

100 Years of History As Seen Through the Study of Two Beaumont Families

Lesson 2: *Arriving in Texas*

Overview:

John J. French was born in Woodbridge, Connecticut, on December 20, 1799. He moved to New York state after marrying Sally Munson on December 15, 1819. As a tanner and merchant, French constantly sought new business opportunities. Attracted by the unclaimed land in the west, French gathered his family and the stock from his New York store and boarded a riverboat. They launched at Troy, New York, on the Erie Canal and began their journey west to Texas in 1835. Tragedy befell the family with the death of 3-year-old son, John J. French, Jr. as they ventured down the Ohio River at Massilon, Ohio. The group traveled on to the Mississippi River and continued as far as New Orleans, completing a five week trip by water. An ox-drawn wagon brought the family and possessions west, but the Texas Revolution kept Sally and their children in Opelousas for three years. By 1838, the Frenches settled on their Mexican land grant in Texas at Taylor's Bayou. In 1845, French purchased 300 wooded acres on the Neches River plain north of Beaumont and built his home, tannery, and trading post there. After a long and prosperous life in Beaumont, John and Sally French moved to Merkle, Texas, in 1884, where Sally died in 1885 and John in 1889.

Born in 1789 in Montgomery County, Tennessee, James McFaddin left in 1813, probably by way of the Mississippi River, to serve as a soldier with the Tennessee Volunteers in the War of 1812. He fought in the Battle of New Orleans, serving under commanding general Andrew Jackson. Following the war McFaddin, like thousands of others, headed west to find new opportunities and a new life. From New Orleans James continued westward to Lake Charles, Louisiana, where he married Elizabeth Mackey sometime between 1815 and 1818; McFaddin lived in Louisiana during this time. In 1823, James, Elizabeth, and their three children moved to Texas, first settling near Liberty at what is now Moss Bluff. They were listed in the first Atascosita census of 1826 with James' occupation noted as being a tanner and stock raiser. In 1833 James and Elizabeth retraced their steps east as far as Jefferson County, settling on the banks of the Neches River in what is now Beaumont. He built a log house and began to farm and raise cattle. There were only three Anglo families in Jefferson County when the family arrived. Among them were Noah Tevis, Tom Lewis, and Christian Hillebrandt. The land where the McFaddins' settled was adjacent to the Tevis claim and later officially granted to McFaddin by the Republic of Texas. He made a trip to Montgomery County, Tennessee, and was on his way back to Texas when he became ill and died in Natchitoches, Louisiana, on March 27, 1845. His wife Elizabeth died a year later in Beaumont.

Comparing the routes the French family and the McFaddin family took to Texas, our state hero Stephen F. Austin, who was born in Virginia, traveled to Missouri, Arkansas, and Louisiana before making it to Texas in 1821. Having journeyed from New Orleans, he and his colony of settlers homesteaded between the Colorado and Brazos Rivers.

Objectives:

- * Students will use the United States map to understand how the French and McFaddin families came to Beaumont, Texas, and compare these routes with that of Texas pioneer Stephen F. Austin.
- * Students will correctly answer questions on the handout below.

Activities:

1. Look at the example of Stephen F. Austin’s route to Texas on the United States map on Student Handout 2a. Be sure to look at the key on the lower part of map. Use the appropriate symbols and colored pencils.
 - a. Trace the route the French family took to get to Beaumont.
 - b. Trace the route the McFaddin family took to get to Beaumont.
2. Use Student Handout 2b to draw the route your family used to get to Beaumont. Follow the directions on the lower portion of the map.

Questions:

1. Where was each family from originally, and what year did they first arrive in Beaumont?
Frenches _____ McFaddins _____

2. What same state did the Frenches, the McFaddins, and Stephen Austin cross to get to Texas?

3. Compare how each family made a living.
If there are similarities, identify them.

4. From the information given on Student Handouts 1 and 2, what do you think the Frenches and McFaddins contribute to local history?
