

Amonett Family Newsletter  
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By Glen Amonett

I recently took a book from the shelf that I meant to read long ago. It was written by Douglas MacArthur, a military man whose name is very familiar to my generation. It was in his command that we served in the Pacific during World War II. The General spent most of a lifetime in the Philippine Islands. As a young officer, he stayed as much as ten years at a time over there between visits to the Mainland USA. Just as the Philippine Islands and the Pacific influenced the career of the General, so a place and a time can influence the life of an average citizen.

Many of us share the heritage of a West Texas farm. Farming was much different from today, but the time, and place, and activities are our heritage.

Even the old Indian Chief mentioned in this letter felt similarly when he returned to Roaring Springs. His career too, was shaped by a time and a place, and activities that preceded us in this area.

I hope you enjoy this visit to the area of our youth.

Do most of you remember the old homestead in Motley County? Well, buckle your seat belts, because we are going to return to that old farm. It is only 80 miles away as the crow flies, but in memory it is a long long trail A-winding.

This trip won't be like our first arrival, when Granddad and Grandmother arrived in 1926. At that time the farm had just been broken out of native pasture, and Granddad was 52 years old, with Grandmother and three kids still at home, and accompanied by three married sons with their own families in loaded wagons. We were practically a wagon train by ourselves, in coming up from Hamlin, with four loaded wagons. We made the trip in two days. (I was a babe-in-arms at that time). That was fast travel for wagons, and must have required long days on the road, with those mules clopping along before daylight and until after dark to average about sixty miles per day. The roads were not paved then, and we were on the road only one night. One time my Dad showed me the trees where we camped overnight. It was a few miles southeast of Spur and the trees are still there. Getting an early start when traveling continued to be a habit with my Dad. Years later we would be on the road long before daylight even when traveling in modern vehicles.

Let's take a look at the colorful history of the area that we were moving into. It had been a favorite hunting ground of the Indians. Wild game was plentiful in the early days. There was good grass for Indian horses and adequate firewood for their campfires. A dependable supply of water was available in the springs along the caprock, and in the rivers they could dig a hole in a minute that would fill with drinking water. Reports were that there were always Indian camps near the running streams at Roaring Springs and Quitaque. Our new home was between these sites.

Indian relics used to be abundant in the area. Some collectors have hundreds of them. Near Roaring Springs are frequent holes in the rock where Indians ground their corn. The Comanche tribe was dominant in West Texas. Bands of that tribe raided far and wide across the area. One band, with the aid of Kiowas, raided Fort Parker in East Texas, in Limestone County. They captured a young white girl, Cynthia Ann Parker, and she grew up among the Indians. The year was 1836. The Indian raiding party returned to West Texas after the capture of Cynthia Ann, and she grew up with the Indians in our area (long before we arrived). Their other favorite hunting area was near a natural lake in Lynn County. When mature, Cynthia married the Indian Chief Pete Nocona. He has a colorful history, too.

A company of Texas Rangers surprised Pete's little band near the confluence of two branches of the Pease River, in our area. The Indian band included women and children and they scattered like a covey of quail. The Rangers rode through the bushes looking for the Indians. Pete sprang from the bushes and pulled the Ranger Captain off his horse. In the knife fight that followed Pete lost, but a town near Wichita Falls is named for him. The town is Nocona, Texas.

Some time later the Kohadi band of Comanche's were well known for their frequent skirmishes with the US Army. The Chief of the Kohadis was Quanah Parker, son of Cynthia Ann and Chief Pete Nocona. That band was in the battle of Adobe Walls near Amarillo and several others. After they lost the early morning battle in Palo Duro Canyon with Mackenzie's Raiders, a cavalry unit, the Indian horses were shot and the Indians made to walk to an Oklahoma reservation. Fourteen hundred Indian horses were killed after that skirmish and the Indians were never again permitted to accumulate significant numbers of horses.

Another contributing factor to ending the Indian era was the slaughter of the millions of buffalo across western states in the 1880's. The buffalo provided the Indian with food, shelter and clothing. Without a readily available food supply, and without horses, the Indian era was over. An Indian on foot was not a problem.

Big ranches, covering millions of acres, followed the Indian era and preceded farming in our area. A few ranches are still big, but after the turn of the century came the farmer, and much of the better land was put into cultivation.

In 1911 as an old man chief Quanah Parker returned to Roaring Springs to see what the white man had done to his former territory. By then it was a land of small farms. He made a speech at a weekend gathering on the street in Roaring Springs. He said the white man had destroyed forever the fine hunting ground of the Indian. I understand that our old neighbor Earnest Fisher was there. A town near Oklahoma is named for the Old chief (Quanah, Texas).

Near Quitaque, in Indian days was a valley with abundant grass and adequate water that was made famous by the Comancheros, or the Indian Traders, as they were known. The valley was a meeting place for the Indians and the traders. The Indians often possessed stolen livestock, merchandise or captive women and children that they would trade for most anything of value. That area was known as Valle De Lagrinas (Valley of Tears) because the women and children often went to different traders.

The Comancheros were mostly from New Mexico and usually were Mexican or part Mexican and brought their trading goods from as far away as Santa Fe, a week's travel by wagon or cart.

Let's get back to details about the family. There were only two houses on the Motley County farm in 1926, so Granddad built two more houses for Willis and Posy. They were newly married and in their early twenties. After a few years they returned to the Haskell and Hamlin area where they had married. Willis farmed the same place down there for more than thirty years. About 1937, Posy and Jessie moved to Crosby County to the farm where Gaylon and Margaret lived.

A number of years later Clyde and Juanita started their married life in one of the houses Granddad built.

One of those houses was moved near Granddaddy's house, and feed for the milk cows was kept in it. Clyde and Shorty used to do the milking about sundown each day. As they went to do the milking, they would get a bucket of cow feed from that house for the milk cows. Some boys thought it would be fun to play a prank on them and built a shelf on the door at the top and put a bucket of water on it, with the bail tied to the wall above the door. When the door was opened the water would spill on anyone coming in. - remember that Bruce? - We overlooked one thing. Grandmother kept her chicken feed in that house also, and she went to feed the chickens before milking time. Guess who was doused with that bucket of water? As she was telling my mother about it, she said that she got - "wet as a dog-".

Farm equipment was small in the early years in Motley County, and there was plenty of work for everybody. Most equipment was single row at first and moved at the speed of a span of mules. Harvest wasn't fast either, because cotton was harvested a sackful at a time. Maize was hand harvested with a pocketknife and a wagon and team. Nowadays big eight row equipment moves across the field in a hurry.

A good rain up here gave me the time to make this return visit to Motley County. The present owner isn't like old Doc Pardue, who owned the farm near Hamlin as well as the new farm in Motley County. The present owner prefers that nobody - especially hunters - roam the area. He lives in Matador, so I figured nobody would know when I visited our old home place. I got stuck down there, so my visit didn't go unnoticed. I went in from the West, over the road that we followed many times when we attended White Star School, which was also the community church house. Many of us started school there. We provided our own transportation at that time and rode horses several years. Granddad was a trustee then, and later my Dad (Leo) became a trustee.

Some of us who attended White Star School were Earlene, Clyde, Shorty, Derwood, Kay, Gloria, Ladelle, John Thomas, Dane, myself, Dorothy Lane, and maybe Nelda, Deloyce, and Gerald. White Star closed its doors in 1936 when we went to White Flat schools for a year. In 1937, White Star consolidated with Flomot and we had a large school a few years. Dwindling enrollment caused by a declining farm population caused many school closings. There is only one school in the County now, at Matador. There was at least a half dozen schools there in the 30's. Flomot students attend Valley View, a fairly new rural school in Hall County between Quitaque and Turkey. Neither of those towns have a school, and their students attend Valley View.

I entered the old homestead where Willis's house used to be, after going through a gate or two, and drove along the edge of the field by the pasture. It was early summer and there was a crop of young maize on the big field. It used to seem bigger.

I parked in front of Granddaddy's house and walked around the yard. Falling Chinaberries have made a thicket under the Chinaberry tree. In 1929 Clyde and Shorty brought that tree and a number of others from the pasture and set them around the houses. A cottonwood tree in our yard did well. It is big, but has a few dead limbs. Some mesquite trees have come up in the yard and are doing well but the yard isn't crowded. As I walked around the house, a rattlesnake hustled to get under the house. That's probably the first time he had been disturbed in some time. As you remember, we had an occasional rattler around there.

The smokehouse is gone; the chicken houses are gone, as well as the garage, which we called the car shed. I went into the house, which hasn't changed much on the outside. It is still strong and durable and erect. After lightning hit the house in 1938, Granddad put a metal roof over the shingles and it is still good. A wall has been added in the living room, so it's smaller. It was a fairly large living room in the old days. When there was lots of company several families could visit while a domino or "42" game was going on, and over at the side somebody might be getting a haircut. Several good barbers were in the family. The barber tools were not electric. We didn't have electricity except for Granddaddy's wind charger. It provided lighting and radio.

The house had some hay in it, and there were cattle in the pasture. It doesn't do justice to the old house to use it for hay storage. The kitchen hasn't changed much, except that there is furniture in it. The little room is still there, but with hay on the floor I was looking carefully to see that no snakes had come inside. The east room was about the same as always.

I walked out to the "well", as we used to call the windmill. The tower for the old overhead tank is still there but the windmill has been moved. It is now in the cow pasture west of the barn. I went out there to get a drink. It's good water, but I liked it better where it was.

The milking pens and horse lots are gone. The fencing has been changed, but the barn is still there. It's in fair condition, considering that we moved away fifty years ago in January. Granddad moved a few years later when he bought the farm in Floyd County.

There is a trace of the old stack lot where stacks of winter feed were much bigger than the barn. No saddles hang in the old barn now, and there is only a part of the harness racks under the shed. There are no mule tracks along the turn row where Beck and Kate used to turn when the crop was young, and there are no wagon tracks along the road where our wagons used to go, with cotton rounded above the sideboards.

From the barn I walked down in the pasture to look for familiar landmarks. In the mesquite flat near the barn there aren't many trees. They have got rid of most of the trees in the little pasture.

The big pasture was more like it used to be, except the creek is filling in. Conservation dams upstream have stopped the drainage, and the creek is so narrow that I can step across it. Even the Pease River is covered with trees, mostly salt cedar, when it used to have a sand bottom more than a hundred yards wide, with no water usually.

The two big cottonwood trees in the middle of the creek near the old spring are still there. I used to walk under the bottom limb. Now the creek has filled in until that limb is partly covered with sand. The old spring water hole has filled in. A new water hole about a quarter mile west has been dug and it seeps full of water for the cattle when they are in that pasture.

The wild plum thickets are still there, but I've been going to Earl's place for plums for years. Earl sold his place. The new owner sprayed that whole pasture to kill the trees so the grass would do better. We found some plums near the river that the spray missed.

From the spring, I headed on back toward the house. The new ground that was broken out after we moved there was too sandy to farm and was turned back to pasture. That area is now covered with fully-grown mesquite trees and grass. Only a few of us would know that it was once a cultivated field.

When I got back to the pick-up, I drove over to the other house, which is the first home I remember. It hasn't fared so well. On a previous visit about ten years ago it was standing erect. Not so this time. It was leaning badly and it seemed that one more windstorm would flatten it. By now I'm sure it has gone down. The extra room that we added on the back was holding up better. That room was about ten by twenty feet, and the cost of lumber and roofing and doors was only \$50.00.

The big hackberry tree fell many years ago while Bud and Cordie still lived there. That was the biggest hackberry tree that I've ever seen. We youngsters spent a large part of the summer in the old tree. All my cousins became great tree climbers there.

I got back in the pick-up and headed east along the old turn row. That was a mistake. There is a different route now. Only tractors use the old turn row. Water runs down the old turn row and rain had soaked it and washed in loose sand. My pickup dropped into the sand like there was no bottom. There was no way that I could get out without a tractor, and there was none on the place. There is no neighbor on the Garrett place, or the Fisher place, or where Nelson Hunt lived. I had seen Mary Ellen (Dude) Barton a few years earlier so I headed for her place, nearly two miles away across the river. She was plowing some young maize near the

house. When her parents died, she bought most of the land from the other kids. She was agreeable to help me out, and we got her other tractor at the house. On our way to my pick-up, I noticed a big gravel pit near where Uncle Marvin and Aunt Myrta lived. I wonder where they used so much gravel. Perhaps it was hauled to Plainview; that's about fifty miles.

Dude pulled out my pick-up easily but we left some deep tracks. There is a new plum thicket on the land nearby that was a field. They were real good ones and we picked a couple of gallons. Dude still chews tobacco. A few years ago she was nominated and installed in the Cowgirl Hall of Fame in Hereford as an outstanding West Texas Cowgirl. She does most of her ranch work and most farm work as well.

It was a fine trip down to the old home place. For my first fourteen years that was home. It was new land when we went there in 1926, and it produced good crops of cotton maize and cattle. That was home to a lot of us in the old days.

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