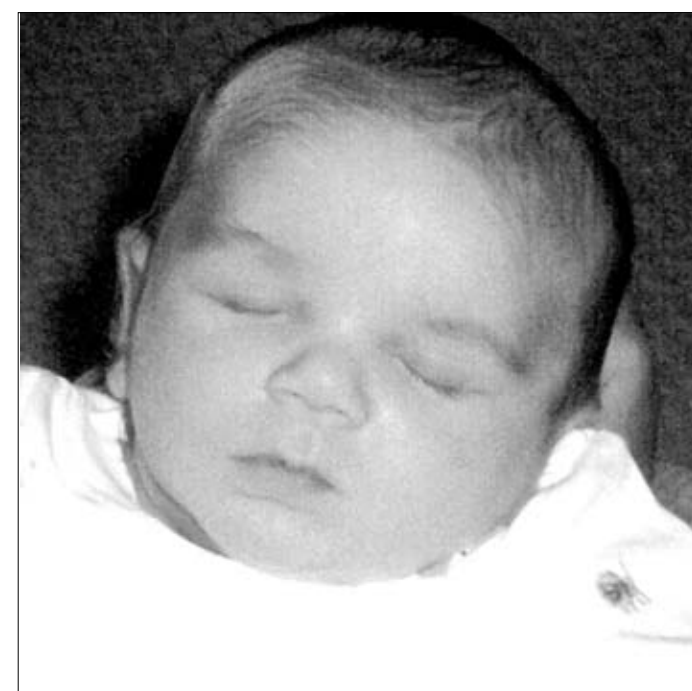


# New arrivals!



Kyle Wayne Gardner

## Kyle Wayne Gardner

STATE LINE, Miss. — Rob and Tammy Gardner, of State Line, MS, proudly announce the birth of their son, Kyle Wayne.

Kyle was born on Feb. 15, 2007 at 9:28 a.m. He weighed ten pounds and one ounce and was 20-3/4 inches long.

Maternal grandparents are Butch and Doris Casey of Toxey. Paternal grandparents are Wayne and Cathie Gardner of Buckatunna, MS. Paternal great-grandmother is Martha Gardner of State Line, MS.

Kyle was welcomed home by his very excited cousins Kate Roberts and Taylor McIlwain.



Evan McKenzie McIlwain

## Evan McKenzie McIlwain

PELAHATCHIE -- John and April McIlwain of Pelahatchie, Ms. proudly announce the birth of their daughter Evan McKenzie McIlwain.

She was born January 18, 2007 at 1:18 p.m. at River Oaks Hospital in Jackson, MS. She weighed 7 lbs. 2 oz. And was 19 3/4 in. long.

Her maternal grandparents are Danny and Brenda Cherry of Scooba, MS. Paternal grandparents are Sammy and Bleece McIlwain of Gilbertown. Maternal great grandparents are Dan and Sue Meacham of Scooba, MS. and Mary Cherry and the late James Cherry of DeKalb, MS. Paternal great grandparents are Lomac Taylor and the late John Taylor of Gilbertown and the late Sam and Eva Lee McIlwain of Silas.



Matthew Morrison Mize

## Matthew Morrison Mize

MERIDIAN, MS — Chauncey and Suzanne Mize of Meridian, MS are pleased to announce the birth of their son, Matthew Morrison Mize.

Matthew was born at Jeff Anderson Regional Medical Center on March 1, 2007. He weighed six pounds and seven ounces and was 20 inches long.

Maternal Grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Ike Armistead of Butler and Dr. and Mrs. David Hensleigh of Lineville. Paternal Grandparents are Wanda Phillips of Luling, LA and Mackie Mize of Slidell, LA.

Maternal great-grandparents are Dolores Alexander of Butler and Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hensleigh of Purvis, MS. Paternal great-grandmother is Lillie Luke of Butler.

Mrs. Mize is the former Susanne Hensleigh of Butler.



## Rylee Grace Pitts

WAYNESBORO, Miss. — Thoye and Angela Pitts of Waynesboro, MS proudly announce the birth of their daughter, Rylee Grace.

Rylee was born on Feb. 28, 2007 at 9:11 a.m. She weighed seven pounds and eight ounces and was 21 inches long.

Maternal grandparents are James and Karen Williams of Silas. Paternal grandparents are V. W. and Ann Pitts of Waynesboro, MS. Maternal great-grandparents are Jack and Kay McLemore, and Roy and Ruby Casey of Silas. Paternal great-grandparents are Floyd and Sally McCarty and the late Louise McCarty, Ethel Wayne Pitts and the late Vardaman Pitts of Waynesboro, MS.

Mrs. Pitts is the former Angela Williams of Silas.

AT LEFT: Rylee Grace Pitts

## It's a population explosion!

The Sun has had so MANY New Arrival announcements

lately that we simply haven't had room to print them all!

But don't worry -- more to come next week!

# The connection between Dempsey and Tom

The letter from the Choctaw County Genealogical Society that we received recently through the graciousness of Charles and Frances Houlditch was especially significant to us. It mentioned two deaths, and there was no relationship at all between the two men who died. In fact, they lived in different parts of the country, and neither was aware of the existence of the other.

One of the men was Tom Sawyer who died in January 1907. His name is memorable to every reader in America, and it was especially important to Mark Twain. Tom was a pioneer, riverboat pilot, veteran, and volunteer fireman. He grew up with Mark Twain in Hannibal, Missouri. Twain was so impressed by Tom that he gave his name to the main character in his book, "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer."

The other man was Dempsey Sturdivant, Jr., a native of Choctaw County who died in Meridian of typhoid in July, 1891. A sentence in the letter sent us to the Bogueloosa Valley Cemetery near Needham. It stated that "His body was brought back to his native land for burial." The death notice was published in the Choctaw Herald, an early county newspaper.

The name is more than familiar to us because Dempsey was the nephew of our own great-grandmother, Matilda Sturdivant. Dempsey died at age of twenty-seven, but one of his very profitable adventures established his legacy in the family forever, and elevated the living standards of many people Mississippi.

Perhaps if a connection could be made between Twain's mythical Tom Sawyer and our own Dempsey, it would be through a reverse tactic

of Tom's that Dempsey used. We do not know if Dempsey read the book, but it is possible. Dempsey was born in 1864, and the book was published in 1874. Beyond that, however, we cannot prove any connection between Dempsey and the book.

One episode was used by Tom in the book, and Dempsey used a variation of it, but it was probably only by happenstance. Tom lived with his Aunt Polly. One Saturday morning, she put him to work whitewashing the picket fence that enclosed the front yard. A gang of Tom's friends came by and chided him for having to work on Saturday morning. Tom responded that only he was qualified and able to whitewash the fence because the job required a lot of ability and experience.

When several of the boys bragged that they could do the job and would like to prove it, Tom told them that the job was so hard that he would have to charge them a quarter each in case they goofed up the job. Even more, each boy who tried it would have to whitewash at least four feet of fence. The boys quickly agreed, and before the morning was over, they finished the fence and Tom had a pocket full of quarters.

Now, let us go backward a few years to 1869 when Thomas Durant decided to join his railroad, the Union Pacific out of Omaha, with Leland Stanford's Central Pacific out of Sacramento. Before the railroads joined, Durant went west to check on Stanford's progress. He was shocked to find that Stanford was using three thousand Chinese Coolies to build the railroad. Durant watched in fascination as the coolies dug tunnels through the extremely



rocky Sierra Nevada Mountains, and he watched with horror when the coolies stopped for lunch. They went through a chow line and each received a few ounces of rice in a bowl. They sat on the ground and ate the rice with chopsticks. Totally shocked, Durant asked Stanford if he really expected to build a railroad with those men.

"Why not?" Stanford replied. "They built the great wall of China, didn't they?"

The railroads met at Promontory, Utah in 1869. A spike of California gold was driven into a cross-tie to celebrate the event. It is now on display in the Museum of Stanford University at Palo Alto. If you are ever out that way, visit the museum. The completion of the railroad opened up a flurry of railroad activity, especially in this area. Edward Harriman completed the Illinois Central in the late 1880's. It ran through Meridian on its way from Chicago to New Orleans. Inciden-

tally, the passenger train on that railroad was called the "City of New Orleans." A few years ago, Willie Nelson wrote a song about it: "Riding on the City of New Orleans, Don't you know that I'm you native son?"

Numerous other railroads were laid that fed into the Illinois Central, and the trains could all run on the same tracks because the gauge (distance between the rails) was standardized in 1871 at four feet, eight and one half inches. Rails that are nearer together than that are classed as narrow gauge. Such tracks were usually short and were used in the logging woods or in mines.

Dempsey Sturdivant knew about the railroad activity in Mississippi, and decided to check it out. He was in his early twenties, and as far as anyone knew, had never seen a railroad before going to Mississippi where he learned that there was an urgent need for foreman to supervise the work crews that were laying the tracks. Ordinary hands made a dollar a day, but foremen made six dollars.

Dempsey spent a whole day watching a group of section hands at work. When the day ended, he struck up a conversation with an elderly hand who, worked directly under the foreman. He got rather personal with the man by asking about his experience and rate of pay. The man told Dempsey that he had worked on the railroad since it left Chicago three years previously, and he was paid more than an ordinary hand. In fact, he proudly boasted that his pay was a dollar and a half a day.

Dempsey thanked the man and told him that he would see him again very soon, probably the next day. He spent the night in a cot house, a dormi-

tory-type building that was furnished with numerous cots that were rented at a very low price. In moments before going to sleep, he meditated about the situation.

There was no doubt that he could go to work as a section hand, but the prospect did not appear very rewarding because of the low pay. He had found some doubt in others, but never within himself because he never looked for it, and the self-confidence within often erased that which he found in his friends. Happy people usually manage to stick together. With those thoughts in mind, he went into a long, restful sleep, fully aware that the next day he would find work as a foreman.

After a leisurely breakfast in a café, he walked to the tent by the railroad and told a man who was hiring that he was applying for a job as a foreman. The man looked at Dempsey's youthful face and began to ask some questions. Of course, the first thing he asked about was Dempsey's experience, and just how much of it there was.

At that point, Dempsey employed a Tom Sawyer tactic: "Do you actually think that I would apply for a job as a foreman without any experience? How else would I know that the railbed should be hard and level or that there should be a clearing that is at least fifty feet wide on each side of the track? Who else but a foreman would know that the gauge of a standard railroad is four feet, eight and a half inches between the rails or that a tie plate should be used on at least every third tie, and more often than that when necessary?"

The man who was hiring quickly admitted that such knowledge was

not generally known to by most people, but it was common among foreman. Well, the track needed several foreman. He wanted to know just when Dempsey could start work.

"I can start just about anytime after today, but there is one requirement that you must meet. I have a trusted friend who is working now on another section, but he is not happy. He would prefer to work under me. If I take this job, you will have to hire him as a hand at a dollar and a half a day. Otherwise, I am not interested."

The man told Dempsey to return the next morning with his friend, and he would have someone take them out to the track that was being started. Dempsey left there in a highly elated state and went back to the track where the old man was working.

"Have you ever laid track?" Dempsey asked, intending to \$1.50 of his pay away.

"I have done everything that can be done on a railroad over the last twenty years," the old man said.

"Well," Dempsey said, "I have a job for you that starts tomorrow, and your experience has qualified you for it. I will be the job foreman, and you will work directly under me. Your pay will be exactly twice what you are getting now."

The two men did go to work the next day, and over the next several years laid new railroad tracks throughout western Mississippi and on to New Orleans. During one long period, they laid track for the Gulf and Ohio railroad which later became the Gulf Mobile, and Ohio. Dempsey hired many hands over the years, but he never did hire --

another foreman.