

Thomas Swift
A PIONEER WILSON COUNTY RESIDENT

Thos. Swift was born in Henry County, Missouri on December 28, 1852. When he was eight years old, he moved with the Swift family to Fannin County, Texas. The family lived in Fannin County for only three months. They moved to Erath County, Texas and remained there until 1873. Then they moved to Fairview, Wilson County, Texas.

On March 12, 1874, Thos. Swift married a local Fairview Citizen, Miss Maggie Carver. She was just fifteen years of age on her wedding day, but it was a joyous celebration with seventy five people attending the ceremony.

Mr. and Mrs. Swift's first home was a log cabin with no windows and only one door. Mrs. Swift began housekeeping without a stove and very few kitchen utensils. All meals were cooked in a Dutch oven over coals of fire in front of the fireplace in cold or inclement weather. During the summer time and on pleasant days, the Dutch oven was moved outside and meals were cooked over an open fire. Only basic groceries such as coffee, flour, salt and sugar were purchased. Wild game or wild cattle roamed the surrounding prairies, and Mr. Swift could kill the animals for meat.

On a monthly basis, Mr. Swift would travel by wagon to San Antonio to purchase supplies including groceries. At this time crossing the country by road to Lodi was not practical and the route to San Antonio was the most feasible.

On one of his trips to purchase provisions, Mrs. Swift was left alone in the cabin with her four little children. One evening after the children had gone to bed, Mrs. Swift heard an unusual noise at the door. It sounded as if someone was attempting to break in the house. Mrs. Swift did not have a firearm, so she armed herself with a hatchet. She boldly informed the intended intruder that she would end his life if he entered the house. The intruder did not reply, but left the premises without causing any further problems. Later it was determined that this intruder was a wandering individual who thought he could steal some money which was presumed to be hidden in the house.

During his time in Erath County, Mr. Swift learned farming while plowing with a wooden moldboard plow pulled by a yoke of oxen. He believed this was the first attempt at farming in the area as ranching was the principal business in the region.

Indians were a constant concern in the area and since there was no law on the frontier, individuals went about armed with pistols and carbines. In 1865, Comanche Indians were the greatest menace, killing many men, women and children. With ranch homes so far apart, the settlers had to leave their homes and gather together for mutual protection.

In the time frame of 1866 – 67, New Orleans was the best market for cattle. The sale of cattle was the major source of cash for the ranchers of Erath County. Mr. Swift was one of the local trail drivers who drove the herds of cattle to this market. Cattle trailing

during this period, would consume almost six months of his time during the year. A saddle blanket would be his only bed and his roof was the blue sky or a slicker during inclement weather. Mr. Swift enjoyed the great outdoors. These were happy days for him, free of problems and instilling a broad outlook on life. Nothing was more exciting, after bedding down a herd of cattle, than to sleep out under a clear sky and observe the stars on a bright, still night.

For more than thirty years he served as Justice of the Peace in the Fairview Community and at one time was a county Commissioner of Wilson County. For more than a quarter of a century, he was secretary of the Fairview Jephtha Masonic Lodge. He also served three times as Past Master of the Lodge of which he was an honored member.

Mr. Swift and his wife raised a family of stalwart sons and daughters. Thirteen children were born to this marriage. One son, J. E. Swift served for many years as county superintendent of the schools in Wilson County.

On Tuesday, December 29, 1942, Mr. Swift passed away at his home just a day after he had celebrated his 90th birthday. He had been in failing health for some time. His funeral services were conducted in his Fairview country home by the Reverend J. W. Black, pastor of the Floresville Methodist Church. The Floresville Masonic Lodge concluded the burial services with the rites of the order at the old Rock Church Cemetery. He was buried beside his wife, who preceded him in death in September of 1935.

Compiled by Gene Maeckel from information in the Wilson County Historical Society Archives. 9/2008