There are a few characters that flash like a meteor across the pages of history. In the star-dust of their trail ever scintillate the accomplishments of their brief span of years in this hurrying world. Such a character was Dr. Ashbel Smith.

Small of stature, keen of mind, ever in the forefront of public affairs, he was a scholar, statesman, diplomat, soldier, farmer and physician. As a scholar, he held the degrees of B. A., M. A. from Yale at the age of nineteen years, 1824. He later studied both law and medicine, and was a skilled surgeon.

He came to Texas a few months after the Battle of San Jacinto, and was appointed Surgeon General of the Texan Army. A close personal friend of Sam Houston, he occupied for several years the same room with him in that celebrated log house, the home of the President. His splendid intellect was often of valuable assistance to those earnest men who were creating a new nation. His influence in the enactment of laws regulating the practice of law and medicine was needed and accepted; this same influence was used in the establishment of our great University and the early medical schools. Dr. Smith was one of the organizers of the University of Texas and served many years as a regent and President of the Board of Regents. He wrote many medical treatises that were published in this country and abroad. His final great mental attainment was the valued assistance he gave as collaborator of the American revised version of the Bible, published shortly before his death, 1885. Dr. Smith's library of about four thousand volumes is now a part of the Library of the University of Texas.

As a Latin and Greek scholar he was unexcelled. As a statesman, Dr. Smith served Texas in both the House
of Representatives and the Senate. He negotiated the first treaty with the Comanche Indians, knowing that peace with them must be had before peace could be had with the Mexicans. He served as Secretary of State under the last president of the Republic of Texas and at that time also negotiated a treaty of peace with Mexico. This was accepted by Mexico, but was made void by the annexation of Texas to the United States. Undoubtedly Dr. Smith's services as a diplomat are largely responsible for the entrance of Texas into the Union. As a minister from Texas to the Court of St. James and St. Cloud, this clever man, who danced with Queen Victoria and lunched with Napoleon III, also so tactfully and intelligently handled the foreign relations of the baby republic that the United States Government began to see the trend of affairs, and, after having spurned all overtures from Texas on several occasions, finally became a suitor for the vast land and unlimited resources that lay so near her southern borders.

Dr. Smith spoke and wrote French fluently. After his return to the United States he wrote and published in French a pamphlet that told of the happenings in Texas and distributed this news both at home and abroad. He was later sent as an honorary commissioner to the Paris Exposition and it was said by friends who accompanied him that he received more attention from the French people than any other American on the commission. "He was wined, dined and feted by the medical profession and had many special honors bestowed upon him by scientists and literary men."

Dr. Smith was sent to Rome on a secret mission to Pope Gregory XVI. This mission is thought to have had something to do with the property rights of the Catholic Church in Texas.

Dr. Smith was also Colonel Smith. He was bitterly opposed to secession, which is well understood when we realize that it had been only a little over sixteen years since he had used every honest diplomatic manoeuvre he could conceive to get Texas into the Union. However, abiding by the decision of the majority, after a convention held for the purpose of discussing secession, Dr. Smith raised the Second Texas Infantry and fought throughout the Civil
War. He was promoted to the rank of Colonel and was seriously wounded at the battle of Shiloh. He previously had served with distinction through the entire war between the United States and Mexico.

Dr. Smith was personally without physical fear. He fought several duels, and while small of stature he is said to have had unusual strength and so roughly handled many of his enemies on various occasions that he always inspired a deep respect from those who need that type of handling. Several good stories are told of how the doctor demonstrated his prowess during the Reconstruction Days when the Ku Klux situation was so serious. He gave shelter, protection and counsel to both sides.

Dr. Smith is said to have been a wealthy man when he came to Texas, and his pioneering was the direct result of an unrequited love affair in Connecticut. He never married; and his home at Goose Creek, called by him "Evergreen," always lacked the feminine touch until in later years, when he adopted an attractive little patient who was an orphan—Anna Allen, later Wright. The doctor's baronial estates, as he had termed them, comprised two thousand acres of land overlooking Galveston Bay. He owned twelve hundred and eighty acres in Comanche County and two hundred and forty in Caldwell County, which he received as a reward for public services. As a farmer he took great pride in the fact that everything served on his table was raised on his farm. His enemies sometimes said that his fare was very meager. Probably the story most often told to illustrate this point is the one about the visit of Commodore Vanderbilt. Dr. Smith traveled much in this country and abroad; he always stopped at the best hotels and met many prominent people, among them the old Commodore, whom he invited to visit him on his estates in Texas. The invitation was accepted, but the millionaire's yacht nosed into the landing at "Evergreen" unexpectedly and unannounced. One story relates how the guests, with valets, maids and bags, climbed the hill just in time to hear the Colonel telling Bonney, his man servant, to hurry out and catch some rabbits, that guests had arrived. One neighbor is said to have sent in a quickly baked cake, and the doctor handled the situation in such a courtly manner
that despite the very limited accommodations of his three-room house, the guests left after a few hour’s visit perfectly satisfied with the hospitality dispensed. Another story says that when he saw the Vanderbilts arriving, he ran out, jumped on his horse, and left for parts unknown for an unlimited time. This does not sound like the right story, for on no other occasion was Dr. Smith ever known to have run from anything unless perhaps it was that love affair in Connecticut, and that, too, is hearsay.

As a physician and surgeon, Dr. Smith’s knowledge was accurate and profound. He was always in touch with the latest scientific discoveries and practiced extensively with and without remuneration. As a yellow fever expert his services were sought and recognized not only in Texas and Tennessee, but also in old Mexico. He was given many valuable and appropriate gifts in recognition of his services in Mexico, among them a magnificent saddle and blanket.

Dr. Smith was once bitten by a rattlesnake. He treated himself, and kept an accurate and detailed account of his symptoms and the effect of the drugs he used. These reports were later published in this country and abroad.

It was during his gratuitous services at the Baylands orphan home that he found little Anna Allen, about nine years old. She had a serious eye trouble which the doctor treated for several months. He took her across the bay to “Evergreen” where he could give her his constant care. He there became so much attached to her that he kept her with him until his death. He wanted to adopt her, but she did not like the name Smith. However, the doctor left her a handsome estate, which was later the center of the Goose Creek Oil Field.

Dr. Smith is said to have had another love affair when in middle life, and rumor says he carried the miniature of Eva Harris with him for the rest of his days. She was of a prominent Houston family and died while he was serving the Confederacy. Unhappy as he was in his love affairs we may nevertheless feel that had his love for the state of his adoption been divided by a love for home and family, perhaps it would have been at the expense of many of the public benefits that Texas received from his large brain and heart.
Perhaps we may find the keynote to Dr. Smith’s life in the words of this letter, written to Anna Allen, March 24, 1878. “May God bless you, my dear child, for you are a child to me. May I beg you on all occasions and in all matters to aim to do your duty to God as He requires it, and to put your trust, your whole trust, in Him, the Great Father who never abandons His Children, is the prayer of your affectionate

Ashbel Smith.”

DR. GIDEON LINCECUM

One of the most interesting characters of early Texas was Dr. Gideon Lincecum. He was born in Georgia in 1793. His education consisted of what he learned in the short terms of country schools. He studied medicine at odd moments until the War of 1812. Having been elected tax collector of Putnam county, he could enlist in the army for only five months. Upon his return home, he collected the taxes, paid the money into the treasury, and then married. After another three months in the army, he returned and worked for his father, and then taught school for a period of time, being paid ten dollars a head for his pupils at the end of the term. His was a roving spirit, so he moved on to Alabama for a short stay and then into Mississippi, where he settled on the Tombigbee River, three miles from Columbus, Mississippi. He formed a partnership with a half-breed Choctaw Indian, and would no doubt have prospered in trading with the Indians, had his health not failed.

Doctors for many miles around attended him, offered advice and all their medical knowledge, but to no avail. It was some form of heart trouble, and lasted more than three years. During this time he was unable to work; and while he had many thousands of dollars due him, he was unable to collect anything, and his family became destitute. He finally decided a piece of venison would put new life in him, so he crept out to a waterhole in the woods, a mile and a half from home; and feeling too feeble to return,
"Evergreen," Home of Dr. Ashbel Smith
he remained and slept at the root of a red oak tree. When morning came, much to his surprise, he felt better than for some time and remained a day longer to ponder on this. He shortly noticed a very large, and evidently an old buck nearing the waterhole. He was very poor and limped badly. The doctor expected the deer to drink heartily of the water, but to his surprise the buck sipped it very lightly, ate sparingly of a few briar leaves (the natural food of deer) and then he hobbled a short distance and lay down under some trees. His abstemiousness gave the doctor something to think about, and he resolved to try it in his own case. He returned home with more ease than when he had gone out, though he had been thirty hours without food. He told his wife to fix him a cup of sassafras tea with a heaping spoonful of sugar. This with a corn waffle was his only food three times a day for some time. He continued his life in the open, supplying his family in this way with deer, turkey, bear and honey—his health was soon completely restored.

About the first of August, 1830, William Wall, a grateful neighbor whom he had relieved very successfully on several occasions, urged him to accept a loan of a hundred dollars, with which the doctor was to acquire the necessary drugs to set up shop. He went on a borrowed horse to Tuscumbia and made the necessary purchases. His equipment was much above the average. All he needed was a good horse on which he could make his calls. This he acquired in trade, and the result was he soon had provisions for his family and was able to repay the hundred dollar loan and had three hundred dollars worth of good accounts.

About this time an epidemic of intestinal trouble became prevalent in the community, and, finding his treatment ineffective, he was so discouraged that he quit the practice of medicine for a time and tried to earn his living by other means. Failing in this, he conceived the idea of living with the Indians for a period and learning the methods and practice of their medicine men. The outstanding medicine man of his time and community was the great Eliche Chito, from the six towns, who was most willing to teach his cult to some one, and to a white man
in preference to one of his own people, as the white man could put it on paper and preserve it. They were to meet "the day after twelve sleeps—at the black rock bluff on the Noxuby River." They met exactly on time, staked their horses and lay down in the shade to plan their course.

The Indian, gathering medicinal plants, would describe the kind of soil they were found in, their use, the season to collect them and with what other plants they were sometimes combined.

For six weeks they lived in close companionship, the doctor learning and writing down what the medicine man had to impart. He was to pay the Indian fifty cents a day for his lectures and also furnish all their board, doing his hunting while the medicine man gathered his plants. Dr. Lincecum says: "He would not go to any house or suffer me to do so. He said it would spoil the knowledge he was teaching and make me forgetful. At the expiration of six weeks the old doctor told me there were no more medicinal plants this side of the Mississippi River for me to study; and that as soon as I would read and let him hear what I had put on the paper about what he had told me, he would let me go to my own country. I procured some fat pine and read a great deal that night. The old Indian corrected some errors and added many things to the manuscript, which was written in Choctaw. We got through with the examination the next day at 10 p. m. Chito was greatly pleased. He took the manuscript and seemed to weigh it in his hands. 'How strange it is,' he said, 'but it is true that this small bundle of holiso (paper) contains all the knowledge I ever possessed that is really of any account. Oh, if I had only the power to do that (write) I should have been one of the renowned men of the world. Will you keep it and take care of it?' he eagerly inquired. 'Oh, yes,' said I. 'I shall soon translate it into English. It will then be printed on a great number of papers and made so plain that everybody can understand it. I shall also state that Eliche Chito of Okla hunale taught it to me and everybody will read that too.' 'Well, well!' said he, 'that is wonderful. I am truly gratified. My old wasted heart is glad.' I told him further that, when
the book should be completed, I would send him one and he could get his friend, Pierre Jurzorg, to read it for him when he could see that the same words had been faithfully preserved. 'Then the time for me to go to the Good Hunting Ground will be come.'

"Morning came, and I gave him twenty-one dollars. He looked steadily at the money, then handed back ten dollars of it, saying, 'you are young and will need this more than I shall. I would not have any of it, but at a little store on my road home are two very good blankets that I laid aside as I came up. I must pay for them.'

"It was in vain that I urged him to keep all the money. He persisted, saying he didn’t need it. So on that little branch not far from the Yak nubbe old fields we shook hands most affectionately and parted forever."

Dr. Lincecum returned to civilization and found that "Samuel Thompson’s Guide to Health" was being widely distributed at twenty dollars a copy, and people felt their needs were filled and that a doctor was unnecessary. He soon absorbed the information in this volume and carried the Thomasonian medicines in one side of his saddlebag and the herbs of the old school and the Indian medicine man’s in the other. He was often in consultation and his practice grew in a most remarkable manner. He often received a hundred dollars for a visit. Being of a roving nature the wanderlust seized Dr. Lincecum again, and he set out on a tour of Texas. After many adventures he landed at San Felipe. From there he went to where La Grange now stands and made his headquarters at the home of Captain Burnhams, who was a prominent man with large holdings in that vicinity. From there he made long excursions, alone, on horseback.

After seven months’ absence, he set his face homeward, stopping at San Felipe to make a professional call on Gail Borden, who was a prosperous ranchman of that day. After attending to this case he started back to Mississippi with thirty-one dollars more than he left home with.

Soon after his return, the doctor moved his family to Columbus, Mississippi, where he enjoyed a wide and profitable practice. Just thirteen years after his departure from Texas, he, with his family, ten negroes, ten
fine horses, all his furniture and a good stock of medicines, set out to return there. He settled on the Long Point tract of land which he had selected on his visit thirteen years before, paying 75 cents per acre for several thousand acres. A friend bought the adjoining tract at the same rate, but used as exchange "one fitified negro girl and several Mexican ponies.

Dr. Lincecum worked hard during the Civil War making spinning wheels, looms, reels, spinning and carding machines—all the necessities for making cloth. He was too old to do active duty. His wife died at the close of the war and he with his son and two other men set out on another tour into the wilds of Texas. On this trip he collected some two thousand butterflies, a great many varieties of mussel shells, oysters, clams and conches. The doctor wrote a great deal about the natural history of Texas, extracts from which have been reprinted in the journals of Europe. He also corresponded with some of the great scientists of Europe and received a "most polite letter from the great Charles Darwin."

Due to the unsettled conditions in Texas immediately after the Civil War, he sold all his possessions and moved to Tuxpan, Mexico. After five years residence there, he returned to his former home in Washington county, Texas, where he died November 28, 1873.

He had directed that a highly prized violin, to which numerous references are made in his biography, should be buried with him. It was a valuable instrument made in Paris, in 1820. This request was complied with, and in old Mount Zion Cemetery, in Washington County, this pioneer doctor of many talents lies buried.