

She shows visitors the location in the cellar where the caskets are buried; and she points out the exact area of the painting where, she says, the crow sat for over a hundred years. The solitary tree stands impassively, caring nothing for the activities of the world, whether they be human or non-human, fact or fiction. An ancient, tarnished brass nameplate at the bottom of the painting still bears the title "Tree and Crow".

THE GO-AHEAD MAN

April 19, 1999

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This is the story of Thomas Jefferson Green, a most interesting man. Even if he were not my ancestor I would find his life a curiosity worth sharing with you. Some of his adventures challenge both understanding and credulity. But there is more. I will try to sort out historical fact from family legend; a daunting task. Where his actions sometimes suggest motivations that are perhaps less lofty than family lore would have them, I will ask you to consider with me some alternative explanations of his proud deeds that are often puzzling, to say the least.

But first, a little background. If you are a really serious student of America history of the period 1830-1850, you might have stumbled across a fleeting reference or two to T J Green (as I shall refer to him throughout this paper). He was born in North Carolina in 1801, and after a full life of adventure on the frontiers of a young and growing America, he died in 1863. He was my great, great grandfather on my maternal side.

Now, southern families, in my experience, take their lineage and ancestry more seriously than northerners. All too often, family is about all they have to be proud of. There is a tendency to revere one's forebears, whether they deserve it or not. And

when an ancestor has shown a little gumption in the great world beyond his place of birth, his (or her) descendants make much of his accomplishments and he approaches Olympian status in family tradition.

This is especially true if the descendants have literary leanings. With T J Green, this was certainly the case. His son Wharton received a solid grounding in the classics and fancied himself a man of letters. He spent his later years deifying his father in his writings. . .and this legend was seized upon by the women in the family. I will remember my grandmother lowering her voice to a whisper of awe and respect whenever she mentioned the name or doings of T J Green, her grandfather. While T J Green left a fine pile of papers and memorabilia on file at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, the most accessible records of his adventures come from his one published book and his admiring son's writings both of which, in my opinion, need to be taken with a grain of salt.

What kind of man would undertake to debunk his ancestor, you ask? Especially, his sole ancestor with a slight claim to fame? I think I am driven in this by the unavoidable conclusion that the facts - as best I can reconstruct them - are not consistent with family legend, and I am curious about the truth of the matter.

Family lore has it that General T J Green was a great American: a patriarch and a patriot second in high purpose only to Nathan Hale and Patrick Henry, and that he was driven throughout a long and active life on the frontier by his love of country, loyalty to family and loathing of tyranny. I'm not so sure. There is plenty of evidence of his courage, his luck, and his entrepreneurial drive; but a case can be made that his actions were driven more by self-interest than by noble purpose. In fact, seen from a late twentieth century viewpoint, he appears to have consistently exhibited an arrogance and reckless disregard for the needs of either his family, his government, or anyone other than himself. And his persistence in this course was continually reinforced by the approval of the world in which he lived. But perhaps that's the way with patriots, when they are subjected to too-close

scrutiny, especially by those who live in a different age. Let us see what you think. . .

T J Green was born in 1801 in Warrenton, North Carolina. he was the son of Solomon Green, a courier for the Continental army during the Revolution, and nephew of Nathaniel Green, a well-known Revolutionary general. His father was a member of the North Carolina legislature from Warren County. He attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the United States Military Academy at West Point, where he withdrew "for academic reasons" after four short months.

By 1826 he had returned to Warrenton, where, like his father, he was elected to the North Carolina legislature. In 1830 he married Sarah Wharton of Nashville, Tennessee, whose father was a wealthy and respected plantation owner and member of the Tennessee legislature.

But he was already showing signs of the restlessness which was to drive him most of his life. He took his bride to the territory of Florida, then a wild and dangerous bush country, where he established a plantation at Crazy Hills post office, near St. Marks. It is not clear where he found the capital for this undertaking. His own family was not wealthy and we must assume it was his bride's money. Their one child, Andrew Jackson Green, was born there in 1831. Trading upon his dubious West Point credential, he left his wife and infant son for the Indian campaigns of the second Seminole war, fighting with Winfield Scott to achieve an ethnic cleansing of the land by removing the Seminoles to the Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). He was rewarded with appointment to the territorial legislature of Florida, his second legislature before he reached 30.

In 1834 his wife Sarah died, and it seems that T J Green could stand responsible family life no longer. But he had a three year old son to deal with. Not a problem: he cowbirded the boy with his late wife's family in Tennessee and set off in search of adventure. His reasons are not clear. Perhaps he felt Florida (still twenty-one years from statehood) was becoming

too settled. Perhaps he wanted to get away from the place where his young wife died. Subsequent events suggest that he simply wanted to move with the frontier: that he found it exciting, and potentially profitable. And at that time, the frontier was Texas.

To appreciate fully T J Green's adventures there, it would be helpful to take a brief look at conditions in Texas on the eve of its 1836 war for independence from Mexico. This is often confused with the 1846 war between the United States and Mexico, the US having by then annexed Texas.

To begin, Texas was indisputably Mexican territory. Because of its proximity to established American states such as Louisiana (which had been a state since 1812), and because of its inexhaustible open spaces of good land inviting settlement, the Mexican government had to deal with the challenge of controlling immigration by Anglo American settlers. Mexican policy seesawed back and forth between a reluctant acceptance of settlers if they recognized Mexican sovereignty to absolute prohibition of any immigrants crossing the Sabine river (the border between Mexico and Louisiana). But regardless of Mexican policy, settlers came to Texas anyhow. . .and in an ever-increasing flood.

The situation invited lawless trade and profiteering back and forth across the Sabine River, and the men who pursued these riches were known as filibusters (a derivative of "freebooters"). Later, when Texas claimed independence from Mexico in 1836, another class of entrepreneur appeared on the scene. These were typically educated men, land speculators with a little capital to invest in a new territory, opportunists who smelled profit in being first upon the scene as a wild land was tamed. They were known as "go-ahead men," and they moved with the western frontier all the way to California, seeking wealth. T J Green is named in several works on the Texas frontier as one of these. . .an the label seems to fit, as we shall see.

(An aside: the contemporary usage of the time was the word "Texians" rather than today's "Texans", and I will use this throughout the paper).

But back to T J Green's story. When he arrived in Texas early in 1836, disorganized armed resistance to the Mexican government had been underway for two years, often punished by acts of ruthless barbarity by Mexican forces who were trying desperately to crush an incipient revolution. It was clear that a larger armed conflict was brewing. T J Green was welcomed and — based on his West Point and the Seminole-fighting background — offered a direct commission as a Brigadier General if he would return to Louisiana, raise a brigade of volunteers at his own expense, and get back to Texas before full scale fighting began. He departed immediately on this mission.

But alas, events overtook him. While he was recruiting in Louisiana the besieged Alamo in San Antonio, defended by Travis, Crockett, Bowie and a gallant force of 182 sharpshooters, fell to a large and well-trained Mexican army capably led by General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna de Lebron, who put all the survivors to the sword. Two weeks later, a second force of 390 Texian soldiers led by Fannin at the presidio of Goliad, was surrounded and offered the "honors of war" if they surrendered: but Santa Anna reneged and had them all shot as well. There was, however, a third surviving Texian force, led by Sam Houston, which had continually evaded contact with the Mexicans in a way that caused many to question their leader's manhood. Whether by accident or design, Houston finally met the enemy at San Jacinto and, in an action that still challenges understanding, crushed the much larger Mexican army, taking Santa Anna prisoner. The short, bloody fighting was over, and Texas claimed its independence.

Despite the rage against Santa Anna for his atrocities, he was now a key pawn in subsequent Texian negotiations to ensure its independence from Mexico. A deal was finally struck for the recognition of Texas, and on June 3, 1836 Santa Anna was put on a boat for Mexico. But before the ship could raise anchor, T J Green and his force of 200 fresh volunteers arrived

from Louisiana, furious at having missed the fighting and outraged at the release of the man who had ordered so many war crimes. So they boarded the ship and seized Santa Anna from the Texian authorities. Green actually had Santa Anna shackled to him as his personal prisoner, so that there could be no foolishness about his escape or return to Mexico. . .and there Santa Anna remained for many weeks.

This was an outrageous action. In a single stroke of impetuous arrogance, T J Green undid his government's delicately negotiated political solution which should have assured Texas' future independence: hardly an act of patriotism or honor. But it was seen as heroic and thoroughly justified by the soldiers and settlers, and T J Green became something of a celebrity. Santa Anna was not well-treated by his new captors. He was displayed like a bear on a rope, exhibited to one and all, ill-fed and forced to undergo numerous indignities and physical abuse to the delight of his Texian captors. Many months passed before his return to Mexico was negotiated all over again and Santa Anna finally left Texas for Washington, and thence to Vera Cruz, filled with venomous hatred for all things Texian.

In the aftermath of his "capture" of Santa Anna, T J Green set about rebuilding his fortunes, which were evidently much depleted by his expenses in raising and equipping his brigade of volunteers. He was elected to the new legislature of the Republic of Texas — his third legislature by the time he was 35 — where he authored the bill that would establish the Rio Grande as the new Republic's border with Mexico. He fought Indians. And he speculated in real estate, was a founder of the Bank of Texas, and a founding director of the earliest Texas railroad — at first just a gleam in the new directors' eyes, but destined to become the Southern Pacific. He actively lobbied for Texas to legalize slavery, convinced that his new railroad could never be built without cheap slave labor — and thus became a key sticking point in subsequent debate over the question of statehood for Texas. In short, he was a true go-ahead man.

And now T J Green was caught up in his most remarkable adventure, known reverently in my family's lore as "The Mier Expedition." From childhood I was instructed in the brilliance, daring, and nobility of this military campaign. . . though none of my forebears – all women, as it happened – had much to offer by way of detail. I very much doubt that they understood what the Mier Expedition was all about. It is not a pretty tale.

Over and over again, T J Green (and his biographer son) justifies his actions (which some might call outlawry) on the basis of the free man's obligation to fight tyranny wherever it raises its head. With their classical educations, both father and son cite the worst tyrants of antique times, and the brave men who stood up to them. Fighting tyranny – in this case, the tyranny of "priest-ridden Mexico" – becomes a sacred duty and an all-purpose justification for taking the law into one's own hands. Of course, tyranny is largely a matter of point-of-view. The Mexicans were, after all, simply trying to defend their territory.

The fighting with Mexico was not over, as it turned out. Despite lengthy diplomatic negotiations Mexico had not formally acknowledged Texas' independence. In the years following San Jacinto, there was a nasty series of bloody raids back and forth across the new border, with Mexican soldiers and Texian irregulars in turn crossing the Rio Grande to steal cattle, burn, murder, rape and pillage on the other side. When a Mexican raid penetrated all the way to San Antonio, an organized military response was called for. A force of 750 Texians was raised in November 1842, with T J Green's enthusiastic participation. After marching to the Rio Grande and taking Laredo from the Mexicans, the force was ordered back into Texas. But many of the men refused: they wanted another pound of flesh. With frontier arrogance, they rejected their orders. A force of 300 determined to continue the incursion. They elected a new commander, William Fisher, with T J Green second in command, and headed downstream along the Rio Grande some eighty miles to the town of Mier, spreading appropriate retaliatory destruction along the way. In Mier, unknown to the Texians, was an entire regiment of Mexican soldiers

under the command of General Ampudia. On Christmas day, 1842, the Texians blundered into this vastly superior enemy force. After a fierce two day firefight, and many casualties, they were compelled to surrender, with T J Green in such strong dissent that he broke his rifle in two rather than hand it to the Mexicans.

General Ampudia sent a rider to Mexico City advising the President of his victory, and naming the Texian commanders in his custody. And the president of Mexico, by this time, was T J Green's notorious captive of six years previous, Santa Anna. One can only imagine the satisfaction it must have given the presidente to hear that his tormentors were now in his power, and with grim pleasure he sent instructions for all 248 Texians to be shot. General Ampudia respectfully declined to execute this order because he had given his word that the Texians would be treated as prisoners of war if they surrendered, so Santa Anna ordered him to march the captives to Mexico City where he would deal with them personally.

This was a fearsome march through over 600 miles of empty desert and mountainous terrain for the remaining captives, with a very doubtful fate awaiting them at the other end. They looked for every opportunity to escape. On the evening of February 11 the column of Texian captives, now numbering 214, arrived at a lonely ranch near the town of Salado where they were placed in a high walled corral, under heavy guard. Early the next morning they made their break, overpowering their guards and seizing their guns. They suffered ten casualties in the attempt, but the rest made it into the barren mountains, headed north for Texas and home. Their Mexican guards did not even attempt to recapture them for two days, knowing there was no water where they were headed, and it would be easier (and safer) to wait a while before going out to peel them up off the desert floor. One hundred seventy-six survivors were eventually brought back to the corral, and there they encountered a chilling site. In the middle of the corral sat a Mexican officer at a table, with a large bowl before him. The bowl contained 176 beans: 159 red and 17 black. One at a time, the Texians were ordered to step forward and draw

a bean. Those who drew black were taken to one side and shot. In other words, the Texians were decimated (a term widely misused today): one in ten was executed.

That same day the column, now numbering 159, resumed its dreary march to Mexico City, experiencing dreadful treatment along the way. Upon arrival, they were put in chains and clapped into the infamous Mexican prison, the castle of Perote, where they were held pending the pleasure of Santa Anna. While conditions at Perote were as awful as one might imagine, a standoff quickly arose over the refusal of the Texian officers to do any manual labor, even under threat of "work or be shot." This predicament dragged out over the following months, while T J Green wrote impassioned letters importuning Presidents Tyler and Houston (of Texas) to interest themselves in freeing the Texians. But Tyler refused, stating with regret that after all they were citizens of Texas and not of the United States. And Houston, who was still negotiating for Mexico's recognition of Texas, declined to get involved, noting that the captured Texians had greatly complicated relations with Mexico, and were acting on their own authority when they were taken prisoner. So there was only one thing left for them to do: escape.

It was agreed at the outset that only a small number of prisoners could make a break with any realistic chance of avoiding recapture: in effect, there would have to be a series of escapes. In the months that followed, the Texians – most of whom were doing forced labor during the day paving streets – worked nightly scraping a passage through the stone wall of the prison. Their cells were lit by narrow loopholes through the eight foot thick stone walls: these loopholes were two feet wide on the interior wall, tapering to one foot in the external wall. Their original plan was to widen the outer dimensions of the loophole sufficiently to permit passage directly through the wall. This proved impractical, because it would be too visible to the daily inspections conducted by the guards. So they started digging sideways into the wall at a point about two feet into the loophole, and gradually created, at the rate of about a half-inch

a night, an L-shaped crawlspace through the masonry. On the night of July 2, 1843, seven of the Texians, led by T J Green, broke through the last half-inch of the outer wall, dropped some thirty feet to the floor of the surrounding dry moat, successfully negotiated the outer barriers, and headed into the surrounding mountains.

The escapees now divided themselves into three smaller groups to maintain low visibility, and headed for Texas by different routes. T J Green and two comrades survived a month of harrowing adventure as they made their way to Vera Cruz, where they hoped to steal a boat and sail north to Texas. They narrowly avoided recapture on several occasions. . . were befriended and then betrayed by a band of robbers. . . and finally reached the port city where, with the help of a friendly American captain, they were spirited aboard his ship and hidden under the boilers until it had been searched and cleared for departure, and was safely out of Mexican waters. A week later, they stepped ashore in New Orleans.

Back in Texas, T J Green was again a popular folk hero, but his fortunes were sadly depleted. He was consumed by venomous hatred for Sam Houston, who was now solidly entrenched as the leader of the new republic. And he was filled with bitterness that the republic's only remuneration for his services, expenses, and the trials he had endured was a new double barreled rifle. He resumed his seat in the legislature, and his go-ahead affairs. He wrote the first of a series of incredibly virulent pamphlets denouncing Houston — whose personal and financial life did not bear close scrutiny, who had not acted on behalf of the captured Mier veterans, and who, in Green's opinion, was unaccountably soft in all his dealings with hated Mexico. These pamphlets were published in both Texas and Washington, and became an obsession for Green. Meantime, he worked diligently for the release of his comrades still in Perote, and began work on a book telling the full story of the Mier expedition, with charming illustrations drawn by one of the surviving captives, entitled The Journal of the Texian Expedition Against Mier. This is a very well written work, and a masterpiece of point-of-view,

relying heavily on anti-tyrant rhetoric to put a veneer of noble purpose to the affair. It subsequently became an American folk classic.

And now, T J Green seems to have remembered a son, Andrew Jackson Green, who he had parked ten years previous with his late wife's family. He headed for Tennessee and reclaimed the boy, now thirteen. Their first step was a visit to the Homestead to call on T J Green's honored acquaintance Andrew Jackson – the boy's namesake. There is an affecting account of their April 1845 visit, shortly before Old Hickory's death, with the boy receiving the blessing of the great man and a lock of his hair (which we still have).

For reasons that are unclear, T J Green later changed his son's name to Jackson Wharton Green, perhaps with the intent of sparing his son any difficulties later in life from those who did not hold controversial Old Hickory in high esteem. . .or possibly to recognize his influential Tennessee relatives who had raised the boy. (Years later, the son again changed his name to Wharton Jackson Green). Father and son headed for North Carolina to reconnect with the Green family, and then to Washington, where the boy was placed in the first of a succession of schools and academies. He was a reluctant student, and having learned well from his father's hyperbole, justified his distaste for academic discipline on the grounds of his obligation to resist tyranny. Later in life, the boy wrote in his memoirs that he early learned the secret of survival in academe was to "creep, crawl, and cringe;" and this he declined to do with predictable results.

T J Green's next priority was to replenish his dwindling resources, still sadly depleted by his adventuring in Texas and Mexico. The obvious step was to find a rich wife. And so he headed north to Boston, in search of a likely prospect. It was not long before he found one: Adeline Ellery, the widow of a very wealthy merchant and ship owner with properties in Gloucester, Salem, and Boston. She had a daughter. . .a simpleton, by all accounts. . .but she was looking for a dashing husband and she had a very large fortune variously reported as being in the range of five

million dollars. (It is hard to imagine an estate this large in the 1840's: even if it was half the reported amount it was surely one of the more substantial fortunes of its time). It could hardly have been a more fortuitous marriage. The next few years were spent living the good life at a succession of fine east coast hotels and watering spots – with summers at their favorite elegant spa in White Sulphur.

But this kind of easy living could not keep T J Green happy indefinitely. The go-ahead man yearned for the excitement of the frontier. . .which by now was in California. When gold was found in 1848 he could resist the call no longer. He packed his bags and was off again, leaving behind his son, wife, and stepdaughter for what proved to be a five year absence.

Family records are not helpful in establishing what he hoped to accomplish, beyond having fun. He speaks in letters of the gold fields, but it seems unlikely that he was manning a sluice on some remote creek. More likely he was dealing in land claims, looking to get in at the ground floor where influence and prestige were a more potent force than sweat of the brow. He did send a sack of gold nuggets back to his wife, but I am much inclined to think he traded for it. His Indian fighting experience in Florida and Texas, and his general's rank in Texas, stood him in good stead. In short order he was appointed major general in California's militia, and led a force of soldiers to capture and subdue a notorious band of Indian renegades. (Parenthetically, historians of this period tell us that the Indian campaigns in California were particularly deplorable affairs, with peaceful native American men, women, and children routinely being hunted and shot as weekend sport, like so many buffalo. We can only hope that T J Green's adventures were more honorable).

Predictably, he was elected to the first California senate – his fourth legislature – where he lobbied vigorously for slavery (a struggle that long delayed California's admission to statehood), authored the bill that established the first state university, and presided over the planning for the new cities of Oro and Vallejo. There was a critical shortage of

marriageable women in California, which led to proposed legislation which would greatly expedite the divorce process – to a simple joint request by husband and wife – so that eligible women could be expediently recycled. T J Green thought this a scandalous cheapening of sacred family values, and against overwhelming odds he led a successful opposition to the bill.

But T J Green the go-ahead man was ever on the lookout for his own affairs, and his primary interest seems to have been his holdings in the railroad company that was to become the Southern Pacific. He lobbied aggressively for this railroad to be built on the southern route, and – unsuccessful in his efforts to make California a slave state – he worked with James Gadsden (with whom he had fought the Seminoles) to have the territory later purchased by the United States from Mexico in his name be declared a slave territory, which would greatly reduce the cost of building a railroad on that southerly route.

Green seems to have been best known in these years for his easygoing socializing during what must have been a rip-roaring time, as the state of California took shape. He is referred to in several contemporary records as "One Hundred Drinks Green" for his habitual invitation "let's have a hundred drinks on that!" and the first Senate was known as the "Thousand Drink Senate."

Meanwhile, back east, his son Wharton was coming of age and eager for an appointment to West Point, which his father had very briefly attended. Unfortunately, because of his father's footloose ways, Wharton could not claim residence, or qualify for an appointment, from any one state. His father turned to his old comrade Winfield Scott, now Secretary of War, for a way around this problem. Scott noted that statehood for California was to be voted on any day; and if the Congress admitted California by September 9, 1850 – the last possible day for entrance into the Military Academy – he would personally give young Wharton the first California appointment. And that is precisely what happened.

It was exciting in California, but after five years T J Green could no longer avoid his responsibilities to his family three thousand miles away. He had a wife, a son, and a stepdaughter back east, and some very comfortable living awaiting his return. And his son was giving him some problems. Wharton left West Point after three years — like his father, for "academic reasons." Having also attended Georgetown, the University of Virginia, and Cumberland Universities without being graduated from any, he was admitted to the bar in Washington. He worked for a law firm for all of two months before claiming a stress-induced collapse in his health, and took off for Texas to follow his father's footsteps — where instead of adventure he mostly found saddle sores. Clearly, the boy lacked "bottom" as it was then known, and needed steadying. . .and that meant marriage.

But Wharton wasn't the only challenge on T J Green's horizon. Even more serious, his wife's very significant fortune was entailed to her daughter, Esther Ellery, and Esther was reaching marriageable age. This needed to be managed. With these pressing matters to attend to, T J Green returned from his last frontier in 1853. He spent the summer at White Sulphur, and then retired to a comfortable plantation named Esmeralda in Warrenton, North Carolina to manage his family affairs.

Now, what about the stepdaughter, Esther? She is still a family mystery, after all these years. Clearly, something was very wrong with her. In a highly literate family that kept every written record, there is not a scrap of her writing. We do have a letter to her stepfather in California which she dictated to a nurse at age eleven, and its juvenile wording raises questions. The letter closes with childlike scribbles on a blank page. Some years later a northern lady who was writing memoirs of the first families in North Carolina described Esther as "an idiot." What was the truth of the matter? Was she severely dyslexic or the victim of some other learning disability? Was she autistic? Or was she truly incompetent? In any case, she was very wealthy and T J Green's son Wharton needed a wife. The indicated action was obvious.

I have wondered how the father handled the discussion with his son. It can't have been easy. It seems unlikely that the union was Wharton's idea. Several scenarios occur. "My son, she is a very sweet girl." Or, "My son, it's a lot of money." Perhaps, "My son, you do not seem disposed to a life of toil, and this marriage would provide nicely for you." Or, "My son, this is for the good of the family: imagine the consequences for us all if someone else were to marry the girl." And so Wharton's stepsister became his bride.

The bride and groom set out on a honeymoon tour of Europe, which was to last a year, and cost — by Wharton's scrupulously kept account book — \$41,000 (or about a half-million in today's money). And for reasons that seem apparent in retrospect, the bride's first cousin Addie Carrier joined the honeymooners as the bride's companion. Wharton's journal of the trip describes many wonders they saw, but makes few references to his new wife's reaction to any. The same Northern lady who described her as "an idiot" reported that the bride stayed in hotels while her groom and her cousin Addie saw the sights. Who knows the truth of the matter? It sounds suspicious.

In any case, Wharton's bride bore him four children — one of them my maternal grandmother Mabel. Cousin Addie, companion on her honeymoon, married Judge David Davis who became the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Under the administration of bachelor president Chester Arthur, when there was no vice president, protocol dictated that she serve briefly as the country's First Lady. But when Justice Davis and Esther Green had both died early deaths, Wharton and Addie married.

Meanwhile, life was winding down for Thomas Jefferson Green, even as the pace of his surrounding world accelerated with the advent of the Civil War. Now in his declining years, the go-ahead man closed a life of adventure in considerable comfort with his wealthy wife, and died peacefully in his bed in Warrenton in 1863, while his son Wharton — wounded and captured at Gettysburg — was a prisoner of war in a Federal prison camp on Johnson's Island, in Sandusky

Bay, and his daughter-in-law's fortune was about to be confiscated by Union authorities in Boston. But that is another story.

And that, briefly told, is the story of Thomas Jefferson Green's life, as best I reconstruct it. Plantation owner, legislator from four states and territories (North Carolina, Florida, Texas and California), captor of Santa Anna, prisoner of Santa Anna, escapee of Santa Anna, survivor of a true decimation, foe of tyranny, advocate of slavery, veteran of Indian wars in three territories (Florida, Texas, and California), generally unsuccessful entrepreneur at the leading edge of the expanding frontier, skilled player in the marriage game which provided his only financial success, sometime husband and parent, and friend of the great from our history. The story cries out for some kind of appraisal. What are we to make of T J Green, the go-ahead man?

I see in him a fascinating blend of the qualities of his time and place. Like all early Victorians he was absolutely sure he was right about just about everything. Self-doubt or differing viewpoints seem never to have troubled him. He was right about tyranny, Mexicans, Indians and Sam Houston; right about slavery; right about what was best for his family. He saw nothing inconsistent about his hatred of tyranny while cleansing Florida of Seminoles and enslaving Blacks. He was utterly pragmatic about defending the sanctity of married women while selling his son in marriage.

He was reckless in his certainty about all things. His oversized ego and gift for self-justification were fed by the approval of a world which made him a popular hero and rewarded him with legislative office wherever he went. He willfully undid the plans of those in higher authority and he unhesitatingly rewrote history to justify himself as a lifetime foe of tyranny: His nobly titled Journal of the Texian Expedition Against Mier claims high flown purpose for what was, after all, a grubby border skirmish in a town where a band of marauding Texians just happened to get caught.

He repeatedly proved his physical courage and ability to withstand privation and pain. He was a man with big needs. . . a lunger at life. . . never the victim of circumstances, but always the shaper of his own destiny. He was a dreadful family man. He was an amoral natural force determined to have things his way.

But weren't they all? If T J Green emerges as a reckless figure, weren't they reckless times? Can't the same be said for all the men who lived on the leading edge of the American frontier? Weren't they all sure they were right? Didn't they all have outsized ego needs? How many were good family men? Weren't they all driven at least as much by the search for personal opportunity as by ideology? Weren't they all brave?

It seems to me there was a natural sequence of the kinds of men who washed up on the frontier, like successive waves on the beach, and who each made their contribution, in turn. . . starting with the explorers, then the trappers, the pioneers, the prospectors, the first settlers, and - yes - the go-ahead men, and finally the farmers and city builders. They each held the stage for their brief moment, played their role, and then moved on. T J Green and others like him were a part of this progression, for better or worse. Researching and writing this paper has made me think he was probably a pretty good go-ahead man.



Engraving of Thomas J. Green

Thos. J. Green,
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