

BOSQUE

LETTER

March 2011

Bosque County Courthouse Turns 125 in 2011

In honor of this event the Bosque Letter will feature courthouse stories throughout the year. You are invited to submit any remembrance you may have regarding an experience about the courthouse, or possibly someone who worked in the courthouse.

Courthouse Memories

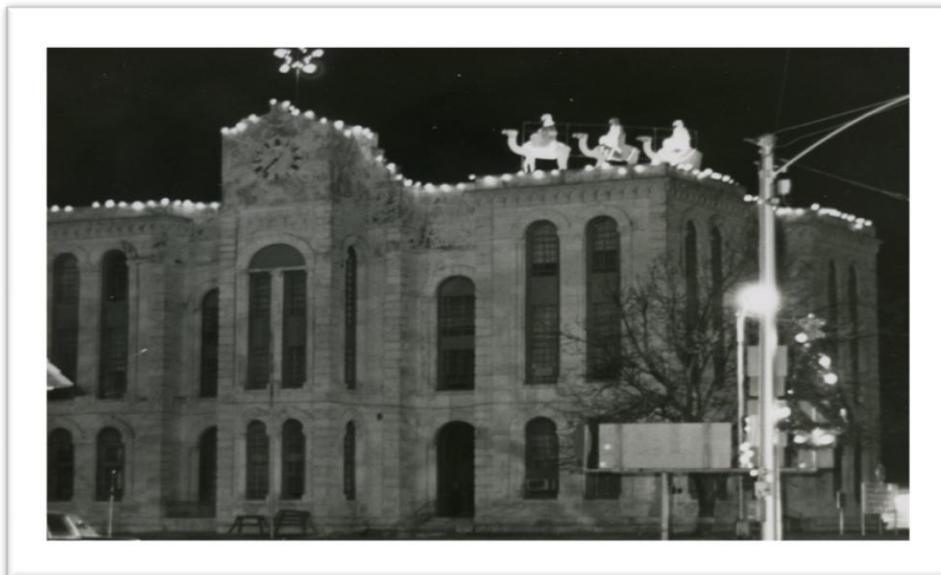
By

Betty Outlaw, Bosque County Clerk

When I was growing up in the 50's, my folks would come to visit Uncle Fuzz and Aunt Bobbye, but otherwise, I never came to Meridian. My first actual memory of the courthouse was at Christmas when we came up after dark to see the courthouse all lit up. I believe it was outlined in blue bulbs and I think there were nativity figures on the roof. (Of course, this was after the remodeling in the 30's.) I was totally impressed.

The first time I remember actually being inside the courthouse was to take my driving test when I was 14. I remember the chair that went to the second floor. I always wanted to ride the thing!

I admit that I'm still a little in awe of the courthouse and the fact that I work here.



January



In January, new officials are sworn in and begin serving, and the first term Grand Jury is selected. President Franklin D. Roosevelt celebrated his birthday on January 30th, and a “President’s Ball” was held annually on that date. The proceeds from these events were donated to benefit victims of polio, and were held all over the country. At that time there weren’t many places in the county with a dance floor large enough to hold such an event; so the benches in the District Courtroom were pushed back and the floor was dusted with dance wax.

In 1935 Durward Cline and his NBC dance Orchestra, featuring two vocalists and eccentric dancer Ken Carley, performed. These events were held in the courtroom for three years.

Note: When the time capsule was opened one of the items inside was a can of dance wax!

February

February 4th is “Bosque County Founders Day.” Lowry H Scrutchfield was the first county judge and the first commissioners were S.S. Locker, J.H. Mabray, Robert S. Barnes and Ozro Dennis. The first county treasurer was Archibald Kell and county clerk was J.N. Mabray. The first tax collector was Isaac Gary, sheriff was Presley Bryant, district clerk was W.C. Sampson and justice of the peace was J.K. Helton. The first court was held under a stand of trees east of Meridian. On August 28, 1854 the County Court commissioned William C. McCurry and his son-in-law Nathan Screws to erect a courthouse on Lot 1 Block 5 (site of current Tax Office). Mr. McCurry built a single room, one-story log structure for \$125.00. There were very few structures, business or residential, at this time in Meridian; however, two cabins were rented for housing the Grand Jury when they were in session, and for the use of the County and District Clerks.

1860-1880

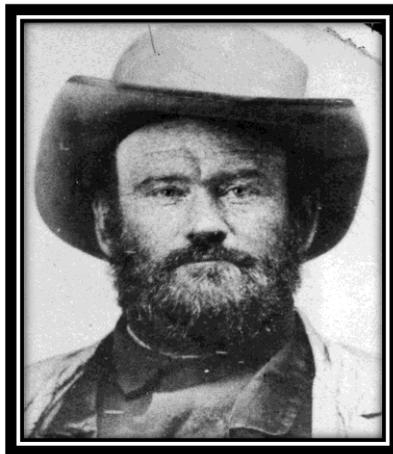
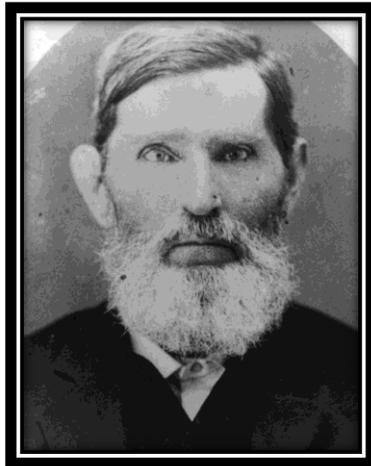
The War Between the States brought many hardships to Bosque County, however the citizens held their resolve. Commissioner’s Court saw to the protection of the citizens by ordering patrols in all areas. Guns were inventoried and repaired, and ammunition was supplied. Families with soldiers fighting away from home

were monitored by court appointed supervisors, and if they had needs, they were helped. Uniforms were made for indigent soldiers.

In spite of the war, regular business continued at the courthouse. In October of 1860, a new courthouse had been built on the square and a new jail. The courthouse was wooden and not very large. The District Clerk's office was a rented home belonging to Dr. Little. It is rumored that this courthouse burned down; however, no documentation can be found to show this. Commissioner Court minutes show orders for several repairs (paint and lumber), and the desire to build a suitable and fire-proof courthouse and jail. By the late 1860's court was being held on the top floor of Fossett Hall, which was used as a community hall.

Joseph Knowles Helton moved to Bosque County around 1848 with his in-laws, the Mabray family. He was an early leader in the development of Bosque County, and served as the first justice of the peace. When W.R. Sedberry resigned as county judge and joined the Confederacy, Mr. Helton was appointed as interim judge. In October 1866, Judge Helton was re-elected; however, the Reconstruction Government replaced him in November 1867 with Thomas Greer and Commissioners Court was then called Police Court. From May 1870 until 1875, no county judge served. Court was held on a rotation basis officiated by the county Justices of the Peace.

In 1875 the first county elections were held since the war, and Mr. Helton was re-elected and served until 1880.



William Rush Sedberry served as judge from 1858 until his resignation in August of 1861. The War Between the States had begun in April, and Judge Sedberry enlisted in Speights Regiment as a 2nd Lt. He was killed in action in Arkansas.

Bosque County Trivia – Can you guess the three most common surnames in Bosque County, using the 1870 & 1880 U.S. Census as a guide? How about the three most common given names for males and females? E-mail your guesses to manager@bosquecountycollection.org.

23rd Annual Preservation Luncheon

The Bosque County Historical Committee hosted the Preservation Luncheon on March 5 at the Clifton Civic Center. Guest speaker was Sharon Whitney, author of *The Memories of Will Conine*. Sharon discovered the writings of Will Conine in family papers, transcribed them and then had them published. The time frame was the 1870's and 1880's, a time during and just after reconstruction. It was truly a rough and sometimes lawless time. The memories focus on a few notorious folks who were outside the law, who lived for a time in the Coon Creek area. The most famous of these were Belle Starr and Jim Reed. There were other "criminal sorts" that were also harbored in the area. The book is no longer in print, however the Collection has a copy that can be read in the research room.

The Election Oak Award was presented to Raymond and Valeria Whitney. The Whitney's have done much work in their community and all over the county to document and preserve history. Both have been members of the Bosque County Historical Commission for thirty-four years. Raymond and Valeria walked and documented cemeteries and helped publish the Bosque County Cemetery Books. Health issues have slowed them down a little, but they still help wherever they are able. Raymond will celebrate his 80th birthday March 26.

Special music was provided by Colette Boyette, who plays traditional Texas long-bow fiddle music. Betty Johannes noted that this is the 175th birthday of Texas, the 125th anniversary of the Bosque Courthouse and the 10th anniversary of the renovation of the Lumpkin Building, home of the Bosque Collection. Bosque County Poet Laureate Sherrod Fielden read his newest poem written in honor of the 175th Anniversary of Texas Independence, "The Alamo and Beyond." Sherrod has been so generous with this poem, allowing it to be used and reprinted by several groups. We thank him for these powerful words, and for sharing them with all proud Texans.

THE ALAMO AND BEYOND

By Sherrod L. Fielden

~ Poet Laureate of Bosque County Texas ~

**A million words have been put down
to commemorate Texas' most hallowed ground.
Thirteen days that will forever bind
"Remember the Alamo" to our mind.**

**175 years have passed since then,
yet we still honor a battle we did not win.
The lesson learned wasn't winning or losing,
but right or wrong was in the choosing.**

**The odds were long -- the outcome imminent,
unless reinforcements were quickly sent.
When the line was drawn there in the sand
they stood as one -- man to man.**

**When the smoke cleared that final day,
180 plus lives had paved the way
for all future Texans to walk proud,
and sing the Alamo anthem loud.**

**The Goliad Massacre lay ahead.
It would forever in history books be read.
350 unarmed soldiers were slain
that Palm Sunday on the Coastal Plain.**

**The battle at San Jacinto did Santa Anna in.
It took just eighteen minutes for Houston to win.
“Remember the Alamo, Remember Goliad” was the cry
the Mexicans heard as they were about to die.**

**April 21st is a day set aside
that Texans point to with great pride.
700 Mexicans killed while losing only nine.
Our Independence won -- let the Lone Star shine!**

Nell Jenson 1916-2010

The 2011 Preservation Luncheon was dedicated to the life of Nell Gilliam Jenson.

Nell Gilliam Jenson was born to A.G. and Bess Gilliam in 1916. Her sister was Grace Parks and her brother was Phil Gilliam, who served as Bosque County Judge. She graduated Clifton High School in 1934, Clifton College in 1936 and Baylor in 1938. She went on to earn her Masters in Music Education from Baylor. One of her favorite past-times was playing the piano.

Nell married her childhood friend Odis Raymond “Happy” Jenson in 1939. Happy owned car dealerships in Clifton. The Jenson’s had one of the first all-electric homes in Bosque County. They had one daughter, Rosemary.

After 34 years of teaching in the Clifton Schools, Nell retired and she and Happy did some traveling to places like Canada, Mexico and Norway.

Nell devoted much of her retirement time to serving her community and church, the First Presbyterian in Clifton. She was honored as the first recipient of the Heritage Award, given by the Bosque County Museum. She was a member of Texas State Teachers Association, Delta Kappa

Gamma, Clifton Civic Improvement Society, Goodall-Witcher Auxiliary, Business and Professional Women's Study Guild, Nellie Pederson Civic Society and the Bosque County Historical Commission.

As the coordinator of *Bosque County; Land and People*, she worked diligently to get the book printed. The money that was raised from the sale of the book helped pay for the Lumpkin Building, home of the Bosque Collection. According to Elizabeth Torrence, Nell gave up two years of her life to get that book completed.

One of Nell's favorite quotes was, "Life is rich as you fill it with things that are beautiful to remember".

Bosque County Celebrates Texas Independence Week

For the past three years, Bosque Countians have shown their Lone Star pride by participation in week long celebrations of Texas history, focusing on our independence. Rodney Joy, President of First Security State Bank, has been the leader of this event, working with government, organizations, churches and schools in the entire county. County members of the Daughters of the Republic were invited, and several were present at all the activities.

The week began Monday, February 28 at the Walnut Springs Museum, with Max Ratheal speaking on the Comanche tribe: how they roamed, fought and lived.

Tuesday guests in the Bosque County District Courtroom were treated to a humorous and enlightening tour of early Austin by Dr. Jeff Kerr. Dr. Kerr used old paintings and maps of Austin, and then current photos of Austin to give an idea of then and now. Then guests were treated to a special unveiling of the newest work by George Hallmark, a beautiful painting of the Alamo, circa 1865.

Wednesday a memorial service was held at the Barry Cemetery, located between Walnut Springs and Iredell. Col. James Buckner "Buck" Barry was honored, with Brian Sowell on hand to tell about the character of Col. Barry.

Thursday the Bosque Museum hosted Mike Cox, a syndicated columnist, who spoke on frontier days. Friday Jo Atkinson related some Texas stories to the Clifton Elementary School, and afterward the winners of the art and essay contests were announced.

Saturday the BCHC Preservation Luncheon was held.

Monday March 7 the Bosque Valley Heritage Society presented DRT member Ronita DeCordova Miller, who gave a vivid and colorful description of the Battle of San Jacinto, using a map of the battlefield. DRT member Jo Nell Dansby Meyer gave the life story of a survivor of that battle, Roden T. Crain. Mrs. Meyer and Mrs. Miller also presented this program to Valley Mills High School and Elementary School. Sherrod and Sue Fielden attended all events, where Sherrod shared his poem, "The Alamo and Beyond."

Many thanks to all those who worked so hard to make this week a success!

Roden T Crain

By Nelan McMichael, Collection Volunteer

Less than two years after his arrival in Texas, Roden Taylor Crain of Tennessee joined a company of volunteers from San Augustine led by Captain William Kimbro. Among this group of volunteers were Andrew Caddell, Daniel McGarie, Ben Thomas, John Harmon, William Burditt, N.W. Burditt, J.A. Burditt, George Hancock, and his cousin Joel Crain.

According to Roden's own account for the Texas Almanac in 1872, his company joined Sam Houston at Groce's Retreat and was ordered, along with two other companies, to San Felipe to guard the crossing there. They burned the town and entrenched themselves on the far side of the river to wait for Santa Anna's advance. It was here, while under attack by Gen. Santa Anna's advance guard the he was "slightly " wounded in the head, causing him to lose sight in one eye.

After the war, Roden accepted a patent of land for 1476 acres in Milam County along Childers (Childress) Creek where he took up residence. The area later became part of McLennan County, then Bosque County. Having no family, Roden apparently had trouble making ends meet. He began selling off parcels of his land and using some for collateral for loans he couldn't pay back.

He was eligible for a Texas Veterans pension of \$500 for his service. But it took him 15 years, from 1872 to 1887, to collect his due after several letters of request and appeal, and several affidavits of testimony from various citizens, including his own cousin Joel.

In 1891 Roden drowned while crossing the Bosque and Lowery Scrutchfield was appointed administrator of his estate which came to \$84.10 in cash tools and personal possessions, out of which came \$53.65 for funeral expenses. The remainder not covering the \$45 for his tombstone in the Valley Mills Cemetery which reads:

Roden T. Crain
Born Apr. 29, 1819
Died July 20, 1891

Tx. Veteran in Battle
of San Jacinto
Apr. 21, 1836

Bosque Collection is Proud to announce that Derwood Johnson will be a guest speaker at the Bosque County District Courtroom (second floor) on Saturday, April 16 at 11 am, with a reception following at the Collection. Mr. Johnson is the co-author of "Norge i Texas" and has done extensive research on the Norwegian settlements of Texas. He will be sharing his research wisdom. The program will be interesting for everyone, even if you have no Norwegian lineage.

Donations:

Derwood Johnson donated *Light on the Prairie, New Writings of Elise Waerenskjold*, letters and other documents relating to Norwegian immigrants to Texas, and especially Bosque County.

B.J. Hogg donated the book *Journey in the Sun*, a true story about a Depression era trek of a young Alabama man charged with returning four sisters to their mother in Utah. While working their way to Utah, the five young people stopped and worked cotton fields in the Kopperl area, one of the only places where they found safety and kindness.

Daughters of the Republic of Texas donated several reference books, including *90 Years of the Daughters*, Volumes 1 and 2 of the *Papers Concerning Robertson's Colony*, and *Story of Bell County*, volumes 1 and 2.

Elizabeth King donated several photographs, circa 1920, found in a vacant garage near Meridian.

Brenda Stapp Hamilton donated *Telling The Folks Back Home*, written by Marion Judson Morgan and dedicated to Bren's father Wayne Stapp. Stapp scrounged food and cared for the injured Morgan during their time in a Korean Prison of War camp.

Helen Dozier donated voter registration lists from 1986 to 2008. Helen retired in 2008 as Bosque County Republican Chairman, after 20 years of service. Her responsibilities were to coordinate with the county clerk on all elections, provide precinct judges, direct all Republican primaries, and she also served as a Republican delegate to the state convention.

The **grandchildren of Joe D Rickard** donated news articles and family photographs. One photo is of the 1936 Yellowjackets football team.

Thank you to all members who continue to support the Bosque Collection!

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The mission of The Collection is to gather, document, record and preserve the history of Bosque County.
