



## Walter P. Freytag, Fayette County Historian

*By Josephine White*

My memories of Mr. Walter Freytag go back to the 1950s. Mr. Freytag was a fine historian. When he was doing much of his research, it was during the 1930s as Texas was preparing for its centennial. He was working with a woman named Sue Ragsdale Diggle, a descendant of the Ragsdale family from the Plum/West Point area of Fayette County. She was kin to many of the pioneer families of Fayette County, including the Scallorn family. Mrs. Diggle spent considerable time in the Archives in Austin where Mr. Kemp and other historians were researching San Jacinto veterans and other works for the Texas Centennial. Mr. Freytag was searching through records in the Fayette County Courthouse, and he and Mrs. Diggle collaborated their work. His files contain much correspondence between him and Mrs. Diggle. At the time Mr. Freytag was doing his research, the courthouse records were intact, and he was given access to records that are no longer open to the public.

My maternal grandmother was Alameda Josephine Scallorn. My mother's family knew little of her background. They did know that she had been born in Fayette County, TX, and that her father's name was George Scallorn. They thought that George Scallorn had been born in Georgia and that he was a graduate of Yale University.

In 1950, we were living in San Antonio. On a family vacation, we visited the San Jacinto Monument, where I saw the name of John Wesley Scallorn on the monument. When we got back to San Antonio where my mother was also living, I asked her who this Scallorn was. My mother said that she thought he was kin, but she wasn't sure how.

In the late 1950s my family was living in Alice, Texas. While on another vacation, we came through La Grange and visited Monument Hill State Park. On the crypt, I again saw the name of John Wesley Scallorn. (By that time I had learned that my mother and her family knew little of their family history, and what they had told me about other family lines was usually incorrect, so I decided to do a little investigating myself on John Wesley Scallorn).

We went to the courthouse and an elderly gentleman, Mr. Kubena, was the county clerk. I had been told that he knew everything recorded in the courthouse, and he graciously spoke with me. When I told him that I wanted to research the Scallorn line, he told me that the courthouse had never burned, that all the records were there, and that I was welcome to look at anything I wanted to see. Then he suggested that if I wanted to save time, I should visit Mr. Walter Freytag, the Postmaster. He said that Mr. Freytag had already done extensive research on the men who were buried in the tomb on Monument Hill. We went to the post office and I asked to see Mr. Freytag. He was in his office and invited me to come in. I told him that my grandmother had been born in Fayette County. He asked who she was? I told him, "Alameda Josephine Scallorn". He immediately said, "And yes, she is the daughter of George W.

Scallorn, the only son of that man up on the hill. Doesn't your family know this?" He just couldn't believe that my family didn't know their Scallorn history. He said that his family didn't get to Texas until later and would have been so proud to have had an ancestor who fought in the Texas Revolution.

Mr. Freytag opened his filing cabinet and began to pull out papers. There were no copy machines at that time. Mr. Freytag had many extra carbon copies of the research he had done and typed from his courthouse notes. He kindly gave me numerous copies. Then when he didn't have a copy, he entrusted me with his originals which I took home and retyped and then promptly returned his originals. This was the true beginning of my love of genealogy. George W. Scallorn was not born in Georgia, he was born in Fayette County, Texas in 1840. He was not a Yale graduate. He attended Baylor University when it was still at Independence, Texas before it was moved to Waco.

Mr. Freytag told me that the reason he had done so much research on the Scallorn family was because with the two Scallorn brothers, Stephen and William, both married to McClure sisters and with each having about ten children (double cousins), that everywhere he looked, he kept running into Scallorns mixed with other families. He said that he decided he had to research those lines so that he could keep things straight.

Mr. Freytag did tell me that the research he was doing was for the purpose of writing a book and that he planned to give his research papers to the Barker Library in Austin. It is Fayette County's good fortune that he changed his mind and instead gave his papers to our local library.

Editor's Addendum: Walter P. Freytag (1909-1990) will go down in history as one of the foremost citizens and historians of Fayette County. His love of history led him to do a great deal of research on the history of Fayette County and its citizens, most of which can be found in the Fayette Heritage Archives in La Grange. He did extensive genealogical research, mapped the Fayette County cemeteries with the help of Joe Cole, did research for historical markers, edited and published the "Reminiscences of Julia Lee Sinks", the first written history of the county, and gave many speeches on the county's history. He also served as the chairperson of the Fayette County Historical Commission.

He moved his family from Flatonia to La Grange in 1938 after being elected County Superintendent, the youngest man in Texas to attain that achievement. He was given the unpopular job of consolidating the 101 rural schools in the county into seven larger more efficient school districts, which required bussing of students.

He later became the head of the Fayette County Vocational Agricultural School, the owner-publisher of the La Grange Journal and was the mayor of La Grange from 1947 – 1949. Many of the city services were established during his term, as well as the library board. After his term as mayor, he became the postmaster of La Grange from 1949 to 1973, during which time he was appointed the Section Center Manager. He was one of the longest-serving postmasters in the state.

Mr. Freytag devoted a lifetime researching, documenting and collecting data on the history of the county with the intent to publish a book that was never written. However, his efforts were not in vain. Much of his research was used in the Fayette County, Texas Heritage history book, published in 1996. His research has also been used in various other historical projects, all of which have provided us with a

lasting legacy for future generations to be able to appreciate his love of history and our county.

Photo of Walter P. Freytag is courtesy of the Fayette Heritage Museum & Archives