

Old Gainesville lives on in memories

LLANO COUNTY - When Kingsland started to develop in the 1800s, a small settlement named Gainesville was already in existence. It was located across the Llano River, having grown up along both sides of a rutty, narrow dirt road today called Slab Road (CR 307), which runs across the river and south toward Hwy. 71.

In the book, "Llano, Gem of the Hill Country: Revisited by Wilburn Oatman Sr." and edited posthumously by Wilburn Oatman Jr. and granddaughter Sarah Oatman Franklin, the senior Oatman writes that Gainesville was "a county village," that it was located "about eight to 10 miles west of Kingsland." The drive through the peaceful area is a visual treat, evoking pleasant nostalgia.

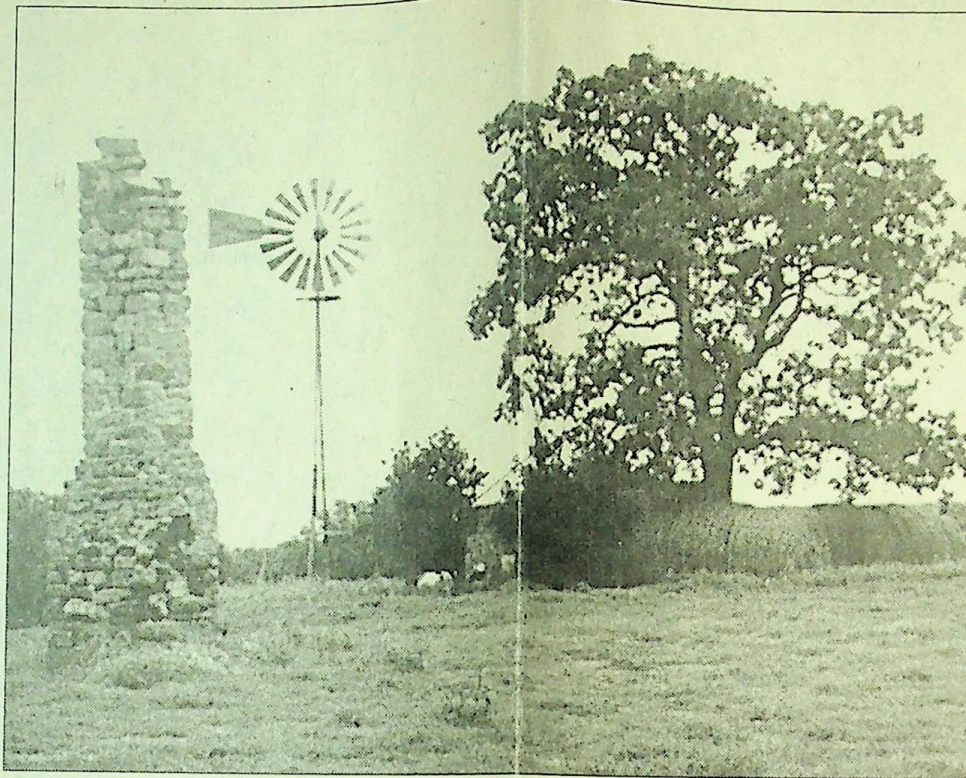
One-dipper school house

"Another year, we had a teacher fresh out of college who came from out of the county. She had no place to stay, so she stayed with the families of the kids she taught. There were only three families with kids going to school, so they decided to let her stay two months at each place. There was only six months of school back then. She never lasted through the first two months. I believe she was staying with the Frank Moore family. Anyway, they woke up one morning and she was gone. They traced her down somehow and when they found her, she told them that she wasn't going to live in the country another minute, because she was afraid of the hoot owls. So they moved us to the Kingsland school, and we finished the year there."

Recalling other details concerning the Gainesville school, Andy says the teacher kept a large pail of drinking water on her desk, and everyone drank from the same dipper, thinking nothing of it. And to keep warm on particularly cold days, the students would scoot their wooden desks up close to a large potbelied wood stove which sat in the middle of the room. The teacher would stand near the stove and teach them.

The Center of Gainesville

Gainesville, "proper" was situated on both sides of Slab Road approximately midway between the Llano River and Hwy. 71. Still standing today in this central "spot in the road" is the wooden clapboard home of the late L. L. Long,



An old chimney is all that remains of this Old Gainesville homestead

Dale Fry

built in 1905. With a wooden porch stretching across the entire front, it is owned today by Long's daughter, Patricia Holland, who, along with her husband Bob, keeps it in great condition. Directly across from this house on the west side of the road sat the general store and post office, neither of which no longer exist. Some 100 yards east of the house was a cotton gin and, next that was a well. The gin is gone, but one can still discern the presence of the well, even though it's caved in.

In front of the house and up the road a short distance toward the Slab stands a lone rock chimney and a windmill in a neat pasture to the left, the only objects which remain of what locals today refer to as "the old Durwood Long place" - or "the old Wendell place." (Both men lived there at different times.) Across the road from this chimney is a U.S. Geological Survey Marker. Smith says the Gainesville School was located about 25 to 30 feet west of this present day marker.

First Post Office in 1873

According to Oatman's history of Llano County, the first post office in Gainesville opened on March 17, 1873, with John D. Duncan named as its Postmaster. Three years later, on May 11, 1876, the post office discontinued its service for reasons unknown, then, just 15 days later on May 26, reopened its doors, introducing new Postmaster Luke A. Moore, the grandfather of Jim Moore, who today lives on Luke's ranch which fronts on Hwy.71, not far from old Gainesville. Then, in 1888, the post office closed its doors for the last time. During those years, others Postmasters included William Long, William M. Long, Thomas Paschall and William A. Starr.

Andy Smith adds an interesting bit of information concerning the post office: "One day I was looking around on my property (where the rock chimney stands today) at an old barn that's falling in, and I noticed up in the ceiling a board with the words "Gainesville Post

Part two of a two-part series

Office" painted on it. So, apparently someone tore the post office down after it closed and used the lumber to build the barn. I don't know - I'm just speculating."

Located also in the Gainesville area is the old Walter Hiram Ligon home, an architecturally unusual building sitting just east of Slab Road, perhaps three-quarters of a mile south of the Long house. Today, Peggy Tatsch, widow of Hiram's son, the late Clayton Stribling "Happy" Ligon, owns the property.

Packsaddle Mountain battle vet

Dewey Baker, who with his wife Sally Smith Baker, lives on another part of the Smith Ranch today, tells an interesting story in connection with E.D. Harrington, who fought in the famous Packsaddle Mountain Indian battle a short distance away when he was a boy of 16.

"An old man by the name of E. D. Harrington, who was only 16 when he fought in the Packsaddle Mountain Indian battle, the youngest one to fight, came here in the 1940s when he was 90 and wanted to borrow a horse to go up on Packsaddle and look at the old battle site," he says. "Sally's daddy didn't want to, but he loaned him the horse. The old man came back after awhile and said nothing looked the same; that he didn't recognize anything up there. He told me that back during that time, there were rolling hills of grass with pecan trees all through this area and along the Llano River and the creeks. I don't know where Harrington lived at the time of his visit, but I know he was kin to J.W. Smith in Johnson City. He was no kin to Sally's daddy. I think he died right after that. I'm just assuming that."

Today, the original ranches still in existence and operated by their heirs or new owners in the Gainesville area are as follows: the Walter Hiram Ligon ranch, by Peggy Tatsch; the Isaac Ray Smith Ranch, by Andy Smith, Tooter Smith Meeks and Sally Smith Baker; the Jim Long ranch, by Joe B. Long; the Henry Long ranch, by Patricia Long