mexican officials in San Antonio and the greatest of all the empresarios, Stephen F. Austin. The top leadership and general contours of this Fredonian Rebellion are easy to identify. More may be learned, however, by careful scrutinization of the life of one “middle manager” who eventually threw support to the Edwards faction. In the end fifty-year-old John Sprowl, along with his twenty-nine rebellious compatriots, used El Camino Real to find safety across the American border in Natchitoches.

John Sprowl (b. abt. 1775 in Virginia / d. bef. 12 February 1835 in Louisiana), was a versatile planter who contributed greatly to the early growth of the rapidly developing Ayish Bayou settlement. While Sprowl’s participation in the Fredonian revolt is easily documented, his life before and after his northeast Texas years have remained heretofore enigmatic. George Louis Crocket’s forty-year-old treatment of the Fredonian Rebellion briefly acknowledged Sprowl’s importance in the troublesome episode, but Crocket also
concedes, “much of the history of this man is uncertain.” Ultimately he concluded that after the end of the rebellion, “no further mention of his name occurs in the records or history of the county. Whether he died or moved away does not appear.”

Crocket looked only in East Texas. A full and rich biography of this Fredonian rebel is available when Louisiana records are added to the mix. Had Crocket pursued the path frequently followed by the descendants of the Caddo twins, Natchitoches and Nacogdoches, he would have discovered the story of a frontier pioneer par excellence. Moreover, Sprowl’s example demonstrates the extent to which northwest Louisiana and northeast Texas were connected during the eventful decades of the 1820s and 1830s. International boundaries notwithstanding, men like Sprowl moved with abandon, staking out settlements in both areas and residing in the location that proved most expedient at any given moment during a time of change, tumult, and distress.

John Sprowl’s story begins in western Virginia where he was born into a Scots-Irish family. True to his heritage—Scots-Irish emigrants “were all a border people”—there is something profoundly appropriate about the Sprowl migration out of frontier Augusta County, Virginia to border regions of Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mexican Texas. If John Sprowl never remained in a single location for long, his impact wherever he went was always significant. He was a force for modernization, early-nineteenth century “style.” In every instance, Sprowl’s presence brought agricultural and economic development to the outer edge of the American frontier. If his more sedentary children put down substantial roots in northwest Louisiana, Sprowl’s restless entrepreneurial spirit kept him moving his entire life.

In the mid-eighteenth century, Sprowl’s father, dubbed in family lore as “Jackson River John,” immigrated to the far western Virginia frontier from County Tyrone in Ireland. The family patriarch left a paltry inheritance to his three oldest sons, all of who migrated at the turn of the nineteenth century across the Appalachians to the Kentucky-Tennessee border area. In 1799, John settled
just across Kentucky's southern border in Overton County, Tennessee. By September of that year, he had received a personal visit from one of Tennessee's best-loved hero-pioneers, Tennessee Governor John Sevier who was on a reconnaissance mission to inspect recently settled areas in the north central area of the state.

At that far outpost, as a young man in his early-twenties, John Sprowl set about to find a wife. This he did from among another group of recently arrived Virginia migrants, the Ned Irons family. In November 1799, Sprowl wed Elizabeth Irons. Within a decade, the migratory spirit again overtook the thirty-four-year-old Sprowl. He relocated to northeast Alabama, America's newest, most attractive agricultural frontier. Although no account of Sprowl's migration to Alabama has survived, he was among the earliest patentees in the Madison County community that soon became known as Brownsboro.

If Sprowl's successful land acquisitions gave him some measure of success, his marital fortunes were far less favorable, but in spite of marital conflict, Sprowl's union with Elizabeth Irons did produce three children: Sarah Ann (b. abt. 1800), Mary Margaret Sprowl (b. 1804 / m. Daniel Brown in 1821 / d. 1831), and John Paul Sprowl (b. June 19, 1802 / m. Mahala Brown in 1823 / d. September 8, 1843). But the union binding John and Elizabeth dissolved after seven years (1799-1806), and by 1807, Sprowl was living with a woman named Rachel Daws or Davis—relevant records use both names. In 1822, Elizabeth charged that John "took up with" another woman—Rachel—around 1806 or 1807 and continued to live with her in Kentucky for about two years. From there, the couple moved to Alabama where they lived as husband and wife. Before Rachel's death in 1822, she and John had two surviving sons—Jonathan (b. 1807 in Tennessee / d. 1877 in Louisiana) and William (b. 1821/2 in Alabama / d. 1875). Rachel had not been gone long before John found a third spouse in Madison County. There, on April 11, 1822, Sprowl married Permelia Brown (b. approx. 1786), the oldest daughter of his Brownsboro neighbor, John Brown (1764-1830). The union curiously made him brother-in-law to two of his own children.

In August 1822, a mere four months after the Sprowl-
Brown nuptials, Sprowl’s first wife, Elizabeth Irons brought suit against him. The testimony of prominent Huntsville brick mason Bird Brandon indicated that Sprowl had sold his Alabama land and was on his way with all his property “to some foreign country,” by which he meant Mexican Texas.¹⁴ Sprowl’s relocation in Texas came, however, only after an important Louisiana sojourn.

Meanwhile, on September 10, 1823 Sprowl answered his estranged wife’s charges from Natchitoches Parish, disagreeing with the complaint, and arguing “that there was no authority by whom [sic] a marriage could be solemnized in the County of Cumberland, State of Kentucky.” In fact, Sprowl’s memory was quite convenient. William Ray, who performed his marriage to Elizabeth—was an ordained minister for the Sinking Spring Baptist Church in Overton County, Tennessee.¹⁵ Perhaps Ray was not officially authorized to perform marriages in Kentucky, but such a distinction, particularly on the frontier, seems one of the letter—not the spirit—of the law. Sprowl also charged misconduct, specifically adultery, on the petitioner’s part. He explained that he had taken his three children borne by Irons and, bearing the full cost of their education, moved to Alabama. As for Sprowl’s departure from Alabama, he was part of a vanguard of settlers that charted the way from their Flint River Alabama settlement to Louisiana’s Red River Valley. Sprowl was in Louisiana no later than November 27, 1822, when he paid twenty-three-year-old attorney-planter Cyrus Ratliff of Feliciana Parish $120 for a deed of improvement, quite likely for the construction of a cotton gin. Richard Callahan made the said improvement “on Congress’ Land in the said parish of Natchitoches on the waters of the Ouachita [probably the Red].”¹⁶

Sprowl identified his residence at the time as Natchitoches Parish. If the record seems at face value pedestrian, it provides insight into Sprowl’s route from Alabama to Louisiana. It likewise reveals much about his subsequent movement and activities as he worked his way toward Texas between late-1822 and 1824. Sprowl was part of a general movement described early in 1822 by the colorful Natchitoches doctor John Sibley (1757–1837). Sibley remarked upon the “‘prodigious moving of family
and settlers' into Texas. 'I should not be surprised if in 18 months 50,000 Americans should migrate thither.' . . . By March, Sibley could report that 'the Road by Nackitosh is full' of Texas bound settlers.”

Sprowl undoubtedly chose the water route down the Mississippi River to reach Louisiana. That frequently used "pathway" led directly to Feliciana Parish (divided into East and West Feliciana in 1824). There, Sprowl made personal contact not only with Ratliff but several other Felicianans—particularly the Barkers—whose lives were soon tied by migration and marriage to both John Sprowl and his in-laws, the Browns.

In Feliciana Parish, Bayou Sara, and St. Francisville were beehives of activity and an excellent staging ground for a migratory Madison countian hoping to penetrate the frontier reaches of northwest Louisiana's Red River Valley, and ultimately beyond to the Ayish Bayou Redlands of northeast Texas. The parish was a well-known gateway across the Mississippi River and into north Louisiana. Sprowl's specific method of negotiating the river is unknown, but he might have used the ferry owned by Samuel Barker, whose brother Eldred moved to the Red River Valley with the Sprowls and Browns. Barker's one daughter Nancy married Jonathan Sprowl; another, Mary, wed John W. Brown. However Sprowl and his family passed over the great river, he was active across a wide area in north Louisiana before finally reaching his ultimate destination, Mexican Texas.

John Sprowl ranged across Louisiana long enough to establish acquaintances with influential men in both Rapides and Iberville parishes. Sprowl's first letter to Stephen F. Austin, dated August 18, 1824 and sent from "Aish Bayou," is a warning about John G. Jackson who "came from near Alexandra [sic] on Red River, to my neighborhood." In June 1824, Sprowl purchased a horse from Jackson. Writing to Austin, he declares: "I am told by undoubted authority he s'd. Jackson must have s[t]ole from Esq' Stokes in the Town of Rapede [Alexandria]." Further evidence of Sprowl's presence in Rapides Parish is found in the November 27, 1822 deed of improvement from Cyrus Ratliff. The document incidentally notes that Callahan's improvement
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March 25, 1820—Madison County, Alabama (above) & June 25, 1826—Ayish Bayou, Texas (below). Note Sprowl's stylistic idiosyncrasies—the "J," the flourish above "DO," and the conjoined "S" and "p"

The improvement in controversy here
John Williams and John King was made by Thos. Williams in the year 1826 by all the evidence that here to come. King got in possession in 1826. Williams was not living on the place

June 25th, 1826, John Sprowl

Wm. Smith, Notary Public
was "conveyed by said Callahan to said person to Deed bearing date the 25th of November instant passed before to parish Judge of the parish of Rapides." Even after his move to Ayish Bayou, Sprowl retained his Louisiana contacts and remained oriented toward the Red River.

On July 13, 1825, "Captain John Sprowl" from "Dist. Of Aysh Bayou" wrote a letter of recommendation for Dr. Le Hicks to "Col. J. T. Gross" (sic—Jared Ellison Groce). Sprowl based his endorsement on the testimony of an Iberville Parish Judge named Dutton. The judge declared that Hicks was "a physician of talents who wised to establish himself in this parish, or on your side of the Sabine." Thus, Sprowl's contacts in Iberville and Rapides parishes, not to mention family members ensconced in Natchitoches Parish, mark a trail out of Feliciana Parish and ultimately across the Sabine into Texas.

A Scot-Irish migrant such as John Sprowl fit comfortably into north Louisiana. Samuel C. Hyde Jr., who defines "upstate Louisiana" as "the remaining portion of the state north of Alexandria, as well as the region along the Sabine River and the Florida Parishes," describes the area as containing:

"considerable numbers of Protestant yeoman farmers. By 1850, the white population of upstate Louisiana consisted largely of immigrants of Scotch-Irish ancestry from Georgia and the Carolinas. Even though upstate farmers maintained significant herds of livestock, particularly in the north-central region, cotton farming dominated."

In addition to this ethnic homogeneity of which the Sprowls were a part, the religious environment was custom fit for Scots-Irish migrants forged in the crucible of Scottish Presbyterianism. Although traditional Presbyterianism, with its fundamentally urban outlook, failed to adapt as successfully to frontier conditions as Baptist and Methodist Christianity, "the Anglo-Celt polity and outlook suffused those religions and stamped them immutably; Baptistry and Methodism, on the frontier, were very much Puritanism reorganized to fit society. The Calvinistic code remained."
Not surprisingly, John Sprowl’s son, John Paul, became a lay minister in Louisiana’s Methodist Episcopal Church. The conversion of the Sprowl clan to Methodism probably occurred before the family exodus to Louisiana and Texas (perhaps in connection to Sprowl’s association with the devotedly Methodist Brown family).

Sprowl’s arrival in Texas came hard on the heels of Mexico’s National Colonization Law (August 18, 1824), a declaration that encouraged migration to Texas. By then a veteran land-trader and pioneer, Sprowl was quick to take advantage. The Sprowl family was part of the fast-paced migration eloquently described by contemporary observer, Alexander Horton (b. April 18, 1810 in Halifax County, North Carolina / d. January 11, 1894 in San Augustine, Texas):

“Early settlers of the county were high minded farmers who did not run here for crimes, but were honest industrious men who came here to better their condition being actuated by the large amount of land given to actual settlers, for they gave married men one league and single men one third of a league. Many of these early settlers were men of considerable means. . . . The early settlers of San Augustine were as kind and noble a set of men as ever settled in any country. Their houses were always open to receive anyone that might require hospitality. . . . Everything went on quietly, the country filling up fast with good citizens, for I think these the best body of men that I ever associated with.”

John Sprowl and his family were firmly established at Ayish Bayou no later than June 1824, only a few years after the establishment of the Mexican independence in 1821 and the creation of the Mexican Republic in 1823. Sprowl selected a location about fifty-five miles west-southwest of the Red River Valley where his adult children and his Brown in-laws resided. He chose the brow of a hill two miles east of Ayish Bayou and west of the ford on Carrizo Creek. There he built Pleasant Grove plantation and rapidly rose to
positions of political and agricultural leadership, no doubt bringing with him slaves and knowledge of cotton gin technology from his Alabama years. Sprowl immediately became a leading planter—one of the “most prosperous residents of the region”26—in sparsely settled, but rapidly growing East Texas. His arrival in Ayish Bayou coincided with exceptionally high New Orleans cotton prices—35¢ a bale.

Little wonder that Sprowl’s Ayish Bayou neighbors looked to him to erect a cotton gin so they could exploit a favorable market. Sprowl willingly obliged. Gin construction was a tradition within his extended family. He likely had overseen the 1822 construction of a gin on the “waters of the Ouachita,” and his Brown in-laws erected a gin on their own riverbank holdings in Natchitoches Parish.27 Indeed, Sprowl’s November 11, 1824 letter to Nacogdoches Commandant, Patricio Detora, offhandedly mentions that he “had just got home [Ayish Bayou] from Natchitoches with my Cotton Gin and am on the point of strting [sic] her, and my Neighbors are hurieng [sic] me to get thair [sic] Cotton Gind [sic] for Market.”28 By late 1824, Sprowl had the first Ayish Bayou gin up and running along El Camino Real near his home. He and his neighbors were ready to profit as slave labor prepared to pick the harvest of 1825.

Other influential area planters, including Elisha Roberts (b. abt. 1785 on Holston River near Knoxville, Tennessee / d. 1844 in Texas) living not far from Sprowl, and John A. Williams to the west of Ayish Bayou, were quick to build gins of their own. In short order, the area enjoyed the service of several “old Whitney gins with what was called a diamond press, made with a large wooden screw, twenty or thirty feet in height, and run down on the lint by horsepower. The bale was bound by ropes, as iron ties were not then invented.”29

Economic leadership led to political responsibilities for Sprowl. He became the alcalde—the title given the mayor or chief judicial official of a Spanish town—for the Ayish Bayou settlement.30 This responsibility was a natural continuation of the role that Sprowl had played in Madison County, Alabama where his name seasons the public record as “justice of the peace.”31
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reminiscence by Alexander Horton names Sprown among "the most earliest settlers of East Texas." Horton's account also preserves several relevant insights about the role that the early alcalde played:

"When I arrived in Texas in 1824 I found (it) so sparsely settled that there was no regulations in any legal form. As we had no knowledge of the Mexican laws we were a law unto ourselves. But as the country became more thickly settled it became manifest that there must be some rule to collect debts and punish crimes. The people agreed to elect a man whom they called an Alcalde and a Sheriff to execute his orders. The Alcalde's power extended to all cases civil and criminal without any regard to the amount in controversy. Murder, thefts, and all other cases came under his jurisdiction except divorces, and as the old Texas men and women were always true and loyal to each other, divorce cases was never heard of. The Alcalde had the power in all cases to call to his assistance twelve good and lawful citizens to his aid when he deemed it necessary or the parties required it, and the decision of the Alcalde and 12 men was final from which no appeal could be taken, and there was as much justice done then as there is now and not half so much grumbling. The first Alcalde was Baily Anderson, the next was John Sprown."32

Sprown served as the Ayish Bayou district alcalde not once but twice, in 1824 and 1826, his administration being interrupted by Bailey Anderson, who defeated the incumbent Sprown by a thirty-one to twenty vote in the January 8, 1825 local election.33

From his position as alcalde and community leader, Sprown became a part of the political intrigue that often plagued Spanish/Mexican Texas. He emerged as a key leader in the rebellion that broke late in 1826. His Pleasant Grove plantation even served as rebel headquarters in the
Ayish Bayou area, a logical choice since the Sprowl home had regularly served as the site of official business during Sprowl's two tenures as district alcalde. The revolt sprang from a conflict that arose between land speculator and Empresario Haden Edwards (b. 1771 in Stafford County, Virginia / d. 14 August 1849 in Nacogdoches, Texas) and the Mexican government. Much like Stephen F. Austin, Edwards had been authorized to plant colonists in the fertile vacant spaces of Mexican Texas. The April 15, 1825 Edwards Grant near Nacogdoches soon became home for some fifty families drawn largely from Mississippi, the same location from which Edwards himself had most recently come.

The midwife of the Fredonian Rebellion was growing tension between settlers new and old. Although Edwards had governmental approval to plant up to 800 families in his East Texas bailiwick, the Mexican government expected him to honor all previous Spanish or Mexican land grants and claims established prior to his 1825 arrival. To address the matter, Edwards issued an October 15, 1825 proclamation requiring proof of all such claims. Otherwise, properties of delinquent claimants would be offered up for sale. "A very considerable number of Mexican holders of lands in East Texas had never completed their titles to the farms they occupied, and in consequence could not establish their right of ownership." Predictably, a sharp division began to form between Edwards and those settlers whose presence long predated his own.

Local politics split along partisan lines. The December 1825 election of alcalde in Nacogdoches became a revolutionary flashpoint. Family loyalty played a pivotal role. Edwards favored his son-in-law Chichester Chaplin over opponent and longtime area resident Samuel Norris. When Edwards certified the victory of Chaplin, Norris appealed to San Antonio. In March 1826, Governor José Antonio Saucedo reversed the election results, officially installing Norris. To occupy his office, however, Norris had to rely on support from local militia—an act that inspired John A. Williams to write indignant 1826 letter to Austin.

Williams was not a voice crying alone in the wilderness. Haden Edwards' brother, Benjamin, wrote to "Colo STEPHEN F. AUSTIN” from Nacogdoches on July 12,
1826 declaring: “I returned to this place about the 1st of April last; and, much to my astonishment and mortification, found everything in disorder and confusion in this section of the Province. . . . I have now been here three months and upwards, hoping that order and confidence would be restored to this distracted community.” He vigorously complained about “additional cause of confusion amongst the people, and consequent distrust of the rights and security of Americans on this side of the Sabine river.”

Edwards declared that official “proceedings and decisions” were “incompatible with a republican government, and contrary to the fundamental principles of the constitution of the country.” He openly worried about the security of his “person and property,” noting that he had “rec’d a letter from [his brother] Haden Edwards at Natchitoches.” Haden requested Benjamin “to take charge of his colony until his return.” Moving to closure, Benjamin implored Austin to remedy “the unfortunate misunderstanding . . . between you and my brother.” Edwards further affirmed to Austin that he had “received an assurance” from Haden “that there was no disposition on his part to commence hostilities, and that he had on the contrary desired nothing more than a friendly understanding with” Austin.38

Austin listened to both sides of the story. One of the loudest voices was James Gaines’s. Ironically, the Sprowls got to Texas from Louisiana by crossing the Sabine River at Gaines’s ferry on El Camino Real. Later, a decade after the Fredonian Rebellion that Gaines resisted, Gaines served on the very committee that crafted the Texas Declaration of Independence. In 1826, however, blood ran thicker than water. Gaines’s brother-in-law was Samuel Norris, alcaldede of Nacogdoches by Mexican fiat. On August 21, 1826, Gaines soberly warned Austin that “something like a Revolution has been aimed at and probably yet on foot.” About two weeks later, Norris similarly cautioned Austin that “from the present state of affairs our strength is verry [sic] divided. . . . It appears that you had no confidence in the proper authority of this place.”39 Reports about political frictions, plus continuing complaints about Haden Edwards’s administration of his colony, led to the October 2, 1826 revocation of the Edwards Grant and his expulsion.
This meant the loss of some $50,000 that Edwards had already invested in Texas, as well as the cancellation of claims by those settlers that Edwards had persuaded to move in 1825 and 1826, a reversal that Haden Edwards and his brother could ill-afford. Staging a kangaroo court with the feel and texture of burlesque at its best, Benjamin Edwards saw to the arrest of Norris and local militia chief José Antonio Sepúlveda. He also arrested his own brother, Haden.

At the November 22nd trial, not a single accuser charged the empresario. As for Norris and Sepúlveda, both were found not only guilty of abuse of their political and military power but worthy of death. The sentence was softened, merely disallowing Norris and Sepúlveda from holding any future local public office. Nevertheless, if Edwards and his supporters took comfort in the rapidly shifting balance of power, they were soon distressed by the news that the Mexican government was sending Lieutenant Colonel Mateo Ahumada to Nacogdoches to take control.

Edwards enlisted the help of Martin Parmer, the self-proclaimed Colonel of the militia between the Trinity and the Sabine. The two men looked to nearby Ayish Bayou for additional support. Most residents of this settlement chose discretion over valor, and struck out east along El Camino Real, headed for Louisiana. However, at least some members of the Ayish Bayou militia, including John Sprowl and Burrill J. Thompson, rallied under the red, white, and blue banner of the Edwards brothers. They prepared to make their corner of Texas the independent Fredonian Republic, a polity proclaimed on December 16, 1826.

John Sprowl came to support the rebellion with ample cause. The Norris faction had forcibly entered the alcalde's office and seized his official papers. Thereafter, Sprowl's enemies summoned him to trial, but without apprising him of the charges. In yet a further denial of due process, without notice of postponement, his accusers changed his trial date. Little wonder that Sprowl began to fear for the security of his property.

While Sprowl's financial investment in Ayish Bayou was smaller than that of Haden Edwards, in practical terms...
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it was no less personally significant. With his Alabama assets liquidated and all his slaves in Texas, he had reason to worry about what the Mexican government might do with his own recently established but untitled land claims and substantial Ayish Bayou assets, both unmovable and moveable. John Sprowl’s concerns about the disposition of Mexican authorities toward the Peculiar Institution are articulated nowhere in Sprowl’s own writing, but two letters dated August 11, 1826 demonstrate the importance of this matter to the Sprowls and fellow-Ayish Bayou planters. The correspondence was written against the backdrop of ominous legislative momentum in Mexico City and the creation of a new constitution. Among other things, that document promised to rescind the reluctant toleration of slavery that the Mexican government had heretofore extended, particularly to the Anglo settlers of Texas.41

From San Felipe de Austin, a discouraged Jesse Thompson wrote to Sprowl: “I have been Enjoying myself as well as any man on Earth could in my circumstances, until I have acquired the disagreeable information of the Government within the last Twelve Hours, relative to the prohibition of slavery within this Colony.” This “leaves no doubt on the subject upon which I Fell [feel] my self Entirely ruined from the moast [sic] flatering [sic] prospects. . . . I am compeled to injoin secracy [sic] on your part. . . . I wish you to consult your interest and do accordingly as you may think best Theare [sic] is hardly any room for doubt on the subject of our having to relinquish the right of slavery.” In a postscript, Thompson reaffirmed: “I again Enjoin it on you as secracy [sic] not Let your best frends no [sic] it at least the negroes might get hold of it and you no [sic] the nature of a greate [sic] many people.” Under the same cover, another of Sprowl’s trusted friends, J. C. Payton, asserted: “I have nothing more to communicate than is in the above [Thompson’s letter] whitch [sic] is reather [sic] unpleasant to me who have a knowledge of the most provable fact.” 42 For Sprowl and other east Texas cotton planters, the prospect of financial success in the Mexican Republic began to dim.

Sprowl took the warnings from Thompson and Payton seriously enough to spread alarm among Ayish Bayou residents. In an August 21, 1826 letter from James Gaines in
Nacogdoches to "Col. Steven F. Austin," the former declared:

"Sprowls prohiced [sic] that one half of your Colony and the people here would be out of the Country he was asked If they would be drove out he answered no they would go out of their Own accord I insisted on knowing If it was anything that might Effect the Government or the interest of the people he [Sprowl] Refused to answer me But Told Mr. Thomas It was the subject of Slavery and that no hope remained on that Subject thereby Creating much Rumor."43

For Sprowl, preservation of slave property became worth the risk of revolt. He no doubt believed the odds were on the rebels' side. Sprowl was well-acquainted with the historical backdrop of the West Florida Revolt of 1810 only sixteen years before. In 1822, he had passed through Feliciana Parish, the very center of a successful coup that overturned impotent Spanish rule in Nueva Feliciana and led to the establishment of an independent if short-lived West Florida Republic quickly absorbed by the United States. If a decrepit Spanish regime could not retain the Florida Parishes, Sprowl must have believed the Fredonian cause would enjoy similar success. Moreover, when all was over but the shouting, he might well be elevated both personally and politically.

Austin himself took the rebels very seriously, and opposed them in the strongest terms. In late-December 1826, he composed a "list of the members of the Conference Meeting of Nacogdoches" which included "Hadden Edwards, Benjamin W. Edwards, H. B. Mayo, Joseph Antonio Huber, John Sprowl, William B. Ligon, Burrill J. Thompson, Martin Parmer, President, Richard Fields and John Negro Legs."

Austin also somberly observed: "A friend writes to me from the Sabine River, on the 14th of December, 1826" about "the revolution at Nacogdoches... I cannot detail in a letter all the resources they have already at command; but I am convinced that they are sufficient to destroy the whole country between the Sabine River and Saltillo."44

Meanwhile, Austin implored the Fredonian rebels to cease and desist. His words for Ayish Bayou leader
Burrill Thompson were exceeding harsh. "That man, Burril
Thompson, has entirely deceived me; when I knew him in
Missouri, he bore a good character; but, it seems that he has
joined those rebels who are attempting to take the law into
their own hands, and I have nothing to say in his behalf,
further than that he has turned crazy and is surrounded by
crazy people." On December 14 and 24, 1826, Austin
wrote John A. Williams accusing the revolutionary party of
personally,

"jeopardising the prospects of hundreds
of innocent families who wish to live in peace
and quietness in the country. . . . Should the
conduct of the new Emigrants in the infancy
of their settlement be such as to convince the
Government that in their manhood they will be
turbulent and disobedient, it will crush them.
. . . What influence are acts of this outrageous
[sic] character calculated to have on the
minds of the members and on the decision
[sic] of the slave or any other question
. . . I am in the highest degree displeased
at Burril J Thompson . . . . No matter what
Norris may have done the party who entered
Nacogdoches have done as bad and are liable
to heavy punishment. . . . You must humble
yourselves before the Government and that
immediately." 46

Austin's admonitions for John Sprowl were far more
temperate. On January 1, 1827, he courteously and earnestly
wrote:

"Dear Sir, I have been very much
concerned at the State of things in your part
of the country. . . . As an American I feel
a lively and warm interest in every thing
that concerns Americans, and as a Mexican
I am bound by my duty, honor and every
obligation that a man ought to hold sacred, to
be faithfull [sic] to this Govt. and to the true
interests of this nation— I hope therefore
that you will not consider me as intruding my
advice upon you improperly, and that you will understand and appreciate the motives which influence me in offering it— I wish to serve my adopted country, and at the same time to befriend my native countrymen living in your section of Texas, and I flatter myself that both these objects can be effected if you will all listen to reason and take the Law Justice and virtue for your guide which I have no doubt you will do— I know nothing positive as to the particular acts of oppression or injustice which you complain of against the local authorities of Nacogdoches. If report is to be believed you have cause to complain against the local authorities, but my Dr Sir the local authorities the Alcalde of Nacogdoches is not the whole Govt. . . . I use the word rebel because communications have been sent to this colony by a few misguided persons of Nacogdoches which speak open defiance and rebellion against the whole Mexican Govt. . . . Nothing can possible [sic] result from such mad proceedings but the total ruin both in character and property of every man engaged who has any of either to loose, and it is a duty that you and every good man owes to himself publically [sic] to declare his disapprobation of all attempts at rebellion against the Govt. The letters that have been written here state that you are all United and determined to set up for yourselves and form a New nation to be composed of Indians etc. etc—and it is therefore your duty to make a public declaration of your sentiments.”

An alliance with the Indians was, in fact, part of the Fredonian plan. On December 20, 1826, the rebels sought to forge an agreement—a solemn Union and League and Confederation in Peace and War—with the disaffected Cherokees living to the north under Richard Fields and John Dunn Hunter. Taking advantage of Cherokee dissatisfaction
over denial of land titles and coaxing them with promises of dividing Texas between Anglos and Indians, leaders of the revolt struck a short-lived agreement that they hoped would create a force strong enough to repel the advancing Mexican army.

They never got the chance since the revolution died stillborn without as much as the firing of a shot. The collapse of the rebellion occurred on John Sprowl's very property, "two double log houses and other out houses." Crocket, declares: "It was at or near his place that the Fredonian company was surprised and captured by Stephen Prater and Alexander Horton with a company of settlers and Indians." The seventeen-year-old Horton, who would later become Ayish Bayou sheriff (1831-1835) and aide-de-camp for Sam Houston during the Texas Revolution, joined with Prater only after the vast majority of the Ayish Bayou population had rejected Haden Edwards's ultimatum to support the Fredonian rebels or suffer banishment and confiscation of their property. In a late nineteenth century reminiscence, Horton explained "every citizen of this county with the bare exception of Edward Teel and myself fled across the Sabine, and it did seem as if all was lost." At that critical moment, Prater, an old Horton family friend and veteran of Andrew Jackson's campaigns, arrived at the Horton homestead about two miles north of today's town of San Augustine. Seven Anglos and seventy-five to 100 Indians, well prepared for war, accompanied Prater. Horton recalled:

"When he rode up to my mother's house he called me out and said, 'not run away yet?' I told him I had not left, and did not intend to leave. He then said, 'are you willing to join us and fight for your country?' I told him I was. 'Then,' said he, 'saddle your horse and follow me, for I intend to take that Fredonian garrison in the morning or die in the attempt.' I at once saddled my horse, shouldered my rifle, and fell into line."50

That same evening, Prater and his brigade marched to within 100 yards of the fortification at the Sprowl plantation,
where two companies of volunteers recruited from the U. S. occupied Fredonian facilities. Prater’s force dismounted and waited for daylight. The following morning, Prater served notice to his company that he intended to take the place “by storm but that they were not to fire or kill any one unless fired on first.” At the order to charge, given when Prater’s forces were about fifty yards from the fort, “the Indians raised the war whoop, and it was so terrible that the Fredonians threw down their arms and begged for quarter, which was at once granted. They were all disarmed and put under guard.”

The following day, when Edwards’s troops from Nacogdoches came to Ayish Bayou to implement the appointed confiscation, Prater’s solders immediately arrested the rebels. News of the Ayish Bayou capitulation quickly reached Haden Edwards in Nacogdoches. He “and the rest of the party fled to the United States, across the Sabine River at Richard Haley’s crossing.” Their destination was the benign surroundings of Natchitoches.

Meanwhile, the rebels in Ayish Bayou who did not escape received kindly treatment. Dr. John Sibley, a participant in the failed Long expedition of 1819, indicated as much in a February 18, 1827 letter from Natchitoches. He wrote to the “Honble. Stephen F. Austin at Nacogdoches,” where the empresario had accompanied his own mounted militia and the Mexican army sent from San Antonio to quell the rebellion. Ironically, Sibley declared, “I am happy to hear of the Restoration of tranquility at Nacogdoches.... There never was a more silly, wild, Quicksotic [sic] scheme than that of Nacogdoches, and all sober honest thinking people here view it in the same light.” In a postscript, Sibley offered revealing information about how the government handled the Fredonian rebels: “Note. your expressions of Lenity [sic] towards the Prisoners”—the proclamation of a general amnesty—“are humane to the Extream [sic], the Crime of high treason could in no Govt be passed over so lightly.”

In this whirl of events, the precise fate of John Sprowl is not entirely clear. When the garrison at Ayish Bayou fell, Sprowl may have been with Edwards in Nacogdoches. After all, at over fifty years of age, perhaps Sprowl left the confiscation and coming battle to younger, livelier men.
Wherever he was when Prater's forces overcame the Ayish Bayou garrison, as one of the named leaders of the rebellion Sprowl suffered banishment along with better-known men of higher rank. After the revolt, Sprowl disappears completely from the Texas public record. In fact, Sprowl, his wife Permelia, and their family returned to northwest Louisiana. There, for the past half decade, other members of Sprowl's extended family had been carving out an increasingly comfortable existence within U.S. boundaries. Indeed, some Natchitochians even lived in Louisiana but owned property across the international border. It made good sense since the Ayish Bayou District was "the stronghold of American immigration to Texas." Moreover, the geographical continuity of northeast Texas and northwest Louisiana is affirmed by a host of similarities, particularly in soil and vegetation. Even today, other than the obligatory welcome signs, there is little to suggest that one has crossed from one state into another on a westward drive down Highway 6 from Caddo Parish, Louisiana, across Toledo Bend Reservoir, and into Sabine County, Texas. J. Fair Hardin concluded that "the physical make-up of the region" forms "an unbroken union with identical formation and growth that stretches far into East Texas on the West," an area that consists of "an ancient cypress-covered bayou bed that later became a chain of lakes, the largest of which is now called Caddo."

Consequently, Haden Edwards and his co-conspirators operated with equal ease on either side of the border. Natchitoches was a logical haven for refugees retreating from the failed rebellion. As testified in the 1827 correspondence of rebel leader Burrill Thompson to Stephen F. Austin, the city of Natchitoches along El Camino Real was the specific retreat of all thirty refugee rebel leaders. On February 3rd from the "Parrish [sic] of Natchitoches," Thompson expressed concern over rumors that the reinstated Norris administration "would give 3 or 4 of The Prisners [sic] for me." Two weeks later, Thompson wrote again to Austin from Natchitoches, attributing the recent trouble and confusion in East Texas to "the Imperfect manner of the organization of the government" and "the management of a few Ignorant Designing men without Principle and with out
laws, men who wished to show their Power and acted with more Tyranny.” In an impassioned conclusion, Thompson declared:

“Hearing I am threatncd as one of the Promoters of the Rebellion, I shall not Return, untill [sic] times can be Better Regulated, I should be glad to see you and Think if I could or was orthised [sic] That I could Bring the Party That is on this side to a compromise, Provided They could be Pardoned for their offence, and I think all But the Edwards would be glad to Return to that country Provided they could Do It in Peace—I am settled 20 miles from the sabine [sic] But would meet you There at any Time [desired] and I Do not Hesitate in saying that [I can] Bring all the Party, (and There is near 30 men) to Terms of Peace Provided It is by your Request and that of the officers of the army I should be glad you and your Brother could come and spend a few Days with us.”

Of the thirty that Thompson called “the Party,” many never returned to Texas. John Sprowl was among that number. Ironically, and contrary to Thompson's prediction, Haden Edwards did, but only after the Revolution of 1836 began. Edwards made a home in Nacogdoches where, until August 14, 1849, he lived out his years. In 1836 Thompson also returned to Texas where he purchased a tract of land formerly owned by Natchitoches resident Joshua Blair on the Palo Gaucho Creek some twenty miles southeast of his former home at Ayish Bayou.

Chichester Chaplin—one of the thirty—accompanied his father-in-law Edwards to Natchitoches and began a successful judicial career, serving successively as Natchitoches Parish justice of the peace, parish probate judge, and finally judge in the newly formed parish of Claiborne (1828). Chaplin eventually returned to Texas in 1833 or 1834, but spent his remaining years, like the descendants of the old Caddo chief, moving back and forth between the Lone Star and Pelican states. Meanwhile,
his son, Chichester, Jr. became a prominent Natchitoches attorney and was retained by the widow of Yale medical school graduate Dr. Edward Sprowl (John Sprowl's grandson), for services in a heated and protracted legal battle over the Succession of Mahala Brown Sprowl. ⁴⁸

Surprisingly, Samuel Norris, who wrested the alcalde's office from Chichester Sr., also moved to Natchitoches Parish. ⁵⁹ He is found in the 1830 parish census about thirty households distant from the settlement near Middle Crest Bayou in today's Kisatchie National Forest where John Paul Sprowl (John's son and Mahala's husband) and several of his Brown and Barker in-laws resided. Other more anonymous San Augustinians—plain folk rather than the planters and politicians involved in the revolt—also moved into Natchitoches Parish in the 1830s and 40s, including the Carradines who soon thereafter forged ties of marriage with both the Sprowls and Browns. ⁶⁰

If several of the Fredonian refugees eventually returned to Texas in more tranquil times, John Sprowl did not live long enough to see the decisive overturn of the Mexican government. Before their deaths at some point prior to February 12, 1835, John Sprowl and his third wife Permelia settled in Natchitoches Parish for the long term. Permelia's 1835 Succession identifies the parish as their final residence. Nevertheless, Permelia's Succession record, on the very same page, declares that she was also "late of the City of New Orleans, deceased." ⁶¹ This ambiguity implies that during their last decade together, John and Permelia oscillated between Natchitoches Parish and New Orleans. In all likelihood, John continued to engage in the entrepreneurial and agricultural endeavors that had been his trademark in Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas. ⁶²

Sprowl's legacy was maintained in Louisiana's Red River Valley where his three sons—John Paul, ⁶³ Jonathan, ⁶⁴ and William ⁶⁵—developed and managed their respective, flourishing plantations on the river's eastern bank dotting a south-to-north stretch roughly a dozen miles in length on either side of today's small town of Coushatta. From the death of their father through the antebellum era, John Sprowl's sons played their part as members in an ascendant Red River Valley kinship group that rose to planter
status. Whatever their patriarch-father might have lost in his failed efforts contributing to the Fredonian Rebellion, the road back to Natchitoches was familiar and stood his progeny in good stead to enjoy a prosperous future, albeit somewhat cast of where John Sprowl had hoped to make his final fortune.

(Endnotes)


3 San Augustine “is truly the ‘Cradle of Texas Independence’ for in this area of red land and tall timber there assembled the men who plotted and planned the struggle for Texas freedom . . . and if San Augustine be the Cradle of Texas Independence, then surely Natchitoches was the hand that rocked the cradle.” Natchitoches and the Neutral Strip were “a breeding ground for the filibuster expedition into the Texas area.” Louis Raphael Nardini Sr., My Historic Natchitoches, Louisiana and Its Environment (Natchitoches, Louisiana: Nardini Publishing Co., 1963), 12, 123-141, 231-232.


5 George Louis Crocket, Two Centuries in East Texas: A History of San Augustine County and Surrounding Territory from 1685 to the Present Time (Dallas, Texas: The Southwest Press, 1962), 93-94.


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2010) from the booklet titled “Overton County, Address of Albert V. Goodpasture, delivered at Livingston, TN July 4, 1876” (An exact reprint of the original edition of 1877) by B.C. Goodpasture, 932 Caldwell Lane, Nashville 4, Tenn. 1954. See “First Settlers,” 5-8.


10 See Madison County Tract Book (1811–1812), p. 220, federal patent 1063 Huntsville Public Library Heritage Room (hearafter cited as HPLHR) documenting his January 24, 1811 purchase of 159.3 acres in NE¼ Sec. 29 T3S R2E and another 1813 purchase in SE¼ section 29 T3N R2E. Cf. Ricky L. Sherrod, “Planters in the Making: The Brown Family’s Alabama Years,” Huntsville Historical Review Vol. 34, No. 1 (Winter-Spring 2009), 33-53.

11 See Madison County, Alabama Court Minutes, volume 180, p. 40, HPLHR.

12 “Davis” is used in Madison County Court Minutes, Vol. 103, p. 40, HPLHR.

13 Madison County, Alabama Court Minutes, Volume 180, p. 40 (filed in 1824 for Aug. 27, 1822); Deed, John Sprowl to William Derrick, Aug. 17, 1822, Madison County, Alabama Deed Book H, pp. 290-291, HPLHR.

14 Elizabeth Sprowl (by Grant Taylor her next friend) v. John Sprowl, original bill filed Aug. 27, 1822, and heard May Term 1825, Madison County, Huntsville, Ala., Madison County Chancery Superior Court, Book B, p. 40, HPLHR.


16 Deed of Improvement, Cyrus Ratliff to John Sprowl, Nov. 27, 1822, Natchitoches Parish Original Conveyance No. 230, Natchitoches Parish, Natchitoches, Louisiana (hearafter cited as NPC).

17 Greg Cantrell, Stephen F. Austin, 109.

18 Eldred Barker, John P. Sprowl, Daniel Brown, and Thomas Brown households (about eighteen miles south-
southwest of Natchitoches), United States Fifth Census (1830), Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, Schedule 1 (Free Inhabitants) [Ancestry.com, accessed Dec. 11, 2008].

19 Eugene C. Barker, editor, *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1919 in Two Volumes: The Austin Papers* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1924), 876. Sprowl’s opening sentence—"Altho we are personally unknown to each other"—confutes the speculation of George Louis Crockett (*Two Centuries in East Texas*, 93) that Sprowl and Austin may have been acquainted in Missouri. Crocket writes: "He seems to have been an acquaintance of the Austins in Missouri and to have come to Texas some time before 1824, but the exact date is not known."

In the early nineteenth century, Alexandria was often referred to as "Rapides" (Nardini, *My Historic Natchitoches*, 129). Sprowl apparently had trouble with his equine acquisitions. A Madison County, Alabama lawsuit brought by Sprowl against John Erwin in 1816 documents the plaintiff’s request for $150 from Erwin "for falsely and fraudulently representing & affirming a certain bay stud horse" was sound, healthy and fit for use. The matter was not fully resolved until the 1822 April Term of the Madison County Court when a jury found "in favor of the plaintiff." Sprowl received $75 in damages (*John Sprowl v. John Erwin*, May 1816 Term, Case No. 926, Madison County Circuit Court Minutes, Book 12, pp. 296B-298A, HPLHR).

20 Eugene Barker, *The Austin Papers*, 1146. Sprowl received his information in a July 11, 1825 letter sent from John Carr in Louisiana. Carr declared: "Dutton says he has known him for two years past." Regarding Carr’s own character, Sprowl wrote that there "is no doubt of Judge Carrs being a man of Honour Honesty and Probity." On September 18, 1824, Carr was a Natchitoches Parish judge (Nacogdoches Archives, microfilm reel 18—conveyance documenting the sale by Jacob Nord to Charles Pavie of livestock, a house on Bayou Pierre, and furniture). Carr was still a parish judge on September 26, 1826 when the conveyance was officially filed and on February 22 when the "Heirs of James Brown" (including John Paul Sprowl) divided Brown’s estate (Mortgage, Heirs of James Brown to William Brown, Feb. 22, 1832, Natchitoches Parish Original
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Conveyance, Book 3, p. 1, NPC).


24 Sprowl signed his June 8, 1824 letter to Nacogdoches Commandant Juan Seguin, as “Jn Sprowl, Alcalde” of “Dist of Aich [sic] Bayou.” Asbury Papers (box 5, folder 61, item 2—transcribed from the Nacogdoches Archives, Vol. XXV, 9). Sprowl may have returned to Alabama at least briefly in early-1824. His name appears with John Brown, William Scott, and William A. Scott as witnesses for the defendant in the case of John Evans vs. William Scott, Madison County, Alabama Court Minutes for 1824, Volume 181, p. 77, HPLHR.

25 See Alexander Horton, A True Account, 2. In his reminiscences, Horton precisely located the Sprowl’s residence, noting that it was “on the place where Mr. Alvis now [1891] resided.” Cf. Crocket, Two Centuries in East Texas, 147.

26 George Crockett, Two Centuries in East Texas, 138.


29 Alexander Horton identified Sprowl’s cotton gin as the first one built in the area (A True Account, 68). Cf. Crocket, Two Centuries in East Texas, 86-87.

31 For example, Case #1728, Madison County, Alabama Circuit Court Record Book 12, pp. 283-284, HPLHR.


33 Nacogdoches Archives microfilm reel 20 (June 8, 1824); reel 21 (May 1 and July 8, 1825; and March 5 and May 3 and 13, 1826); reel 23 (January 8, 1825).

34 Sprowl writes from “Pleasant Grove” in a March 29, 1826 letter to Nacogdoches District *alcalde* Samuel Norris and in a subsequent report sent on May 3, 1826 describing the activity of area desperadoes (Nacogdoches Archives, microfilm reel 21).

35 Pleasant Grove was the site where Sprowl took depositions in the case of *Howell Eason v. Elijah Lloyd.* There, Sprowl interviewed Lloyd, Stephen Lynch, Pharaoh H. Midkiff, and James Odell (Nacogdoches Archives, reel 20—August 13 – 24, 1824). “The house of John Sprowl Esq” was also where Sprowl hosted the January 8, 1825 Ayish Bayou election of *alcalde* (Nacogdoches Archives, reel 23). Although Sprowl lost the election, his July 8, 1825 letter to Patricio Detora, Commandant at Nacogdoches, suggests a reluctance to continue in the role. Sprowl observes: “let me know what you intend to do relative to our having an *alcalde* here if it is your wish I should act until thare [sic] is another appointed I will do so, if you will authorize me to do so” (Nacogdoches Archives, microfilm reel 21).


37 Eugene Barker, *The Austin Papers*, 892. The letter to Stephen F. Austin criticized the administration of the Nacogdoches District and contained a long list of grievances with particular emphasis on the actions of James Gaines, who would oppose the Edwards brothers during the Fredonian
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Rebellion.


43 Eugene Barker, *The Austin Papers*, 1428-1429. See also 1490.


51 Texas State Historical Association, “The Quarterly of
the Texas State Historical Association," Vol. 14 online.

52 Sibley served on Long’s Supreme Council of advisers.


57 George Crocket, *Two Centuries in East Texas*, 64, 73.

58 Lease, V. G. Sprowl to Joseph Hamilton, Oct. 23, 1871, Red River Original Conveyance, Book A:28, Clerk of Court’s Office, Red River Parish, Coushatta, Louisiana (hereafter cited as RRPC) and Succession of Mahala Sprowl (Case No. 1094), Petition of Daniel Brown to Sixteenth Judicial District Court, March 17, 1859, Natchitoches Parish Conveyance, Book 3, pp. 120-133, (NPC).

59 United States Fifth Census (1830), Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, Schedule 1 (Free Inhabitants) [Ancestry.com, accessed Dec. 11, 2008]. The Norris family was well acquainted with Louisiana even before some of its members moved to Texas. Samuel’s sister, Susannah—the wife of James Gaines—was born in 1789 Boeuf Bayou in Rapides Parish, Louisiana.

60 Isaac Carradine was living in Natchitoches Parish by August 30, 1841 when his wife Eliza brought suit against him for $3,480 at 5% interest (*Eliza Carradine v. Isaac Carradine*, Aug. 30, 1841, Bundle 123 [Case No. 2913], and October 13, 1841, Bundle 142 [Case No. 20], both in Tenth Judicial District, NPC). Isaac and Eliza’s daughter, Sarah Elizabeth, successively married Henry Brown and William Sprowl.

61 Succession of Pamela [sic] Brown, Feb. 12, 1835, Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Book 22, NPC.
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62 John Sprowl entry (161.72 acres), June 20, 1837, aliquot parts 2 and 6, both in sec. 5, T11N R9W Federal land certificate 2057 (June 20, 1837) for Section 5 of T11N R9W, Red River Parish, La. BLM, GLO accessed March 19, 2010. This sale to "John Sprowl" is likely a posthumous purchase made by the son John Paul on behalf of his deceased father who had busied himself in land development on this tract after his departure from Ayish Bayou. Posthumous transactions are, in fact, occasionally seen when a deceased buyer had entered and developed the tract in advance of official purchase.

63 See John C. Seaman, compiler, Abstracts of U.S. Lands (Aug. 25, 1913) in Clerk of Court's Office, Red River Parish, Coushatta, Louisiana (hearafter cited as RRPC) shows that Sprowl purchased lot 4 with 153.5 acres for $125 on November 19, 1831; lot 1 with 159.9 acres on December 24, 1831; and lots 2 and 3 with 160 acres on 11 December 1834. All were purchases of federal land at the price of $1.25 per acre. Later Sprowl purchases this same general area are documented in Natchitoches Parish, La., BLM, GLO (accessed March 20, 2010): John Paul Sprowl entries, June 15, 1837, aliquot part 1 and 4, sec. 9 and also sec. 22 all in T11N R9W; June 20, 1837, aliquot arts 1-3, sec. 9 and aliquot part 4, sec. 10 and SW¼ SW¼ sec. 4 all in T11N R9W; Apr. 1, 1843, aliquot part 4, sec. 21, T11N R8W. Also among the purchasers of Louisiana's federal land were John Sprowl's sons William (a graduation of 84 acres—Apr. 2, 1860, aliquot part 4, sec. 36, T12N R10W) and Jonathan (a preempton of 139 acres—Aug. 10, 1850, NE¼, sec. 10, T7N R7W). By his 1843 death, John Paul had accumulated 1,220 acres on the left bank and another 240 on the right, not to mention an additional 80 acres of "fine woods," and a cotton gin. Sprowl's twenty-eight slaves were valued at $17,190. See Mahala Brown v. John P. Sprowl's Succession, Lemié Syndic, Aug. 26, 1844, Case No. 173, Natchitoches Parish Court of Probate; Succession of John P. Sprowl, Dec. 2, 1843, Book 18, pp. 190, 193, 195; and Succession of John P. Sprowl (Case No. 1840), June 11, 1844, Miscellaneous Record Book 37 all in NPC. Natchitoches Parish Court of Probates heard the case on June 11, 1844.

64 See Credit Sale, McCorley & Beeson to Jonathan
Sprowl, 1837, Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Book A, p.226, 239; Annulment, François Besson to Jonathan Sprowl (original conveyance no. 2256), Sep. 16, 1839, Natchitoches Parish Conveyance, Book 1, p. 127; Power of Attorney, François Besson to Jonathan Sprowl, July 23, 1838, Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Book 24, p. 407; Jonathan Sprowl to John Paul Sprowl (original conveyance no. 2409), Jan. 30, 1840, Natchitoches Parish Conveyance, Book 25, p. 431; Succession of Nancy [Barker] Sprowl (Case No. 1339), June 28, 1864, Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Book 63, pp. 26-29 and Abstract of Inventory, Jonathan Sprowl, Tutor to Alice Leonora Sprowl (original conveyance no. 5656), Nov. 30, 1869, Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Book 3, p. 348; Sheriff’s Sale, Estate of John S. Robinson to Jonathan Sprowl, May 22, 1861, Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Book 56, p. 113, all in NPC. See also the successions of Jonathan Sprowl: Oct. 23, 1877, Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Book 74, pp. 1-7 and Nov. 14, 1877, Book 74, pp. 296-311 both in NPC. These successions reveal that Jonathan left two productive plantations “situated on Loggy Bayou near its confluence with Red River and containing about two hundred and fifty (250) acres of cultivatable land.”

65 William’s property was in sec. 36, T12N and sec. 1,T12N, both in R10W (William Sprowl et al. v. Ella D. Stewart, et al., Bundle 250 [Case No. 6282], Ninth Judicial District Court and Sprowl et al. v. Ella D. Stewart et al. Bundle 278 [Case No. 6379], Ninth Judicial District Court, both in NPC). The 1860 Natchitoches Parish census (United States Eighth Census, Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, Schedule 1 [Free Inhabitants] [Ancestry.com, accessed Dec. 11, 2008]) finds William, his wife Sarah (a dozen years younger than he), and their household of four children and sixteen slaves living in this location and holding property valued at $20,000 and a personal estate worth $22,000.