

Gay L. Tufts: NEWSPAPER EDITOR

By Kevin Ladd

As editor of Anahuac's newspaper, "The Progress," from 1911 to 1925, Gay L. Tufts endeared himself to the people of Chambers County by turning out a weekly publication that was witty, intelligent, newsworthy and (most of all) enjoyable to read.

Even after he left this place for other pastures, he was always faithful to write back and even to drop in on old friends and acquaintances from time to time.

A Tufts family historian, Herbert F. Adams, once sent me an interesting and quite fascinating account of his life. It would be difficult to improve upon this. It reads as follows: "His full and correct name I feel sure was John Gay Lussik Tufts, although he never used his first name. Three names were common in that Tufts family. He had a brother, Charles Drew Goodwin Tufts, who went by the name 'Drew Tufts.' They were two of seven children born in Centralia, Illinois, to Samuel Penniman and Zuelda (Goodwin) Tufts, and he was born there on April 17, 1860. His father was the proprietor of the 'Centralia Democrat' newspaper and undoubtedly Gay was weaned on printer's ink. His brother, Drew, later took over that newspaper. Samuel P., the father, served in the Mexican War and later organized the International Association of Mexican War Veterans and was for several years the president of the Illinois branch of that organization. He later was a major in Company F, Fifth Regiment, U.S. Infantry and Company J, First Illinois Volunteer Cavalry during the Civil War. Gay Tufts was a widower at the time he was in your area."

Gay Tufts was married on October 17, 1900 to Minnie Wetmore, and they had one daughter, Octavia, who was born in September 1900. His wife died while Octavia was only a small child. She would later marry a gentleman by the name of Russell Roberts, and they lived for many years in Paris, Texas.

Tufts took over the editorial and business management of the newspaper in July 1911, picking up that torch from A. L. Beason, an attorney by training, who clearly preferred the bench and the bar to the printing press. Introducing himself to his new neighbors, Tufts said he felt a great deal like a cowboy climbing on board a strange bronco. "The pony may buck with him for awhile," he said, "but soon yields to the guidance of the master's hand."

His salutatory to the subscribers continued: "I have been in the newspaper and printing business line for thirty years, having worked in all departments, both in country and in city. [I] published the Celeste (Texas) Courier five years; sold out three years ago with the intention of going into the farming business, and went to the western states on a prospecting tour, worked a few months on a farm in Oregon and finally decided to return to my old love Texas, where there are more opportunities fringed with gold."

This opening introduction proved to be rather typical of the new editor, who was always capable of cramming a lot of information in a small space and loading the words he used with irony, wit and additional meaning. The June 24, 1912 issue briefly described the construction of the new Chambers County State Bank (later Security State Bank): "Material for the new bank building is being placed on the ground. Mr. [M. L.] Franzen, the contractor of Winnie, arrived Tuesday and a force of men is now at work. This will be a two story brick, 25 x 50; the entire first floor will be occupied by the bank, which is to be equipped with the latest improved banking fixtures and conveniences, including a rein-forced concrete, fire and burglar-proof vault, 8 x 10. The structure will be a model of neatness,

presenting an air of business enterprise, and is to cost \$3,200.00." In one paragraph and only four sentences, Tufts told as much as modern newspapers would in several paragraphs.

He was perhaps best known for his wit, an innate ability to search out the amusing events surrounding the townsfolk in any given week. An August 1912 story was rather typical: "Louis Schwarz has a span of mules that are as gentle as young kittens when on the farm, and are not afraid of any kind of country noise, but when they come into Anahuac the city noises frighten them and they run away. Two weeks ago they got a shock at the sawmill, and the same day became frightened at Ben Barrow's dinner gong. Late Thursday of last week Louis went to Broussard's warehouse at the wharf to get a sack of feed and the mules got scared at a big ship and ran up the hill. Louis was putting a sack of feed into the wagon when they started and he grabbed the lines, falling down, and the mules dragged the road with him. That was all right--the road needed dragging, but it was hard on Louis' clothes. They struck the telephone pole at the corner of Bolivar avenue and Main street, breaking the tongue and harness, but doing no other damage."

Tufts quite often served as a one-man chamber of commerce, promoting new businesses and encouraging older ones. His writing elevated the town of Anahuac and Chambers County. He nurtured any number of correspondents, who in turn sent in interesting and sometimes amusing articles from the outlying communities. It was a lively, interesting paper that made readers feel good about themselves and each other. It was, in short, everything that a newspaper should be.

Tufts left the newspaper in early 1925, turning over the editorial reins to David T. McWilliams, another able journalist. The former editor hung around town for awhile, enjoying his retirement. He sold his home on the Bay Shore and headed off to Galveston for the fall and winter. Tufts wrote back from far-flung places, such as Richmond, Virginia and San Francisco, California, where he lived at different times. Although family historians could not provide the actual date of his death, they believe he died in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

A resident of Chambers County for only thirteen years, Gay L. Tufts remains a resident here at least in memory.

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The following two articles are great examples of Gay L. Tuft's writing ability, capturing perfectly the spirit of that not too distant time period.

THE PROGRESS
March 27, 1914

EDITOR ON A JOY RIDE

On Tuesday at noon County Judge R. J. McMurrey, who is also county school superintendent, invited the editor to accompany him on a trip to Smith Point, it being the Judge's duty to visit the schools of the county occasionally. The trip was made in the Judge's car, a Krit. The roads, which had not been dragged, were bad, and there were probabilities of rain before we got back. The man who drives a car has no time to talk much to the person riding with him, so the editor took along a story entitled "Mad Mike, or The Death Shot," to read when the scenery along the route was not interesting. Going through the beautiful piney woods at Double Bayou, where the sandy roads are ideal, the editor dropped his novel and remarked, "Ain't this fine," but when he struck the bleak prairie

intervening Double Bayou and Smith Point, he took up the novel and began to read again. Just as Mike had jumped over a precipice on a horse after a fleeing Redskin, the Judge's car got stuck in the mud and he yelled, "Get out, Tufts, and push." The editor, being a powerful pusher, pushed the car right out all right and resumed his story, but only read a half a page before another mud hole stopped the car. More pushing. Another bogdown and still more manpower. In order to evade the boggy places the Judge turned out onto the prairie and lost the main road, driving up to a colored man's house. The Judge stopped the car, got out and walked around over the prairie looking for the Smith Point road. In the meantime the editor embraced the opportunity to finish his story and then walked over to the colored man's house and inquired if he knew where in hell we were headed for. He replied he didn't, but that [Hell] would be where we would wind up if we continued on that road in an automobile.

The proper road was learned, however, and the Judge, who had wandered for out on the prairie, was called in. The journey was continued and the schoolhouse finally reached. Our visit at the school was very pleasant, the teacher and children were delighted to see us. The Judge made a little talk, and so did the editor.

It took three and a half hours to go down there, but coming back the Judge thought about putting the chains on the drive wheels and we went through the mud licketycut and was home in one hour and forty-five minutes.

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THE PROGRESS **July 10, 1914**

THE NEW MAIL BOAT

The Velma made her first trip with the mail Friday of last week. She has been remodeled into an elegant passenger boat, capable of accommodating 125 passengers comfortably. Capt. John P. Mitchell, the owner, has spared no pains in making this one of the finest boats in the bay, and also one of the swiftest. The upper deck is exclusively for passengers and at no time will an excess of freight interfere with the comfort of the passengers. There are two long benches, affording one an opportunity to lie down and sleep an hour or so if desired when the boat is not crowded, and there are plenty of chairs for those who wish to occupy seats on the lower deck, upper deck or any place outside of the engine room or the pilot house. Preparations have also been made to serve coffee and sandwiches to those who might become hungry on the way. The Velma is equipped with a 60-horse power engine, rides the sea like a swan and makes the trip from Galveston to Anahuac in about four and one-half hours.

