

Thomas Lewis (1843-1911)

From a young boy who fought as a Confederate soldier to a bullwhacker on the Santa Fe Trail to a resurrected soldier from the dead to a Baptist minister to a rancher, this story could only be real life in the west. Here is a minister who commissioned the sheriff to keep the drunks in line during church services held, where else, but in the local saloon.



- **1843-Birth.** Thomas Lewis was born on April 5th, 1843, in a log cabin on homesteaded land across the Missouri River from Fort Leavenworth.
- **1871-Marriage.** In 1871 while the pastor of a county church near Gallatin MO he met his wife to be, Martha Surface.
 - The Reverend Thomas Lindsay Lewis – that was Father. But to “Nell”, the youngest of his five daughters, he was always three distinct men.
 - "First was Papa a very hospitable and warm loving man, intensely interested in the pursuits of his children and never hesitating to get down on all fours to growl like a grizzly, sending us all to scatter, playfully shrieking and screaming with delight.
 - Second was the minister, who stood with dignity before his congregation; a man dedicated to God. He was handsome with a striking resemblance to the portraits of the Confederate General, Robert E. Lee. As a working partner of The Almighty, the church stood between us...and he was never exclusively our own.
 - Third was the man created in my imagination from the tales that he told. The young Tom Lewis of the Missouri River frontier, a two-gun Santa Fe trailman shooting from the hip, Confederate cavalryman, Colorado logger and teamster, who became a struggling ministerial student in the “Reconstruction” days after the Civil War."
- As a child Thomas was an avid reader, including “fiction” which Grandfather, “Ezekiel” did not approve of. “Tom” was a little too “bookish” for Ezekiel’s “hard-shell” Baptist views.
- **1861.** The Civil War broke out and although neither Thomas nor Ezekiel held with slavery being “proper”, they were Democrats who strictly believed in “States Rights”, unlike Lincoln and those Republicans. So Thomas, at 19, joined the Missouri Militia Volunteers under General Sterling Price to support the South. During that first year Tom was devastated when his childhood friend, Jim Nugent, died at his side in battle. That same year Thomas had conversations with fellow-confederate, Frank James (Jesse’s brother) regarding their mutual interest in the William Jewell “Baptist” College where Frank and Jesse’s father had been on the Board of Directors.
- While on furlough from the war, recovering from contagious measles, Thomas took work as a “bullwhacker”, driving ox-drawn wagons down the Santa Fe Trail. On one trip he was captured by Indians, who curiously offered him a squaw and five ponies if he would join their tribe. Although he had to concede that this was a very fine offer, he bartered his freedom for the negotiated price of a nice four-cornered blanket and a hand mirror.
- After re-enlisting with the Confederate cavalry under General Marmaduke, Thomas was shot in the back. From this he survived, only to be later captured and incarcerated in the infamous “Gratiot State Prison in St Louis where he remained until months after the war.
- When Thomas returned home he was confronted by a very suspicious, new Stepmother who believed that “Tom” had been killed, but when “Coon” the family dog, whimpering excitedly,



Nell Lewis Macgregor
Author of "The Long
Tough Trail"

wagged his tail and licked Tom frantically, his Stepmother was convinced that this very sickly, disheveled young man must be her husband's son Tom, who had somehow survived the awful war and found his way back home.

- After regaining his health, Tom worked in Colorado at logging camps and silver mines in order to earn tuition for college.
- **1866.** Thomas registered at William Jewell "Baptist" College in Liberty, Missouri, where he attained his education while he survived on a diet of corn-mush.
- **1886.** While a Pastor at "Brush Creek" Mo. his wife, Martha, gave birth to their 5th daughter, "Nellie Nannie Ray Lewis". Having names in common with the old family horses and cows, she would later settle for "Nell", with hopes that others might think it was a derivative of something more glamorous.

"Meanwhile poor "Papa" felt so deprived that he was not being blessed with a "son", that he went on a reckless binge, purchasing extravagant books about Ancient Monarchies, which were considerably out of the family budget. Years after his death, I realized that the date of purchase inside the books was also the day I was born! At that moment I sat on the floor, hugging the books to my chest and laughing aloud thinking how a man who had trustingly believed in his prayers for a son had been so let down by both his wife and The Lord."

- Possibly these frustrations led to his request to move West, which was granted by the Baptist Missionary Board when they sent him to a brand new Baptist Church in Stevensville, Montana. A church that still stands today, in 2009, as the oldest of its kind in Montana. A Bible that he secured for the church in 1887 is still prominently displayed under the cross inside the church.
- **1887.** Thomas found beautiful prairie land with timber next to Big Creek in Victor where the church members helped him build a two-story log cabin that still stands today as of 2009.
- **1889.** The Baptist Mission Board transferred Thomas to Cheney, Washington, where a troubled congregation needed the strong leadership that the Rev. Lewis possessed. It was during this period that their family received an extraordinary "missionary box". These boxes were often filled with items of old un-wearable clothes sent by other congregations to missionary families like the Lewis family. However in "this" box Rev. Lewis received a very nice suit, suitable to wear for preaching. The previous owner's name, "John D. Rockefeller" was sewn inside - and the breast pocket contained a handsome \$10.00 bill.
- For the next several years the Mission Board sent Rev. Lewis to various congregations in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and back to Montana that were in need of his strong leadership.
- **Winter of 1897.** Thomas and Martha Lewis sold the ranch and moved the family to Missoula where they bought an old two-story house on the corner of South 4th and Orange Streets, in order to take in student boarders from the new University - where their children Mary and Sue, and "Yes, my younger brother, Frank, who Papa had prayed for, would eventually attend and graduate." That old Missoula home somehow survived and still stands today as of 2009.
- As the years passed, Thomas's health forced him to retire from his missionary work. He spent his last days in the Missoula home engaged in his favorite passions: classifying geological specimens and listening to Nell: playing classic piano pieces or reading various biographies.
- **1911-Death.** At the age of 69, in the winter of 1911, he passed away. The last almost illegible scrawl of words he wrote sang in triumph, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." Thomas was laid to rest in the Missoula Cemetery. Later Martha, and Nell's first child who was still-born and eventually Nell would join Thomas all in the same grave site. Nell's husband, Billy Macgregor's parents, Donald and Margaret were also laid to rest in the Missoula Cemetery.



All information taken from the "The Long Tough Trail" written by Nell Lewis Macgregor, daughter of Thomas & Martha.