

Elijah Cannon (1796-1887)

First known relative to come to Texas in 1852



Historical marker for the old town of Cannon

Elijah Cannon* was born in Pickens County, South Carolina, on September 7, 1796. He married Dorcas Bowen and had 14 children (3 died). In 1852, two years after his wife died, Elijah, his widowed sister, 11 surviving children and slaves travelled by wagon train the 1,200 miles to North Texas and settled in an area he named "Cannon".

** Elijah Cannon is Lucy's great-great-great-great-great (5 greats) grandfather.*



Road sign for Cannon with VanAlstyne road sign in background

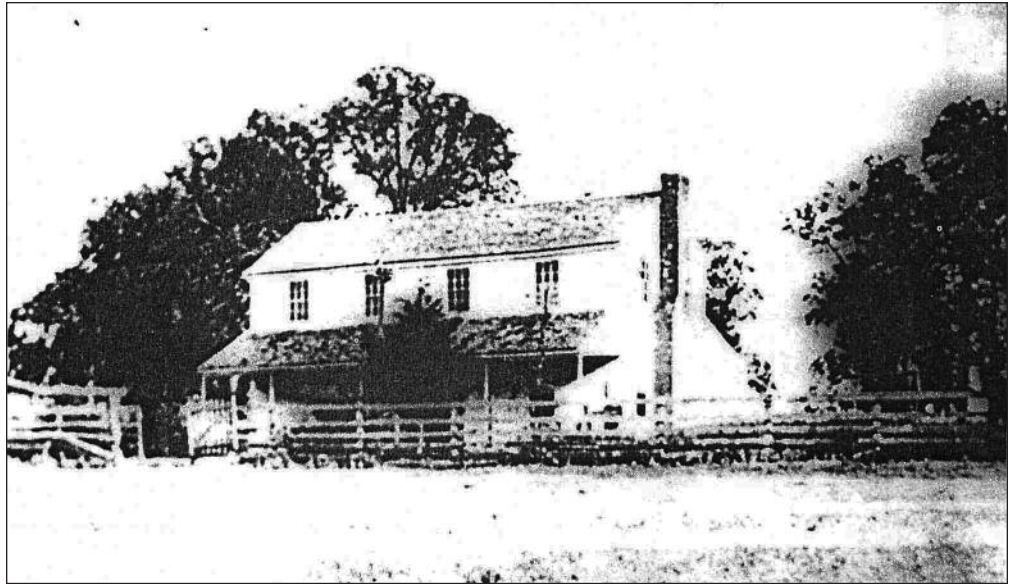


Cannon, Texas is located between Dallas and Sherman. The closest town is VanAlstyne, halfway between McKinney and Sherman, just east of I-75 on State Highway 5. Cannon is six miles east of VanAlstyne.

FAMILY TREE



A photo of the Old Cannon Homestead is at right. In 1852 Elijah Cannon arrived in Texas with his six sons, five daughters, his widowed sister "Aunt Patsy Brown" and the family slaves. He made the 1,200 mile trip by wagon train. His wife Dorcas had died two years before and only six months after she had given birth to her youngest child, Sultana, who was two years old when Elijah made the move to Texas. Elijah's oldest child, Elizabeth, was 25 years old and married with children.



Upon arrival, Elijah purchased 700 acres of land, some of it from the government at \$1.00 an acre or less. He named his settlement Cannon. The land was fertile and the men hunted squirrels, prairie chickens, opossums, wild turkeys and rabbit. Caddo Indians were still roaming North Texas at that time.

With the help of his sons and slaves, Elijah cleared the land and built a large two-story house with a big brick chimney on two sides of the house so to be able to have a fire place in the upstairs and down. The ceilings were ten-feet high and the floors were made from Bois D' Arc trees, a tough durable wood. Some of the building material was hauled from Jefferson, Texas (125 miles away). Other materials were from the big trees on the Sister Grove Creek, which flowed on their property. The Cannons also built their own furniture, though later, better furniture was bought and hauled by oxen from Jefferson, Texas.

The Cannon sons learned trades such as carpentry and harness-making, scientific farming, business and banking. They established a small school and country store which became a gathering spot as well as selling homegrown products. The Cannons helped build the first major school of higher learning in 1866, known as the Centennial Institute (established in 1876, 100 years after U.S. declared its independence). It had an attached dormitory with 30 rooms. The school burned in the late 1880s and the children transferred to nearby VanAlstyne schools. Though Cannon started to decline in the 1890s, in the early 1930s, it still had a 2-room school house, general store, filling station, cotton gin and church. The depression years took their toll and the 2-teacher school closed just before World War II.

The Cannon family held religious services in their homes until The Cannon Congregational Methodist Church was founded in 1892. In 2015, the building and sign still stand off of C.R. 2729, but due to lack of care its future looks uncertain.

As deaths occurred after the Cannons arrived in Texas, ground on their property was set aside for a cemetery. That land was eventually deeded to the city for a community cemetery.

The old Home Place stood for nearly 60 years, burning down in the early-1900s.

Although we do not have a detailed description of that journey by the Cannons, we do have this account about the trip of another ancestor, James J. Gathings. He also brought his family from South Carolina to Texas in 1852. One of his sons gave an account of the journey: "He recalled with vividness the Mississippi River, which the travelers first saw at Vicksburg. They crossed on ferry boats. The crossing required two days. The travelers had real troubles crossing Louisiana lowlands and streams." Accompanying the family were 100 slaves. The Gathings group eventually made it to an area near present day Hillsboro, which is over 100 miles south of Cannon. Their journey took three months. There they built the town of Covington, named after James' wife, Martha Wall Covington. Gathings became the owner of 10,000 acres of land. His first home was a double log house, a far cry from the elegance he left in South Carolina.

The town of Cannon is at the junction of Farm Roads 2729 and 121, twelve miles southeast of Sherman in southeastern Grayson County. Elijah's widowed sister, Patsy Brown, was three years older than he was and the acting mother of the eleven children. Elijah earned the right of the naming of the town by building a grist mill and cotton gin. Having a ready source of grist (grain to grind into flour), locals invested in a school and church.

By the 1870s, Cannon became a major market for the area. It grew to a respectable population of around 400 residents by the mid-1880s, reaching its high-water mark. In 1877 the community acquired a post office and it was named after Reece Cannon, one of Elijah's sons. Cannon then joined the list of towns across America whose sad story ended with the words: "then along came the railroad and bypassed the town." In Cannon's case, the decline wasn't immediate, but when the town got down to less than 50 residents, the post office closed its doors in 1907.

By 1910 the population was a mere 30 and over the next 80 years it slowly gathered 45 more people to place the 1990 Census at 75. The 2000 census counted 50 people calling Cannon home. About all that is left of Cannon is the church and cemetery.

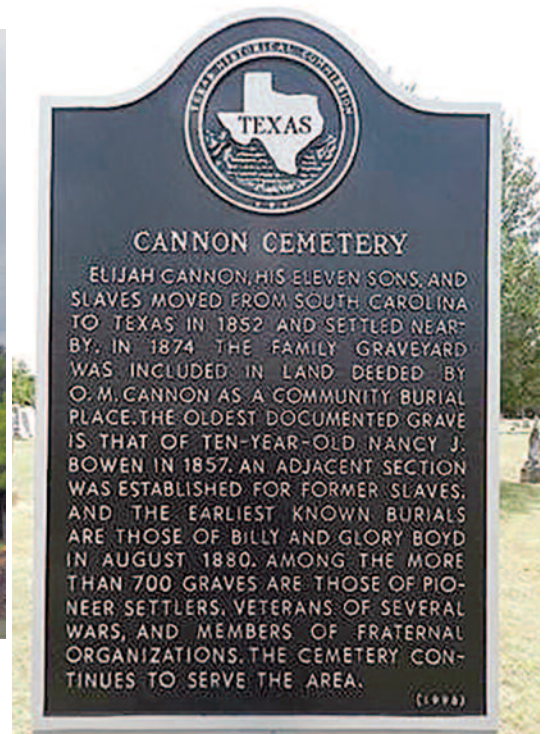
Cannon Cemetery is located about three miles outside of Van Alstyne, in Grayson County. In 1874 Oscar O. M. Cannon (another son of Elijah) deeded land to the city which included the family graveyard to be used as a community burial place. The oldest documented grave is that of ten year old Nancy J. Bowen* in 1857. Among the more than 700 graves in Cannon Cemetery are those of pioneer settlers, veterans of several wars, and members of fraternal organizations. In 2018, it still serves the area and is a well-cared-for cemetery with its own FaceBook page.

An adjoining section of the cemetery was established for former slaves. At the end of the Civil War, Elijah freed all of his slaves, giving each of them 20 acres land so they could support themselves. He also gave them the last name of Boyd. The earliest known slave burials are those of Billy and Glory Boyd in August of 1880, but there are other Boyd slaves buried in the slave section of the cemetery.

** Elijah's deceased wife was Darcus Bowen. It's curious that the oldest documented grave in Cannon Cemetery is for a 10-year old Nancy Bowen, death in 1857. Maybe some of the Bowen family later followed Elijah and his family to Cannon?*



Cannon Cemetery sign at entry of cemetery



Historical marker located in Cannon Cemetery



Elijah Cannon gravestone in center with gravestones of his daughter Eliza Cannon West on the left, and his son Oscar on the right. Eliza's husband, T.M. West ("Uncle Doc") is buried the the left of her. He was a dentist in the Confederacy.



Elijah Cannon gravestone located in Cannon Cemetery



Graves of two of Elijah's sons in Cannon Cemetery: John (left) and Woddy (right). Woddy is the son who died in the Civil War on April 20, 1863. He was wounded in the arm in the Battle of Corinth in Mississippi on Oct. 3, 1862. Medical care was inadequate and he was not given proper treatment. He was finally sent home, walking much of the way from Mississippi to Texas. He died three weeks after arriving home and six months after being wounded. Woddy was buried on the family property.



Original tombstone of W.H. "Woddy" Cannon which is now a bench on Catherine Cannon's property. See below photos taken in 1980. At left is Catherine and Cindy sitting on bench in front of Catherine's house. At right are Mark and David sitting on the Woddy bench.

His original tombstone was made into a little bench which is located at Catherine Cannon's house in Cannon. At some point, a grander tombstone for Woddy was erected in the Cannon family plot area of the Cannon Cemetery.





An adjacent section of the Cannon Cemetery was established for former slaves. Elijah gave the last name of Boyd to his slaves at the end of the Civil War. The earliest known slave burials are those of Billy and Glory Boyd in August of 1880 (see photos below).



Andy Boyd slave grave, 1895



Billy Boyd slave grave, 1880



Glory Boyd slave grave, 1880



Slave grave, Dennis Boyd 1911 and Emline Boyd, 1916

Descendants of Elijah Cannon slaves.
Older adults were very young at time
of freedom through the Emancipation Act.



Descendants of Elijah Cannon slaves. Older adults were very young at time of freedom through the Emancipation Act of 1863.

Elijah Cannon family coming from South Carolina in order of date of birth:

“Aunt Patsy Brown” was Elijah’s sister, three years older than he. She was widowed before she left for Texas. She played the role of mother, counselor, cook, baby sitter and general manager of the big household. Under her supervision came the smaller children and women slaves who assisted in the home chores. She died at age 92 in 1885 and is buried in the Cannon Cemetery. Held in such high esteem, her “children” did not follow the frontier practice of burying the dead in roughly hewn coffins. Her’s was beautifully constructed with the best material available.

Elizabeth J. Cannon was born Dec. 19, 1827. She was 25 years old when she left South Carolina with her father, siblings and her own small family consisting of three children and husband, Miles Calyton. Both are buried at Cannon with their tombstone a single marker.

John R. Cannon, born Aug. 25, 1829, never married. He was a carpenter, well digger and farmer. He and Oscar built three homes on the family property prior to the Civil War. They also built the brick building in VanAlstyne now occupied by the City Drug Store. Their names are in bold brick relief above the second floor. John died at age 99 as an invalid. Before his death he was cared for by a nurse who carried his meals to him from the local cafe. He is buried in the Cannon Cemetery.

William R. Cannon, known as “Uncle Billie” was born Aug. 13, 1831. He was an adult when he was on the trip to Texas and stopped in a small community north of Cannon to live out his life. He had eight children and died at age 92 on Jan. 23, 1923.

Martha Cannon, “Marthy” was born July 24, 1833 and was still in her teens when she moved to Texas. She married, but died at age 23 years old and her husband disappeared after that.

Reece McGuffy Cannon, best known of Elijah’s sons, was born July 12, 1835. He invested in cotton after the Civil War and became one of the most prominent and wealthiest of the Cannons. He had extensive land holdings in Cannon and Van Alstyne. He married Texanna Dumas, the first white child born in Grayson County. She bore him five children. After she died, Reece married Betty Milam, daughter of Jefferson Milam (brother of Ben Milam,



The Cannons of Cannon

Six surviving descendents of Elijah and Dorcas Bowen Cannon pose for this photograph made in the early 1920s. Standing from left are Oscar, Elijah Halston “Hoss” and Reece Cannon. Seated from left are William Robert, Elizabeth (Mrs. T.M. West) and John R. Cannon. The Cannon family is regarded as one of the most prominent pioneer Grayson County families.

A family photo taken in the early 1920s showing the six surviving siblings of Elijah Cannon. It is believed to be the oldest siblings then living in Texas. Standing left to right are Oscar, Elijah Halston “Hoss” and Reece Cannon. Seated from left are William Robert, Elizabeth (the oldest child) and John.

hero of San Antonio). Reece bought his first car in 1910 and learned to drive at age 75 so he could check on his tenants and property. Reece died at age 91 in 1926.

Huldah L. Cannon was born March 19, 1837. She was a young girl when she arrived in Texas and married two husbands, having six children. She died of tuberculosis “consumption” in 1885. Her first husband and four of her children also died of the disease.

Woddy H. Cannon was born on Jan. 6, 1839. He was 22 years old

when the Civil War started and he enlisted immediately. He was wounded at the Battle of Corinth in Mississippi, Oct. 5, 1862. He was not given proper medical treatment and released to walk home and die six months after his wound and three weeks after arriving home. He died a bachelor and is buried at Cannon.

Eliza E. Cannon, born January 27, 1842, helped look after the youngest siblings. She met and married T. M. West, a young dentist, shortly before he entered the Civil War. He was known as

“Uncle Doc”. Both Eliza and Uncle Doc are buried in the Cannon Cemetery.

Elijah Halston “Hoss” was born Oct. 28, 1844. He was a carpenter, expert in mechanics and repaired farm implements. He built things in wood and metal, but his premier profession was as a wagon-builder. This helped to alleviate the transportation shortage in Cannon. In 1870, he married Alice Tolbert. They first had four daughters* and then four sons. Much of their beautiful furniture in the house was made by Hoss. One of Hoss’ sons (Jim) and his wife, Catherine, lived in one of the smaller houses built on the family property in Cannon. Our family, including Mark and David, visited several times in 1980. Hoss continued to make wagons until after WW One. He died in 1925.

*One of Hoss and Alice’s daughters was named **Willia Darcus Cannon**, born Oct. 22, 1877. She is a direct descendant. Willia married Charles B. McAnally. They had four sons, one of them Loyd McAnally “Doc” (Cindy Livingston’s grandfather; Lucy’s great great grandfather). Willia died when she was only 32 years old in 1909. She was pregnant when one of her young sons jumped on her belly. She and the unborn baby did not survive the injury. There is a small 18K gold bracelet that was given to Willia on her 20th birthday. The back of the heart charm is engraved with the name Willia and date Oct. 22,



1897. The bracelet was passed down to Cindy and has been made into a necklace (see photos below).

Oscar M. Cannon, born May 18, 1848 was only four years old when his family left South Carolina. He never married. He eventually owned the “Old Home Place” but deeded much of the land as a community cemetery. On the remaining 119 acres he lived in the old house until it burned down in the early 1900s. Oscar then built a new house in almost the exact same location. It is still standing (owned by Clyde Massie for many years). Oscar hosted many family reunions there. With so many people attending, at one reunion he supplied the first adult males with a few hatchets, hammers, saws, nails and wood to build a long table on the porch so everyone had a seat for dinner. The table stretched the length of the house and was used for years. Oscar, with his brother John, also built other houses on the property, one still standing and owned by Catherine Cannon, Jim



Cannon’s widow. (Jim was a son of E.J. “Hoss” Cannon). Oscar and his brother John built the brick building in Van Alstyne, now occupied by City Drug. Their names are in bold brick relief above the second floor with the year 1890 on it. Oscar also built other brick buildings in Van Alstyne and moved there in his later life so that he could be close to his businesses. He walked to work everyday because he couldn’t drive. At the time of his death, June 2, 1931 (age 83), Oscar was the last member of the original Cannon family that came from South Carolina.

Sultana Cannon, the youngest of Elijah’s children, was born Nov. 18, 1849. When she was 18, shortly after the Civil War ended, she met and married Sam T. Blassingame. She had six children, one of them named WINN. When her sister, Huldah, had to take over care of her grandchildren, due to the death of Huldah’s daughter, Sultana offered to care for Sammie, the youngest. She called him Sam after her husband. He called her “Aunt Tana”. Sultana reared Sam until he left home at age 17. He added a middle initial to his name to make it Sam E. (Morrison). Sultana died in 1908. She and her husband are buried in Cannon Cemetery in the Blassingame family plot.

