

**J. M. ELKIN'S LIFE: A SHORT SKETCH WRITTEN FOR THE DUFFAU
PROGRESS BY HIMSELF ABOUT THE YEAR 1915**

The following autobiographical sketch was submitted by Mrs. Geraldine E. Cook, 992 Viejo Dr. DCBE, Granbury, Texas 76048.

I was born in East Tennessee, April 25, 1836, which will make me 80 years old my next birthday. My parents were born, married and raised there. Their names are David and Ruth Elkins.

We left there when I was a small tot. People were very poor those days, made their living at home but very little money. The good women made the clothes at home. The first move we made was on the banks of the Tennessee River, the cold cotton part, then father leaving us there while he went to Alabama, returning before long we moved down the Tennessee River with another family in a boat that was built for that purpose. It was just like being in a house. When the water would run pretty swift they would just let it float and when the water was slow we would put on the cars and went right along. I don't remember where we left the boat for I was very small and only six years old.

We stopped in Watson [Madison?] County, Alabama, and stayed in that county for seven years. Father was a good worker, but was a great hand to move, renting land and working hard and never getting anything ahead. Father never had time to send us children to school. He was always going to send us next year, but the next year never came, and when seven years had past he began planning to go to Texas.

In the fall of 1849 with six other families we started to Texas in wagons, for that was the only way we had to travel in those days. We crossed the Mississippi River at Memphis. I can't tell much about that but we went to Little Rock, Arkansas and after a long weary trip of 40 days we landed in Rusk, Cherokee County, Texas.

Father, Mother, four of us children and Aunt Matilda Dannis (or Dennis), one of Mother's sisters comprised our family. I was still a small boy of 13 years and very small, weighed only about 65 pounds. Well, now we were in Texas without a dollar and about \$40.00 in debt, borrowed to get here on and in a strange land and only one family that we knew, that was John Nelson, who had come the year before so we went to his house about five miles southwest of Rusk. Mr. Nelson's brother, being an old settler was pretty well fixed and in a few days he let us move in a little house in his yard and we went to work for him. We cleared land and done any kind of work we could get to do. In a short time father bought a little place near by and we bought a fine log house. We made boards out of pine and covered it. So we moved to that, renting some more land from Mr. Nelson. The first year we went to work and improved the place, putting in a pretty good farm for that country.

When I was about 15 years old I professed religion and joined the Methodist Protestant Church and have remained in it since that time and I have been a reader of the Baltimore Church paper for about 64 years and guess I will continue to read it as long as I can see to read.

J. M. ELKIN'S LIFE

We had been in Texas now about three years, and father and brother, the latter being about two years older than myself, decided to raise corn and cotton, and Mother and aunt to make cloth. We were getting along pretty well now, but in two years father thought it was time to move again. Selling out we then moved six miles and bought land again in the woods we were new to, about three miles of Alto, Texas. Some of the creek bottom land was very heavy timbered. We then commenced to improve that place, got it pretty well improved and then I began to think it was time for me to get married, as I was then about twenty two years old. So on November 12, 1858, I and Miss Rebecca Ann Hamilton were married.

I had never left home. My older brother and sister had both married and left, so wife and I lived with my parents until after the war between the states. Soon after we were married my wife joined the church with me and lived a devoted christian life and was a true helpmate indeed.

Well, as we had this place pretty well improved, it was getting about time for father to move again, who pretty soon sold out. I was tired of so much moving and began to think some for myself. My older brother had bought a farm and moved on it about six miles from Rusk, so father and I after looking around a little bought 200 acres and divided it between us on the public road leading from Rusk to Alto. This was joining my brother's land. I have never said much about my younger brother. His health was so bad that he was never able to do but little work.

Father's land had one spring of good water running out of the hill so we went to work on his part of the land to improve it. A good part of the land was heavy pine timber, so we went to cutting logs and soon had us a house built. Then we went to clearing land and in a few years we had very good houses and good farms cleared up and was pretty well fixed as we had it paid for and had some stock, but lo, the war was on and father thought I must take care of home and he would go to war. So away he went to Kentucky. His health failing him, he was discharged and back at home and was willing to stay.

It was now about time for me to go to the war, so my older brother and brother-in-law and I went in. We were in Company of the 18 Regiment from Texas, Pole Annex Brigade, Walker's Division. I guess we had the right name for they sure did walk us around. Soon after we left we went to Jefferson, Texas and camped there a while. My brother-in-law, Tom Collier, taken the measles and died, leaving my sister and three little boys, J. T. Collier being the baby. Later we moved up to Little Rock, Arkansas, and then cut into the swamps of White River, there we camped and drilled for some time. Later we got orders to go to Arkansas Post down the Arkansas River, but too late as the fight was over when we got there. We were camped in the river bottom the worst snow I think I ever saw. We had nothing to burn but green cottonwood or pack rails about half a mile. During the snow my brother was detailed to drive the Colonel's wagon up the river about 15 miles, the driver playing sick. One of my brother's feet was frozen so bad he was crippled the balance of the winter.

About the time the snow was gone we were ordered up the river about 15 miles to where the Colonel was camped, it being very cold and muddy. I was on rear guard that day. We started out pretty early in the morning, went a few miles and it began raining and was very cold. An officer of the guards

J. M. ELKIN'S LIFE

came around and relieved us and told us if we could get to camp to do so. Then it was every man for himself, the water being over shoe mouth deep. I kept pulling along for it was too cold to stop. Late in the evening we pulled into camp, my company pretty well all behind. The Colonel asked me to eat supper with him which I readily accepted. Only four of my company got in that night, three of us brothers and the driver of the Colonel's wagon, slept in the Colonel's wagon, I in the middle just as wet as I could be. Next morning I was dry and felt all right.

Those were the worst days I had during the war. We stayed near Pine Bluff, Ark. till Spring opened up and the weather got warmer, then we began walking again, still moving towards Vicksburg, getting closer to the Mississippi River. This was long before the fall of Vicksburg and when we got within 20 miles of there we were sleeping on the ground at night, and the big guns would jar the ground. We kept going down until one time we were within six miles of Vicksburg and could see it very plainly from our side of the river. Still we had no fighting to do, although only a little picket fighting that didn't amount to much.

We stayed around in that part of the country for some time but on the third day of November were hurled into battle at Burlie Bay. The enemy being formed in a low place, fired on us as we went over the hill. Then the battle opened up and after a few scattered rounds, falling back a little they charged again. We were then about thirty yards past where the first line was and the charge was worse than the first one. About that time I was shot in the right arm, and Captain Gartin, a brave man and a good doctor, came to me and tied a string around my arm to stop the blood, telling J. T. Allison, one of the mess mates who died at Huckaby a few years ago to take me. We started out under a heavy shower of bullets. I was warm and very thirsty, and soon we came to a little spring of water, and got all we wanted. Filling our canteens we started on. The bullets were still flying pretty thick, but soon Gen. Green's hundred first cavalry ran in on them with a yell and took seven hundred prisoners and marched them out. But the enemy was reinforced and we could not hold our ground and had to give back.

I did not want to be taken prisoner, so when the Captain came to where the wounded was cared for, with one arm broken to pieces, I rode back about seven miles that evening to camp. That night I was sent to the hospital at Opalsin, La., the court house being the hospital. There I lay on the floor, a quilt under me, my pack for a pillow, more than 48 hours, my arm with the minie ball in it. The Doctor came to me and asked me if I could sit up in a chair. I told him I could. I asked him if he was going to take my arm off. He said he wanted to examine it. So everything was ready and as quick as I was in the chair they held a handkerchief wet with chloroforme to my nose until I was almost dead. The doctor told me later that he thought I was gone, but in time I came to myself and found that my arm was off and very neatly dressed. I was very weak from the loss of blood. They put me on a cot in a little jury room with two other men who had lost legs. One of them was Mr. Kounse who died in Gorman a short time back. The other was Captain Lovelady of Jacksonville, Texas. The next morning after my arm was taken off the good ladies of the town brought me lots of nice clean clothes which I was badly in need of as mine were very bloody. The same day my brother was detailed to wait on me, and a few days later blood poison set up in my wound

J. M. ELKIN'S LIFE

and I lay there on that cot for twenty days or more. Brother told me later that he thought every day would be my last, but with the assistance of him and the good people of the town I pulled through. So I feel like I owe my life to them. I lack for nothing willing hands could do, so I began to mend. I stayed there until the 25th day of December, when I was able to be moved to the hospital three miles east of Alexandria on the banks of the Red River, brother going to the command.

I remained there until I was able to ride horseback two hundred miles to my home. There were no railroads those days so it was either ride horseback or walk. Father came after me and I got home the last of January 1864. I found my wife and baby all right. That baby is now Mrs. Mattie Hammack, who lives with me now.

Well, Spring soon came and I would go to the field and drop corn, and like a boy, when they would stop the plow, I would take hold of it and see if I could plow with one hand. Before the crop was done I was making a full hand.

As I had no education, wife and I began to plan how to make a living farming, but we agreed not to go in debt for anything and stayed with it. Father and brother helped me and we built a pine log house near the road leading from Rusk to Alto. So in a short time we moved to ourselves. We went to work, wife making our clothes and I on the farm. We had one pony and a few cows and pretty soon we began to pick up a little. Anything we could make we would sell to the people travelling the road by our place. Pretty soon we had a little money with which to buy what we needed most and kept building up a little and soon we could buy everything we needed.

My mother passed away and was laid to rest at Shilo Methodist Church three miles west of Alto. She was about fifty years old.

Pretty soon my brother went up to Smith County near Silar and was married. He was like father in some ways, and would not stay still long enough to make anything. A little later my sister married again, J. S. Nowlin. Father broke up housekeeping and lived among his children. He passed away when he was 73 years old. We stayed on this place until 1870. By this time we were pretty well fixed, had plenty of stock and making a fair living and a little more. A little later brother and brother-in-law moved to Freestone County ten miles north of Fairfield, the County Seat. Thinking I could better myself, I sold out and began fixing to move to Freestone County. J. F. Hines, a young man went with me. So I bought land there with very little improvements but Hines stayed with me for nearly one year. My getting negroes to split rails and Mr. Hines and I clearing land, we put in a pretty good farm that year. We stayed there about four years making plenty to live on but was not very healthy so we thought it best to move again. We never had anything to give away when we went to move. We had plenty of wagons and good teams to haul all that could not walk. We had a nice bunch of cattle and kept them with us in all our moving.

In the fall of 1864 I rented out my farm for two years for two hundred dollars a year and went to Hill County near Covington and rented a place. This was the only time I ever lived in a rented house.

J. M. ELKIN'S LIFE

We are getting down to home now. The next fall I moved to Erath County and bought land a little east of Duffau, in the fall of 1872. Where we moved, we had some prairie and some timbered land. Then we went to work to improve it, built us a house and broke a little land and fenced it. We had to buy rails or fence it with rock as barbed wire had not yet come about. It was a slow way of fencing but in a few years we had built a rock and rail fence around 100 acres putting that in a farm so we were getting pretty well fixed to live. I always did want a little more than a living so about this time I sold my farm in Freestone County and had a little money ahead.

Mr. A. B. McClure and I went into the mercantile business in Duffau. In 1878 my daughter married Mr. J. T. Hammack. He died in 1907. I sold my place to J. S. Nowlin and later they sold out and moved to Arkansas and he and his wife are buried there. Then I bought a place in the little city of Duffau and moved on it and have lived near there since that time.

A little later thinking I could make some money, I took in the Duffau Flouring Mill and Gin Co. and lost about \$4000, then I quit the public business. Still had our farm and stock and plenty to eat until I could make some more and the farm never failed to make a living.

We had borned to us ten children, five boys and five girls. Two of our boys are dead. One died when about seventeen years old, the other was still born. Our children professed religion when young and joined churches. Two of the girls are in the Presbyterian Church; one in the Baptist and two in the M. E. Church South. The boys are still in the Methodist Protestant Church. I hope they are living for a better life and will be an unbroken family in the beyond.

Our children are all married and scattered. The girls, one in Deport, Lamar County, two on the Texas Plains, one at Canyon City, the other at Hale Center; one girl at Hico. One son lives at Rising Star and the other two here. I guess all are doing very well. My wife was called away July 3, 1911. Wife and I lived together over fifty two years but it seems as long since she left as the balance of my life. But I am glad to say my children are able and willing to take care of me as long as I live. We have about thirty grandchildren and fourteen great grandchildren living.

This is the first time I ever wrote a sketch of my life. My recollection is short and I will close by saying that all my soldier mates are gone that I know anything about. My parents, sister, two brothers, their wives, my dear wife and two children and several grandchildren are all gone. I am still here but by all the laws of nature it won't be long till I will follow. This is written especially for my children that they may see how I passed through this world when I am gone.

*(On a copy of this that Margaret has there is a penciled note saying his wife died June 2 and was buried June 3.)

J. M. ELKIN'S OBITUARY

Funeral services for J. M. Elkins, 90 years old Confederate Veteran and a long time resident of Texas, were held Friday at Duffau, Erath County, where he died Thursday. He was the father of T. M. Elkins of Dallas. Mr. Elkins

Continued on page 118