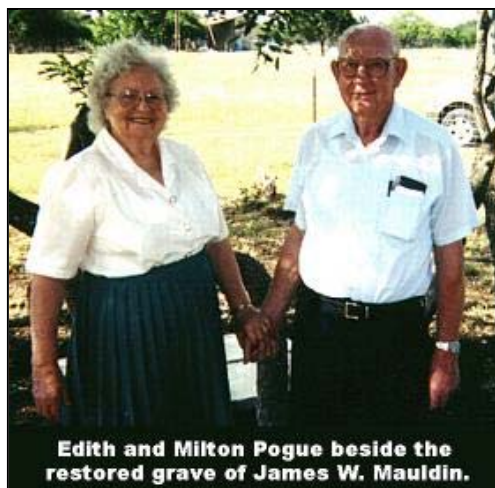


## Mauldin Burial Site in Liberty Hill

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Four years ago when Nancy Bell's family moved to the 64-acre T Bar N Ranch in Liberty Hill, she was looking for a bit of seclusion and rural quietude, and a small herd of goats to raise while the teenagers went off to college. She didn't expect that a "welcome neighbor" visit by the old-timers from down the road would lead her to restore an old burial site on the property. Bell's family thinks that it is an odd hobby, but they let her have her way because working the land, one way or another, is the way it seems to go in Liberty Hill -- that along with respect for history and tradition.

The neighbors who paid a visit to Nancy Bell are Milton, a minister and retired rancher, and wife Edith Pogue. Milton's parents and grandparents moved to Williamson County in 1906, and there he was eventually born at a twist in County Road 200 that lead to the country store called "Mount Nebo"; the community was known as Mather Mills, named after a 19th century settler of this western Williamson County area.



**Edith and Milton Pogue beside the restored grave of James W. Mauldin.**

"Samuel Mather was the first [Anglo] to settle in this end of Williamson County," said Milton Pogue. "Andy Mather was Samuel's son. And I remember, when I was a small boy, seeing Andy Mather ride his horse by my dad's place. Andy was an old Texas Ranger and an indian-fighter."

As a boy growing up, Milton attended the Clear Creek School, which was located a few hundred yards from the burial site of one James W. Mauldin, born in Alabama and died in Liberty Hill in 1873. In time Milton's grandfather purchased the land where the burial site is located, and young Milton enjoyed the privilege of working this land -- mowing and tilling and picking cotton with the complete knowledge that there was a cemetery on the property and it should not be disturbed.

"This was in cultivation, all down here and along this fence," he said while motioning toward the landscape. "And those graves were out in the middle of the field. We'd just plow around them. I remember as a boy looking in there at the gravestones. As I remember, there must have been three, four or five graves in there -- but [today] we can't find but one gravemarker."

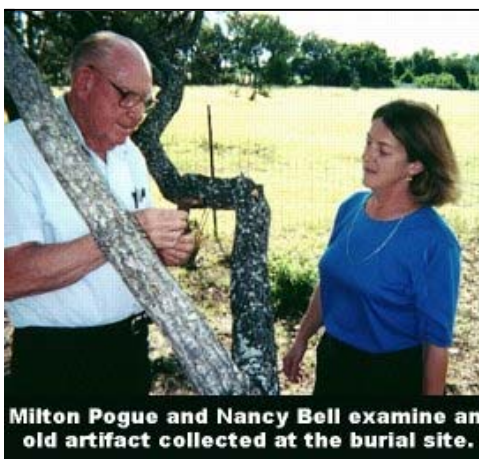
Later in life Milton Pogue learned that one of his grandmothers was a Mauldin, and this affinity stirred him to realize that he was somehow related to the person that was buried in the remaining grave, the one he had

cultivated around for years. An additional responsibility to preserving the site therefore came into focus.

"My oldest sister was named for her two grandmothers, and her name was Lula Bell -- grandmother Pogue was 'Lula,' and grandmother Mauldin was 'Bell,' " said Milton Pogue. For the record, Bell Mauldin eventually married Patrick Whitt.

Milton's family sold the property in 1953. Nancy Bell and husband Terry bought the ranch in 1996 and built their house a couple of years after that. They had no idea that there was a cemetery on the property. The gravesite had been hidden from anyone's view by a small copse of escarpment oaks and an Eve's necklace; otherwise the burial site would be in clear view from the Bell's back door. Then came the day when the Pogues came to visit and brought the Bells up to date on the history of their new domain, detailing it right down to the Mauldin burial site.

Nancy Bell reminisced, "Milton and Edith, when we were building our house in 1998, came by and said, 'You have a graveyard on your property!' And we had no idea that we did. And Milton went directly to the site and showed it to us. And sure enough, in a bunch of brush, we could see the stone lying over. My husband was totally shocked. He said, 'I've been through this property, front and back, side to side, walked it all -- I haven't seen anything!'"



**Milton Pogue and Nancy Bell examine an old artifact collected at the burial site.**

That first reaction of surprise soon turned into an enthusiasm to restore the overgrown site, and make it into a respectable-looking area again. Beyond the overgrown brush, the gravesite had been slightly disturbed over the years, probably by the animals that grazed on the property. Husband Terry cleaned the area up, cleaned and leveled the two large limestone slabs that covered Mauldin's grave, and erected a fence to keep animals out. The large headstone had fallen over and was broken into a couple of pieces. Nancy read up on gravestone repair, bought supplies and started to do the work herself. Now however, she seeks a contractor to come out and do the work with her supplies, because this is a large, heavy monument that deserves proper repair technique. All of this has been done at the Bells' personal expense.

"I wanted to preserve it. Poor guy had been forgotten! And nobody seemed to care about his upkeep and his gravesite," Nancy said.

Nancy has also learned a lot about the local history in order to better understand just how James Mauldin fit into the local picture. When that picture becomes clearer, she intends to apply for a Texas Historical Cemetery designation for the site. But for the moment, at least, she has some lingering questions about his life. "He was older when he married and he married somebody like 29 years younger than he was. And he had six kids living with him before he died." Nancy has been looking for a clue about his survivors.

James' older brother, William Poe Mauldin, was the first doctor in that part of Williamson County. Several of William Poe Maudlin's relatives have approached Nancy Bell about their uncle J.W. and his situation, but there are no direct descendants of James Mauldin in the Liberty Hill area to be found, and none have ever come by or even corresponded with Nancy. Milton recalls from his youth that there were several burials in the little cemetery. Nancy has seen a document that confirms that at least two more burials exist beside Mauldin's grave, probably infant burials, but there are no obvious signs of those today.

This whole experience has not only given Nancy a one-in-a-lifetime community service and historical project, but has led her to look at her own family history for the first time and to appreciate genealogy like never before. Nancy was born in Texas, but her family is from the northeast and includes immigrants from the Mayflower; she intends to make a historical reconnoiter in the near future.

"I'm going to Vermont. They've now got associations and societies that are saving the cemeteries, and they are going in there and cleaning them up," Nancy said. One hopes that she will find people there who care as much for her ancestral landmarks as she has ably demonstrated for the Mauldins in Williamson County.

[Back to top](#)  
[Archive](#)  
[GRAVESTONE SPEAKS](#)  
[Back to STC Index](#)