

Tales from the Big Thicket

Editor: Francis Edward Abernethy

Paperback Price: \$18.95

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Paperback ISBN-13: 9781574411423

Paperback ISBN-10: 157441142X

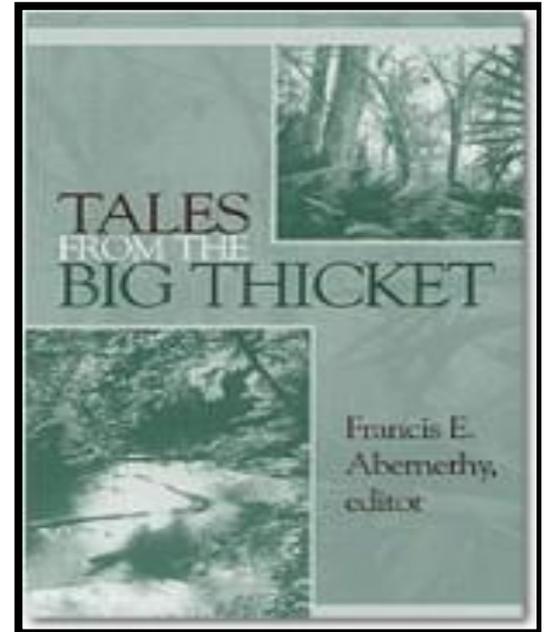
Physical Description: 6 x 9. 256 pp. 89 b&w photos.
3 maps. Index.

Publication Date: February 2002

Series: Temple Big Thicket Series | Volume: 1

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REVIEW: Tales from the Big Thicket Rienstra, part of Nederland's founding family, featured in book Wednesday, August 28, 2002, Port Arthur News

Review by Darragh Doiron, Port Arthur News Staff Writer

NEDERLAND- There's no need to go into Ellen Walker Rienstra's family background and her connections with the Big Thicket, reads the introduction to her story in "Tales from the Big Thicket."

Rienstra, who is part of a Nederland founding family, shares the story "A Family Full of Legends" in a new University of North Texas Press book.

Rienstra is the great-granddaughter of William Hooks and the granddaughter of Bud Hooks, central characters in her story. She leads with the notion that a strange type of people were attracted to the thicket and its abundance of timber, game, mosquitoes, wildcats, snakes, bears and wolves.

A full-bearded William "Pap" Hooks is pictured in the book. He looked to one local like a "big hairy animal." He sometimes plowed without his pants and he wasn't much for visiting.

He once had business in Spurger and thought to call on his brother he hadn't seen in 10 years. In town he met a local man who knew the brother. Papa asked how Jim was and the man said he was doing just fine.

"Since he knew that his brother was well and didn't need anything, Pap passed his brother's house and went back to his own farm," she writes.

Pap's nephew May loved to fight and some thought it was his name that made him that way. Another one, Gus, was a "bootlegger of some renown" who claims he could outrun a horse.

"Gus had two houses, just around the bend in the road from each other, and two wives," Rienstra writes. "The story goes that when one of Gus's sons was convicted of robbery and sent to the penitentiary, Gus was present at the trial. After the sentence had been pronounced, Gus went up to Judge L.B. Hightower and told him, "Judge, there ain't no use to send that boy up there. He won't be satisfied."

He wasn't. He escaped two or three times, always returning to East Texas.

There is plenty more in the story. A man who gave his horse for love, bear trackers and raising cane make "A Family Full of Legends" a true Texas tale.

Frances E. Abernethy edited the book of short stories and contributed one on the Saratoga Light. Other tales are "The Battle at Bad Luck Creek" by Dean Tevis; "Texas Bear Hunt, 1906," by L.L. Kiene; "BoomTown Tales" by Alice Cashen; and "Sour Lake: Spa of the Big Thicket," by Ruth Garrison Scurlock.

REVIEW: Tales from the Big Thicket
Francis E. Abernethy, editor
Spring 2002, Review of Texas Books

What Is the Big Thicket?
Review by Jeffrey Turk

Francis E. Abernethy's collection *Tales from the Big Thicket* answers much of this question. It describes what comprises the Big Thicket and where it is located geographically. Perhaps more importantly, the book conveys much of the mythical elements associated with the area by relating many of the Big Thicket Stories, both

factual and fictional, that developed the heritage and legends of this unique Texas location.

This collection is simultaneously interesting and informative. The tales are supported by fact and fiction, and the details of the area and its people are enhanced by photos, maps, and eyewitness accounts of various events. While sections of the book seem to be poorly written, one must keep in mind that many of these stories recount events from the early 1900s and are frequently told from a first person point of view. With these ideas in mind, one realizes that the odd phrases, halting speech, and poor grammar sometimes evident are elements of a given people's speech patterns at given points in history. These are, after all, stories related by the inhabitants of the Big Thicket in a manner similar to telling tales around a campfire.

Most of the stories from this reprint of *Tales from the Big Thicket* comes straight out of the lore and history of the area. Likewise, most are written by the people of the Thicket or their descendents. Francis E. Abernethy has amassed a diverse collection of stories, folklore, geography, geological trivia, history, and photographs for one of the few areas of unspoiled nature in southeast Texas. History buffs, trivia collectors, and people of all ages will find this book interesting and useful.

REVIEW: Tales from the Big Thicket
October 29, 2002 The Facts

By Francis E. Abernethy, Editor, University of North Texas Press

A collection of stories about the Big Thicket and its people includes anecdotes and tales running the gamut from the Alabama-Coushatta to the Civil War, and from a travel account during the 19th century to a history of the legendary Hooks family.

Some outstanding photographs of Big Thicket homes and people, of cemeteries and landscapes, oil fields and "scalded land" add to the text.

Abernethy describes the Big Thicket as being "as much a product of the imagination and wishful thinking as it is a geographical area," explaining that it represents "the great Unknown to the mind cluttered with trade names in a society labeled and categorized."

Among the stories is one by Solomon Alexander Wright. His longhand-written autobiography was sent in 1937 to J. Frank Dobie, who published it in 1942 under the auspices of Texas Folklore Society.

Wright tells of trailing nearly a thousand head of cattle through about 10 miles of marshes with water six or eight inches deep, in which both cattle and horses bogged halfway to their knees at every step.

“Here and there in the marshes are thickets of short-leaf pine saplings growing on little rises of ground,” he writes. “The water was not over these island plots, but the ground was full of water and was boggy enough to bog a buzzard’s shadow.”

Now that’s what I’d call boggy.

**REVIEW: Tales from the Big Thicket,
Francis E. Abernethy, editor
East Texas Historical Association**

Review by Wanda Landrey

In 1956 Francis E. “Ab” Abernethy moved to southeast Texas to become a professor of English at Lamar University in Beaumont, and thus began his love for the Big Thicket. As an avid hunter, fisherman, and folklorist in his homeland around Palestine and Nacogdoches, it was only natural that he would pursue his hobbies whenever he could in the outdoors further south. In fact, he stated recently, “On the first day of every hunting season, I would always turn out class and head to the Thicket.” Quickly taken under the native wings of such nature enthusiasts as Cecil Overstreet, Arden Hooks, and Lance Rosier, his interest was piqued by their stories of the unique culture around them. It was then that his hobby as a folklorist took over, and he began to collect the stories of other students of Thicket lore.

The collections, which begin with a background history and a brief survey of the geological conditions of the area, offer its readers a glimpse into the unpretentious lifestyles of the Thicket’s past. The stories, prefaced by the home-style rhetoric of Abernethy, include such tales as the well-known Texas bear hunt of 1906, a Civil War episode involving a search for hidden Jayhawkers, and the mysterious legends surrounding the “Saratoga Light.” This Big Thicket classic should surely delight any East Texas history buff. Special thanks go to the Big Thicket Association for making this reprint possible.

Tales from the Big Thicket

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Jeffrey Turk, Review of Texas Books



Folklorist “Ab” Abernethy weaves fact and fiction through colorful short stories that describe the heritage and legends of the deep woods of Southeast Texas.

Mary C. Johnston, BTA President 2011-12