

Dr. Joseph B. Fox

Dr. Joseph Fox was born on the 22nd of March in 1800. There has been some discrepancy as to his birth place throughout the years. Oral family lore handed down told that he was born in London and this became the accepted location of his birth. It is the birthplace listed on the historical marker located at the Fox Cemetery.

It is not, however, the correct location of his birth. Dr. Fox himself listed Connecticut as his birthplace on all census data. He was, in fact, born in the city of "New London", Connecticut. After his death, rather like a game of "Telephone", the information mutated and the "New" was dropped from "New London", and "London" became the accepted place of birth. In 1880, the first census year in which information about parent's birthplaces was required, Dr. Fox's children demonstrate the origins of the confusion. The oldest surviving sons, Charles and Joseph correctly said that their father came from Connecticut and that their mother came from North Carolina. The next oldest surviving child was Thomas and he knew that he was born in Mississippi but perhaps he had forgotten where his parents were born because the census taker put nothing in these blanks. Benjamin put down that he was born in Mississippi and he didn't know where his father was born or he would have put it down, but he said his mother was born in Alabama. Emily Elizabeth claimed that she was born in Mississippi, which was correct, and that her father was born in Connecticut, which was correct and that her mother was from Tennessee, which was not correct. John Smith Fox said that he was born in Mississippi and his father was born in Connecticut and that his mother was born in Alabama. Julia Ann and James both put down that their father was born in England.

Much of the Fox family history has been passed down orally, although we do have a few written accounts. One such source is an interview of the wife of Joseph Henry Fox (3rd son of Dr. Joseph B. Fox) conducted in the 1930's by a young Jack Fox. In this account, Vi Priddy Fox states, "He liked to recall that his mother's sister married John Paul Jones. They had no children and always promised to leave their money to him." There are several John Joneses listed on the Connecticut censuses and several with no children listed, but this topic needs more research which perhaps someday will lend more information on the family of Dr. Fox.

The writings of Jack Fox also state that the father of Dr. Joseph Fox "remarried while Joe was still a child. The step-mother was of the lower type and when he was 12 or 14, Joe" left home. Other versions of the story state that Dr. Fox was orphaned in his early teens and was taken in by an aunt named Sarah Death (Deeth) or Elizabeth Death by other accounts. As no

record of any family with this last name has been found during this time period in Connecticut, it is more probable that the story of the father's remarriage is closer to the truth.

Whether Dr. Fox ran away from an aunt or a step-mother, all versions agree that Dr. Fox ran away at 13 or 14 years of age aboard a ship. New London is on the coast of Connecticut, with a fine port, and undoubtedly Joseph watched ships coming and going all his young life. Jack Fox records that Dr. Fox, "Scrubbed decks after having been discovered as a stowaway." Another account says he joined the Navy to become a sailor, but this account can now be disproven. Frank Shiels has tracked down a document from the Collector's office of the District of Edenton, North Carolina dated January 1, 1816. This certificate number 1110 shows Joseph Fox to be a registered seaman as of December 28, 1815, being 15 years old. It even provides us with his description - 4 feet 11½ inches in height, light complexion, light hair and further tells us he was born in Connecticut, City of New London, and Native of the United States. Maryland laws of the time stated that "any mariner or seaman, above 14 and under 50 years of age, may repair to any naval officer and there deliver his name, age, stature, complexion and place of birth, and require the naval officer to register him accordingly, and to give him a certificate thereof under his hand and seal of office and such certificate shall be sufficient evidence that such mariner is a citizen of this state." If North Carolina's law were similar, then Joseph Fox was considered a resident of North Carolina in 1816.

Jack Fox's writing also tells us that he witnessed the Battle of New Orleans. He "probably landed in New Orleans for he saw the Battle of New Orleans from a summit nearby. After several minor attacks the battle started on January 8, 1815 at dawn. In any event, just as the battle was beginning six men tried to run but were stopped and immediately shot by Andrew Jackson's orders. This is the reason he disliked Jackson so much." Loraine Priddy Lanham told the story that later in life he had great, heated "discussions" with his good friend Thomas J. Priddy about Andrew Jackson.

This battle took place in January 1815, eleven months before we find the document where Joseph B. Fox became a "registered seaman" in Edenton, North Carolina. Joseph surely reached New Orleans aboard a ship, but it would seem, not as a "registered seaman." Family lore holds that not only did Joseph scrub the decks after being found as a stowaway, but he also helped the ship's doctor in his duties, and this chore gave Joseph his practical experience in medicine. In those days, you could become a doctor simply by becoming apprenticed to a doctor. Jack Fox writes, "He became a doctor mostly through his own studies which was the way doctors got most of their training in those days. He was considered a good doctor and

never ceased to study." But early in 1815, he must have been considered a sort of cabin boy or apprentice, not a seaman.

Frank Shiels has found other documents which list Joseph B. Fox aboard a ship, one of which is the crew list for the schooner "Perdido" of Mobile bound for Pensacola, June 16th, 1821. This document lists his birthplace as New London, Connecticut and his residence as New Orleans. On September 5th, 1821 he is aboard the "Fisher Ames" when the ship docked in Newport, Rhode Island from St. John, New Brunswick. The record lists him as a "Physician" at 20 years of age. In June, he is on the Perdido bound for Pensacola, but by September, he is on the Fisher Ames. The Fisher Ames picked him up in a foreign port, and we know this because the document is a "List of all the passengers taken on board the ship Fisher Ames of Newport, William Seaburg master, in any foreign port or place." By 1820, masters were required by congressional act to file with the district collector of customs a manifest (or list) of all passengers who embarked from a foreign port. These lists were to include the name of each passenger; his or her age, sex, and occupation; the country to which he or she belonged; the country where the passenger intended to live, and a list of deaths that occurred during the voyage. Records show The Fisher Ames stopped in Matanzas, Cuba and perhaps this was the foreign port at which Dr. Fox was picked up.

An additional document that lists Joseph is from the Survey of Federal Archives in Louisiana of Crew Lists. Here Joseph B. Fox is shown on December 31st, 1821 as being 20 years old and a physician and from the United States. So we know that for most of 1821, Joseph considered New Orleans to be his home port. Frank Shiels is hopeful that we can uncover other ship's manifests from ports such as Newport, Mobile, Pensacola and New Orleans. It is noteworthy that Joseph is listed as a full-fledged Physician in these 1821 documents. This was quite a matter of prestige aboard a ship at that time. In 1814, the Royal Navy only had 14 Physicians, and they were paid quite well.

According to Jack Fox, "Another story that he (Dr. Fox) always told with regret was that on one of his three journeys across the Atlantic he was within thirty miles of the Holy Land, but thinking he would pass that way again he did not visit there. But he was never in the vicinity again." Joseph went back to New London, Connecticut while a sailor but it is said he never got in touch with his relatives. In an article written by Pauline Fox Nichols, it is said that "he rode the mast when the ship was rolling from side to side, and that he was "shipwrecked on the Carolina coast." Family lore holds that he made his way inland to Alabama after this shipwreck and the first we have of Joseph in Alabama is in 1828 when he married. (Surely he needed a

little courting time as well as time to establish himself professionally, so most likely he was in Alabama before this date.) If Joseph was on a ship beginning in 1814 (he had to have caught a ship in 1814 in order to be in New Orleans in January of 1815) and ended his travels in 1827, he would have spent 13 years serving aboard ships.

Another story we have from Jack Fox is that soon after Joseph landed he was stricken with Yellow Fever and a man took Joseph to a barn and laid him inside on an old hammock. He left him there without food or water as his fever raged. Finally it began to rain and with such a burning desire for water he crawled out into the open and drank the deposits of water he found in the horse tracks. The cool water gave him strength and when an old woman passed by he was able to attract her attention. He gave her a silver dollar and asked her to take it and buy a chicken and make him some soup. Sometime soon afterward another old man found him and took him away to his house. When he was awakened by the unearthly cries and muttering of a mad woman on a spree he could only lie there and hope that he would not incur her wrath. She had been breaking up the bedsteads with an axe. After the threshing ceased the old man came back and assured him that he was safe and that his wife had gotten some money somewhere and used it to get her tipsy. This was the same woman he had asked to buy a chicken for him!

We pick Joseph's trail back up in Alabama, where he married Elizabeth "Betsy" Shaw, who was born 18 December 1810, the daughter of James S. Shaw and Catherine Elliott. Judging by the first child's birthday (William G. Fox – 29 Aug 1929), this marriage probably occurred in late 1828. Elizabeth's family lived in Green County, Alabama and this is no doubt where the marriage occurred.

By 1830, Joseph has settled in Montgomery County, Alabama. He is listed with one male child under 5 (William G. Fox), himself, Elizabeth, 1 adult male slave and 1 child male slave.

On April 9, 1831 Joseph and Elizabeth had their second child, Charles Joseph Fox, born in Montgomery County, Alabama. One month later on May 11, 1831 Joseph mortgaged some property to Victor F. Mongin and this is recorded in Montgomery county courthouse. He mortgaged one bay mare age about five years, one black horse aged about ten years, four cows and calves, one Negro boy named William about ten years of age (the same 10 year old slave listed on the 1830 census), and one wagon and harness. This property Joseph mortgaged in return for \$250.00. If Fox did not pay back Mongin by the 25th of December Mongin would have the right to take the property, give ten days public notice and auction it off to the highest bidder.

The next record found comes from Frank Shiels. He discovered that on December 15, 1832 Joseph was living in Perry County, Alabama. On this date he purchased 40.12 acres at \$1.25 per acre to make a total amount of \$50.15. The area was located at S.E. ¼ S.E. ¼ 32 T 18 R6. Joseph applied for a land patent from the government and received one on August 20, 1834, signed by "President" Andrew Jackson – the same Andrew Jackson that gave the orders eighteen years earlier in New Orleans to kill six men on sight.

On January 9, 1833 their third child, Joseph Henry Fox, was born in Perry County, Alabama. It was probably after Joseph was born that the first Thomas Fox was born (there were two sons with the name Thomas). Jack Fox, in his interview with Leona Elvira Priddy (Vi), wife of Dr. Fox's son Joseph Henry Fox, writes that Thomas "burned to death when a deep covering of shavings caught fire while he and Joe were playing there. Joe was very small and was removed unhurt" and Thomas Wade Fox was later named in memory of the Thomas who had burned in the fire.

On December 4, 1834 Joseph Fox bought additional acreage that involved 68.36 ½ acres at \$1.25 per acre amounting in total \$85.46. The land was located in Perry County at W1/2 S.W. ¼ 24 T 18 R 6. Andrew Jackson also granted this land patent on October 1, 1835 with the patent number #20305 Vol. 43, page 489 and registered at the land office at Cahaba. The first land patent was #14194, Vol. 31, page 111. It must be noted that not only were the Fox family living in Perry County, Alabama but so were the Shaw family and this would have been James and Catherine Shaw, parents of Elizabeth Shaw. It was here in Perry County that Elizabeth's brother, Robert B. Shaw (who was later a Captain in the Civil War) was born on July 19, 1833.

Joseph and Elizabeth's fifth child, Sarah K. Fox, was born in Chickasaw County, Mississippi on 25 Apr 1837. The land of Chickasaw County opened up after the Chickasaw Indians of that territory were forcibly moved in what is now known as the Trail of Tears in 1834 to the "Indian Territory", present day Oklahoma. On the 1840 Chickasaw County Federal Census, he is shown with 4 male children and 1 female child. It also lists 2 adult male slaves and 3 adult female slaves. He is listed on both the 1841 and 1845 Mississippi State Census Index in Chickasaw County. He is also found on the Judgment Roll, 1836-1845, Chickasaw Co., Mississippi - #165 Willis W. Churry VS. John Bailey & Joseph Fox and #166 Jordon & Buchanan VS. Joseph Fox & Robert A. Pearce.

The 1850 Chickasaw County census lists the following information:

Joseph Fox , age 50, occupation: Physician, \$1000 in real estate, born in Connecticut.

Elizabeth Fox, age 39, born North Carolina
William G. Fox, age 20, occupation: Farmer, born Alabama
Charles J. Fox, age 19, born Alabama
Joseph H. Fox, age 17, born Alabama
Sarah R. Fox, age 13, born Mississippi
Thomas W. Fox, age 11, born Mississippi
Benjamin F. Fox, age 9, born Mississippi
Julian Fox, age 7, born Mississippi (Julia)
Elizabeth B. Fox, age 5, born Mississippi (Emily)
John S. Fox, age 3, born Mississippi
Druesella M. Fox, age 1, born Mississippi (Druesella Margaret)

Pauline Fox Nichols wrote, "Dr. Fox's grandson, Marion Fox, recalls Joseph coming from Okolona, Chickasaw County, Mississippi, but his daughter Julia Ann Fox Spikes often spoke of living at Aberdeen, Mississippi." The record is clear that Joseph's family resided in Chickasaw County, but it is also true that they spent time in Aberdeen, Monroe County, Mississippi, for this is where their grandparents (Elizabeth's parents) resided. Per Frank Shiels: "When I (Frank Shiels) visited Chickasaw, Mississippi in 1981, I was told that the Union soldiers had burned down the courthouse, therefore wiping out any proof that the Fox or Shaw families lived there. But in the adjacent Monroe County, I found a deed dated 1842 whereby James Shaw deeded property to his grandchildren, then living in Chickasaw County."

Dr. Fox moved his family to Kaufman County, Texas around 1851. Grandson Marion Fox has said they settled there in June of 1851. According to Jack Fox's writing, "On their journey here from the East she (Betsy Shaw Fox) rode her horse with a side saddle (her husband followed just behind on his horse) and attached to her waist, lying in her lap was their bag of gold which was to establish them in the new land. It was a leather pouch measuring 4" by 8". Even after they came to Texas they traveled this way she went ahead bearing the money bag."

It is said that Joseph gave one slave for two sections of land (1280 acres), and also that he paid \$1.00 or \$1.25 per acre to P. H. Pearson plus a good horse, saddle and bridle for 189 acres. He built his house about one and a half miles east of Prospect (which became Egypt, then Chief and is now Rand). This is nine miles east of the county seat of Kaufman. According to his grandson, Marion Fox, there were only two other houses from Kaufman to the Van Zandt

County line at the time. The house was a "Dog Run" cabin. This is two log cabins connected by a plank room with a long porch across the front of the three rooms. Elizabeth's mother, Catherine Elliott Shaw, lived in the plank room after she was widowed.

As neighbors were so few, Joseph had to travel far and wide to practice medicine. It is said he would be gone for 2-3 weeks at a time, going as far as Henderson and Tyler while carrying his medicines and other supplies in his saddle bags. Excerpt from *Kaufman County History, Vol II*, written by Pauline Fox Nichols: "Joseph Fox began the practice of medicine among the Indians it is told. After he moved to Kaufman County he had a wide practice among the early settlers. Sometimes he would be gone from home as long as three weeks, people calling him from one home to another, often getting as far away as Henderson. He raised yellow horses and always rode one in his practice. He carried his pills in the saddlebags."

Elizabeth and her sons kept the homestead running. Wildlife and small game were plentiful in the area. In addition, they kept hogs, chickens and beef, all which found feed on the open prairie. They raised corn and other grains. They made their own cloth, thread and clothes. Groceries such as sugar and coffee were sent by wagon train from Shreveport, Louisiana and salt was obtained from Jordan's Saline, which is Grand Saline today. Water was obtained from a nearby creek.

Elizabeth was six months pregnant with their twelfth child, Joseph Anthony Fox, who was born in November of 1852, when the family lost their second child, Sara K Fox on 24 August 1852. She was only fifteen years old and is the first grave in the Fox Cemetery. Dr. Fox donated the land to be used as a family cemetery. According to the obituary of Elizabeth Shaw Fox, this land was 400 yards from their cabin.

Three months later, James Anthony was born – the first of Joseph and Elizabeth's children to be born in Texas. Their last child, Sarah C. Fox, named for her deceased sister, was born in March of 1854. This Sarah, unfortunately, did not survive childhood either. One year after her birth, Joseph and Elizabeth laid to rest their third child, the second in the Fox Cemetery – William G. Fox in April of 1855. William was 25 years old and left behind a wife and child. One and one-half years after his death, they laid to rest their fourth child, the third in the Fox Cemetery – Sarah C., who was only two years old.

While in Mississippi, Dr. Fox met and befriended a man by the name of Thomas Jefferson Priddy. Thomas was only four years older than Joseph, a veteran of the war of 1812, and a Baptist preacher. They maintained their friendship through correspondence after Joseph left Mississippi in 1851. Eighteen years later, Thomas Priddy, after numerous personal tragedies,

joined his friend in Kaufman County, Texas, moving most of his family to the area. Thomas arrived on Christmas Day in 1869 leading a wagon train of about 100 people consisting mainly of his descendants and their families.

In the three years the two friends had together in Texas, they kept up a lively discussion of the issues of the day. Some they agreed upon, some they did not. One topic that always proved lively was General/President Andrew Jackson. Thomas Priddy admired Andrew Jackson while Dr. Fox disliked him. I like to think Dr. Fox's dislike stemmed as much from the treatment of the soldiers he witnessed in New Orleans in 1815 as from Jackson's cruel and inhumane treatment of the Indians in 1834.

As close as these two men were, it is not surprising that several of Thomas's grandchildren married Dr. Fox's children and grandchildren. (And I for one am grateful for this occurrence which makes my existence possible.)

In 1870, Dr. Fox is listed on the census of Kaufman County as a physician born in Connecticut with real estate valued at \$4,200 and personal estate valued at \$1,500. He passed away on 17 October 1872 at the age of 72, and is buried in the Fox Cemetery. Thomas passed away four years later and is also buried in the cemetery, close even in death to his great friend and in-law.

Elizabeth stayed on the land she and Dr. Fox had settled. In 1880, she is shown alone in the residence, next door to her son Joseph Henry and his family, but was apparently already in bad shape. According to Jack Fox, "In her old age she became blind and her mind was worn out. When Aunt Lena was born (1875) Grandpa (Joseph Henry Fox) took his new daughter in to her to tell the old woman about her. Grandma Shaw was confined to her bed but she insisted on holding the baby and as she did she felt all over its face and then said, "Joe, this is a fine baby." In telling me this Grannie (Vi Priddy Fox) still remembered how afraid she was that she'd either drop or hurt the baby."

Before she passed away on 17 Oct 1895, she had moved in with her son Joe. She is buried in the Fox Cemetery next to her husband of forty-four years. Together, they had thirteen children and at least seventy-four grand-children.

The following tribute to her is found in the *Fox Family of Kaufman County, Texas* by Robert Barclay, Accumulator:

"Elizabeth Shaw met and married Dr. Joe Fox in Alabama and moved to Mississippi and then to Texas in 1851. She was the mother of thirteen children and the sister of Captain R.B. Shaw,

formerly sheriff of Kaufman County but later a large merchant of Kemp and of Honorable W.A. Shaw of Clarksville who so ably represented Red River County in the legislature. Elizabeth was also the Aunt of Mr. A.E. Carlisle who was probably the most popular man in the county and those three splendid gentlemen and good citizens, John, Bob and Gus Carlisle. From her early youth she was a consistent member of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and an earnest worker in the good cause. Her last few years she lived with Uncle Joe Fox in the Egypt neighborhood and was an invalid for years, the last eight months being stretched upon a bed of pain, but all that kind hearts and willing hands could do to relieve her suffering was freely done by her neighbors and relatives. Eighty-five years is a long time to live in this world but all who knew Aunt Betsy, as she was fondly called, reckoned her life more by her deeds of kindness and acts of charity than by the flight of time or the rolling seasons. If there is a better world she has gone to it, if not she made the best of this."

The following copy of the death notice in the Kaufman newspaper, transcribed and recorded by Jack Fox contains all written above, but includes these first lines: "The subject of this tribute – Aunt Elizabeth Fox - was born in Alabama (North Carolina) on the 18th day of December, 1810 and died on the 17th day of October, 1895."

In 1968 a historical marker was placed at the Fox Cemetery and many of Joseph's and Elizabeth's descendants continue to be buried there. In November 1977, the Marion Fox Farm was accepted in the Texas Family Land Heritage Program for a century or more of continuous ownership and operation as a family agricultural enterprise.

The following is from a letter written by Dr. Fox's Grandson, Marion Fox.

My grandfather, Dr. Joseph Fox, was born in London, England in 1800. He was left an orphan at eleven years old and was adopted by an aunt by the name of Sarah Death. He ran away at the age of thirteen, caught a ship for America and became a sailor. He crossed the Atlantic several times and was shipwrecked on the coast of the Carolinas. He drifted inland and from there went to Alabama, then to Mississippi, and in the spring of 1851, with his family and slaves, immigrated to Kaufman County.

Dr. Fox settled in what is now the Rand Community in June of 1851. He gave one slave for two sections of land (1280 acres). Land was very cheap and slaves were high. A "leader" sold for as high as \$2000 in gold.

There were no banks, railroads, telegraph systems, telephones, radios, television sets, roads or bridges, or any of the other conveniences of life we now take for granted.

The Indian and the buffalo were gone, but there were plenty of buffalo bones on the prairies.

They built their house out of logs, covered them with boards and daubed the cracks. There was no such thing as windows or screens or lumber here then. They made their own thread, own cloth, and own clothes, and even their shoes. What groceries they got came from Shreveport, Louisiana.

There were regular freighters in that day, or wagon trains. One old freighter said he never bought any whiskey but always had all he wanted. Men in that day would send by him for a barrel that cost from fifty cents to \$1 per gallon. He would knock down one hoop, bore a hole with a gimlet, draw out what he wanted and drive in a wooden peg to stop the hole, and then drive down the hoop over the peg.

The settlers got their salt at Jordan's Saline, which today is Grand Saline. Prairieville was called "Norway" because Norwegians settled it.

Court was held at old Cedar Grove under a big oak tree. Kaufman was originally called Kingsboro. Kaufman County was organized in 1848, and was originally in the Nacogdoches District.

My father, C.J. Fox, said at one time he personally knew every man in Kaufman County, and that was not many.

When my people came here, there were only two houses from Kaufman to the Van Zandt County line, the Morrrows who came in 1847 from Wisconsin and the Barnes on Cedar, who probably came to Kaufman County in 1836 from Tennessee.

There was a mail rider by the name of "Hill" who possibly carried the mail from Kaufman to Canton once a week by horseback. One day he got off his horse and the horse ran off with the mail. He followed him for some distance and could not catch him so he pulled out his pistol, killed the horse, and picked up the mail bag. He walked to Dr. Morrow's and borrowed a horse and carried the mail to Kaufman. In that day game was plentiful, deer, turkey, bear, panthers, prairie chickens and an abundance of small game. Wild horses roamed the county. There were no barbed wire fences. The only fences were of bois d'arc hedge or rails. If a man in that day and time had his bread for another year, he was considered "okay" as his meat grew wild and he made everything else.