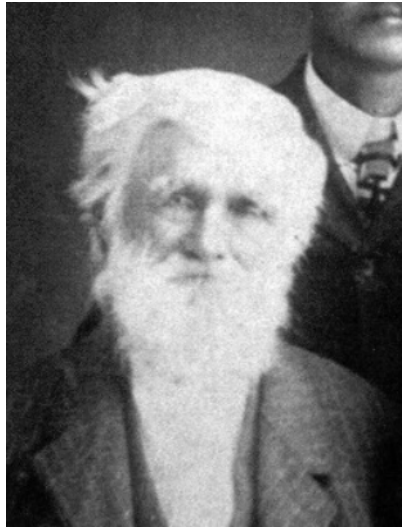


Henry S. Morriss

Henry Sterling Morriss never amassed any great amount of wealth. As far as I know he never invented any thing, never wrote any great work of literature or fought in any branch of the military. But he was a great American and one of my great-great grandfathers. These are some of the things that I have discovered about him.

He was born on October 2, 1818 in what is now West Virginia. Henry was the son of John Pemberton Morriss and Eliza Duncan. His father was a merchant and hotel owner. Henry's father and mother were second cousins who both descended from some of the very first English settlers of Virginia. Henry was one of eleven children. He lived in a dangerous time when children often died before reaching their tenth birthday. Pandemic diseases such as measles, smallpox and influenza were often lethal. Life then was accompanied by daily risks from bacterial assailants that we have little fear of now. Diseases like Tuberculosis, Tetanus, Gangrene, and Rabies were also indiscriminate killers in the early 1800's. If that were not enough, many people died from eating bad food. You could always get Typhoid, Cholera or Amebic Dysentery if you were not careful. These hazards were a part of the lives of everyone in the early nineteenth century. It resulted in a general attitude toward life that was very different from what is now considered normal.

Henry's father settled in Buckingham County, Virginia. He was a merchant and owned a road house or tavern. John P. Morriss must have been quite ambitious by our standards, but not so much so as to be considered abnormal by people of his time. At the conclusion of the War of 1812 the US Government set about to move all of the Indians away from what is now Kentucky and Tennessee. As the Cherokee and Seminole tribes were being pushed out of this vast area, there were many



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incentives given to entice citizens to move in. Gifts of free land, called warrants, were offered to veterans of the two wars that our country had fought. So much land was available that it became a magnet too difficult for many Virginians to resist. John and Eliza had family members who qualified for, and

received land in Kentucky. In the fall of 1818 John and his pregnant wife Eliza and their two young children left Buckingham County to visit some of their Kentucky relatives. Their exact destination and the route they took is not known, but it is not likely that they used the popular path of that time, known as the Cumberland Gap. They may have followed a route through the mountains to the Ohio River, where the family could get transported to western Kentucky on a riverboat. We do know that Henry was born

in the part of Virginia that was destined to become West Virginia 45 years hence. Whether the journey was terminated because of the birth of Henry is not clear. John, Eliza, baby Henry and two of his brothers returned to Buckingham County late in 1818.

Perseverance (or perhaps stubbornness) has long been considered one of my family's behavioral traits. It must come from John P. Morriss. When Henry was five, his family once again departed for Kentucky, this time with the intention to stay. Thomas, Henry's eight-year-old brother and William his three-year-old brother died on the journey. John did not stay long in Kentucky. He learned of government land offers in the new state of Missouri. In 1824, the family moved to Howard County which is about half way between St. Louis and Kansas City. The logical route to follow would have been on a riverboat down the Ohio and Mississippi

rivers then up the Missouri. While the Morriss family was establishing itself in central Missouri, there were reports of serious resistance growing among the several Indian tribes that the Army was trying to move out of the region. Because of fear for his family, John abruptly moved back to Kentucky, this time settling in Hopkinsville.

Even though literacy was not very common among the agrarian population of the country at that time, everyone in the Morriss family knew how to read and write. Whether Henry attended schools as he was growing up, or whether he learned at home is not known. It was probably both. There is no doubt that his mother and father, who were well educated, insisted that their offspring get all of the schooling that they could. At any rate, it is not likely that the education of any of the children suffered when John moved his family to St. Louis sometime late in 1830. The move came when Henry was twelve years old. John, Eliza and their six children drove wagons and walked. They were accompanied by several members of Eliza's family and possibly by other families that were moving west from Kentucky. They probably did not go by way of boat because of livestock that they wanted to bring with them. It was a difficult trip to make so late in the year. One of Henry's brothers, Richard Smith Morriss, who was eight at the time, suffered a severe case of frostbite on the trip, which plagued him throughout the rest of his life.

Through hard work, the Morriss family forged a comfortable life style in St. Louis. John bought land on Olive Street close to the Mississippi River. He built a warehouse there and established a business buying and selling produce, especially tobacco. Henry would have been required (as were his brothers) to work in the family business. We do not know what schooling opportunities were available. St. Louis was a raw frontier town in 1821, when Missouri became a state. But its position on the Mississippi River and the development of the steamboat brought civilization very rapidly. We can be confident that Henry got all of the formal schooling that was available and that he learned a lot about commerce and other

parts of the world through his father's contacts with river boat men.

The family attended and joined the St. Louis Presbyterian Church. They also made close friendships with several other nearby families. Among their friends was the family of Samuel McCormick who were also Presbyterians. When Henry was about 16, William S. Potts, the Pastor of the St. Louis Presbyterian church, was contacted by a group of individuals who were starting a Presbyterian affiliated college about 150 miles up the Mississippi River. William Muldrow had been traveling throughout the country seeking donations and prospective students for the school that was soon to be built in the low lands of Marion County. Mr. Muldrow was an outstanding salesman and could be incredibly persuasive. Henry S. Morriss as well as several other young men from the St. Louis Presbyterian Church were convinced to attend the new college. Samuel McCormick moved his entire family to Marion County so all of his children could be educated there. Even Dr. Potts the St. Louis pastor agreed to resign his job and become the college president.

Despite the fact that Marion College, as it was to be called, was located in a "slave state," most of the people running it were ardent abolitionists. They not only hated the institution of slavery, they preached to everyone that all slaves should be set free at once and that violence was justified in getting this accomplished. Because of his inability to even consider a compromise, David Nelson one of the school's stalwart founders, was driven from the County by a large group of local citizens. The remaining originators, who were unfazed by the hostility of most of their neighbors, set out to build a utopian city to match their world-class college. The college administrators were very adept at making great plans and raising money to enact them. They proved to be just as incompetent at carrying out their grandiose ideas, as they were opportunistic in promoting them. Within two years, all of the money that had been

collected was gone. Different plans to make the college self-sufficient had been grossly mismanaged. Several of the founders of the school engaged in long bitter arguments. As a result, Marion College withered to nearly nothing and was finally sold in 1844.

It is difficult to determine the exact effect that all of these tumultuous events had on the young Henry Morriss. We might have expected him to return to his parents after such an incredible experience. Several Presbyterian families, that Henry knew from when he was a boy in St. Louis, had moved to Marion County. Henry would probably also have made several close friendships with people who had moved in from other parts of the country. The young men who attended Marion College received more than just the political message of the school's founders. Each was expected to learn a trade and work for the benefit of the institution. Henry learned saddle making which must have been in some demand in northeast Missouri. We know that Henry remained in Marion County and on September 20, 1839 he married Nancy Emaline McCormick, who was the daughter of Samuel McCormick. It is believed that he worked on his father-in-law's farm, and may have done some saddle and harness making to augment his income.

What his own views on slavery were, are not clear. It is a fact that his father, John P. Morriss, had owned slaves for as long as Henry could remember. Because they were literate, Henry and his parents were able to communicate through letters. He was aware that his mother had brothers who had fought in the Texas Revolution. He knew that his mother and father were planning to leave the country and move to the Republic of Texas. By 1841, Henry's parents and all of his brothers and sisters moved to Houston and Henry considered joining them. His wife Nancy also was corresponding with her uncle, Isaac.

Isaac McCormick had moved from St. Louis to Norristown, Arkansas about the time that Marion College started. There seemed to be a lot of people leaving St. Louis at that time. Uncle Isaac reported that there were opportunities in the new

state of Arkansas for people who were able to work. Americans living in the west were beginning to lose their customary attitudes of optimism. Presidents Jackson and VanBuren had encouraged wild land speculation and high taxes on businesses and on imports. Their Populist policies, which had been solidly accepted by many westerners, were causing big problems with the country's economy. There was no escape from the fact that a major depression was looming. People who had been willing to move around to find a better life were now having to move around to keep food on the table. Furthermore, the farm land that Henry's father-in-law owned was often inundated by seasonal flooding. Marion County did not seem to be a good place to try to make a living for his growing family. Nancy's brother, William J. McCormick, his wife Margaret and their two young children left Missouri and settled in Arkansas prior to 1840. Sometime around 1842, Henry and Nancy and their two sons, William and Richard, moved there also. It would seem that Henry was very close to his brother-in-law William. They both grew up in St. Louis and then attended college together. Both moved to Arkansas and probably their families lived close together. Henry's first son was named William and William's first son was named Henry.

Nancy's uncle Isaac was correct about there being opportunities in Arkansas. To begin with, it was very easy to get there. More and more steamboats were traveling up and down the big river every day. Some of these were also regularly making the journey up the Arkansas River as far west as the state line with the Indian Territory. The US Army had very recently pushed the remaining Indian tribes out of the area around Pope County. The government was also selling farmland for bargain prices. Forty and eighty acre blocks of land, which were called "patents," were being sold for \$1.25 per acre. This was considered a very good price even in those economic hard times. Isaac McCormick bought 120 acres in this manner and William got 40. It is not

known if Henry Morriss applied for a land patent in Arkansas, but there is no record that he was ever granted one. We do know that prior to his departure from Missouri, Henry applied for a land patent in the county to the northwest of Marion College.

Norristown, Arkansas in the 1840's was a rough and tumble frontier community. Great numbers of people were moving in to receive cheap federal land. Henry probably helped both William and Isaac McCormick in the clearing and planting on their land. He also probably kept busy making and repairing saddles and other leather objects. The soil was a fertile loam, which had been deposited over the previous eons by the Arkansas River. The new inhabitants found that a wide variety of crops could be grown there, but cotton seemed to be the most profitable. Many of the farmers who were choosing to make the area their home, were from southern states. They knew very well how to raise cotton. That was an agricultural commodity in which Henry Morriss and William McCormick would have been novices. There was also an automatic acceptance of slavery among most of the new arrivals. Even those who did not have the economic means to own slaves, sincerely wished that they could make enough money to afford them.

The wild community of Norristown was growing at a very rapid rate. It became the county seat and very nearly was made the capital city of the whole state. However, the spring flood in 1845 resulted in a shift in the position of the Arkansas River. The loss of the convenient natural river port put an abrupt halt to the growth of the city. This fact alone would not have caused either Henry or William to abandon the area, but both knew that they would have to decide to either become better cotton planters or else move on. Henry was still communicating with his family in Houston. His father who was nearly 60 years old was in good health and working as a bricklayer. John sent his son letters encouraging him to move to Texas. He reported that life was good there and jobs were plentiful. There was talk that the fledgling republic would soon be annexed into the United States of America.

Henry received word that the patent that he requested in Missouri was his if he wanted it. He could get 155 acres in Knox County for less than \$200. He also was aware that the Republic of Texas had agreed to become a state of the USA and that the Empire of Mexico was so upset that they declared war on both the US and Texas. Henry's parents notified him that Edward Morriss his 18-year-old brother had volunteered to join the Army. Edward became a Private in the First Texas Foot Riflemen. His unit was sent to northwestern Mexico where Edward fought and was wounded. Rather than bring their young family into a war zone, Henry and Nancy moved back to Missouri. They arrived in Knox County late in 1846. William McCormick sold his 40 acres in Arkansas. The two families may have journeyed back to northeast Missouri together.

When they arrived they found that the land was a big improvement over the swampy, flood prone farm that William's father had bought, and the land that Marion College had been built on. It was further from the inexpensive transportation of the Mississippi River, but this disadvantage was outweighed by the fact that it was not likely to flood. Enough land was being cleared in the general area that wood, for constructing houses and farm buildings, was not expensive. Clearing the land and planting crops would have been a priority. Corn and wheat were big crops in the area. Raising pigs and cattle could also bring a profit to the area's farmers.

As Henry Morriss was re-establishing himself in Missouri, William McCormick was considering other opportunities further west. William and Nancy's father, Samuel McCormick died in 1849 which was the same year that the California gold rush began. William decided to move there. He settled a few miles west of Sacramento, in Davisville where he died in 1854.

In 1851 Henry received word that his father, John Pemberton Morriss died in Houston, at

the age of 64. It happened on July 19 and it is probable that it took a week for the news to reach Missouri. Sometime around this period, Henry sold his farmland in Knox County and moved to Lewis County. He continued farming at a place called Oyster Prairie. Like many farmers of that time Henry and Nancy were forming a large close-knit family. Several of Nancy's brothers and sisters remained in the area of northeastern Missouri. Edward Morriss, his younger brother from Texas, visited Henry and Nancy. Edward had been seriously wounded in the Mexican war, but his arm which had been shot was healing and there seemed to be no noticeable impairment. Edward renewed a childhood acquaintance with Nancy's younger sister, Mary Jane McCormick. Edward soon proposed to Mary and on May 27, 1852 the two were married in LaGrange, Mo. Edward and Mary moved back to Texas after their wedding. The two brothers and two sisters remained in close contact through letters.

The divisive issues of slavery and states rights were transforming the nation into two bickering factions. Henry and Edward were both living in what were then called "slave states." These were states where the institution of slavery was legal and slaves could be bought and sold. The people in most of the state of Missouri were in favor of slave ownership. There were strong exceptions to this general rule, mostly along the banks of the Mississippi river. Thus Henry found himself living on a farm surrounded by neighbors who favored secession, but having a large group of pro-union people living just 25 miles away. In 1861 when the Civil War finally broke out, the state of Missouri was affected by dissension much more than Texas was. There was quite a lot of violence there. Several citizens were murdered, both anti-slavery people killed by southern sympathizers and states rights advocates killed by abolitionist zealots. That tended to intensify views that had already been brought to a boiling point all over the country. Henry's oldest son, William joined the Union Army. He served in Company E of the Third Missouri Cavalry. They fought in, and help win, the Battle of Pea Ridge in northern Arkansas. Henry's sentiments were well displayed

in 1863 when he and Nancy named their youngest son Abraham Lincoln Morriss.

In Texas, views were not so diverse as they were in Missouri. The overwhelming majority in Texas was strongly in favor of the rights of states to do as they pleased, and to succeed if they desired it. They were not as strongly in favor of slavery or even in the Confederacy. But when it came time to decide, the Lone Star State went with the South. Edward Morriss enlisted in the Texas Eighth Cavalry. This very effective fighting unit won admiration from many Confederate battle groups and grudging respect from the many Union regiments that they engaged in battle. They were better known as Terry's Texas Rangers. Edward fought in the Battle of Woodsonville on December 17, 1861 and the Battle of Shiloh on April 6-7, 1862. He mustered out of Terry's Rangers and was given a commission as Lieutenant of the Marine detachment aboard the Confederate Steam Ship, "Bayou City." Henry's vessel participated in driving the U.S. Navy out of Galveston Bay on New Years Day of 1863. He was instrumental in capturing the US Warship "Harriet Lane," in what became known as the Battle of Galveston.

After the war, life began to return to normal both in the North and the South. Because Missouri was officially a neutral state during the war, there was no army of occupation or reconstruction government. In Texas, both were a problem. Very deep resentments were growing. As a result, Henry and Edward did not write or speak to each other for the remainder of their lives. Nancy and Mary Jane communicated regularly with letters and every few years one would visit the other. Neither brother displayed any animosity; they just didn't speak to each other. In my family the term "Brother against Brother," which is frequently used when discussing the Civil War, has a very literal meaning.

Henry and Edward's mother, Eliza Duncan Morriss died in Houston, Texas on December 7, 1886. Mary Jane was 18 years younger than her sister Nancy. She would not have been able to remember a time when her sister was not married. Nancy must have seemed more like a mother to her than a sister. The two were able to remain close until 1893 when Nancy died. After that there was very little contact between the Morriss families in Missouri and Texas. The resolve that the two sisters showed to keep their respective families connected is a credit to their memories. Nancy married when she was just 19 years old. She had her first child when she was 20. In all, she had fifteen babies including four that were stillborn. Two of her children died in their early childhood. Henry lived on after the death of his beloved wife. He was nearly crippled by arthritis by August of 1911 when he died.

One of the younger children of Henry and Nancy Morriss was James Newton Morriss. J.N. as he was called, had a son named Wesley Morriss, who

was my own grandfather. Wes married Ivah Morton who lived to be 94 years old and died in 1985. My grandmother had a very sharp mind until the end of her life. She told me many things about the early days of her life in Lewis County, Missouri. She remembered seeing and speaking with Henry Sterling Morriss. She also knew a lot about the family of her husband because they had been early settlers of the small town where she grew up. I also received a lot of this information from Mrs. Mary Ellen Leathers of San Antonio, Texas. Mrs. Leathers was an accomplished genealogist and a great grand daughter of Edward James Morriss. I have also done first hand research on federal census records, military records, marriage records, land grant records, and deed records. My research has reinforced and augmented the data received from Mrs. Leathers and my grandmother. The facts presented here are to the best of my knowledge correct and most of them can be proven.
