

# **PRESERVATION NEWS**

Newsletter of the Wichita County Historical Commission

Volume XLIX

Robert Palmer, Chairman

April 3, 2014

Wichita County Archives720 Indiana AvenueWichita Falls, Texas 76301

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

Telephone 940-763-0020

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# AGENDA FOR MEETING

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

1. Call to Order2. Introduction of Guests3. Business4. Program5. AdjournMonthly Meeting:Location: The Country Club.Price for the luncheon is \$17.00 each which includes: salads, maincourse, vegetables, drink & dessert.Please bring the correct change.

**<u>Reservations</u>**: Call the <u>Archives (763-0020)</u> 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.

**PROGRAM** - WOW! If only we could print it!!!!! Don't miss it!!!!

## From the Desk of Robert Palmer -

Oh, give me land, lots of land under starry skies above, Don't fence me in. Let me ride through the wide open country that I love, Don't fence me in. Bob Fletcher and Cole Porter

Wichita County, Texas, and most of The Great Plains was wide open prairie, as far as the eye could see, before 1870. The Native Americans followed the huge herds of Bison. Giant herds of cattle were driven from Texas to emerging markets in Kansas. Nothing stood in the way. That all changed in less than ten years. By 1880, it was all but gone.

What changed it? One simple invention...barbed wire.

The idea of building fences goes back thousands of years. The old world built stone fences and planted hedge rows. Osage Orange hedges were especially effective. The new world followed the same thinking and the East Coast still shows remains of stone fences. As the early settlers moved slowly west, new forms emerged. Abraham Lincoln was a rail splitter. Wooden rails could contain a small group of animals on a small plot of land but that didn't work west of the Mississippi River. The land was just too big. What was needed was something that could stretch for miles, be inexpensive, be easy to put up.

Leonce Eugene Grassin-Baledans, in 1860, designed a fence made of metal wire in France. In April 1865, Louis Francois Janin proposed a double wire with diamond shaped metal points embedded in it. Michael Kelly from New York designed a similar wire. Lucien B. Smith of Kent, Ohio received a patent for his design in 1867. Joseph F. Glidden of Dekalb, Illinois received a patent for an improved version in 1874. Glidden's design met all the requirements. It could be stretched for miles. It was cheap to produce. It was easy to put up. From 1868 to 1874 over 500 patents were issued. All were different, limited only by the inventor's imagination. One hundred years later, it became a collector's dream.

The idea didn't catch on that quickly. Native cattle were wild. They had never seen barbed wire. The greatest selling demonstration took place on The Military Plaza in San Antonio in 1876. John Warne Gates built a small fenced in area and put untamed cattle in it.

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What provided the power for early Maytag Washing Machines?

# Wichita County Archive News April 2014

#### **News Items**

**Burnett Horse Ranch** marker is in the ground on Hwy 240at Slama Rd. Dedication ceremony is scheduled for Saturday, April 26th at 10:00am.

We are searching for topics for the Undertold Marker Program. Currently, work is progressing on applications for Dr. C. B. Fuller, Providence Church in Burkburnett, and the "Colored School" in Burkburnett.

Welcome to new members of the Commission: Mel Feller and Lou Murdock

We are saddened by the February 13, 2014 death of Mary Thomas, long-time commission member. Mary provided the "Bit of History" programs for the Museum of North Texas History for many years. Mary was the second baby born at General Hospital (United Regional).

We may have enough money soon to place another historic marker. Let's start making a list of people, places or events in Wichita County that need to be marked. **What do you think needs to be marked for posterity?** 

#### **Barbs, Bullets, and Blood**

The Wire War That Revolutionized Texas Saturday, April 26<sup>th.</sup> For more information contact **Tales N' Trails**, Nocona, Texas (940) 825-5330 <u>www.talesntrails.org</u>

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John Warne Gates built a small fenced in area and put untamed cattle in it. The fence held. He retired to the Menger Hotel and took orders. Cattle barons were incensed. The idea of eliminating open range was not in their thoughts. Wire was cut and range wars were fought. The greatest tragedy occurred in the 1880s with "The Big Die Off". Cattle herds were moved south during the harsh Plains winters. The Texas Panhandle ranchers decided to stop this by building a huge fence completely across the Panhandle. A very bad winter forced the cattle against the fence where unbelievable numbers died. Laws followed.

When was Wichita County first fenced? Old fences that can be traced to their patent dates give us clues. We know that the first settlers in western Wichita County did not have fences in the late 1870s. Electra High School Journalism student Carrie Rowe interviewed a descendent of the Banta family of Beaver Creek in 1972. She told how her parents year after year lost their gardens and hay fields to roaming animals. Bill Richardson of the Richardson-Ancell families collected old wire from his ranch in the 1960s and 70s. He had a very large collection of wire patented in the 1870s and 1880s. The land in northern Wichita County between The Waggoner Ranch and the Burnett Ranch was fenced with many forms of exotic 1870s barbed wire. Most prevalent was a wire called Scutts Arrow plate. It was a very thick gaged wire with pieces of metal shaped like arrow heads bent and embedded in it. For the most part it is still there. It was very good wire. It was patented June 18, 1878 by Hiram B. Scutt of Joliet, Illinois. The XIT Ranch in the Panhandle was fenced in by a flat, single strand wire with attached barbs called Brinkerhoff. It is all over Wichita County, too. It was patented by Jacob Brinkerhoff of Auburn, New York April 8, 1878. What an insult. The west was fenced by wire made in New York!!

What is old wire worth? Spur Rowell wire can go for \$50.00 for a standard 18 inch collector's specimen. Shorter pieces are virtually worthless as collector pieces. Don't go cutting wires from rancher's fences! ! Besides the danger of getting shot, it is against Texas law.