

BRAZOSPORT FACTS  
28 JULY 86 p3

# ***Sweeny's Ellis documenting city's history***

By CHRIS DAY  
The Brazosport Facts

**SWEENY** — It's all the books tucked neatly on shelves lining the wall. That's the first clue Pat Ellis is interested in more than working, eating and watching television.

A closer examination of the titles on those books reveals that the 58-year-old Sweeny native is a history buff.

Ellis has books about Texas history, Indian lore and even Mexico's version of the Texas revolution.

About the only book he doesn't have is a detailed history of the area's West of the Brazos Texans.

**THE LIFELONG** history enthusiast says he has searched for historical accounts of Sweeny, Brazoria and West Columbia, but has pretty much drilled dry holes.



PAT ELLIS  
Sweeny historian

On his own, Ellis started to question the old-timers to record their memories of the settling of the western part of Brazoria County, particularly the Sweeny area. His mom and dad, Marie and Charles Ellis, helped settle the Sweeny townsite in 1912.

Ellis eventually would like to assemble the information in written form and preserve the history of west Brazoria County. Ellis has a head start on Sweeny's history as city official's asked him to write a history of the city for an advertisement in *The Brazosport Facts* Sesquicentennial edition.

**ELLIS' HISTORY** of Sweeny cites the major developments in the area, but doesn't touch on some of the interesting tidbits that add spice to life.

In 1902 and 1903, a bearded man with two large hunting dogs tied to his belt roamed the Sweeny area, looking for big game.

That man was the legendary Ben Lilly, a game hunter and guide who once led President Theodore Roosevelt's hunting expeditions, Ellis said.

Ellis learned of Lilly's exploits in and around Sweeny from King Webb, an elderly Sweeny man who was a youth when Lilly was stalking bear and other big game in the area.

Webb described Lilly to a "T" and since Webb could not read or right, Ellis said he believed the story was true. Author J. Frank Dobie has written a biography of Lilly.

**PEOPLE FAMILIAR** with the Sweeny area know about Black's Ferry and Black's Ferry Road,

but Capt. James E. Black was not the first operator of the ferry across the San Bernard River.

In 1824, David McCormick operated the crossing. In 1845, McCormick sold the 1,000 acre tract, two boats and the household for \$10,000 in gold coins, Ellis said.



"He wouldn't settle for currency. McCormick wanted gold coins. With the coins in hand, McCormick built a plantation about a mile up the river where he raised his family," he said.

The plantation home was destroyed in the 1932 hurricane, he said, but it didn't destroy the history of the family, which corrects a historical error.

**IN THE BATTLE** of San Jacinto, history credits a G.W. Lewis as being one of the few wounded Texans in the fray. However, the injured man's name really was G.W. Lonis, Ellis said.

"The McCormick history reveals a man returned from San Jacinto with a chest wound, he recovered and lived. That man was G.W. Lonis," Ellis said.

Ellis has many more interesting stories about the history West of the Brazos, but he almost didn't get to record them.

His mom and dad moved to Sweeny from Indiana. They arrived in the fledgling town shortly after midnight in 1912. On the way to the hotel, his mother tripped over a black cow lying in the middle of muddy dirt road.

"If the train hadn't already pulled out of the station, I think we would have left on it and headed back to Indiana," Ellis said.

#### **MORE ON BEN LILLY**

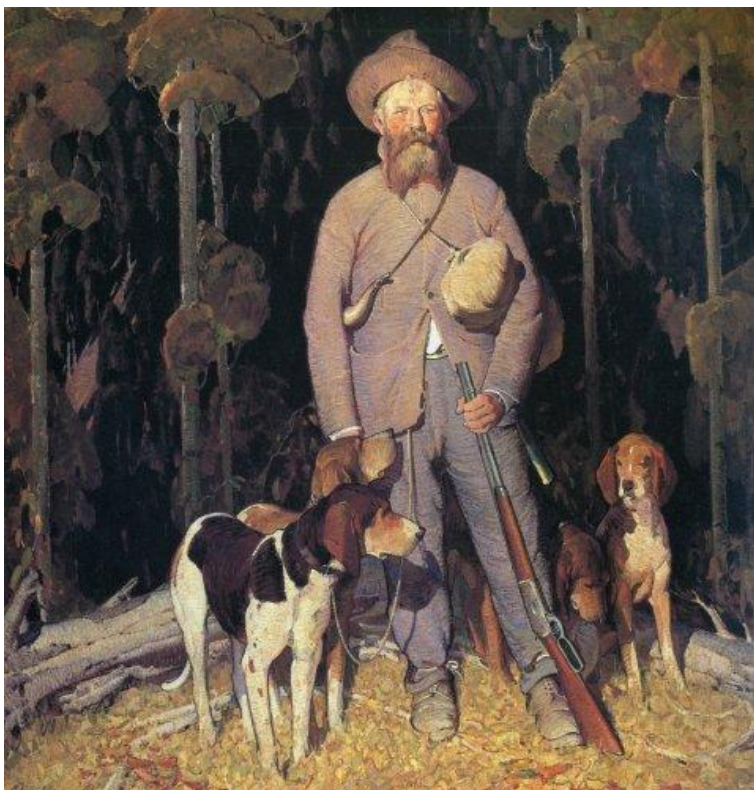
Did he roam the woods around what would become Sweeny? Great story which could be true as he was in Texas in the early 1900s. See his exploits in this website:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben\\_Lilly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Lilly)



Ben Lilly skinning bear at Ben Hook's hunting camp, Big Thicket, TX, 1906





**Notice the dogs tied to his belt just as King Webb described to Ellis. Truth or an old man's stories. Who knows?**

**RIP PAT ELLIS (1928-2003)**



**Collecting Sweeny history. Comments welcome. Basil Shannon  
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