



Daphne Prairie Spring Flowers
and Mima Mounds

NPAT is very grateful to Mr. B. F. Hicks for presenting us with this comprehensive chronical of Daphne Prairie, so rich in his family's and Texas' history.

(The following pages are a summation of Mr. Hicks' original July 11, 2016 narrative.)



Grantor, B. F. ('Billy') Hicks
Hughes' Family Historical Background and Events;
Historical-to-Current Land uses of 922 acres within the Original Daphne Prairie

History of Daphne Prairie, the 'easternmost prairie in Texas'

Situated at the edge of the Post Oak Savannah and the Blackland Prairie in an area near Mt. Vernon, Texas, **Daphne Prairie** historically extended for 5 miles (north to south orientation) and varied from one to three miles in width (east to west). The boundaries were defined by watersheds that are still evident today.

"The United States claimed this area of Texas as part of the Louisiana Purchase. An Indian Agent, Anthony Glass, is sent to scout this portion of the Purchase. We have vistas which have not changed since they were described by Anthony Glass. On July 27, 1808, Anthony Glass comes through this area. He writes of passing 'small mounds innumerable. Elevated 5 or 6 feet they are generally 15 or 20 feet in diameter and rising perpendicularly. We saw this day great numbers of Prairie Hens.' And he speaks of the wildflowers; the variety. We have the opportunity to still encounter this nature of an earlier Texas."

*"The tall grasses and **mima mounds** (probably on the 80-acre hay meadow in the middle of my 922 acre tract and the tall grass pasture with mounds lying west of the meadow) both closely resemble the landscape Anthony Glass encountered."*

"These are the easternmost prairies in Texas; we are at the very edge of the prairie region as the land transitions to eastern forests."

B. F. Hicks

It is easy to understand that varied theories arose in the 1800's on the origin of '**mima mounds**':

- Gophers built up enough vegetation to create mounds;
- They are ancient mounds of ice-age Glyptodonts (armadillo-creature the size of a VW Beetle);
- They were formed by the activity of American Indians living in the area;
- They were gas pockets (according to B. F. Hicks' mother, Christine Hughes Hicks).

The Caddo Indian Highway/The Cherokee Trace

'Wide enough for four horsemen to ride abreast through the thick forest', wrote a French trader in his 1767 journal. The historic *highway* ran north to south along the eastern edge of Daphne Prairie, through the forest, from near Nacogdoches' Caddo Confederacy into Oklahoma. Mr. Glass also wrote of it in 1808: the 'Caddo Indian Highway'. Caddo Indians had lived in this part of the Southeastern U.S. for over 1,200 years. Remnant groups began migrating along 'Caddo Indian Highway' in the early 1800's to escape settlers. The area was then occupied by Cherokee Indians who had been forced to migrate west of the Mississippi River. Then U. S. Indian Removal Policy of 1830 forced them from the area. 'The Cherokee Trace' was an integral part of *The Trail of Tears*. Today portions of 'The Cherokee Trace' follow Texas FM1896.



Daphne, Texas

The community of Daphne, Texas (northeast of Mt. Vernon, Texas) in Franklin County was settled in the 1850's; the town grew and had a post office and a couple of churches by 1895. It was a community of agriculture and lumbering. (The post office was closed in 1906; their mail is delivered via Mt. Vernon, Texas.) The Daphne, Texas of 1985 was comprised of a community center and a few homes. Today there is a dense settlement along portions of FM 1896. New Hope Methodist Church was organized in the community of Mt. Vernon, Texas in early 1841, but their new church building was destroyed during an Indian massacre a few months later, in April. The congregation remains active today; it is one of the oldest continuously active Protestant congregations in Texas holding regular services, which Mr. B. F. Hicks currently attends.

The C. G. ('Green') Hughes Family

Mr. Hicks' great-grandfather, C. G. 'Green' Hughes (1861-1934), was an only child, orphaned when his father was killed during the Civil War. He married Melody Aikin (1865-1953) in 1881. Green and Melody were both 4th generation Texans (very unusual at the time). Like Green, Melody was considered an only child as her brother, her only sibling, had moved away to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. This put her in the position to inherit land from the Republic of Texas. Green also purchased adjoining tracts from some family members; his and Melody's lands totaled 10,000 acres. He contemplated how to manage 10,000 acres on his own. (No mechanized agricultural implements existed in the 1880's.) He determined the best choices were to:

- 1) graze cattle and sheep on the 3,000-acre portion of grassland that included the site of the young couple's new home (still identified by a lone crepe myrtle even though the home burned in October, 1914); and
- 2) lease outlying land to sharecroppers who plowed the land and planted and raised cash crops of corn and cotton. (Historical records in Mt. Vernon, Texas reflect Green had between 19 and 23 sharecropper families working his land.)

He became very wealthy and retained ownership of the original 10,000 acres upon his death at the age of 53.

Land Steward

Mr. Hicks' childhood home was in the community of Daphne, Texas, and he relished his visits to Daphne Prairie Farm. He shares the strong connection and dedication to the land, valuing the flora and fauna as his ancestors did. He cherishes his grandparents' love of nature and devotion to the land, their picnics on the prairie, and how they NEVER engaged in hunting of quail or dove or waterfowl!

Mr. Hicks embarked on a steep learning curve when he decided to take efforts necessary to restore the 'damaged' portions of Daphne Prairie. He reached out to The Nature Conservancy and contacted scholars of prairie studies, botany, entomology, ornithology, aquatic biology. Artists were invited to visit and 'document' the property through their artwork. His 922-acre property was officially designated as Daphne Prairie Conservation Easement in the November, 2016 agreement he signed with NPAT.



Mr. Hicks' Account of Land and Management and Restoration Plan

1861-1865: Daphne Prairie's 'main back hay meadow' was set aside and only cut annually, on the 4th of July after the Civil War. Cattle were never permitted on that meadow, protecting the valuable environmental mix

1881-1934: C. G. ('Green') Hughes and Melody Aikin married, built their family home, and raised three children. Green managed his land: some was grazed and some was farmed by share croppers. The 35-acre 'front hay meadow', consisting of a rare mix of grass and the mima mounds, remained undisturbed. Green practiced law **and** served in Mt. Vernon, Texas as a director of two banks simultaneously. (Something he would **not** be able to do that today!) Green passed away in 1934 at the age of 53.

1936: Oil was discovered on March 2, 1936, Texas Independence Day. Mrs. Hughes and their three children were then financial able to retain Daphne Prairie Farm.

1953: Portions of the Hughes Family's 8,800 acres would be sold. Portions of a 3,000-acre 'intact prairie' surrounding the original home place were plowed to plant wheat (this failed), and Bermuda was sodded (under government programs endorsing agriculture).

2003-2013: Contrasting conditions: 1,500 acres (location of original home) were damaged by overgrazing. Two hay meadows, never grazed by cattle, remain in good condition.

2013-2016: Mr. Hicks' goal is to restore Daphne Prairie's hay meadow and tall grass pastures (with its mima mounds) to the landscape described by Anthony Glass in 1808! He began his quest to protect his ancestors' land, recognizing they did their best, even though the results were less successful than one would prefer. He takes initiative, reaches out to experts, embarks on personal research, and remains actively engaged in processes that will restore the land and honor his great-grandparents, C. G. ('Green') and Melody Aikin Hughes.

Restoration on his 992 acres:

- One-half were severely overgrazed but were never plowed nor tilled; a 35-acre hay meadow survived as cattle were never permitted to graze.
- Management Practices have been defined to protect the land and all it supports!
- Wildlife Management Plan will be adopted: limited haying and monitored/controlled burns will be conducted.
- The native grasses will thrive, and the land's historic integrity maintained!

*"The prairie is beginning to support its native environmental mix.
Grass is recovering; a wet season brought out thousands of orchids."*

B. F. Hicks