

PRESERVATION NEWS

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Becky Trammell, Editor

From the Desk of Robert Palmer

Beginning in the 1870s, Wichita County went from an almost bare prairie to an industry-filled area of enterprise, happening in barely 50 years. Population growth and hard work were major forces; engineering skills were a big part. What were the most important engineering projects that led to Wichita County's growth?

The railroads, Ft. Worth and Denver, Wichita Falls and Northwestern, and Wichita Falls and Southern were certainly part of it. Other projects were: Oil patch manufacturing, including drilling rigs, pump jacks, tanks, and pipeline systems; the bridges spanning the Red River and the steel bridges scattered across the county; the windmills that pumped water; and the brick streets that turned muddy bogs into the stable roadways of today.

Buildings were certainly part of it. Downtown structures in Wichita Falls, Electra, Iowa Park, and Burkburnett are monuments to the planning and growth of the county. Wichita Falls High School, Electra High School, and Memorial Auditorium are magnificent structures.

What is the best engineering project in the history of the county? The answers I got when I posed the question will surprise you. Many named the cement grain elevators in Wichita Falls, Burkburnett, and Electra. They are tremendously well-engineered structures. Think of their weight and strength. How were they built? Surprising, it was the same process used to build the Hemisphere Tower of the Americas in San Antonio. Four-foot-high steel rings formed the mold. It was called the slip pour method. It was poured in increments until the full height was reached. As each level was poured and set, the steel mold was moved upward. Again, some of those cement towers are almost 100 years old.

However, what engineering project in Wichita County was number one?

My "experts" named the Wichita Valley Irrigation System as the Top Engineering Project in the History of the County. Even though the farming aspect of it had flaws, the overall planning, development, and resulting benefits are staggering. Imagine what Joseph Kemp's vision was for the project. He saw a green oasis covering much of

the county, a continuous supply of water, and flood control. The last is hard for us to understand, but the area was once prone to sudden high water causing unbelievable damage. The system of lakes put the water and the flooding under control.

Think of the system of canals and feeder ditches and the surveying, controlling water flow, and the maintenance to make the system work. Here are some numbers that will shock you. Water Improvement District 1 covered 15,543 acres. Water Improvement District 2 covered 76,784 acres of land. The system was designed to adequately serve all patrons within those areas with a level flow of water. As I was researching this, I had a conversation with Jimmy Banks who was the last director of the system. He is probably the last person alive who fully understands what a great engineering accomplishment this was.

Wichita County Archives

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mission.org/

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

Wichita County Texas
Archives is on [Facebook](#)

Program John Yates

The City of Electra
Throws A Party: The
Big Bash of 1914

MEETING

12:00 Noon - 1:00pm
AGENDA FOR MEETING:
1. Call to Order
2. Introduction of Guests
3. Business
4. Program
5. Adjourn



Wichita County Archive News - January 2022 - Monthly Report

First Postmaster in Wichita Falls – While researching in the Archives, some conflicting information was found as to who was our first postmaster. In Louise Kelly’s note cards, it is mentioned that John Converse was the first “actual” postmaster. In Jonnie Morgan’s book, John Converse is mentioned as one of the early pioneers of Wichita Falls. Mrs. A.H. Carrigan mentioned that John Converse had the first store. Then we find in a book of U.S. Appointments of Postmasters that the first postmaster in Wichita Falls was Charles G. Convers, appointed March 5, 1879. In Louise Kelly’s book, there is a list of appointed postmasters. She lists the first as Charles G Converse. In Kelly’s note cards, she expresses the opinion that John and Charles Converse may be brothers. Following the Charles G. Convers lead, we researched and found him living in Denison in 1876. The Sherman Public Library was contacted to see if Convers was thereafter 1876. They found no record of him after that time. We hypothesize that the name, John Converse was confused with Charles Convers and Charles was our first storekeeper and postmaster. John Converse as far as we can tell did not exist. We couldn’t find him on Ancestry. Everyone is invited to join in on this research and give us your 2 cents worth!!!!

Midwestern State University Texas 100th Anniversary – Three different groups are researching in preparation for the anniversary of MSU Texas. Pamela Morgan came in looking for images of the groundbreaking by John G. Hardin and some earlier photos. Mary Draper, History Professor, came in to get images and early history of MSU for a project for her class. Mary is on the Centennial Committee as well. Warren Ayres came in looking for the history of oil-related businesses to highlight the Business School for the Centennial Celebration. We anticipate more researchers coming in for what looks to be a Great Exhibit at MSU Texas and the Museum of North Texas

History.

Thanks to the Museum of North Texas History, The Wichita County Archives display watercolors belonging to the museum. We change them out once a year to prevent fading. Last year’s portraits were of the Wichita County Courthouse and the construction scene of downtown Wichita Falls in 1919.

The new portraits are of the Pavilion at Lake Wichita and a street scene in downtown Burkburnett during the Oil Boom. Just so everyone knows..... the Archives are more than boring documents and old photos. We can be “artsy artsy” as well.



WCHC and MoNTH News

**2021 County Historical
Commission Annual
Reports**

**Deadline for Report is
February 28th.**

Please report your volunteer hours as soon as possible. Let’s beat our last year report of 3600!!

MoNTH

Renew your membership now!

Upcoming Events

“Rural Texas Women at Work”

100th Anniversary of MSU Texas

German-American Settlers