

PRESERVATION NEWS

Newsletter of the Wichita County Historical Commission

Volume L

Robert Palmer, Chairman

May 1, 2014

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

4. Program

5. Adjourn

1. Call to Order 2. Introduction of Guests 3. Business

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.

PROGRAM

Securing A Marker - The Process Becky Trammell

From the Desk of Robert Palmer -

The old Valley View School Campus is the site of a Texas Historical Marker that tells one small part of the life of a person whose whole life was one of the kind of material that is almost pure Hollywood. Earl Van Dorn was part Shakespearian Tragedy, part Errol Flynn, and, unbelievably, a man of highs and lows.

The marker tells of the creation of the Van Dorn Trail. It became an important wagon trail, the first in Wichita County. The story of the man behind it is not on the marker.

Earl Van Dorn was a career army officer, fighting with honors in The Mexican War, an Indian fighter, and a Confederate General. He was physically short, impulsive, highly emotional, a noted painter, writer of poetry, highly skilled at riding a horse, and known for his love of women... a tragic flaw that would end his career and life. He was dubbed, "The terror of ugly husbands".

Van Dorn was born in Port Gibson, Mississippi. In 1843 he married Caroline Godbold and fathered a son, Earl Van Dorn, Jr. and a daughter, Olivia. He graduated from West Point in 1842, 52nd of 56. Van Dorn served in Texas from 1845-1846 defending Fort Texas in Brownsville. He fought at the Battle of Monterrey and the siege of Vera Cruz. He fought well and received two Brevet promotions. He was wounded at Mexico City and at the storming of Belen Gate. After the war he fought against the Seminoles in 1849.

He was promoted to Captain and served with the

2nd Cavalry at Fort Belknap. He scouted North Texas in 1856 and fought the Comanche. He again fought the Comanche along the Red River and into Indian Territory. He was wounded four separate times, taking two arrows at one time, severely damaging his stomach and lung. He was not expected to live, but survived. He led six companies of cavalry and was highly respected. He left the service in 1860 and 1861. On January 31, 1861, he joined the Confederate cause. He was put in charge of large ground forces and bungled the Battles of Pea Ridge and Corinth. He returned to cavalry duty at Holly Springs and showed that was his true calling. His forces severely damaged General Grant's efforts. It looked like he was destined for greatness.

One historian called him "a serial adulterer". A young Southern widow told him to "let the women alone until after the war is over". He replied, "I cannot do that for it is all I am fighting for".

He met Jessie Peters, the beautiful and much younger third wife of Dr. George Peters. Why? Van Dorn was described as a Southern Cavalier, with slender waist, broad shoulders, handsome face, blue eyes, chestnut hair, and mustache much admired by the ladies.

Dr. Peters shot Van Dorn in the back of the head as Van Dorn sat at his writing desk. He died two hours later. Dr. Peters was never prosecuted.

Ouestion of the Month

Where did the airplane name "Jennie" come from?

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News Items

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.

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?

GIVE LIGHT AWARD

The Wichita County Historical Commission recommended JoAnn Crites for the Give Light Award, sponsored by the Junior League and The Times. During 2013, she devoted 365 hours to the work in the Archives. She is primary responsible for the 100 notebooks of Louise Kelly's newspaper clippings, she keeps a current clipping file and also enters each new accession into the data base as well as helping researchers. And in addition, she donates many hours to the Museum of North Texas History.

WE NEED A MISSION STATEMENT

What is the purpose of the Wichita County Historical Commission? Why do you belong? We need a Mission Statement. We've had a mission statement for the MONTH since its inception, but it only recently occurred to me that we need one for the Historical Commission and one for the Archives.

One for the Archives might be: To collect, preserve and catalog paper ITEMS RELEVANT TO THE HISTORY OF WIGHITA COUNTY AND MAKE THEM AVAILABLE TO RESEARCHERS.

Please come with your ideas.