

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

THOMAS BUTLER EASTLAND

Marion Otis Smith was an intrepid and prolific caver, as all who had the privilege to be his friend will gladly attest. He also was a fine historian with a special interest in saltpetre caves, especially those worked to supply nitre for the South during the War Between the States. While Burton Faust was long considered the dean of saltpetre investigators, it was MOS who was unsurpassed in his meticulous researches into saltpetre caves, their operations and their operators. It was in this context that Marion unearthed records documenting that in 1856 Thomas B. Eastland was one of two principals in the “White County Mining and Saltpetre Mining and Manufacturing Company”. Marion wrote about Eastland in his article “Civil War Saltpeter Mining Near McMinnville”, *Nashville Speleoneers*, v. XXXI, n. 3 (June 1987), pp. 39-51. In the accompanying image we see MOS contemplating the 1856 signature of T. B. Eastland smoked on the ceiling of Johnson Saltpetre Cave.



MOS examining a century of historic names in Johnson Saltpetre Cave. (Image courtesy of Alan Cressler.)

But I wonder, did Marion know that there were three generations of TBEs: father, son and grandson? And if so, was Marion able to determine with certainty which TBE was the saltpetre entrepreneur? The TBEs did not deign to use the suffixes Sr., Jr., & III or I, II, & III. Remember also, in the mid-80s Marion did not have the benefit (sometimes dubious) of the plethora of information (and mis-information) available on the internet today. And though considerable information regarding the Eastland family is available on line now, some of it is confused and some contradictory. And it doesn't help that the Eastlands perpetuated the name Thomas B. Eastland in various other family branches.

Thomas Butler Eastland –the first-- was born Dec. 23, 1777, in the village of Boydton, Virginia. My heart skipped a beat when I first read the location of Eastland's natality, for I had spent part of each of my childhood years in Boydton, and for me the little town of 500 is rife with memories and family graves. It was the home of my maternal grandparents; my mother was born and raised there.

Unlike my mother, TBE did not grow up in Boydton, but at an early age removed to Kentucky with his parents. It was in Kentucky that Eastland grew to manhood and fell in love with Nancy Mosby. On May 8, 1800 they married at Brook Farm (her home) in Woodford Co. According to one internet source, Thomas and Nancy lived at a plantation called Woodlands. Wherever they lived, one hopes it was a spacious home, for they proceeded to have nine children between 1802 – 1813.

It was also while Eastland was living in Kentucky that he began his military service, which is a bit difficult to sort out. Several on line sources state that he became Quartermaster General of the Kentucky Militia, but I have not been able to verify this claim. However, it appears that he was commissioned 1st Lieutenant of Infantry in the U.S. Army, his commission being signed by John Adams in 1801. He served under Gen'l Wm. Henry Harrison during the War of 1812, taking part in the Battle of New Orleans. For his service he was awarded several land grants in Tennessee, eventually owning many thousands of acres. After the close of the war, Eastland moved his family to Nashville. After Nancy's death in 1817, Eastland married Mary Swann and proceeded to father nine more children during the years 1820 - 1840 (one of whom received the unusual name of Cumberland Mountain Eastland!).

In 1821 Eastland moved to White Co., living first in Sparta and later in Bon Air and/or Clifty on the Cumberland Plateau. In 1839 he purchased the Clifty Homestead from his good friend James Simpson. On this large holding, re-named Eastland Stand, TBE built an inn which became a local landmark.

According to local lore—first told to me years ago by Tank Gorin, and recently repeated in a presentation by Sparta caver Ross Cardwell— one day while Eastland

and Simpson were hunting, they came to the top of a beautiful, symmetrical, wooded knob, which they dubbed "Dumpling Knob". They were so enchanted by the spot that they pledged to each other to be buried here. Their wishes were honored, Simpson's in 1854 and Eastland's in 1860. TBE's youngest child, who died at 14, is also buried there, beside his father.

The former coal mining community of Eastland, next to Clifty, was named in honor of TBE.

Three of TBE's sons by his first marriage went to Texas where two of them became involved in the Texas revolution against Mexico. One of them, William Mosby Eastland had the misfortune to be a member of the ill-fated Mier expedition, an 1842 incursion into Mexico which resulted in the capture of a number of Texans. It was William's additional bad luck to draw a black bean in the infamous forced lottery that decided which 17 captives the Mexicans would execute. Eastland Co. in Texas is named after William.

However, it was Eastland's third son, Thomas Butler Eastland –the second— born in Kentucky in 1805 that concerns us most. In 1829, TBE-2 married Josephine Green in Tennessee. Together they had six children, five born in Nashville, including his son TBE-3 in 1833. In 1840 TBE-2 went to New Orleans as a cotton broker, where Josephine bore their sixth child. Like three of his brothers, TBE-2 eventually went to Texas, but somewhat later than they: he served as quartermaster under Gen'l Zachary Taylor during the Mexican-American War (1846-48), with the rank of Major.

After Mexico's defeat, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) awarded much of what had been northern Mexico to the U.S. TBE-2 sensed opportunity and in 1849 – leaving Josephine and most of his family in Nashville-- traveled with a party that included his son Joseph G. Eastland westward across Texas, then southwestward across Mexico to Mazatlán on the Pacific coast, where they took passage on the steamer *Oregon* to California. Eastland promptly set up a company, Eastland and Son, no doubt profiting from the enormous influx of Anglo-American settlers thronging to California during the Gold Rush.

TBE-2 also became a Brigadier General in the California Militia. In 1851 Anglo settlers clashed with Native Americans in the so-called Mariposa Indian War. Eastland may well have known my great-great-great grandfather, Major James G. Burney, who was the first sheriff of Mariposa Co. As sheriff, Burney organized the first group of armed white settlers to attempt to subdue the uprising of a coalition of local tribes (who were understandably fed up with encroachments by the Anglos on their traditional territories). Eastland was one of the few whites in a position of authority who sympathized with the Native Americans, writing to the governor that "the Indians have

been more 'sinned against than sinning' since the settling of California by the whites" and urging that measures be taken to re-establish peaceful relations.

In 1853, Gen'l Eastland returned to his family in Nashville, leaving Joseph in charge of his affairs in California. Joseph prospered in California business endeavors, being involved in gas lighting and railroads. He married and had three children and created an estate he named "Bon Air", after the White Co. Tennessee village of that name.

Ultimately, in 1864, TBE-2 returned to California, this time bringing Josephine and other members of his family with him. Unfortunately, he had not long to enjoy his new life in California, dying in November of that same year.

Thomas Butler Eastland –the third—was the least fortunate of the three direct line TBES. He married in Tennessee in 1851. When the War came, he served in Confederate forces with the rank of 2nd Lieutenant. But instead of dying in putative martial glory, he, like so many other young Southern men, died of illness (pneumonia in TBE-3's case), in 1863.

And so, what's in a name? Especially, what's in the name "T. B. Eastland" smoked on the ceiling of Johnson Saltpetre Cave in 1856? All three TBES were living in 1856. Which one explored Johnson? In his Speleoneers article, Marion states that the TBE involved in the saltpetre mining company lived "ca. 1806 – 1864", and that would be TBE-2, whose correct dates are 1805 – 1864. But was Marion aware of the three TBES, *père*, *fils*, and *petit fils*? There's no way to know. But I'm betting Marion pegged it right. He usually did. In 1856, TBE-1 would have been 79, a tad elderly for clambering around in saltpetre caves by flickering torch- or candle-light. TBE-3 would have been a youth of 20, physically fine for caving, but probably not well enough established financially to be a principal in a saltpetre mining company. But TBE-2, who would have been 51, was an adventurer, a seasoned entrepreneur, and a man knowledgeable of military needs. I believe Marion chose the right Thomas Butler Eastland.

--Richard C. Finch
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