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The Hardins:

The Story of a Pioneer Family

The Hardins, Real-Life Legends

The Descendants of William Everett Harding and Sarah Bledsoe

You don't have to shake the Hardin family tree very hard to discover people worthy of folk tales. One line starts with the very earliest settlers to the New World, includes an officer in the Revolutionary War, provides vital leadership in the Texas War for Independence, supplies civic statesmen in the creation and early expansion of Texas community life, endures the Civil War and eventually grows to include a vast number of modern day descendants. The story includes tales of bravery and loyalty as well as treachery. There is an ample supply of saints and yet enough sinners to keep it interesting. The family survived bitter hard times and even fled as fugitives from the law. From the East Coast to Texas, there are towns and counties named Hardin. Plus, the Hardins gave the Old West one of the coldest, most violent gunfighters of all.

The Early Ancestors

Although the earliest mention of the Hardin name dates back almost to the time of King Arthur in Britain, we pick up the modern Hardins in the mid-seventeenth century. Martin Hardewyn Hardin was born in 1650 in Suffolk County on what is now Long Island, New York. In 1671 in New York City, he married Madeleine Du Sauchoy who had been born in 1658 in Staten Island, New York. About 1680, Mrs. Hardin gave birth to Mark Hardin in Rouen, Normandy, France, but he was christened in Staten

Island, New York, in March, 1681. Martin Hardin lived until sometime after 1706, dying in Prince William County, Virginia.

Mark Hardin moved with the rest of his family to Prince William County, VA, sometime during his youth. It was there that he met Mary Hogue, born in 1665 in Northumberland, VA. They married in 1700 or 1701 in Prince William County where they apparently lived out the rest of their lives together. In 1720, their son, Henry Hardin, was born. Both Mark and Mary died in 1735 and were buried in Prince William County, VA.

In 1741, Henry married Judith Lynch who had been born in 1711 in Lynchburg, VA. They produced a son, William Everett Hardin, on April 25, 1741, in Prince William County, VA. Eventually, the family moved to Pittsylvania, County, VA. Henry died there in 1796, and Judith followed him in death around 1800.

Sarah Bledsoe was born in 1739 in Pittsylvania, VA, and she evidently caught William's eye soon after the family moved to Pittsylvania, because she married him there in 1760. During the Revolutionary War, he was appointed a captain of the Beaufort Artillery and later commanded a regiment under General Francis Marion, rising to the rank of Colonel. General Marion was known as the "Swamp Fox" for his effective guerilla tactics. Early in the war, he sprained his ankle and had to be removed from the garrison at Charleston, SC, causing him not to be among the captured when the British defeated Generals Gates and Sumter shortly after he left. With his few remaining troops, including William Hardin, Marion took refuge in a secret hideout on Snow Island in the Pee Dee River. The soldiers provided their own horses and weapons. Swords were fashioned from saw blades, and the men made musket balls from melting down pewter plates. They harassed the British with quick raids on supply lines and outposts and by rescuing captured patriots. Although they were too few in number to take on the British in a full-scale battle, their hit-and-run tactics succeeded in tying down a significant portion of the British forces as they searched for Marion's militia. On April 12, 1781, however, Colonel Hardin's force captured Fort Mifflin and almost 100 prisoners.

After the war, William returned to farming, this time on a plantation on the Tugaloo River in Franklin County of northeastern Georgia. It appears that he was a person of substance, because the Tax Digest of 1800 records that he owned 400 acres and 14 slaves. William Everett and Sarah Hardin were

to bring into the world, not to mention the fledgling nation, nine children who would firmly establish the Hardin name in the new United States and Texas. Col. Hardin was living with his youngest son, Richard, in Franklin County, GA, when he died in 1810. Sarah lived to the age of 102, dying in February, 1843, at College Hill, Lafayette County, Mississippi.

## The Era of the Patriarchs

Colonel and Mrs. Hardin produced six sons and three daughters. Bledsoe Hardin was born about 1763. Henry Hardin came along on September 18, 1765. Mark Hardin was born in 1767, and Swan Hardin arrived on March 10, 1773. Martin Hardin's birth was in the same year as the outbreak of the American Revolution, 1776. All of the first five brothers were born in Johnston, NC. Cynthia Hardin was born either in Johnston or in Ashe, NC, in 1777. Richard Hardin came in 1780 at Ashe, as did Sarah Hardin in 1783 and Susan Hardin in 1787. Additional details about dates, marriages and deaths on these siblings can be found in the tree diagram in the appendix. All of these children lived well into their adult years, apparently all married and presumably raised children of their own, and eventually settled all over the American South, including North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas.

Although an interesting story could be told by following the line of descendants of any one of these young Hardins, the branch of interest to my family is the one that originates with Swan Hardin. In the opening years of the 19th Century, Swan and his wife, Jerusha, moved from Franklin County, GA, to Maury County, TN, to establish a new farm. As compensation for his service with the North Carolina militia in the war, Col. Hardin had been granted 1700 acres on the Duck River in central Tennessee. It was apparently to this site that Swan relocated his household. It seems that he was already an experienced and moderately successful plantation owner, since the Tax Digest of 1800 for Franklin Co., GA, showed that Swan owned three slaves and 204 acres of land. According to the 1973 Maury County Genealogist, Swan was said to have been a Tennessee resident at least by 1807.

Swan had met Jerusha Blackburn in Georgia and on January 27,

1795, they were married in Franklin County. They began their family right away, with Benjamin Watson Hardin being born on March 25, 1796. Augustine Blackburn Hardin followed on July 13, 1797, and Elizabeth Hardin came on March 18, 1799. William Hardin was born on March 25, 1801, and on January 25, 1803, Benjamin Franklin Hardin arrived. (That's right—they gave two sons the name of Benjamin.) All of these children were born in Franklin County.

Following the move to Tennessee, Sarah Hardin was born on February 25, 1805, but she apparently died in infancy. James Harvey Hardin came along on November 10, 1806, but died the same day. Cynthia Hardin, Susannah Hardin and Nancy Hardin were born in 1807, 1809 and 1811, respectively, but none lived past infancy. Finally, on November 4, 1813, Milton Ashley Hardin was born in Maury County.

Swan and Jerusha and their family were to remain in Maury County until the autumn of 1825. In the intervening years they became a prominent family in the area. Swan was an early Justice of the Peace for Maury County and his name appears on numerous court records, but his primary occupation appears to have remained farming. Benjamin Watson (who would eventually be the grandfather to the outlaw John Wesley Hardin), being the oldest son, managed the family farm with his father. Augustine was a deputy sheriff, William was an attorney and the editor of the *Columbia Reporter* in Maury County, while Benjamin Franklin worked as a surveyor.

The men of the family precipitated both a crisis and a scandal when, on October 1, 1825, Swan, Watson, A. B., William and Franklin rode into Columbia with the obvious intent of settling a score. The historical record, i.e. contemporaneous court records and newspaper articles, does not tell us what offense they were attempting to avenge, but the book entitled *Seven Pines* by Camilla Davis Trammell includes a story allegedly told by A. B. to a slave named Rankin years later. As this story tells it, a Columbia resident named Isaac Newton Porter had had an adulterous affair with Augustine's wife, Mary Elizabeth, and had been bragging of the conquest in public. When the news reached Swan, he called his sons together and they agreed that A. B. must call Potter out to avenge the honor of the family. The five armed themselves with pistols and rode to Columbia, but Porter had been expecting such a response and had enlisted his brother-in-law, William Williamson, to act as his bodyguard. According to

the legend, A. B. called out to Porter to draw his gun when Franklin saw Williamson raise his pistol toward A. B. Frank fired first, killing Williamson. In the meantime, as Porter was turning to draw his gun, A. B. shot him in the left side leaving a fatal wound.

Because Porter belonged to the most prominent family in that part of Tennessee, the Hardin boys concluded that they could not count on a fair trial in Tennessee. A. B. immediately loaded up his (unfaithful) wife and their six-year-old son Blackie and traveled to her parents' home where he left them. He then traveled to College Hill, Mississippi, where his Aunt Susan and his grandmother, Sarah Hardin, were living. Tradition tells us that Sarah, then in her eighties, approved of Augustine's actions and assisted him in his flight to Texas. Some weeks later, A. B. arrived on the banks of the Trinity River in Texas and began building a homestead, writing to his brother Franklin, who seems to have also been on the run, to tell him to join him in Texas.

Swan, Watson, and William were promptly arrested and charged in the double murder, although they all pled not guilty. The entire case was transferred to Rutherford County, where the indictment read as follows:

Murfreesboro Courthouse

Rutherford County, Tennessee

Indictment of Swan Hardin, Benjamin W. Hardin, Benjamin F. Hardin and Augustine B. Hardin for The Murder of William H. Williamson and Isaac N. Porter – December 21, 1825

The Jury also indorsed Joseph B. Porter, prosecutor, John Porter, Peter J. Noorkins, Japi W. Egino, Nimrod Porter, Peter R. Booker, Abner Prewelk, John Gordon, William Cherry, James Dobbins, and Joshuah Guest, all sworn and charged to the Grand Jury.

(The Grand Jury) do present and say that...on the first day of October [1825], Benjamin F. Hardin of said county yeoman, Swan Hardin of said county yeoman, Benjamin W. Hardin of said county yeoman, William Hardin of said county Printer [sic], Augustine B. Hardin of said county yeoman, not having the fear of God before their eyes but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the Devil, with force and arms at the town of Columbia in the county of Maury aforesaid in and upon William H. Williamson, then and there being in the peace of God, and of the State aforesaid, feloniously, willfully, and of their malice aforethought, did make and assault....And that the said Benjamin F. Hardin a certain pistol of the value of five dollars, then and there charged with gun powder and eight leaden balls, (with) which pistol, he the said Benjamin F. Hardin, in the right hand...did strike...William H. Williamson in and upon the back of him...between the lowest points of the shoulder blades (and) afflicted the said William H. Williamson one main wound of the depth of seven inches and the breadth of half an inch, of which said mortal wound, he...did die... And that said Swan Hardin, Benjamin W. Hardin, William Hardin and Augustine B. Hardin...were present, aiding, helping, abetting, comforting, assisting and maintaining the said Benjamin F. Hardin, the felony...to do and commit. And so the Grand Jurors...do present and say that the said Benjamin F. Hardin, Swan Hardin, Benjamin W. Hardin, William Hardin, and Augustine B. Hardin...did kill and murder the said William H. Williamson against the peace and dignity of the state.

And the Grand Jurors...do further present and say that afterwards...the said Augustine B. Hardin, Swan Hardin, Benjamin W. Hardin, William Hardin, and Benjamin F. Hardin not having the fear of God before their eyes but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil, with force and arms at the town aforesaid in the County of Maury...did make an assault in and upon one Isaac N. Porter...and that the said Augustine B. Hardin, a certain pistol of the value of six dollars...did shoot off and...did strike, penetrate, and wound the said Isaac N. Porter in and upon the left side of him...giving him...one mortal wound of the depth of eight inches and of the breadth of half an inch, of which...Isaac N. Porter, then and there, instantly died. And that the said Swan Hardin, Benjamin W. Hardin, William Hardin, and Benjamin F. Hardin...were present, aiding, helping,

abetting, comforting, assisting, and maintaining said Augustine B. Hardin the felony and murder last aforesaid in manner and form last aforesaid to do and commit, and so the Grand Jurors... say that said Augustine B. Hardin, Swan Hardin, Benjamin W. Hardin, William Hardin and Benjamin F. Hardin... did kill and murder the said Isaac N. Porter against the peace and dignity of the state.

Signed, Thomas B. Craighead

Solicitor General of the Ninth Solicitorial District of the State of Tennessee

Swan petitioned for and received a separate trial on March 4, 1826. He was found "not guilty" of the charge of murder but was adjudged to be an accessory to manslaughter. For this verdict, he was to be branded on the left thumb and jailed for three months. He filed a notice of intent appeal to the Supreme Court of the State of Tennessee, but there is no record of any further action or results.

## The Texas Years

Watson and William managed to escape before coming to trial. They were convinced that the area was so heavily dominated by the Porter family that it was unlikely that they could win in their defense. They loaded up a wagon with tools and supplies and headed off to join A. B. and Frank in Texas. Sheriff Nimrod Porter then enlisted the help of Congressman James K. Polk of Columbia, TN, as his attorney and instructed Polk to seek a formal extradition of the Hardins from Mexico, of which Texas was a part, through Secretary of State Henry Clay (also related by marriage to the Porters) and President John Quincy Adams.

By the time extradition proceeding had gotten underway in 1828, while

Sam Houston was still governor of Tennessee, the Hardin brothers had already established themselves as leaders and officials in the Atascocito District of Texas. The U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Joel Poinsett, delivered the request for extradition to Ramon Musquiz, senior political chief for the Department of Texas. Musquiz commissioned Stephen F. Austin to arrest the brothers, and although Austin knew the Hardins well, having fought with some of them against the Fredonian Rebellion in 1827, Austin agreed. He organized a small militia to march to Atascocito to arrest the brothers. Austin received word that the Hardins were staying at the home of George Orr, but when he arrived at dawn to surround the house on August 8, 1828, they were not there. Apparently they had been warned by Orr or other friends of the approaching posse. Tired of the chase, Austin turned the assignment of capturing the Hardins over to Orr, and that was the end of the extradition effort.

Also in 1828, Milton Hardin, the youngest brother, moved from Tennessee to join his brothers in Texas. He brought his parents, Swan and Jerusha, and his sister, Elizabeth, and her family with him to settle in the area of the future Liberty County, Texas. In 1835, Milton and Franklin fought with the Texas army in the battles of Concepcion and the siege of Bexar, for which Milton received a grant of 1,280 acres in Liberty County in 1838. By 1839, he was a wealthy cotton planter and rancher and was one of the founders of the Liberty Masonic Lodge in 1849. In 1854, Milton sold a 413-acre piece of land in Polk County to the Texas Indian commissioners, creating the beginnings of the modern Alabama-Coushatta Indian Reservation near Livingston, TX. Sometime later, he and his family moved to Granbury in Hood County, eventually settling in Cleburne where he died in 1894.

Finally, the Texas Declaration of Independence, signed March 2, 1836, includes the signature of A. B. (Augustine Blackburn) Hardin. After signing the declaration, he spent that night camping at Washington-on-the-Brazos before fleeing the approaching Mexican army.