



# PRESERVATION NEWS

JANUARY 7th, 2016

Newsletter of the Wichita County Historical Commission

Volume LXVIII

Robert Palmer, Chairman

Wichita County Archives

720 Indiana Avenue

Wichita Falls, Texas 76301

Hours of Operation: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 10:00am - 12:00pm & 1:00pm - 4:00pm

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## AGENDA FOR MEETING

Lunch at 11:30am Meeting 12:00 Noon - 1:00pm

1. Call to Order      2. Introduction of Guests      3. Business      4. Program      5. Adjourn

**Monthly Meeting:** Location: **The Country Club**. Price for the luncheon is **\$17.00 each** which includes: salads, main course, vegetables, drink & dessert. Please bring the correct change.

**Reservations:** Call the **Archives (763-0020)** and leave your name and number of reservations on the voice mail up thru Wednesday prior to the meeting. Call the Archives Wednesday (763-0020 or 322-7628) if you have a change of plans.

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## PROGRAM

Brenda Jarrett - Black History Month Exhibit

### From the Desk of Robert Palmer -

While recently traveling to Vernon, going by the Electra Cemetery, I noticed a large metal gate on the southwest end of the cemetery. At the top of the gate are the words "Dick Sparks". I know many people, going down Hwy 287, see the same name and wonder who he was. I know because we wrote about him in the book, ELECTRA 100, A CLASSIC TEXAS STORY.

Dick Sparks was a legend in the history of Electra. He may have been one of the most respected men ever to live in the community. Every young boy knew his story. He was so respected that, toward the end of his life, the community built him a house to live in. Who was he? Well, in broad terms, he was a black cowboy. He was much more than that.

He was born to a slave family, he thought, in 1829. His family came to Texas and settled in Denton County. They soon were employed by the Burnett family. Young Dick learned the ways of a cowboy. When the Burnetts brought a herd of cattle to the North Texas area, Sparks came with them, helping move the cattle. As S. B. Burnett began to expand his ranching operation, Sparks was a top hand. He cowboied until he thought he was too old. Then, he went to work as a camp cook and ranch handyman. Handymen fixed fences, repaired windmills, and generally did whatever was needed. He liked North Texas. It was home.

When he appeared to be too old to work, he left the Burnetts and went to work for W. T. Waggoner. It allowed him to stay in the area that became the community of, first, Beaver Switch, then Electra. He was the first black resident of the town.

He had a great memory for names and faces. He was

a walking history of the Burnett and Waggoner Ranches. Folks said he knew more people than anyone else. Even when his eyesight failed, he could still recognize peoples' voices. He loved to tell about the early ranching days. He was a fixture in cowboy reunions and parades. Young black boys, growing up in Electra, knew him as a hero. He died December 12, 1946. He would have been over 115 years of age. Every rancher in the area came to his funeral. Old cowboys never really die. They live on in memory.

While I was gathering the information for the Dick Sparks story, I ran into a lady who teaches in Vernon and rode the school bus I drove 40 years ago. Her name was Laurie and she was the first student I picked up each morning at about 6:30 a.m.. We began to tell stories about then and I told her my favorite was her being baptized in the tank at the Whiteface Ranch, the far eastern part of the Waggoner Ranch. The whole church went to the ranch after Sunday Services, had dinner on the ground, and, then, watched the preacher baptize Laurie. I asked about her dad, Boots O'Neil. I asked if he was retired. She laughed and said, "No". At age 83, he stilled worked for the Four 6666 Ranch, got up every morning and rode horses. Old Cowboys are truly remarkable people!

## QUESTION OF THE MONTH

What is the connection between Midwestern State University and The Governor's Office in Oklahoma?

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# Wichita County Archive News

## January 2016

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### NEED WCHC VOLUNTEER HOURS IN JANUARY

Wording for the Midwestern University Desegregation marker has been received from the THC. Revisions have been submitted.

Sometime over the weekend of December 12-13, the Wichita General Hospital marker was hit and the support pole broken off at ground level. It appears the plaque was not damaged. We are still waiting for information from United Regional.

We received information that the Kadane Discovery Well marker has been reset. (Hurray!)

Welcome to new member, Dr. Whitney Snow, to the Wichita County Historical Commission.

Texas Department of Transportation will place two markers, one near Burkburnett and the other on the grounds of the Wichita County Courthouse, commemorating the Chisolm Trail. After the markers are placed, they will become property of the Texas Historical Commission. An official unveiling of the markers, scheduled by the Texas Department of Transportation, will occur sometime next year.

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### A Tribute to the Dedication of JoAnn Crites

JoAnn was mainly responsible for organizing the material in the 100 notebooks of the Louise Kelly Collection.

She clipped current newspapers and filed them according to our category list.

She entered all acquisitions into the data base.

She aided researchers and amazed many with the good information she found for them.

Not only was she invaluable to the Archives but to the Museum as well, where she served as membership committee for many years and she and Bill supported the Museum monetarily.

We certainly miss JoAnn and wish her well in her new town.

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### HARRY T. THORNBERRY

Harry Thornberry was born in 1885 in Thornberry, Texas and was educated in Thornberry schools. He took his pharmacy degree at the Fort Worth University in 1909 and became associated with Dr. R. L. Miller, who owned a drug store in Wichita Falls. Two years later, 1911, Thornberry and G. W. Shaw, purchased the business, located at Eighth and Ohio. By 1915, Thornberry had bought out Shaw.

In 1913, Thornberry married Edith Welshimer, a member of a well known West Texas family.

Miller Drug Store carried a complete line of drugs and sundries, extensive selection of candies, high grade domestic and imported perfumes, and toilet waters, cigars and tobacco. A well equipped, modern soda fountain catered to a large clientele and the store was one of the most popular places in Downtown Wichita Falls.

Thornberry was a great booster for Wichita Falls and was involved in civic affairs. He was active in real estate, building several houses in town. Thornberry was a member of the Wichita Golf Club and Chamber of Commerce. He was a 32d degree Mason, a member of Maskat Temple Shrine and Blue Lodge No. 1105.