

AUTOBIOGRAPHY of GIDEON LINCECUM

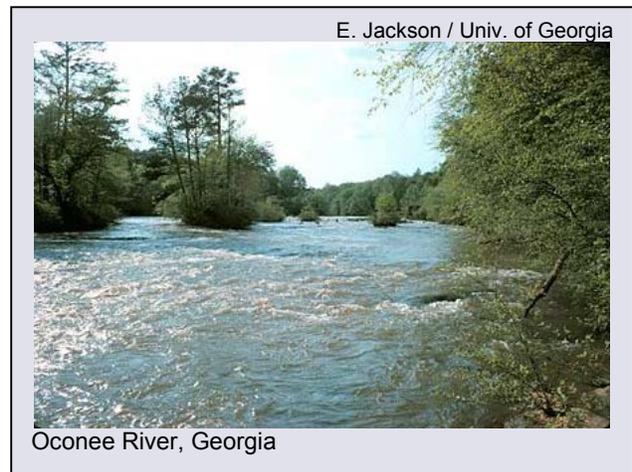
excerpts: 1793-1819

Publications of The Mississippi Historical Society,
F. L. Riley, ed., v. VIII, 1904, 443-509;
compiled by the editor from letters written
by Lincecum to his grandson beginning in 1871.

1793

. . . as the sun was rising, Monday morning, the 22nd day of April, 1793, when she [Sally Lincecum] was sixteen years and forty-eight days of age, the lovely, industrious young wife gave birth to a full formed and quite large male child. Hezekiah was in ecstasy on the occasion, and named the new comer for his father, Gideon.

Hezekiah remained two seasons at that place, but being of a restless spirit, he sold out and moved farther out on the border, settling near the Scull Shoals on the Oconee river, Georgia. At this place the Indians proved so troublesome that he remained only two years. He returned to Hancock county, and bought out a man by the name of Byrd Brazil. This was a good home, near the place where he had lived before, where Gideon, his son, was born.



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On this place he remained three years, accumulating property very rapidly. Here he raised the first crop of cotton that ever grew in that portion of Georgia. . . .

About this time Tyre Kelly, James and John Hickman, of Tennessee, three brothers-in-law, wrote my father frequent letters, urging him to sell out and go to that rich country. He, being naturally of a restless disposition, was very willing to try the experiment. He soon found a purchaser for his rich,

1800

20 money making home. Three years of successful farming had tired him out. He sold out everything that he could not carry with him, bought a good road wagon and four fine horses, and set out for Tennessee

. . . I never shall forget the exceeding gladness that filled my boy's heart the morning we set out from Morris's place on our journey for Tennessee. I ran far ahead of the moving company, shooting my arrows at every bird I could see. We rolled on four days, until we came in view of a little, dilapidated village on the bank of the Savannah river; just below the mouth of Broad river. There was

other company ahead of us, and we could not get our wagon into the flat till

30 near sundown. Just as the wagon was turning to go down into the ferry boat, a quite handsome young lady came up and, without asking any questions, threw a small budget¹ into the wagon, and crossed over with us.

After getting over into South Carolina, we had only time to get out into the timber when it was night. Here we camped.

While they were collecting wood to make a fire, the before mentioned young lady came into camp with a

heavier log of wood on her shoulder, my father said, than a man could carry. In a few days this young lady who proved to be Miss Melinda Nevils was married to my cousin Asa Lincecum, who had joined us a few days previous to our setting out from Georgia.

Rumsey Collection



Burbeck & Melish, United States, 1818 (detail), showing approximate sites where Lincecum settled as a child and adult through 1848, when he went farther west to Texas and Mexico.

B (born)	Warren County, Georgia
2	Scull Shoals, Oconee River, Georgia
3	Hancock County, Georgia
4	Calhoun's Creek, Abbeville district, South Carolina
5	Clark County, Georgia, near Athens
6	Pendleton district, South Carolina
7	Clark County, Georgia, near Athens
8	"wild woods," near Eatonton, Georgia
--	Served in the War of 1812
9	Ocmulgee River, Georgia
10	Tuscaloosa, Alabama
11	Tombechee River, near present Columbus, Mississippi
12	Three miles south of above
13	To Texas, Mexico, and back to Texas

¹ budget: A wallet or small pouch (Appalachian Mountains). [American Heritage Dictionary]

We remained at that camp three days during two of which my father had been away with an old drunken Irishman, who had come there the day after we pitched camp. Mother was uneasy and said she did not understand it; that it was too bad to lose three days of pretty, fair weather in such a long journey. But father came back the evening of the third day and astonished us all by informing us that he had rented an excellent farm on Calhoun's creek, Abbeville district, S.C.

60 We went there the next day and found the house a very good one and the land excellent. There was another good house on the farm, and Asa agreed to make a crop with my father, as there was plenty of open land on the place. He and his wife had nothing but their health and strength to begin life with, not even a blanket. But they had courage, and they went bravely to work, clearing the land and fixing up their house. Mother lent them a bedstead and some blankets. Asa made a fine crop of cotton and corn and Melinda spun and made cloth sufficient for clothing and household use. In the course of a year they had accumulated a wagon load of property. My father paid Asa for his share of the large crop they made, and it enabled them to supply all their immediate necessities.

My father sold his cotton for a good price and made a visit to his sister, living in Clark county, Ga. He was gone two or three weeks, and when he returned, he told my mother that he had purchased a tract of land with a good house on it, one mile from Athens, Ga. We were soon on the road again, returning to Georgia. In the course of a week we reached our new home. Father exerted every power at his new place. He planted and raised a large crop of cotton; and as soon as it began to open, every one that could pick five pounds a day was forced into the cotton field. I soon learned to pick thirty pounds a day, and as a reward for my industry, father got a blacksmith to make me a nice spike for my arrow We succeeded in gathering the cotton by Christmas, and father took it to the gin and got the receipts for 4,643 pounds, for which he received five cents a pound.

80 He again became restless, and selling his place, put his wagon in good repair, set out on this third attempt to get to Tennessee. This time his cargo, besides the beds, trunks, etc., consisted of grandmother, four white and four black children. He had also two white children and one negro child walking. The weather was fine, and we made good progress. I was delighted that we were on the road.



1805

Being in my twelfth year, I was an expert with a bow and arrow, and could run far ahead, shooting and killing many birds in the course of a day.

Father hired a straggling old fellow to drive for this trip, and we rolled on bravely until we came to Saluda river. There was there a store and a blacksmith shop, and we stopped until the smith nailed a pair of shoes on the out-riding horse. Father and his teamster became somewhat intoxicated and got two bottles of whiskey to carry with them. The river was wide and swift, but shallow. We forded it, and in the course of two hours were all safely landed on the border of South Carolina again. After going about five miles my father and the driver became more deeply intoxicated. The latter fell off the wagon and frightened the horses. They ran away and tore up the wagon, hurting all who were in it. My grandmother was very seriously wounded. It became necessary for us to remain at this place three weeks before my grandmother was able to travel again. At the end of this time my father told us that he had decided to purchase a place from a man by the name of Hamilton, who lived on a hill nearby. My father gave him some money and his wagon and two horses for the place. This was in Pendleton district, S.C.

We had on this place a large orchard. There were in it fifty peach trees, said to be forty-four years old. They made a very fine crop of peaches, which my father gathered and carried to a still, where he had them made into brandy. This, with all of his corn and fodder that he could spare, he sold to travelers for ready money at a good price. It was an easy place to make a living, and my father seemed to be quieting down to a settled state of mind. All of the family were satisfied and willing to remain there. Unfortunately my uncle, Tyre Kelly, who had been living in Tennessee, stopped with us on his way to Georgia. He and his eight motherless children remained with us a month. After they left my father became restless again, and sold his place at the first opportunity.

We were soon on the road again. The next time we stopped it was at a place a mile from where we lived the previous year.

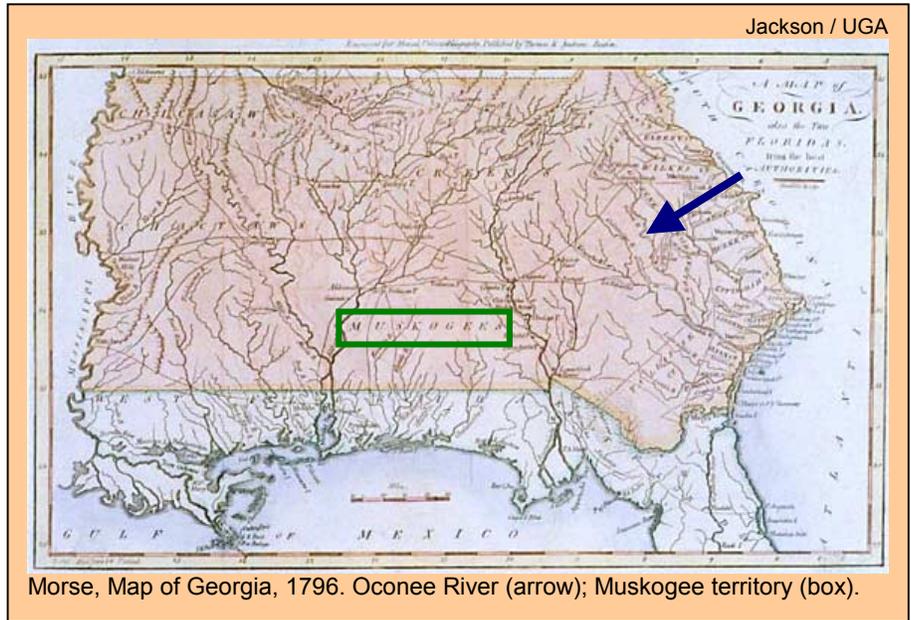
The lands beyond the Oconee river had been obtained by the United States from the Muskogee Indians. No one had moved into this new purchase, and as father intended to settle there as soon as the



Indians had completed the twelve months' hunting which had been by stipulation in the treaty with the United States reserved to them, he took an overseer's place instead of purchasing land. . . .

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When the Indians had finished their year of hunting and retired from the new purchase my father took me with him to explore the country. We crossed the Oconee river and traversed the lands of the new purchase ten



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or twelve days. He preferred the country on Little river, selected a place and we returned home to make ready for the removal as soon as possible. The newly acquired land belonged to the State, and the Legislature enacted that it should be surveyed into lots of 202½ acres each, and have it drawn for by her citizens in general lottery. Men having families were entitled to two tickets; single men and women of age, and sets of orphaned children, one ticket, each. My father had been moving and shackling about so much that he was not entitled to a chance in the lottery,—and the place he had selected on Little river had been drawn by a man who would not part with it. This discovery was not made until we had moved on to it. Father then found a place belonging to Thomas McLellon, with a double cabin on it. For this place he gave all the money he had, with “Mammy Pat” and two of her children. It was situated in the wild woods, on a beautiful clear running creek, in one mile of where Eatonton now stands.

1807

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Great numbers of people flocked into the country, and the next year after we came there the county seat was laid off and named Eatonton. I was one of the chain carriers to survey the streets and lots though I was but fourteen years old. We had cleared and planted ten acres of ground the year before, and this year we cleared fifteen acres more. About this time my father and I had a misunderstanding and I decided to leave home. I hired to a man by the name of William Wilkins, a merchant at Eatonton. I worked for him two years remaining in his home during this time. At the end of the first year I had a serious difficulty with a man by the name of Clark, who had insulted me several times. He was discharged by Mr. Wilkins, who put me in entire charge of his business. After my second year

with Mr. Wilkins I was employed by Mr. Thompson, a more prosperous merchant, who paid me a salary of \$500.00 a year.

1812

150 In the meantime I had studied medicine during odd moments. The War of 1812 was approaching. I left the store and confined myself entirely to the study of medicine until the declaration of war. I then enlisted in a company of volunteers, but as the people of Putnam county had elected me tax collector, I could enlist for only five months. I had to begin collecting in January, and it was in the month of August when I went into the army. I served until the first of January; then went home, collected the taxes, paid the money into the treasury and married. I served another period of three months after I was married, and in the spring of 1815 went home and gave my father a faithful year's work. . . .

160 . . . The Alabama, Black Warrior Tombecbee, and Chattahoochie countries had all been acquired by conquest, and I was determined to seek a home in the wilderness. My father had made up his mind to go to the new country with his large family and he had been insinuating to me the propriety of breaking up to go with him. There was another *little thing* that increased my restlessness. My wife's relations were all wealthy and my wife said they had been mean enough to cast little slurs at her and her poverty. She also persuaded me to sell out and go with my father to the new country. All these influences confirmed me in the resolution to get ready and bid adieu to my native State.

1816

170 Father and I sold out our possessions and were soon on the road to the new country. We had proceeded about forty-five miles when we came to the Ocmulgee river, which at that time was a dividing line between the Georgians and the Creek Indians. A man by the name of Ferguson came to our camp and getting a little "tight" with my father, in a kind of prolic [*sic*],² sold my father his land and cattle. All along the river the people owned herds of cattle which they kept in the range on the Indian side of it. There was plenty of deer over there, too; and being satisfied that my father would not remain more than a year, I concluded to stop also and do what I had never done in my life; idle away the time until he got tired of his bargain and made ready to move again. . . .

1818

My father loved a border life, and the place he had purchased on the Ocmulgee, as the people had already commenced settling on the opposite side of the river, was no longer looked upon as a border country. He sold his place and was soon equipped and geared up for the road, and so was I. I had been reared to a belief and faith in the pleasure of frequent change of country, and I looked upon the long journey, through the wilderness, with much pleasure.

Our company consisted of my father and mother and eight children, with six negroes; Joseph Bryan, my brother-in-law, and his wife and two negroes; my wife and me and two small sons and two

² prolic: prolix, perhaps.

180 negroes. We had good horses and wagons and guns and big dogs. We set out on the 10th of March, 1818. I felt as if I was on a big camp hunt.

The journey, the way we traveled, was about 500 miles, all wilderness; full of deer and turkeys, and the streams were full of fish. We were six weeks on the road; and, altogether it was, as I thought and felt, the most delightful time I had ever spent in my life. My brother Garland and I “flanked it” as the wagons rolled along and killed deer, turkeys, wild pigeons; and at nights, with pine torches, we fished and killed a great many with my bow and arrows, whenever we camped on any water course. Little creeks were full of fish in that season.

At length we reached Tuscaloosa, Ala. It was at that time a small log cabin village; but people from Tennessee were arriving daily, and in the course of that year it grew to be a considerable town.

190 I concluded to stop there, and my father and his family and Bryan and his family continued their journey to a small improvement eight miles below Tuscaloosa, on the river, where they settled, and, cutting down a canebrake³, made corn; and killed bear, venison and fish enough to supply the family.

I fished and had as much as we needed of that kind of food, but there were no bear nor deer in reach of the town, and I had to buy provisions at enormous rates. Flour, \$25 a barrel; corn, \$2½ a bushel; sugar, 50 cents a pound; coffee, 62½ cents a pound; salt, \$8 a bushel; bacon, 37½ cents a pound. There was no beef to be had.

200 I built a little clapboard house on the river side of the town, which had not yet been surveyed. The land hunters from Georgia found us and continued their friendly calls on us until what money I had left from the long journey was eaten up. This was a circumstance for which I had made no provisions. I felt no uneasiness on that account; for I was as strong as two common men and could do anything from cutting and splitting fence rails to fine cabinet work. And in mercantile action was familiar with all the duties from the lumber house to the counting room. I could mix drugs and practice medicine as far as it was known in the interior of the country in those days. So I felt no alarm at the fact that my money was gone. . . .

About the time the month expired my father came to town, and informed me that he had just returned from exploring lands on the Tombecbee river and that he found it to be a more desirable country than that on the Tuscaloosa river. He said that the part he preferred was distant about 75 miles with no road to it, and that he was going to remove there immediately.

210 I was greatly pleased with his description of the country. He said there was not a house between Tuscaloosa and the Tombecbee, that the Choctaws were near the river on the opposite side, but that nowhere on the east side was to be found any signs that the country had ever been occupied. The

³ canebrake: a dense thicket of cane. [American Heritage Dictionary]

forests were very densely timbered, and the bottom lands were covered with the heaviest kinds of cane. Altogether, he said, it was the wildest, least trodden and tomahawk marked country he had ever explored, and that the soil was rich enough.

His description of the dark, heavy forests, the wide thick canebrakes and the clear, running river, full of fish put me into a perfect transport. I told my father that I owed nobody anything. I had nothing to hinder me from starting in two days, if he would be ready by that time; that I could take my effects in a boat down the river to his house where my wagon was.

He said that was what he came to see about; that he was glad to find me so little incumbered; and that he could be ready to move in three days.

220 I told him I would be with him before that time. . . .

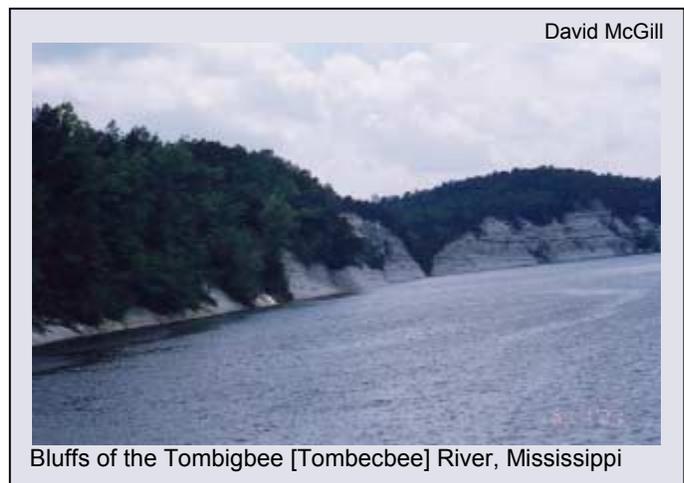
We had made every arrangement and packed our goods in our little boat by 4 p. m. the second day. We then bade adieu to Tuscaloosa and to a crowd of our newly made young friends, who had followed us down to the river, helping us to pack the boat.

1818

We got to my father's house about dark. They were all delighted to see us, and we were in a perfect ecstasy over the prospect of a wagon journey through a roadless wilderness. We made the preparation and set out on the 1st day of November, 1818. The weather was fine. We were twelve days *en route* and the heavens were perfectly cloudless during the entire trip. The autumnal leaves and nuts were clattering down everywhere. Shellbarks, hickory nuts, and chestnuts strewed the ground, and grapes, muscadines, persimmons and various wild autumnal fruits were plentiful. It was delightful to
230 observe the women and children wallowing in the dry leaves in the evening and gathering such quantities of nuts as to require assistance to get them into camp. Then such cracking and roasting nuts and loud merry talk till bedtime.

We killed plenty of deer, turkeys, ducks, wild pigeons, and had the music of great gangs of wolves around our camp every night. The entire trip was delightful beyond description. . . .

In the afternoon of the twelfth day we landed on the banks of the Tombecbee river, three miles by land above where Columbus Miss., now stands. I was delighted with the appearance of the low bluff and the canebrake that came to a point where the river turned abruptly from the bluff a few steps above where we struck it. Here I made my camp. Father went four hundred yards lower down and



pitched his tent. . . .

260 Three days after we came there I began to prepare for building me a house. I got the clapboards in one day, cut the logs in a day, hauled them together in a day; and the next day, by the aid of my brothers and Jo. Bryan, raised and covered it. The next day I floored it with linwood puncheons, and the day after I made a wooden chimney to it, and we left our camp and moved into it. The weather was getting cool, and with a rousing log fire fed with plenty of rich pine knots, the light was as bright as day, making the whole house which was lined with newly split board fairly glitter again. Having no bedstead yet, my wife made the bed on the floor. I never shall forget the encouraging remark she made when we lay down. After gazing for a moment on the shining walls of the little cabin she said, "This is fine, and it inspires me with confidence that we are capable of making our way and successfully meeting the exigencies of existence here. The quantity of venison, fish and fowl that we have on hand already, and the facility which with it is procured quiets all fears of scarcity of provisions."

Having no good place to keep our provisions, I then built a little smokehouse. My wife said, while she was placing the provisions in it, "This is very convenient." And then she remarked, "Notwithstanding the fact that we are surrounded with this wild impenetrable forest, we have nothing to fear." "No, dat we ha'n't," said Aunt Polly, who was young too then.

270 These little incidents tell the situation we occupied, and how little dread we entertained. We felt ourselves fully competent for the emergency.

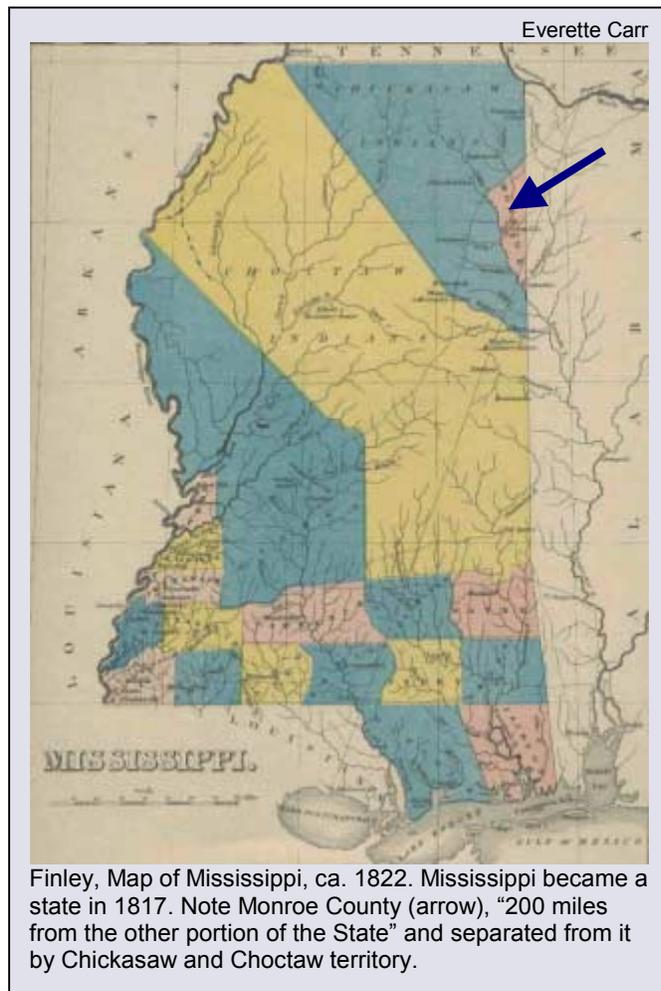
Soon all the families had houses, and all hands went to work, cutting down and clearing the maiden forest to make fields to plant corn in. I cut down six acres of the canebrake that jammed itself almost down to the place where I built my house. I burnt off the cane on the 5th of May, and planted it with a sharp stick on the 6th. Twice while it was growing I cut and beat down the young cane that sprouted up from the old cane stumps. That was all the work the crop got. The bear and raccoons ate and destroyed a good deal of it, and yet I gathered 150 bushels of good corn. . . .

1819

280 In 1819, the government marked or surveyed a road from Nashville, Tenn., to Natchez, Miss. It crossed the Tombecbee river where Columbus, Miss., now stands; ten miles by water, and three by land below where I had settled. I went down there to see what kind of a place it was. I found it a beautifully elevated situation, being about the head of navigation. I thought it was an eligible town site, and that it would be a town as soon as the country should settle up. I was so fully impressed with the belief that a big town would some day loom up on that beautiful bluff that I went home, sawed a thousand boards; put them on a raft and floated them down the river with the intention of building a snug little house on a nice place I had selected, hoping to be able to realize a profit from it, as soon as people should move into the country. . . .

The State line had not been run, and we were supposed to be in Alabama. It was not long until the line dividing the States of Alabama and Mississippi was laid off, and we found ourselves fifteen miles from the line on the Mississippi side; in a strip of country 80 miles long and averaging 20 miles in width, east of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations. The Tombecbee river was the line between us and the Indians; 200 miles from the other portion of the State. And thus cut off from the law, we were there 18 months before we saw an officer of any kind. At length, the Legislature recognized us as a portion of the State, and named that long strip of land Monroe county. They also appointed me chief justice, with authority to appoint all the officers necessary to organize the county. The land having been previously surveyed, it was found that Columbus was on a 16th section — school land.

The Legislature also appointed me chairman of the school commissioners, with power to appoint four associates; also to lay off the town and lease the lots for the term of 99 years, renewable forever.



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In 1848, when he was a successful 55-year-old physician in Columbus, Mississippi, Lincecum picked up stakes and moved to Texas with his wife, ten children, and several great-grandchildren. Here he became known as the "frontier naturalist," practicing herbal medicine and studying the plant life of Texas. Twenty years later he headed south to Vera Cruz, Mexico, with a widowed daughter and her children, and for ten years ran a banana plantation in a Confederate settlement. In the final leg of his migrations, he returned to Texas and wrote his autobiographical letters. He died in 1874 at the age of 81.