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Samuel, Patrick and Cato:
A History of the Dallas Fire of 1860
And its Tragic Aftermath

by

William R. Farmer
The Dallas Fire of 1860 occurred at a time when the United States was being torn apart over the issue of slavery. Within a matter of months after the burning of Dallas, war had broken out. At that moment in history someone took in hand the task of composing a narrative of the events that led up to this tragic war. Our narrative of the Dallas Fire of July 8, 1860, must be seen within the context of this divisive sectional conflict, and coming at a time when feelings about political issues were running high. To set the stage for our narrative we chose to begin with the following insightful paragraphs composed by a historian who wished to set the stage for his narrative of the controlling events leading up to the secession of the South from the Union.

It may be observed that no extensive and formidable rebellion of an intelligent people against an established government has ever arisen without a long train of previous and subsidiary causes. A principal object of the author, therefore, is to present to the reader a historical sketch of the antecedents ending in the late rebellion. In performing this task, the eye naturally fixes itself, as the starting point, upon the existence of domestic slavery in the South, recognized and protected as this was by the Constitution of the United States. We shall not inquire whether its patriotic and enlightened framers acted with wise foresight in yielding their sanction to an institution which is in itself a great social evil, though they considered this was necessary to avoid the still greater calamity of dissolving the convention without the formation of our Federal Union. The narrative will prove that the original and conspiring causes of all our future troubles are to be found in the long, active, and persistent hostility of
the Northern Abolitionists, both in and out of Congress, against Southern slavery, until the final triumph of their cause in the election of President Lincoln; and on the other hand, the corresponding antagonism and violence with which the advocates of slavery resisted these efforts, and vindicated its preservation and extension up till the period of secession. So excited were the parties, that had they intended to furnish material to inflame the passions of the one against the other, they could not have more effectively succeeded than they did by their mutual criminations and recriminations. The struggle continued without intermission for more than a quarter of a century, except within the brief interval between the passage of the Compromise measures of 1850 and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise [of 1820] in [the Kansas-Nebraska Act of] 1854, during which the hostile feelings of the parties were greatly allayed, and hopes were entertained that the strife might finally subside. These peaceful prospects, it will appear, were soon blasted by the repeal of this Compromise, and the struggle was then renewed with more bitterness than ever until the final catastrophe. Many grievous errors were committed by both parties from the beginning, but the most fatal of them all was the secession of the Cotton States." --Anonymous.

These paragraphs from the Preface of Mr. Buchanan's Administration on the Eve of the Rebellion, composed soon after Mr. Lincoln took office, presumably by a learned member of President Buchanan's outgoing administration, provide a sketch of the historical context within which we can best understand the tragic significance of the Dallas Fire of 1860, and its awful aftermath, the communal murders of Samuel Smith, Patrick Jennings, and Old Cato followed by a mandatory whipping of the greater part of the slave population in Dallas. The chilling effect of these extremely repressive measures is a part of the psychological and social heritage of the Dallas community. The events of July 1860, though mentioned from time to time in Dallas newspapers and briefly touched upon in most histories of the city, remain largely unknown to the Dallas public, in whose schools and churches
this tragic and painful memory of the past remains largely repressed. The price that has been paid and is still being paid for this repression in terms of its effect upon the mental health of the Dallas community is difficult to assess. But it must be enormous. Control of the Black community has been and largely remains one of the assumed duties of the leadership of the city. This begins with control of the voices of conscience within the community. Samuel Smith was a slave preacher. It is an essential element in the narrative to follow that the chief ground for offense against this person was that he had been observed talking to white preachers believed to be "abolitionists."

On January 4, 1860 The Dallas Herald carried a front page story about a circular signed by sixty-eight members of Congress advocating a plan to abolish slavery. The wording of this circular is very faithful to the original text of a book published by a Southern abolitionist from North Carolina named Hinton Rowan Helper. The book was entitled: The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It, and published in N.Y. in 1857 (p. 420).

The story in The Dallas Herald was taken from a long article in The New York Herald giving the plan of a new organization whose object was, according to The Dallas Herald, "to revolutionize the South and abolish slavery," and the first means proposed for this object was to circulate the book by Hinton Rowan Helper.

In publishing this story, the editors of The Dallas Herald were informing its readers of the existence of Helper's book, and warning them of the implications that followed from the fact that a very significant number of Congressmen were supporting Helper's plan to free the slaves.
The circular signed by the Congressmen, presumably printed in full by The New York Herald, and very largely reprinted in The Dallas Herald, makes the following major points:

(1) The great revolutionary movement which was set on foot in Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina on the 20th day of May, 1775 will not be terminated until every slave in the United States is freed from the tyranny of his master.

(2) Non-slaveholders of the South, farmers, mechanics and working men, must join together in earnest and timely effort to rescue the generous soil of the South from the desolating control of slave-holding politicians who have hoodwinked the populace in electing them into offices of honor and profit.

(3) In concert with anti-slavery voters in the North, the non-slaveholders of the South plan to elect John C. Fremont, Cassius M. Clay, James G. Birney, or some other Southern non-slaveholder to the Presidency in 1860; with the understanding that the patriot they elevated will be succeeded by William H. Seward, Charles Sumner, Joah McLean, or some other non-slaveholder of the North.

The banner under which this political revolution was to be fought carried the following mottoes:

1st--Thorough Organization and Independent Political Action on the part of the Non-Slaveholding whites of the South.

2nd--Ineligibility of Slaveholders--Never another vote to the Trafficker in Human Flesh.

3rd--No Co-operation with Slaveholders in Politics--No Fellowship with
them in Religion—No Affiliation with them in Society.

4th—No Patronage to Slaveholding Merchants—No Guest-ship in Slavewaiting Hotels—No Fees to Slaveholding Lawyers—No Employment of Slave-holding Physicians—No Audience to Slaveholding Parsons.

5th—No Recognition of Pro-Slavery Men, except as Ruffians, Outlaws, and Criminals.

6th—Abrupt Discontinuance of Subscription to Pro-slavery Newspapers.

7th—The Greatest Possible Encouragement to Free White Labor.

During the previous year of 1859 two preachers believed to be from the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) had been working in Dallas County and had spent some time in Dallas. Their names were Blunt and McKinney. These preachers spent some time, possibly a considerable amount of time, with at least one slave preacher in the Dallas area named Samuel Smith. These preachers eventually had been run out of Dallas County ostensibly on the grounds that they were believed to be involved in an attempt to excite insurrection among the Negroes. They apparently were quite open in expressing anti-slavery views and thus were categorized as "abolitionists."

There is some evidence that only McKinney was an ordained minister. The ecclesiastical status of his close associate Blount, remains uncertain.

On October 16, 1859, John Brown and his eighteen followers had captured the Federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry in western Virginia. It is important to stress that this surprising and mind-boggling armed invasion of the South had taken place during the same general period that itinerant anti-slavery preachers like McKinney and Blount were active in Dallas
Brown's idea seems to have been to take arms from the arsenal at Harper's Ferry (Dallas possessed the arsenal for an artillery company operating in North Texas [R.S.D.F. pp. and pp. , Austin State Gazette, July 28, 1860, p. 1, col. 6 and Houston Weekly Telegraph, July 31, 1860, p. 1, col. 7]) and then, protected by the mountains, encourage slaves to rebel. Once during the Kansas War, Brown had led his followers across the state line into Missouri where he liberated eleven slaves. A slave owner had been killed during the action.

Two days after John Brown captured the Federal Arsenal, Colonel Robert E. Lee forced him out, i.e. on October 18, and delivered him for trial. Brown conducted himself in an admirable manner throughout the trial. But he was convicted of treason and hanged on December 2. Ralph Waldo Emerson was inspired by this event in United States history to say that Brown would make the gallows "as glorious as a cross." All of these stirring developments were fresh on the minds of Dallas residents as they read The Dallas Herald on January 4, 1860 and as they faced the upcoming Presidential election. The editors of The Dallas Herald were solidly behind the conservative (pro-slavery) Democratic ticket of Breckenridge and Lane. Their greatest fear was that the Republicans would be successful in getting Lincoln (anti-slavery) elected. In that case it was imperative to prepare Texans for secession. Governor Houston could not be depended upon to take Texas out of the Union, so there was every reason to back the Breckenridge-Lane ticket against the candidacy of the otherwise still popular Houston who was an off and on candidate on an anti-secessionist ticket in the upcoming Presidential election. In the eyes of its leading citizens, a moderate
entrepreneurial pro-slavery coalition of business and professional men, the future of Dallas, whether in or out of the Union, was with cotton (and the slave economy it required). The railroad from Galveston Bay, which would make cotton king in Dallas County and all the counties along the way, had already been started. Some Dallas citizens had invested in this ambitious building project. 4

A slave insurrection was the last thing that some people in Dallas thought Texas needed. Even the hint of one in North and East Texas could have spelled financial peril for those in the Dallas area who had their future fortunes tied to a slave economy, were the uprising not knocked down quickly. Without the solid prospect of a dependable supply of slave labor that could be counted on for a very long time into the future, i.e. until all financial obligations entailed in the capital outlay required for building envisioned railroads could be repaid, there simply would have been no money available to back such gambles. The money markets of Houston, Memphis, New York, and Boston had their ears to the ground. What was happening in North Texas was closely followed not only in Austin and Houston, but also in New Orleans, New York and Boston. 5

From its beginning Dallas had been a part of the Peters Colony Settlement in North Texas. Out of the 896 families that were living in the colony when, as a separate legal entity, it ceased to function on July 1, 1848, only 31 held slaves. The total number of slaves in the entire colony at that time was only 106. This means that Dallas was part of a larger North Texas Community which from its beginning had been dominantly a free labor society. By occupation most settlers were non slave-owning farmers
(81.2 per cent). The remainder were artisans (6.4 per cent); professional or semiprofessional (4.6 per cent); laborers (3.8 per cent), tradesmen, broadly classified (1.4 per cent). By birth the Peters Colony settlers were distributed as follows: 2.5 per cent had been born in Georgia; 3.6 per cent in South Carolina; 8.9 per cent in North Carolina; 9.9 per cent in Virginia; 17 per cent in Kentucky; 23.1 per cent in Tennessee; 8.3 per cent in Missouri; 4.8 per cent in Indiana; and 5.5 per cent in Illinois. Of the remainder 8.8 per cent were born in northern states and 2.8 per cent in Southern states. 2.3 per cent were born in Europe. "Slaveholding in the Colony was almost negligible, and not a single colonist was listed on the census (1850) as a planter." 6

Sociologically speaking Peters Colony was a border state society in which pro-slavery sentiments could not be taken for granted. Without control of newspapers it was hardly possible for the pro-slavery faction in North Texas to dominate politics.

When the vote on secession was finally taken, much of the opposition to leaving the Union was concentrated in North Texas. Collin, Cooke, Fannin, Grayson, Jack, Lamar, Montague and Wise counties actually cast a majority of their votes against secession. 7 It should further be remembered that the Kansas border was hardly more than two hundred miles north of the Red River. Sherman, in Grayson County, as the crow flies, was closer to Independence, Kansas, than to Houston. Gainesville, in Cooke County, was closer to El Dorado, Kansas than to Galveston, and Pilot Point in Denton County, which county voted 43.6 percent against secession, was closer to the Kansas border than to the mouth of the Trinity. It would have
been different had the Trinity been navigable. But it was not. It was wagon or stage coach, whether traveling north or south. And since the Butterfield Overland Stage coming from St. Louis ran through Sherman and Gainesville on its way to El Paso, it took less time after 1856 to get to Eastern Missouri and Western Kansas than to reach Austin or San Antonio. To sum matters up, Peters Colony was not particularly well oriented either to the Alamo or to the Southern Plantation.

Dallas was the southern point of entry into Peters Colony for most outside developers and land speculators who wanted to see their interests furthered in North Texas. Playing upon some legitimate grievances of the Peters Colony settlers, a politician from Henderson County, one hundred miles south of Peters Colony, John H. Reagan by name, managed to help organize a meeting in Dallas on May 21, 1849, which led to resolutions favorable to those who profited from land paper speculation. The problem was exacerbated by the highhanded behavior of the Peters Colony Company agent, Henry O. Hedgcoxe.

Hedgcoxe was an English immigrant who was residing in Indiana when he was employed in 1845 by representatives of those who had negotiated with Texas authorities the agreement which was enacted into law by the Texas legislature and which made possible the forming of Peters Colony.

At one point in the conflict, on July 12 and 13, 1849, a six man committee, claiming to represent the citizens of Dallas, and including a physician, Samuel B. Pryor, the first mayor of Dallas, "forced their way into Hedgcoxe's office in Collin County and proceeded to make an 'investigation' of his records."
There was a mass meeting in Dallas on July 15, where Reagan spoke for several hours. That night:

John J. Good, a militia commander, led a contingent of armed men from the Dallas meeting to Hedgcoxe's office, which was apparently located in or adjacent to his home. Hedgcoxe was ordered to leave the colony, and his files of the colonists' claims, together with the books, maps and papers of the company, were seized. Hedgcoxe fled the next day to Austin. Good and his men returned to Dallas, deposited Hedgcoxe's papers in the courthouse, and joined the general celebration of what was imagined as a brilliant coup. 9

The afternoon of July 17th the militia commander wrote to a friend:

We reached this place [Dallas] early this morning, and met a brilliant reception from the citizens of Dallas County, at whose expense we have been feasting and revelling until this time (3 o'clock) and still the excitement is up. Sam Bogart [Reagan's chief political rival who had led in the passing of legislation what was both troublesome for the Peters Colony settlers and jeopardized the interests of outsiders who profited from land paper speculation] was promenaded around the square in effigy, on a rail, then [they] swung him to a black jack and burned him. William Myres, a spy of the [Peters Colony] company's here was seized, rode around for some time, on the sharp edge of a rail, and the other spies of the company are notified that one month is given them in which to arrange their business and to leave this county. 10

Early Dallas was a city in which it was possible for some of its citizens to celebrate political opponents being burned in effigy, banished, and the law against assault and battery violated if its leading citizens perceived their vital interests in their property to be at stake. Early Dallas was a city where some of its leading citizens were willing to take the law into their own hands when they believed that this was necessary, and to sanction the use of force in protecting those property interests. The
events of 1849 must be borne in mind as one seeks to understand the Dallas Fire of 1860 and its aftermath.

We have surveyed the main events and developments which enable us to understand the Dallas Fire of 1860 within its own sociological and historical contexts. We cannot, however, go further and chronicle the actual causative events which led to the fire. No one knows how the fire started, whether Dallas was purposely set on fire, or whether the fire started accidentally. And if the city was purposely set on fire, we do not know who struck the matches, or why. We only know the following facts:

On the afternoon of Sunday, July 8, 1860 a fire started in the southwest section of downtown Dallas, and within a few hours almost the whole of the downtown business district was burned to the ground. This included the town newspaper, so that all primary source material containing eyewitness accounts datable to the time of the fire have been preserved in accounts carried by newspapers outside of Dallas in places like Clarkesville, Bonham, Marshall, Austin, and Houston. The most important accounts are given in letters written in Dallas by eyewitnesses to the events, and sent to outside newspapers.

Fortunately, the authors of most of these letters were newspaper writers, and while we must allow for their prejudices in our evaluation of their interpretation of the events they describe, we have little reason to question the essential accuracy of their reports of the events themselves.

The day after the fire, the editor of The Dallas Herald, Charles R. Pryor, brother of City Alderman Samuel B. Pryor, who had previously served as the first mayor of Dallas and who had gone with the committee of six to
"investigate" the records of the Peters Colony Company headquarters, wrote to the editor of The Houston Telegraph:

Dear Cushing: A terrible disaster has befallen our once flourishing little city. Dallas is in ruins—burned to the ground—not a business left standing, hotel, shop, printing office, or anything, save a few private dwellings. Yesterday, Sunday, July 8th, about half after one o'clock, a fire broke out in front of Peak's new drug store, and in an instant the house was enveloped in flames. It was a large two story frame building, filled with a large amount of stores of every kind. The fire then spread to Smith's warehouse, then to the Herald office, even before we could remove anything except the books. Everything we had is lost. 4 presses, material of every kind, clothing—in fact every thing. If you have an old coat, an old shoe or shirt, send it to your confrere. But, notwithstanding we have lost everything, we this morning have ordered a new press and new material, and in less than 6 weeks we will be up, all right, sooner than you would expect.

The St. Nicholas Hotel, a large three story frame building 100 feet front by 100 back, is totally consumed. Smith & Murphy's brick store burnt. Shirek's new warehouse and store, with entire stock of goods, the Crutchfield House and all its furniture, including the post office and the mail matter in it, Westen's Corner, Simon's new building just framed, the old tavern, Saddler's shop, Hirsh's large storehouse with entire lot of goods, Fletcher's mercantile establishment, Birtle's old establishment and private residence, Mrs. Bingham's old residence, Law office, books and papers belong to Leonard, McKenzie, Crockett, Adams, Chapman, Russell, Hay, and the medicine, surgical instruments and libraries of Drs. Pryor, Spencer, Johnson and Thomas.

We do not know how to compute the loss we have all sustained; but $300,000 will hardly come near the amount. We are all houseless and homeless. The fire caught most of us in our siesta, the thermometer standing at 106 in the shade. We barely escaped with our lives—some like myself, without clothes, boots, shoes or anything else. I will write again soon.

Yours truly

CHAS. R. PRYOR

The next day the publisher of The Dallas Herald, John W. Swindells
wrote a letter to the Clarkesville Standard:

Dallas, Texas, July 10, 1860

Major C. DeMorse, Clarkesville:
Dear Sir: - I write this morning to inform you of the occurrence of the most appalling event that has ever visited Dallas. On Sunday, the 8th about 2 o'clock, a fire broke out among some rubbish on the outside of the store of Messrs. W. W. Peak & Bro., and such was the rapidity of the flames, that in less than two hours, every building on the western and northern sides of the square and half of those on the eastern were consumed, together with very nearly all their contents. Both the hotels—the Dallas and the Crutchfield—the "Herald" office, and every store in town are now a mass of ruins. I have not time now to give you a list of the buildings destroyed,—the loss is variously estimated at from $300,000 to $400,000, on which there was but about $10,000 insurance. Already I hear the sound of carpenters, &c., preparing to rebuild some of the stores. Most if not all our merchants will go to work at once to rebuild, and I hope to see our town, in a short time, rebuilt more substantially if not more elegantly than it was before the fire.

Will you please announce in the "Standard" that I have ordered an entire new outfit for the Herald, and shall issue the paper just as soon as I can get the material here. I have saved nothing from the office but my books.

Yesterday afternoon another fire took place, about a mile and a half from town. The residences of Mr. J. J. Eakins and Silas Leonard were entirely consumed together with all their contents. The families were in town at the time, and nothing was saved but a bed or two.

Very truly, yours, in haste,
JOHN W. SWINDELLS,
Publisher, Dallas Herald

The next day Swindells wrote a follow up letter to that posted by Pryor to the Houston Telegraph two days earlier:

Dallas, Texas, July 11th, 1860

Friend Cushing:—Dr. Pryor wrote you by last mail the particulars of the calamity that has desolated our once beautiful town; I write now to request you to make an announcement in the "Telegraph," that I have ordered an entire new office, and expect to get my paper again under
way in from two to three months, and I ask the indulgence of the patrons of the paper until then. I did not save a thing out of the office except my books. I heard already of preparations being commenced to rebuild several of our stores, and hope ere many months to see our square built as substantially as it was before the fire.

Very truly yours, &c.
Jno. W. Swindells

P.S. A fire also occurred about 1 1/2 miles from town, on Monday noon – the residence of Mr. J. J. Eakins and J.S.C. Leonard. They were absent from home at the time, with their families, and lost everything. We learn also, yesterday, of a fire in Denton, on Sunday last, about noon, which consumed three stores.

In haste, J. W. S. 13

We learn from this letter that a house near Dallas was burned one day after the city was burned, and that by Tuesday, July 10, word had reached Dallas about the fire in Denton on the previous Sunday. By now the prospect of some connection between these fires must have occurred to some Dallas residents. We note that the P.S. in Swindell's letter was added "in haste."

Some time on Tuesday or Wednesday Swindells and Pryor decided to arrange for an extra edition of the Dallas Herald to be published in the form of a handbill through the friendly offices of the McKinney Messenger. This account of the Dallas Fire is the fullest we have. Fortunately a single copy of this important handbill survived the ravages of time and was made available to the Dallas Morning News where the text was reprinted December 14, 1890. It reads as follows:

On Sunday last, 8th inst., the town of Dallas was nearly all reduced to ashes, and almost wiped out of existence. Such a calamity has never before befallen this community--so overwhelmingly a disaster afflicted an enterprising and industrious people; nor so complete a destruction of valuable property ever occurred in a small town. The fire originated in some boxes in front of W. W. Peak Brothers' Drug Store, and in less than five minutes the entire building was enveloped in flames. The wind was high,
blowing from the southwest, and the thermometer at the time (half past 1 o'clock) was standing at 105 Fahrenheit in the shade. The fire was then communicated to the old drug store, and the building and warehouse of A. Shirek, and the Herald office on the north side of Peak's and on the other to the large brick store of Messrs. Smith & Murphy, and the three-story brick building of Mrs. Cockrell, known as the Dallas (St. Nicholas) Hotel. Thus at one and the same time, the whole west side of the square was a blazing mass of ruins. The Crutchfield House, Wester's barber shop, the frame of the new building for A. Simon, the old tavern stand, the office of B. W. Stone, young Carr's saddlery shop, the large storehouse of Herman Hirsh, Darnell's livery stable, A. Simon's storehouse and warehouse (Caruth's old stand), D. B. Thomas' drug store, J. W. Elliott's store and warehouse, Syres' old drug store, W. Burtle's old shop and residence, E. M. Stackpole's storehouse, R. R. Fletcher & Co.'s storehouse and J. C. McCoy's law office, followed. From this, the fire extended to a blacksmith shop on the north side of the street, and for a time threatened a number of private residences.

There were also several small buildings near and in the rear of those on the square, consumed. In the upper story of Peak's drug store were the offices of Dr. C. C. Spencer and W. S. J. Adams, Samuel Russell and John S. Chapman, lawyers, who lost all their libraries and wardrobes. Also rooms occupied by P. W. Stevenson, Peter Spanburg and W. W. Peak, who also lost their clothing. James N. Smith's small office adjoining Peak's was occupied by himself, Dr. A. A. Johnson and John J. Good, the last two of whom lost all their libraries, etc.

Old Store Vacant.

The old drug store was vacant, but had a few of Smith & Murphy's goods in it, which were burnt. Over Mr. Shirek's store, and in the front room of the Herald office, was the office of E. C. McKenzie, who lost all in the room, with a trifling exception. In the Crutchfield house was the post office and an attempt was made to save its contents, and a portion of the mail was gotten out, but was afterward destroyed in another building. The entire contents of the post office were burned, with the exception of the postage stamps, most of which were saved. All the postage envelopes in the office were burned. Nearly everything was destroyed that was in the Crutchfield house, even to the wearing apparel of the occupants, furniture and everything.

The stable belonging to the hotel was also destroyed, together with its contents (no horses, however) and the office of J. M. Crocket, with all his library, papers, etc. In the rear of J. M. Crocket's office was the residence of
Mr. Harris, who saved a portion of his furniture. Over Hirsh's store were the offices of Dr. Henry S. Scott, and the books and papers of Messrs. G. W. Donaldson, and also the sleeping room of Mr. S. Schaeffer. The contents of all were burned. Over Simon's store was the exchange and law office of Messrs. Nicholson and Ferris—contents of iron safe saved; their whole library and many valuable papers and some account books burned.

Over Dr. Thomas' drug store was the law office of Mr. Phillip Hay—part of library saved. The total loss is variously estimated—some say between $200,000 and $300,000 and others over that amount. The destruction is nearly total and complete.

Happening at an hour when a large majority of the citizens were in deshabille to take an after-dinner siesta, no one was ready to save his property. Some saved a few things by dragging them into the streets, leaving them there only to be burnt in a few moments, as the flames surged down the wide openings between the houses, and in some instances catching on fire nearly 100 yards ahead of the flames.

Herald Office Loss Complete

The loss of the Herald office was complete; four printing presses, a large amount of new and valuable material, a large quantity of paper, files of the Dallas Herald, important documents, correspondence, letters and the entire library and furniture. We had barely time to save the business books of the office before the rush of fire and smoke and an intense heat drove us out and prevented all attempts to save anything more. Our entire wardrobe (a very slim concern, by the way), a large amount of old boots, shoes, hats, gloves and such like paraphernalia peculiar to a bachelor's establishment, all went glimmering, and left us sans culotte, sans souliers et sans habits-tout suite.

We are indebted to the friendly offices of our generous neighbor, the McKinney Messenger, for the issue of this extra. We take this opportunity to return our thanks for the kindess shown us, and the kind offers of material aid from our numerous friends—it almost reconciles us to our misfortunes, when they prove to us that we have friends on whom we can rely in the hour of adversity. Such acts of kindness and sympathy rob misfortunes of half their stings. We wish to say to our subscribers that as soon as we can get new material, which we have already ordered, the Dallas Herald will appear again, and we hope than in two months from the present time we will be as large as life again.

To Commence Building.

The indomitable spirit and energy of our people are manifested on this trying occasion. Our merchants will rebuild immediately, larger and better houses than they had
before. Messrs. Hirsh, Caruth, Shirek, Stackpole, Simons, Smith & Murphy, Fletcher and others, we learn, will commence rebuilding in a short time. There is a demand for carpenters, lumber and brick, especially the latter.

Misfortune never comes alone. During the fire many of our strongest and most energetic citizens became overpowered by heat, and almost superhumanly made the attempt to assist each other, and many of them fell exhausted, and for a time a new horror was added to the rest. The courthouse, a handsome brick building in the center of the public square, was alone saved by the constant exertions of a few spirited individuals. The heat was so great that the curtains on the inside of the windows caught fire through the glass, and the beautiful groves of trees that adorned the square were completely ruined. On Monday, the 9th, the dwelling house of John J. Eakins, one and a half miles from town, was totally destroyed by fire, together with the entire contents, supposed to have been the work of an incendiary. It is also reported that there were fires about the same time at several places in the surrounding counties, but our accounts are contradictory.

With this issue we suspend for a time, and hope that our friends will bear patiently with us until our reappearance on the stage of action.14

Sometime during this same period of time Mr. E. M. Stackpole, a Dallas businessman, took the trouble of writing a letter to the Galveston Civilian in which he listed estimated losses of various parties in the Dallas fire as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Loss in Dollars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W. W. Peak &amp; Co., no insurance</td>
<td>$18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Shirek</td>
<td>$16,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crutchfield House</td>
<td>$12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas Herald Office</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Murphy &amp; Co</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. M. Stackpole</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cockerel House, a three story brick, no insurance</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squire Smith's office</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Good's law library</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. A. A. Johnson</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Wester</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Simon's new frame</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartay, shoemaker</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Reinhardt, jeweler</td>
<td>$400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. W. Stone, Lawyer</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Carr, saddler
H. Hersh, store and goods insured for about $5,000
A. Simon, store and goods insured for about $5,000
E. P. Nicholson, lawyer
D. P. P. Thomas' drug store
J. W. Elliott, goods and store
Caruth and Simon
R. R. Fletcher & Co., goods and store
J. C. McCoy, lawyer
Lynch, saddler

Only about $10,000 insurance in all.¹⁵

Upon examination, we can see that we need the lists given by the editors of the Dallas Herald as well as that of Stackpole in order to compile a more complete list of all businesses destroyed in the fire.

On the basis of these reports concerning the fire and its effects, it is possible to reconstruct a credible account of where the fire started, how it spread, and the damage that resulted.

In order to visualize what happened it is important to realize that John Nealy Bryan, the founder of Dallas, laid out the town on a traditional 19th century grid, in such a way that city streets ran parallel and at right angles to the Trinity River. The closest street running parallel to the river was appropriately named Water Street. Paralleling Water Street moving ever to the east of the river the streets were named in succession Broadway, Houston, Jefferson, Market, etc.

One of the streets that ran at right angles to the river was appropriately named Commerce. At the foot of Commerce was a natural place to ford the Trinity. For at that point the river flowed over an outcropping of rock which gave a firm footing for those wanting to cross it
with minimal risk of getting bogged down in the muddy bottom that generally characterized the river's channel. Before white settlers came to North Texas, buffalo and Indians using this natural crossing had already worn down the banks on both sides of the river. During the days of the Texas Republic when it was state policy to drive Indians in North Texas out of the path of white settlers, legislation for a military road running from Austin to the Red River was passed. Provision was made for settlers to claim land along this road in order that through the resulting settlements could come the forces needed to protect the road and pacify the area. One of the places stipulated as a crossing of the Trinity for the military road from Austin to Red River was this natural ford originally known as Kikapo Trace, named after one of the Indian tribes which was using it when white settlers came to North Texas. By locating his town so that it would straddle any route the military road took once it crossed the Trinity at Kikapo Trace, Bryan guaranteed Dallas would have a prime location in North Texas. That he named the street which offered the most direct access to this natural crossing Commerce Street explains what Bryant had in mind in locating his town where he did.

The crossing was improved and maintained by hauling in rocks to supplement the natural outcropping. When the river was too high for passage a ferry service was available. In 1855 Alexander Cockrell constructed a wooden bridge from the foot of Commerce Street across the Trinity. In 1858 Dallas experienced its first major catastrophe when a part of Cockrell's bridge collapsed. This bridge was never repaired, so in 1860, travelers were still using the improved crossing of logs and rocks during low-water,
and a ferry boat when the level of the river rose.

One block north of Commerce Street was Main Street. In 1860 these were the two most important Dallas streets that ran east from the banks of the Trinity. In deciding where to locate his site for a County Court House, Bryan had walked up from the banks of the Trinity until he reached an elevation where he believed that the Court House square, so very vital to the civic life of the County, would seldom if ever be under water. Since the Court House was to serve Dallas County citizens living on both sides of the Trinity River, and since those living on the west side were being asked to suffer the inconvenience of crossing the Trinity to get to their Court House, simple political considerations favored locating the Court House as close to the River as was safe and convenient. It was relatively convenient in 1860 for citizens from west of the Trinity to come across the Trinity by wagon or ferry at the Commerce Street crossing, walk or ride up Commerce Street two blocks to reach the Court House square, bounded by Houston Street on the West, Main Street on the North, Jefferson Street on the East and Commerce Street on the South. The Court House itself was a relatively new two story brick building erected in the middle of the Court House square and surrounded by a grove of planted trees. There were places on the square to tie horses, and room for buggies as well. The most valuable pieces of property in North Texas were the real estate building lots which fronted this square. Political and economic power ran along lines which, by stage coach and mail, came up from Galveston and Houston through Palestine; from San Antonio, Austin and Waco, through Waxahachie; and points west through Fort Worth, all converging on the banks of the Trinity at the west end of
the Commerce Street crossing. Political power and commercial influence from the North and East flowed into Dallas through Denton, Sherman, Bonham, and Jefferson, all lines of traffic converging on the streets leading toward Court House square, the most important of which were Main and Commerce. The single most important corridor of power ran between the home of Dallas' Congressional Representative, H. Reagan, who lived in Palestine and that of his former law partner, Judge Nathaniel Burford, who had replaced Reagan as District Judge, and in 1860 lived on Main Street just east of the Court House square. If we would proceed along this corridor of power following its most potent path, we would, after traversing the Trinity at the Commerce Street crossing, immediately to our right see the impressive two story frame family home of the Cockrells, owners and operators of the ferry and leading real estate owners, developers and builders of the city. Alexander Cockrell himself had been killed by the Dallas Marshall in 1858, but his able widow Sarah Cockrell was carrying on as Dallas' leading capitalist. As we proceed up Commerce Street and reach Broadway, we would see to the left on the northeast corner of Broadway and Commerce impressive evidence of the growing wealth and power of the Cockrell family. For there before us would be the home that Cockrell built, the Dallas (St. Nicholas) Hotel, one of the finest buildings in Texas, a new three story brick structure, the most valuable piece of real estate in town. Proceeding on up Commerce we would find to the right on the southwest corner of Commerce and Houston and cattycornered from the Court House Square, a two story brick saloon owned by John W. Merrifield.

At this point, after refreshing ourselves at Merrified's Saloon, we
would, if we were bent on moving past the offices of the movers and shakers of Dallas on our way to Judge Burford's home, turn left and go north on Houston. Immediately on the northeast corner of Commerce and Houston we would pass by Smith and Murphy's brick store, another very valuable piece of property. A couple of doors up the street we would pass the office of General John J. Good, a lawyer with military experience who was ever ready to serve the power structure of the city when it was necessary to marshall, train, and command an armed force of men ready to act resolutely and with effect. In the same small office building were the offices of James H. Smith, owner, and Dr. A. A. Johnson.

Next door is the new drug store owned by Wallace Peak. Upstairs in the two story building are the offices of doctors C. C. Spencer and W. S. J. Adams, and lawyers Samuel Russell and John S. Chapman, as well as rooms occupied by Wallace Peak, the owner, Peter Spanburg and P. W. Stevenson.

Next door continuing north on Houston is the old drug store, now vacant except for a few goods stored there by Smith and Murphy.

On the southwest corner of Houston and Main is the new two story warehouse and store owned by A. Shirek. Both the new building housing "W. W. Peak and Co." and this new Shirek store and warehouse are very valuable pieces of property. Around the corner and immediately next door to Shirek's store is the office of the city's only newspaper, the Dallas Herald. The city post office is nearby, just across the street and located within the premises of the city's second major hotel, the Crutchfield House. This hotel, conveniently situated catty-cornered from the Court House Square, occupies the northwest corner of Houston and Main. Across the street on the
northeast corner of Houston and Main is Eric Wester's barber shop. Next door, continuing east on the north side of Main Street, we find a new frame building that has been put up for A. Simon. Two doors further east we find the store of the jeweler, L. Reinhardt. We next pass the office of B. W. Stone, a lawyer, before coming to Carr's saddlery. Further along, occupying the northwest corner of Main and Jefferson, we come to the large storehouse of Herman Hirsch. Upstairs rooms in this two story building are occupied by Dr. Henry Scott, G. W. Donaldson and S. Schaffer.

Across the street and catty-cornered from the Court House Square, occupying the northeast corner of Main and Jefferson is the store of A. Simon. Proceeding further east on Main Street, now moving away from the Court House Square toward Market Street we come to D. B. Thomas' drug store, and next to him J. W. Elliott's store and warehouse. Immediately across from Elliott's establishment, on the south side of Main Street is R. R. Fletcher and Co.'s storehouse. Moving back down the north side of Main Street toward the Court House Square we come to E. M. Stackpole's storehouse.

On the southeast corner of Main and Jefferson, directly across the street from the northeast corner of the Court House Square are law offices of Judge John Calvin McCoy, the single most influential citizen of Dallas. Knowledge is power, and McCoy came to Dallas as the representative of the Peeters Colony. He soon resigned his position with the colony administration and set himself up in the private practice of law in Dallas. As a result, many Dallas citizens from a very early date frequented the office of Judge McCoy where they sought the counsel of a lawyer whose legal memory
reached back into the earliest days of the settlement. If there was a second seat of government in Dallas outside the Court House, it was in John McCoy's law office. He was the natural rival of Judge Burford who lived further east on Main Street, and who had a direct line to outside power through his contact with Congressman Reagan and his many personal contacts with influential citizens of other towns on his district circuit. But in Dallas itself, John McCoy was *primus inter parus*, in all civic matters. This of course is in distinction from commercial matters where property owners' interests would be paramount. McCoy knew how to serve the interests of individual propertied people while advancing the interests of the whole community.

The *Dallas Herald* had a significant influence, and performed a similar function. It was completely dedicated to the promotion of what its publisher and editor perceived to be the city's well being.

It was this corridor of power running up Commerce Street to the Court House Square, north on Houston to Main and east on Main to Market, that was so severely damaged by the fire of 1860. Since the south side of Commerce was built up solid from John Merrifield's saloon on the southeast corner of Commerce and Houston, all the way to Market, the statement to the effect that the whole business district around the Court House Square was destroyed is an exaggeration. For example, none of the places of business facing the Court House from the south side of Commerce were damaged. But from the point of view of the *Dallas Herald*, situated on Main Street just off Houston, and in the same block which included the prestigious Dallas (St. Nicholas) Hotel, as well as all the places of business facing the Court
House Square on the west side of Houston, and situated just across the street from the post office, located in Dallas' other hotel, along with all the places of business lining Main Street almost to Market, it appeared to be a total disaster, and was so represented in the hurried accounts that were sent out to newspapers in the state of Texas. The fact is that most of the residences of its approximately 900 citizens remained unaffected by the fire. And none of its means of production were affected. The brick factory was intact, the lumber mill was intact. Horses, wagons, and all means of transportation were undestroyed. All roads leading into and out of Dallas were servicable. Though the disaster was great, the greatest ever suffered by the city before or since, it was not total, in any sense of the word, except that it virtually brought the city to its knees economically and politically because it struck such devastating blows all up and down its central corridor of power. All of the most important business establishments in Dallas were destroyed. Only one two story brick building on the Court House Square remained standing. That was the Merrifield Saloon on the southwest corner of Commerce and Houston. The several places of business on the south and southeast sides of the Court House Square that were not destroyed by the fire were simply less important in the economic and political power structure of Dallas. That best explains why they could go unmentioned in the hurriedly prepared memoranda that were sent out to inform the outside world of the catastrophic fire that had struck the nerve center and seat of economic, military and political power in North Texas.

All reports concur that the fire broke out in the southwest quadrant of the business district surrounding the Court House Square.
The time was early Sunday afternoon. Outside temperatures, both in the sun and in the shade were very high even for a July day in Dallas. It was too hot to be outside and most people were resting in the privacy of their homes, "taking an afternoon siesta" when news of the fire began to spread through the city. The exact time fixed by the Dallas Herald for the start of the fire was 1:30 p.m. The place: on the west side of the square near W. W. Peak's new drug store. There was some rubbish in boxes sitting outside and in front of the store. Inside were stores of every kind, some flammable. "In less than five minutes the entire two story building was enveloped in flames. The wind was high, blowing from the southwest." This explains why it spread quickly to the buildings to the north. First to Smith's warehouse and then northward till it reached the building and warehouse of A. Shirek and the Herald office. From the Dallas Herald building as well as from the two-story Shirek building the high wind blowing from the southwest carried embers from the blazing roof materials across Main Street to the Crutchfield House and to Wester's barber shop on the east side of Houston. From there the fire swept up Main Street almost to Market with flames consuming everything in their path.

Meanwhile, so intense was the heat from the chemical combustion in Peak's Drug Store that the fire, against the prevailing winds, began to burn the buildings to the south and east, first James H. Smith's small office adjoining Peak's Drug Store, and from there, building by building until it reached Smith and Murphy's large brick store on the southeast corner of Commerce and Houston and the three story brick Dallas (St. Nicholas) Hotel, on the southwest corner of Commerce and Broadway.
At that point the fire break represented by Commerce Street combined with the direction of the wind was blowing served to spare all of Dallas located on and south of the south side of Commerce.

Not so, however, the buildings across the Court House Square. The high wind from the southwest carried embers around and over the small Courthouse and combined with the intense heat emanating from the burning buildings on the north side of Main Street, set fire to the buildings on the northwest side of Jefferson. From there the flames spread eastward to the buildings along the south side of Main Street. An eyewitness summed up the situation in these words: "Such was the rapidity of the flames, that in less than two hours, every building on the western and northern sides of the square and half of those on the eastern were consumed, together with very nearly all their contents." The same eyewitness gave the following account of the effects of the fire upon his own establishment and of the valiant attempt to save what could be saved.

The loss of the Herald office was complete; four printing presses, a large amount of new and valuable material, a large quantity of paper, files of the Dallas Herald, important documents, correspondence, letters and the entire library and furniture. We had barely time to save the business books of the office before the rush of fire and smoke and an intense heat drove us out and prevented all attempts to save anything more.

The situation must have been somewhat similar in the case of any attempt that was made to save important documents from the burning office of General Good located in the J. H. Smith building which adjoined Peak's drugstore. The evidence indicates that the loss there, too, was complete, for in Stackpole's list of the estimated damages caused by the fire, there
is included the entry: "Gen. Good's law library - $1,200." In fact, if Peak's drugstore was enveloped in flames in "less than five minutes," it is reasonable to think that the adjoining building housing General Good's office was aflame within ten.

If the city was set on fire purposely, it may have been intended that certain documents housed in General Good's office be destroyed. What these documents could have been we can never be certain. But whatever intelligence had been gathered on persons believed to be "unreliable" on the life and death issues that were threatening to destroy the basis of social cohesion within the society of Dallas would most likely have been in the custody of General Good, since he was not only a lawyer and thus a member of the legal establishment of the city, but also that person into whose hands would fall the responsibility of rounding up those suspected of insurrection in case the "impending crisis" ever became imminent enough to require such forceful measures.

During the "Hedgcoxe War" General Good had led his militia to the offices of the Peeters Colony, and upon returning to Dallas he had basked in the recognition of a grateful public, whose threatened welfare had been safeguarded by the resolute show of force by General Good and his citizen army. Later General Good would serve honorably in the Confederate Army, and after Reconstruction he would be elected Mayor of Dallas. In 1860 General Good was the military arm of the Dallas slavocracy. That was not, however, the most likely way he perceived himself. For like his minute men forebears he realized that "eternal vigilance was the price of liberty," and in the freedom loving tradition of English yeomanry, General Good stood ready to
marshal his troops at a moment's notice. That his yeomen brothers he would have been expected to place under arrest may also have been lovers of liberty--some including the liberty of slaves within the circle of their concern--could have troubled the conscience of General Good. But the speedy arrest of those bent on insurrection would be for the good order of the community and thus favor the welfare of the wives and children of these misguided brethren as well as all others in the city.

It is reasonable to conclude that ever since January when the revolutionary plan outlined in Helper's *The Impending Crisis* was published in the *Dallas Herald*, counter measures had been put in place, and that General Good had been given authority by the City fathers to be prepared. The majority of white males living in Dallas were artisans of one kind or another. Most would probably have been "free labor" men, or at least to some degree "anti slavery" in their sentiments. In any case it was acknowledged by the editor of the *Dallas Herald* that in a situation where the "pro slavery" forces in control of the city were acting to supress an insurrection against the oligarchy of the county, those willing to use force to defend the pro-slavery oligarchy could be outnumbered by what was called the "abolition fraternity." Names of the more outspoken anti-slavery men in the county would have been among the first to be placed on the list of those prudence would dictate were "unreliable." Documentation of words actually spoken would be needed at the hearings that would be held. Such hearings would be demanded by most free men and women worthy of the name. How else could the wives and children of detained husbands and fathers be answered when they came to the places of incarceration inquiring about loved ones
under arrest? These women and children were neighbors of the wives and children of General Good and his co-conspirators. Documentation, hard evidence of prospective disloyalty was required in order to justify measures that General Good was expected to enforce.

According to this way of viewing the Dallas Fire of 1860, it may never have been essential that so much of the city would be destroyed. The goal of this powerful revolutionary counter measure did not require such extensive destruction of property as actually took place. After all, relatively little property was destroyed at the Boston Tea Party. But the effect was electrifying, and nothing was ever to be the same in the colonies after that revolutionary act.

On the other hand, if Dr. Pryor, in his subsequent analysis of the cause of the fire, is correct in saying that:

The object of the firing the town of Dallas was to destroy the arms of the Artillery Company, ammunition and provisions known to be collected here; to destroy the stores throughout the country containing powder and lead—burn the grain and thus reduce this portion of the country to the state of utter helplessness,

then we must pronounce the fire of July 8, 1860 of only limited success. For it did not reach to the arms of the Artillery Company, nor to the ammunition known to be collected in Dallas. At least there is no report of this in the letters sent out to report the damage done by the fire. To be sure, such information could have been suppressed for security reasons during the chaotic days that followed the fire. But none of the several reports given of the fire years later ever refer to the kind of explosions that are generally associated with destruction of ammunition and gunpowder.
If the fire was intentionally started, the place of origin becomes important, and since that was close by a building housing the office of General Good—containing, we may presume, his files, important documents, and correspondence—it is most likely that the immediate purpose for setting the fire was accomplished, whatever further damage may have been envisioned.

When we see the burning of Dallas against the background of the English and American revolutions, the "Kansas War" and John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry, and within the context of all that ensued, including the firing on Fort Sumpter, Shilo, Gettysburg, Lee's surrender to Grant, Lincoln's assassination, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, Martin Luther King, it gives reason to pause and reflect on the past and its meaning for the present and the future.

And the most poignant question of all must be this: "What thoughts were going through the minds of Patrick, Samuel and Cato as they walked from the jail to the killing place on the banks of the Trinity? Did they wonder whether the rescue attempt feared by General Good and his men might actually take place? It is essential to this narrative that the reader understand that Dr. Pryor and his co-conspirators did realize that they were outnumbered in Dallas, and that they could be overcome by force. But they were resolute, and, like the men of the Confederacy would soon show themselves to be, they were prepared to put up a good fight before succumbing to superior forces.

It makes the most sense to conclude that, whatever their number, these anti-slavery forces in Dr. Pryor's "abolitionist fraternity," were real, not imaginary, and that by destroying the conjectured evidence gathered by
General Good, these opposing forces would have temporarily forestalled any imminent danger to themselves or their families. They had no newspaper, and no arsenal. A minimal goal having been achieved (we must not overlook the irony that it was General Good who had led the Dallas forces which acted to neutralize potentially damaging documents in the custody of Peters Colony representatives), the tactical decision that was made by those opposed to General Good and his backers, when push came to shove, was to temporize and hold their fire. How many of these men were standing there on the banks of the Trinity with all the others to witness the end of Patrick, Samuel and Cato, we shall never know. Some of them, no doubt, were amongst those men who, during the months that followed, we imagine, packed their belongings and headed North with their families to get their wives and children out of danger. Of these men, some would later have fought to save the Union and, to the extent it could be done by force, eventually to emancipate the slaves. They would have owed that much to Patrick, Samuel, and Cato, who had put their lives on the line.

On or about Wednesday, July 11, the theory that Dallas had been burned as a part of a conspiracy must have been born in the minds of some of those who talked to whomever had brought the news about the burning of Denton. For the fire in Denton as the fire in Dallas had started in the southwest sector of the city, where prevailing winds could best spread the conflagration. Such a coincidence occurring the afternoon of the same day in two nearby cities could hardly have been accidental.

On July 9th, the same day that Dr. Pryor had written the Houston Telegraph, Otis G. Welch of Denton had written the same newspaper the
Denton, Texas, Monday, July 9, 1860

Dear Telegraph:

About half past three o'clock on yesterday evening a fire was discovered in the counting room of the store of James M. Smoot, situated on the corner of Elm and Hickory streets, at the S.W. corner of the public square in the town of Denton. An alarm was immediately given and every effort made by the few who first arrived at the spot to save the books and goods, but to very little purpose. In a few moments the whole building was a mass of flames. A stiff breeze at the same time sprang up from the S.W. and in a few seconds the stores of Messrs B. & H. Jacobs, and of Messrs. Baines & Mounts were wrapped [sic] in flames. There were twenty five kegs of powder in a hogshead in the latter store, which in a few moments exploded with tremendous force, scattering fragments of the building and goods in every direction; pieces of burning timber, fragments of chain and casting were scattered for hundreds of yards, penetrating the buildings on the other side of the square and setting several of them on fire, and it was only by the utmost exertions of the few people that happened to be in town that the remaining business portion of our thriving village was saved from the devouring elements, which, owing to the scarcity and distance of water at one time was thought inevitable. But the ladies (God bless them) came to the rescue, and notwithstanding the almost intolerable heat of the sun, soon brought sufficient water to save several buildings which we had almost given up to destruction. As it is, the whole west side of the public square with the solitary exception of Messrs. Blount & Scruggs store, on the extreme N.W. corner is in ashes.

Mr. Smoot had with his lady taken a ride in the country, but seeing the smoke and hearing the explosion in the direction of town he hastened back, and arrived in time only to behold the accumulation of long years of laborious toil and honest enterprise smouldering in ruins. The losses are as follows:

Mr. Smoot saved comparatively nothing. Books and all were burned. $50,000 will not cover his loss. Messrs. Jacobs total loss 7,000, Messrs. Baines and Mounts saved their books and a portion of their goods, their loss is estimated at $20,000; a building belonging to Ed Row partly finished, and a store house belonging to the Aldrich estate were also destroyed, valued at some $1200. Messrs. B. & S. store was in great danger and was probably only saved by the explosion spoken of above. The goods, however, were
all removed. While I write, Mr. Turner, of the firm of Smoot & Turner, at Pilot Point brings the sad news that on the same day and at the same hour their store at that place was consumed by fire. Everything is a total loss. This swells Mr. Smoot's losses on yesterday to $60,000. Surely he can exclaim misfortune comes not single handed, but in battalions. How the two fires originated at the same time in the two towns is wrapped in mystery, though we have little doubt that they both must be the work of an incendiary. Our whole town is wrapped in gloom. Mr. Turner has made arrangements to put up another house, and on his way to this place to consult with his partner respecting the dimensions [sic] learned for the first time the disheartening news of our distaster.

Yours, &c. OTIS G. WELCH

If the oral reports about the fire which reached Dallas on Tuesday covered the same ground that Welch covered in his letter written on Monday, we can assume that a possible connection between the fires in North Texas was certainly on some peoples' minds within a matter of days if not hours.

By the end of the week some in Dallas, Dr. Pryor included, had become convinced of a plan for insurrection. That week end Pryor began sending out word announcing the discovery of a "diabolical" plot. The Bonham Era of Bonham, Texas, received a letter from Dr. Pryor dated Sunday, July 15. The editor of The Bonham Era immediately complied with the appeal in this letter to issue "extras" and promptly got one out by Tuesday, July 17th. Pryor had asked that these extras be sent out in "every direction." One reached the editor of the Texas Republican in Marshall, Texas, and was reprinted as follows:

Dallas, July 15th, 1860
Dear Sir: - I write in haste that you may prepare your people for the most alarming state of affairs that has ever occurred in Texas. On the 8th July the town of Dallas was fired, and the whole business portion entirely consumed, every store in town was destroyed. The next day the dwelling house of J. J. Wilkins was
bursed; after that the residence of P. Nicholson was
fired but discovered in time to arrest the flames. On
Thursday the premises of Crill Miller, with a large
amount of oats, grain, etc. were totally consumed.
This led to the arrest of some negroes and white men.
A most diabolical plan was then discovered to devastate
this entire portion of Northern Texas, extending even
to the Red River counties. White men, friends of the
abolition preachers Blunt and McKinney, who were
expelled from the country last year, are the insti-
gators of the plot. The whole plot is systematically
conceived and most ingeniously contrived. It makes the
blood run cold to hear the details. The whole country
was to be laid waste with fire, destroying all the
ammunition, provisions, arms, etc., to get the country
in a state of helplessness, and then on election day in
August to make a general insurrection, aided and assis-
ted by emissaries from the North, and persons friendly
to them in our midst. Their sphere of operations is
districted and subdistricted, giving to each division a
close supervision by one energetic white man who
controls the negroes as his subordinates. A regular
invasion and a real war. You and all Bonham are in as
much danger as we are. Be on your guard and make these
facts known by issuing extras to be sent in every
direction. All business has ceased and the country is
terribly excited. In haste, yours truly, Chas. B.
Pryor

The next day, Monday, July 16, Pryor issued an even more impassioned
plea in a letter to the editor of the Texas Gazette in Austin, once again
urging that "extras" be issued, "warning the country of the dangers that
threaten it:"

Dallas, Texas, July 16th 1860

Major John Marshall,

Dear Sir—I will give you some of the facts connected
with the burning of Dallas, and the deep laid scheme of
villainy to devastate the whole of Northern Texas. The
town of Dallas was fired on Sunday the 8th last, between
one and two o'clock, P.M. The day was very hot, the
thermometer standing at 106 F. in the shade, and a high
South-west wind blowing. The fire was first discovered
in front of Peak's new drug store, on the west side of
the square, and continued to spread rapidly until the
whole north side were consumed, and one half of the east
side; together with all the buildings on Main street east of the square and west of the Crutchfield House. Several other buildings were consumed, with the loss of dry goods, groceries, &c. in all of them.

On Monday, the next day, the house of John J. Eakens, one mile from town was fired. On Wednesday, the handsome establishment of E. P. Nicholson was fired, but discovered in time to arrest the flames. On Thursday, the stables, out-houses, grain and oats belonging to Crill Miller, Esq. 8 miles from Dallas were destroyed by fire. All of these were so plainly the work of an incendiary, that suspicions were excited, and several white men and negroes were arrested and underwent an examination. This led to the detection of a most diabolical plot to destroy the country. The scheme was laid by a master mind, and conceived with infernal ingenuity. It was determined by certain abolition preachers who were expelled from the country last year, to devastate with fire and assassination, the whole of Northern Texas and when the country was reduced to a helpless condition, a general revolt of the slaves aided by white men from the North, and many in our midst, was to come off on the day of Elections in August. The object of firing the town of Dallas, was to destroy the arms of the Artillery Company, ammunition and provision known to be collected here; to destroy the stores throughout the country containing powder and lead—burn the grain and thus reduce this portion of the country to a state of utter helplessness.

When this was accomplished, assistance was expected from Indians and Abolitionists. Many other places have already been fired, Denton, Pilot Point, Belknap, Gainesville, Black-jack Grove; some stores in Kaufman and Navarro, Waxahachie and other places that I do not now remember. Each county has a special Superintendent, a white man, and each county is laid off into districts under the supervision of a white man, who controls the section of the negroes in that district. The negroes are not permitted to know what is doing outside of their immediate sphere of action. Many of our most prominent citizens were to be assassinated, when they make their escape from the burning houses. Arms have been discovered in possession of the negroes, and the whole plot revealed, for a general insurrection and civil war at the August election. I write in hates, we sleep upon our arms, and the whole country is most deeply excited. Many whites are implicated whose names are not yet made public. Blunt and McKinney, the abolition preachers, were expected here at the head of a large force at that
time. You had better issue extras containing these facts, and warn the country of the dangers that threaten it. We are expecting the worst, and do not know what an hour may bring forth. Do the best you can for us. We have no printing press and can do nothing in that line. We may have to call on the lower counties for assistance—no one can tell. All is confusion, excitement and distrust. I will write again. There never were such times before.

Yours in haste,
Chas. R. Pryor18

At the end of that week, on Saturday July 21, Prior sent an updated account to the Houston Telegraph:

Editor Telegraph:—The burning of Dallas and several farm houses in this county, has led to the discovery of a most diabolical plot to devastate the whole of Northern Texas. At first it was believed that the fire was accidental, but the successive burning of farm houses and the firing of many other towns, and store in this section, caused reflecting men to adopt means to ferret out, if possible, the cause of such wholesale destruction. It seemed almost impossible that so many places should be fired simultaneously, and that that should be accidental. The out-houses, graneries, oats and grain of Mr. Crill Miller, were destroyed a few days after the destruction of Dallas. This led to the arrest of some white men, whose innocence was proved beyond a doubt. Several negroes belonging to Mr. Miller, were taken up and examined, and developments of the most startling character elicited. A plot to destroy the county was revealed, and every circumstance even to the minutiae, detailed—Nearly or quite a hundred negroes have been arrested, and upon a close examination separate and apart from each other, they deposed to the existence of a plot of conspiracy to lay waste the entire country by fire and assassination—to impoverish the land by the destruction of the provision, arms and ammunition, and then when in a state of helplessness, a general revolt of the negroes was to begin on the first Monday in August, the day of election for State officers. This conspiracy is aided and abetted by abolition emissaries from the North, and by those in our midst. The details of the plot, and its modus operandi, are these: Each county in Northern Texas has a supervisor in the person of a white man, whose name is not given; each county laid off into districts under the sub-agents of the villain who controls the action of the negroes in said districts, by whom the firing was to be
done. Many of our most prominent citizens were singled out for assassination whenever they made their escape from their burning homes—Negroes never before suspected, are implicated, and the insurrectionary movement is widespread to an extent truly alarming. In some places the plan was conceived in every form shocking to the mind, and frightful in its results. Poisoning was to be added, and the old females to be slaughtered along with the men and the young and handsome women to be parcelled out amongst these infamous scoundrels. They had even gone so far as to designate their choice, and certain ladies had already been selected as the victims of these misguided monsters. Fortunately, the country has been saved from the accomplishment of these horrors; but then, a fearful duty remains for us. The negroes have been incited to these infernal proceedings by abolitionists, and the emissaries of certain preachers who were expelled from this county last year. Their agents have been busy amongst us, and many of them have been in our midst. Some of them have been identified, but have fled from the country, others still remain, to receive a fearful accountability from an outraged and enfuriated people. Nearly a hundred negroes have testified that a large reinforcement of abolitionists are expected on the 1st August, and these to be aided by recruits from the Indian tribes, while the Rangers are several hundred miles to the North of us. It was desired to destroy Dallas, in order that the arms and ammunition of the artillery company might share the same fate. Our jail is filled with the villains, many of whom will be hung and that very soon. A man was found hung at our neighboring city of Fort Worth, two days ago, believed to be one of those scoundrels who are engaged in this work. We learn that he had stored away a number of rifles, and the day after he was hung a load of six-shooters passed on to him, but were intercepted. He was betrayed by one of the gang, and hence his plans were thwarted. Many others will share his fate. I have never witnessed such times. We are most profoundly excited. We go armed day and night, and know not what we shall be called upon to do. The circumstances are frightful, and I fear that the trouble is not confined to this State. It behooves every true man to buckle on his armor, and fight the good fight for his country's sake.

In regard to this insurrectionary movement I will write you again, in a few days. There is a great demand for brick masons, and workmen of every kind. Can you not induce some of your rich merchants to come up, and some of your numerous hotel keepers to build a house and commence business amongst us? Every kind of business has a vacancy now, and the wants of the people require it to be filled.
Many new and elegant structures are already begun and will be completed in a few months. Workmen are busy over the burnt districts, removing the rubbish and getting ready for work.

Capt. Baylor sent down for our inspection the trophies of his late fight with the Indians, scalps, shields, bows and arrows, and various ornaments. On one of the shields was the fair, blonde hair of a white woman, who had fallen a victim to the merciless tomahawk. Who she was, where she lived, had she a father, brother, mother, or some dearer one still, no one will ever know. All that is now left of her, is that lock of fair hair, fine and glossy, highly ornamented with beads, after their savage taste, and now on a warrior's shield as a badge of honor. Poor woman, no one lives to tell the sad tale of her taking off—no one lives to bear to father, mother, or sister, the last death screams as the scalp was torn from her head. The warrior's scalp now dangles side by side with hers, mingling the jetty locks of the savage with the blonde curls of the Texas woman. We hear but seldom from Johnson's company.

The nomination of Breckenridge and Lane has filled the public mind in this county with supreme satisfaction. Every one, even most of the opposition are enthusiastic in professions for the ticket. In all honor and candor, I do not know a Sam Houston man in this county. If one is here I have not seen him. From every county surrounding this, we hear of nothing but Breckenridge and Lane men and meetings. It is no time now to look at local and party divisions—the country must be saved, and Breck and Lane can do it.

The investigation of this unholy conspiracy is now going on in our town and surrounding counties. I will keep you posted as new developments are made. John Brown and his followers were fools compared with the men engaged in this affair. Developments of the most alarming character, and calculated to shake our government to its very centre, are looked for. In haste, P. 19

Also on July 21, on the same day that Dr. Pryor wrote the above letter to the Houston Telegraph, some correspondent, probably the same Dr. Pryor, sat down to write a letter to the State Gazette in Austin. The correspondent did not send this letter right away, but as if keeping a journal, reports were added on Monday, July 23, and Tuesday, July 24. This series of letters was published in Austin on Saturday, August 4, and quickly picked up
in Houston and partially included in the August 7 edition of the Houston Telegraph. This Houston abridgement includes part of the "correspondent's" entry for July 23 and the whole of the entry for July 24, including an account of the hanging of three men that afternoon.

While the editor of the State Gazette in Austin simply identified the author as "one of the most reliable citizens of Dallas," the editor of the Houston Telegraph identifies him as "Dr. Pryor." The full text is as follows:

Dallas, Saturday, July 21, 1860
The excitement consequent upon the revelations made by Negroes under examination, continues unabated. Already nearly a hundred blacks have been arrested and examined separately before a committee of Vigilance, appointed for that purpose. This committee consists of the most respectable and responsible gentlemen of this county, whose proceedings have been characterized by the utmost prudence and moderation. During so much excitement and confusion it seems almost a miracle that so much forethought and deliberation should govern their actions. Such developments and such outrages would seem to indicate a speedy resort to extreme measures; but in this instance they have acted with as much calmness as if no public calamity had befallen the community, and as if no extraordinary emergency had called them from their homes.

Crowds of men are in Dallas, anxious and eager to lend their assistance, and ready to quell every disturbance that threatens the peace of the State. The developments are of the most startling character, unfolding the most diabolical plot that the wickedness of men could invent to destroy this whole section of the country.

At the town of Lancaster the same general plot was revealed—-to burn the town, to poison the inhabitants, to assassinate the aged females, and to seize and appropriate the young and handsome for their villainous purposes. Thank God! this unhallowed conspiracy has been nipped in the bud, and the country saved from such a scene of horrors.

Investigations are going on in all directions and startling disclosures are being made.

Monday, July 23. An immense concourse of people from all parts of the country is here awaiting the action of the committee of Vigilance. The stage came in from Waxahachie
yesterday, bringing news of the high state of excitement in that town. The conspiracy and insurrectionary spirit extend to that place in all the horrid forms contemplated at this place. Throughout the country as far as we can learn the same thing exists. That town was destined to be burned, the people to be poisoned and slaughtered, and the remaining property to be distributed among the victorious blacks. On Red Oak Creek the chief poisoner had been arrested and executed. Negroes at Waxahachie have been detected with the poison in their possession; and a runner in town yesterday reports that there have been several executions at that place. We have not yet received the particulars.

The committee of Vigilance have been in session all day, and this evening, they announced that 3 of the ringleaders of the insurrection are to be hanged tomorrow--These hardened scoundrels were among the most hardened and unscrupulous of the whole number. The decision seems to give general satisfaction. The crowd dispersed after this announcement, and a strong guard was detailed to watch the jail in which are confined 6 or 8 of the criminals. The police are active and unremitting in their efforts and it would be impossible for the whole abolition fraternity to surprise us now, although we might easily be overpowered. They 'would have to fight for it' however.

Tuesday, July 24. This evening at 4 o'clock the 3 ringleaders, Sam, Cato, and Patrick were escorted from the jail under a strong guard to the place of execution. An immense concourse of citizens and Negroes assembled to witness their exit from the scene of their wickedness. As they passed through the town they surveyed with composure the ruins of the once flourishing town that now lay in a blackened mass before them. Patrick Jennings (so called) remained calm and collected during the whole day, and betrayed no remorse or feeling whatever in view of his approaching doom. He it was who fired the town, and that night after its destruction glorified himself for the deed, and pronounced it only the commencement of the good work. These facts were obtained from many witnesses who testified to the same facts without any hesitations or contradictions of each others' statements. Sam Smith, so called from the name of his master was an old Negro preacher who had imbibed most of his villainous principles from 2 abolition preachers Blunt and McKinney, who lived in the country a year before, and had had much intercourse with said Negro; this old negro was a deep dyed villain. Cato had always enjoyed a bad reputation. They met their fate with a composure worthy of a better cause. Patrick Jennings with unparalleled nonchalance died with a chew of tobacco in his mouth, and refused to make any statement whatever.
They were hung on the bank of the river above town and are buried beneath the gallows.

Investigations are still going on throughout the country, all of which tend to confirm the facts elicited at this place. The evidence obtained before the committee will be published in due time. More anon. 20

If it was Dr. Pryor who wrote this eyewitness account of the hanging of Patrick Jennings, Samuel Smith and Cato, it takes on added meaning to know that it was written later that evening within a few hours after the hangings took place and before Dr. Pryor retired for the night.

In any case Dr. Pryor the next morning, in a letter to the Houston Telegraph went over the same ground, giving us another eyewitness account, whether it was his first or second we can never be certain. This letter is more comprehensive in nature and aims among other things to urge completion of the railroad from Houston to Dallas. It is here given in full:

Dallas, July 25

Ed. Telegraph: Three negro men, the leaders in the insurrectionary plot, were executed at this place last Tuesday evening. One of them, Pat Jennings, was the man who applied the torch to the town of Dallas, and one of the most prominent of those who were engaged in the work. Sam Smith, another and a preacher, was a hardened old scoundrel, and the third—old Cato—had always borne a bad character in this county. They were taken out of jail, escorted to the place of execution by the military, and, in the presence of a large concourse of people, expiated their crimes as justice demanded. They betrayed no discomposure in view of the awful fate before them. Pat positively refused to say anything, and died with as much indifference as if he had been about his ordinary occupation. With unparalleled nonchalance, he retained his chew of tobacco in his mouth, and died with it there. They hung about twenty minutes, Pat dying very hard, and the other two without a struggle—the former by asphyxia and the two latter by dislocation of the cervical vertebrae.

This is a fearful warning to the rest, who yet may share the same fate. In Waxahachie many important developments have been made, and a large amount of poison
found in the possession of negroes. The whole affair will have the most important results. The dangerous sentiments entertained by some people will be shown up in their practical results, and be laid open before the country in their naked deformity, stripped of all adventititious coloring. Men in high places will find a practical interpretation of their political dogmas in the view taken of them by deluded negroes. The plot to devastate northern Texas is dated from a certain time, and based upon facts calculated to mislead a people no better informed than our negro population. The danger of suffering negroes to go out to celebrations, to hear political speeches and to hold meetings of their own, is rendered apparent by the developments connected with this matter. We have learned a lesson, and will profit by it.

What of the railroad, Cushing? For Heaven's sake hurry on the work. Thousands of our rich, broad acres are lying idle and useless now, that would be white with cotton if our road was completed. Cotton is poison to the abolitionist. He cannot breathe in a cotton field; it is worse to him than hemp, and if we had the means of transportation we could supply your market with inexhaustible quantities of the raw material. We are in the right latitude, and our soil the most prolific, and better adapted to cotton than corn or anything else, as its growth fully testifies; and yet we are left to the mercies of the villainous hordes of abolitionists, who wish to play their Kansas game upon us. Give us our road, to which we are entitled by the contributions of our citizens three or four years ago, and then we will be safe. But without this, who knows what may happen?

Flournoy and McAdoo closed their canvass at this place on Saturday last, by not speaking at all. They spoke at Kaufman the day before. I have heard the highest encomiums passed upon Flournoy. He is spoken of as one of the most promising young men in Texas. He has begun a brilliant career, and will make a name for himself, depend upon it. He will sweep the whole of this portion of the State, notwithstanding that the Opposition have flooded the country with their "Constitution and Union" tickets. The people will not be humbugged again.

As regards the Presidential candidates, it is all one way. "Breckenridge and Lane" is the watchword of almost every man. Bell and Everett have a few--precious few--supporters in this county; Douglass two or three; Houston none; Lincoln none.

There will be a ratification meeting at this place during court, and at McKinney very soon. By the way, it may not be amiss, right here, to pay just a small
compliment to a son of Old Kentucky who has settled in our town, and who has already distinguished himself as an orator and a sound politician. Mr. Adams, a young lawyer, is destined to figure largely in the politics of the country. A man of enlarged views, an orator, a statesman of the best information upon the political history of the country, he will make a useful member of society. Moreover, he has always been a democrat, through sunshine and storm, always the same. Such men are the men for the times. The talent of the country—the young and rising men of the country—are mostly with us in the great struggle for Southern equality and Southern rights.—Victory will surely perch upon our banner and crown us with success. I am happy to state that the leading and most talented men of the Opposition are with us in the fight for Breck and Lane. We welcome them cordially, but hope that the scenes of '59 will never be re-enacted against us, when men who had been with us long enough to get some influence, turned upon the bosom that warmed them into life, and stung it to death. God grant that we may have no more of this.

The account of the hangings in this letter and that sent to the Austin State Gazette are independent accounts, with no indication of any direct literary relationship, and while each contains information not in the other, so that they could on that ground qualify for being accounts by different eyewitnesses of the same event, the general similarity of the accounts and their internal self consistency suggest that they have emanated from the same mind and simply reflect the differences that are to be expected when the same author writes about a recent event on two different days. The use of certain phrases like "with unparalleled nonchalance" in describing the manner in which Patrick Jennings "died" with a "chew of tobacco in his mouth" supports the identification of the Dallas correspondent to the State Gazette as Dr. Pryor. The editor of the Houston Telegraph
could have been sufficiently acquainted with existing arrangements and with Dr. Pryor's diction and style of composition so as to be in no doubt about his authorship.

Taking all known facts into consideration, there is little if any reason to doubt that Dr. Pryor probably was the author of both accounts.

When we realize that Dr. Pryor is a hostile witness who believed that these communal murders were justified, his nearness to the awesome moment of the taking of life, in the light of his physician's oath to preserve life, in those moments before retiring after what must have been an emotionally draining day, give to certain of his words a special meaning:

"An immense concourse of citizens and Negroes" had assembled to witness the hangings. "As they [Samuel, Patrick, and Cato] passed through the town they surveyed with composure the ruins of the once flourishing town that now lay in a blackened mass before them."

"Patrick Jennings remained calm and collected during the whole day." How did Dr. Pryor know this? Had he actually been with these men in the jail all morning? Was he the attending physician whose presence throughout was needed to give some semblance of due process to the illegal proceedings? Had he walked alongside the miliatry guard which escorted the victims to the appointed killing place? Had he been able to keep the three in view all the way? Was that how he could put pen to paper and write that Patrick had "remained calm and collected during the whole day," and that he had "betrayed no remorse
or feeling whatever in view of his approaching doom"? For what kind of reassurance was Dr. Pryor looking that this killing was justified? Dr. Pryor's summary judgment that the three men "met their fate with a composure worthy of a better cause," is a high tribute, emanating from the soul of one who had not been unaffected by the events of the day. Patrick had not died quickly or easily. His neck had not been broken when he dropped, and the rope took about twenty minutes to strangle him. He had died very hard. All in all the way Patrick died left a deep impression on Dr. Pryor: "Patrick Jennings with unparalleled nonchalance died with a chew of tobacco in his mouth, and refused to make any statement whatever."

After a night's sleep, Dr. Pryor the next morning, in the clear light of day, was able to be more matter of fact in his description of the event. His second account is only three fourths as long as the one composed the night before. One notable omission is the statement that "They met their fate with a composure worth of a better cause." The corresponding statement, "They betrayed no discomposure in view of the awful fate before them" is sufficiently more begrudging as to suggest that Dr. Pryor was well on his way to being at peace with himself as an advocate of the cause he represented: equality within the Union for the Slave States of the South, entailing the preservation and extension of a way of life to which as a son of a fine Virginia family he had grown accustomed.

Patrick Jennings had also come from Virginia. There in 1775 the revolutionary Patrick Henry had urged armed defense against
England before the Virginia Provincial Convention, at which time he uttered the immortal words: "Give me liberty or give me death." Two years earlier Patrick Henry, in a letter dated January 18, 1773 inveighed against slavery: "Is it not a little surprising that the professors of Christianity, whose chief excellence consists in softening the human heart, in cherishing and improving its finer feelings, should encourage a practice so totally repugnant to the first impressions of right and wrong? . . . I believe a time will come when an opportunity will be offered to abolish this lamentable evil." Helper had cited this letter rather fully in his book The Impending Crisis [pp. 200-201], and had added: "Again, this great orator says: 'It would rejoice my soul, that every one of my fellow beings was emancipated. We ought to lament and deplore the necessity of holding our fellow-man in bondage. . . .'" In so speaking Patrick Henry was showing himself to be a true son of his namesake St. Patrick, who as a youth had been sold into slavery, had run away, and later returned to preach the Gospel in Ireland.

In his book, Helper cites anti-slavery statements from Washington, Jefferson, and Madison, as well as those from Patrick Henry.

In the spirit and tradition of '76 Patrick Jennings had a defensible revolutionary right to rebel against his master and strike a blow for the freedom of his people. It follows that Charles Pryor and Patrick Jennings are proto-typical Virginia-Texas protagonists.

In 1831, Nathanial Turner, a Negro slave preacher born in
Southampton County, Virginia, had led the largest slave revolt in American history. This had led to the passing of strict laws for control of slaves in the Southern states. These oppressive measures served to dampen but never entirely drown out the rebellious spirit of those slaves who understood the Bible as Nat Turner had understood it. There probably was a bond of empathy between the preacher Samuel Smith and Patrick Jennings and it is not unlikely that the spirit of Nat Turner and other slave rebels was awakened in the consciousness of Dallas slaves like Patrick Jennings, Samuel Smith and Old Cato by the highly charged campaign rhetoric of the times. The paranoia of the Charles Pryors was no doubt matched by the apocalyptic hopes of the Patrick Jennings. The prospects of Lincoln's election as President must have been intoxicating to Patrick Jennings and people in Dallas who, as a consequence of their opposition to slavery, experienced repression and oppression at the hands of a pro-slavery oligarchy which, on the issue of slavery, dominated newspapers, courts, and police power.

It is doubtful, under these circumstances, that there was any need for white abolitionist preachers to put ideas into the heads of slaves in Dallas. Ideas of freedom and justice have never been far from the minds of enslaved people. But there certainly was a greater degree of freedom of movement for whites, and it is likely that it would have been possible for at least some of those whites living in Dallas county who loved liberty for themselves and strongly sympathized with the anti-slavery cause, to further that cause as
they had opportunity, by secretly cooperating with slaves who were willing to risk being discovered, in working out plans for concerted action involving the kind of coordination that appears to have lain behind the various fires in North Texas during July and August of 1860. In our judgment some coordination is probable in light of the contemporaneous burning of Dallas and Denton and the independently reported fact that the fires in both places began in the southwest sector of town where prevailing winds could most quickly spread the flames.

That part of Pryor's letter that urges his Houston friend to hurry up the work on the railroad and waxes lyrical on the eschatological benefits that will flow from the consequent expansion of the cotton economy in North Texas, combined with his acknowledging the antipathy abolitionists felt for "cotton," is most revealing and forces the historian to recognize the importance of this economic interest of the Dallas pro-slavery oligarchy which the Dallas Herald represented.

In this one paragraph the essential forces shaping the future of Dallas are seen to come together to form an intelligible picture.

(1) The availability of a vast amount of fertile land well suited to produce a product in great demand in the world market, but (2) requiring a dependable low cost labor supply which could compete with slave labor in other parts of the South and with depressed working classes in cotton growing areas of Africa and India, (3) all threatened by a slave insurrection, imaginary or real, that would
scare off the necessary outside capital support required to complete
the indispensable railroad. Thus (4) we have Pryor's polemic against
the abolitionists, who may have appreciated the usefulness of cotton
as much as anyone, but who hated the cotton economy which required an
ever more problem-causing need for the despised institution of
slavery. Their agitation against slavery was a deadly threat to
Pryor's capitalistic dreams.

No doubt there was racial fear and prejudice, class interests,
political rivalry, mob psychology, frontier justice, possibly some
revenge and other causes as well that will need to be considered for
a well rounded and comprehensive explanation for why the committee of
fifty two of the "best citizens of Dallas," after deliberating over
the matter, agreed to hang Samuel, Patrick and Cato. But the
economic interest of these men and their families, as their leading
members envisioned it, cannot be discounted. Their buildings were
dispensable. They could be rebuilt, better than before. But slaves
were not dispensable. Freedmen would never do. Their labor cost too
much. Better that three slaves should die, and scores whipped than
that the word go forth that the city fathers of Dallas were not in
control of their slaves and thus not worthy of the continued
confidence of those interested in the political and economic future
of the Central and North Texas area.23

When Pryor said of Patrick, Samuel and Cato: "They died in a
manner worthy of a better cause," what better cause can be imagined
for slaves to engage in than that envisioned by Patrick Henry when he
wrote: "I believe a time will come when an opportunity will be offered to abolish this lamentable evil." What opportunity was there to abolish an evil institution so convenient to those in power that would not also involve accepting revolutionary risks, even the risk of death? For even if one did no more than whisper his opposition to such an evil, to that extent he was making himself vulnerable to some future accusation. We may be confident that Patrick, Samuel and Cato had done more than whisper to warrant their being chosen from among the eight or so "ringleaders" to be the ones who were to be killed. That all three were opposed to slavery we have to believe, and that each would have been prepared to do things to end slavery is intrinsically probable. The burning of Dallas should be interpreted within the context of the times and in the light of the impressive silence of those chosen to die.

Our narrative of the Dallas Fire of 1860 now draws to a close. We have only two more letters to consider, both by Dr. Pryor. The pro-slavery cause is still being advanced with impassioned zeal in his letter of August 5 to the State Gazette in Austin, but a more elevated aspect of the Virginian's character comes to expression in his letter of August 11 to the Houston Telegraph, composed five days after the election. The cause at issue was a way of life that depended upon the preservation if not the extension of the institution of slavery. A violent conflict to settle the legal issue might deal the cause a fatal blow, and yet still not end the way of life. That remains the unfinished business of the citizens of
Dallas, and history has its role to play.

The two letters follow:

Dallas, August 5, 1860

Editor Gazette: - The excitement growing out of the late developments in regard to the insurrectionary movements in this country, is somewhat subsiding. But the watchfulness of the people is still as active as amidst the first alarm. The 6th day of August, was the time selected for an indiscriminate massacre of the whites, but owing to the strong guard constantly kept up throughout the country, and the increasing vigilance of the people, we have no apprehensions of an outbreak. The hanging of those miscreants throughout the different counties seems to have struck terror into the hearts of the remainder. They have abandoned the idea for the present, or else they are conducting their plans more cautiously than formerly. The attempt to throw distrust upon the action of our people, and to brand their efforts for self-protection as lynching or as mobocratic, will revert only on the heads of those soul-less creatures, whose affinities are, I fear, not with us, but with those who would invade our homes, murder our men, women, and children, pollute the 'green groves' of our friends with their hostile tread, and fill the country with all the horrors of a servile and internecine war. Those men who fear to side with the people, through dread of some political disaster to their party, are not to be trusted in such emergencies, and God forbid that they should ever be called to posts of honor and responsibility in the hour of danger. This is no time to draw party distinctions and to run political questions, while the facts are before us—while the country is blackened with the ruins of our burnt houses, and our firesides endangered by the machinations of Abolition emissaries. This is no time for idle speculations and political twaddle—The facts connected with this matter will soon be published, and all the developments given. The country will then see what has happened, and will judge of the horrors through which we have recently passed.

The printing office of Capt Hamner, with all its material, was consumed last week—This was the work of an incendiary. This is a great misfortune on Capt. Hamner—a man who has suffered more from Indian depredations than any other on the frontier—who has done as much active service as any other—who has a large family of children, a most estimable wife in ill health—a man who is indefatigable in the pursuit of justice, and one of the
most high-toned and honorable feelings. The voice of 'the white man' in this particular emergency is hushed, and at a time too, when its claron notes should ring over those broad prairies, and tell its tale of truth and justice. It is singular that it should be burned just at this time. No one believes that Abolitionism had anything to do with it. I hope that a subscription will be raised at once throughout the county for him, and his press re-established without delay.

The Dallas Company of Rangers under Capt. N. H. Darnell reached home yesterday and today. These gallant men have borne the brunt of the expedition, so far as they were advance guard of the company, penetrated farther into the Indian country, scouted more and saw more hardships than any other company in the service. Although no battle was fought, our boys are not to blame for that, for they are as gallant a set of men as ever shouldered a gun or rifle. Their appearance unmistakably corroborates the fact that they have not been on a pleasure excursion. This company will be mustered out of service on 13th inst. Col. Johnson with the portion of his men not now discharged will beat around on the waters of the Colorado and reach Belknap in from 3 to 5 weeks and there disband. Those veterans, Darnell and Bryan are chagrined that no opportunity was given for a fight, they were all ready and almost spoiling for a contest with the redskins. As far as I can learn there are not many Houston men amongst them—there are many Breckenridge and Lane men, who openly express their preference for this ticket. The election tomorrow will be thinly attended; the results of which shall be forwarded at once to you.

From our Dallas correspondent – Dallas, Aug. 11th, 1860.

The heavens have opened and poured refreshing showers upon a thirsty land; gentle rain has once more gladdened the hearts of thousands of God's creatures, revived their hopes, and reinvigorated the parched vegetation of our wide prairies. The long drought, attended with a torried heat and parching wind, has cut short our crop by half. A plentiful supply for home consumption yet remains, and will last until another crop reassures us. One remarkable feature of Texas soil is that we never make an entire failure. A sufficiency, even in the dryest seasons, always rewards the farmer. The heat of this summer has been unparalleled in this portion of Texas, yet the nights have been cool and often delicious after the heat of the day. At this time an entire change has occurred; the heat is no longer oppressive, the earth moist, and the nights so cool that a blanket is even endurable. The sky is
cloudless, and the atmosphere pure; the prairies are once more donning their verdant mantle, and our industrious citizens preparing their fall gardens. Our autumn vegetables often surpass those of the spring, as the wild flowers that glint forth amid the mild winds of October and November are as delicately fair as those of April and May.

Last week I rode some distance on the high prairies and witnessed that miracle of fabulous beauty, the mirage of the prairie. Lakes of azure brightness seemed to flash their silvery waves in the sunlight, and at times seemed tossed with wildness along their flowery banks; fairy-like groves were reflected upon their polished sheen, at times, and then changing with the rapidity of a kaleidoscope, a mass of grotesque figures were painted upon the illusive canvas—lakes, streams, trees, hills, mountains and plains were all dancing before the bewildered eyes of the gazer. They are seen at best advantage between 9 o'clock A.M. and 2 o'clock P.M., and are always plainest after a cool night when a rapid evaporation is progressing from the previous night's dew.

Our town is being rebuilt with more rapidity than the most sanguine of us anticipated at first. Mr. Hermann Hirsch has already commenced an elegant brick storehouse on the public square; Mr. Crutchfield is preparing to rebuild his hotel, and Mrs. Cockerell to enlarge her already commodious establishment. We will soon have plenty of room for visitors and travelers. Many other buildings are in progress. The ladies have resumed their evening promenades, and you may rest assured that the presence of crinoline once more upon the streets, has caused us to smile with unwonted cheerfulness, and to hope for better days. For one month a dark cloud seems to have overhung our town and county, but a bright change has come over us within the last few days, and now all hands seem ready and willing to go to work and renovate our destroyed property.

We have just heard of the destruction of the flourishing town of Henderson in Rusk County. We have hopes it is not as bad as represented. I saw a letter received last night by a gentleman of this town from a friend in Athens, stating that an attempt had been made at that place to fire the town; that two white men had been hung, some negroes shot, and others hung. All sorts of rumors are afloat, and most of them partake of the horrible. One fact is ascertained beyond a doubt, except in the minds of those who are wilfully skeptical on the subject, that every negro who has been implicated in this plot, even more than a hundred miles off, has testified to
the same facts, the same dates, names and circumstances that were detailed here at Dallas. Such men as those who pronounce these things a ridiculous farce are men whose affinities and proclivities lead them most naturally to such a conclusion. You will hear the particulars of the disaster at Henderson before us, therefore it is needless to give you any of the rumors that have reached this place.

Last week, a negro man, one of the conspirators died, and on his death bed confessed his criminal connection with the insurrectionists, revealed many additional facts, and evinced the most pungent remorse. It would make you shudder to hear the dangers we have so far escaped. It would excite the public mind too much to know them, hence I will not give them in detail. You will soon get the particulars in the most authentic form.

The election has resulted, as far as I can hear, most gloriously for the Democracy. The disorganizers have been rebuked, if our section of the country is a test of the popular feeling, Dallas, Ellis, Tarrant, Parker, Johnson, Jack and Palo Pinto have all given heavy majorities for Flournoy, Johns, and Randolph. The last throes of the opposition, amidst a great muss, have brought forth only a mus ridiculus. The Democracy like Antaeus of old, has only been refreshed and reinvigorated by its fall, last year. We judge that the lesson will not be soon forgotten.

The company of Rangers under Capt. Darnell have returned home. They are a brave company of men, and desired an opportunity to show their valor against the foe, but the Comanche was not thereabouts.

I must not forget to mention that the good people of Dallas have generously and nobly come up and subscribed five or six thousand dollars for the sufferers by the late fire—perhaps more than this.

Swindells is often seen, about sunset, sitting, like Marius viewing the ruins of Carthage, but not despondent. The Herald office is again in progress of erection. A neat brick house, fire proof, at that, will be built by the time the new press and material arrive here; so you can expect to see the Herald again at no distant day.

Rome destroyed Carthage in 146 B.C. The Roman forces were successful largely because they were the patriotic citizen army of a republic in which the land was divided among small farmers. Carthage was ruled by a small number of men. Their large estates were tilled by slaves, and their army
was composed of outsiders hired to fight for money.

Unlike Pryor, Swindells had come from the North. As he sat viewing the ruins of Dallas, he probably had more to muse about than Pryor could imagine, like how what had happened in Dallas would play in New York, of which city he was a native son. This hanging of slaves would certainly be used by abolitionists there to argue their case against the South. Lincoln would probably be elected President. The state elections just ended had made it clear that in the November election Texas would be represented nationally by a party disposed to secession in the event of Lincoln's victory. The Texas legislature in a joint resolution approved February 16, 1858, had already gone on record to "act alone," i.e. to "secede" in the face of such an outcome of the debate over the rights of slave-holding citizens in the territories of the Union. Pryor is obviously sanguine, if not elated about the way things are going. But Swindells' family ties were different. To a Virginian like Pryor, it would only seem right that the North would agree to allow Texas, a once sovereign Republic, to withdraw from a Union that could no longer be constitutionally maintained. But Swindells doubtless expected that the Empire State of New York would be more than reluctant to agree to such a resolution of the crisis. Those in power seldom if ever give up power voluntarily. The opposite was more likely. The Empire State could and probably would pour its wealth behind the effort to "save the Union." The war had actually begun. And Dallas was its temporary victim.

Those not wanting to embrace this understanding of the event would welcome the myth of "spontaneous combustion." But such a theory for
explaining how the Dallas fire originated flies in the face of reality. Nonetheless it is a theory that has become more popular with time, for it is a theory which serves well the ideological needs of Dallas society where Black and White need to work together and get along with one another. It is a theory convenient to both races. Whites can continue to believe that Blacks started the fire and got what they deserved so long as they are quiet about it. Blacks can accept the theory that they were not at fault and pretend to "forgive" the hotheads in charge of the hangings. But however serviceable this myth has been, it is based upon an illusion and should be rejected. It serves mainly the convenience of the Whites who continue as a race to benefit from the perpetration of what is still largely a "slave-economy," however ameliorated the injustices in the interim have become. It is a theory that trivializes history and obscures the meaning of the murder of three human beings. They did not die for nothing. They had a cause, as Pryor begrudgingly admits. They died for that cause. What was it?

While our narrative ends on August 11, 1860 with Swindells sitting at the end of the day viewing the ruins of Dallas, our task will not have been completed until we have evaluated the several narrative statements about this fire and its aftermath that have been preserved through recorded interviews of persons living within a radius of sixty miles of Dallas at the time it burned, whose memories provide us with valuable additional information.

Dr. Pryor, in his letter to the Houston Telegraph dated Saturday, July 21, thirteen days after the fire, informs his readers that a few days after the destruction of Dallas (on Thursday, July 12th, to be exact), the
outhouses, graneries, oats and grain of Mr. Crill Miller were destroyed. He relates that this led to the arrest of some white men, whose innocence was proved beyond a doubt. In the investigation that ensued among Mr. Miller's slaves, an alleged plot to destroy the county was revealed.

Thirty two years later, at a time when pioneers of Dallas County were about to assemble for their annual reunion, a member of the Miller family, 85 year old Uncle Billy Miller, who was 53 years old at the time of the fire, was interviewed by a reporter from the *Dallas Morning News*. Referring to himself throughout his statement, with one exception, as Uncle Billy Miller or Uncle W. B. Miller, the statement reads as follows:

... my memory is somewhat defective; but those scenes and the startling revelations of an uprising among the blacks created such an impression on my mind that I can never forget it. Crill Miller, now dead, who was a son of W. B. Miller of Dallas, who then lived west of the river five miles from town, took the part of a detective and worked up the case. It is said that he had some Indian blood in his veins, and he kept his own counsel, saying but little, but he discovered the plot to burn, rob, and murder. There had been a great deal of burning going on in the country: farmers' homes, their feed stacks and cribs were burned, and no one knew how.

One day as Crill was at his father's a little negro boy, whom he called Bruce, came running in crying and saying: 'O, Mars Crill, three white men came and made me fetch them some water, and then they sot fire to the barn and the house.' Crill could see the smoke issuing from his place, but he said nothing then. After he had worked on a few clews and put this and that together he one day took Bruce from the house and in the presence of a committee of white men told him that he would have to tell them who had burned his house else they would kill him, and he informed him that if he died lying the devil would get him sure. Bruce confessed that he himself fired the place, and that he had been put up to it by another negro. This led to the revelation of a plot, which included every negro in the county except three, and one of the three was old Uncle Clayton Miller, Henry Miller's father, who belonged to Uncle W. B. Miller. He
knew about the plot, but under threatened penalty of death he dared not reveal it. A part of the plan was to poison Uncle Billy (W. B.) Miller and his wife and divide their property among the blacks.

When the scheme was fully disclosed it was shown to have been instigated by two white preachers from Iowa. They were in the county about two years prior to the outbreak, but they left and returned again, it was charged, to fully develop their plans, which were evidently laid during their first visit to the county. As soon as their connection with the scheme became known a committee composed of Judge Hord, Uncle Billy Miller, and Mr. Knight, Judge Burford's father-in-law, started to wait on them. One of them was seen. When the committee approached the negro quarter where he was stopping, Uncle Billy Miller called him out to acquaint him with the committee's mission. He was eating breakfast and he reached back to get a gun which was standing against the wall near him. At that moment a shot was fired from the outside. The preacher then commenced crying and asked me to keep the men from shooting him. He promised to get out of the State in five hours, and the committee left, but before he could get away he was captured somewhere on Farmer's branch, brought to town and put in jail. The other preacher was captured and that night they were both taken out, whipped and told to get out of the State instanter. They left, but we heard of them during the war circulating stories in the North about us.

After the burning of the town, which occurred on July 10, 1860, when the mercury stood 110 degrees in the shade, we whipped every negro in the county one by one. One of the negroes whipped became very sick afterward, and, thinking he was going to die, he made a confession to his old mistress, telling her all about the plot, which contemplated the murder of herself and her husband. He confirmed the statement of other negroes that the two Iowa preachers had instigated the entire plot. Upon his confession he with two other negroes, one of whom was a preacher, was taken out and hanged on the bluff just above where the Commerce Street bridge now stands.26

The venerable pioneer's memory appears to be defective on some points. For example he is cited as giving the date of the fire as July 10, 1860 instead of the correct date, July 8, 1860. However, "which occurred on July 10, 1860" may have been added by an editor to a text which reads as well without it, and even better if the addition included the words: "when the mercury stood 110 degrees in the shade."

In any case he wrongly represents the confession that led to the
hanging of the three negroes as coming after the whippings, which as we will see from Judge Nat M. Burford's statement, were mandated at the same time the decision to hang the three slaves was reached, and were in fact given to satisfy those who wanted more than three slaves to die.

The apparent discrepancy between Dr. Pryor's statement that the white men arrested in connection with the investigation of the destruction of Crill Miller's property were found to be innocent, and the account given here, by the way, may in part be explained by the fact that the evidence against them, coming from slaves, was inadmissible in court, and in part by the fact that there was no evidence that they had actually done anything themselves that would stand up in a court of law as evidence of a crime. The practice at the time was to whip those suspected of tampering with slaves and run them out of the State.

The statement by 68 year old Judge Nat M. Burford which appeared in this same issue of the *Dallas Morning News* is no less interesting. Judge Burford said that he could not remember dates exactly, but that he had a vivid memory of the events themselves. This is important because he was a principal in the whole affair. As District Judge for Dallas, he was the highest legal authority in the city, and a person of considerable influence.

I was then district judge, he began, and I was then holding court in Waxahachi. I adjourned court there Saturday and started to my home in Dallas, but I did not get here until Monday, the day after the town was burned. There were no railroads in those days, you know, and travel was slow. I then lived on Main street, where the St. George hotel now stands. When I got home I found the largest portion of the town in smoking ruins. Nearly all the buildings on the square, about fifteen business houses, were burned. One two-story brick house was left standing on the southeast corner of
the square. It was a saloon and I believe a saloon is kept in the same building today. Residences as far as my house had been burned. I remember that when I got to town everything was very quiet. It was almost a death-like stillness. People talked in whispers, but they were determined-looking. They were desperate. They gathered in groups and they were sure that nothing was said in the presence of anybody who was not known to be with them. A little after dinner T. C. Hawpe, the sheriff, came to my house and told me that a meeting was being held in the courthouse. He was afraid they were going to hang all the negroes in the county and so entail a great loss of property. He said that three were known to be guilty and he did not think that any more should hang. He asked me to go down and address the crowd and do what I could to hold violence in check. I went and when I got to the courthouse door—it was a brick courthouse, the second built on the spot where the new one is being erected—I encountered a doorkeeper. The guards were admitting only those whom they knew to be all right. The doorkeeper asked me if I would abide the action of the people's meeting. I replied that I would and I went in. The first man I found inside said: 'Now, we must vote to hang them three negroes, but it won't do to hang too many. We can't afford it. After we get the three let's call up some rich man's negro and make a fight to save him. If we save the rich man's negro the meeting will not then turn around and vote to hang the poor man's negro.' I saw that he had an eye to business and I thought it was a good suggestion. I went up to the courtroom and talked about three-quarters of an hour. Being a judiciary officer I then left the meeting and took no part in subsequent proceedings. However, the three negroes were condemned to death by a jury of, I think, fifty-two men. The fourth negro brought out belonged to Billy Miller, the richest man in the county. Sure enough a fight was made to save him and succeeded, but Miller said that the negro shouldn't stay in the county, and he afterward sent him away. The moderation wing of the meeting compromised with the other faction by offering and voting for a resolution to whip every negro in the county. The resolution was adopted and a committee was appointed to do the whipping. I remember my cook was whipped, but she said they didn't whip her hard, and her husband at that time got the only whipping he ever had in his life. He was a fine mulatto, a splendid blacksmith, and he would have nothing to do with the negroes. He opposed the abolition of slavery and
thereby engendered the ill will of all the negroes. He
is living now on Elm fork, about seven miles from here.
The public meeting in the courthouse was held Monday
afternoon, and I think the three negroes condemned were
hanged the following Wednesday in the forenoon. I was
not at the hangings and I took no part in it, but most
of the people had their negroes there to witness it.

I am satisfied the town was fired by negroes. Mr.
Cameron, who lived on the Fort Worth road, twelve miles
from Dallas, had a negro boy about twelve years old who
came to town every Sunday to get the mail. When he got
back home that Sunday after being in Dallas his master
saw the smoke from the burning town and asked him what
it was. He replied that Dallas was burning. He was
asked how he knew it. He said that as he was going to
Dallas that morning Uncle Cato, who was then a notorious
negro in these parts, told him to look out, that Dallas
would be burning before he got back home. This to my
mind was most convincing proof. Old Cato was captured
and he implicated the other two negroes who were hanged
with him. Their stories were corroborated by other
negroes, so that there could be but little doubt that
the negroes started the fire. They stated that two
white preachers from the North put them up to it, and a
committee waited on the preachers. I never saw them,
but after the committee waited on them they were whipped
and told to leave the country. At the time there was a
good deal of house burning all over the country, but the
war soon came on with its exciting events, and that is
the reason. I reckon nothing was ever recorded about the
burning of Dallas and the threatened slave
insurrection. It almost passed out of the minds of the
people.27

Burford's statement asserts that the resolution to whip "every negro
in the county" was part of a compromise between moderate and extremist
factions. This resolution to whip the slaves could not have led to a
confession that would have led to the hanging of the three men, as indicated
in the Miller statement. The mandated whipping of slaves is not mentioned
by Dr. Pryor. Of course he was under no necessity to have mentioned such a
matter. Dr. Pryor also does not mention that the white men arrested were
whipped. Perhaps as a medical doctor Charles Pryor had experience with the
lacerations sometimes resulting from such corporal punishment and for this or some other personal reason preferred not to draw unnecessary attention to this measure. There is no reason to think that the mandate to whip was not carried out.\textsuperscript{28}

Judge Burford's difficulty recalling dates is documented by the mistaken chronology he gives. The hangings took place in the afternoon, not in the forenoon, and on Tuesday, not Wednesday, and a full sixteen days after the fire, not nearly as soon as is suggested by his account.

The story about the twelve year old negro slave of Mr. Cameron who lived twelve miles west of Dallas on the road to Fort Worth, who implicated Old Cato, who upon being captured implicated Samuel and Patrick has a sort of etiological parallel in that of the little negro boy Bruce who under the threat of death confessed that "he himself" fired the (Crill Miller) place, and that he had been put up to it by another slave.

Burford's narrative, however, corroborates the Miller account on the matter of "two white preachers from the North," the committee which "waited upon them," and their being "whipped and told to leave the county." The repeated use of such exculpating or disclaiming phrases as "I took no part in subsequent proceedings," "I was not at the hanging and I took no part in it," "I never saw them [the two white preachers], but after the committee waited on them they were whipped . . ." reflects the way in which an officer of the court must position himself in matters where what had happened was against the constitutional law he was under oath to uphold.

Support for Pryor's statement that the two white preachers arrested were found to be innocent is given by Judge James Bentley who was a member
of the committee of 52 Dallas citizens which deliberated over the fate of
the accused slaves.

... The two white preachers I believe to have been
guiltless of the charge laid against them. ... When
the preachers were captured ... one of them doubtless
would have been shot in his buggy, but his wife threw
her arms around his neck and threw herself in front of
him, so that the vigilantes could not shoot him with­
out shooting her. She made such a piteous plea for her
husband's life that they decided to spare it. The
elder of the preachers was not wanted, but he refused
to leave his brother of the cloth. He said that he
would return to Dallas and go to jail with him. The
preachers were afterward whipped and told to leave the
country. I think that about the extent of their
connection with the negroes was that they had been seen
perched on rail fences talking with negroes several
times, and once or twice they felt it their duty to
preach to them. I don't believe they instigated an
insurrection. In fact there was no insurrection.
People became frightened and almost panic-stricken.

When the town was burned it was a hot day—so hot
that matches ignited from the heat of the sun. Wallace
Peak had just finished a new two-story frame building,
and in the upper story that day a number of men were
lounging and smoking. Piled up near the building was a
lot of boxes filled with shavings, and I think a cigar
stump or a match was thrown into one of the boxes, and
from that the fire was started, about two o'clock in
the afternoon. Several fires had occurred; there was a
great deal of excitement about the apprehended negro
uprising; somebody had to hang; and the three negroes
went. There was a merchant in the town of Henderson
who wrote to a friend here that he would pass through
Dallas on a given date. Incidentally in the letter he
mentioned the fact that the day when Dallas burned a
box of matches in his store took fire from natural heat
and he barely saved his store from burning. This
incident was cited by those supporting the theory of
accidental origin, but the merchant was denounced for
being in collusion with the negroes. It happened that
he originally came from the North and there were
threats of lynching him in case he appeared in Dallas.
His friend wrote to him to keep away from Dallas, and
he did. At that time there was considerable wagon
immigration to this country from the North, and the idea somehow gained currency that those Northern people were coming down here and supplying the negroes with firearms and ammunitions. People actually held up the wagons and searched them as they entered the town, but nothing was ever found to confirm these suspicions. 29

This testimony is difficult to evaluate. Judge Bentley could not make all the disclaimers made by Judge Burford. He did take part in the subsequent proceedings following Judge Burford's visit to the courtroom. These culminated in a compromise resolution for which he presumably voted, limiting the number to die to three, with the stipulation that all other slaves believed to be implicated would be whipped. "Several fires had occurred; there was a great deal of excitement about the apprehended negro uprising; somebody had to hang, and the three negroes went." No doubt in retrospect Judge Bentley was a chastened human being. He was involved in blood guilt, and a judge at that. His effort, under these circumstances, to exculpate both the preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who had been whipped and denied their constitutional rights, and the slaves in whose murder he had taken part, is understandable. But in bringing in the "theory of accidental origin" for the fire, he is engaging in subterfuge. It is to be noted that he does not himself subscribe to the theory. It only serves as a legal consideration to support his view that Patrick, Samuel and Cato were wrongly killed by offering a possible explanation for the origin of the fire that if true would prove these men innocent of the crime with which they had been charged. Lawyers do this kind of thing for a living. But historians, and judges, for that matter, must assess probabilities. And in this instance we have a theory which, while possible, is barely so.
Four days later, during the Pioneers' Day celebration which in 1892 took place in Garland, W. P. Overton, a pioneer of Dallas County gave what appears to be independent support to the "theory of accidental origin" for the fire. It is to be noted that here as with Judge Bentley this theory is linked with the view that the men hung were innocent. The portion of the long statement by Overton which deals with the fire is as follows:

The town of Dallas was burned July 8, 1860. A lot of men had been smoking that Sunday around Sam Pryor's drug-store, and I think the fire started from that. Crill Miller's house (the burning of which was mentioned in last Sunday's News) was not burned, but his wheat stacks and cribs were burned. A chunk of fire had been placed on a bed beneath the mattress, but when the mattress was turned back it smothered the fire out and the house did not burn. Crill's negro boy, Bruce, told about another negro, Spence, giving him a dollar to fire the house. I think the hanging of the three negroes for burning the town was unjust, because I don't believe they were guilty. At the courthouse, when the committee was investigating the fire, there came near being a squally time between Judge Nat M. Burford and Colonel John C. McCoy.30

On the same day W. H. Beeman, one of the very earliest settlers in Dallas, spoke at length, touching on the fire as follows:

I remember the burning of Dallas in 1860. I was not in town that day. The fire started on the west side of the square at Wallace Peak's drug store. While the people were at work trying to check it at that point it broke out on the east side, and then they told me it broke out here and there so fast that they could not keep up with it. There is no doubt but the negroes fired the town. They said they did, and the two white preachers, whom they said had put them up to it, were whipped and sent out of the country. Just before the fire Alex. Cockrell had built a three-story brick tavern. The building was 50 x 100 feet, and it was the largest and finest building in all North Texas. It burned. A brick wareroom on the north side of Commerce Street covers the spot where this tavern was built. I kept the first tavern in Dallas in a small house on the north side of the square. Old man Tom Crutchfield
rented it, and finally he built the old Crutchfield house on the northwest corner of the square, which was burned several times. But speaking of the hanging of the three negroes for setting fire to Dallas, in 1860, when excavations were being made for the Texas and Pacific railway bridge across the Trinity at Dallas, their bones were unearthed. They were buried there after they were hanged. I remember the first legal hanging in the county. It was the first trial for murder, and the negro woman, who had split a man's head open with an ax, while he was asleep, was hanged.31

The grounds stated by Beeman for his peremptory conclusion that there was "no doubt" but that the negroes fired the town, are no more satisfactory than those cited by Bentley and Overton to support their "theory of accidental origin." The fact that two white preachers were whipped and sent out of the county could never establish the premise that the "negroes fired the town." It is interesting to note that this old pioneer finds it natural to go directly from "hanging the three negroes for setting fire to Dallas," to the "first legal hanging in the county." This was the celebrated case of the slave Jane Elkins. The defendant pleaded not guilty to the charge. When sentence was pronounced and she was asked whether she had anything to say Jane Elkins remained silent. This happened in 1853, seven years before the fire. Nat. M. Burford, then District Attorney, prosecuted Jane. The judge was Burford's former law partner. This circumstance constitutes legal grounds for judicial appeal. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This relatively powerless woman was believed to have killed a white widower whose motherless children she had been hired to care for. If whites could remember this hanging, blacks could as well. The fires of the apocalypse presage social reversal.

Approximately 33 years later, in about 1925, W. S. Adair of the Dallas
Morning News interviewed Mrs. Addie K. McDermott, who had come to Texas with her father as a young girl, reaching Dallas on December 28, 1847. Mrs. McDermott was a teenager when Dallas burned, and in her eighties when she gave the following account:

I saw the town burn in July, 1860, and joined the rest of the population in carrying goods out of stores and furniture out of dwellings. The fire seemed to break out in a dozen places at once. This gave work to everyone willing to lend a helping hand. I have no idea where the mercury stood, but it must have been the hottest day we have ever had in this latitude. Many persons were overcome by the heat. The town had no provision for fighting fire and no effort was made to stay the flames. I think there was just one cabin left facing the courthouse.

The negro slaves were accused of starting the fire, at the instigation of some white men from the North, who had been preaching insurrection to them. The citizens made an investigation, tried and hanged three negroes who were supposed to have been the leaders, and ordered a number of others, more or less implicated, to be horsewhipped. A negro known as Old Pat, owned by Mrs. Bowles, was dealt with as the leader of the whole thing. He had always been liked by the white people, and especially by the white children. One of the negroes belonged to W. B. Miller, father of Dick and Charlie Miller. I have forgotten who owned the third negro. It was the law in some of the slave states, perhaps in them all, that when it became necessary to hang a slave, the State should pay the owner half the value of the negro. I know Mrs. Bowles received half pay for Old Pat and I suppose the owners of the other two also were compensated.32

We have seen how in the mind of W. H. Beeman the hanging of Patrick, Samuel and Cato in 1860 was closely associated with the hanging of the negro slave Jane Elkins in 1853. Both events tended to stand out in the minds of the early pioneers of Dallas, and we should not be surprised if, with the passage of time, some confusion should ensue involving the names of these
"notorious" slaves and of their respective owners. This may have happened in the mind of Mrs. McDermott. We know that George Guess was the owner of Patrick Jennings. We know that the owner of Jane Elkins was a widow of the Reverend William Bowles at the time she married Mr. Elkins. Following the death of her second husband this widow probably reassumed the name of her first husband and as Mrs. McDermott grew up in Dallas she presumably knew this woman as Mrs. Bowles. In this way we can explain the mental transfer that appears to have taken place in Mrs. McDermott's mind. The owner of the notorious slave Jane Elkins has become the owner of the notorious slave Patrick Jennings.

We also know that Old Cato belonged to Aaron Overton. Therefore, if Mrs. McDermott is correct in her statement that one of the three slaves hung belonged to W. B. Miller, it must have been Samuel Smith. However, since she appears to have misidentified the owner of Patrick it is possible that a similar mental transfer has taken place in her mind with regard to the owner of Old Cato. Both Aaron Overton and W. B. Miller were prominent pioneer citizens who lived on the east side of the Trinity River, and it is possible that Mrs. McDermott has confused Miller with Overton in identifying the owner of Cato.

While mixing up names like this is not unusual, there is no reason to doubt the general reliability of Mrs. McDermott's memory of the fire itself. For those memories are corroborated by the testimony of others.

Three years before he interviewed Mrs. McDermott, W. S. Adair interviewed another Dallas pioneer, S. B. Scott. In the course of this interview Scott referred to his uncle "Callahan Loving." He relates that
this uncle, who was a lawyer, set himself up in the practice of law in Dallas sometime after his arrival in 1858, and that he "became overheated in fighting the fire that destroyed the business part of Dallas in July, 1860, and died in the courthouse yard." John H. Cochran, in his book Dallas County: A Record of its Pioneers and Progress, published six years later in 1928, is more specific as to the actual date of Loving's death:

Calahil [sic.] Loving, a lawyer, whose wife was the oldest daughter of Samuel McGregor Scott, practiced law in Dallas and died suddenly on July 9th, 1860, in the Court House yard, from over heat caused by the fire which destroyed the greater part of Dallas the day before.

Elsewhere John Cochran refers to this lawyer as "Judge Loving." John Cochran was born in 1838 and thus was 22 years old at the time Judge Loving died from the aftereffects of heat exhaustion. It is unlikely that his report is in error since he was a well trained observer who was personally acquainted with almost all of the early pioneers of Dallas. As a judge, Loving would have been concerned to preserve important papers from the Courthouse which were imperilled by the fire. One can envision him rushing up and down the stairs inside the two story courthouse, and one can see him coming out of the Courthouse with his arms loaded with books and papers. The heat from the burning buildings around the Courthouse square must have been very intense, even though this never set the Courthouse itself afire. Judge Loving was presumably still over-exerting himself the next day when he dropped dead on the Courthouse square.

It is passing strange that none of the letters sent from Dallas to inform outsiders about the damage to Dallas property caused by the fire make
mention of the tragic loss of this precious life of a Dallas judge whose wife, named Emma, was thereafter to become the widow Loving.

Once suspicions of arson were aroused, we doubt not that many in Dallas thought that responsibility for the death of Judge Loving should be laid at the feet of whomever may have fired the town, since this death was an indirect consequence of the fire. But legally speaking there was no way anyone could have been hanged for setting Dallas afire since the penalty for arson, according to Texas law, was limited to fine and imprisonment, capital punishment being reserved for more heinous crimes. Therefore, the hands of the 52 men gathered in the Courthouse to deliberate the fate of those incarcerated as "ringleaders" were legally tied, as far as the death penalty was concerned, even if it could have been established by reliable witnesses that Patrick Jennings, as Dr. Prior in his letter of July 24 asserts, "glorified himself for the deed [i.e. the firing of Dallas]," pronouncing it "only the commencement of the good work."36

In order to kill Patrick it was necessary for these men to go outside the law. For that reason Judge Buford left the Courthouse, so as not to be implicated unnecessarily in any unlawful final decision to take the life of the accused. By deciding on the death penalty, the Dallas Committee of 52 set themselves outside the law. They made themselves outlaws in the eyes of conscientious law abiding citizens, their decision being by majority vote not withstanding. It is the essence of lawlessness that unlawful acts are sanctioned by the will of a majority of the power-wielding members of any group. Justice flees the council room of those bent on following the dictates of group survival—in this case the survival of the privileged
non-slave population of Dallas.

Legally speaking, even if Patrick set fire to Dallas, he could not have been lawfully punished for the death of Judge Loving, since the Judge voluntarily participated in the salvage operation and thus was responsible for bringing his own life, for whatever reason, into danger.

All this must have been very frustrating for those not well trained in the law among the committee of 52. And no doubt resentment against such niceties of the law made it easier for many to rationalize their proceedings as "lawful" in some "higher" sense and, in any case not to perceive them as unjust. After all, the Texas legislature, the previous January, had passed an unconstitutional measure infringing the constitutional right of freedom of speech, providing that when insurrection was believed imminent, the death penalty was allowed for anyone who could be shown to have advocated the anti-slavery cause. Collective self-deception was endemic in North Texas at this time. But collective self deception of this kind is what sullies the honor of a city. And until Dallas public opinion openly and without mental reservation condemns these killings, the city will never regain its honor or achieve that deeper sense of self respect so essential to its well being.

Last, but not least, we have the testimony that comes from Joseph Oliver. He was born in Hill County, Texas, in 1847, and would have been 13 years old when Dallas burned. In 1937, at the age of 90, Mr. Oliver was interviewed by Miss Effie Crown out in the country near Waco as a part of the celebrated Public Works project preserving oral history through the recording of "slave narratives." The evidence we have considered thus far comes solely from the direct testimony of whites. We listen to this voice
of Joe Oliver with the greatest of interest:

I wuz born in Hill County, Texas in de year 1847. My Master wuz named James Gatlin, he cum from Missippi befo' de Civil War an' brung his slaves wid him, he had a plantation of five hundred acres of land an' 'bout two hundred slaves. Dey cum to Texas befo' de war for freedom, de bes' I remember dey wuz here w'en dey had de war wid Mexico.

Dey is so many things dat happened in all dis time dat I does not hardly know how to begin to tell you. In Hill County, my Master had his own gin an' corn mill w'en I was growin' up my daddy had charge of dem an' I helped to run dem. He send de cotton an' de corn an' all dat he raise for de market to sell to Houston by wagon trains. Den after de Houston an' de Texas Central Rail Road is built, he ship hit over de railroad.

After de Civil War is over dey start a school for de w'ite chillun an' one for de nigger's slave chillun, dis is de first school dat I went to, de teachers name wuz Yeager, I was a good big boy den, we did not go to school but 'bout three months at a time, dis wuz in de winter w'en we didn't work in de fields. We had a little log school house wid de benches made from a plank of lumber hewed from a big log, de boys had to take dey turns at what dey would call guard duty now, for de Indians an' de stray niggers wuz passin' all de time. Times wuz in de reconstruction days an' no one could tell what might happen, nobody felt safe. De first church dat I 'members going to wuz de one held in de brush arbor, close by de little log school house.

I well remember one of de camp meetin's, de preacher wuz named Anderson, an' he preach to de sinner de gospel of fire an' brimstone for dey sins, den dey called demselves de Protestan Methodist, an' dey singin' and shoutin' till de break of day, some goin' into trances an' some speakin' in what dey called strange tongues, dis wuz a good chance for de slaves to run away, for w'en dey would rise up from dey trance some would run like de debbil wuz after him, an' jes keep runnin' un' till he run clear off. So de w'ite folks den put's de trusty niggers to guard de door or de way dey leaves if hit in de arbor, but hit is hard to make de trusty ketch dem for dey think hit de Holy Ghost dat is makin' dey run, so dey is afraid to stop dem, claimin' dey can't stop de Holy Ghost.

De w'ite folks Fourth of July dinners wuz de biggest thing dat de nigger got to do to in dem days, if dey wuz one of de helpers dey wuz de lucky nigger. If hit wuz de year for de candidates, dey would have de speakin' jes
befo' an' right after de barbecues. De merchants in Hillsboro would give de groceries, de farmers would give roastin' ears, watermelons, canteloupes, an' de vegetables. De hunters would bring in de deer, wild turkey, beef an' hogs to be barbecued. De wimmen would bake de pound cakes, dewberry, grape an' wild plum pies.

Our old Master an' his folks would go an' help to fix de tables dey would have hit in de brush arbor, under dis dey has de seats an' de speakers stand, after awhile dey has de sawdust to spread on de ground but at first hit wuz jes on de grass. De w'ite folks cum from all over de country nearly to Fort Worth, Dallas, Waco, an' all 'roun', especially de year dey has de race for de Governor. I 'members de year dat Richard Coke, an' governor Ross run for his office, bof' times de Waco folks had dey crowds to cum an' spread de papers for dem 'roun', dey would call hit de boosters now, but in dese times dey didn't have dese big words.

After dey has de speakin's for de candidates, den dey has de barbecue dey has de long tables, an' dey eats untill hit is mos' gone, den while de niggers eat an' de wimmen gather up de leavin' of de barbecue, dey fires off de canon an' de bands play Yankee Doodle, an' Dixie an' Hail Columbia, den if dey has a place for de crowd to dance, de ole fiddler begin to play de dance tunes. If de w'ite folks fiddler did not cum den dey has de ole black fiddler whose name was Caleb, he plays de fiddle, 'nother plays de jews harp, an' still 'nother one plays de hoe by scrapin' on hit wid a case knife, dey like to play songs like "Oh, git up gals in the mawnin', Oh, git up gals in the mawnin', Oh, git up gals in the mawnin', jes at de break ob day." At de end of de dance, de players give a extra loud blow to dey instruments an' de dancers dance wid dey heel an' toe a rat-tat-tat. Den 'nother tune de w'ite folks like wuz de "Gal I Left Behind Me," kase dey wuz all from de old States mostly an' dis song wuz about de gal in dey old home, an' many a one left a behin' dem, dey jes didn't go back after w'en dey starts dey own home in Texas.

I kin hear dem singin' hit as dey listen to de band a playin' an' de dancin'. De old men leans back wid dey eyes closed an' dey sing to de fiddlers tunes, "I'll cross Red River one more time, If de tears don't fall an' drown me, A-weepin' for dat pretty little gal, De gal I left behind me."

Oh, dem wuz de days befo' de hard times cum, but I must think up some thing about what happened, dey wuz de Ku-Klux, dat got to whippin' de niggers so bad after freedom day my daddy moved nearer to Hillsboro an' lived
wid Dr. Craig. He wuz a practicin' medicine at Hillsboro an' he would not let de Ku-Klux whip his niggers dat wuz workin' for him after de war is over an' de slaves is free.

After freedom my daddy went to political conventions at Austin in de days of reconstruction, an' helped to pass de laws, but de Yankees sent so many rascals down here to run things dat de Texas men would not stand for dis. Dey wuz called de carpet baggers, dey took de vote away from de very men dat had freed Texas from Mexico, kase dey had fought for de rebels, den dey put de nigger troops over at Tyler, kase hit wuz he headquarters for de Yankees. Dey put two niggers troops here, an' so dey din't have any better sence den to think dey could run de town, de men an' women bof' wuz not safe to go anywhar at night for fear of dese soldiers, w'en all of a sudden dey wuz de Ku-Klux a ridin' up an' down de streets at night, dey wuz robbed in w'ite, an' not a sound did dey make but dey horse hoofs a poundin' de pavements, an' in de road dat led into de city.

De next mornin' dey would be de bodies of de soljers a hangin' to de trees, sometimes dey would be out in de cemeteries. Dey put de soljers guards from de nigger troops to guard de roads dat led into de town but de guards body would be found hangin' jes de same as de soljers. De soljers called dem [i.e. de Ku-Klux] "de w'ite devils," but pretty soon dey [i.e. de soldiers] commenced to behave demselves, an' let de w'ite folks go 'bout dey business, an' so de troops had enough of de Ku-Klux an' wuz soon sent some other place.

Jes befo' de war broke out dey wuz a lot of trouble in some places in Texas, 'bout de slaves. Dey wuz what dey called de Black Republican party an' de Democratic party, an' I does not know how many others, but dey keep up de agitation among de w'ite folks, an' dat de nigger is goin' to rise up again de w'ite folks, an' dat de nigger is burnin' de houses an' doin' all kinds of devilment, but to dis day I thinks hit wuz de work of de Abolition preachers dat cum to work up de niggers against de w'ite folks.

Dey had big fires from Waxahachie, on up to Dallas an' other town an' dese abolition preachers put hit on de slaves. I 'member at de town of Henderson dey had one of de bigges' fires an' several niggers wuz hung for hit. So dey organizes what dey call de vigilance committees whose business hit wuz to arrest dese folks dat is tryin' to git de slaves to rise up agin' de w'ite folks, an' to keep a watch for de ones who is burnin' up de towns. Dis wuz w'en Houston wuz de Governor.

Den de war cum, an' dey forgit 'bout dese troubles,
for de slaves didn't rise up agin' de w'ite folks like dey had been
told to do by dese abolition preachers, or whoever dey wuz. W'en de
war cum den dey didn't bother us
any more, dey had gained dey purpose to work up feelings
'bout de war, but dey did not succeed in makin' de slaves
turn agin' dey Masters except de ones dat went to de war,
an' mos' of dese cum back de first chance dey git.

You has heard tell 'bout de Texas Rangers all you
life, I knows, but to de ones dat wuz livin' w'en dey wuz
needed, dey wuz de bes' soljers dey wuz. Dey wuz de bes'
protection from de Indians an' de Mexicans dat Texas had.
Dey had to be good riders to be able to fight de Indians,
an' mos' especially de Comanches. Dey wuz good riflemen,
an' dey used de six-shooters as well as de soljers in the
army, maybe better. Dey knew de trails throu' de timber,
an' could track de Indians as well as de Indian scouts
could. For dey arms, dey carried de revolver, de pistol a
rope an' a bowie knife. I 'member how dey look w'en dey
ridin' by, dey used to wear de old buckskin leggins, an'
de big hats, leather boots, an' dey spurs dey always wore.

At first dey wuz jes to keep de Indians an' de
Mexicans from dey raids on de settlers, but after de war
wuz over dey wuz called on again', de Indians wuz
troublesome agin,' de carpet-baggers from de North cum to
give trouble, an' to take what dey could away from de
country, an' den dey wuz fightin' an' den dey desperadoes,
an' all dese things, so dey jes had to cum back an' help
to git Texas straightened out, an' dis is jes what dey
did. Some of dese rangers dat I kin 'member hearin de
w'ite folks talk 'bout wuz Colonel Ford, John Hays, Ben
McCulloch an' de two Ross's. De Rosses wuz from Waco, I
thinks, an' dis McCulloch was from Tennessee, an' wuz a
friend to Davy Crockett, dat wuz killed in de Alamo. Hit
seems to be dat McCulloch wuz killed in de Civil War, but
I does not know for sure.

I kin 'member, too, de way de Rangers took dey water
wid dem, dey used de gourds for dey water bottles, dey
used de long neck gourds, an' tied dem to de horn of dey
saddles. De way dey cleaned de gourds wuz to fill dem wid
water an' let stan' over night wid a little sugar in hit,
de next mornin' dey would put hit over a red ant-hill, an'
de ants would eat all de insides of it de gourd but de
shell, to git de sugar, den hit would be ready to wash an'
use.

De folks does not know how many useful things dat de
gourd wuz used for in de early days, dey made good
dippers, spoons an' dishes, I had seen de big ones used to
keep sugar, lard an' coffee. Dey would last a lot longer
dan de chin an' de glass dishes. De Indians wuz de ones I
expect dat showed de w'ite folks how to use de gourd.

Yes, I kin 'member seein' de Indians when I wuz a boy, some of dem wuz friendly Indians, an' would cum to de old Torrey Tradin' House on de Tehuacana Creek, which some of de folks called de Tradin' House Creek, dis wuz below Hillsboro, but dey pass by our homes w'en dey goin' to hit. Sometimes dey trade us some beads for corn or something to eat.

I kin 'member as a boy, our Master takin' us to see de Indians w'en dey would be camped on de Brazos; sometimes dey would have hogs killed an' dressed an' trade a whole ham for jes a few yards of calico or something to eat or wear. After dey begun to dress more like de w'ite folks. I has heard de folks say dat de Indians, or de Commanches met wid dey head chiefs in de month of June at de time of de new moon on de Salt Fork of de Colorado an' de Brazos rivers, to plan dey huntin' an' anything else dey planned for de year. Dis wuz a kind of picnic an' de Indians dat wuz not in de plannin' gathered de salt for dey use, an' run races on dey horses, had sham battles, foot races an' all de Indians do w'en dey is takin' dey vacation, we would call it now.

As I used to hear de talk 'bout de Indians, I learned how dey made de arrow heads, dey took large flint stones, broke dem into pieces an' den dey made dey any shape dey wanted wid de help of stone tools. Sometimes dey used de rib bones of deer an' buffalo as a chisel in makin' de arrows. De bones wuz cut de size dey wanted an' given a sharp point. After awhile dey used spikes made from hoop-iron, copper an' bone.

De Indians in dese days wuz de most we thought about befo' de war, for we wuz always afraid de Comanches or de tribes dat wuz not friendly would cum an' steal our Massa's oxen, cattle, or if dey didn't kill dem. Dey would take de bright moonlight nights for dey raids, I kin 'member how my daddy an' mammy would take dey time 'bout stayin' awake watching for de Indians. But if dey cum I does not 'member right now.

In dis country aroun' Hillsboro hit wuz on de Prairie an' what dey had been using de old time plowes befo' de Civil War, dey had new ways of sowing an' harvestin' de crops. Dey begun to use de mowin' machine and de reaper, de horse power thresher an' de fannin' mill, de kind of reaper some one made wuz called a self-rake reaper an' what dey called a broadcast reaper. Den he finally quits de use of oxen an' he commences to bring de horses to Texas from de old States, mostly Missouri, de mules an' horses bof' dey bring from de other States, of course dey has de Indian ponies, what dey call mustangs, an de
Indians had started de horses bof' by catchin' de wild ones an' bringin' to de tradin' post called Torreys an' later dey bring dem from de old States.

Den I kin 'member how after awhile dey commence to ship de lumber down de rivers an' by de wagon trains to Texas for de settlers to build dey houses instid of de log cabins of de first settlers. De settlers dat I knew wuz de prairie settlers, an' dey wuz some different to de ones dat first settles de timber country, dey wuz a huntin' for more land to break an' put in cultivation.

After de Civil War de demand for flour wuz so much bigger dat de prairie farmer commenced to sow more wheat, an' de same way hit wuz for corn so dey had to invent more machinery to harvest hit, an' hit wuz de same way wid de meat, de demand wuz for so much more dat dey commenced to need pasture dey call de short grass, which wuz on de prairie. Dey commenced to raise de cattle for di on de open range w'en dey had driven de Indians off. After awhile dey finds dat by jes feedin' de herds of cattle an' grazin' dem along de trails to de North dat by de time dey git to de end of de trail, dey is ready to sell, an' I kin 'member back as far as de year 1865 w'en dey had started to grazin' de cattle up dese trails.

I kin 'member how de cowboy's den wuz so common, as much as de farmer, dat took de place of de plantation owners befo' freedom, but de farmer soon begun to put all dis land in cultivation so bye an' by de cowboy had to go further west, some of dem didn't go away, dey jes stayed and hung up his spurs and went to plowin' de land an' turnin' his pasture into a cotton an' corn field, but while dey wuz here dey made hit worth de time for dey wuz one of de best folks dat ever lived in dese parts. I kin 'member dey camp-fires an' how dey had de spring round ups befo' dey start on de drives up de trails, de songs of de cowboy wuz a whole lot better to hear on de prairies or aroun' de camp fires dan de ones you hear de city dudes singin' dese days.

As I look back on de trail dat is already gittin' dim in my memory I kin still see de camp fires a sparklin' on de prairies an' den I kin hear my old Master as dey ride up to de house an' call "Hello, de house!" I kin see de w'ite-topped prairie schooners slowly toiling up de trail or by de river bed as dey camp for de night, I hear de voices of dey chilluns dat is to be de men of today, an' I is glad dat I was born early enough to ketch de dying echoes of dey songs, an' to get a little glimpse of de light of dey fires.

The interview as a whole has been reproduced so that the reader can
see the three pertinent paragraphs in context. Oliver has been socialized to view political matters very much through the eyes of the ruling class, and therefore he is certainly not providing us with testimony reflecting a radical social ideology. His memory is remarkably clear and the resulting narrative reflects unusual powers of observation. Therefore, his statement that the abolitionists in Texas did not succeed in making the slaves turn against their masters except the ones that went to the war, is a telling bit of information otherwise unknown. Some slaves were influenced by abolitionists working in Texas to turn against their masters, and when the war came they left to do what they could to support the anti-slavery cause. To be sure most returned home after discovering how little they could do for the time being, although some were able to join the Union army and many were employed in the army's support system. In any case, those who "turned against" their masters voted with their feet when they went north to the war, whether they remained in the north or whether they returned home to await the arrival of the Union troops. Their vote bespoke their desire for freedom. They were freedom fighters, and not a few such southern slaves died for this cause. It is important to bear all this in mind when we reflect on the Dallas Fire of 1860.

Whether Samuel, Patrick or Cato, had they survived the aftermath of the fire of 1860, would have been numbered among the freedom fighters who voted with their feet to side with the anti-slavery forces coming from the north, we will never know. But what Joseph Oliver tells us about the social history of the times enables us to see the fires of 1860 which flared up in North Texas during July of that election year in a much clearer light.
Oliver's account documents a connection between some Methodist preaching and runaway slaves. This is not a direct abolitionist-Methodist connection. But the fact that "trusty niggers" could permit slaves to get away on the grounds that Methodist preaching had put the unstoppable Holy Ghost into them explains why in the minds of the slave owners, slave preachers like Samuel could not be trusted, especially when they had contact with white Methodist preachers from outside the South. For once this escape mechanism was in place, every brush arbor camp meeting to which slaves were permitted to go, could result in one or more slaves escaping under the guise of being driven by the Holy Ghost. Thus slave preachers like Anderson were a constant problem for slave owners. And in the 4th of July season, especially in an election year when campaign issues were treated in political and patriotic speeches, slaves who were permitted to attend such political meetings as were some slaves in Dallas County in the year 1860, could be forgiven if what they heard from slave preachers like Anderson and Samuel Smith was blended with what they were hearing about Black Republicans and the "threat" of a potential abolition of slavery in the political rhetoric of the time. So between July 4, 1860 and July 8, 1860, it is not unreasonable to think that some slaves in the North Texas slave community made their final decision to participate in a conspiracy abetted by anti-slavery views of preachers like Blount and McKinney. If so, such apocalyptic thinking and action as was required can only be judged premature or unsuccessful in the sense some so judge John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry less than a year before. Seen in the larger perspective of history such insurrectionary activity as did take place at Harper's Ferry, Virginia and
may have taken place in Dallas, Texas, must be seen as threads in the
imagined fabric of history that unites these events with other signs of
insurrectionary activity on the part of anti-slavery elements such as the
departure of some North Texas slaves influenced by abolitionists to "turn
again' dey Masters," once full scale hostility broke out on a national scale.

Even if Samuel, Patrick and Cato were completely innocent of any
direct involvement of the burning of Dallas, it is still to a small number
of slaves in North Texas who had been influenced by "abolition preachers"
(as Joseph Oliver terms them) that we must look for the will and
determination to set Dallas and other North Texas towns and villages afire
on or soon after July 8, 1860. Joseph Oliver does not hesitate to make this
connection. His oral history supports and confirms this hypothesis.
Samuel, we are told, had been seen talking to two of these "abolition
preachers." If these reports are worthy of our trust, and we have no
reasonable doubt but that they are, then it follows that at least he of the
Dallas three was among those slaves who were in a position to have been
influenced by the anti-slavery sentiments of these emissaries from the
North. To this extent, Samuel potentially falls into the category of those
slaves who, under the influence of abolitionists, set the fires that burned
the North Texas towns and villages during July of 1860. This is not to say
that Blunt or McKinney advocated arson on the part of Dallas slaves, nor
that Samuel under their influence participated in the setting fire to
Dallas. It is only to say that Joseph Oliver's testimony lends some
credence to the slave insurrection theory on which the slavocracy of Dallas
acted in deciding that some slaves had to die in order to nip in the bud any
possible slave insurrection (imagined or real), connected with the Dallas fire. It is a fact that Samuel, Patrick and Cato were chosen to die. It is reasonable to agree with the reports that they were leaders in the slave community. And it is virtually certain that all three opposed slavery and longed for freedom. It is not likely that they were chosen at random. They probably were chosen because they were believed to be against slavery and capable of acting on their convictions. By hanging Samuel, Patrick and Cato, the slavocracy of Dallas intended to make examples of them, so that any like-minded slaves (or anti-slavery whites) could plainly see what the consequence of further putative or real insurrectionary acts would be. Any behavior in the county that could pass for insurrection would be violently suppressed. Because as slaves they longed for freedom, and because they were chosen by the leaders of a pro-slavery oligarchy to die in the interests of maintaining a slave economy—a way of life that was dependant upon human bondage—their deaths can have redemptive meaning for those who reflect upon them.

Dr. Pryor may not have been fully conscious of the roots of his begrudging admiration of the silence of Samuel, Patrick and Cato as they were escorted by armed guards through the streets of Dallas to the hanging place on the banks of the Trinity. But his admiration was probably rooted in part in his own spiritual formation in the ecclesiastical culture of Virginia, going back to the Gospels and behind the Gospels to the Prophet Isaiah. In order to enter into this interpretative tradition and understand its meaning we need only imagine ourselves as the mother of one of those three slaves, nurtured in the spirituality of slave preaching and watching the proceedings.
Behold, my servant whom I have chosen
My beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.
I will put my Spirit upon him,
And he shall proclaim justice to the nations
He will not wrangle or cry aloud,
Nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

As the noose of the rope was lowered over her son's head and the hanging knot was firmly pressed against his neck, her silent prayer would have been: "Please, Lord, stay with my son. You haven't brought him this far to let him down. Please, Lord, don't let him say a mumbling word."

Such prayers, sent up to God by the slaves who had heard Samuel preach and who thus knew how they were to stand in death, were answered. There was not a mumbling word from any of the three. The faith community was together in the hour of death. Even Dr. Pryor, standing on the fringe of the community, felt its power.

Samuel, Patrick and Cato died nobly. They were martyrs for a just cause. Similar sacrifices were made by many others who remain mostly unknown. But we know the names of these three, and their memory is a blessing to all freedom loving people. Thus in Dallas were the words of the Prophet Isaiah fulfilled:

"They did not wrangle or cry aloud,
Nor did anyone hear their voices in the streets."
Notes

1 The Dallas Herald, January 4, 1860.
For an appraisal of the effect of Helper's book upon the developing situation see Mr. Buchanan's Administration on the Eve of the Rebellion, Chapter III.

"Senator Seward, of New York, was at this period the acknowledged head and leader of the Republican party . . . In accordance with the views expressed by Senator Seward, Hinton Helper's 'Impending Crisis' soon afterward appeared, a book well calculated to alarm the southern people. This was ushered into the world by the following warm commendation from Mr. Seward himself: 'I have read the "Impending Crisis of the South" with great attention. It seems to me a work of great merit, rich yet accurate in statistical information, and logical in analysis.'

On the 9th of March, 1859, a Republican committee in New York . . ., issued a circular warmly commending the book, and proposing to publish one hundred thousand copies of a compendium of it at a cheap rate for gratuitous circulation. In order to raise subscriptions for the purpose, they obtained the recommendations of this plan by sixty-eight Republican members of Congress . . . in the following terms: 'We the undersigned, members of the House of Representatives of the National Congress, do cordially endorse the opinion and approve the enterprise set forth in the foregoing circular' . . .

Published under such auspices, the 'Impending Crisis' became at once an authoritative exposition of the principles of the Republican party. The original, as well as a compendium, were circulated by hundreds of thousands, North, South, East, and West. No book could be better calculated for the purpose of intensifying the mutual hatred between the North and the South . . .

. . . In the midst of the excitement produced by this book, both North and South, occurred the raid of John Brown into Virginia. This was undertaken for the avowed purpose of producing a servile insurrection among the slaves, and aiding them by military force in rising against their masters." pp. 57-62.

See also Crusade Against Slavery: Friends, Foes, and Reforms, 1820-1860, by Louis Filler. "Earnestness and thought have given eloquence to this self-schooled southern abolitionist . . . His book was proscribed in the South (it had been printed in Baltimore), and he himself was declared an outlaw . . .

In the North, the book began its career slowly, but became a phenomenal success. By the time of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, it was a major document of the national crisis. Millions of copies circulated during the presidential election which followed especially in doubtful states. So pedestrian a politician as John Sherman of Ohio, brother of the later famous Civil War general, William T. Sherman, . . . became the center for harsh debate as a candidate for Speaker of the House of Representatives. He was charged with having endorsed Helper's book, though at the time he had not read it (pp. 302-303).
One of those who raised this question against Sherman was Dallas' Congressional Representative, John H. Reagan, and this from the floor of the House on January 4, 1860, the exact same day the Dallas Herald republished the article on Helper's book printed in the New York Herald. [Speech, Hon. John H. Reagan of Texas: Delivered in the House of Representatives, January 4, 1860. A 16 page pamphlet printed by Thos. McGill, Washington, D.C. n.d.] Reagan objected to the way in which Helper's book and John Brown's raid were being interpreted by others and offers his own analysis of the impending crisis (pp. 2-3).

The controversial "Bailey" letter which has served as the linchpin in the defense of the hanging of Anthony Bewley for his alleged involvement (as an "abolitionist") in the North Texas fires, concludes with a "tell-tale" N.B. "Brother Leake will give you what few numbers of 'Impending Crisis' I have. Also Brother Summer's speech, and Brother Beecher's letter, etc. Farewell." ["The Texas Slave Insurrection of 1860," by William W. White, pp. 265-269.] There is a collection of Helper's pamphlets in the St. Louis Mercantile Library, according to Louis Filler, op cit., p. 301, f.n. 100. Filler lists other books about Helper in this footnote, as well as in f.n. 102 on p. 302.

2 See The State Gazette, Austin, Saturday, August 4, 1860 p. 2, column 8, and The Weekly Telegraph, August 14, 1860 from the Houston Telegraph, August 9, 1860, p. 1, column 5.


4 The Weekly Telegraph, Tues., August 7, 1860, p. 2, bottom two thirds of column 6, top of column 7.

This was "the second railroad on which work began in Texas" and "was chartered as the Galveston and Red River Railway Company on March 11, 1848," see S. G. Read, A History of the Texas Railroads, p. 65. The Texas Legislature "on September 1, 1856, authorized a change in the name of the road to the Houston and Texas Central Railway Company." By 1860 this railroad had extended thirty miles to Millican. Work on grading continued until it was brought to a temporary halt in March, 1861. "In 1858 the legislature had authorized the extension of the road beyond the Red River through the Indian Territory so as to connect in Kansas and Missouri with the great network of roads which were then in progress or projected throughout the Western States and Territories of the Union," p. 71. This dream never materialized.

The first successful railroad venture in Texas was carried out by General Sidney Sherman who came to Texas from Kentucky in 1836. His boyhood home, however, was in Boston, and it was there he went in 1847, where he successfully arranged for the capital investment of his plan. On October 31, 1847 he formed with Boston financiers the Harrisburg City Company, which was subsequently validated by the Texas legislature as the legal operating body for the railroad, which was chartered as The Buffalo Bayou, Brazos and Colorado Railway Company on
February 10, 1847. This was all accomplished without promise or expectation of State aid. Two previous chartered railroads had failed to materialize. Generally speaking it was a major problem for railroad developers to get adequate financing. Such State aid as was made available was hardly adequate, and the capital resources of private investors in Texas were limited. The promotors of the Galveston and Red River Railway Company pushed stock in North Texas, and all kinds of schemes were advanced to get the Southern Pacific Railroad Company (later named the Texas and Pacific) built. This included not only selling stock and State aid, but also the involvement of eastern financial circles centered in Memphis and New York, Op. Cit. pp. 95-103.

Fortunately, family members of Dallas' first great businessman and real estate developer, Alexander Cockrell, have preserved many documents important for understanding the early history of Dallas. Cockrell was born in Kentucky June 8, 1820. He served in the Mexican War. He came to Dallas in 1848 and raised and sold cattle and freighted from Houston, Jefferson and Shreveport. In 1852, the same year that John H. Reagan was elected District Judge, Cockrell sold out his stock and purchased John Neely Bryan's headright of the City of Dallas. This included outright ownership of one third of all land within the city. He went into the building supply business and built the first bridge across the Trinity River. "He was a benevolent and enterprising man respected by all who knew him," according to John H. Cochran. See Dallas County: A Record of its Pioneers and Progress, pp. 66-67. Among the documents preserved by his family are two of particular interest for understanding the prospective importance of Railroads in the minds of Dallas leaders during the period under study. The first is a certificate issued in Houston by the Galveston and Red River Railway Company documenting that Alex Cockrell was a shareholder in the capital stock of said company. It is dated the 17th day of December, 1856. The second is a document dated 23rd day of July 1857 conveying land and right of way to the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, the right of way being fifty feet wide through the town of Dallas, and two hundred feet wide through any other land owned by Alexander Cockrell. This was done in consideration of the sum of one dollar, "as well as in consideration of the great advantages that would accrue to Cockrell," should the railroad pass "within one mile of Dallas." This document was a promotional form gotten up by the Railroad to induce support for building the railroad. Cockrell was dead serious about the deal for he stipulated that in addition to right of way privileges through Dallas proper, he would convey to the Railroad "three hundred and twenty acres of land." Dallas was to be criss-crossed by railroads going north and south, east and west.

5 See The New York Tribune, reprinted in The Weekly Telegraph, August 9, 1860, p. 1 col. 5. See also The Liberator, Boston, Fri. Sept 17, 1858 p. 152, column 2; Fri. April 22, 1859, p. 1; Fri. July 1, 1859 p. 103, column 3, et al. See S. G. Reed, A
The Peters Colony of Texas: A History and Biographical Sketches of the Early Settlers, by Seymour V. Connor, The Texas State Historical Association, Austin, 1959, p. 107. All the preceding statistics are drawn from this same source pp. 104-105.

Between 1850 and 1860, according to the Federal Census, the slave population of Dallas County climbed from 207 to 1,074, according to Thomas H. Smith in "Blacks in Dallas: From Slavery to Freedom," Heritage News, Vol. X, No. 1, Dallas County Heritage Society, Dallas, TX, p. 18. Drawing from slave statistics published annually for Texas counties in the Texas Almanac, and from the Federal Census both in 1850 and 1860, Thomas Smith was able to produce the following information: (a) In 1850, 58,161 slaves were in Texas. By 1855, the number had increased to 105,704. In 1860 it had increased to 182,566, "one third of the state's population" (p. 19); (b) In Dallas County the figures for the same period were: 1850, 207; 1855, 481; 1860, 1,074; (c) In 1850, of the total white population in Dallas County of 2,536, 2% owned slaves. By 1860 the white population had risen to 7,591, and slave owners were 3% of this total. The slave population in Dallas County in 1860 was 12% of the total; (d) In 1850 the number of slave owners in Dallas County was 56. By 1860 this number had increased to 228. Of this number 22 had been in Dallas County in 1850 but had been slaveless at that time. During the decade 1850-60, 180 new slave owners entered the county. Of the 56 slave owners in 1850, 27, or 48% were gone from the county by 1860; three more had given up their slaves but remained in the county (p. 19); (e) In 1860, 53% of Dallas County slave owners were born in Kentucky and Tennessee, 23% were from Virginia and the Carolinas, 6% listed northern states as places of birth. There were slave owners from England, France, and Canada. In all, seventeen states and three foreign countries were represented by the slave holding class in Dallas County (p. 19); (f) 173 slave owners were engaged in agriculture, including five planters (owners of 20 or more slaves). Seven of those 173 slave owners listed themselves as physicians/farmers. Five other physicians held slaves. Other professions listed as holding slaves were wine merchants, six lawyers, including the 'Chief Justice of the County Court,' and the District Judge, three carpenters, three hotel keepers, a minister, a school teacher, constable, county surveyor, justice of the peace, county clerk, merchant clerk, publisher and wool carder (p. 19). Seventy five slaves lived within the Dallas city limits in 1860. 57% of the slave owners in 1860 owned between one and three slaves. 30% of the slave owners in 1860 held between four and nine slaves; twenty four owned four; thirteen held five; eleven owned six; eight owned seven; eleven owned eight, and six held nine (p. 20). The greatest number of slaves owned by one person was twenty-three. Next was twenty-two. Two men owned twenty-one slaves each. The fifth largest number of slaves owned by one person was 20; (g) In 1860 the
slave population remained young as it had been in 1850. Forty per cent were between the ages of fifteen and forty; 46% were between one and fourteen. The largest group was between twenty and thirty, comprising 19% of the total; 17% were between the ages of five and one; thirty five were under one year. Females outnumbered males 561 to 513 (p. 20). (h) There were no slave markets in Dallas, consequently new slaves were introduced into the county by birth, purchased by other owners in the county, brought in by new immigrants, or bought elsewhere and transported to their new homes. On occasion runaway slaves were caught in the county and lodged in the jail. Notice of the slave's whereabouts was posted in the newspaper and if not claimed in a certain amount of time, they were sold at public auction (p. 20). Smith documents this summary statement from articles in the Dallas Herald during the period 1858-59.


8 Op. Cit. p. 142. In 1847, as a State Representative, J. H. Reagan with others "forced the door" of a hall in Austin and took some legal papers from the desk of the clerk of the House of Representatives of the Texas State Legislature. Memoirs: With Special Reference to Secession and the Civil War, by John H. Reagan, edited by Walter Flavius McCaleb, N.Y., 1906, p. 54. There were extenuating circumstances under which this questionable action was taken. It is mentioned here only to document the fact that J. H. Reagan and his associates were prepared when they thought it necessary to take matters into their own hands.

9 Loc. Cit. [Connor's negative representation of J. H. Reagan's modus operandi in the Peters Colony affair is in contrast to that given by his biographer, Ben H. Procter, in Not Without Honor: The Life of John H. Reagan, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1962, pp. 72-86.]

10 Op. Cit., pp. 142-3. The full role of J. H. Reagan in the history of Dallas has yet to be documented and assessed. Although his home was near Palestine, Reagan had significant real estate holdings in Dallas. He practiced law in the city and formed a law partnership with Judge Nathaniel M. Burford which he maintained until 1852 when he was elected District Judge of a judicial area including Dallas. He presided over the trial of Jane Elkins who pleaded not guilty to the charge of murder. On May 16, 1853, the jury found the defendant guilty and she was hung on May 27. The prosecuting attorney was his former law-partner, N. M. Burford. When asked whether she had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon her, Jane Elkins, a slave, whose owner, a widow, had done nothing to defeat the execution of the law upon her slave, had remained silent. Reagan
resigned his judgeship to run for a seat in the United States House of Representatives in 1857. He was supported by the Dallas Herald, and other moderate pro-slavery newspapers. He won the election, and was re-elected two years later. Dallas was in the congressional District Reagan served. He returned to Washington in December 1859, and on January 4, he gave an important address in the House of Representatives in which he warned his moderate anti-slavery colleagues that Texas and other slave-holding states would secede from the Union unless the radical anti-slavery proclivities of the Republicans could be checked. At issue when he spoke was whether a Republican colleague who had endorsed Helper's plan to free the slaves should be elected Speaker of the House. He lamented the fact that some sixty representatives of Congress had endorsed Helper's plan, and saw this development, along with John Brown's recent raid, as two ominous signs that the North would not make the kind of compromises that would be required to save the Union. The remarkable coincidence of the fact that Reagan made the speech on the same day the Dallas Herald published the piece on Helper's book remains unexplained. Reagan eventually played a leading role in Texas' secession from the Union. Samuel Bogart (Reagan's old rival) and J. W. Throckmorton were successful in keeping Collin County in the anti-secessionist column. Reagan became Postmaster General in the Confederate Cabinet, and after Reconstruction served as a U.S. Senator from Texas. Throckmorton served as Governor of Texas during Reconstruction.

11 The Houston Telegraph, Saturday, July 14, 1860, p. 3, column 2. Dr. Samuel B. Pryor came to Dallas in 1846. "About four years later his brother, Dr. Charles R. Pryor, joined him here. These gentlemen were scions of an old Virginia family, and were noted both for their social and intellectual culture as well as their professional ability." [Memorial and Biographical History of Dallas County, Texas, Chicago, 1892, p. 205.]

12 The Standard, Clarkesville, Saturday, July 14th, 1860.


14 The Dallas Morning News, December 14, 1890, p. 20, column 3.


17 The Texas Republican, Marshall, Texas, July 28, 1860, p. 2 col. 2 from right.


21 The Weekly Telegraph, Tuesday, August 7, 1860, p. 2, bottom two thirds of column 6, top of 7.

22 "When we were preparing to leave Virginia, my father was requested by a relative to bring to Texas an unruly negro, Old Pat, and to sell him. Old Pat had always been a maker of trouble. My father [Dr. Roy B. Scott] traded him to Lawyer George Guess for 320 acres of land on the Preston road seven miles north of the city. Old Pat continued to be an agitator in Texas as he had been in Virginia. He was tried for complicity in the burning of Dallas, convicted, and was one of the three negroes executed for that crime." This statement was made in 1922 by Samuel Beverly Scott, who was only six years old when Dallas burned. He was 68 years old at the time he made this statement, and while his memory of Patrick's character and reputation in Virginia will have been influenced by stories he had heard other members of the Scott family tell about Patrick, the report of this witness, no doubt largely based on oral tradition within the Scott family, that Patrick had come to Dallas in 1858 with the Scott family from Virginia, should be accepted as reliable. Dallas Morning News, Sunday Magazine section, Sunday, December 31, 1922, p. 6, top half of cols. 5-8.

Samuel Scott states in the same interview that the Scott family party "counting the negroes, outnumbered the population of Dallas. It was a case of doubling its population overnight." He stipulates that the party "was composed of a number of white families and 200 negro slaves." John H. Cochran, who had grown up with, and was a good friend of, S. B. Scott, five years after Scott's interview of 1922, in his book Dallas County, A Record of its Pioneers and Progress, issued a confirming statement stipulating that Col. Samuel McGregor Scott and his wife Camila were accompanied by the families of their seven children and grandchildren. S. B. Scott himself was the youngest of four children of Dr. Roy B. Scott and his first wife Lucy Ann. One may estimate that the total number of whites, including children, would come to at least 20 and perhaps as many as 50 or more. Cochran simply states: "The Scott family, including their negroes, numbered over 200." (p. 62) He refers to the party as a whole as "a large, intelligent, industrious and thrifty population from Virginia, headed by Col. Samuel McGregor Scott, with five sons and two sons-in-law." (p. 61) Sociologically speaking we must take account of the impact of such a proportionately large and sudden increase in the Dallas population, especially at the point of the precipitous increase of the slave population, which all at once would have been quadrupled. Not all of the slaves in this party settled in Dallas. Some went to work on the Scott farm land 11 miles north of
Dallas. And some were sold and of these some would have been bought by owners outside Dallas. Nonetheless, in estimating the potential danger of a slave insurrection in Dallas, imagined or real, we must contend with the sociological consequences of this unusual "slave-economy" population increase in the town of Dallas just one year before the news of John Brown's invasion of Virginia and just two years before Dallas burned. Could all this sudden slave population from Virginia stir the imagination of a Virginian like Pryor and stimulate him to imagine the expansive dreams to which he gives expression in his letter to the Houston Telegraph of July 25? In that letter he refers to "The danger of suffering negroes to go out to celebrations, to hear political speeches and to hold meetings of their own," before asking his Houston friend to "hurry on the work" of building the railroad that, once completed, would pave the way to transforming "thousands" of acres, now idle, into fields "white with cotton." Was there a surplus of slave labor (1858-60) created by the Scott migration? Were there idle hands that needed to be put to work? We are only at the beginning of the research that is opening up before us!


The essential ideas and claims of the Texas promoters of this Railroad (who had placed two New Yorkers on their Board of Directors), and who were looking for financing investment from capitalists in New York and Boston, were as follows:

(1) The three hundred mile stretch of land lying between the Trinity and Brazos Rivers was the "backbone" of Texas.

(2) The projected railway would be built from Galveston and Houston in the South along that "backbone" to Dallas and Fort Worth in the North, and then on to the Red River.

(3) A committee of the Board of Directors reported to the President and Directors that it estimated that during the year 1855, with only the first seventy miles between Houston and Washington on the Brazos in place, the company would realize receipts of $552,450 for services rendered to a twenty-six county area now dependent upon ox and horse drawn wagons.

(4) These counties were listed as: "parts of Harris, Montgomery, Austin and Walker; all of Grimes, Washington, Fayette, Bastrop, Travis, Burnet, Williamson, Dallas, Ellis, Navarro, Limestone, Freestone, Leon and Madison."

(5) Out of the $552,450 in receipts, including receipts for passengers, United States mail, government stores and troops, city manufactures, lumber, merchandise, livestock and produce, the receipts for carrying exports from these counties, which, of course, in the first year would have to be carried by wagon to Washington on the Brazos,
would total $171,250. This included receipts for transporting horses, cattle, hogs, sheep, corn, oats, hay, hides, pelts, and cotton. Out of the total of $171,250, the receipts for transporting cotton alone would total $131,250. This was more than five times the amount for transporting all other produce together, and more than eight times the amount for transporting all forms of livestock.

(6) The Chief Engineer, J. W. P. Lewis, estimated that the cost for constructing and furnishing the first 70 miles of the railroad with depots, locomotives and all other equipment was $1,204,050. With receipts for the first year totalling $552,450, it was clear that the investors, even after allowing for wages and salaries for operating the railroad for the year, could envision a profitable return on their investment within a relatively short period of time. It was obvious however, that that prospect depended for one thing heavily on a constant and growing supply of cotton over a long period of time.

In 1860 the main produce grown and exported from the Dallas area was wheat. Wheat could be grown and exported from Dallas with free labor and still turn a profit. But not cotton. Informed people could see that the future was with cotton, and that that future required slave labor. It is within the context of these facts as well as those documented in footnote number _, showing that the leading financial and business family in Dallas, the Cockrells, as well as the others Pryor is referring to in his letter, had membership in this Galveston and Red River Railway Company, that we can best understand the full implications of Dr. Pryor's references to the railroad from Houston, cotton and abolitionists.

While the Galveston and Red River Railway Company was busy in the East getting word out about projected plans for development, its "agents held meetings, throughout North Texas, . . . with advertisements and 'write ups' in the weekly newspapers and personal canvassing for funds . . . It was an opportune time. The people wanted a railway. The long haul by wagon from Houston or Shreveport was tedious and expensive" [see Frank M. Cockrell, History of Early Dallas, p. 48].

We have already noted that the leading capitalist in Dallas [see footnote 4] had invested in this railway as early as 1856. But more important is the fact that Madison M. Miller, who was "one of the richest and most successful planters of Dallas County, subscribed for a large block of stock in the railroad." [William Miller Family Scrap Book, Vol. I, p. 26, from a newspaper clipping on Dallas history from about 1892, in the Dallas Public Library Archives] Although he died April 1, 1860, three months before the Dallas Fire, Madison M. Miller was remembered as "one of those instrumental in securing the Texas Central Railroad." The full name of this railroad was: The Houston and Texas Central Railway Company, which began under the name of The Galveston and Red River Railways Company [see footnote 4].

Madison M. Miller was born in Georgia in 1814, and in 1832 moved to Alabama where he eventually became the overseer of three large plantations. With this experience behind him, after serving for two years as a Texas Ranger in about 1846 he settled on a 640 acre homestead
in the southern part of Dallas County [Memorial and Biographical History of Dallas County, Chicago, 1892, p. 603]. Unlike most Peter Colony settlers, Madison M. Miller was a planter, and his heavy investment in the Galveston and Red River Railway Company was, within the context of his experience and vision of the future, not difficult to understand. See "Advantages of Texas Cotton Land," The Texas Almanac for 1859, p. 32; "Commerce of Galveston," giving favorable statistics for cotton exports for years 1856-7, 1857-8, and 1858-9, op. cit., 1860, p. 222; and "The Houston and Texas Central Road," projecting a bright future for grain and cotton growers in North Texas, op. cit., 1861, p. 228.

24 The Weekly Telegraph, August 7, 1860, p. 1, column 8. On July 31, five days before Pryor wrote this letter, and six days after he wrote the previous letter, John T. Coit, a Dallas County resident, wrote to his sister in South Carolina: "I told you in my last [letter] of the excitement here. Since I wrote [that letter] the vigilance committee at Dallas, after investigations extending over two weeks sentenced three negro men to death, and they were executed last Tuesday by hanging in the presence of a large crowd. I attended none of the meetings, but hear from those who did that there is no doubt that they were guilty, and that all the Negroes nearby knew of the plot. Of some forty or fifty examined by them not one I hear but was 'posted' [sic].

"They planned to get all the stores they could and then destroy powder and other ammunition and then on election day to rise, when they expected the Northern abolitionists would invade Texas. They say white emissaries incited them to these proceedings. One man was arrested at Forth Worth some forty miles west of this for trying to induce Negroes to run away, and I learned twenty Sharp's rifles [were] found in his keeping which he said he had for torn [sic]. He was hung on the next morning after he was heard talking to the Negroes.

"It is a demonstration of the fiendish inhumanity of the abolitionists, that they would incite the Negroes to an attempt that could only result in ruin and summary vengeance on themselves. People generally attribute it to two Negroes who were whipped and run out of the county last summer. It is cause of gratitude to the power that turned their counsels to foolishness. Otherwise, before the insurrection was quelled there might have been much blood shed, as the plot was to murder our women and children on election day and seize the arms left in the houses by the men who had gone to vote.

"No Negroes in this immediate neighborhood have been implicated as far as I have heard, but I am afraid as it was so general a thing at Dallas the secret must have been known. The Negroes executed were leaders. One of them they say fired Dallas.

"The town is rebuilding with remarkable energy--brick in many places replaces wood."

Nov. 7 "Dallas is rebuilding rapidly --six brick buildings are just begun--a number are completed. The fire will have improved ..." [This has been copied from an undated newspaper article by Miss Virginia Leddy which was provided me by Barret Stephen Sanders in February,
1989. The original is deposited with the Dallas Historical Society, but unavailable as of this date because of building restoration.

Since the fire started on Sunday, July 8, the 24th of July, the date of the hangings would have fallen on a Tuesday as is here stated. Since this letter is dated July 31, it would have been written one week to the day after the hanging of Samuel, Patrick and Cato. John Coit, by his own testimony was not an eyewitness. But he had the opportunity to talk to others who had participated in the various meetings and his testimony is so near to the events themselves we must give his account considerable weight. The only clear mistake is his reference to two Negroes who were "whipped and run out of the county last summer." All other accounts designate those two men as white. Pryor's letter of July 15th carried the essential information conveyed in this letter about the plot. There is no evidence of any literary dependence. But copies of those early letters of Pryor about the plot could have been printed in papers, copies of which could have found their way back to Dallas by July 31, a good two weeks later. So Coit's letter is not necessarily a separate and independent account of events. However, it is likely that he did talk to others who had participated in the events of the time. So his letter, whether dependent on Pryor's early letters or upon oral reports, is a valid witness to what was widely believed by those who lived in Dallas County the week following the hangings. It is to be noted that Coit does not mention the match theory, and he does designate Samuel, Patrick and Cato, though not by name, as "leaders." The one whom people in Dallas were saying "fired Dallas," was, we may presume, Patrick Jennings.

25 The State Gazette, Austin, Saturday, August 18, 1860, p. 2, column 7.

26 Dallas Morning News, July 10, 1892. The statement: "We whipped every negro in the county one by one," is in accord with the memory of Billy Miller's co-conspirator, Judge Nat M. Burford, who in his interview on the same day at the same annual reunion of the pioneers of Dallas County, stated: "The moderation wing of the meeting compromised with the other [more extreme] faction by offering and voting for a resolution to whip every negro in the county. The resolution was adopted and a committee was appointed to do the whipping."

In the United States Federal Census of 1860, listed under the heading "Free Inhabitants Precinct no. 8, County of Dallas, p. 82, Dwelling House no. 552 is the name Allen Q. Nance, 46, Farmer, Real estate $4,400, Personal $2,250, born in Kentucky, married Elizabeth, 35, in Kentucky. The names of four daughters and two sons are also listed. One of these siblings is listed as David C., age 17, born in Illinois. About 48 years later, near the age of 65, David C. Nance, still living in Dallas County in the old home place in the southern part of the County near De Soto, wrote a brief history of his family including the following autobiographical statement:

"David C. Nance was the first born of his father's house, and in
his tenth year came with his father to Texas, and hence was soon his father's chief assistant in the new home. He herded the sheep, penned the cows, drove the oxen and plowed the field. But soon the great Civil War came and took away the bone and sinew from every home, and home building stopped. In 1860 the question of slavery was on top, and designing slaveowners and traders saw their doom in a coming war; and by intrigue they sought to deceive and so postpone the evil day. Accordingly an imaginary insurrection among the slaves was announced far and near by these men and their dupes. Imaginary incendiaries had passed through in the night and had counseled the slaves, and the poor black men were rounded up like cattle and whipped without mercy. The object of this whipping was two-fold; first, on the part of the traders, to bring down the price of slaves in North Texas; second, to discourage betimes any possible real insurrection in case of war. But these men reckoned without their host, for this whipping hastened the war, and the war brought down the price of slaves everywhere. The writer was present at one of these whippings, though he took no part in it. And even now, after all these years, it makes his blood run cold when he thinks of the horrors of that day. He knew the young men who used the lash, and it is a significant fact that the only one who exhibited any mercy that day is also the only one who has made any success in life. The war came quick on the heels of the whipping, and one of these merciless men perished in the first battle he was in; a second perished in the next; the third was later whipped to death in the penitentiary; and a fourth, who did not use the lash much, and who is now wearing his hoary locks, is without a home and without even one friend in all the earth.

"The very next year the writer entered the army, for he did not see then as he sees now. And if there is any one act of his whole life which he regrets more than another it is this entering the army. He regrets it first, because he wishes he had never assisted in the protection of an institution so fraught with evil as that of human slavery; second, because war is murder, and murder has no mercy in it. Then he entered the army against his father's will, and he regrets it for that, too." From A History of Greater Dallas and Vicinity, Vol. II, "Selected Biography and Memoirs," Mr. L. B. Hill editor, Lewis Publishing Co., Chicago, 1909, pp. 403-4. (Vol. I was edited by Philip Lindsley.) This source is not listed or used by B. P. Gallaway in his otherwise rather detailed biography of David C. Nance: The Ragged Rebel: A Common Soldier in W. H. Parsons' Texas Cavalry 1861-1865, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1988. One effect of Gallaway's excellent biography is to increase confidence in the general credibility of David Nance as a witness. There is no reason to doubt that the mandated whippings were carried out, and sometimes with a measure of brutality.

27 Dallas Morning News, July 10, 1892.
29 Dallas Morning News, July 10, 1892. It is to be noted that
Judge Bentley, although he knows that July 8 was a hot day—so hot that matches ignited from the heat of the sun—he himself has not subscribed to the theory that this caused the Dallas fire. It was well known that the "fire had started, not inside a store where the temperature may have built up on Sunday when stores were closed," but outside in the front of Peak's Drugstore. He conjectures that a match was "thrown into" one of the boxes filled with shavings that was "piled near the [Peak] building," by someone who was lounging and smoking in the upper story of Peak's Drugstore.

The letter of John W. Swindells in the Clarksville Standard, July 14, 1860, dated July 10th, places the starting of the fire "outside." This is corroborated by Richard Pryor's letter of the day before [i.e. July 9th] which specifies that the fire started "in front of" the store. So even thirty two years later, in 1892, the memory that the fire in Dallas started outside Peak's store was firmly fixed in the minds of those who lived in Dallas in 1860. It is not known how the fire of 1860 in Dallas got started, but it is know where it started. There is no eye witness support for a theory that the fire in Dallas started from matches which were ignited accidentally by the high temperature of that day, let alone that this happened inside a store where they were stored. It is tempting to link the starting of the fire in Dallas to the same causes believed to have started fires at Ladonia, Milford, and "in the Drug Store at Honey Grove," during this same general period. The cause reported by the editor of the Clarksville Standard for all these fires was "believed to be combustion of matches." But it is to be noted that this editor specifically refrained from making this link, and for good reason: he had just printed Swindells' letter stating that the fire "broke out among some rubbish on the outside of the store of Messrs. W. W. Peak and Bro." [Underlining mine. W.R.F.] But in 1894, C. A. Williams, while ignoring these facts, states that there is "no doubt" in his mind but that the fire in Dallas started from "matches exploding in hot weather." Cf. History of Denton County, From its Beginning to 1960, ed. F. Bates, Texas Press, Waco, 1978, p. 349, as from Denton Chronicle, May 12, 1894. Williams links the fire in Dallas with fires in Pilot Point, Waxahachie, Denton and "two places out from Denton." But there is no evidence that any of those fires were caused by "exploding matches." The reference in Bentley's letter to the letter from a merchant in the town of Henderson to a friend in Dallas who incidentally mentioned the fact that on the day Dallas burned a box of matches in his store took fire from natural heat is difficult to evaluate. Bentley appears to want to give it some credence since he is at pains to mention the prejudice of those in Dallas who denounced this merchant "for being in collusion with the Negroes." Yet his own theory as to the cause of the fire remains within the bounds of the facts as reported by persons who lived in Dallas in 1860, including himself, i.e. the fire started outside Peak's Drug Store, and not by matches that took fire from natural heat. The so called "match theory" for explaining the cause of the Dallas fire does not fit the facts as described in the earliest sources. It is particularly important that there is no indication that the fire in
Denton which started at the same general time of the day in the same general quadrant of the town square was caused by exploding matches. The same is true for the fire in Pilot Point which took place the same afternoon. All of these fires may have been started accidentally by matches exploding from the excessive heat. But there is no evidence that this was the case in any of these three places. And in the case of Dallas, there is explicit evidence that works against such a conclusion. Collusion appears to be the more probable cause of these particular fires. But collusion on the part of whom? That is the unanswered question.

30 Dallas Morning News, July 14, 1892. Overton may have had a motive for wanting to believe these negroes were not guilty, since one of them, Old Cato, was a highly regarded slave of the Overton family into whose hands Aaron Overton, the patriarch, had entrusted the running of his mill. "Another noted place was the old mill of Aaron Overton, just northwest of Col. Stemmon's house. It was the first mill established in the county ... The mill was run by an old negro man, owned by Overton, named Cato, who made all decisions regarding priority, and many a fee of 25 or 50 cents bestowed on Cato would greatly facilitate your turn." There can be no doubt about the identity of this slave because the author of this statement, a son of pioneer Thomas Crutchfield, J. O. Crutchfield, who was a young man in Dallas at the time of the fire, goes on to say: "Poor Old Cato! He was implicated with two other negroes in the burning of Dallas in 1860, and all three were hanged by the citizens just where the Texas and Pacific bridge spans the Trinity at the river bottom. All three were buried near where they were hanged." Dallas Morning News, July 21, 1889, p. 11, col. 1.

31 Dallas Morning News, July 14, 1892.


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