

Still Seeking Deaf Smith A Forty-Year Adventure

Part Two: Deaf Smith descendants, Smith family Bible, Alarum the dog, SA statue issue, new discoveries with rarely published images and photos!

PART THREE: Old and new books, TV mini-series, ENT doctor, Richmond TX, Deaf Smith Oak tree, and a spooky story!

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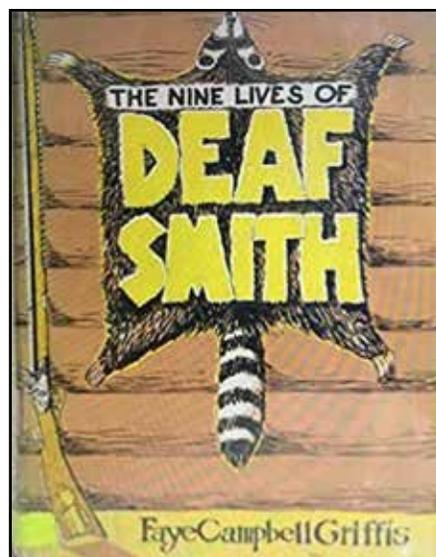
During the last ten years, my latest story about Deaf Smith evolved into different happenings.

For the last 35 years, I have wondered how my wife Rosie M. Serna, a native Texan, knew about Deaf Smith's dog. She was 14 years old in 1961 when she attended TSD. That was 12 years before Texian Press of Waco released Cleburne Huston's definitive biography about Deaf Smith in 1973. As a day student, Rosie had to stay in the school library after attending a Girl Scout meeting. Her thoughtful Upper School librarian, Geraldine Moursund (1909-1991) showed Rosie a book that impacted her life. In those days, hearing teachers spoke orally and fingerspelled sloppily, excruciatingly slow, yet understandably tolerable. After she told Rosie a narrative story, she showed her an exquisite drawing of a sitting dog and Smith in buckskins. She gladly allowed Rosie to check out the book for two weeks. Unfortunately, Rosie cannot recall the exact book title or all the contents, yet described the cover and drawing quite clearly. Intrigued about the book, I decided to track it down on the Internet.



TSD librarian Geraldine Moursund
(1909-1991)

Lo and behold, I found the book! The exact title is “The Nine Lives of Deaf Smith” by Faye Campbell Griffis (1907-1974), published by Banks Upshaw of Dallas in 1958. I now recall reading this juvenile book in the Big Spring Public Library in 1980 and vaguely remember the same drawing that Rosie described. Even more surprising is that Huston listed Griffis’ book among his authoritative book’s main sources five years later.



1958 book cover of
“Nine Lives of Deaf Smith”



Author Faye Campbell Griffis
(1907-1974)

My reason for bringing up notable books about Deaf Smith, nonfiction or fiction, is three-fold. I have read countless articles, books, and watched deaf blogs and vlogs about Deaf Smith during the last decade. I wanted to see what else is new, old, or even questionable. Yet I do not bother to critique the materials or presentations because they do not impact my work or Huston’s or Griffis’. However, if there is a major issue involving plagiarism, I will address the matter, to preserve Smith’s legacy. One such national deaf magazine copied a substantial part of the 2012 *TDT* Deaf Smith edition without permission in April of 2012. It is legally known that stealing ideas or articles is a felony. Social media is a field day for plagiarists as we well know. Nevertheless, some of the deaf vloggers I have watched do not always do their homework. That’s my pet peeve when they are unprepared, sloppy, or overdramatic. By the same token, I take note of hearing writers who missed or misrepresented some facts. Thirdly, I read four new Texas history books from 2015 to 2020, thus, keeping myself informed of the latest historical perceptions about Deaf Smith.

Although those hearing writers are qualified historians, I lament the fact that some are either ignorant or inadequate to some extent. My evaluation tool is using the research feature in my e-book that helps me count the number of times they mention Deaf Smith. Then I would scrutinize the content and context of each reference. Since I have no space to report on each chosen book, I encourage the reader to look for the unique boxed insert that lists the four books, the number of times Deaf Smith is mentioned, and my brief comment about each book. Check it out!

Yes, there have been movies about Deaf Smith, too. According to David H. Pierce, a film, TV, and cable historian, there have been about nine movies and one dramatic video featuring Deaf Smith for the last 105 years. Pierce often referred films about Deaf Smith to me for review over the years for my own academic benefit.

Please do not believe in that infamous 1973 spaghetti western movie entitled “Deaf Smith and Johnny Ears.” The film is historically and notoriously inaccurate. In fact, there is a movie poster of that film hanging in the Deaf Smith Student Center at TSD that would make the namesake spin in his grave (I have repeatedly asked an ignorant past director of student life to remove the movie poster, but my signs fell on his deaf eyes). However, I must admit that the great versatile actor Anthony Quinn (1915-2001) did an impressive job playing Deaf Smith. He performed far better than Alan Arkin, who played the deaf-mute John Singer in the 1968 film called “The Heart is a Lonely Hunter.”

There was a TV mini-series presented on the History Channel in the spring of 2015. The movie is based on Stephen L. Moore’s historical 2015 novel called “Texas Rising.” As temporary editor of *The Deaf Texan* for just one issue, I selected Larry Evans and David Myers to review “Texas Rising” with me after five episodes. For the record, Rotten Tomatoes panned the film with a pathetic rating of 19%, which coincided with thumbs-down from Evans, Myers, and other movie critics. However, I gave the film a passing grade for two reasons: 1) the Emmy-award winning actor Jeffrey D. Morgan portrayed Deaf Smith superbly as a non-signing hard of hearing character, thus earning my standing ovation, and 2) the character Deaf Smith was portrayed prominently and substantially throughout the series when compared to past commercial films since 1915. Of all nine-known hearing-written films about Deaf Smith, minor or major, superficial or realistic, this History Channel special earned my two thumbs up for giving quality time about the pivotal military contributions of Deaf Smith toward the founding of the Texas Republic.

An ENT Doctor and his Innovative Theory.

Four years ago, I received an unexpected email from Dr. Norman Wendell Todd, Jr. At that time, he was a professor at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta, Georgia. Although he specialized in head and neck surgery, he has a vested interest in the early hearing loss detection

and intervention in babies. By force of habit, I called him my ENT (Ear, Nose, Throat) friend. He tracked me down through TSD and requested my assistance for his research paper that he was developing about Deaf Smith. Definitely interested, I was all eyes, ears, and throat!

Dr. Todd asked me all the right questions: “Did Smith have tinnitus issues?” “Did his writings reflect the hearing loss he had?” “What was his speech shape?” “Considering his sensory abilities, is it possible that he could not hear the musket ball because of his ‘cookie-cut shaped’ audiogram?” You bet I had to brush up on my audiological knowledge.

Although most of the Deaf Community wouldn’t care less about the pathological, audiological, and medical aspect of deafness, it was understandable that Dr. Todd was adding a new dimension about Deaf Smith that we didn’t think of before! From a pragmatic point of view, it helps to have a unique researcher on our side of Texas history.

I provided him with all the historical information related to Deaf Smith’s speech ability (per testimonies from the scout’s contemporaries), his mannerisms, and relatively few personal documents that we have on record. Because I have two hard-of-hearing siblings, I could see the correlation between their speech ability and writing skills. Dr. Todd went beyond my Deaf Smith collection at the Briscoe Center. He mined the Library of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas at the Alamo and prowled the halls at Trinity University for more information about Deaf Smith. Much to our delight, he discovered a thesis written by Lawrence D. Williams (1919-2004) that noted Smith’s sensory abilities! (Because of the pandemic, I couldn’t easily obtain that paper, as it was not online, and only available through an interlibrary connection, which requires time and patience.)

For all Dr. Todd’s hard work, he developed a major scientific paper that also required me to brush up on my college physics and advanced math skills before scrutinizing the shape and speed of a Mexican-fired musket ball! Before his presentation at a national medical conference last year, he shared his Deaf Smith research paper with me. Without question, he put in quality time for his hypothesis about the correlation between the musket ball and Smith’s hearing loss. Even a field test of firing an early 19th-century rifle from X-number of yards was developed as an interesting critical method. There were six complicated graphs to peruse, but nothing I can do to correct them other than suggest that he modified two minor historical facts, which was my department anyway.



Dr. Baldwin & Dr. Todd point to Deaf Smith in the vast painting by Henry A. McArdle (1836-1908), which is located in the Senate Chamber of the Texas State Capital.

Indeed, it was generous and thoughtful of him to acknowledge my collection at the Briscoe Center and for giving him a grand tour of the state capital. By showing him the vast paintings by Huddle (“Surrender of Santa Anna”) and McArdle (“The Battle of San Jacinto”), I emphasized that both painters interviewed veterans of the 1836 battle that described the heroics and hearing loss characteristics of Deaf Smith. What could be better than utilizing true witnesses for the two historically accurate paintings?

Even though some ignorant people think Deaf Smith was a fake deafened person, the majority and Dr. Todd proved otherwise with his scientific approach. Indeed, it was my pleasure to encourage and work with him. Furthermore, we need more innovative doctors like him. He indeed makes my journey worthwhile.

Visiting Richmond, TX for the Latest on Deaf Smith’s Missing Grave.

Over the past 40 years, I visited Deaf Smith’s last town four times. Maybe one time in every ten years I would stop by Richmond, Texas. If I’m driving on Interstate-10 heading for Houston or to Galveston for research (Leroy Colombo information) or to the TAD Convention (1993), I usually visited the Morton Cemetery, where the Mother of Texas,



Close-up of the famous Deaf Smith stone marker that has been moved several times around Richmond, especially next the Lamar monument in the Morton Cemetery.

Jane Long, and the Father of Education, Mirabeau B. Lamar are buried. Believe it or not, a fake granite marker for Deaf Smith once was placed next to the Lamar monument. By fake, I mean it was not genuinely a grave maker, nor an exact gravesite, since Smith's gravesite has been lost since 1853 (Sowell, 81). That marker had a merry-go-around history and was basically designed to attract tourists since the 1930s when the Daughters of the Republic of Texas placed both the marker and a monument on or near the county courthouse. Thanks primarily to Mrs. Sarah Roach Farnsworth (1874-1968), Deaf Smith's great-granddaughter, for sharing this rock marker and monument information.

Just a block away from the impressive Fort Bend County Museum, I met a true professional curator named Chris Godbold, who gave me a quick tour of the museum before our 45-minute meeting. This visit is one of those rare times when the host secured an interpreter for me without my requesting one. He answered all my questions and more. Then I donated copied documents that the museum didn't have, albeit a hard copy of the 2012 Special Edition *TDT* about Deaf Smith that he genuinely appreciated.



Steve with curator Chris Godbold in the Fort Bend Museum in December 2018.

The visit could not have been more productive as we discussed the latest research on the long-lost gravesite of Deaf Smith, which I assumed to be located only a half a block away underneath the intersection of 6th and Houston Street, there in Richmond. Godbold explained that an archaeological dig took place two years earlier with GPR equipment in the basement of a house on Block 90, lots 1-3. He even showed me an old town map of pre-1835 gravesites, which I requested. Unfortunately, those 2013 archaeologists found only "tree roots and pipes" in the dig.



Texas historic marker in front of the house is where archaeologists investigated the basement for the missing gravesite of Deaf Smith and came up with only pipes and tree roots. The SE part of the intersection of 6th and Houston Street has been considered as the Deaf Smith's burial location.

Our meeting took place on December 17, 2015, when I purchased the 2nd edition book, "History of Fort Bend County", that originally came out in 1904. The author, A.J. Sowell, was the son of pioneer parents, and much of what was written there was from mostly oral history since 1824! This is the book that details Smith's apparent hearing loss, mumbling speech, and anti-social demeanor. The book also reminds me of what author Huston told me in 1981: "There are too many Smiths that I have to go through!" Upon checking the book's index, I counted 35 Smiths, and Deaf or Capt. Smith was listed 14 times for a total of 25 pages out of 418! Modern Texas historians do not give Deaf Smith that many references. That's why history books written by first-generation historians provide us more authentic information through eyewitness accounts and reliable oral or signed history. For example: the late Frank Clark, a deaf La Vista resident in San Marcos, TX told me in my videotaped interview that William Huddle's wife became an art teacher at TSD because the state still owed him money after he died in 1892, for his 1886 painting "Surrender of Santa Ana" which hangs in the Texas Capitol. Mrs. Huddle taught for over 40 years at TSD.

Be sure to stop by the Fort Bend Museum and buy the book "History of Fort Bend County," for only \$37 whenever you are halfway from your planned destination. And check out the Deaf Smith display, too.

Deaf Smith Oak Tree is No More!

The *TDT* 2012 Special Deaf Smith Edition contains a full-page story about the historic live oak tree that Deaf Smith used to climb and watch for Mexican army movements beyond the western part of Cibolo Creek during the fall of 1835. With permission from the pioneering Scull family, on whose land the Deaf Smith Tree stood, and the guidance of Texas Forest Service, I received 11 freshly sawed logs and many limb-wood pieces. One such log or two earned \$360 for the TAD in a fundraising event in Big Spring during the 2013 TAD Convention, where Larry Evans notched his 3rd presidential title.

Fast forward to six years, TSD woodworking teacher Allen Hamilton and his student Craig Hall presented a beautifully crafted gavel to the TSD Governing Board on October 19, 2019. The process of converting a live oak log or two into a work of art was hard, intensive, frustrating, and dangerous at times. Hamilton had received a couple of Deaf Smith logs from me to use

when he built the backdrop for the award-winning Deaf Smith exhibit in the basement of the Rotunda at the Texas State Capitol in April of 2012. It took a TSD team of six students and three staffers to make that one-of-a-kind historic gavel a reality that provided a memorable history lesson that will last them a lifetime.

Sadly, the officially recognized Deaf Smith Oak Tree is no more. The Texas Forest Service at Texas A&M in College Station informed me that lightning struck and destroyed the aging 300-plus-year-old tree. Then it dawned on me that I had no official proof that my remaining logs came from the historic tree. After submitting my request for an official authentication, I received their letter on March 19, 2019! In retrospect, the TSD meeting gavel is now a priceless relic, and let's hope the board chairperson pounds the gavel ever so gently.



Close-up shot of TSD senior Craig Hall holding the remarkably crafted gavel that was presented to the TSD Governing board in late 2018.

Photo credit: TSD Lone Star Magazine, fall issue, 2018.)

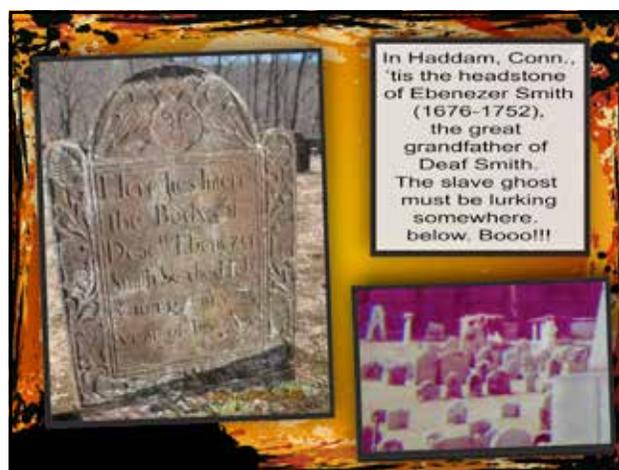


Letter from the Texas A & M Forest Service verifying that the logs and limb wood sent to Dr. Steve Baldwin are indeed from the Deaf Smith Oak Tree.

The Deaf Smith story within the next five years and my absurd predictions.

How does one end this series? With the exception of Williams' thesis (1964) at Trinity University in San Antonio, which I am resolved to get my hands on, my journey finally sees the light at the end of the tunnel. One thing for sure: printed and digital copies of this series will be sent to Briscoe Center of American History for updates on my research. Secondly, the TSD-Texas School for the Deaf SOC-Statewide Outreach Center (formerly ERCOD-Educational Resource Center on Deafness) and GU-Gallaudet University Archives and Collections will also be privileged to receive my most updated materials for their respective educational and archival websites.

Since this *Deaf Texan* issue is distributed between Halloween time and the 183rd anniversary of Smith's death in Richmond, I'm reminded of a true ghost story related to Deaf Smith's ancestral family in Haddam, Connecticut. That's where Smith's family originally came from, especially his grandparents and their parents. It so happened two years ago that I communicated about a business matter with a professional commercial artist named Karen Kratzer of Haddam Neck, Conn. Much to my surprise, she had heard about Deaf Smith! Then she explained that the Smith family plot, which goes as far back as 1753, actually borders her backyard! She emailed me about a slave named Smith that always walks by her yard, creepily and solemnly, at Halloween time! Since Stephen King lives only 112 miles away in Maine, he ought to check out this story for his next book!



Picture from Haddam, Connecticut of the headstone of Ebenezer Smith, great grandfather of Deaf Smith. Is there a ghost here . . .???

As I now peer into my crystal ball, I can see the Texas Historical Commission and Texas Historical Association discovering Deaf Smith's missing gravesite after spending over one million dollars for the excavations, expected legal fees and compensation for the City of Richmond while obtaining DNA samples from the Hull brothers. *The Deaf Texan* newsletter will get the scoop before the New York Times does! Dramatically and without warning, the Republican Texas legislature motions that Deaf Smith's remains must be reburied in the Texas State Cemetery

to compensate for the expenses. The chosen plot will be situated within proximity to the graves of Stephen F. Austin, "Big Foot" Wallace, Edward Burluson, Randal Jones (reinterred from Richmond!), Benjamin McCulloch, Jose Navarro, and Susanna Dickinson, just seven of Smith's fellow contemporaries of the 91 citizens and soldiers who fought for Texas Independence and are buried there. There will be fervors, protests and lawsuits, but without the destruction of public property or shops on 909 Navasota Street in East Austin. After a Democratic governor vetoes the bill, a compromise is reached. The chosen reburial site will go to La Vernia, Texas, on the Scull family farm where the Deaf Smith oak tree was located. The lonely stump now has the company of its famous climber and scout six feet below the ground.



Dr. Baldwin with representative of the Texas Forest Service, Mark Duff, on the Scull family property in La Vernia, Texas in 2011. They are holding a replica of the flag that was used during the Battle of San Jacinto. The flag was also used as a personal prop in the 1985 Deaf Smith play. The Smith Oak has been reduced to a stump, due to inclement weather, drought, and lightning.

By the way, this ongoing coronavirus epoch and my self-quarantined life seem to instigate some funny things to this writer's mind. At least, I hope the readers enjoy the humor, imagination, and the three-part series.

All other contents in the series are historically real. The journey ends on this single page.

In closing on a personal note, my special thanks to *TDT* editor Dr. Patti Singleton and layout artist Kari Graves for making the Deaf Smith series possible and allowing me to conclude my forty-year journey about Texas' most famous scout and spy.