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**JOHN PERRYMAN AND BILL HUNTER:  
BIG THICKET WOODSMEN OF A BYGONE ERA**

*By J. Armand Lanier*

*"How 'ya Gonna Keep 'em Down on the Farm?  
(After They've Seen Patee)."<sup>1</sup>*

However appropriate this WWI epigrammatic song title was for other veterans in an agrarian society, it did not describe John Perryman and Bill Hunter. Their post-war choice of environment was the Big Thicket's wonder and quiet: they became full-time fishermen, hunters, and trappers. And just as their post-war life-choices belied this song's prognostication, so too did their pre-war education and experience hardly suggest a life in the woods.

My earliest memories of John Perryman, my maternal uncle, resulted from our Perryman family reunions of 1929 and 1930. At the first of these, after visiting briefly with my grandfather and other relatives at Spurger, we proceeded to my Aunt Carrie Jordan's farmhouse in the nearby Beech Creek community. All of this area, along with Perryman and Hunter's camp, was included in the "Ecological Area" of the Big Thicket, which extended north of Woodville, Jasper, and Wiergate.<sup>2</sup>

At Aunt Carrie's house, where we spent the night, my twelve-year-old eyes were opened wide. The house was without screens, had no indoor plumbing, newspapers covered the walls for insulation, and there was no running water. Early the next morning, the men went hunting, and soon returned with plenty of squirrels for breakfast. It tasted good, but I do remember biting down on several shotgun pellets.

Later that day, proceeding to my Uncle John's camp, I remember the thick woods and his open-fire pot of "hunter's stew;" but most of all, I remember his sisters' plethora of pies and cakes. Then Uncle John asked if I'd like to run traps with him. How many traps we checked I don't remember – except one. Out in a clearing was this steel fox trap, and in it remained only part of a fox's leg, chewed off at the thigh. Explaining the obvious, Uncle John said he had delayed his run too long. I must have been impressed by the sight, as this was seventy-five years ago.

My second visit to John's camp (1930) was less impressive. I remember little beyond sleeping all night on a branch sandbar with several young cousins. It looked so soft, but felt like a concrete floor as the night wore on. Adding to my misery was an invasion of sand flies that bit mercilessly.

Perryman and Hunter's "Neches River-bottom" subsistence (from the early 1920s until 1954) covered a changing era. The beginning of their stint may well be viewed as a continuation of the nineteenth-century practice of frontiersmen "living off the land" by hunting, fishing, and trapping under the free-range policy. Toward the mid-twentieth century, however, there were increasing encroachments upon squatters and river-hermits generally. Lumber

companies and other big landowners continued their selective deforestation, and at the same time began fencing and converting property for commercial hunters. Then in 1947, with the beginning of construction on Dam B, further ecological changes evolved. These and other impingements, while gradual, directly impacted aquatic and mammalian populations – and presumably, the livelihood of Perryman and Hunter.<sup>3</sup>

John Perryman was born in Town Bluff, Tyler County, Texas on the Neches River in 1890, his family having settled there before the Civil War. Later, he moved to Spurger, Texas, a Big Thicket community of fewer than 500, some eight miles south of his birthplace. In Spurger, Perryman's father owned and operated a general store that housed the local post office. Here, Perryman graduated from the local school (nine grades?), clerked in his father's store and in-house post office, and subsequently completed the book-keeping curriculum of a Beaumont business college. Overall, a rather exceptional education for that time and place.<sup>4</sup>

Perryman seemed well on his way toward a career in business or the white-collar world. Not unexpectedly, he soon found employment in Beaumont as bookkeeper with Keith Lumber Company, in whose employ he remained for a time before his WWI enlistment.<sup>5</sup>

William I. (Bill) Hunter, Perryman's lifelong friend and woods partner, was born in 1892, in Tyler County, Texas, also.<sup>6</sup> His father, Professor Percy I. Hunter, taught in the Spurger school, as did Percy's wife, Duck Lyons Hunter, and their daughter, Cecil Hunter Bergeron. Professor Hunter also headed up the Spurger Summer Normal School in the 1890s and again after 1910. With his Master of Arts from the University of North Carolina, he was thought to be the only teacher in Tyler County with a college degree.<sup>7</sup> In the early 1900s, Professor Hunter removed his family to Jasper, Texas where he was president of the Southeast Texas Male and Female College, and later, Jasper's first Superintendent of Schools.<sup>8</sup> After 1910, he became superintendent of the Woodville public schools.<sup>9</sup>

Given the Hunter family's history and professional bent, it is not surprising to learn of Bill Hunter's own pursuit of advanced learning. For the year 1910-1911, he was enrolled as a freshman in the University of Texas at Austin with records showing graduation from Jasper's Southeast Texas Male and Female College.<sup>10</sup>

Despite their propitious backgrounds, however, the career plans of Perryman and Hunter were cut short by WWI when both joined the armed forces – Perryman the Navy and Hunter the Army.<sup>11</sup> But by 1920 the two men were again living in the Spurger area. Perryman lived with his parents and worked as a "general merchandise salesman" in his father's store, and Hunter boarded nearby on Town Bluff Road and was employed as a "bank bookkeeper." Both employments proved brief, however. Each man was restless and dissatisfied with his job. One day, hoping to relieve their frustrations, they decided to go fishing: their choice, a site in the Neches River bottom near Spurger. So liberating was this experience that they forthwith chose a life in the woods.

By the early 1920s, they were firmly ensconced in a river-bottom shack, their residence for the next thirty years. Neither Perryman nor Hunter ever married.<sup>12</sup>

Their campsite of choice, and the abandoned two-room, run-down shack they expropriated, happened to be on their friend Bill Letney's property. Fortunately, Letney readily consented to their use of both. This is not to say, however, that Perryman and Hunter's fishing, hunting, and trapping excursions were necessarily limited to Letney's property, as the open-range policy for this area was widely prevalent at that time.<sup>13</sup>

More definitively, the camp was located in the Neches River bottom of Tyler County some three miles northeast of Spurger, or approximately seven miles south of the present Town Bluff Dam. County Road 4420 is their old campsite's current access. Therefore, their hunting and fishing region encompassed that area of the Big Thicket now designated as the "Upper Neches River Corridor Unit."<sup>14</sup>

Blanche Potts, Perryman's youngest sister, visited his camp frequently. Once after being exposed to too much sun from a boat ride, he told her to apply Pet's canned milk to her burns; and because she had also gone barefooted, he prescribed washing her feet with alcohol to prevent ground itch. In commenting on John and Bill's style of operation, Blanche explained that while long-time close friends, they nevertheless kept all their records and gear separate – even cooking separately, though John made biscuits for both.<sup>15</sup>

For most of his camp life, John Perryman had several sisters living in the Spurger and Hillister areas. Among these, however, it was Carrie Perryman Jordan to whom he was closest. Likewise, it was her children who have provided the major firsthand impressions of their Uncle John for this paper.

Donna Jordan Mize (b. 1920), John Perryman's niece, has affirmed that John's parents and siblings were all devout Missionary Baptists in the Spurger community. A fundamentalist church, the Missionary Baptists stood firm in their principles of teetotalism along with other strict tenets against gambling, card playing, and Sabbath-breaking. Donna also recounted how John would bring her mother, Carrie, clothes to mend and launder, and at times raccoons and opossums to bake, the latter of which she refused. Donna said John had beautiful handwriting and was very good at math. He was also a faithful Mason, having served as treasurer for the Spurger Chapter to offset his fees.<sup>16</sup>

Herschel C. Jordan (b. 1931), recalled this incident involving alcohol. A younger brother of John's, Jack Perryman, had extended his Thicket culture through employment as a statewide traveling salesman. Now wise in worldly ways, he would visit John and Bill's camp occasionally. On one such visit, stopping first at his sister Carrie's house and not finding her at home, he had forthwith deposited his pack of beer (intended for John and Bill) in her icebox and left on an errand. Meanwhile, Carrie, having returned home unexpectedly, found the beer, and with righteous disgust, poured out each bottle in the yard.<sup>17</sup>

As implied above, both John and Bill imbibed, but as Henry E. Sawyer (b. 1938), a hunting companion put it, their drinking "was never out-of-the-

way." Sawyer, whose parents operated the nearby Works Bluff Ferry, grew up close to John and Bill's camp. As a teenager he would "hang around," and at times took their grocery lists to town. According to Sawyer, John and Bill were neat, clean, and well liked by townspeople. Bill was brilliant, well educated, and nice to talk to. "When Bill spoke, John listened." John and Bill played a lot of dominoes in camp. John smoked cigars (Sawyer wondered how he paid for them), chewed Tinsley tobacco, and took it out in perfectly rounded little balls. Sawyer added that quite a few people visited John and Bill's camp.<sup>18</sup>

That John and Bill were somewhat less gracious toward "outside" visitors than toward neighboring hunters, I can attest to myself. I know that Jack, John's younger brother, was wont to bring fellow Dallas and St. Louis businessmen to see this "unique" Big Thicket camp. Beyond the obvious relational and cultural hurdles, there would have been an associated disruption of camp routines, and especially a drain on food and resources. Knowing Jack's outgoing nature, however, I'm sure that in his case the camp was well compensated.

Regarding the above matter, another of John's nephews, J. Douglas Swearingen (b. 1922) averred, "I know for sure, if you wanted to fish or hunt with them, you were expected to bring food and supplies."<sup>19</sup>

Jack Sheffield (b. 1930), who hunted often with John and Bill, described Bill as "laid back." "They naturally lived isolated lives. Neither one had any social life."<sup>20</sup>

Rebecca McClain Montgomery (b.1942) grew up in Spurger and was well acquainted with both John and Bill. She explained that as a child she was very close to her father, and would "tag along with him" at every chance she got. On many occasions she went with him to John and Bill's camp, and still has vivid pictures in her mind's eye of the camp shack and its contents. She remembered that after John's death, Bill – who along with her daddy was a great baseball fan – would come to their house to watch baseball on black-and-white television with him. And they were not to be disturbed! Rebecca thought John and Bill probably drank a lot with their buddies, Herschel McClain and Miles Jordan. Bill's typical dress, she remembered, was rubber boots with khaki pants and shirt; John's was overalls. Their old abandoned two-room shack was really not fit for habitation, Rebecca said. Each partner had his own side of the bedroom. Regarding the old beat-up car they owned, John alone did the driving, Bill having no license at the time. Rebecca saw our subjects as crusty in manner, unkempt, smelly – not the kind of people you would want to visit with, not active in society, staying to themselves. On the other hand, they were not troublemakers, never ran afoul of the law, and never bothered anybody. And John was treasurer of Eastern Star.<sup>21</sup>

Carrie's oldest boy, the late Richard (Dick) M. Jordan (b.1922), recalled John Perryman's staying with them at times in the dead of winter, apparently to escape the cold of his dilapidated cabin. Dick was also well acquainted with Bill Hunter, having stayed at the camp on several occasions. Bill was quiet, according to Dick, but a fine man, and very smart. John loved to listen to base-

ball and Amos and Andy on the Jordan's battery radio. Dick never knew John or Bill to drink. John was good in math, real good!<sup>22</sup>

After considerable search, I located and interviewed two of Bill Hunter's nephews: his namesake, William Burton Hunter (b. 1936), and James H. Bergeron (b. 1926).

As a child, William B. Hunter had gone with his father, John Reddick Hunter, to Bill's camp on two occasions. Later, after John Perryman's death in 1954, he remembered that the elder Bill Hunter's health had deteriorated, and his brother had taken him to the hospital, and then home to live with him in Kirbyville, Texas. When asked about his woodsman uncle's religious faith, William B. Hunter told me, "I don't know ... my family's not outspoken about such matters." I then asked about his Hunter family's attitude toward Bill's having turned woodsman: that is, whether they were critical of him at all. He was not aware of any adverse criticism in this respect.<sup>23</sup>

James H. Bergeron (b.1926), another nephew of Bill Hunter, was more familiar with John and Bill, having first visited Bill at camp as a child. Since then, he had hunted and fished many times with both. He considered them "reliable men." James was especially drawn to John Perryman whom he liked a lot. Bill wasn't easy to get along with, but he was definitely the leader of the two. He was quiet, and a good talker. John was a drinker and smoker. Bill didn't drink much. When asked what his mother and her family thought of Bill's life in the woods, James replied, "Well, you know my uncle [John Reddick Hunter] drove to the camp regularly from Kirbyville to check on Bill after his partner, John Perryman, died. On finding Bill sick on his last visit, he took him to the State [mental] Hospital at Rusk, and then to Kirbyville to live with him." [This, he assumed, had answered my question.] Finally, James knew both Bill and John to have received small, WWI pensions later in life, though they had resisted such aid earlier.<sup>24</sup>

For the 1920s and 30s (the first two decades of John and Bill's undertaking), few firsthand reports exist of the type and prevalence of mammals in their camp vicinity. Therefore, for further documentation of such species, we must turn to the research of others – if not for animals in John and Bill's specific location, at least for the Big Thicket generally. David Schmidly's *Texas Natural History, A Century of Change*, is one such key source.<sup>25</sup> This work conveniently incorporates the earlier twentieth century species distributions from Vernon Bailey's volume, *Biological Survey of Texas* (1905). We are also indebted to a related work by Davis and Schmidly, *The Mammals of Texas* (1994),<sup>26</sup> that documents mammalian populations for the latter half of the twentieth century. From these and other references we can reasonably extrapolate to the target animals of woodsmen, John and Bill, for the 1920s and 30s.

Having perused Bailey's (1905) survey in the above source, I find pertinent references to the following pelt and furbearing animals at the turn of the nineteenth century for Tyler County, or to the Big Thicket East Texas area, generally.

opossum	bobcat	raccoon
white-tailed deer	red fox	otter
squirrel	gray fox	mink
beaver	black bear	skunk
rabbit		

To determine population changes of these mammals for the latter half of the twentieth century, we have, as noted above, Davis and Schmidly's *Mammals of Texas* (1994), with its revised species distribution maps. Surprisingly, there appear to be but small changes in the distribution of the above species over the period in question with the exception of the black bear, which was extirpated in East Texas – even in the lower Big Thicket – by the latter half of the twentieth century. Species with reduced populations but still present for that period included the beaver, mink, and red fox.

Given these findings, we may conclude that the animals sought by John and Bill for furs or pelts over their thirty-year backwoods stint were among those highlighted above, with the exception of the black bear.

As a teenager, Dick Jordan (b. 1922) had hunted with his uncle, John Perryman, but only for squirrels. Dick recalled that early on he was made to know that shotgun shells were a precious commodity, and not to be wasted. If John and Bill had hunted deer at that time, he was not aware of it. Interestingly (and attesting to the importance of hunting dogs) Dick, without hesitation, and after some sixty-five years, knew that John's squirrel dog was named "Teddy," and Bill's, "Pooch."

As for trapping, Dick thought John and Bill targeted otter, beaver, mink, and gray fox. He knew of no red fox takes. Otter and beaver were rare; more common were mink, gray foxes, raccoons, and opossums. It was his opinion that some skins and furs were sold to John's father's general store, but more were sold to fur dealers who came up periodically from Beaumont. Mink, according to Dick, was one of the most profitable furs for John and Bill, bringing as much as twenty dollars apiece.<sup>27</sup>

Herschel Jordan (b. 1931), Dick's youngest brother, remembered that when he was a youngster a schoolteacher had boarded at his house. This teacher told him he would pay five cents for every raccoon he could catch. Herschel complied, and soon his mother was cooking raccoon for the teacher. According to Herschel, this teacher "loved armadillo meat," too, but whether Carrie obliged again, I did not learn.<sup>28</sup>

Henry Earl Sawyer (b. ca. 1938), had grown up near the river and close to John and Bill's camp, as related above. When asked what animals John and Bill had trapped, Sawyer replied, "mink, coon, and bobcat." He then added that despite John and Bill's general division of labor, they had hunted together. And Sawyer himself had hunted deer and fox with them, using dogs.<sup>29</sup>

Jack Sheffield (b. 1930), a Spurger resident, related that he had hunted often with John and Bill. He remembered that John used a twelve-gauge, single-barrel shotgun, and had a remarkable way of holding shells in his free fin-

gers, enabling him to reload and fire nearly as fast as a double-barrel.<sup>30</sup>

Jim F. Hicks (b. 1930) grew up in Spurger and lived "just across the creek" from John and Bill's camp. Residing in Kirbyville at present, he remembered both men well, and had hunted deer often with John, using John's dogs. Their hunting style was to spread out on "stands" and then to turn the dogs loose. The spoils of the kill were alternated, so that each hunter got choice pieces equally. And Jim remembered that if you missed a shot, a part of your shirttail was cut off. Jim had also hunted with Bill on deer drives. Bill, too, used a shotgun – no rifle. In addition, they hunted wild hogs some, using hog dogs. They had hog pens, and would pen wild and tame ones together. In this way the feral hogs would gradually become tame. Permission to hunt on private land was not required in those days, as a policy of "open range" existed, both for cattle and hogs. When asked what other animals John and Bill hunted, Jim emphasized "squirrels," and then added "raccoons and possums." Regarding trapping, Jim related that John was the main trapper of the two. Jim remembered seeing many skins stretched out about the camp often. Such skins were sold to a man from Beaumont who came up from time to time for that purpose. Among John and Bill's takes, otter was number one, but he also mentioned mink (very profitable), and gray and red fox. When asked about beaver he answered, "Not many," adding that the timber companies had earlier hired beaver trappers for control purposes.<sup>31</sup>

Harvey Newman (b. 1926) had worked as a surveyor under Bill Hunter's younger brother, John Reddick Hunter. While Newman had been to John and Bill's camp on several occasions, he had not known them well. He remembered the camp as being on a high bluff, however, and thought it near Sheffield's Ferry. He also remembered that they trapped mink and raccoon, and that at one time raccoon skins were especially profitable.<sup>32</sup>

Darrell D. Shine (b. ca. 1931), another business associate of John Reddick Hunter, Bill's younger brother, had visited the camp in the early fifties. He knew John and Bill to have hunted deer at night, and said that they also hunted fox.<sup>33</sup>

The first of Bill Hunter's nephews that I succeeded in contacting for interview was William Burton Hunter (b. 1936), the elder Bill's namesake. His childhood impression had been that Bill and John did more trapping and fishing than hunting.<sup>34</sup>

Another nephew of Bill Hunter whom I interviewed was James H. Bergeron (b. 1926). James had hunted and fished many times with his uncle, and knew him to have hunting dogs. He remembered the names of two of Bill's squirrel dogs: "Poochie" and "Big Boy." Bill hunted squirrels often, and did some deer and fox hunting at night, but deer were often scarce. In addition, he had dogs trained to hunt deer and fox interchangeably. In the winter, Bill and John trapped, trying for mink but taking mostly raccoons.<sup>35</sup>



## Fishing

As every trot liner must know, it's the anticipatory thrill of the next run's catch that really keeps him going. Will tomorrow bring the big one? Although this type of anticipation may have paled somewhat for John and Bill after years of productive fishing, in no way were they prepared for their catch of April 1, 1940. For background on this story we go to Nida A. Marshall's account in her book, *The Jasper Journal*.

On a nice spring day in March two young men ... walked into the Kirbyville State Bank, drew their guns ... scooped up silver and currency and sped away in a Nash sedan.

It was Thursday, March 28, 1940 ... .

As the pair drove away, Reldon Huffman, operator of a filling station across the street ... fired two shots at them. One ... punctured a rear tire ... . Within forty minutes the abandoned car had been found ... about eight miles southwest of Kirbyville. Loaded with camping equipment, the car, officers speculated, had been headed for the Big Thicket.

Early the next morning near the little town of Fred, just across the Neches River in Tyler County, somebody saw a young man crawl from inside a culvert and head toward the home of Sam Wright . Officers were notified and [the young man was] ... brought in handcuffs to the Jasper County Jail ... . Then he proceeded to tell this unlikely story ... . They [had] decided to swim the Neches River over to Tyler County and get lost on the other side. Not having time to divide up the loot, his partner had wrapped the money in his jacket and tied it around his neck.

The Neches was swifter than [they] had figured ... . James Stokes made it across, but ... his ill-fated partner ... got into deep trouble and drowned ... .

Four days later, ... four Tyler County fishermen – Dick Gregory and Clyde Spurlock of Fred and John Perryman and Bill Hunter of Spurger, were running their trot lines when they made the gruesome discovery of a man's hand caught on one of their hooks ... . A truck brought the body back to Jasper ... . Within three weeks of the robbery, Stokes [the dead man's partner] was en route to Huntsville, sentenced to seven years in prison.<sup>36</sup>

Marshall's story, at least in an abbreviated form, was well known to the Jordan family, and most other interviewees. By their reports, however, the body was discovered by John Perryman and Bill Hunter at their camp, with no mention of Spurlock or Gregory, the other fishermen.

Rebecca McClain Montgomery (b. 1942) recalled that while her father didn't fish himself, fish was a favorite dish of his. He insisted on buying live ones, however, which John and Bill always provided, either delivering them to his house in a foot tub or waiting for Rebecca's father to pick them up at their camp. Rebecca noted that John and Bill would bring live fish to town for sale fairly often. So it was that she thought of them as fishermen rather than hunters or trappers. Rebecca had vivid memories of the camp itself, as well as of John and Bill. Her father bought small fish, but she also knew John and Bill to have caught very large ones, one of which weighed more than 100 pounds.<sup>37</sup>

Dick Jordan (b. 1922) also noted that John and Bill sold live fish, adding "They kept them in cypress fish boxes." Ice was available in Spurger, but not

affordable. Dick had trot-lined several times with his Uncle John. He thought the building of Town Bluff Dam (1951) had an unfavorable impact on their fishing.<sup>38</sup>

Herschel C. Jordan (b. 1931) lived in Beech Creek and then Spurger before leaving home in 1951. Unlike his brothers, however, he was too young to serve in WWII, and so it is that we have his observations of our subjects over this wartime hiatus. Not only this, but Herschel's father, having rounded up his cattle from the "free range" and sold them during the war, had then moved his family to Spurger where he bought a small service station for Herschel to operate. From the end of the War until 1951, then, Herschel was not only physically closer to John and Bill but saw them regularly on their Spurger visits. Regarding fishing, Herschel knew John and Bill to have caught a catfish weighing slightly more than 100 pounds. He knew this from firsthand observation, having been there when they weighed it in. "It looked like a whale." In the opinion of Herschel, fishing was their main income.<sup>39</sup>

Earl Sawyer (b. 1938), knew John and Bill to have had separate cypress fishing boats and to fish separately. John would dig worms and catch live perch with which to bait his trotline. Earl related that John caught a forty-pound blue cat once, which he kept in a cypress fish box out in the water. Spurger townspeople came down to see it.<sup>40</sup>

Dick Jordan (b.1922) knew that John sold fish for school picnics, church fish fries, and Fourth of July celebrations. "It would not have been unusual for him to fill orders of 200 pounds for such occasions," he added. Dick knew his Uncle John to have fished up until the day he died.<sup>41</sup>

Since William Burton Hunter (b. 1936) had only been to his Uncle Bill and John's camp twice, and both times as a child, his memory of them was limited. He did spend the night in their cabin both times, however, and remembered his Uncle taking him in his little boat to bait his trotlines. And he definitely remembered the bait Bill used at the time – ivory soap – which must have been effective since they caught big catfish. His impression was that Bill and John did more trapping and fishing than hunting.<sup>42</sup>

James H. Bergeron (b. 1926), another nephew of Bill Hunter, lives currently in Bridge City, Texas and fished many times with John and Bill. He knew them on occasion to take fish to Woodville to sell [a new market to me]. They did fairly well, James said, until the illegal practice of "telephoning" became popular with outlaw fishermen. This procedure consisted of placing wires in the water from "hand crank" telephones with which to stun fish and make them surface – a practice that soon significantly reduced catfish populations for John and Bill and other legitimate fishermen.<sup>43</sup>

But John and Bill's saga would end abruptly. On November 13, 1954, John Perryman stopped by for a visit with his sister, Carrie, and her family in Spurger. On leaving, he climbed into his beat-up Model A coupe, pulled away from their house, slumped, and was dead of a heart attack at age sixty-four.<sup>44</sup>

Asked what happened to Bill after the loss of his partner, Dick replied,

"He grieved himself to death." While records show that dramatic lifestyle changes soon followed for Bill, together with a depressive illness requiring hospitalization, his demise did not occur until July 10, 1973.<sup>45</sup>

As is evident from their extended venture, John and Bill eked out a living at their chosen pursuit; although in John's case, not without considerable timely assistance from his sister, Carrie. On one occasion, she allowed him to grow an acre of potatoes on her place. In short, he was always treated as a beloved brother, with special care and concern.

As for Bill's family support, from the evidence at hand we can only surmise a similar concern. Most probative perhaps was Bill's brother, John Reddick Hunter's, careful watch over Bill's general health following his partner's death; and then, seeing no improvement, his moving Bill to Kirbyville to live with him.<sup>46</sup>

However, for some of us there are overriding questions that remain: why should such gifted and educated men opt for a river bottom subsistence? And why no family denigration? The first question we have already addressed, however naively, via family stories. The second remains an enigma for present-day observers. Perhaps close family ties, as described above, played a significant role. But I would proffer a cultural explanation as well. As implied by this paper's title, John and Bill's lifestyle was part of a vanishing era. The open-range policy, though still in effect at the end of their operation, was fading, and there were other encroachments such as the Town Bluff Dam construction (begun in 1947) and its ecological consequences.

The above circumstances serve to demarcate an earlier, long-standing epoch. As an example of that tradition, Truett and Lay cite woodsman Sol Wright as illustrative of the Thicket's late nineteenth-century-style frontiersmen who chose "hunting, fishing, and rambling" as their occupations. "In our time he might have come close to being called a ne'er-do-well."<sup>47</sup>

Author Blair Pittman also refers to this former style of life in describing what he calls "Dog People." These were descendants of early settlers of the Neches River bottom who had settled there shortly before the Civil War and continued their predecessors' style of living as hunters and fishermen for their own survival. They thought of the land as their own, or at least took for granted their right to live there. Hence for John and Bill's families, a culturally disposed tolerance toward their brothers' retreat.<sup>48</sup>

I could find no obituary for Bill Hunter. However, under dateline of Woodville, Texas, November 15, and special to the *Beaumont Enterprise*, appeared this prominent caption, "John Perryman Dies at Spurger." Mention was made of his Baptist Church membership [although his attendance was sporadic at best]. Surprisingly, Bill Hunter was not among the listed pallbearers; however, his brother John Reddick Hunter served in this capacity.

When he died John Perryman had two sisters living in Hilister, and Carrie in Spurger. Four ministers officiated at his service: the Reverends R. L. Pope and E.F. Cockrell of Hillister, and A.N. Todd and W.H. Ellis of Spurger.

A Masonic graveside service ensued. Thus his loving family made sure their brother was put away respectfully, and with all bases covered.

### NOTES

For purposes of this paper, and specifically for the documentation of added details and events in John Perryman and Bill Hunter's lives, I have interviewed the following niece and nephews of Perryman: Donna Jordan Mize, Robert Julian Stamps, James Douglas Swearingen, the late Richard Matthew Jordan, Harold Jordan, also deceased, Herschel Carroll Jordan, and James Oliver Potts. In addition, I am a nephew of Perryman.

Fortunately, I have also interviewed the late Blanche Perryman Potts, the youngest of John Perryman's five sisters, and two of Bill Hunter's nephews: William Burton Hunter and James H. Bergeron.

To these and such kind informants as Ronald Thill, Ricky W. Maxey, and numerous librarians and other unreferenced interviewees, I am deeply indebted. Finally, I am grateful for the comprehensive review by wildlife biologist Roy G. Frye.

<sup>1</sup>Walter Donaldson, "How 'ya Gonna Keep 'em Down on the Farm? (After they've Seen Poree)" (n. p.: Mills Music, Inc., 1919).

<sup>2</sup>Pete Gunter. *The Big Thicket: A Challenge for Conservation* (Austin, 1972), pp. 46-47 (map). This reference includes McCloud's 1970 "Ecological Area."

<sup>3</sup>See Thad Sitton, *Backwoodsmen: Stockmen and Hunters along a Big Thicket River Valley* (Norman, 1995), pp. 78-79; Joe C. Truett and Daniel W. Lay, *Land of Bears and Honey* (Austin, 1984), pp. 138, 144-145; David J. Schmidly, *Texas Natural History: A Century of Change* (Lubbock, 1997), pp. 443-444.

<sup>4</sup>With the exception of Spurger's population, this paragraph's data are from Perryman family history. For Spurger's population, see *New Handbook of Texas*, s.v. "Spurger, Texas."

<sup>5</sup>For a brief biographical sketch of Perryman and his employment history, see:

Discrete Collection No. 155 (Navy Photographs, WWI); John M. Perryman, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>6</sup>Hunter, William, U.S. Bureau of Census, 1920, Texas, Tyler County; Enumeration Dist. 201, Sheet 6.

<sup>7</sup>Jordan, Vivian C., ed. *A Brief History of the Spurger Area, 1839-1976* (Beech Creek (Spurger), Texas, Home Demonstration Club, 1976), pp. 23, 29, 49.

<sup>8</sup>*New Handbook of Texas*, s.v. "Southeast Texas Male and Female College."

<sup>9</sup>Phoebe Young Armstrong. *From the Forks of Turkey Creek* (n.p.: n.d.), p. 35.

<sup>10</sup>William Hunter, Office of the Registrar, University of Texas, Austin, 1910-1911, Student Permanent Record Card.

<sup>11</sup>For John and Bill's simultaneous entry into the armed services, Herschel Carroll Jordan to author, June 10, 2003, telephone interview. for Hunter's army service, gravestone inscription, Turner's Branch Cemetery, Tyler County, Texas.

<sup>12</sup>Hunter, William, U.S. Bureau of Census, 1920, Texas, Tyler County; Enumeration Dist. 201, Sheet 6; Perryman, John M., U. S. Bureau of Census, 1920, Texas, Tyler County, Enumeration Dist. 205, Sheet 9; Richard M. (Dick) Jordan to author, May 10, 2003, telephone interview.

<sup>13</sup>Herschel C. Jordan to author, June 10, 2003, telephone interview.

<sup>14</sup>Richard M. Jordan to author, May 10, 2003, telephone interview; for "Upper River Corridor" reference, see *Big Thicket Map and Guide* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001).

<sup>15</sup>Blanche Perryman Potts to author, May 5, 1986, personal interview.

<sup>16</sup>Donna Jordan Mize to author, April 15, 20, 2003; May 12, 2003; June 1, 10, 2003; July 20, 2003; April 6, 2004, telephone interviews, notes in author's possession.

<sup>17</sup>Herschel C. Jordan to author, June 10, 2003, telephone interview.

<sup>18</sup>Henry E. Sawyer to author, January 13, 14, and 15, 2004, telephone interviews.

<sup>19</sup>J. Douglas Swearingen to author, May 7, 2003, telephone interview.

<sup>20</sup>Jack Sheffield to author, January 15, 2004, telephone interview.

<sup>21</sup>Rebecca McClain Montgomery to author, May 12, 18, 24, 26, 31, 2003, telephone interviews.

- <sup>21</sup>Richard (Dick) M. Jordan to author, February 27, 2003, March 12, 2003, April 27, 2003, May 10, 30, 31, 2003, June 15, 2003, telephone interviews.
- <sup>22</sup>William Burton Hunter to author, March 24, 25, June n.d., 2004, telephone interviews.
- <sup>23</sup>James H. Bergeron to author, April 6, 7, 19, 2004, telephone interviews.
- <sup>24</sup>Schmidly, *Texas Natural History*.
- <sup>25</sup>William B. Davis and David J Schmidly, *The Mammals of Texas* (Austin, 1994).
- <sup>26</sup>Richard (Dick) M. Jordan to author, February 27, 2003, March 12, 2003, April 27, 2003, May 10, 30, 31, 2003, June 15, 2003, telephone interviews.
- <sup>28</sup>Herschel C. Jordan to author, June 10, 2003, telephone interview.
- <sup>29</sup>Henry E. Sawyer to author, January 13, 14, and 15, 2004, telephone interviews.
- <sup>30</sup>Jack Sheffield to author, January 15, 2004, telephone interview.
- <sup>31</sup>Jim F. Hicks to author, January 21, 2004, telephone interview.
- <sup>32</sup>Harvey Newman to author, March 20, 2004, telephone interview.
- <sup>33</sup>Darrell D. Shine to author, March 20, 22, 2004, telephone interview.
- <sup>34</sup>William Burton Hunter to author, March 24, 25, June n.d., 2004, telephone interviews.
- <sup>35</sup>James H. Bergeron to author, April 6, 7, 19, 2004, telephone interviews.
- <sup>36</sup>Nida A. Marshall, *The Jasper Journal* (Austin, 1993), 1: 267-269.
- <sup>37</sup>Rebecca McClain Montgomery to author, May 12, 18, 24, 26, 31, 2003, telephone interviews.
- <sup>38</sup>Richard (Dick) M. Jordan to author, February 27, 2003, March 12, 2003, April 27, 2003, May 10, 30, 31, 2003, June 15, 2003, telephone interviews.
- <sup>39</sup>Herschel C. Jordan to author, June 10, 2003, telephone interview.
- <sup>40</sup>Henry E. Sawyer to author, January 13, 14, and 15, 2004, telephone interviews.
- <sup>41</sup>Richard (Dick) M. Jordan to author, February 27, 2003, March 12, 2003, April 27, 2003, May 10, 30, 31, 2003, June 15, 2003, telephone interviews.
- <sup>42</sup>William Burton Hunter to author, March 24, 25, June n.d., 2004, telephone interviews.
- <sup>43</sup>James H. Bergeron to author, April 6, 7, 19, 2004, telephone interviews.
- <sup>44</sup>Richard (Dick) M. Jordan to author, February 27, 2003, March 12, 2003, April 27, 2003, May 10, 30, 31, 2003, June 15, 2003, telephone interviews. John Perryman's date of death is confirmed by family history in author's possession and by Texas Department of health records.
- <sup>45</sup>Richard (Dick) M. Jordan to author, February 27, 2003, March 12, 2003, April 27, 2003, May 10, 30, 31, 2003, June 15, 2003, telephone interviews. Bill Hunter's date of death is confirmed by Turner Branch Cemetery (Tyler County) tombstone markings and Texas Department of Health records.
- <sup>46</sup>William Burton Hunter to author, March 24, 25, June n.d., 2004, telephone interviews.
- <sup>47</sup>Truett and Lay, *Land of Bears and Honey*, p. 122.
- <sup>48</sup>Blair Pittman, *The Stories of L.C. Eason, King of the Dog People* (Denton, 1996), pp. X-XI.