

# Bosque Letter

Summer 2010

## Happy Birthday Meridian

On June 27, 1854 Bosque County Locating Commissioners S.S. Locker, William McCurry, Jasper N. Mabray and T.E. Everett, along with Chief Justice Lowery H. Scrutchfield, received donations of 100 acres out of the William H. King survey from Dr. J. M. Steiner and 20 acres from Andrew Montgomery. This land was to be auctioned off as city lots for the new county seat called Meridian. George Erath and his survey team began striking off these lots, leaving space for the courthouse square, and finished just in time for the great 4<sup>th</sup> of July picnic held under a stand of trees, approximately where the Seawright gazebo stands, across from the Methodist church. At that picnic, these lots were auctioned by William McCurry, and the money from the sale of the lots was used as operating funds for the new county.

## Phillip Smith Hale

Phillip Smith Hale served as Bosque County Judge from 1904-1916. He also was an attorney, a financier, and an insurance agent. Many years back, his beautiful home on Main Street in Meridian was sold and all the contents of the home were auctioned off. Miss Elizabeth Torrence was able to salvage many items before the auction, to be archived here at the Collection. Those items were boxed and stored on the third floor of the courthouse, and then made the move across the street to the Lumpkin Building, and were never sorted or indexed. Two months ago, volunteers and Manager Ruth Crawford began the tedious and time consuming task of cataloguing and storing over 4000 items. During this process, however, many interesting facts were discovered pertaining to Bosque County and Judge Hale.

>Judge Hale owned thousands of acres of land in Eastland, Comanche, Hamilton, Coryell, Somervell and Bosque counties. This land was leased to folks on the "4ths" system. In other words, the sharecroppers worked the land, and for every four bushels of corn or wheat raised, the farmer got three and Mr. Hale got one. Mr. Hale also owned

full or partial mineral rights on all the property. This was around 1916 when the Ranger oil boom was just beginning. Judge Hale was definitely a land and oil baron.

>Judge Hale formed the Meridian Oil Company, along with R.V. Ferguson, J.E. Turner, W.W. Todd, J.L. Brown, Ole J. Olson and J.J. Lumpkin.

>He served on the board for the Meridian Training School, later called Meridian College. There is extensive information about the building and operating of the school in his papers.

>His wife, Mary Elizabeth Dunlap Hale, was the daughter of Tom Dunlap and Cynthia Hall Dunlap. Her sister, Ada, married A.A. Lumpkin. Mary Hale was a descendent of James "Horseshoe" Robertson, a Revolutionary War hero.

>He was a Mason, Knight of Pythias, Odd Fellow, and served as Chairman of the Tuberculosis Association.

>Judge Hale was very close to his family and was the financial and legal advisor for his siblings. His papers include documents from the Hale family dating back to 1813.

These papers offer much insight to eras of boom and bust in Bosque County, and also give some brief glimpses into the lives of many pioneer and influential families, such as the Lumpkins.

## **Bosque County Names First Poet Laureate**

In May, County Judge Cole Word named a selection committee consisting of Ruth Crawford, Janet Jackson, Debbie Tolman and Debbie Kibler to choose a Poet Laureate.

Applications were taken and reviewed, and Sherrod Fielden was unanimously chosen as the first Bosque County Poet Laureate. Sherrod will serve for three years, and will act as Good Will Ambassador for Bosque County. He will also work with our youth, encouraging them to write poetry, prose and song.

The Bosque Collection hosted an award program honoring Sherrod and his wife, Sue, on Thursday, June 10<sup>th</sup>. County Judge Cole Word introduced the poet, and he was presented his certificate by Steven Fromholz, Texas Poet Laureate Emeritus.

Sherrod has just published a book of his works, *Rhyme and Reason, A Collection of Poems by Sherrod L. Fielden, Writer of Rhyme*, which includes over one hundred poems. He has received many honors for his rhymes, and has appeared all over the state for poetry readings. Congratulations, Sherrod!

# Spring Tour of Flat Top Ranch

By Ruth Crawford, Manager of the Bosque Collection

On April 20<sup>th</sup> I had the privilege of attending a tour of Flat Top Ranch, located outside Walnut Springs. The tour was hosted by William Offutt, who has been ranch manager for over thirty years. Twenty people were led on a caravan, in trucks and four-wheel drive vehicles, from the gate all the way across the ranch to Taylor Springs. The views were spectacular, especially on the top of the mesa known as Flat Top Mountain. Wildlife was abundant, including rattlesnakes, white tail, and elk and antelope. Early written accounts of Bosque County describe large herds of both antelope and elk, and these animals were re-introduced to the ranch a few years back.

Flat Top Ranch consists of 17,000 acres; however, at one time it encompassed 24,000 acres. The earliest settler was J.W. Taylor, who, around 1852 settled in the area known as Taylor Springs, beside Flag Branch Creek. The log cabin he built is still standing and hosts a Boy Scout Jamboree every spring.

Comanche threats were common to the Taylor family; however, friendly tribes, such as the "Tonks", traded with the family. The family often welcomed travelers, who found the springs a nice respite, and many of them carved their names and the date they passed through on the side of the limestone cliffs (early graffiti). One date is clearly marked "1886 12/30".

Other folks who settled early were Col. James Buckner "Buck" Barry and Capt J.J. "Jack" Cureton. Members of the Cureton family are buried on the very top of the mountain. In the 1870's W.H. McCurdy and N.H. Daniels began ranching, buying up as much land as possible, until they built a small cattle and sheep empire. They were dominant until their deaths around the turn of the century. For years after that the property was leased or changed owners several times until 1938 when Charles Pettit bought the ranch. Under Mr. Pettit's reign, the ranch became known as one of the finest conservation ranches in the land. Charles Pettit was especially known for his champion Herefords.

In 1961, Louis Beecherl bought 703 acres right in the middle of the ranch, which was a tract of land that Charles Petit had been trying to buy for years. Mr. Beecherl eventually bought the entire Flat Top Ranch. Mrs. Julia Beecherl is a descendent of the Tutt family, which lived in the Kimball Bend area. Mr. and Mrs. Beecherl, who live in Dallas, and their family visit the ranch almost every weekend.

Pictured below is the pool beside the cabin in which milk and other perishables were kept cool; and the Taylor Cabin.



After the tour, the group returned to the ranch headquarters, which is the house that was built by Charles Pettit. Everyone was treated to a delicious meal, courtesy of William and Kay Offutt.

We are grateful to the Pettit and Beecherl families for their contributions and support to Walnut Springs and Bosque County.

Grave of J.J. Cureton



## **Donations**

C.D. Handley: Photographs of downtown Clifton during trade days, taken in the twenties from the top of the grain mill by unknown photographer.

Estate of Georgia Gustafson: Three ledger books from the Midway Store and a spinning top hand carved by Burton Gustafson.

Raymond & Valeria Whitney: Bosque County Historical Commission documents, from 1985 to present. Raymond and Valeria were appointed by Judge Pete Page, and have

served on the Cemetery Committee and as Co-Vice Presidents. Their knowledge of the Valley Mills area is invaluable. Valeria's brothers donated \$2500.00 on her behalf toward the restoration fund of the Lumpkin Building.

Sherrod Fielden: A copy of "Rhyme And Reason, A Collection of Poems by Sherrod Fielden, Writer of Rhyme".

Larry Lawson: Slides his father took during the construction of Whitney Dam.

Janice Merchant: Meridian Study Club yearbooks and a scrapbook

Elizabeth Torrence: Four beautiful paintings done by Miss Torrence of her family homes. Her grandfather, Tom Pool, first built a log cabin near the Election Oak and later built Highview, current home of George and Martha Boutwell.

Miss Torrence also has donated the following: a Bosque County lap blanket, a cream pitcher commemorating the county's centennial, a Pool family bible that dates back to 1870, commemorative plates of St. Olaf Lutheran Church and Norse Church, several books pertaining to local history, and silver serving tongs from the Scrutchfield estate.

Family of Sleepy and Velma Hill: photographs of downtown Kopperl from 1930-1950 and personal memorabilia.

Maleta Palmeyer: Cemetery and veteran information compiled by her late husband, Bill, plus a very generous memorial in honor of William C. Pallmeyer, Jr.

Gloria Hewlett: Memorials for Veterans - R.L. Hopson, Elmo Hovned, Jack Huffman, W.D. Huffman, T.L. Huse, Lonnie Ivey, Orville Jackson, Clifford Jenson, Raymond Reesing, Frank Spangle, Eldon Zimmerman, Avery Johnson, H.M. Jones, Jr., Alvin Jorgenson, Clifford Josey, David Keller, H.P. Kettler, C.G. Knudson, Truman Knudson, Wade Knudson, Gus Krueger, Addie Connie Kruse, Walter Kruse, Raymond LaFon, and Vernon Lambert.

Bosque County Retired Teacher Association: memorial for Alle Mae Tyler.

Michael and Debra Gray: New members at the Benefactor level and new business owners in downtown Clifton.

Jody and Ruth Crawford: Tripod for video camera

## Bosque County Flag Comes Home From Iraq

Last year a very nice young man came into the Collection and wanted to buy a County flag. During the conversation it was learned that he was returning for a third tour of duty in Iraq and wanted to fly the flag over his base. He mentioned that several of the servicemen had flown their state flags and he wanted to be the first, and possibly only, one to fly his county's flag. After he purchased his flag, I handed him another and requested that he fly it also and return it to the Collection.

On June 15<sup>th</sup> the serviceman and the flag returned to the Collection, safe and sound. The young man is Captain Thomas Patton, USN, from Valley Mills. He is a pilot of the Seahawk helicopter and flies reconnaissance missions along the border of Iraq, searching for arms movements. He trained and flew with Iraqi pilots for these missions. He has completed his third tour and will now be stationed near Pensacola, Florida, where he will be an instructor at the flight school. Captain Patton is also a medical doctor, who was mentored by Dr. Goodall, and he is a USN Flight Surgeon. Tom is a descendent of several pioneer families.



The Bosque Collection is honored to have our county flag and also an American flag that flew in combat aboard the Seahawk. We are grateful to Captain Patton for his service and his sacrifices and wish him the best.

*The Bosque Letter is published quarterly by the Bosque County Collection - The Collection's mission is to survey, gather, document and preserve the history of Bosque County.*