



# Retrospect

Denton County Historical Commission

Summer 2011

## Now is the Time

*By Rynell Novak, DCHC Chair*

The famous sentence used by typing teachers in the past, “Now is the time for all good men . . .” reflects the work of the Denton County Historical Commission (DCHC) as it leads out in our County with preserving the past, promoting the present and planning for the future.

Now is the time to preserve items and memories from our past before they are gone. Also, now is the time to recognize people, places and programs from our past by activities such as encouraging citizens to clean up cemeteries that have been neglected, and by recognizing the past through placement of historical markers in special locations around the County.

And, now is the time to be a part of developing our Museums at the Courthouse-on-the-Square, and the Bayless-Selby House and

the Denton County African American Museum in the Historical Park, but also the other structures in the Park – and those planned for the Park – that await preservation. Your support is needed to complete those projects.

We trust you will enjoy the articles in this issue about diverse topics ranging from “cleansing” of artifacts, to recognition of a famous Denton civic leader, to trivia on Lost Communities – all of which illustrate the work of the DCHC.

Now may be the time for you to join with the DCHC in our work of historical preservation and be a part of the activities of the DCHC as it fulfills its mission in Denton County.

This may be the time for you to visit a monthly meeting of the DCHC – first Thursday of each month except August and December. Everyone is welcome. Is it your time?

### Inside this issue:

Artifacts, con’t	2
Members, con’t	2
Expert Retires	2
Fair Gathering	3
Looking Back	4
Footsteps	4
Traveling Trunk	5

### TRIVIA

Lost Communities of Denton County

When the Elizabeth post office moved and changed its name in 1881, what town flourished in its place?

## Meet our Members *By DJ Taylor*

When Dallas native Bob Montgomery moved to Denton in 1987, little did he realize the wealth of history that could be found within the county.

“I discovered Denton County had more to tell than I thought,” he recalls. “I’ve always believed we should write history with a small ‘h.’ History isn’t just battles and major events; the everyday things matter.” He cites the discovery of an old mail road from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as one example.

Denton County’s nearness to the frontier and the hard life associated with living there or traveling through it is noted by Montgomery. “Most folks don’t realize that the John Wayne stories happened here and not way out west.”

Long known for his expertise on the history of the Butterfield Overland Mail and Stage, “Butterfield Bob” was recently presented the Texas Historical Commission’s 2011 Anice B. Read Award of Excellence in Community Heritage Development. The award honored him for his work in downtown revitalization, historical preservation and heritage tourism.

Montgomery has led groups on educational trips

## Native American

### Artifacts Returned *By DJ Taylor*

On a bright and windy Saturday in early March, a small group gathered at the front of the Courthouse-on-the-Square for a sacred Native American ceremony. The aroma of burning cedar directed by a fan of eagle feathers wafted through the air as museum staff, Historical Commission members and representatives from the Caddo and Cherokee nations assembled for an event of cultural significance with the ritual cleansing of artifacts and those who handled them.

Dr. Jonathan Hook, a Cherokee, led the ceremony to purify the funerary artifacts. Although not a medicine man, he was given permission by a tribal representative to conduct the ceremony.

The museum’s employees found participating in the solemn ceremony rewarding. Kim McCoig Cupit, the museum’s curator of collections, found it to be “a calming experience” as well as enlightening. “The ceremony gave me a different perspective on these items, where they had been and their deeper meaning.”

Several years ago the University of North Texas (UNT) received Native American items that were



Montgomery: Denton historian, tourism activist, and former Denton City Councilmember

## Artifacts (from Page 1)

part of a museum at the campus. In 1987 when the university closed its museum, the artifacts were loaned to the Courthouse-on-the-Square Museum. Most of the items had been kept in storage.



Dr. Jonathan Hook, in Cherokee attire, led the ritual cleansing of artifacts. Olivia Woodward, in Caddo regalia, was one of several Caddo women in attendance.

Recently, Dr. Hook, a research professor of indigenous studies at UNT, approached the UNT archivist after determining 73 artifacts likely came from Native American burial sites. In accordance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, museums are required to return such items to the tribe of origin when identified.

The decision to return the items was an easy one according to museum executive director Dr. Georgia Caraway. "We were eager to return these. From the first contact until the ceremonial return was but a matter of weeks."

Now that the artifacts have been returned to UNT's archives, they will be photographed for distribution to Native American tribal leaders who will review the items. Those identified and claimed will be returned or handled according to the tribe's instructions.

Dr. Caraway expressed gratitude at being part of the purification. "The dignity and care taken in handling the items touched each of us. We (non-Native Americans) were grateful for being part of it."

"It was quite spiritual," added Michelle Mears, the UNT archivist who is also a Historical Commission member. "I was very touched by being included. Now that we are in the process of getting these items back to their rightful place, I see it as a very positive step for all concerned."

Attending the ceremony were Diane Woodward, a Caddo woman, and her daughters Olivia and Leona. The Caddo and Wichita once inhabited Denton County. They expressed their thanks to the museum staff, Ms. Mears, and others for not only returning the items but also for taking part in the ceremony.

"The museum staff showed cultural sensitivity in allowing the ceremony and, more so, to participate in it," stated Dr. Hook. "Their cooperation demonstrated that they view other cultures as being important parts of the community. It showed they had great respect for our ancestors and the artifacts buried with them."



Museum staff and DCHC members attended the cleansing ceremony.

## Members (from Page 1)

throughout Denton County and points west over the years. A few years ago he taught a four-week continuing education class at the University of North Texas, "The Hard Frontier of Northwest Texas, 1836 to 1876."

A member of the Denton County Historical Commission since 1998, with a break while serving on the Denton City Council, Montgomery counts his association with the Heritage Trails program and getting Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) funds for the county museums and other historical programs as his proudest accomplishments.

When asked for words of wisdom or advice for the Denton County Historical Commission, Bob Montgomery said "I believe we need to do a better job recruiting. It is important that we get more members, especially younger ones."

## Oral History Expert Retires

By DJ Taylor

The Denton County Historical Commission says goodbye to Michelle Mears, chair of the Oral History Committee and the Recording Secretary for the commission. Ms. Mears retired at the end of May from the University of North Texas where she has been the university's archivist for the past five years.

Her skills and expertise in the field of oral history have been valuable in expanding the Courthouse-on-the-Square Museum and UNT collections of oral history interviews. A board member of the Texas Oral History Association—and twice its president—Mears brought a wealth of information and expertise to the DCHC and, especially, the Oral History Committee.

A native of Austin with a B.A. in Art History from the University of Texas and Masters degrees in Library Science from UT and History from Baylor, Mears will be relocating to Temple, a town where she had lived previously.

Prior to her work at UNT Ms. Mears worked for the Texas Historical Commission, as archivist for Scott and White Hospital in Temple, and as grant archivist for M. D. Anderson Hospital in Houston.

Regarding her plans in retirement, Mears plans on remodeling her home in Temple as well as getting reacquainted with two of her hobbies: painting and playing Renaissance music on the Viola da Gamba. She also plans to write a second book on the Freedmen. Her first book, *And Grace Will Lead Me Home*, was published in 2009.

"I have enjoyed working with the Historical Commission members these past five years," said Ms. Mears. "There are many who are passionate about their interest in the county's history. I wish them all the luck and success in their work."



L-R: Michelle Mears, DCHC Oral History chair; Lois E. Myers, Associate Director of Baylor's Institute for Oral History; and Dr. Todd Moye, Director of UNT's Oral History Program led the Oral History 101 workshop.

## It's a Fair Gathering!

By DJ Taylor

It's almost that time, again. The North Texas State Fair and Rodeo begins its annual run August 19. A Denton County tradition will once again take center stage.

The fair enjoys a rich history, dating back to its earlier incarnations as the Denton County Fair with roots stretching back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when it was among the first county fairs in Texas. Although Gillespie County is the oldest county fair in Texas, with its 1881 inception, Denton County wasn't far behind. The first documented date for a fair in Denton County is October 15, 1885, when the Dallas Morning News mentioned its opening.

In 1884, the Denton County Fair and Blooded Stock Association, with Joseph A. Carroll, George Oatman and William J. Austin as officers, bought a tract of land from John Atchison for use as fairgrounds. This tract extended, roughly, from West Hickory and Welch streets south to Mill (Eagle Drive) and followed a line back to Hickory along the present Avenue A.

The fair had ceased by 1890 but returned in 1895, again under the auspices of the previous association. For the next few years newspapers carried glowing reports about the quality of livestock, grain, produce and goods found at the fair made the news.

However, the big draw was horse racing. J. W. Medlin, a horse breeder from Roanoke, enjoyed great success with his horses at the track. Former outlaw Frank James had a keen interest in horse races and contacted the fair's secretary, W. E. Smoot, with a request to be the official starter at the 1901 races; a solicitation that was declined. In 1903 the association disbanded and sold the fairgrounds. Most folks believed the county fair had seen its last run.

The fair reappeared in 1915, this time at Sanger. The fair spent three successful years there until the 1918 dates were cancelled due to "conditions arising from the war" (World War I).

The fair resumed in 1920 when it returned to Denton; probably held at the old Carroll Park north of the high school on Congress. The 1922 fair drew over 10,000 in attendance on the final day and officials were soon searching for a larger location. For the 1923 show, the fair moved to Denton's new park (now known as Quakertown Park). It also had acquired a new name, the Denton County Agricultural and Live Stock Fair.

1924 brought another move when the fair was held on the athletic grounds of the "Teachers College. Another hiatus prevailed from 1925 until the Denton County Fair Association organized in 1928 to revive it. By 1930, under the leadership of Dr. Jack Skiles, the association purchased 13 acres off East Hickory Street, near the railroad tracks for the fairgrounds.

Throughout the 1930s the fair drew large crowds. A major event for the county's farmers, the fair was a great draw that brought considerable business to Denton merchants. The local Chamber of Commerce was very much involved with the fair. The Chamber's secretary, Otis Fowler, served for many years on the board of directors.

When the hard times of the Great Depression hit, the association took that into consideration. In the early and mid-1930s the county fair featured either free admission or free days for school kids.

Rodeos at the fair were always a crowd favorite. With farms and

ranches in every corner of the county, there was always a good supply of cowboys eager to give the events a go.

Longtime Denton businessman and Texas Rodeo Cowboy Hall of Fame member Weldon Burgoon recalls his first participation in the rodeo. "It was in 1942 when the fair was held over off Exposition. I was 12-years old." He and his dad tied for second in the break-away roping competition that year, each winning \$18. "I was making 25 cents an hour at Evers Hardware, so that was a lot of money to me."

Burgoon participated in break-away roping; wild cow milking; tie down calf roping and team roping for many years, his final year being 1992.

The 1940s brought more years without a fair. The onset of World War II led to a fair-less stretch from 1943-1945. In 1946 the fair returned but it was evident the fairgrounds at East Hickory and Exposition were no longer sufficient. Citing the fair's poor location and lack of adequate parking, the 1947 and 1948 fairs were cancelled.

In April, 1948, Dr. W. C. Kimbrough, a longtime Denton physician, came to the rescue; donating 22 acres north of Highway 24 (now US 380/University Drive) for a new fairgrounds. In the fall of 1949, the fair returned with its first show at the new venue, where it continues to draw large crowds over sixty years later.

Over the years Denton County has seen its agricultural base decline as the population increased and the county became more urbanized. These days, music concerts and a festival atmosphere prevail alongside the livestock, rodeo and carnival rides. As the fair grew, its name changed to the North Texas State Fair and Rodeo to reflect the regional interest in the event.

The present-day fair is, as was its predecessors, a boon to the area economy. According to Nanci Kimmey, executive assistant for the fair, 135,000 attended last year's event, a 2% increase over the previous year. A 2009 study pegs the economic impact of the fair as \$3.2 million for Denton and \$6 million for Denton County.

Traditions are not easily come by. Overcoming economic hard times, logistics and even a few "vacations" along the way have contributed to strengthening the fair and made it a proud North Texas tradition; one that has survived in one form or the other for over 125 years. To paraphrase a quote from Mark Twain, reports of its death were greatly exaggerated.



*This newsletter is published quarterly. Send comments, information, and articles for the newsletter to Roslyn Shelton at [roslyn.shelton@dentoncounty.com](mailto:roslyn.shelton@dentoncounty.com).*

## Looking Back *By DJ Taylor*

We take a look back at Denton County's history over the past 100, 125 and 150 years through books and the archives of Texas' newspapers.

### 150 years ago:

Texas was literally up in arms as the state seceded from the Union and joined the Confederacy. Cavalries and Infantries were organized on a county basis. The May 8, 1861, issue of the *Dallas Weekly Herald* reported:

*Col. Young, under the requisition of President Davis, is raising a company of 1,000 men in the northern counties, & the enrollment is progressing vigorously. Col. Otis G. Welch, of Denton, has received a commission to raise a company in Denton.*

Welch's company, with Joseph A. Carroll as his second in command, saw duty in Indian Territory (Oklahoma), northwestern Arkansas and Missouri.

### 125 years ago:

In 1886, the Gulf, Colorado & Santa Fe railroad expanded and came to Denton County. The town of Denton worked hard to be on the line, but was quite chagrined when the route chosen was to the west, creating new towns at Krum and Gerald (Ponder). But Denton still held a glimmer of hope as reported in the June 2, 1886, edition of the *Dallas Morning News*:

*Another Santa Fe sensation was created here yesterday by the arrival of an engineering corps with their instruments. The chief gave his opinion that the surveyed line was not satisfactory and that another line would perhaps be finally adopted. Denton people were in better spirits this morning.*

NOTE: The Santa Fe finally reached Denton—seventy years later, in 1956.

### 100 years ago:

An amendment to prohibit alcohol sales in Texas was on the November ballot. Prohibition and anti-Prohibition forces embarked on speaking tours and debates to get out the vote during the summer of 1911. The *Dallas Morning News* reported in its June 23 issue on the meetings:

#### *Denton County Prohibition Dates*

*Judge William Poindexter will make three or four speeches in this county June 30 and July 1, including appointments at Aubrey, Lewisville and here (Denton).*

The August 2 edition of the paper reported that the County Chairman, Lee Zumwalt, had filed with the County Judge an itemized report listing expenses of \$691.51. The local "anti" forces did not file a report, contending it was neither required nor necessary.

The amendment failed by a narrow margin. Prohibition in Texas would have to wait until the United States ratified the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment—ten years later.

## Footsteps *By Wm. M. (Bill) Coleman, RPLS*

I recently encountered an interesting conundrum: As a member of the Denton County Historical Commission I went with the Cemeteries Committee to conduct a Cemetery Survey to submit to the State of Texas for designation as a Texas Historical Cemetery. The application requires all sorts of information about the number and condition of the graves and markers, the occupants, the culture, the surrounding area, etc. The commissioners gathering information employed a number of different methods to acquire the data. Evidence of unmarked graves includes depressions in the soil, variations in plant growth and soil density. Rubbing dark chalk over paper laid on an old headstone can bring up markings not easily visible otherwise.

In most cases of old seldom used cemeteries, the deeds granting title to the lands containing them are very old. The legal descriptions contain references which are difficult to understand. For example a common unit of measurement in this area one hundred and fifty years ago was the vara. Officially established by the Texas Legislature as 33 1/3 inches, the vara, when used to lay out the original grants, actually had differing lengths. Consulting someone with training as a surveyor in Texas is helpful in unraveling some on the mysteries surrounding old land title issues.

Another issue is how the grant was originally located. In Texas the closest to sections we have are abstracts, also called surveys, based on the original grants from the sovereignty, whatever it was; Spanish, Mexican, Republic of Texas or the State of Texas. The United States federal government did not acquire title to any lands within the state when it joined the union so the Township, Range and Section system of describing grants (PLSS) was not applied in Texas.

The commissioners also had a couple of county GIS technicians out there to assist with a survey of the boundaries of the cemeteries, as defined in recorded documents and deeds. There are actually three cemeteries in the same area, one old one and two which were moved from the area now submerged by a US Corps of Engineers lake back in the 1950's.

So, one day I went out with Denton County Historic Cemeteries Committee members to conduct a Cemetery **Survey** for historical designation of three cemeteries, which included a Boundary **Survey** to accurately define their location in the Marcella Jones **Survey** A-992, Denton County, Texas.

There, I've finally committed it to writing, one sentence using the term "Survey" three times, with three separate definitions, none of which is redundant, again. It was another great day to be a surveyor in Texas.

# Denton County's Traveling Trunk Museum

By Gretel L'Heureux

Education/Tourism Director, Courthouse-on-the Square Museum



Gretel L'Heureux takes Denton County's history to classrooms around the county.

From one end of the county to the other, Denton County's Traveling Trunk Museum is reaching out to hundreds of students each year. Whether as an introductory or culminating activity, the museum's K-12 traveling museum presentations bring life to the county's history and enhance the social studies curriculums being taught in the schools.

With hands flying in the air to the excitement of experiencing hands-on artifacts, it is clear that Denton County

students are gaining an appreciation for the county in which they live. Students are introduced to the county's three museums and become mesmerized with the fascinating story of the county's namesake, John B. Denton, and his three burials – the last one being on the courthouse lawn.



In "Then & Now" and "Life in Early Denton County", students shake their heads in disbelief when they hear about the early days with only a horse and no car, no washing machine or refrigerator. They have fun guessing what artifacts are on display. They are especially surprised when they lift the pioneer woman's heavy iron and totally puzzled by the artifact that looks like a cheese grater that turns out to be a toaster!

"African American Heritage" lends itself to the story of Denton's Quakertown community. Students are amazed when they see photos of the different stages of the African American Museum from the Quakertown house's original location to being hauled to the Historic Park by a truck and restored to its present state. In fact, the Quakertown story continues to fascinate all ages – including even adults at FEMA this past winter during Black History Month.

In "Ranching, Brands & Cattle Trails", students learn about the influence of our Hispanic Heritage on our cowboy culture today. Students are launched into participating in a reenactment of the cattle drive that went through the western part of the county by the story of John Chisum, the nation's largest producer of cattle in 1870 who got his start in northwest Denton County.

The Traveling Trunk Museum brings new energy and insight to

enrich and increase students' interest and appreciation of their history. As Lewisville second grader Andrew stated, "Thank you for teaching us! All I can say is WOW! I learned sooooo much!" It also brings attention to the resources that are available in Denton County's three museums. "I didn't know that we had three museums", said Essence. "That is so awesome." As a result, some of the students are proud to bring their parents to the museums for the first time. With comments like these, Denton County's Museums should be in good hands with the upcoming generation.



Krum students get a small glimpse of pioneer life in Denton County through the Traveling Trunk Museum.

## TRIVIA, Lost Communities of Denton County

Elizabeth was west of Roanoke and south of the Texas Motor Speedway.

In the 1880 census the thriving little community listed among its residents two blacksmiths; two merchants; a hotel keeper; two physicians; a shoemaker; a grocer and a freighter along with a postmaster and numerous farmers and ranchers in the outlying areas.

The post office, established in 1870, was moved and its name changed to Roanoke in 1881 when the railroad was built about three miles to the east. The businesses of Elizabeth soon followed. Roanoke grew and Elizabeth withered away.

Today, only the Elizabethtown Cemetery remains as a testament to the once thriving community.

## DO YOU ENJOY HISTORY? ARE YOU INTERESTED IN DENTON COUNTY HISTORY?

If you want to preserve, protect and promote the history of Denton County as an active volunteer, there is a place for you to serve and to enjoy doing it.

The Denton County Historical Commission meets at 2:00 p.m. the first Thursday of each month, except for August and December. Unless publicly announced otherwise, meetings are held in the Commissioners Courtroom, 2nd floor, of the Courthouse-on-the-Square. **Visitors are welcome!**

Committees for service include Archaeology/Cemetery, Education, Historical Research, Historical Structures, Fire Truck, Museums, Membership, Oral History, Publications and Special Events.

Apply to be a member of the Denton County Historical Commission by e-mailing [roslyn.shelton@dentoncounty.com](mailto:roslyn.shelton@dentoncounty.com). You will be sent an application form to be completed, and the application will be submitted to the Commissioners Court for approval.

Let's go to work!

**Denton County Historical Commission**

**110 West Hickory Street  
Denton, TX 76201-4168**

Phone: 940-349-2860  
Fax: 940-349-2851  
www.dentoncounty.com/dchc

**Denton County  
Historical Commission**

Rynell Novak  
*Chairman*

Kathy Strauss  
*First Vice Chairman*

Millard Heath  
*Second Vice Chairman*

Bill Coleman  
*Recording Secretary*

Ann Clark,  
*Corresponding Secretary*

John Genung  
*Financial Secretary*

Don McClure  
DJ Taylor  
Veronica Maldonado  
*At-Large Members*

Roslyn Shelton  
*Administrative Manager*

**Upcoming Events**

**Denton County Historical Commission Meetings**

2:00 pm

July 7

September 1

Courthouse-on-the-Square

**Bayless-Selby House Museum Lectures**

July 14 11-11:45 am

Victorians and "The Home Plot"

August 11 11 - 11:45 am

Victorianism in the Modern Era

August 27 2 - 2:45 pm

Victorian Wallpapers: Hearing the Symphony  
of Color

September 24 10 - Noon

Masters in the Garden

**Courthouse-on-the-Square Museum Lectures**

July 18

Images of America: Pilot Point

August 19

Images of America: Southlake

**African American Museum Lectures**

August 20:

Quakertown History

**Community Events**

July 31:

Pioneer Power Sprint Triathlon, TWU

August 19-27:

North Texas State Fair & Rodeo, Fairgrounds

Bye-Bye Birdie, Campus Theatre

September 10

Arts, Antiques & Autos Extravaganza,  
Downtown Denton

New UNT stadium Opening Day,  
UNT vs. Houston