

# Striking It Rich

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*The Pelham Humphries Story*



**W**HO HASN'T DREAMED OF BEING RICH? I MEAN REALLY RICH. NOT JUST A MILLION DOLLARS RICH, BUT TENS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS RICH, OR MORE. Out of debt, secure, no worry about hospital bills, your children's education covered, travel anywhere, buy anything, rolling in the dough, really rich. Win the state lottery, uncover a treasure chest of lost gold, strike a gusher of oil in your back yard. These are the things dreams are made of, and we love to dream. So people take notice when the headlines read: "ARE YOU PART OF A 300 BILLION DOLLAR INHERITANCE?"

## *A Case Study in Genealogy Fraud*

In late 1983 and early 1984, dozens of such headlines appeared throughout the American South announcing the claims of people named Humphries as the rightful heirs of the estate of Pelham Humphries, supposedly established in the late 1830s in Texas. Details of the history of this estate were based on myths and rumors intermixed with a few facts, and this information had grown into legendary proportions. Grocery store tabloids, and legitimate newspapers alike proclaimed an inheritance of hundreds of millions of dollars to anyone who could prove their connection to this early Texas pioneer, who was the recipient of several thousand acres of land where an oil gusher erupted in 1901!

When I first became acquainted with this amazing story the rewards were touted in the hundreds of millions of dollars, accruing through escrow for nearly 100 years, deep down in the bank vaults of some of America's biggest oil companies. Over the space of three or four years, stories about that money grew to \$700 million; and then \$900 million. Then it topped the billion dollar mark and went wild from there. Three billion! Thirty billion! And finally, \$300 billion. A million dollars divided by a thousand heirs could be overlooked, or even a paltry 50 or 60 million might be discounted as not worth the notice or attention. After all, it takes money to get money, and to mount an assault on some of the biggest oil companies in the world, and their banks and judges, meant getting a lot of cash for working capital. Every news story needed to be bigger and better than the previous one. No one could pass up the incredible potential of hundreds of billions of dollars, no matter how many people were involved. It seems like grandpa mentioned a great-uncle named Pelham, and with that much money available, surely there would be enough to pass around to everyone. It was worth contributing your two hundred, or five hundred, or even a thousand dollars to see that this case could go to court.

The Pelham Humphries Oil Estate is a scam; a fraud perpetrated on thousands of people. It is a genealogy lie of epic proportions. The thing about it that makes it so difficult to label as a scam or a fraud, is that most of the people involved with it believe that it is real. So if it is believed to be real how can it possibly be a scam or a fraud? It fits under that classification because it began as a scam or a fraud in the early 1900s after oil

was discovered. Stories based on lies and half-truths were told and retold until they were believed by the unsuspecting and ignorant. The cases have been beaten down in the courts again and again, but the dream of wealth is so great, that the dream is more important than reality. The cases built upon those lies and half-truths, have been devised by people who believe in the dream so completely that they feel justified in perpetrating additional lies in order to prove they are telling the truth.

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### Pelham Humphries or William Humphries— The Origins of a Myth

On September 27, 1834, a man named Humphries stepped into the land office at San Augustine, State of Coahuila, Texas, which was then part of Mexico, and filed a claim as a colonist prior to 1830, for *a league and a labor of land* (a league of land, for ranching, equaled 4,428 acres; and a labor of land, for farming, equaled 177.1 acres). He signed his name with a mark, but it was recorded by the clerk as “Pelham” Humphries. Land was selected and surveyed, and five months later on Feb. 14, 1835 a league of land was granted to “Pelham” Humphries. This property was located on the west side of the Neches River, a few miles south of the present site of Beaumont, Texas. It was grassland, and swampy grassland at that, and wasn't considered as valuable property by anyone.

Sixty six years later, on Jan. 10, 1901, a group of geologists and miners under the direction of Captain Anthony F. Lucas, studying the area for a rare new treasure called petroleum oil, or black gold, sank a well on the Pelham Humphries league and struck the first oil gusher in Texas history. Overnight, a poor tract of swamp and grazing land became “Spindletop,” the most valuable real estate in America. W.P.H. McFaddin had become one of the richest men in the world, and one of the biggest land rushes in history was on. Soon hundreds of oil wells covered the land around Beaumont, and

hundreds of claims against “Spindletop” were filling the court ledgers. Suddenly, everyone remembered “Uncle Pelham” Humphries. Stories about him abounded. He was a cattle rustler driven out of Tennessee; he was an American Indian half-breed who wandered to Texas to find his fortune. He traveled to Texas with his brother William Humphries, and was shot to death. Brother William then claimed the estate. This was an especially popular story because almost every Humphries family had a William in the old Family Bible. And hundreds of family Bibles surfaced recording the name of Pelham Humphries as their long lost loved one. Nefarious attorneys and con artists spread the word that thousands and even millions of dollars might be available to some lucky heir. The race was on.

## If Grampa Said It, It Must Be True.

The surprising thing about the Pelham Humphries story is that this scenario wasn't at all new by the time I heard about it. It was decades old. About every twenty years since 1901, word of the opportunity of incredible wealth hit the newsstands, and fantasy, greed, and desperate hope became the controlling emotions over reality, moderation, and wisdom. "Don't confuse me with facts, my mind is made up," wasn't just a cute catch phrase. It became the descriptive definition of thousands of hopeful potential heirs.

fully researched or documented the story of the Pelham Humphries league of land in Jefferson County, Texas. They either were so focused on proving their claim to the exclusion of any other account that there was no need for a "documented" history; or they were so afraid of the possibility that the other side might be right, that their only goal was to prove the other side wrong.

In 1984 I was contacted by the President of the East Tennessee Humphries Heirs Association to conduct research for the members of their organization and to determine the true heirs of Pelham Humphries.

dream of wealth and good fortune. I saw this as a terrific business opportunity, to conduct research for dozens if not hundreds of families seeking to discover their correct lineage back to Pelham and his family. It was a genealogist's dream, come true. If this story was real, and at the time I had no reason not to believe it, then this could be the genealogy opportunity of a lifetime. It's amazing how easy it is to forget the old adage, "If it sounds too good to be true. . ."

I wasn't the only professional genealogist caught up in this hunt. Dozens of researchers around the country reported accounts dealing with

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By the 1960s and 1970s, the stories were so deeply founded among many families that the next generation of Humphries heirs was ripe for the picking when a new flurry of scam artists announced that great wealth was available for the taking. This new generation recalled hearing parents or grandparents speak of a long lost uncle who left a fortune, or of relatives who went to Texas to claim their estate years earlier. Now they wondered why they hadn't gotten any of it. This generation regarded their grandparents as pillars of their family; honest, church going people who didn't lie. So what they had talked about must be the absolute truth. David Hannum (not P.T. Barnum) said: "There's a sucker born every minute." A new generation of suckers was ready to shell out their savings and earnings, mortgage their homes, attend meetings, and anxiously read the mail for news of their soon to be had wealth.

The truly amazing aspect of this story is that in over 85 years, no one on either side of the issue had care-

At about the same time representatives of the Humphreys Association of West Tennessee contacted me about helping them with their possible connection with Pelham Humphreys (as they spelled the name). Within a very short time I was bombarded with letters, news stories, and other published accounts about the legend of Pelham Humphries. The Humphries Association of North Carolina joined in, as did groups in Alabama and Georgia. To avoid a conflict of interest between the competing groups, I set my program up so that I was working for the individual members, and not for the organizations. Each of these groups was made up of people descending from dozens of different Humphries families. While a central theory existed with each organization, none of them could state with any authority that their version of the claim on the estate was correct.

I have to admit, when I began my association with all of the Humphries organizations, I was also dazzled by the

tracing family lines back to Pelham Humphries. A number of prominent research organizations in the U.S. and several from England also jumped into the fray. Sad to say, not all genealogists were ethical in their dealings on this issue. At one point in 1986, a client sent me a Humphries Family Newsletter, from the Humphries organization in Atlanta, Georgia. The newsletter proclaimed that after months of planning for their annual convention, invitations had been sent to the three principle genealogists who were dealing with Humphries research in the country, asking for presentations at the annual convention in Atlanta, where one of these prominent genealogists would be chosen to handle the research for their prestigious organization. The three researchers included a prominent English specialist, a well-known Tennessee researcher, and myself. The newsletter went on to announce that the three of us had all appeared at the convention, presented our papers, and the Tennessee researcher had been chosen for the exclusive

job of determining the correct lineage. The surprise was that neither I, nor the Englishman had ever heard of the convention, much less participated in it! Sadly, I was later informed that this particular Tennessee researcher had prepared and mailed the newsletter himself to establish his prominence among the players in this game.

## Uncovering Lies in the Archives of Hope

During the first year of research on the Humphries lines, I looked into the primary documents pertaining to the history of Pelham Humphries and his land grant. But my main focus was on tracing the numerous family lines that had been submitted, to find out who their ancestors were and how they might connect to the Legend of Pelham Humphries. In addition to information from each of

the clients about their individual families, I also received boxes of documents that had been accrued over the years by past lawsuits, and claimants. Sifting through these archives of hope, I ran across the first of many lies that had been promoted to prove the validity of the Humphries claims. In the court papers of *Glover vs. McFadden*, filed during the 1940s, the plaintiff used a description from the 1830 and 1820 federal censuses as evidence in their claim. The claimant proposed that Elisha Humphries of Carter County, Tennessee was the father of Pelham Humphries and noted the account of the 1830 Tennessee federal census of Carter County to show the make up of Elisha Humphries household at that time with so many males, ages 10 to 15; so many males, ages 15 to 20; also males ages 20 to 30; and so on. This was to show that a male

the age of Pelham Humphries existed in the household at that time. Then to corroborate the evidence, the court papers show that the plaintiff presented the information of the 1820 federal census to compare with the 1830 census. Elisha Humphries household was identified, and sure enough, the numbers and ages of the males in the home in 1820 were identical to those shown in the 1830 census, with a ten-year difference. So many males were under 5, so many 5 to 10, 10 to 15, and so on. To the average person this information meant little or nothing, and no problem would be noticed. But to a genealogist two major problems jump right out! First, no record of the 1820 federal census of East Tennessee exists anywhere! Including that of Carter County! And second, the format of the federal census changed dramatically

Panola Co. Texas 1860 census p. 166 shows the widow (Polly Humphries) and children.

SCHEDULE I. Free Inhabitants in \_\_\_\_\_ in the County of \_\_\_\_\_ State of Texas enumerated by me, on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of \_\_\_\_\_ 1860.

1	2	3	SEX AND AGE			7	8	9	10 11 12			13			
			4	5	6				10	11	12				
Name of Person		The Name of every Person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1860, was in this family.		RESIDENCE			Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each Male Person over 15 years of age.		Value of Real Estate owned.		Place of Birth, Naming the State, Territory, or Country.		Whether blind, dumb, deaf, idiotic, insane, or otherwise.		
312	312	Tom Cook	20	M		Farming									
		Virilo	16	F											
312	312	Polly Humphries	26	F		Widow	600		Texas						
		John	15	F					Texas						
		James	13	F					600						
		Maanda	12	F					50						
		Jonathan	10	M					50						
		Andrew	9	M					50						
		Polly	5	F					50						
		Mahaly	1	F					50						
315	315	Jehin Napelle	37	M				500							
		James	27	F											

between 1820 and 1830. The age groups for males and females were completely different between those two census records. The information presented by Glover in his court papers was not just a misstatement; it was a complete fabrication!

I wondered, "Why go to the trouble of inventing evidence so innocuous as an 1820 census entry in such a high profile estate claim?" What I learned was that I was naive. This was just one of many lies and corruptions. One of the most pervasive methods of lying in this case was one known as "lying for God." Family Bibles in the deeply religious and conservative South served as the center of faith in each home. Their contents represent the absolute "Word of God." Somehow this concept translated as "everything written in the Book of God, must also be the word of God." I saw dozens of claims, which included photocopies from family Bibles, identifying Pelham Humphries as a great-great-grandparent's brother. Most of these came from families that were not related to each other in any degree. Consequently instead of creating patterns through relationships, these "hallowed" documents created conflicts, and completely soured my confidence in family Bibles as a respectable document. Some of the Bible records that came to light were very convincing, and if it weren't for their conflict with each other, a researcher would be compelled to regard them as serious evidence. One such record, out of North Carolina, was written in an 1840s Bible with berry juice used as ink. Tests by federal agencies attested that the ink could be old and that the paper and the Bible were authentic. Dozens of families had their hopes riding on this document. It looked perfect except for one item. The entries in the birth

and death information mentioned a brother (not Pelham) who had died in 1849. My research discovered this specific person was alive and well in the 1860 census, not more than thirty miles away from the owner of the Bible. That one inaccuracy plus the general problems relating to the history of Pelham Humphries doomed the document to the literary classification of fantasy.

Another family Bible, in East Tennessee, supporting the claim of the Elisha Humphries family, is a very old volume dating from the early 1800s with references to Pelham, William, and other siblings. It is still the basis for groups in that area that believe their claim is true. The only valid defense against this record is the documented

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history of the Pelham Humphries league of land, and the ramifications of that documentation.

As mentioned before, some dreams are too important to be hindered by historical facts. I met with an old gentleman in East Tennessee, who reverently brought out two framed photographs that had been handed down to him by his parents, and to them from their parents. One was of an "Indian Princess" whom he identified as his 3<sup>rd</sup>-great-grandmother, the mother of "Uncle Pelham." The other photograph was of his great-great-uncles, Pelham and William Humphries, prior to the death of Pelham. He really believed his story, regardless of the fact that by his account the Indian Princess Grandmother, and Uncle Pelham died in the mid-1830s or earlier. We tried to explain to him that photography wasn't

even invented until many years after their purported deaths. If we couldn't convince him of that, mentioning the presence of a modern billboard in the background of the pictures wouldn't make any difference either.

## Uncovering Historical Truth through Documentation

After spending countless hours tracing individual family lines back to dubious historical connections of the Humphries family, I realized that no clear, proven, and documented history had ever been made of the Humphries Land Grant. Although many researchers were hot on the chase, all of them were focused on

proving a particular claim, as opposed to documenting the facts concerning the central issue and building upon the historical record. In all disputes, a correct history should first be determined, and then claims can be established according to the documentation. Everything else is speculation and fantasy.

Identifying Pelham Humphries as a historical figure proved to be the biggest argument refuting the alleged history. Outside of the primary document, the application for land filed Sept. 27, 1834, no other original document identifies Pelham Humphries as a real person. The principle argument about the Humphries title deals with the name Pelham Humphries. That initial application was signed with a mark, but identified by the clerk as "Pelham" Humphries. At some later

date, the original document was altered with the name "William" Humphries written over the name "Pelham." Claimants have argued that since the application was followed by orders to survey, survey notes, certificates of survey, and the actual grant of title, all under the name "Pelham" Humphries, surely the error would have been noticed and corrected before the actual grant was made. But on careful evaluation of the record it is evident that once the application was made and signed, the other documents followed the lead of the initial document. The people involved with the surveying, and the ultimate granting of the title may not even have known Humphries. The only person likely to have known, or at least made the acquaintance of Mr. Humphries was Augustus Hotchkiss, who signed as the witness of the initial application in the presence of Mr. Humphries.

The absence of Pelham Humphries from any other historical record was surprising. For all of the hype and excitement surrounding this name, I expected to find a variety of references to him. But nothing? By *nothing*, we mean records that were recorded during a person's life, that define him as a person. Census records tell us that a person was recognized by name, by a census taker, as a real inhabitant. A marriage record tells us that a specific man and woman were married. Probate records identify the estate of a person, or identify people associated with him in life. Deeds during their lifetime help in describing property and actions taken regarding that property. Records created and information recalled after the lifetime of a subject run the risk of being questionable, or inaccurate in the least.

The name Pelham Humphries doesn't appear in any U.S. federal

census records at any time. Some explain this away because he was out of U.S. jurisdictions after 1820, and was never the head of a family during that early period when censuses only listed the names of heads of families. The argument is valid however, considering the broad scope of claims about Pelham. Some stories claim that he died in a gunfight in 1836 or 1837 while in Texas. But others claim that he moved back and forth between Texas and other U.S. states for many years. Some claims identify him visiting relatives in Tennessee in the 1860s

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and 1870s. Others claim that he resided in Louisiana for many years after the grant. Some of the nineteenth-century claims relating to his land title show him or a son named Pelham Humphries Jr. alive in Texas or near Texas as late as the 1870s. For such claims to be true, there should be evidence of such persons in public records such as censuses, where the records were created many years before the discovery of oil, and were closed to the public for 72 years afterwards. Censuses were taken in Mexican Texas prior to the land grants, but the name Pelham Humphries doesn't appear there either.

Other sources pertaining to Pelham Humphries were searched as well. Pelham, according to legend, was wanted for theft in Hawkins County, Tennessee, but none of the surviving court records or tax lists for that time period mention his name. Similar claims existed for Maury County in West Tennessee, but again no mention of the name Pelham appears, although the Humphries

name is found in abundance. Nor does he appear in contemporary records in any Tennessee county, or counties in any of the states in the South. Probate records in Tennessee, Texas, and other southern states have been searched and searched for reference to Pelham as a testator, an heir, a son, brother, nephew, or any other relation, but no reference to the name is found. Claims were made suggesting that all persons who settled and received property in Mexican Texas had to be baptized in the Catholic Church. Existing parish registers in Texas and Mexico City

were searched, again with negative results.

Pelham's name doesn't appear in colonial or county deeds in Texas, except in later years long after he was supposedly dead. During the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s, deeds identifying Pelham Humphries show up in a variety of counties in Texas. A deed was filed in Bexar County, Texas, dated 1857, claiming that Pelham Humphries of Mexico, sold his tract of land in Jefferson County, to David Snively of Refugio County. In 1860 in Liberty County, Texas, a deed from Pelham Humphries, Jr. and his brother William Humphries to Stephen Dozier was recorded. This deed was supposedly prepared in San Augustine County, pertaining to persons living in Panola County, regarding land in Jefferson County. Pelham Jr. and William claimed they were the only heirs of their deceased father Pelham Humphries Sr.

In all such incidents, researchers have endeavored to corroborate documents with other historical records

and sources that might identify the people involved and the actual identification of a person named Pelham Humphries, but no such identification has ever been made. This identification is important, because anyone can create a document and insert it into a court docket, thereby claiming legitimacy. And where a real person exists and a real incident occurs there should be evidence of that person and event, otherwise it cannot be trusted to be valid history. That is the purpose of genealogy research, to establish historical facts through documentation.

## William (Not Pelham) Humphries of Shelby, Harrison, and Panola Counties, Texas

We found there *were* people and there *was* an account that could be documented. In about 1823, Joseph Humphries and his family including his son William Humphries came to Texas to take advantage of offers of free land made by the Government of Mexico. Joseph's family consisted of William, George, and daughter Tenia Humphries, by his first wife whose name is unknown; and by his second wife Sarah Wilkerson, whom Joseph married about 1825, he had four children: Thomas, Riley, Mary, and Philip Humphries. The family settled in the area that became Shelby County, on the eastern border of Texas separated from Louisiana by the Sabine River. Joseph was a farmer, operated a mill, and ran a ferry from Humphries Bluff, a few miles south of what was then Pulaski, Texas. William Humphries married Mary McFadden, daughter of Andrew McFadden, in about 1833. They had at least seven children between 1835 and 1846, at which time William Humphries died. Their children

were: Jane (1835), Tina (1837), Amanda (1838), Jonathan (1840), Andrew Holland (1841), Polly (1842), and Mahala (1846).

On Sept. 27, 1834, William "Umphries" appeared at the land office at San Augustine, and filed a Certificate of Character, before Judge Benjamin Lindsey, stating that he was a native of Tennessee, and a man of a family consisting of two persons. This was important because only a married man could apply for a full grant consisting of a league and a labor of land. We note that

William's certificate was recorded, and was on file, but was not noted in any application for a grant; whereas Pelham Humphries' certificate is mentioned in his application, but no certificate is registered or on file. The certificate attributed to Pelham Humphries, filed on the same date, Sept. 27, 1834, stated that he was a native of the United States, and a person of family consisting of two persons. Procedure is an important part of this history. In applying for a grant, the applicant came to the court where he obtained a certificate of character, sworn to by a sponsor, with which he could apply for a grant consisting of a league and a labor of land. When the application was complete, an order for survey was issued by the court. When the survey was completed and the tract approved by the Land Office, it was recorded and a grant was issued to the name appearing on the application.

Part of the Humphries land grant application was a second certificate of character made and signed by A. (Augustus) Hotchkiss, Attorney, witnessing that the applicant Humphries was one of the colonists that he introduced to the government as part of a contract he made on March 12, 1829. Still on this same date (Sept. 27, 1834), William Humphries, and a John Crippen filed a joint deed at San Augustine, before Judge Benjamin Lindsey, stating that they had each filed an application for a land grant, and having done that they now filed deeds to William English for 1000 acres of the land they expected to receive from their land grants. These documents all attest to the concept that William Humphries applied for a land grant on Sept. 27, 1834. But the records show only an application by "Pelham" Humphries as the only application for a Humphries grant on or near that date.

## The Legend of William Pelham Humphries

Wanted for theft  
—Tennessee— West Virginia

Sold tract of land  
in Jefferson County 1857

Certificate of  
character 1829

Filed a joint  
deed in 1834

Died in a  
gun fight  
in 1836 or 1837



The Land Grant to "Pelham" Humphries was issued Feb. 15, 1835 at Nacogdoches, Texas. It was prepared and written by Jorge Antonio Nixon, Commissioner. On Oct. 6, 1835, following the grant, William Humphries appealed to the court at San Augustine, under the jurisdiction of Augustus Hotchkiss, Judge, (the same man who sponsored "Pelham" Humphries, and witnessed that he was a man of good character), that when he obtained his order for survey, the name "*Pelham* Humphreys had been inserted in place of William," and requested that "Pelham" be corrected. The petition was filed by William English, Samuel McFaddin (William Humphries' brother-in-law), Jonathan Anderson,

Several months later, a deed was filed in Jefferson County, on Feb. 14, 1836, in which William Humphries of Shelby County, sold his entire grant to William English for \$1000.00. It was filed before Judge John G. Love, and witnessed by Edwin LeGrand and Jonathan Anderson. A deposition by Polly Humphries, wife of William, was taken in Shelby County in 1837, stipulating that she approved of the sale. The deed was filed Dec. 13, 1838, along with a copy of the land grant, with testimony by witnesses that the handwriting of the grant was indeed in the hand of Commissioner Jorge Antonio Nixon. It was noted that by this time (1838) the name "Pelham" Humphries had been

1838, the Land Commissioners for Shelby County, Republic of Texas, issued a grant for a "Labor of Land" to William Humphries, an "emigrant of 1823." In doing this, the commissioners recognized William Humphries as having previously, and lawfully, received a grant for a league of land from the government of Mexico.

In 1840, the first federal census of the Republic of Texas was taken, and William Humphries appeared in Harrison County near his father Joseph Humphries. (Harrison County was formed in 1839 from Shelby County; in 1846 Panola County was organized from Harrison and Shelby). A plat map of original properties of Panola County

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changed to "William" Humphries on the first page of the land grant document. This would indicate that Judge Hotchkiss had approved the petition made in 1835, and a superficial change had been made, and noted in the historical record.

Following the Texas War of Independence in the Spring of 1836, the government of the Republic of Texas approved an act, to provide grants, for a "League and a Labor" to Texas inhabitants that were in Texas prior to November, 1835, when war broke out. Grants issued prior to that time were accepted as valid, but Mexican Grants issued after November 7, 1835, were not valid. The Humphries grant was valid. In addition to offering new grants to early colonists, the Republic of Texas also offered grants for a *labor* where only a *league* had previously been delivered. This was the situation with the Humphries Grant. On Feb. 16,

shows the Labor of Land grant of William Humphries next to the property of his father-in-law Andrew McFadden. William Humphries last appears in the 1846 Tax lists of Panola County. Four years later, his wife Polly Umphries appears as a widow in the 1850 Texas federal census of Panola County, with her children.

This account establishes William Humphries, as a real person of history, with documentation, and association with other real people of history. It identifies him as having been at the right places at the right times, and provides corroborating evidence that other people also regarded William as the very person that applied for and received the land grant attributed to "Pelham" Humphries.

## Fraud Begets Fraud

The story of fraud regarding the Humphries league of land came about as the result of poor record-



and Ephraim Raines. A marked statement by William *Umphreys* was attached, identifying William English as his agent. A contention of later claimants is that William English was one of the people fraudulently claiming the property, but they have no physical or written evidence to support their claim.

keeping in a land that was still a great wilderness. Deeds were often recorded years after they were made. Transactions duplicating previous transactions created confusion among titleholders.

Shelby County deeds show a deed purporting William Humphries selling a portion of his land in Jefferson County to Judge John Love, who had been the judge who acknowledged the sale of that land four years earlier to William English. Love later sold it to someone else. Since Love had known of Humphries' sale of his entire grant to English, we have to wonder just how valid this deed was. Or perhaps it casts doubt on the Humphries-/English deed. In 1850, the Jefferson County Tax Commission advertised the property for sale because of non-payment of taxes, and then sold the "Pelham Humphries" league to the State of Texas. Either the Humphries family, Love family, or English family were unaware of the situation, or they believed they no longer had a claim, or they didn't care.

As mentioned, David Snively claimed that Pelham Humphries sold the land to him in 1857. And Stephen Dozier claimed to have purchased it in 1859 from Pelham Humphries Jr. Both of these men in turn sold it to others. Further sales like this continued, and by the 1870s the property title was claimed by a dozen different claimants. In 1873, W. P. H. (William Perry Herring) McFadden, a prominent public figure of Jefferson County, and a large land and cattle owner (no relation to the McFaddens of Shelby and Panola Counties) purchased an interest in the Pelham Humphries league from M. W. Houghton, a grantee of Alexander Homes, who received it from B. B. Lacey, an heir of David Snively.

Concern over the clear title of the



## More Hidden Wealth?

By Merrill Gillette, Associate Editor

One of the residents of the Island of Manhattan when the British took over from the Dutch was Anneke Jans, widow of Roelof Jansen and then of Everadus Bogardus. Her two husbands left property that has been in dispute almost since her death in 1663. The property is that occupied by the Trinity Church of New York and the surrounding lands.

At first it appeared that the British would honor the land ownership as it was under the Dutch. Soon, however, Queen Anne would grant nearly the same tract of land to a Welsh naval officer, Robert Edwards, for his exploits in raiding the Spanish treasure galleons.

The Bogardus and Edwards descendants have for several hundred years been contending in court that the land is theirs and that they should be awarded the value of the land. The local and appellate courts have consistently ruled in favor of the Trinity Church. Yet, every twenty or thirty years new family organizations are created to try and gain possession of the disputed property, claiming that it is rightfully theirs. Each

believes that they have a strong case based on creative genealogies, fraudulent documentation, lost documentation, family stories told by grandparents, and hopes that are based on greed rather than facts and reality.

In this instance, like the "Pelham" Humphries case, the family organizations are asked to contribute a certain amount to the fund to meet the legal expenses that will be involved. Unfortunately, these funds are frequently misused and go into the pockets of the shysters and immoral lawyers without ever getting to court. When a case does reach the courts the arguments are lost due to the facts of a legal term called Adverse Domain and the New York State statute of limitations.

When you hear of so-called "hidden or lost family treasure" remember to be very skeptical and check carefully with reputable national organizations. It is far better to be safe than lose your savings to a scam.

For additional information see:

[www.vocable.fr/Num19990218/text\\_uk\\_19990218.html](http://www.vocable.fr/Num19990218/text_uk_19990218.html)

[www.freelabs.com/~whitis/clan/bogardus/](http://www.freelabs.com/~whitis/clan/bogardus/)

Pelham Humphries league came to a head in 1880, and Cause 682 of the Eastern District Court of Texas; Heirs of William Humphries vs. Simpson et al., and heirs of William English was initiated. The court brought together the heirs of William and Polly Humphries, William English, David Snively, John Love, and Steven Dozier, and other related parties to determine once and for all, where the proper title to the Pelham Humphries league was legally established. The case continued in court for five years, until May 21, 1885, when the court ruled in favor of the plaintiff, the Heirs of William Humphries, namely Jane McFadden, Mahala Coble, and Thomas Anderson, minor child of Garrison and Amanda Anderson, deceased. Again the legal courts of the State of Texas recognized William Humphries as the proper and legal recipient of the Pelham Humphries league, many years before oil was discovered. However, when the court ruled in favor of William's heirs in 1885, the title to the land didn't belong to them.

In 1883, W. P. H. McFadden purchased the rights of each of the claimants in the case whether they owned legal rights or not, thereby assuring himself full ownership of the land regardless of the winner of the case. McFadden then fenced the property and began using it as private pastureland. This action, meant to solidify W. P. H. McFadden's hold on the Humphries league, actually set it up for further confusion and debate. By purchasing the rights to the property before rights had been clearly established it created an impression that years later was viewed as suspicious or perhaps fraudulent.

After oil was discovered on the Humphries league in 1901 by Anthony Lucas, dozens of claimants

sprang up and declared themselves the rightful heirs to the land. They declared that McFadden hadn't obtained the title from the proper heirs, but rather, the title was stolen from Pelham Humphries by William Humphries, or by William English, or others. In later years, as a defense against these claims, the heirs of McFadden along with Gulf Oil Company established their defense in court based on the principle of "adverse possession." Adverse possession meant that property was fenced and held in private ownership for an extended length of time without legal conflict. This only inflamed things more, because it implied that the Humphries claimants might be right about their history, and that McFadden and the Oil companies could only prove their claim on a rule of law.

False claimants crawled out of the woodwork. Even close relatives of William Humphries created false genealogy to make their grab at the wealth. Descendants of William's half-brother Thomas Humphries claimed that their grandfather Joseph Humphries was the father of Pelham Humphries. They explained that Joseph had a first family consisting of three children, namely, Pelham, William, and Tenia Humphries. They inserted Pelham in place of their uncle George Humphries, who was long since dead (1838). Relatives of William's stepmother Sarah Wilkerson Humphries, recalled stories about Pelham, and how he had been killed by Mexicans in 1839. A niece of Sarah recalled hearing William and his sister Tenia speak about their brother Pelham. All of these accounts were fabrications and lies about people the family clearly knew. All that their efforts did was to muddy the genealogical waters.

If William Humphries' family could lie to the courts about their relationship with "Pelham" Humphries, anyone could make any claim they wanted to. And they have. Millions of dollars have come out of the Humphries claims, but they've come out of the pockets of the people claiming to be heirs. Even murders have been committed over individual claims. With the waters muddier and muddier, the battles continue on. Truth no longer plays a part in this drama. Facts are ignored, and dreams and fantasies prevail. Courts rule on the law, but are shunned by shysters and their attorneys who lay in wait for the naive and innocent. Twenty years or so from now, when the current excitement has died down, and a new generation of dreamers grows up, a new headline will appear: "Oil Companies Hiding Trillions—Are You An Heir?"

For additional information and details about the Pelham Humphries Land Grant and the court cases stemming from it, see *Spindletop Unwound*, by Roger L. Shaffer (Republic of Texas Press. Wordware Publishing, Inc.: Plano, Texas). ■



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