

EWING FAMILY NEWS

Descendants of William Alexander Ewing

The Edwards Ranch

Integral Part of Marshall County History

Anyone who lived in southern Marshall County between the 1880's and the 1920's had to be aware of the area's reputation as a major producer of beef cattle. It started in the early 1870's when the first Herefords were brought into the area and, after a few years, spread rapidly throughout the grasslands of the Big Blue valley. By the early 1900's there were sixty purebred Hereford herds in Marshall County, many of which were near Irving and Blue Rapids.

One of those major cattle operations would later play an important role in the Ewing family story. In addition to being the place where Ray Ewing began his

family, the Edwards Ranch was well-known by all the Ewing boys. When Frank Ewing began farming on his own in 1928, it was on a small parcel that bordered the Edwards Ranch. He always referred to that beginning as "the Proctor place". At one time or another, most of the young men around Irving probably worked part-time on the Edwards Ranch when additional labor was needed.

Throughout the years, whenever two or more of the Ewing boys would settle into conversation, the Edwards Ranch invariably would figure into some of the stories that were told. I have always felt a connection to the

place, even though I've never seen it. So it seems only natural that more should be known about its history.

A couple years ago, I learned that a man named Frank Edwards had bought 160 acres in 1874 that would later become the northeast corner of the ranch. It was easy to assume that transaction was the beginning of the ranch.... but, not a correct assumption. Somehow, in a transaction that wasn't found in records, that land was transferred to a Clark family who sold it in 1892 to Rowland John Edwards. That was the beginning of the ranch.

It's natural to assume that Frank Edwards and R.J. Edwards were related... but no such tie has been found. Frank was born in Indiana, came to Marshall County as a young man in 1857, went away to fight in the Civil War, then returned to marry and raise a family in Kansas. He bought other land about a mile east of the Blue Valley land discussed above, and made his home on that 240 acres that straddled the Black Vermillion river.

Rowland J. Edwards was born in Wales, coming to the U.S. as a

Re-thinking the family reunion

With an eye toward making improvements, it has been decided to not have the family reunion gathering this fall. After experiencing declines in attendance five out of six of the past years, it's time to re-group and consider changes that are more fitting for people's interests today. Your help is needed in determining those interests.

Please complete and mail the enclosed form or email me for an electronic version of the form. Your thoughts and ideas are needed.

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(continued from page 1)

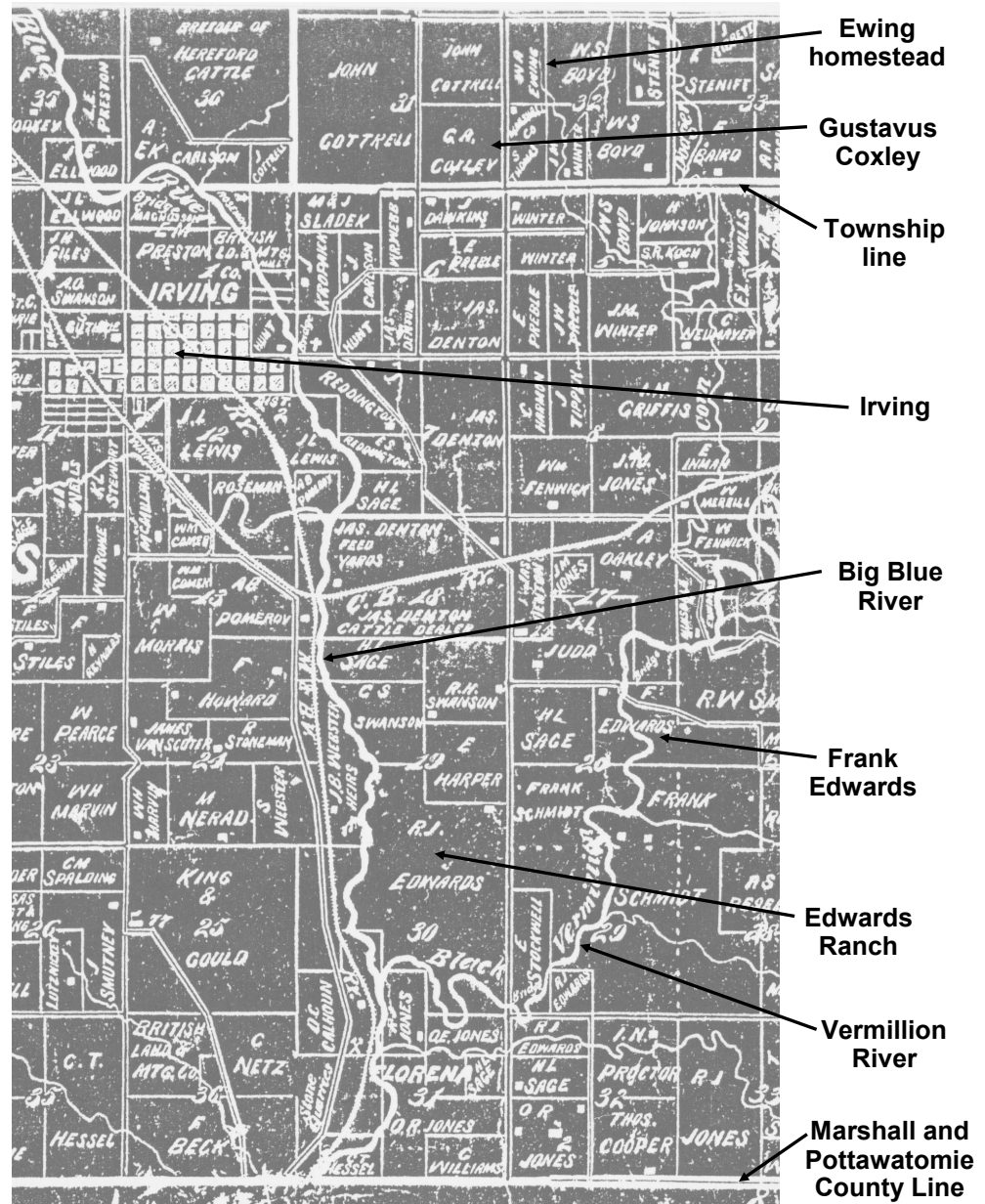
child with his family, settling in Wisconsin near other Welsh families. If there was a family connection between Frank and R.J. it would have probably been a generation or more earlier and is unknown to descendants of R.J. Edwards.

When the Civil War started, Rowland J. Edwards enlisted and participated in a number of the early battles, was captured and imprisoned for a short time, and when released, took part in Sherman's drive through the south, being among the first Union soldiers to enter Atlanta. Promoted to sergeant, R.J. became the flag bearer for his unit for the duration of the march to the sea.

After the war, R.J. returned to Wisconsin where he married Elizabeth Breese, also a Welsh native. Their first child, a daughter, was born in Wisconsin. They lived briefly in Illinois where their second child, Samuel Rowland Edwards, was born in 1869, then the family moved on to Colorado where R.J. prospered in a silver mine and became a prominent cattleman and land trader. At one point he held leases on the land that would later become Estes Park. A second son was born into the Edwards family while they lived in Colorado.

In 1880 the Edwards family moved to Kansas, settling in Emporia, where a number of Welsh natives also lived. There, R.J. was a founder of the College of Emporia, and an incorporator of the Citizens State Bank. He later was president of the First National Bank in Eureka, Kansas. Another daughter was born into the family in Kansas.

R.J. Edwards continued his ranching and land interests in



Plat map from about 1894 showing the Edwards Ranch and its proximity to the town of Irving as well as the Ewing homestead, about 5 miles north of the ranch, in Wells Township.

Kansas, acquiring 160 acres in Marshall County in 1892... the same land previously owned by Frank Edwards (as discussed earlier). It appears that R.J. Edwards never lived in Marshall County, and how he became interested in the area is not known, but he continued to acquire land along the Big Blue river about 3 miles south of Irving from 1892 to 1894, assembling the holdings shown on the map above. In later years, he

would acquire the half-section in the lower right corner of the map marked "R.J. Jones" as well as part of the "Proctor" land next to it. He also acquired 80 acres in the northeast corner of the main ranch (marked "E. Harper"), squaring out the top side of his holdings... over 1200 acres in total.

The Jones Connection

Look at the map and the names on parcels south of the Edwards Ranch. You'll find O.R. Jones as

well as other Joneses who had been in Marshall and Pottawatomie Counties since the early 1870's or before. It was O.R. Jones who travelled back to Wales in 1909 and brought his niece, Annie, her husband William J. Williams, and their children to America. The youngest of the children at that time was Gwendolyn.

R.J. Jones and O.E. Jones shown on the map were nephews of O.R. Jones and all were from Wales. Did they have a family connection to R.J. Edwards? And were they instrumental in Edwards' decision to invest in Marshall County? We don't know. Even though R.J. Edwards' mother was a Jones, we can only speculate. Jones was such a prevalent name in Wales, those who trace family lines will tell you that it's very difficult to isolate relationships there.

It was very common for immigrants in the U.S. to settle close together, where they could share a common bond of language, customs and heritage while learning

to fit into the new surroundings. Those who were not already related often married people of their own heritage.

R.J. Edwards was no exception. From Wisconsin to Illinois to Colorado to Kansas... he maintained close relationships with Welsh countrymen. On his Marshall County ranch, he often turned to the Welsh families nearby for help. The Jones families worked

on the ranch often and in the 1920's the Williams family would figure prominently in the ranch's management.

R.J. Edwards died in 1917 in California, where he had gone to spend the winter. His oldest son, Sam, was listed in the obituary as a resident of Irving. Don't know if he actually lived on the ranch, but he was certainly involved in its operation.



The Edwards barn, a landmark in the area, was known by everyone. This photo from Mary Mleynek's album had hand-written dimensions on it: 104 x 66 x 53 high.

This photo, courtesy of Roger Edwards, was taken in 1954 by a Belleville photographer. It shows the three houses and wide variety of buildings on the ranch.



Ewing Family Reunion Is being re-thought

See page 1 for more details

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Sam Edwards had lived in Eureka, Kansas, where he married and started his family. He had been in the public utility business (electric and telephone) in Greenwood County prior to moving to Irving in 1914, where he assumed responsibility for the ranch. About 1918 he moved to Blue Rapids, making that his home for the rest of his life.

First elected in 1924, Sam Edwards served three terms in the Kansas state legislature. During the Depression he was appointed

to various government positions, administering programs to help Kansas farmers and ranchers. Sam died in 1938.

During the mid-1920's the ranch was under the stewardship of William J. Williams and his sons. His daughter, Gwendolyn, married Ray Ewing in 1927 and they also lived on the ranch until 1934. Ownership of the ranch passed to Sam Edwards' children upon his death and remained in their possession until the late 1950's. Gwen's brother, Gwilym Williams,

remained on the ranch until it was taken by the Federal government to make way for Tuttle Creek reservoir in 1959. All land in the flood plain of the reservoir, including the Edwards Ranch, was condemned and purchased.

Unrecognizable today, most of the fertile Blue River valley land below the old town site of Irving is overgrown with brush and trees and is public hunting ground. The Edwards Ranch, and others like it, are fading memories.

