



Rivalry In Early Texas

A Visit To The Brookfield – Cremer–Brown House

By Klaus Herring

Just a five minute drive south of La Grange, on a rise overlooking the gently undulating plains between Texas' oldest Czech community — Hostyn — and Shiner, stands an old stone house that still harbors a city plan designed by Sam Houston's arch rival, Col. John W. Dancy.

This city plan bears witness to the fact that Texas' capitol city, "Austin," could have been founded on the banks of the Colorado at La Grange. Had it not been for the feud between Houston and Dancy, who had opposed Houston in the race for the Presidency of the Republic of Texas, this may very well have happened. Congress had already adopted a resolution naming this site as the state's future capitol and only Houston's last minute veto changed the course of history.

In 1832 Maj. William C. Brookfield and Sam B. Evans, both from Detroit and part of Stephen F. Austin's colonists, bought the land from David Berry who had settled near Plum. By 1835, Brookfield had built the house on the southeastern half of the league, using Mexican stone masons and slave labor. The southwestern half remained in the hands of Evans. Little did he know that what happened within and around the 24-inch thick walls of his two story home would be the stuff history is made of.

From the very beginning the house was meant to survive the test of time.

The stone masons responsible for actually building the home, laid the stones without mortar, but used a mixture of dirt and ash instead. The inside of the house was plastered, while the outside was stuccoed. Outbuildings included a stone stable on the southwest and a log or frame structure at the northwest corner of the yard. This building served as slave quarters.

Research indicates that a small square structure at the southeast corner of the Brookfield house may have been the kitchen and wine cellar. Surrounding the entire complex was a dual faced rock wall filled with earth and planted with Spanish Dagger and cactus as protection against intruders.

The foundation was a bed of sandstone, forming a promontory approxi-

mately 400 feet above sea level. To this day a visitor has an unobstructed view in all directions.

Brookfield, along with his sons Charles and Francis, and Musgrove Evans (later the Auditor General of the Republic) with his sons Sam B. and Vincent Luray, fought in the Texas Revolution. Sam B. was among those massacred at the Alamo, while Musgrove, Francis E. Brookfield and David Berry fought at San Jacinto. The younger Brookfield and Berry were killed with Dawson's men at Salado Creek in 1842. Vincent Evans went on an expedition that same year and never returned.

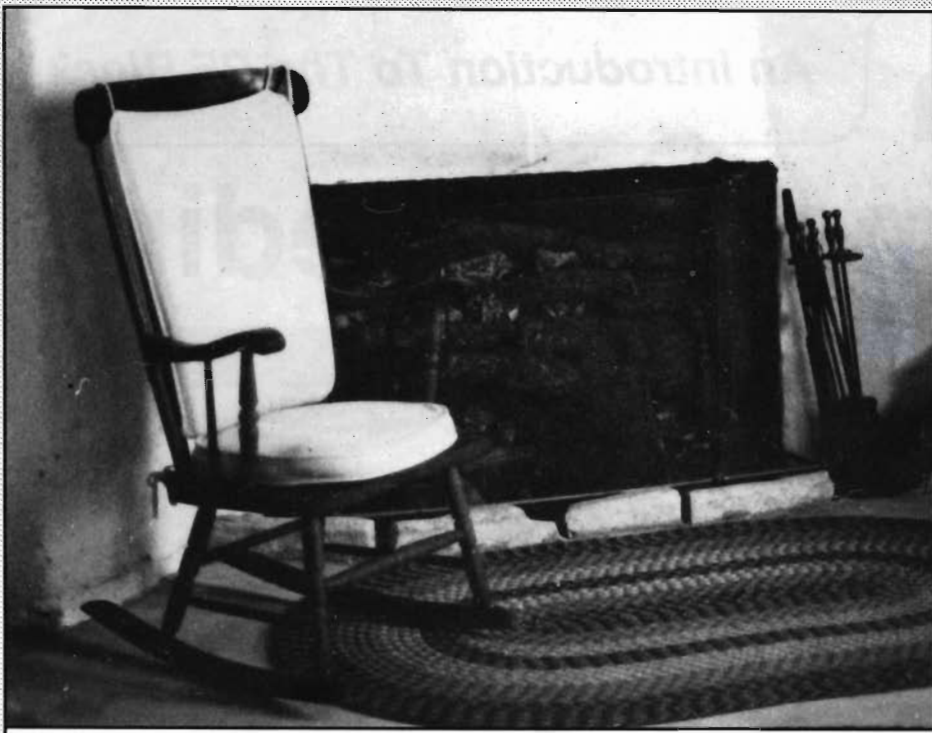
Today the home and part of the land is owned by the Brown family. Brenham architect and former Main Street Director, Lennie Brown, did her best to shed light on the history of the old house.

"This land and the home came into the possession of my family in 1893, when the La Grange law firm of Brown, Lane and Jackson bought the house and 457 acres. Before that it changed hands only once," she explained.

According to a written history of the home, Emma Brookfield, the eldest daughter of William Brookfield, married Vincent L. Evans, the second son of Musgrove Evans. Before the marriage, Vincent inherited the south-



The Brookfield–Cremer–Brown home right after the devastating fire in 1911.



The restored fireplace inside the rebuilt home.

west quarter of the David Berry league.

"Later, after her husband was killed and she became a widow, she married a German immigrant named Julius Cremer. After her death in 1877, he continued to live in the house until his death in 1889. Several years later, the estate was partitioned by sale and my family was able to buy part of it," she said.

"A fire destroyed the grand two story building back in 1911," Brown said, adding, "since that time we have rebuilt what was left and made a one story building out of the house."

"After Houston vetoed the bill to make this land here into the capitol of Texas, William Brookfield, as Foreman of the Grand Jury in Fayette County, brought a bill of indictment against "Inconsistent Acts" of the Republic. He even condemned Houston's veto of the bill," she explained.

In 1842, when the Mexican Army invaded Texas and captured San Antonio, Col. Dancy played a more intimate role in the home's history.

Sam Maverick, one of the signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence, evacuated his family to a place of safety on a 25 acre tract near Dancy's residence on the J. Castleman league.

While building a log cabin, Maverick's family stayed with the Brookfields for a month and a half.

Perhaps it is because of the friendship between Brookfield and Dancy that the old city plan detailing Dancy's vision of Texas' capitol city came into the old home.

Currently, Lennie Brown explained, her father is operating the farm under the business name of "Dancy Farms", because his great-grandfather was no other than Sam Houston's rival.

Since the fire gutted much of the former two-story building, the entire house was rebuilt into a one story home. Only recently, however, has the old stone stable been converted into a "Guest Barn." Inside the house's central hall are murals depicting the story of Rip Van Winkle, painted in 1929 by Olivia Brown Morrison.

Furnishings are almost entirely old family antiques, including a walnut planter's desk made around 1840. It was used by Col. Dancy to hold the business records and archives of Ruthersville College, the first college in Texas. The records of the college are now in The University of Texas library.



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