TEXAS HISTORY & ADVENTURE

ENCHANTED ROCK MAGAZINE

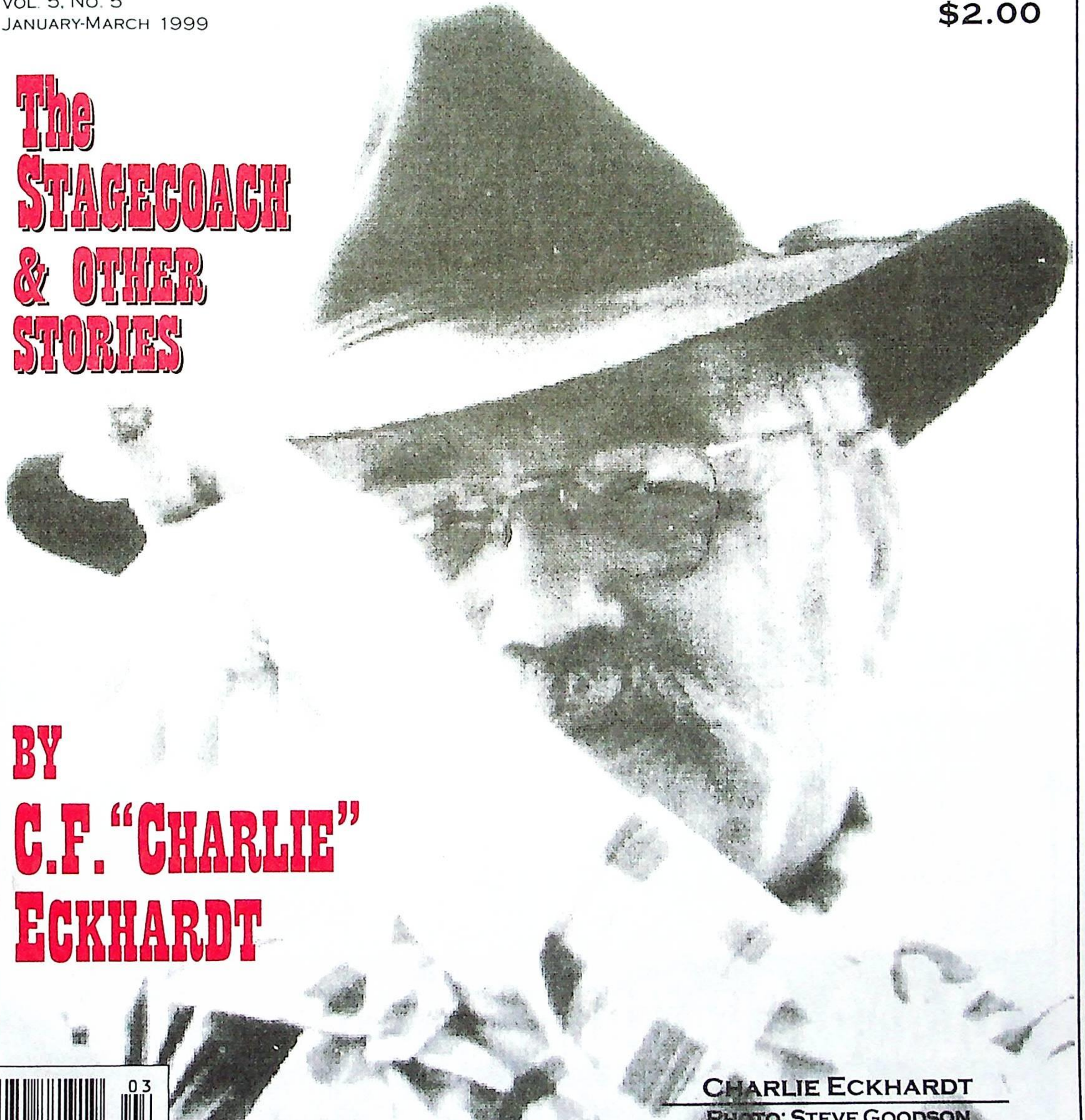
PULL-OUT
HILL COUNTRY MAP INSIDE

VOL. 5, NO. 5
JANUARY-MARCH 1999

$2.00

The STAGECOACH & OTHER STORIES

BY C.F. "CHARLIE" ECKHARDT



CHARLIE ECKHARDT
PHOTO: STEVE GOODSON

VISIT

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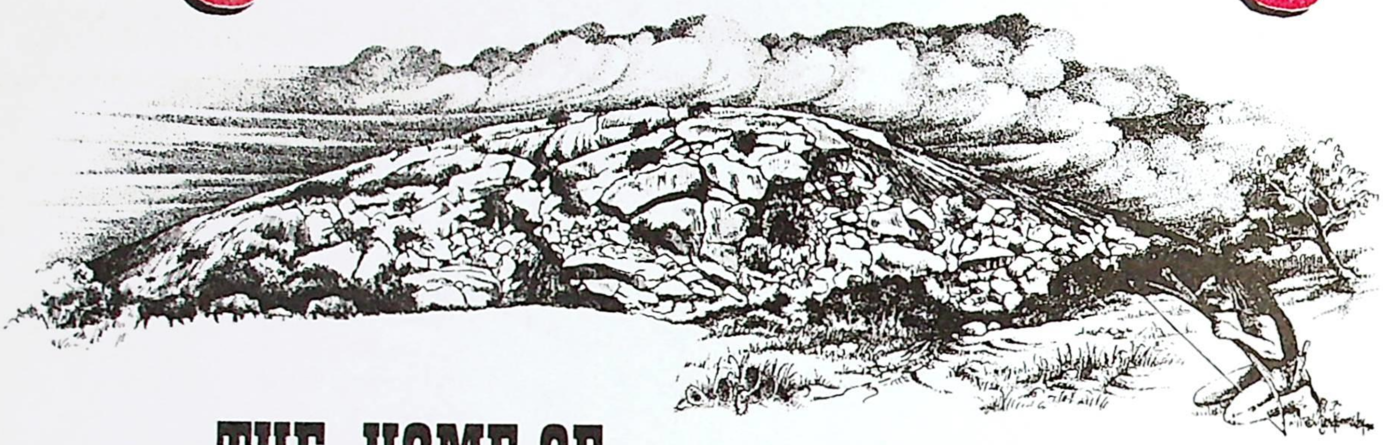

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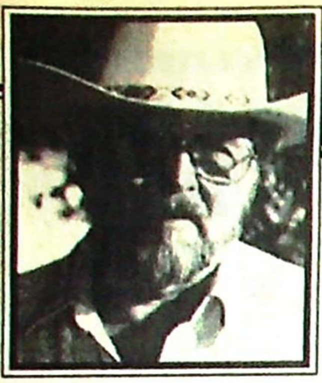

FROM THE EDITOR

HEADED FOR CYBERSPACE

Deep into the night I woke up wide awake and pondering. For months a rough idea was tossing around in my mind 'till it was worn — smooth as a river pebble — and demanding to be held up to the light and examined for clarity. The idea was all about this magazine, the Internet and you the reader all rolled up into one.

I reckon I knew all along what the decision would have to be, but I didn't know how right it was until I piled the up on one side and the downside on the other. Then I knew I would have to discontinue printing the magazine and publish it on the Internet instead. Here's why:

Printing, mailing and paper costs take the lion's share of the income. The production time is labor-intensive and my hourly wage for the task is somewhere around $1 an hour, which we all know is simply not enough. The same information will be posted on the Web in one-tenth the time and with no paper costs whatsoever.

By posting articles from back issues and new submissions on *texfiles.com* a virtual library will be created which represents a significant and valuable resource for entertainment and education. In its five years of publication, *Enchanted Rock Magazine* has published well over 250 stories; and taken together they represent a significant volume of literature on Texas history and adventure. Despite the relative obscurity of the writers, the body of work they have given to the magazine is some of the finest in print, and written by a few of the most dedicated and talented writers in Texas.

This issue is dedicated to C.F. "Charlie" Eckhardt, one of our best and most notable authors. He deserves all of the recognition and success that ever comes his way. Coincidentally, another of the writers, Gary Brown, recently published his first book, *The New Orleans Greys*. In a recent letter he wrote:

"Thanks again for publishing my stories over the past three years and sharing your advice. I think *Enchanted Rock Magazine* is special because it does encourage writing about something very important—Texas."

I would like to assure Gary and all of you that our tradition which provides serious writers and natural storytellers with a story to tell a place to tell it will continue. Now, with the changeover to the Internet the work will reach the World Wide Web instead of some 4,000 people. Furthermore it will be a permanent and accessible library where nothing is "out of print". All of this will be accomplished by April, 1999.

Here's how it will work: On *texfiles.com* there will be two resources, one will provide articles for free downloads. The number of articles available will increase every month. Another resource will be accessed through subscription. Further, individual articles accessible by subscription can also be ordered through e-mail at a nominal price. Other revenue for the on-line magazine will be through the restrained use of advertising banners.

Everything we post will receive the same artistic attention you have come to expect in the printed version. And new stories will be posted monthly. The website will also have a Bulletin Board where storytellers and history buffs can swap tales and share facts.

I know this will come as a disappointment to many of our subscribers. All I can do is promise each of you who can't subscribe over the Internet that whatever money is owed to you will be refunded. (Please see the insert with his issue.) To all of you who have treasured *Enchanted Rock Magazine,* and to the writers and loyal advertisers, I offer my heartfelt gratitude. Together we accomplished something in the printed media that may never be duplicated.

Now for the transformation.

IRA KENNEDY

ENCHANTED ROCK MAGAZINE

www.texfiles.com

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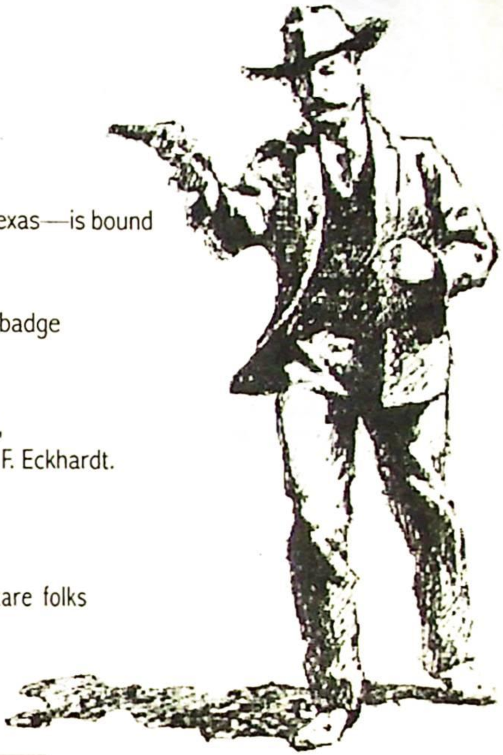

ON THE COVER: C.F. "Charlie" Eckhardt—Photo by Steve Goodson

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- The Elusive Chanas of the Llano Uplift
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LETTERS

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On Scott Cooley

Really enjoy your magazine. Particularly enjoyed the two issues on the Hoodoo War because of my interest in Scott Cooley (my great grandfather, James G. Odiorne, served with Cooley in Rufus Perry's Texas Ranger company prior to the Mason County War, and, according to family lore and Blanco County history, Cooley died in the home of my great, great grandfather, Daniel Maddox). Glen Hadler's story incorporated most of what I have been able to compile on Cooley's involvement in the Hoodoo War. There was one statement in his story that is not factual, however. There is no "granite" tombstone on Cooley's grave. In fact, there is no tombstone per se. A concrete slab covers the entire grave, and on it, cast into the concrete, is the inscription "Scott Cooley - Texas Ranger". My neighbor, Max Gipson (now deceased) was instrumental in getting Cooley's grave marked with that slab a number of years ago.

Was also interested in your sketch of Cooley on the cover of the Sep/Oct issue. Was that sketch based on a photograph, or on written descriptions? I have always been curious about his appearance.

Also, just found your web site. It is great.

Dan Lengefeld
Johnson City, Texas

[The cover art was created from two photographs. IK]

Good Stuff

I am a subscriber to E-rock and just took a look at the new web site. Good Stuff! I can't tell you how much I enjoy your magazine. It makes me feel like I'm at home; even though I have been living elsewhere in the state for several years now.

I am assuming that the llanotexas server is run by you and I would like any information you have about pricing for web hosting services.

I am in the process of designing a web page for a small antique shop in the Hill Country and feel that llanotexas would be good hostsite for such a small page.

Thank you for your time in advance.

Regards,
Chris Masey

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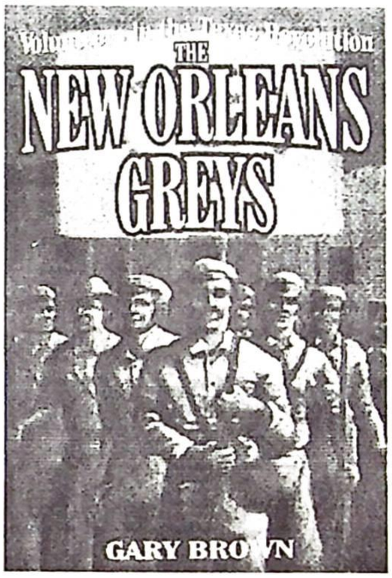
CONGRATULATIONS GARY!

EROCK MAG WRITER PUBLISHES BOOK

A large number of volunteers came to Texas in the 1830s: some came for the promise of free land, a few for the cause of constitutional freedoms; many came for the adventure and a good fight. Such a group came to Texas in 1835. As a unit, they were born in a New Orleans coffee arcade on October 13, 1835. Only 175 days later they had been destroyed as a military unit, and only a handful survived.



During that 175 days they were the most effective fighting force to serve in Texas during the seven-month revolution. They are the only anglo Texan unit to have fought at Bexar, the Alamo, San Patricio, Agua Dulce, Refugion, Coleto, and Goliad. A few survivors even served at San Jacinto.

Their story is one of courage and fighting skill. They were ruthless in battle, yet compassionate in victory. And they are hardly ever mentioned in Texas history books.

They were the New Orleans Greys.

Author Gary Brown writes with all the color and drama often left out of history books and proves that history can be accurate *and* entertaining.

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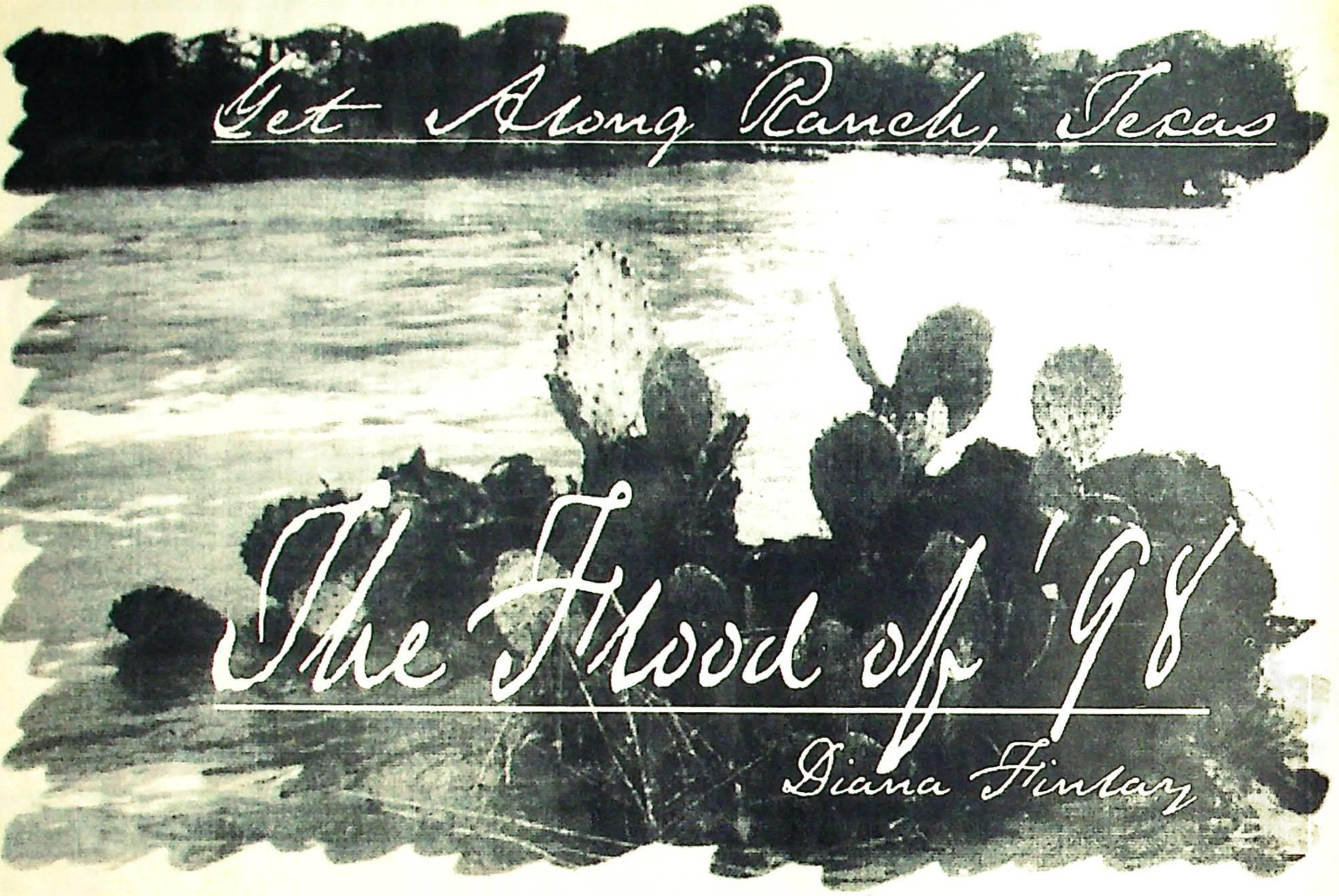

The Flood of '98

Diana Finlay

Texas weather is not a control issue to be debated around here. We know who gets to be the boss. Mother Nature wins. Almost every time.

We have grown used to seeing Texas floods first hand on our little Get Along Ranch, and our kids have grown to recognize flood waters by the smell and the sound, up close and personal. Until the Flood of '98, we have always been safely on higher ground so when the river is coming up, it is a sight to be watched and respected - and never taken lightly. But, it has always held an element of excitement as we watched the danger from a distance.

When the Flood of '98 hit on October 17th, it hit home. Literally. Our family has stood ground on this little hill above the San Marcos River for over 30 years. The land has owned us and the river has run through our veins. We have respected it and watched it rage through what the old timers called the 100-year flood back in 1972, and the nearly-as- big one in '81.

We have pretended to be an Indian family and bathed our children in it just for fun when they were small. We have waded across to shake hands with a neighbor. We have watched our kids grow as they skipped rocks across and pulled skillets full of perch from the waters. We have been awed by the great blue heron who chose our bank for as a good place to raise a family, and we have tasted the magic of the sacred springs from which this little stream pours. We have nurtured our pristine stream through drought years and fought for her honor and protection in state courts and city halls.

But when our pristine clear stream turned on us, it turned into a raging, frothing flooding waterway in a matter of hours.

The Blanco comes into the San Marcos River about eight miles upstream from us. When two Mexican hurricanes dumped over 21 inches of rain all around us, we thought we were ready for the onslaught of the swollen river.

As tradition would have it, I put a pot on the stove and some bread in the oven. We decided that this flood would be remembered with pozole and bolillos. Hearty peasant food. Mindless kitchen labor that would warm our souls as we watched the water rise and waited out the fury of Mother Nature from what we expected to be a safe distance.

expected to be a safe distance.

As in so many other floods of our experience, we were quickly isolated by the overflowing tank blocking the end of our country lane and the river swelling over the bridge on the Farm to Market road.. Little streams and creeks vied for attention as they escaped through fences and tore through gates across our pasture toward the sea.

We looked at our watches and took note. As the water rose a couple of feet an hour and then a foot every ten minutes, we began to wonder. Our telephone lines still worked and at about dusk, we heard from neighbors on our side of the river that all of the people across the river had been evacuated by the volunteer fire department early in the afternoon. By then it was too late to leave and we still expected it to be a little higher than normal but within safe distance. After all, we had protected this river. We had loved this river. And surely, the river knew it.

And so we watched as the evening unfolded. A flood light brightened the back yard as the river came closer and closer. And we breathed the scent of natural danger as we watched huge trees and untold human-made debris plow through the rushing, foaming water. A canoe, a refrigerator, a football, and a sofa all floated by within a couple of hours. A canoe wound up twisted and mangled high in a tree across the river from our porch. River watchers agreed that this was the angriest we had seen the river in recent history, as huge cottonwoods were ripped from the bank and cracks as loud as gunshots signaled huge trees and debris slamming full force into the concrete bridge supports.

By nightfall, we had dumped over 18 inches of water from our rain gauge and the river was still barreling down and frothing in a rage we had never seen. It was evident that this was going to be a flood by which we would judge all others. The cable had long since washed out and our television was useless. Our internet server was down in San Marcos but the telephone lines were holding strong. Our displaced daughter, in school 900 miles away, had seen the reports of flooding on cable television in Nashville. She called to check in - and remember the smell and the feel and the energy that comes with a flood. (And to ask what was cooking - as tradition would have it). Neighbors and friends and family called in.

Suddenly the river started to grow higher and faster than ever before. It came up past the ragged china berry tree and above the twisted pecan. When it was between the pecan and the porch, we knew it was coming on up. It swelled and surged as branches and limbs, fenceposts and debris washed down the river, tumbling through the frothy water that was our backyard.

Soon the water was lapping at the foot of the back porch, something it had never done before. Somewhere about then, I panicked. It was really coming in. There was no safe distance this time. In his usual calm manner, Kent suggested that we go ahead and move from room to room and put things we wanted to keep on top of things we could afford to lose or could replace. We spread out and started the task. The river crept up the edge of the porch and seemed to stop rising for a little while. We later realized that we bought a little time while it was spreading around the front of house, out into the pasture, and under the house.

As Kent and the kids gathered things and prioritized a lifetime of belongings, I stood frozen in Jenni's bedroom and looked around. Attending college 900 miles away from home, what would she want to save? At first it was easy. I found higher ground for a couple of fiddles and an extra guitar. A tambourine signed by Carl Perkins and her high school yearbooks. An abandoned teddy bear. What next? The prom dresses she had long since left behind and would never wear again? A box of memorabilia from fairs and festivals she had played through her childhood?

Everyone was busy. Kent and Sterling were out in the office moving speakers and amps, guitars and songwriter pads to what they hoped would be high and dry safety. HalleyAnna systematically took everything off the floor in the dining room, the bedrooms, and the closets and made stacks and piles on the tables.

I was absolutely useless, wandering to the back door to check on the river lapping at the top of the porch. Moving through the living room, my feet were made of lead. What is the important stuff of our life? Baby pictures and computer disks? Did I want to save that commemorative Lyndon Johnson cream pitcher? The Christmas ornaments the kids had made in forgotten grade school classes? The hurricane tracking map and the report cards on display on the refrigerator? That file drawer full of income tax junk? The negatives and pictures stashed in every nook and cranny in the house - waiting for the day I would get organized?

The river flowed under our pier and beam foundation and around the front of the house spreading out into the pasture. Our caliche lane turned into a millrace with logs and fallen trees swirling and kicking their way down to the highway.

Kent was on the phone with a downstream neighbor, in search of facts regarding estimated crests and anticipated walls of water when we lost that last connection with the rest of the world. The phone went dead as the river swelled up even higher across the back porch, licking at the back door.

We stopped stacking and piling and watched the water. Praying, wishing, hoping, and holding on with some newly found faith. Another inch and the silt and sludge would be seeping into the house. Now our concern was how high it would get. Did we have things stacked high enough? And what if we didn't?

Suddenly, all that stuff was not important at all. It was just stuff, after all.

Sterling made sure the ladder was secure on the front porch, ready for our potential escape to the roof. The flashlights were lined up by the front door. Mud was tracked in and out of both doors as the border collies were moved from back to front porch. And we watched.

As the river continued to lap toward the door but come no further up. All around the house the river continued to rampage but it came no higher. For two hours we watched, holding our breath and waiting for another rise. Finally it started to subside. The river slowly sank to a safer, albeit flood swollen, distance. The silt remained, marking our world with a sludgy reminder of her strength, and our complete lack of control in head-on bouts with Mother Nature.

Texas weather. Texas floods. Damage assessment and FEMA forms. We fared a lot better than a lot of friends. We consider ourselves lucky. It's funny how good fortune can be measured by completely different scales from one week to another. As I run my finger through a ray of sunshine streaking across this desk, I feel warm... and pretty dry... and darn lucky... at home on the San Marcos River.

Continued on following page

Get Along Ranch Recipes

Pozole (pork and hominy stew)

A steamy bowl of pozole is a perfect comfort supper, served with crusty bolillos or hot cornbread slathered with butter. Pozole is a hearty pork and hominy stew that is wonderful alone and even better with condiments for a sort of custom-built bowl of warmth.

Set out bowls of grated cheese, chopped green onions, shredded cabbage, diced tomatoes, cilantro, sliced avocado, Mexican lime wedges, and whatever else you think would go with it.

Pozole is easy to make. It warms the kitchen as it warms the soul and keeps the homefires burning. The aroma of the simmering pot of pozole is as welcoming as a warm smile.

Trim and dice into one inch cubes 1 to 1-1/2 pounds of pork . Use whatever pork looks best at the meat market. This week, I used center cut pork chops. Sometimes pork tenderloin is on sale. A pork roast is okay too.

Peel one whole head of garlic cloves and one medium yellow or white onion . Chop and set aside.

Open one large can of white hominy and drain.

Open one small can of chopped green chiles and set aside.

Put 1/2 cup of olive oil (or oil of your choice) in a heavy Dutch oven or stew pot. Heat to medium high. Add the pork and gently stir to pan fry. When the pork is completely white (about 15 minutes), add the onions and garlic. Stir gently until it smells wonderful. Add the hominy and green chiles. Add about one cup of water or enough to cover.

Sprinkle with 1 tablespoon chili powder and 1 tablespoon cumin . Simmer for about one hour until the pork is very tender. Add water if necessary. Salt and pepper to taste. After spooning the pozole in to a bowl, squeeze a lime wedge over it and garnish with a few green onion tops. Serve alone or with the above mentioned condiments.

This is very good and very easy. There is no way to go wrong with it. Pozole brings out the artist in everyone. It is a good chance for everyone to "play" with their food as they customize it to their tastes.

Enjoy.

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Bolillos (Crusty earthy rolls)

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2 packages active dry yeast
2-1/2 cups warm water
1/2 cup lard (you can use olive oil but when the weather is bad and a flood is eminent, 1/2 cup of lard is not going to hurt you that much)
1 tablespoon sea salt
7 cups all purpose flour
1/2 cup masa harina
1/2 cup white cornmeal
1 teaspoon sea salt

Place 1/2 cup of warm water in a small bowl. Sprinkle in the sugar and then the yeast. Stir and let the yeast mixture proof until it becomes foamy about 5 minutes. In a large bowl, mix a cup and a half of warm water, the lard, salt, 2 cups of flour and the proofed yeast mixture. Stir well with a wooden spoon to make a creamy cake-like batter. Add the masa harina and cornmeal and blend well. Add the rest of the five cups of flour a little at a time. Keep stirring until he dough pulls a way from the side of the bowl. Turn out onto a floured board or table top and knead, sprinkling more flour onto the board if the dough becomes sticky. Continue to knead for about 5 minutes until the ball of dough is firm, resilient and satiny. Butter or oil a large bowl and turn the ball of dough in it so that all sides of the dough are covered by a film of butter. Cover with a towel or plastic wrap and let rise in a warm place for one hour or until doubled in bulk. Turn out the dough on the lightly floured surface and knead for two minutes. Divide the dough into four equal portions and cover three of them. Divide the piece of dough into four rolls. Form each into a flat oval, pinching the ends to form spindle shape. Repeat the process with the remaining dough. Place on ungreased baking sheets and cover to let rise for 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 350. Mix 1/4 cup water with the sea salt and lightly mist or brush the surface of the rolls. Pinch the ends again to be sure they stay in shape. Bake for 20-30 minutes, lowering the heat to 325 if they begin to brown too fast. When the rolls are golden and sound hollow when tapped, remove and cool on a rack.

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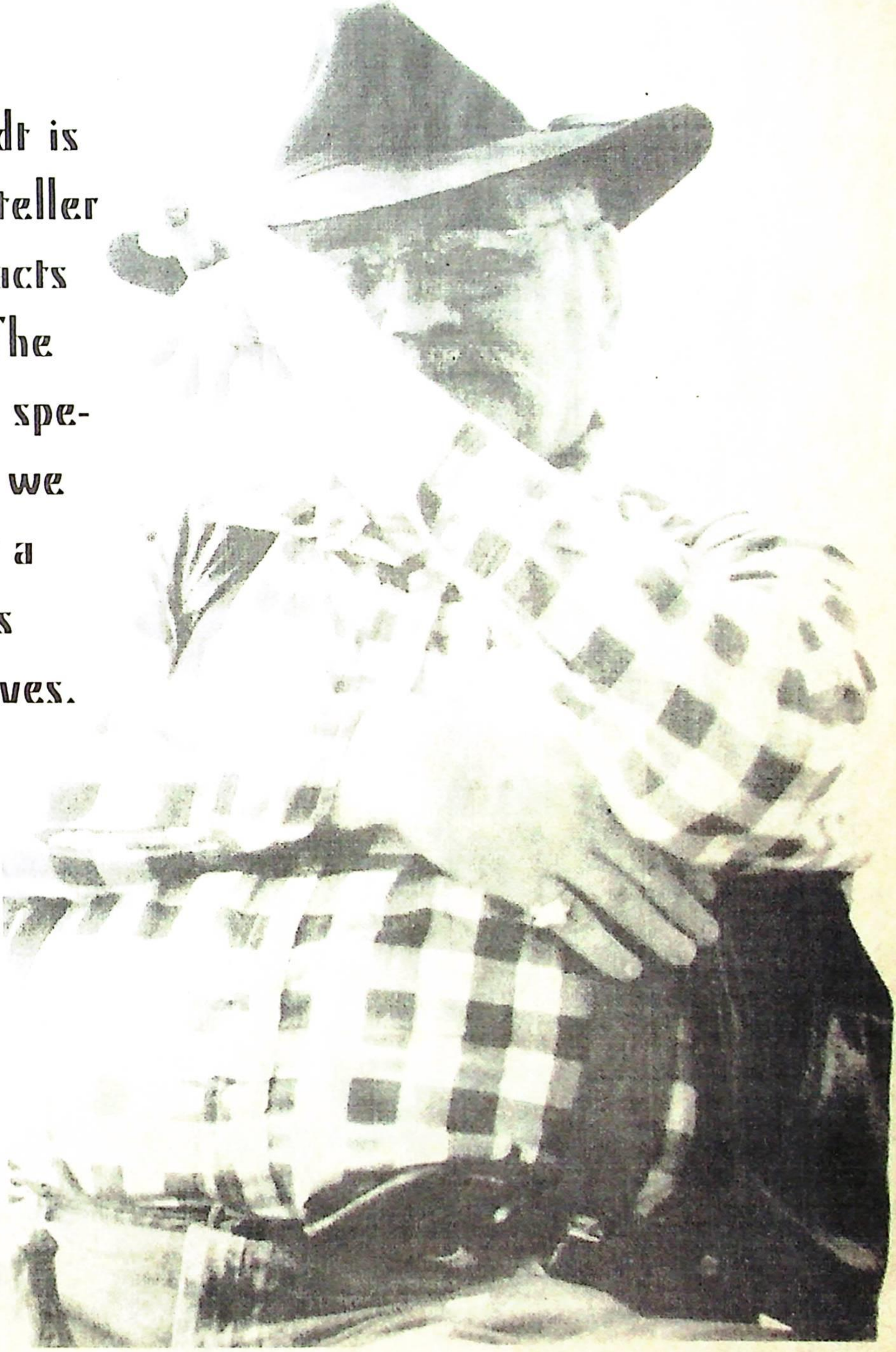

Photo by Steve Goodson

BOOKS IN PRINT:

A prolific author of numerous articles and stories, Charlie's book *Texas Tales Your Teacher Never Told You* is an outstanding collection of history, lore and tales woven into a modern view of how we embellish or change history to make the story bigger than is was.

Charlie, along with Kevin R. Young, contributed to the book *Unsolved Texas Mysteries* by Wallace O. Chariton. Written in a very folksy, down to earth style, the book explores several events from Texas' past which remain a mystery today.

THE STAGECOACH

CHARLIE ECKHARDT

An integral part of the history of the American west--and, of course, of Texas--is bound up in a four-wheeled vehicle usually pulled, if you can believe the movies, at a flying gallop across the mountains, deserts, and prairies--the stagecoach.

There aren't too many true stagecoaches left in the United States, and the movies have had a lot to do with that. Those of us who remember the old black and white Saturday Matinee westerns can remember countless stagecoach wrecks in which the coaches, the heroine having been rescued from inside in the very nick of time by Tom Mix, Ken Maynard, or Hopalong Cassidy, plunges over a cliff and smashes to bits on the rocks below.

Those weren't models or mockups. Those were the real thing. Some of those stages had seen thousands of miles of travel across the west, and some of them, in all probability were Wells Fargo stages Black Bart held up. The poverty-row movie studios—Republic, Monogram, and the rest—bought them cheap in the days before the collecting of relics of the American west became popular (when you could buy a pre-1896 Colt single action army revolver for $10 because it was a black-powder gun and not suitable for modern cartridges, and a Bisley model of the same gun for $7 because it had a funny-shaped grip). They wrecked them by the dozens, those masterpieces of wood, steel, and wrought iron. Today only a few original stages are lest, and a reproduction, full-size, will cost almost as much as a brand-new luxury sedan.

So what was a stagecoach? Who built 'em, where did they come from, who used 'em and what were they good for?

Coaches had been around a long time, believe it or not. The Romans used four-wheeled carriages with tops and side curtains to travel their excellent system of paved roads all over Europe until the fall of the Roman Empire about 700AD. It took almost 800 years for coaches to develop again, mostly because nobody built roads that coaches could travel. The very first record of travel in a public coach was left by Sir William Dugdale, who traveled to London in 1659.

American coaching began about the time the first roads were built on the eastern seaboard, and American coaches followed the pattern of European builders at first. Coaches had huge steel springs, which didn't make for a bad ride inside, but were awfully hard on the horses. Every bump a steel-springed coach hit was sent through the harness to the horses' shoulders, which caused the horses to have very short working lives.

By the late 1700s, American coachbuilders had gone the steel spring one better. The coach body was mounted on two long, thick leather slings called 'thoroughbraces,' which went from the front axle to the back axle. The coach body was independent of the axles and frame connecting them, resting solely on the leather—usually buffalo-hide-thoroughbraces. The thoroughbraces gave a different ride—not necessarily less comfortable than a steel-sprung coach's, but entirely different. Instead of the springy, bouncy ride of steel springs, the thoroughbraced coach had a swinging motion—some described it as 'like a rocking chair.' Mark Twain called the coaches "imposing cradles on wheels." The side to side and fore-and-aft swing of the coach body actually made some people seasick.

In 1813, 21 year old Lewis Downing opened a wheelwright's shop in Concord, New Hampshire. By 1816 Downing's wagons and private carriages were so popular he had to expand his shop into a factory. In 1826 he hired J. Stephen Abbot, then 22 and a journeyman coach-body builder. The very next year Downing and Abbot, between them, designed the very first true American stagecoach—the ones we saw wrecked down the side of Los Angeles' Coldwater and Topanga Canyons in all those Saturday matinees.

Average travel per day by stage was about 50 miles if the weather was dry, much less in mud. There were 'stagecoach inns' every fifty miles or so where travelers could stop for the night--stages did not travel at night unless it was absolutely unavoidable--and, unlike the surviving 'stagecoach inns' which advertise gourmet food and fine accommodations, most served fried hog and hominy horribles and put the guests up on shuck ticks.

Both Downing and Abbot were meticulous craftsmen. The only iron on an Abbot & Downing coach was the tires and bearings, axle irons, doorhandles and hinges, and braces. Everything else was the finest wood obtainable, fitted so closely that it needed no bolts or screws Only glue, mortise-and-tenon joints, and occasionally pegs were used in constructing a coach According to reports by those who worked in the coach factory, any coach that didn't pass Lewis Downing's personal inspection on completion was burned so that no part of it could be used in constructing another. By far the majority of the coaches were painted a dark barn red, with yellow wheels set off with red striping. Most had a landscape scene of some sort painted on the doors, and a noted artist, John Burgum, was employed to paint most of those scenes. After painting, each coat was rubbed down with pumice, and then the coach was given a heavy coat of varnish. What came out of Abbot & Downing's factory was not just a reliable, rugged vehicle, it was a work of art.

We don't know when the very first stages began to run in Texas for sure, but an old stagecoach inn in Crockett, over in east Texas, has a marker claiming it was a stage stop as early as 1838. We do know that, in 1839, the Starke-Burgess stage line between Austin and Houston was in operation. The trip cost $.25 per mile one way, and took three days in good weather. This may have been the 'first class' fare, for 'first class' passengers weren't required to get out and push if the stage got stuck in the mud that was a standard feature on most Texas roads. More usual fares were $.10 a mile if the weather was fair, anywhere from $.20 to $.35 per mile if it looked like rain.

Average travel per day by stage was about 50 miles if the weather was dry, much less in mud. There were 'stagecoach inns' every fifty miles or so where travelers could stop for the night—stages did not travel at night unless it was absolutely unavoidable—and, unlike the surviving 'stagecoach inns' which advertise gourmet food and fine accommodations, most served fried hog and hominy horribles and put the guests up on shuck ticks. About every ten to twelve miles there were 'relay stations,' where the

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teams, which might be mules or horses but would be at least a four-up hitch if not a six-up, could be changes. These, too, could provide something approximating accommodations for passengers if the weather was bad.

Stage horses were specially selected for their size and strength, but not necessarily for their speed. The largest—and often slowest-horses were called 'wheelers' and were the rearmost animals on the team. They could both pull the coach—it was the wheelers, in fact, that got the coach going—and slow down the other horses when necessary. Wheelers were usually the best-trained horses in the hitch. The center team was called the swing team, and it was usually made up of horses slightly smaller than the wheelers. The lead team was made up of the smallest horses, and often they were only 'green-broke' to harness. They could run, but couldn't run away with the coach because the big, steady wheel horses could be depended upon to hold them back. Each horse was controlled with a single rein—the near or lest-side horses with the rein running to the left side of the bit, the off or right-side horses with the rein running to the right side of the bit. The driver held six reins, which were called 'lines'—three in each hand, sometimes riveted together at his hand. A pull on the near or 'gee' line pulled the near-side lead, swing, and wheel horse to the left, and they, being in harness with the off-side animals, pulled them to the left. To stop the driver seldom sawed back on the lines, but instead stepped on the huge brake lever while calling "Whoa!" The well-trained—and heavy—wheel horses immediately began slowing, pulling the other horses back as the coach stopped.

Eastern roads weren't too bad, all considered, and a lot of them were 'turnpikes.' The word 'turnpike' is overused today—it means

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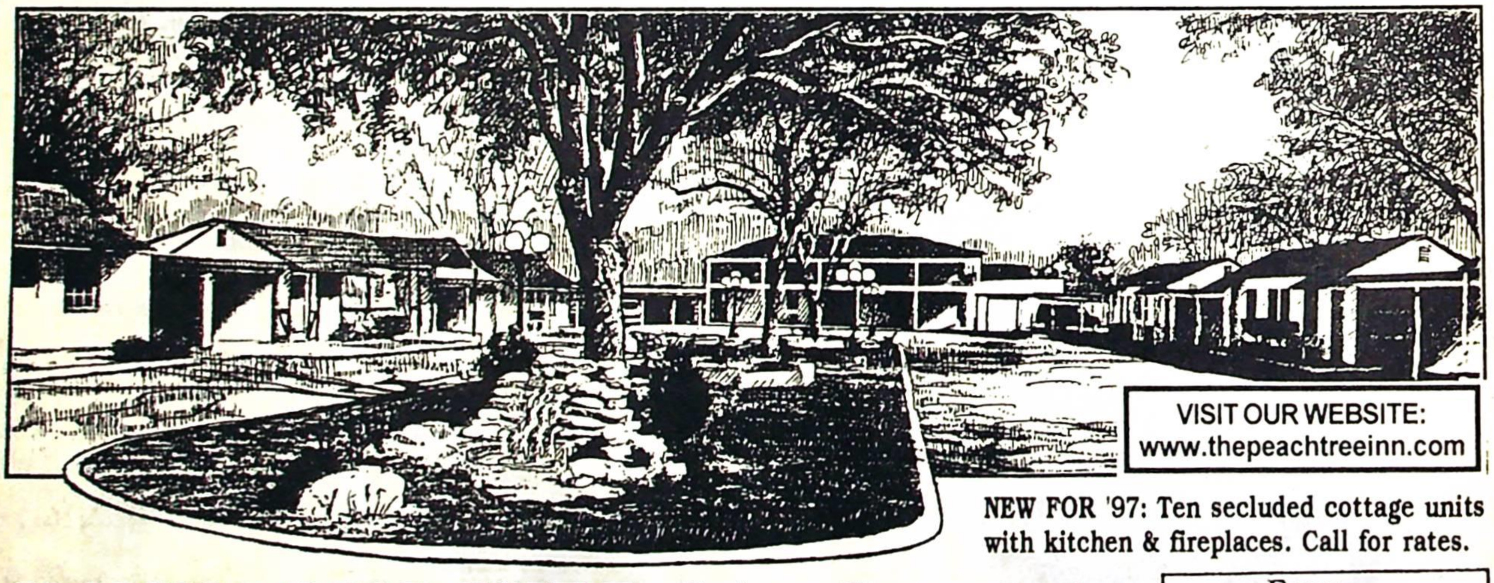

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any toll road—but a 'turnpike' was a special, privately-owned and privately-maintained road. Across the road at each end was a huge pole-pikestaff length, which was usually about 24 feet—and when the toll was paid the turnpike keeper 'turned the pike'—swung the pole out of the way—to allow the vehicle paying toll to proceed.

Turnpikes were usually hard-surfaced in some way—heavily graveled or corduroyed and gravel, which meant huge logs were cut and laid crossways on the road for a base, with gravel dumped and leveled atop them. Abbot & Downing's heavy coaches—or James Goold's, or Eaton & Gilbert's—could travel them fairly easily. Roads in 'the west'—anything west of the Alleghenies—were a different story, and those in Texas were a nightmare.

Coaches built for 'the west' were usually lighter than those used east of the Cumberland Gap. The big eastern coaches might weigh in at a ton and a half, while western coaches which weighed a ton were very heavy. A lot of weight was saved on 'trimmings,' for many of the eastern coaches had huge whale-oil lanterns hanging on the outside, glass in the windows, and such amenities as glass vases for flowers in wrought-iron racks inside. Western coaches usually made do with no lights, leather curtains instead of glass windows, and certainly no flower-vases.

In Texas the vast majority of settlement, immediately after the Revolution and until, in fact, after the War Between the States, was south of Nacogdoches and east of San Antonio. That meant most of the country the coaches had to cover was the thick blackland soil that grows marvelous crops— and will add a foot to your stature if you walk across a muddy field and it doesn't pull your boots off. We call it 'black gumbo' these days, and when it's muddy, it's the muddiest mud in the world.

Julius Froebel, a German living in Fredericksburg, decided to pay a visit to Germany in 1853. He boarded a stagecoach in San Antonio for the trip to the port of Indianola, and bought a brand new suit to travel in. His fare was $12.50 for the 160 or so miles. By his own estimate he walked at least 120 of those 160 miles, most of the time pushing the coach which was stuck in the mud. When he got to Indianola he had to throw his new suit away, so muddy and begrimed had it become from the trip.

To combat the problem, most coachlines—though apparently not in Texas until after the War—employed a special lightweight coach called a 'mud wagon' for conditions of that sort. Mud wagons had only a framework body which was covered with canvas, and a canvas roof. The wheels had wider tires—better for mud—but were lighter built, and they were generally pulled by a six-up or eight-up hitch of mules. While a full-sized coach could carry six passengers inside in relative comfort—and the term 'comfort' was definitely relative—and as many as nine inside in a pinch, a mud wagon was crowded with five. Most full-sized coaches also had 'dicky seats'—seats built onto the roof, which was wooden, and could carry three or four extra passengers up there. Mud wagons, having canvas roofs, could not carry passengers outside.

The year 1848 brought something of a revolution to stagecoaching in Texas. The discovery of gold in California brought thousands of immigrants west—some across the Santa Fe and Oregon trails, some around the horn by sailing ship, some through the Gulf of Mexico to the Panamanian isthmus—at that time a province of Ecuador—across the isthmus by mule and later by rail, and then up the west coast to California. A surprising number, though, debarked at Galveston or Indianola and started west overland from Texas-about one out of every twenty.

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Butterfield soon had crews out constructing his stage stops every fifteen miles. Few remain in Texas today, but at least three are semi-intact or at least marked. One is the Pine springs stage stop, at the foot of Guadalupe Peak north of Sierra Blanca in Hudspeth County.

Bejar, and way out there somewhere there was a town called Franklin, across the Rio Grande from a Mexican town called El Paso del Norte. The United States Army established a fort at Franklin and called it Fort Bliss. The headquarters for the US Army in Texas was in San Antonio—and the San Antonio commandancy had responsibility for the troops at Bliss, some six hundred miles to the west.

The road to Fort Bliss had to have water for the horses. Instead of following the line of today's Interstate 10, it followed the line of present US90—west through what is now Castroville and Uvalde to Las Moras Springs at present Brackettville (where the US Army established a post called Fort Clark, which was not closed until 1947), then northwest to the Devil's River, bypassing what is now Del Rio. It crossed—and watered at-Live Oak Creek, then crossed the alkali-laden waters of the Pecos, followed the springline north and west to the foot of the Guadalupe Mountains, and then went into Franklin pretty much along the line of El Paso's Montana Street. In 1850, the first stagecoach line contracted to carry mail between San Antonio and Fort Bliss on this road—and agreed, as well, to carry passengers, but at a substantial fare. It cost $125, one way—in a day when you could buy an ounce of gold for about $7—to travel from San Antonio to present El Paso by stagecoach. Getting there could be an adventure, too-between January of 1852 and April of 1853 the San Antonio to Fort Bliss stagecoach was attacked by Indians five times. The mail contract, incidentally, required a minimum speed of 15 miles per day regardless of conditions or circumstances, and a good many mailcarriers lost their contracts over failure to move the mail at the required speed.

Just for fun, it's 140 miles from Seguin to Corpus Christi, and within the past five years a first-class letter mailed in Corpus took 10 days to arrive in Seguin-a speed of 14 miles per day. That would have cost a stagecoach company its mail contract in the 1850s.

James Birch won the first transcontinental mail contract, with a route calling for stages to leave San Antonio, Texas and San Diego, California, on the 9th of each month, to make the run between the two points in 30 days or less. The first mail left San Antonio in a horse's saddlebags, Birch's coaches not having arrived, and was transferred to a coach in Franklin. Birch himself saw the first eastbound coach off in San Diego on July 9, 1856. On August 20 he boarded a steamer for Panama to return to the east to oversee his new mail route. Birch made the four hour trip across the isthmus of Panama by rail, then boarded a luxurious side-wheel steamer with auxiliary sail for New York. The ship was SS Central America, specifically built for the New York to Aspinwall, Panama, run—but, unfortunately, not built for hurricanes. On September 3, 1856, Central America went down in a hurricane off the east coast, taking with her some $175,000,000 (at today's prices) in gold bullion and coinage. She rested some three miles deep in the Atlantic until 1988, when—with the use of a robotic submersible—she was discovered and much of her gold recovered. James Birch perished in the disaster.

When James Birch lost his mailcarrying contract—being entirely too dead to continue working it—John Butterfield was awarded the next transcontinental mail-coach contract. Butterfield knew where the bread was buttered—on the mail. Passengers were a secondary consideration. Instead of using regular heavyweight stagecoaches, Butterfield ordered a special type of coach called the 'Celerity.' A Celerity—the word means 'speed'—was a smaller version of a wood-sided coach with only a skeleton framework for sides above the top of the door and a canvas roof. It was pulled by six to eight horses, and Butterfield chose horses for speed as well as strength and stamina. Butterfield's contract called for moving the mail an average of fifteen miles a day, and he proposed to move it much faster than that.

Butterfield's route was more than 2700 miles long, from Memphis, Tennessee, to the California coast. He capitalized his venture with $2,000,000, which went to buy some 1000 horses, 500 mules, 800 sets of harness, and 500 Celerities and utility wagons. It called for the building of some 200 way-stations, each 12 to 15 miles apart—and something over half the line lay across land totally uninhabited by white people. It also ran through the country of two of the most warlike tribes in North America—the Comanche and the Apache.

A goodly portion of Butterfield's route—and some of the wildest parts of it—lay in Texas. It crossed the Red river near Preston and went generally southwest—more west by south than anything—to El Paso. Loud, you may believe, were the screams of those from north of the Mason-Dixon line, who wanted the line to begin at Independence, Missouri, and end at Sacramento or San Francisco—or to begin at Independence and follow the old Santa Fe trial, crossing only the narrow, virtually uninhabited panhandle in Texas. That the Butterfield route was the most eminently practical one, being devoid of really high mountains or difficult rivers to bridge for most of its length, and being virtually snow-free some ten months out of the year, didn't impress those who saw it as 'a slave-holder's plot.'

To manage his line Butterfield hired a crusty Texan named Ben Ficklen. The almost-ghost town of Ben Ficklen, near San Angelo, is named for him, and he was also the first manager of the Pony Express-he resigned to return to Texas and enter the confederate Army with Texas' secession in 1861. The character of 'Tin Cup' in the recent television series The Young Riders was based—very loosely—on Ben Ficklen.

Butterfield soon had crews out constructing his stage stops every fifteen miles. Few remain in Texas today, but at least three are semi-intact or at least marked. One is the Pine springs stage stop, at the foot of Guadalupe Peak north of Sierra Blanca in Hudspeth County. Water was provided from the springs there. A second was at El Cornudas, between Guadalupe Peak and the Hucco Mountains, still in Hudspeth County. The only surface water there was heavily salted from the salt flats that still line the side of the road, so Butterfield had a well dug. The well is still there and the water in it is still quite sweet and drinkable. A third was Hueco Tanks, a peculiar volcanic formation east of El Paso, just east of the Hueco Mountains.

A portion of an adobe structure which was used by the Butterfield company but is actually much older still stands at Hueco Tanks, which is one of the most unusual water-stops on

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the Butterfield line. The only water at Hueco Tanks is rainwater, caught in literally thousands of tiny catch-basins all through a vast devils' playground of strangely-shaped volcanic rock. Species of birds that are found nowhere else in Texas are found at Hueco Tanks, and the catch-basins, which have been holding water for uncountable millions of years, are home to some tiny fresh-water crustaceans found nowhere else in the world. The caves and rock shelters there have been inhabited, off and on, for perhaps 20,000 years, and rock paintings showing kinship to those much farther west—in Arizona—but little resemblance to those at Texas' more publicized prehistoric art galleries at Paint Rock in Concho county or along the Pecos, may be found there. An indication that the climate in that part of Texas was once considerably cooler had been found at Hueco Tanks-seeds from the pinon pine, found today in the salad bars of fancy restaurants as 'pine nuts,' have been found in ancient kitchen middens at Hueco Tanks. Today the pinon grows only at much higher, cooler altitudes.

Butterfield's stagecoach line across Texas lasted less than three years. With secession in the spring of 1861, the Memphis-based line lost its US mail contract. At approximately the same time, the Pony Express began its run across the northern route favored by the Yankees-from Independence to San Francisco. While it lasted slightly more than a year—until October, 1861, when the first transcontinental telegraph line was completed, it had the distinction, well over a hundred years later, of displaying the historical ignorance of an American vice-president. Albert Gore, in his 'Electronic Information Highway' speech at the beginning of the present administration, stated "The electronic information highway began in 1860, when the telegraph reported the election of President Lincoln to the west coast." In fact, it was that old Texas Ben Ficklen's Pony Express riders who carried the word of Lincoln's election. The transcontinental telegraph was some eleven months away from carrying its first message in November of 1860.

Stagecoaches carried the mail across Texas—at least part of the way—from east to west until 1881, when the first railroad spanned the state from east to west. They continued to carry mail across the northern part of the state until the completion of the Texas & Pacific tracks in the 1890s, and—at first horse or mule drawn, later as large touring automobiles—they carried the mail at least part of the way from north to south across the state until 1921, when at last you could ride a train from Amarillo to Brownsville—a matter of four train-changes and five to six days. As late as World War I, horsedrawn stagecoaches in West Texas and western states were often the only means of public transportation between towns not on railroads.

After World War I the coaches, in part, were replaced by large automobiles, which eventually gave way to highway buses. Even at that, the roads in much of the west were often impassable to automotive travel, and a good many local stage-lines, having replaced most of their Concord-built coaches with motor vehicles, kept a mud wagon and a team of mules for when the roads really got bad. It was not until the 1930s, when Texas' magnificent network of Farm to market roads was constructed, that horsedrawn stagecoaches, as a method of public transportation, finally disappeared from Texas' roads.

The old stagecoach is gone—a memory only, to be seen in movies and occasional parades. But for nearly a hundred years in Texas, if you wanted to get somewhere that wasn't on the railroad and you didn't have your own horse, you went by stagecoach—and in bad weather, you walked most of the way and spent about half your time pushing what you were supposed to be riding in out of the mud.

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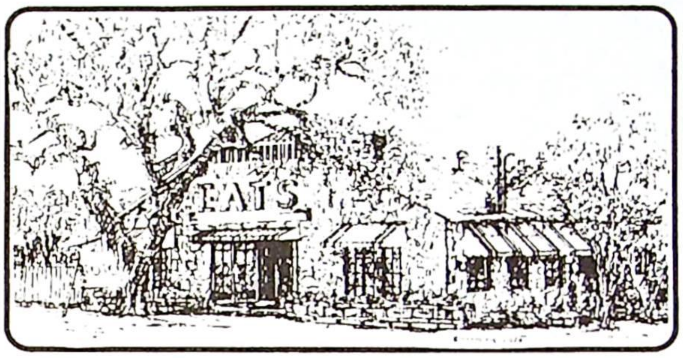

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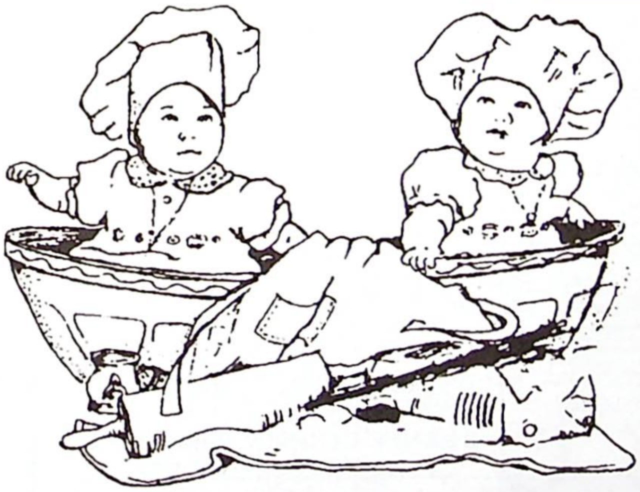

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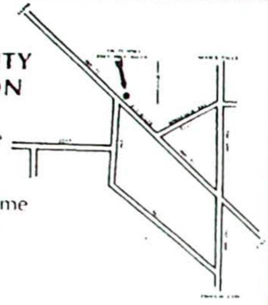

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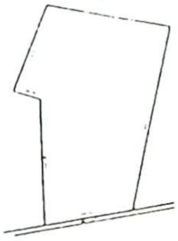

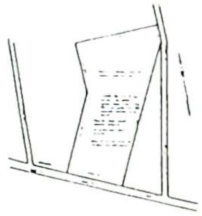

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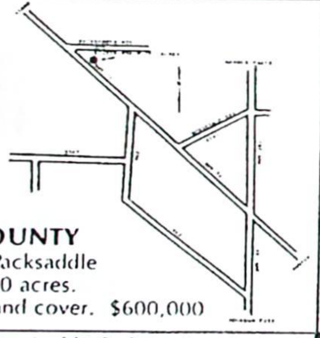

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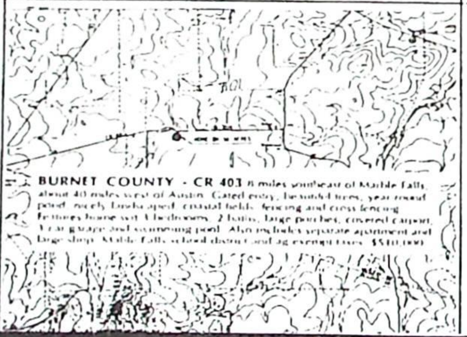

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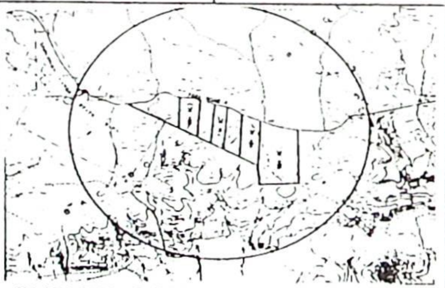

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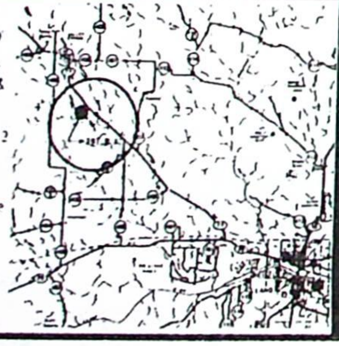

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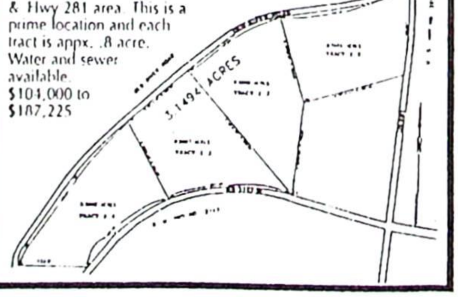

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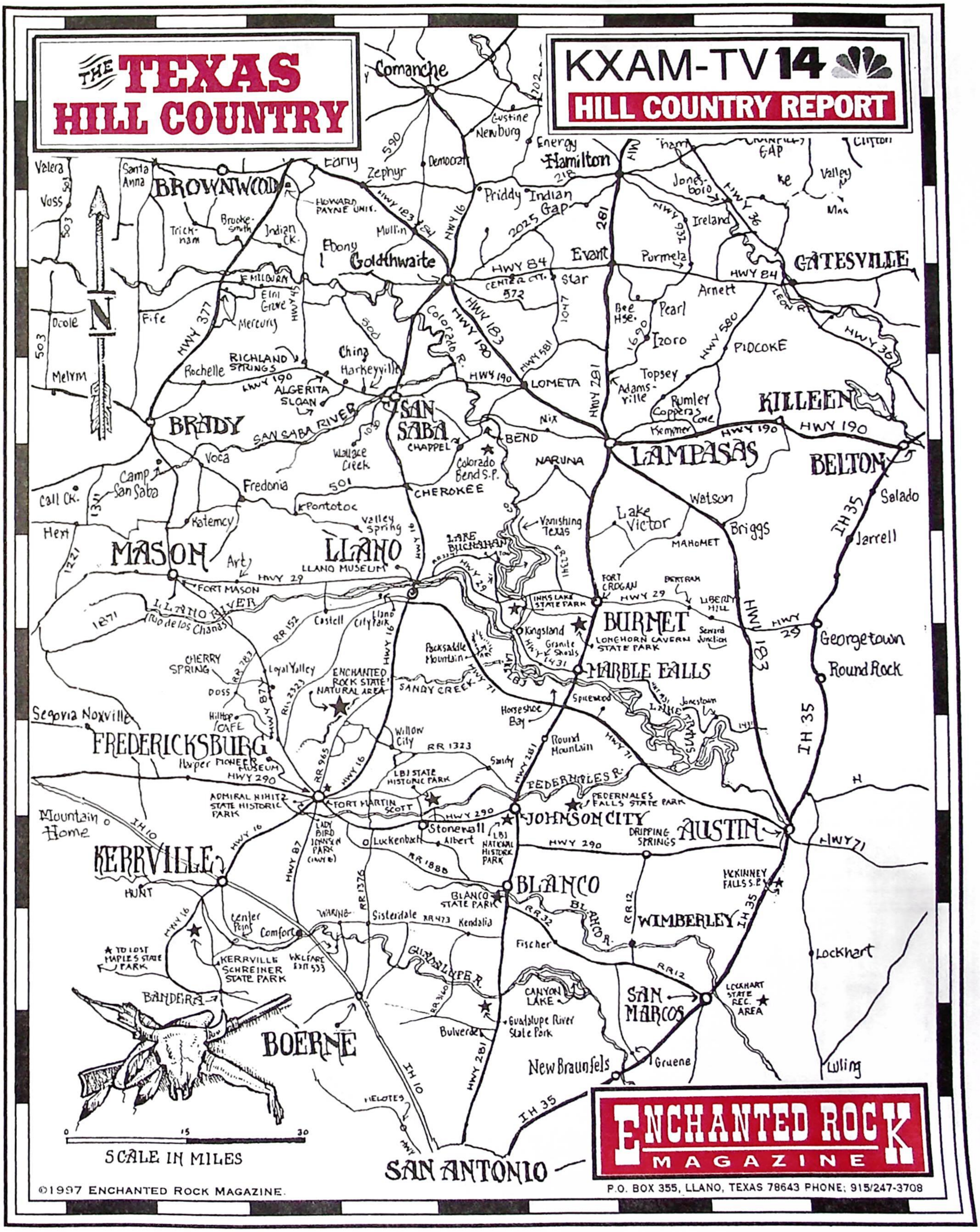

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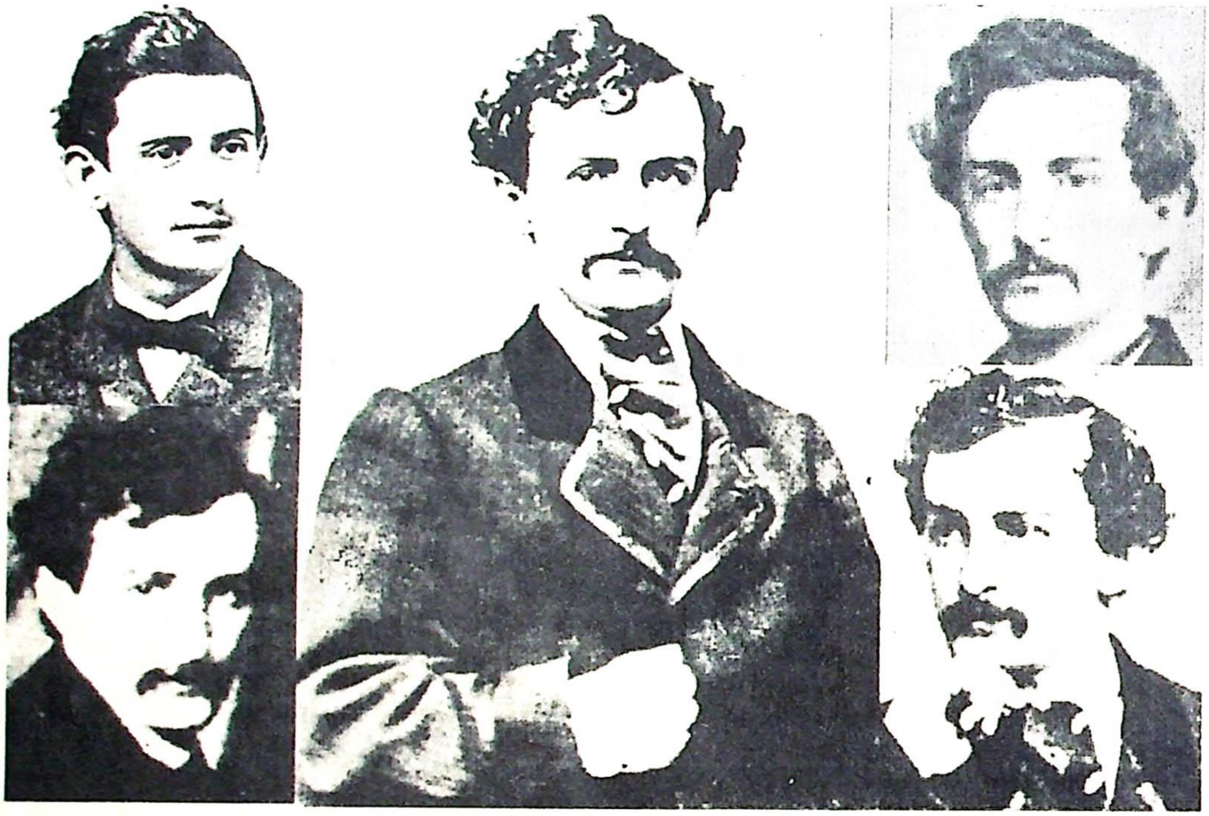
DID LINCOLN'S ASSASSIN HIDE IN TEXAS?



C.F. ECKHARDT

In 1876 a very handsome, black-haired man name John St. Helen, who worked as a barkeep and acted in amateur theatrics in Granbury, Texas, called his friend Finis L. Bates, an attorney, to what St. Helen believed was his deathbed. "My name," he told Bates, "is not John St. Helen. I am John Wilkes Booth. I am the assassin of Abraham Lincoln.

I am indebted to my good friend, Kevin R. Young of San Antonio, for permission to condense for my readers this story, which he wrote for UNSOLVED TEXAS MYSTERIES, a book he and I coauthored with Wallace O. Chariton of Plano. Thanks, Kevin.

According to official history, John Wilkes Booth was cornered in a barn near Culpeper, Virginia, only a few days after the assassination. The barn was set afire to drive him out. Instead, he died of a gunshot wound. Sergeant Boston Corbett claimed to have fired the shot, shooting Booth by aiming between the cracks in the barn wall. Others later claimed Booth shot himself to avoid capture. The corpse was removed to Washington, identified, and quickly buried.

Later, a number of unusual gaps appeared in the official story.

Booth broke his left ankle when he snagged his spur in the bunting draping the Presidential box as he leaped from the box to the stage of Ford's Theater. Dr. Samuel Mudd later testified that he splinted Booth's left ankle. The corpse removed from the barn at Culpepper had a broken right leg.

Enlisted men present when the body was removed from the barn later insisted the corpse they saw had reddish, sandy-colored hair and freckles. Booth had coal-black hair and a clear complexion.

The photograph used to identify the body was not a photo of John Wilkes Booth, but rather a commercially-distributed carte d'visite 'fan photo' of his brother Edwin.

No member of Booth's family was permitted to view or identify the body.

The officer in charge of the pursuit of the assassin was quoted as saying " I intend to have Booth's carcass or a damned good substitute for it." (Italics Kevin's)

While there are many, many more incongruities and anomalies in the official version, these five alone are enough to cast substantial doubt on the 'historical fact' that Booth was run to earth and killed in Culpeper. But is there any evidence—beyond his statement to Finis Bates—that John St. Helen was John Wilkes Booth?

There are three necessary elements for a deathbed statement to be considered legally valid. The person must believe he is going to die. He must make the statement voluntarily. He must die within a reasonable period thereafter, without recovering.

John S. Helen believed he was dying. He made his statement voluntarily. However, he made a full recovery. As a 'deathbed confession,' his statement was legally invalid if he chose, at some later date, to repudiate it. He never repudiated it. Instead, he skipped town.

John S. Helen first appeared in Texas at Glen Rose, about 17 miles south of Granbury, sometime in 1874. Where he came from or who his family was he never said, and he declined to enlighten the curious. He worked as a barkeep and acted in amateur theatrics. He was broodingly handsome, obviously well-educated, well-spoken, gentlemanly of manner—and almost teetotal sober. he was well-liked by the young men and was the object of considerable—though apparently unrequited—affection from numerous young women.

John S. Helen was stone-cold, teetotal sober 364 days out of the year. On one day of every year—April 14—he drank himself into a state of insensibility. April 14 is the anniversary of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

St. Helen remained in Glen Rose about a year. When the impending wedding of a local politician's daughter was announced—a wedding to which a number of important folks, including Army officers and United States marshals, were invited—he abruptly left Glen Rose, never to return. He next surfaced in Granbury.

In Granbury St. Helen again tended bar, drank himself into oblivion on April 14, and participated in amateur theatrics. His knowledge of stagecraft, his stage presence, his impeccable diction and delivery, and obvious familiarity with drama—particularly the plays of Shakespeare—left no doubt in anyone's mind that he had been at one time, and probably for a considerable part of his life, a professional actor—and a very good one.

Shortly after 'confessing' to Bates, St. Helen vanished form Granbury as mysteriously as he'd come. In his rooms Bates found a single-shot derringer' pistol of a type not manufactured until after the assassination. (The pocket pistol marked "H. Deringer Phila.,' which Booth dropped in the presidential box, is now in the Smithsonian.) The pistol was wrapped in the front page of a Washington, D.C. newspaper dated April 15, 1865.

Finis Bates never saw John St. Helen again. In 1906, in Enid, Oklahoma, an alcoholic housepainter calling himself David George claimed, on his deathbed, to be John Wilkes Booth. Bates immediately went to Enid and believed he recognized, in the bloated, sodden corpse of George, his old friend John St. Helen. He claimed the body and had it heavily embalmed, intending—or so it would seem—to preserve it until a positive identification could be made. The process virtually mummified the corpse, and for many years after Bates' death it was a sideshow attraction—The Mummy of John Wilkes Booth, Lincoln's Assassin—at carnivals and circuses. It was still making the circuit as late as the mid-1950s. X-rays of the mummy revealed that George, at some time in his life, suffered a broken left ankle—never properly set.

Was John St. Helen John Wilkes Booth? Was David George John St. Helen?

Kevin points out that the name 'John St. Helen' could be made from Booth's own first name and the anglicized masculine version of Ste. Helena, Napoleon Bonaparte's first isle of exile. 'John St.. Helen,' then, could be a cryptic way of saying 'John the Exile'—and Booth was known to be fond of romantic cryptograms. David and George were the first names of David Herrold and George Atzerodt, two of Booth's known co-conspirators.

More concretely, Kevin had an accomplished artist make a pencil drawing from a well-known, full-face photo of Booth, paying special attention to the shape and lines of the face. He then had the same artist make a pencil drawing from the only known photo of St. Helen—also a full-face pose. The two drawings were then enlarged to identical proportions and printed on semi-transparent paper. When they were superimposed and light was shined through them, they registered precisely. John Wilkes Booth's and John St. Helen's facial features appear to be absolutely identical.

Was John S. Helen/David George—if they were in fact the same person—John Wilkes Booth? A great deal of circumstantial evidence—but little else—points to that possibility. A great deal of evidence—circumstantial, testimonial, and physical—says that the man who died of Boston Corbett's bullet in that barn in Culpeper, Virginia, in April of 1865, whomever he may have been, was assuredly not John Wilkes Booth. If he was not Booth, and there is every indication he was not, then Booth escaped—he was never captured. Where did he go? What did he do?

Did John Wilkes Booth surface briefly in Glen Rose and Granbury, Texas in the 1870s and then die, a drunken wreck, in Enid, Oklahoma, in 1906? Where is the 'mummy?' Although photographs aplenty of it exist, the 'mummy' that was the corpse of David George has not been seen in upwards of forty years. And, though Kevin's story doesn't mention the incident, what was in the twenty-odd pages out of his father's diary Robert Todd Lincoln burned in 1926, shortly before he died—the ones he said "contain concrete evidence of treason on the part of a member of my father's cabinet?" Quien Sabe?

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“THE THANG”

C.F. ECKHARDT

IT IS POLITICALLY INCORRECT THESE DAYS—AND DOWNRIGHT IMPOLITE AS WELL, OR SO WE ARE TOLD—TO USE THE NAME BY WHICH WE CALLED THE ‘THANG.’ BE THAT AS IT MAY, I ONCE ASKED A BLACK MAN WHAT HE, WHEN HE WAS A YOUTH, CALLED THE ‘THANG.’ HE LOOKED AROUND TO MAKE SURE NOBODY WAS LOOKING OR LISTENING, LEANED CLOSE, AND WHISPERED “I DON’T KNOW WHAT YOU WHITE BOYS CALLED ‘EM, BUT WE CALLED ‘EM...” AND THEN I FOUND OUT HE CALLED THE ‘THANG’ THE SAME THING I CALLED IT WHEN I WAS A KID.

The ‘thang’ is sometimes called a ‘slingshot,’ but it isn’t a slingshot. We knew, at least we knew forty-five years ago or so, what a sling shot was. It was two pieces cut off the end of Dad’s trotline, about three feet long each, joined in the middle by a leather ‘pocket.’ You attached one string to your little finger, held the other between thumb and forefinger, put a good-sized ‘smooth slick round river rock’ in the pocket, whirled the apparatus around your head to get it moving, and then released the string between your thumb and forefinger. With a whole lot of practice you might hit a telephone pole one shot out of ten with this contraption, but when you hit that pole, you hit it. Your rock would make a dent as deep as your thumb was wide in the creosoted pine, and if your rock happened to have some irregularities on its surface it would sing when it came out of the pocket. That was a slingshot—probably mankind’s first projectile weapon, also known as ‘the shepherd’s bow.’ The device L’il David used to cold-cock a big, mean dude called Goliath of Gath. Slingshots didn’t have rubber bands on ‘em ‘cause there weren’t any inner tubes around when David let fly. We knew that.

The ‘thang’ was made from a Y-shaped branch of some sort—or, occasionally, a squared-off Y sawed out of the end of an apple box. Properly, I suppose, this Y should be called a ‘stock,’ but we called it a ‘stalk.’ Hunting up a stalk for making a new ‘thang’ was a major operation. For the ‘thang’ to work right, it had to be a perfect capital Y—no off-center, lower-case ‘y’ would do. The stalk had to be at least as big around as your thumb at its smallest point, and it had to be green wood, not dry. Dry wood, dried in an unpredictable manner, might snap on you.

Stalks were religiously searched out and examined, and—at least where I lived—the waxleaf ligustrum hedge, besides furnishing innumerable switches to punish juvenile misbehavior, furnished countless ‘thang’-stalks to misbehave with. Once a stalk was located it was cut out of the hedge or tree, cut off to the proper proportions, and partly peeled of bark. Then two indentations were cut around the upper arms of the Y, about a half a finger’s width below the top.

Once the stalk was prepared, it was off to the fillin’ station for an old inner tube. Red rubber tubes, which were prewar production, I believe, and mostly used in high-pressure tires like those on the Model T, the Model A, and the early-30s Chevrolets, were the best ones. They had a lot of snap in them. Black rubber tubes—which were vulcanized and resisted puncture much better, I understand-were a definite also-ran. They just didn’t have the necessary snap.

After obtaining a tube, you cut away the patched areas—which, by 1944 or so, might be a good portion of the tube— and cut a ‘ring’ out of the tube. Then you cut the ‘ring’ in half at the seam—a raised rib on the inner surface of the tube—and across from the seam. The seam-end you attached to the stalk by laying the band across the top of the Y’s arm and wrapping several layers of white kitestring around it, anchoring the string in the grooves. To the other end you attached a pocket, which you made by cutting the tongue out of an old shoe. This pocket you attached to the ends of the rubber bands with kitestring.

This completed the ‘thang.’ Next, you needed something to shoot in it.

For ‘friendly’ ‘thang’-fights within the neighborhood, the best ammo was green chinaberries. A hard-shot green chinaberry would hurt and send crybabies home in tears, but did no observable permanent damage. They were also remarkably long-ranged, and a well-shot green chinaberry would raise a welt—which we called a 'whelp'—on unprotected skin at ten or twelve yards. Chinaberries were also used to repel dogs and to chase off unwelcome cats.

For more serious business like 'target practice,' which involved breaking a vast number of I'm sure now-highly-collectable bottles, rocks were the appropriate ammo. The ideal rock was about the size of the end-joint of your thumb and as round as possible. Irregularly-shaped rocks tended to 'fly crooked' and do odd things in the air on the way to the target. Rocks were also used in serious 'thang'-fights, against strangers who invaded territory where they 'didn't have no business.' People got hurt in those fights, sometimes seriously, and blood was almost invariably drawn.

For 'hunting'—which was what the 'thang' was actually designed for—the ammo was, for those who could afford it, 'glassies'-glass marbles—or even 'steelies—ball bearings. A powerful 'thang' could drive a steelie half its width into a cedar tree and make it stick there, and a good 'thang' and a pocketful of glassies or steelies in the hands of a good shot insured an at least temporary decline in the 'chee-chee bird' population.

I believe, though I'm not sure, that I was the inventor of the 'thang' shotgun. Others may have tumbled on the trick earlier or later somewhere else, but where I lived I was the first to apply the principle of the scatter-gun to a 'thang.' I cut the palm out of a worn-out leather work glove, sewed a sort of cone-shape from the leather, and attached that as a pocket to a 'thang' with a specially selected, very widespread stalk. I loaded upwards of a dozen Daisy BBs in the cone-shaped pocket, drew back, and let fly.

It worked. Oh, boy, did it work! It wasn't as long-ranged as shooting a glassie or a steelie, but you could do something with the BBs you couldn't do with a one-shot. You could go after-and sometimes actually hit and bring down-birds on the wing. It wasn't long before virtually every back pocket was graced with two 'thangs'—a one-baller with a standard stalk and a 'shotgun' with a wide-armed stalk and a cone-shaped pocket.

Today the 'thang' is commonly referred to as a 'slingshot,' though our British cousins, being more precise in speech than we, call it a 'catapult,' which is a far more accurate description than 'slingshot.' It has been commercialized. "Thangs' with steel stocks, surgical-tubing rubbers, and genuine die-cut split-cowhide leather pockets attached with nylon plugs are sold in almost every hardware and sporting goods store, along with packets of 'ammunition'—quarter-inch and three-eighths-inch glass or steel balls. Organized competitions and 'tournament model' specifications exist.

Yes, I have a Wham-O Wrist Rocket, which—with its powerful surgical-tubing rubbers, scientifically-designed steel-and-plastic stock with a loop over my wrist to prevent the dreaded 'bend-back' that would smack your hand with the rubber, nylon plugs to attach the pocket, and die-cut, scientifically-designed split-cowhide pocket—is not doubt ten or a hundred times 'better' than the 'thangs' I made out of ligustrum branches and red-rubber inner tubes so many years ago. It shoots harder, and it's far more accurate.

It isn't a tenth as much fun, and I don't think it's just the forty-odd intervening years between the two 'thangs' that makes it less fun. Part of the fun of a 'thang' was making it—searching hedges and woods for just exactly the right stalk with just exactly the right Y to it, finding just exactly the right inner tube with just exactly the right snap, and scrounging leather for a pocket. It's much like the difference between a game of workup on a vacant lot with just the neighborhood kids and Little League with umpires and parents.

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THE WAIL OF THE WAMPUS CAT

C.F. ECKHARDT

The words 'wampus cat' usually denote a mythical bugbear or bugaboo used to scare small children and the incredibly credulous. However, for a period of about forty years—the 2910s through the mid-1950s—at least in certain parts of Texas, a 'wampus cat' was something very real. It wasn't an animal—monstrous or otherwise—but a device. It was the Devil's own plaything, specifically designed and operated to scare folks out of their underdrawers.

The story must begin with an ancient Halloween prank call 'tick-tacking.' To tick-tack required a large brass straight pin or piece of thin iron wire, a length of cotton cord of the type used to make trotlines, sail lines, or jug lines for catfish, a cake of beeswax, and-if possible-a fiddle bow. In the absence of a proper fiddle bow, a bow could be constructed from a green stick and tightly-stretched piece of waxed string, or even a thumbnail could be used, but a waxed fiddle bow was the best.

Late in the night or in the wee hours of the morning the victim's house was approached stealthily. The pin or wire, the waxed cord firmly attached, was hooked through a tightly-stretched, latched windowscreen. Then the string was pulled tight and tick-tacking began. The fiddle bow was drawn back and forth across the waxed string, and promptly all sorts of things began to happen.

The tight screen acted as a sounding board, amplifying the sounds of the bow being dragged across the waxed cord. Some of the most unearthly screeches, howls, and moans ever heard by mankind began to echo throughout the house. Since, if the tick-tack was properly done, it was very difficult to pinpoint the exact source of the sounds, the idea that the place was haunted by a very noisy ghost took only a small step in the imagination. Tick-tacking continued for several nights—or only on some nights of the week—or at unpredictable intervals at unpredictable times—reinforced the idea of a haunting. Unless, of course, someone cam into the house and heard the sounds, and the someone had once tick-tacked a window himself.

The wampus cat worked on the same principle as a tick-tack, but it was more complicated and much noisier. The basis for a wampus cat was an empty wooden nail keg and a piece of rawhide.

The nail keg was first soaked and then carefully nailed to make sure it was sturdy. At the same time the rawhide was boiled to soften it and render it stretchable. Once the hide was soft, it was stretched as tightly as possible across the open end of the nailkeg, then tacked and wired in place with baling wire. The device was then set aside so the rawhide could dry, tighten, and get hard. In effect the keg had become a drum—and, in fact, not a bad drum at that. A drum, though, wasn't what was intended.

In the meantime a length of the same sort of cotton trotline twine used for tick-tacking was acquired-a good six or eight feet of it. A 6d or 4d finishing nail was then tied to one end of the twine, the twine tied at the middle of the nail. The twine was heavily waxed.

Finally, once the keg and hide were dry, a small hole was bored in the center of the hide and the finishing nail threaded through it, then pulled up as a gorge, attaching the cord to the rawhide. The wampus cat was ready for action.

When the string was pulled tight and stroked with a fiddle bow—or even scraped with a fingernail—the keg, which acted as a sounding chamber, gave off an unearthly moaning roar like nothing since, perhaps, the cries of dinosaurs—the wail of the wampus cat. Putting the keg in an area that would cause the roar to be amplified and echo—like in a narrow canyon, the outlet of which was in the vicinity of the camp of a group of greenhorn hunters or dudes—has been known to cause grown men to rise a foot or more off camp chairs purely from involuntary muscle contractions.

Depending on circumstances, a wampus cat could be downright unhealthy for its user. Setting up a wampus cat and making it howl near an encampment of greenhorn hunters could—and did, on occasion—bring a regular fusillade from the camp in the general direction of the noises. Most of the shots, of course, were wild, but a high-velocity .270 or .30-06 expanding slug will tear a fair-sized branch off a tree, and getting hit by a falling limb can be painful.

The wail of the wampus cat had its purposes in youth camps. Following a campfire session of ghostly tales ending in one about a mysterious, roaring monster, a couple of pulls of the bow across a wampus cat's string absolutely insured that nobody would venture outside a hutment or tent until well after dawn. A couple of young men with a wampus cat once caused the almost total abandonment of a Girl Scout camp, and a co-ed youth camp that once had trouble with quiet nocturnal visitations between boys' tents and girls' tents put a permanent end to it with a night of wampus-cat wails.

One of the most common places for a wampus cat to wail, at least in the late 1940s and early 1950s, was at a dude ranch. Generally on Saturday night dude ranches held long hayrides, barbecues, songfests, and story-telling sessions—ghost stories, as a rule. One or two of the wranglers would slip away from the fire, wait until the ghost-story session was well under way, and then scrape the string of a previously-positioned wampus cat.

The reaction around the fire-except among the dude wranglers, who were in on the gag-was virtual pandemonium. There were screams and shrieks—mostly female—and female guests promptly wound up in the laps of the first available males-who, if they weren't in on the gag, were usually just as scared as the ladies. For some reason nobody ever bothered to look at the hayride mules, which would have been in a state of panic if a monster of any sort was wandering around. Since the wampus cat was a Saturday-night fixture, they were used to it and kept on eating.

The wampus cat would wail and howl for a while, reducing everyone-except the brave dude wranglers, who were in on the gag-to a state similar to that of jello on a vibrating platform-and then the brave wranglers would produce sixshooters, loaded, of course, with Remington 5-in-1 blanks, move to the edge of the firelight, and 'drive the monster away' with a few well-placed shots. Then, the storytelling session effectively ended, the wranglers would load the wagons with the week's crop of dudes and begin the long, romantic, moonlit ride back to the cabins. Single female guests usually sought out a wrangler for companionship on the ride—which was, of course, the idea behind setting up the wampus cat in the first place.

Wooden nail kegs are kinda rare these days. Rawhide isn't easily come by, either. The proper string is hard to find, and secondhand stores will no longer sell a fiddle bow with most of the hair intact for fifty cents or a dollar. Not many sewing stores stock beeswax cakes any more. I haven't heard the wail of a wampus cat in years. I sorta miss it.

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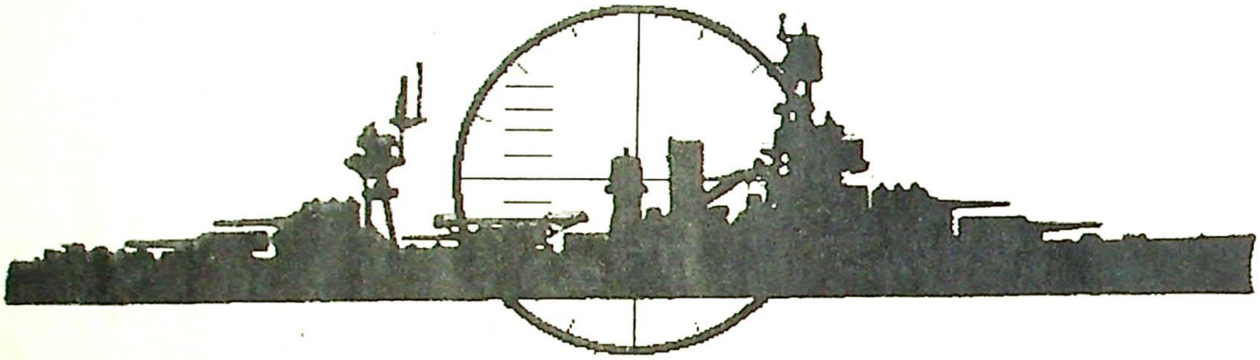
THE KING'S TEXAN AND THE USS TEXAS



C.F. ECKHARDT

DOWN BELOW HOUSTON, PERMANENTLY MOORED, LIES ONE OF THE GREAT RELICS OF AMERICA'S PAST. IT'S THE LAST DREADNAUGHT-TYPE BATTLESHIP STILL EXISTING IN THE WORLD. SHE'S CALLED USS TEXAS.

When the Royal Navy of Great Britain introduced to the world HMS Dreadnaught, surface sea warfare underwent a dramatic change. Dreadnaught was a war machine like no one had ever seen before—although she was big for a battleship of her time (1906), displacing nearly 18,000 tons, she was violently fast— 21 knots at flank speed. Even the best liners on the Liverpool to New York run seldom made over 16 knots. In addition, she was armed to the teeth—ten huge 12-inch guns, twenty-four smaller 12-pounder guns (about 4-inchers), five heavy machine guns, and five below-the-waterline torpedo tubes. Dreadnaught set the world standard for battleships to come.

During the 19th and most of the first half of the 20th century-really until the onset of World War II-the United States Navy was the 'glamour service,' much as the Air Force is today. When World War I began, the entire United States Regular Army consisted of a mere 120,000 officers and men. The thirty-two battleships of the U.S. Navy were crewed by a total of 24,961 officers and men—better than a fifth of the entire strength of the Army, and the Navy had two more battleships under construction, three more projected, 14 heavy cruisers at sea with an average crew of 600, 15 light cruisers with an average crew of 365, 50 destroyers with an average crew of 84 and 12 more under construction, and 45 submarines—not to mention the host of coal colliers, oilers, supply ships, and tenders it took to operate and maintain the fleets.

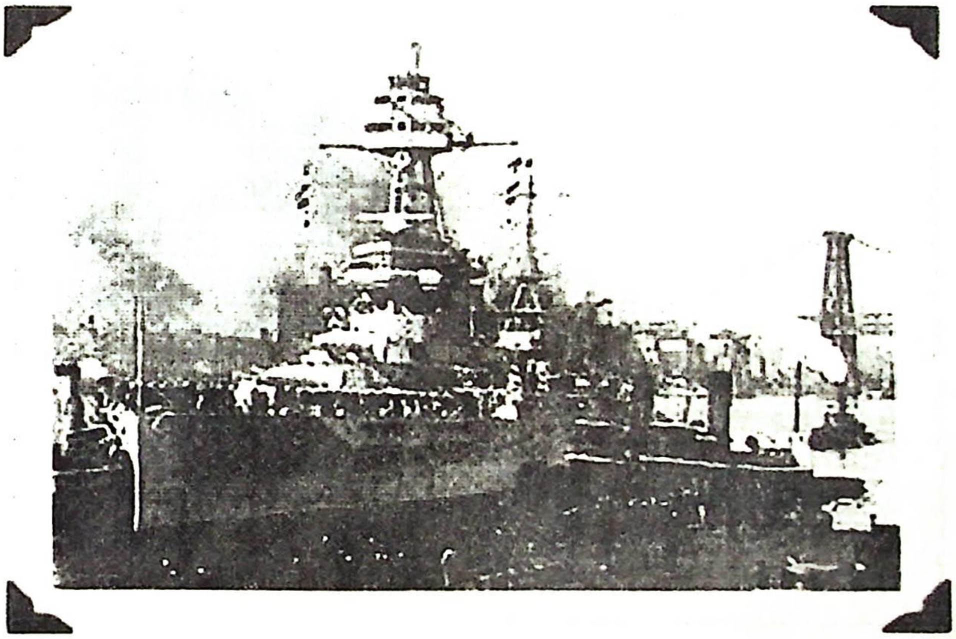
The pride of the fleet was the brand-new-in-1914 USS Texas, type-ship for her class—27,000 tons displacement, a speed of 21 knots, armed with ten 14-inch and 21 5-inch naval rifles, ten heavy machine guns, and four submerged torpedo tubes. She had a crew of 1025, and she and her sister-ship, USS NewYork, of identical specifications, either outran or outgunned anything else afloat. Only the Royal Navy's HMS Agincourt was faster, and Texas and New York had Agincourt outgunned, throwing 14,000 pounds of destruction from their main batteries, as opposed to Agincourt's 11,900.

During the building period of the Texas—1913-1914-Woodrow Wilson was in the White House and the United States Secretary of State was William Jennings Bryan, an acknowledged pacifist. Money was short for building the great ships, in spite of the pride not only the Navy but the entire nation took in them. In order to complete USS Texas, at one point citizens of Texas were asked to contribute. Among other things, "Help build the Texas" drives were held at schools. At one of those a little boy named Archie Ludlow, whose father was a cotton-merchant in Waco, Texas, put his lunch money into the box.

By 1917, when the United States entered World War I, the period of big-ships-slugging-it-out-nose-to-nose sea battles was pretty much over. Texas and her state-named sisters spent most of the war escorting convoys of troops and material across the north Atlantic, and protecting vital installations like the Panama Canal from surprise attack.

After the war ended, Archie Ludlow's dad was offered a position as cotton-factor with his company in Liverpool, England. The family moved to Liverpool, where Archie went to school and learned to be an English schoolboy—instead of football he played rugby, instead of baseball, cricket. If he thought about the ship his lunch money'd helped build, it wasn't often.

Archie grew up in England, met a wonderful girl—he still had a trace of his Texas drawl then, and her brother brought him home to her so she could hear how he talked. They married, and Archie's father-in-law, an intense yachtsman, introduced the Texas boy from the mud flats of the Brazos to the joys of blue-water yachting. Archie took to it like the proverbial duck to water.



Come 1937 and it was pretty obvious that some very bad things were about to happen in Europe—most of them to be caused by a couple of fellers named Mussolini and Hitler. Britain's Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, may have believed in "peace in our time," but the Royal Navy knew better. It issued a call for competent yachtsmen to take an examination for commissions in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve.

This posed a problem for Archie. Though he was resident in England—and had grown up there, and was in effect an Englishman in all but birth—he was still a citizen of the United States. The President of the United States was saying very bad things about what could happen to Americans who chose to join the armed services of other countries—among other things, they could lose their US citizenship. (This applied primarily to The Abraham Lincoln Brigade—a Communist-organized, Communist-led unit recruited in the United States, which fought in the Spanish Civil War for the Spanish Royalists against Francisco Franco's nazi-equipped Falangista. To my knowledge, no volunteer who fought for France, Great Britain, Canada, or China ever lost citizenship. Still, the threat was there.)

England had been good to Archie Ludlow. It was home. All his friends and acquaintances were taking the examination, so the Texas boy took it as well. he passed, and eventually was commissioned Ensign in the RNVR—one of the few Americans, and certainly the only native Texan, ever to be so commissioned. When disaster struck the British Army at Dunkirk, Ensign Archibald Ludlow, RNVR—the King's Texan—was there with his yacht, helping to pick up the survivors and ferry them back to England.

By nine AM Honolulu time, December 7, 1941, the by-now-27-year-old, long-outmoded USS Texas was one of the few battleships the United States still had afloat. As newer, larger ships were built—monsters like Missouri, Wisconsin, Iowa, and New Jersey—the once first-line Texas became, as it's gently expressed in military circles, 'expendable.' She was used primarily for convoy-escort across the North Atlantic—'U-boat alley,' sailors called it—and later for patrol duty around the British Isles.

In the meantime, Ensign Archibald Ludlow, RNVR, had gotten a command of his own—a minesweeper. Just prior to D-Day he had the job of sweeping mines off the Normandy coast. The Germans on the coast didn't appreciate this, and they showed their lack of appreciation by bringing Ensign Ludlow's minesweeper under some very heavy artillery fire. Things looked bad for the King's Texan, and he had to call for help. Help came in a great gray ship with a high, straight, ramming bow—an old First War type. Its massive guns lowered to almost point-blank and roared. The field guns shooting at Ludlow's minesweeper disintegrated in a cloud of smoke, fire and steel. The ship flew the Stars and Stripes.

Ensign Ludlow turned to his signalman, "What ship is that?" he asked. The signalman looked in his identification book. "USS Texas, sir," he replied.

Texas' active combat career effectively ended after D-Day, but as an 'expendable' ship she was ordered to provide close support to the troops on Omaha and Utah beaches. her ten big 14s owned the real estate for 20 miles inland. Nothing moved that was seen and reported to Texas' fire control, that didn't go up in a mass of fire, smoke, and steel.

After the war ended, the old Texas was scheduled for destruction—she would be used as a target ship, or would be broken up for scrap. a massive effort on the part of the Texas congressional delegation saved her, and she was brought home to Texas, to be permanently moored near the San Jacinto battleground. Over the years she deteriorated badly, but today—after a massive restoration—she's once more the proud ship she was, and the last of her breed.

Archie Ludlow eventually cam home to Texas, too—bringing the girl he married. he made his home in Seguin. His advanced age—he was past ninety-made it impossible for him to visit his old friend, but until he died the King's Texas kept a special place in his heart for the old Texas.

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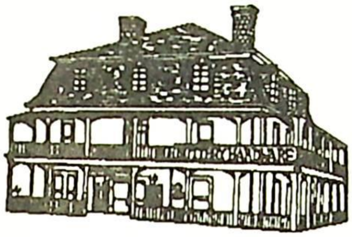

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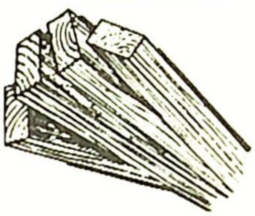

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