



PRESERVATION NEWS

FEBRUARY 4th, 2016

Newsletter of the Wichita County Historical Commission

Volume LXIX

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

Telephone 940-763-0020

E-mail Address - archives@co.wichita.tx.us

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 **\$20.00** 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.

PROGRAM

Lynda Cannedy

The Mayfield and Slaughter Families of Clay County From the Desk of Robert Palmer -

"It flowed across the prairie like a small stream suddenly going out of its banks. What it touched would never be the same." This was the railroad.

Before the Civil War, North Texas was basically virgin prairie. Stories abound about stirrup high grass. One early settler on Beaver Creek described the abundance of buffalo, antelope, and screaming cougars, that kept her awake at night. The early ranches, scattered settlers, and wagon trails mildly disturbed it. The railroads spelled its doom.

The coming of a railroad was a series of well coordinated events. It started slow and then became a loud boisterous event. Wichita County actually spawned a fairly large number of small railroads. The three major ones: The Fort Worth and Denver, The Wichita Falls and Northwestern, and The Wichita Falls and Southern, transformed the countryside. In 1882, the citizens of Wichita Falls offered large land rewards for a railroad to be built through the city. In 1906 Frank Kell built a railroad to connect to the now developing Big Pasture area. The last major connection was the extension of The Wichita Falls and Southern to the coal mines at Newcastle.

The first step was the decision on where the railroad would go. This was a very secretive process well described in the old western movies. Large sums of money were to be made by people who could determine a potential route and then go buy up the land. Next came the surveyors who staked out the actual route. This was a dangerous activity because it meant entering private land. Then came the land purchasers. These people were a combination of sharp business men and tough character. The railroad companies rewarded them well. Some were paid in money, some in actual land that had been set aside by the state for railroad companies. These blocks of land show on early maps. The Ancell Ranch in southwestern Wichita County was put together by George Ancell, a railroad buyer. Mr.

Ancell was a large man who always carried his 45 Caliber pistol in his right boot.

A final survey was done and then the construction process began. Out front were the dirt movers. It was a tough job. Some railroad construction used steam equipment, most used mules and fresnos, a dirt moving scoop. The railroad camp was a small community. There were several hundred workers. They were usually housed in tents that moved as the construction moved. They had to be fed so there was a cooking tent and a chow tent. The food was hardy; lots of bread, meat purchased from ranchers, and wild game. A good duty was to get to go ahead and shoot Prairie Chickens to feed the crew.

There were many "hanger-ons", people who followed the camp as it moved across the prairie. Some were "gofers" who ran errands for the bosses. Some were less honest, trying to profit from the pay of the workers. Creeks and rivers had to be crossed so the land engineers designed bridges and trestles to cross them. These were usually built out of crossties. Some were very elaborate and many still stand. There is a beautifully designed one still standing between Crowell and Benjamin. Many washed downstream. Then came the tie and rail layers. These were large muscular men who wrestled the ties and rails into place. As the flow reached communities, some created by the railroad itself, elaborate celebrations were held. Pictures were taken in front of a steam engine. The beautiful prairie was officially dead.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Name two locations where the Shrine Circus was held in the 1950s.

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As you may or may not know, the Country Club is raising its prices. Our lunch on the 4th will be **\$20.00** plus we are taking **\$50** from the Speaker Fund to pay the **room rent**. This will leave us a balance of \$38.23.

Robert will appoint a committee to look into other possibilities and provide a survey form for your input. If you will not be at the meeting on February 4, please contact Robert [781-0177], Don [766-6234] or me [763-0020] with your input as to possible meeting places, as soon as possible.

Elizabeth Hawley has finished checking on all the markers in the county and the information is on the website: wichitacountyhistoricalcommission.org. This includes photos, wording on the markers and detailed information on location. Also newsletters are readable as well as links to more history.

Not only was it a huge undertaking to visit all 90 markers, but the web site is great. We owe Elizabeth a big THANK YOU for bringing our history into 21st century technology.

How many train songs can you name??

I've been working on the railroad; She Caught the Katy, and left me a mule to ride. . .; Daddy was a railroading man; K. C. Railroad Blues; Travelin' Railroad Man; Freight Train Blues; Take the "A" Train; Desperados Waiting for a Train; Honky Tonk Train; Waiting for a Train; Ghost Train; Last Train to Clarksville; Southbound Train; Train in the Distance; Glory Train; Downtown Train; Midnight Train to Georgia; Morning Train; Orange Blossom Special; City of New Orleans; Hobo Bill's Last Ride; Brakeman's Blues; People Get Ready, There's a Train A Coming; Midnight Special; Night They Drove Old Dixie Down; Wabash Cannon Ball; Casey Jones and the Wreck of the Old 97; Chattanooga Choo Choo; Sentimental Journey



Lest we forget, **Jimmie Rogers (The Singing Brakeman)**, King of the Hoboes, **Boxcar Willie**, and of course, **Roy Acuff**.



And, just what is a gandy dancer?
