Old Brit Bailey Yielded To No Man

By ED SUMMERS

This week we are not going to talk about Rice Institute. We are going to go into the past about one hundred years and move about fifty miles south of Houston and talk about an old Scotchman named Brit Bailey.

The location is Brazoria County, which shortly after the time in question became part of the giant land grant made by the Spaniards to the Connecticut Yankee, Moses Austin, whose son is called the "Father of Texas." Brit Bailey was possibly the first white man to live in Brazoria County. He was the original "rigged individualist." If he could see the smoke from his nearest neighbor's cooking fire, he felt crowded and he moved—always west.

Wet Riverbottoms
Brit Bailey lived in an abundance of essentials and a perhaps welcome lack of luxuries. He shot his food and made his clothes, and was satisfied in the wet Brazos riverbottoms.

But the development of the Austin land grant, confirmed by the revolutionary Mexican government to Moses' son Stephen, brought neighbors to Brit Bailey, and bad blood between himself and Stephen Austin.

In fact, neither of these two great men of Texas history was ever reconciled to the other's presence. As Brit Bailey's years rounded his shoulders and the solitary prairie nesting up to the Brazos River was scored by encroaching settlers, he retreated into the past. All his life he had been an individualist; in death he yielded to no man.

A Rifle and a Jug
Brit Bailey's will directed that his body be buried standing up facing west. He directed that a rifle be placed by his side and a jug of whiskey at his feet. And it was done just that way.

The feud with Austin must have bothered Bailey. At intervals of several years ever since his death, a bright light has been seen on Bailey's prairie.

The black people in Brazoria County claim the light is a lantern in Bailey's hand; that he tramps the lonely swamps and rice fields seeking Stephen Austin; that if he finds him he will shake his hand and call him friend.

This story is typical of the part of Texas longest-settled by white men. Ben Lilly once hunted bear in Brazoria County, and a few years later Ben Lilly chased bears in front of Teddy Roosevelt's tent on an expedition in Louisiana, permitting the leading exponent of the "vigorous life" to shoot them at his convenience.

"Swamp Angels"

The cattle'way back in the woods are known as "swamp angels." They are skinny gray animals with mostly Brahman bloodlines, and spend a majority of their lives hoof-deep in stagnant pools. They run at the sight of human beings. The owners of these beasts are Negroes who still strip bark from oak and elm trees to brew a potent medicine whose properties are considered unlimited by its makers.

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Another football season has arrived. People do wild things during football seasons, such as steal school mascots and paint solemn-looking statues and turn professors out of their own classrooms.

Next week we are going to recount the story of the wildest football season stunt ever pulled at Rice Institute.