

BOSQUE

LETTER

Summer 2009

Bosque County People of Note

Jacob De Cordova

If you travel to almost any courthouse in Texas and search the early property records, you are bound to find the name Jacob De Cordova. He became the most prominent developer and promoter in Texas, owning at one time one million acres. The headline of the Waco Tribune-Herald dated September 16, 1956 states "De Cordova Sold Texas to World", which was near true as Mr De Cordova had traveled to New Orleans, Philadelphia, New York and England, extolling the bounty and beauty of this new frontier.

Jacob De Cordova was born in Jamaica, on June 6, 1808, son of a coffee merchant. His mother died at his birth, so he was sent to England to be raised by an aunt. Around 1820 he moved to Philadelphia, then came to New Orleans in 1836, and began to ship supplies to Texas. His first visit to Texas was to install members in the Odd Fellows Lodge, the first established outside the United States. He settled in Texas in 1839, and served as a representative to the Second Legislature in 1847.

At this time, Mr De Cordova began to travel throughout the state, buying land, surveying and mapping. The *Map of the State of Texas* was compiled in 1849 by Mr De Cordova and Robert Crezbaur. Books written by him include: *The Texas Immigrant and Traveler's Guide Book* and *Texas, Her Resources and Her Public Men*. He and his brother owned the largest land agency in the Southwest, and they published the *Texas Herald* and *Southwest American* newspapers. On one of his trips north, he became acquainted with Richard Kimball from New York. De Cordova became the agent for Mr Kimball, buying approximately 8500 acres, which stretched from south of present day Brazos Point to south of Kopperl, along the Brazos River (Deed records, Vol D page 453). In 1850, the English settlement of Kent was established from part of

this land, near the present location of Indian Lodge. This settlement failed miserably, however, not long after that the community of Kimball was established, which flourished until the railroad was built to the south. Rebecca De Cordova insisted that church and school and public sites in Kimball were donated.

Jacob and his wife Rebecca traveled widely and had many homes, but after the War Between the States Mr De Cordova was in financial trouble, so they settled near the home of Richard Kimball at Kimball Bend. At this time Jacob began to develop a grand plan for a hydro-generated cotton spinning mill, however he died before he could complete the project. Rebecca and Jacob were buried in the Kimball Cemetery, but were moved to the Texas State Cemetery in June of 1935, where they rest with the honor they both earned.

Music, Literature and Arts

John A Lomax

1867-1947

John Lomax was born in Mississippi, and was the age of two when his family migrated west by covered wagon, and settled along the Bosque, 1869. At an early age, he was fascinated by the natural rhythms of everyday things, such as churning butter, the gristmill, the river, and cattle. He became attached to a young bond servant called Nat, who entertained little Johnny with shuffles and hand slaps as they did the chores, and became the star of the *Lomax Circus Extraordinary*. In turn, John taught Nat to read. The songs the cowboys sang in the evening to calm the cattle was a driving force for John's life-long devotion to collecting the songs of the trail, and later delta blues, jazz and many other forms of music. He struggled for many years to have anyone notice his collection of these songs. Old cowboys didn't care anymore, and music teachers and experts were interested in more classical formats. John taught at A & M, and the University of Texas, where he was fired by Governor Ferguson, and then went on to Harvard to get his masters. He eventually got a fellowship grant, and published in 1910 his first collection, "Cowboy Songs". The book was dedicated to President Theodore Roosevelt, who wrote the forward;

"Dear Mr Lomax,

You have done a work emphatically worth doing and one which should appeal to the people of all our country, but particularly to the people of the west and southwest. Your subject is not only exceedingly interesting to the student of literature, but also to the student of the general history of the west. There is something very curious in the reproductions here on this new continent of essentially the conditions of ballad growth which obtained in medieval England; including, by the way, sympathy for the outlaw, Jesse James taking the place of Robin Hood. Under modern conditions

however, the native ballad is killed by competition with the music hall songs; the cowboys becoming ashamed to sing the crude homespun ballads in view of which Owen Wister calls the "ill-smelling salon cleverness" of the far less interesting compositions of the music-hall singers. It is therefore a work of real importance to preserve permanently this unwritten ballad literature of the back country and the frontier.

With all good wishes, I am very truly yours, Theodore Roosevelt"

He is most famous for putting to music the following old cowboy ballads: "Home on the Range", "The Old Chisholm Trail", "Get Along Little Doggie", "Jesse James" and "The Streets of Laredo".

The following is a partial transcription of Chapter One, "Boyhood in Bosque", from the autobiography *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*:

"Our home was on the big road north of Meridian....along this road traveled settlers in covered wagons, herds of horses, cattle and sheep, and many men on horseback.....I hunted and fished, went in swimming, and lived with my kind-Frank and Tom Gandy, Joe and Harvey Francis, Billy Dysart, Sherman Graves and John Hornsby.

Frank Gandy lived on a high bluff on the opposite side of the Bosque from our farm. He and I developed a long-distance speaking code or call of recognition which we shouted to each other back and forth across the river.

Before the soil from cultivated fields sealed up the wayside springs...the Bosque River was a beautiful stream. In those days it ran clear and clean down a valley screened in by chains of cedar-clad hills. Along its banks grew overhanging willows, sycamores, cottonwoods, elm, hackberry and other trees. From some high point a traveler, seeing the ribbon of green that fringed the stream, named it Bosque, which means wooded. And as I galloped my pony, Selim, over unfenced meadows, carpeted with wild flowers, the beauty of the region grew into my soul.

In July and August, when it was hot and the crops were laid by, the churches, especially the Methodist Church, would hold "camp meetings", open air services under brush arbors. Zealous Methodists would grudgingly admit that a person could get to Heaven without joining that church, but it was mighty risky. Our camp grounds were located at Spring Creek, ten miles over the mountain from where we lived. The permanent improvements for a place of worship consisted of forked posts set into the ground connecting crisscross poles over the top, on which each year were spread freshly cut branches. The seats were puncheons (split logs resting on log pegs) or planks laid across the logs. A dry goods box often served as a pulpit, surrounded by the mourners' benches

where the penitents came at the urging of the preacher to be prayed and sung over as their friends whispered words of instruction and advice.

The campers-often entire families, with their dogs, horses, mules and chickens-drove in from many miles around, and camped in open clearings or under live-oaks. Usually a camp meeting lasted eight or ten days, through two consecutive Sundays. During this time the women cooked over campfires and served meals on makeshift tables....

Life in Bosque was hard-both work and play. Religion was of the hell and damnation brand. Against this background of ideas my father and mother must have worked out the rigid rules of conduct they imposed on their children....we never played games on Sunday, not even marbles....we could pick up pecans that had fallen, but we could not climb trees and shake more down. We couldn't pull out a catfish from a set hook....nor could we swim in the silvery Bosque.

Throughout the week we were busy at work on the farm, so our free time for recreation was scant. Sometimes we got Saturday off for swimming or pecan gathering. But the winter nights were long....each family had its stock of riddles and rhymes. Groups musically inclined sang songs and swapped stories with each other.

The tournaments (everybody called them toonaments) of the Texas cowboys helped crystallize my interest in their songs. The six-foot lances, carried by riders at top speed, were not pointed at an enemy, but at five small rings hanging from the arms of the upright posts strung fifty yards apart along a track two hundred yards in length. Each "knight" rode down the track three times, and a perfect score meant that the rider must thread on his lance all fifteen rings, and take no more than twelve seconds for each ride. The prizes were three wreaths of prairie flowers which would be worn proudly by the chosen ladies.

At the end of a large glade stood the judges' platform where later in the evening the dance would be held. The rough uprights were wrapped in gaily colored bunting, and flags fluttered overhead. Men and women-the women on sidesaddles with long riding skirts of flashing colors nearly sweeping the ground-rode singly or in pairs across the field. Scattered among them were the contending knights, broad ribbon sashes over one shoulder, fastened with a rosette on the opposite side at the point of the hip, just below the waistline. There the two bands of ribbon crossed, each one ending in streamers tipped with gold or silver fringe. Feather plumes were arched along their hat brims, plumes either snatched from protesting white ganders or peafowls or borrowed from girls. The crowd converged at the grandstand near where the tracks began.

The ten contestants on their gaily decorated and prancing horses filed singly before the judges stand and were introduced by the master of ceremonies, Judge James Gillette, who stood by the Queen of the Jousts and her ladies-in-waiting.....I present to you Ed Nichols, the Knight of the Silver Cross.

Ed touched his pony's rein. The horse rose on its hind legs, stood for a moment almost perpendicular, dropped to its feet, plunged forward for several bounds, whirled and faced the announcer, then lowered its nose slowly to the ground in a bow.....

Each knight as his name was called curvetted his horse or executed some caracole, no two alike, and rode into line with Ed Nichols. They were:

Asa Gary, Knight of Bosque County
George Scrutchfield, Knight of the Golden Spur
Johnny Rundell, Knight of the Lost Cause
Sam Russell, Knight of the Southern Cross
Jeff Hanna, Knight of the Lone Star
Otto Nelson, Knight of the Green Valley
Frank Hornbuckle, Knight of Double Mountain
Bob Hanna, Knight of the Slim Chance

As the last name was called, Ed Nichols swung his horse to the end of the track, leaned over as he touched his plunging horse with his spurs. He darted forward. By the time he reached the first overhanging ring the lance point was steady and the first ring clicked as it was strung on the lance and struck against the guard just in front of where Ed's hand clasped the shaft. In twice as many seconds the five rings were on Ed's lance....Bob Hanna took all five rings...and was cheered as the champion. Frank Hornbuckle was next, with Ed Nichols having the best time. When Bob had crowned his lady love he led the dance...on the platform behind the judge's stand. Early the next morning he started out on horseback for the range just south of Abilene.

But Ed Nichols stayed in Morgan, and there are few more interesting men in the world than he. Ed could ride the hardest pitching horse so the daylight couldn't ever be seen between him and his saddle. He made a beautiful figure astride a horse. Like many another bullwhacker and cowpuncher, who had little opportunity to read, Ed carried in his memory reams of songs, verses and old ballads.

Tom McCullough over at Kimball's Bend told me a story to show how tender-hearted Ed was: "One night he was riding horseback alone between Hico and Iredell. Passing through a thick wood he heard an old cow mooing. A cow in trouble can sound mighty pitiful.....he found her at the bottom of an old abandoned well...the old cow heard him and mooed and mooed...he looked around until he found a running spring, took off his big, wide-brimmed Stetson, filled it with water, carried it to the old well and poured it in. Again and again...until he filled the well up to the top and the struggling cow swam out."

Men like Bob Hanna and Ed Nichols deepened my love for cowboy songs. I couldn't have been more than four years old when I first heard a cowboy sing and yodel to his cattle.....These sounds come back to me faintly through the years, a foggy maze of

recollections; and my heart leapt even then to the cries of the cowboy trying to quiet, in the deep darkness and sifting rain, a trail herd of restless cattle.....again came the yodel, most like the wail of a coyote; only restful and not wild....the voice of the cowboy rang out.....pleading with the cattle to lie down and sleep..... “It’s your misfortune and none of my own, for you know Wyoming will be your next home”

There was a stream near our house, a good place to rest the cattle before they plodded up the trail through Indian Territory, across Kansas, Nebraska, sometimes Montana and Wyoming. During a period of twenty years ten million cattle and a million horses were driven northward...as the cowboys sang and yodeled, they began to make up songs about trail life. I began to write down these songs when I was a small boy.”

The Collection has a display featuring Mr Lomax, including some of his songs and songbooks, and memorabilia from the Lomax Family Gathering.

Aunt Clara

Clara Irene McDonald was born November 20, 1875 in a log cabin in the newly established town of Iredell (named after the first child born there, Ira Keeler). Her father was a carpenter, one of the few in the area, and later built the family a beautiful home, one of the few structures still standing after the flood, and still standing today. Tom also built many other homes and businesses in and around Iredell. Her mother, Mary, was still spinning thread when Clara was born, but she remembered her mother as being very artistic.

Being the eldest daughter, the duty of caring for younger siblings and helping with domestic chores fell on her. This didn’t leave much time for Clara to pursue any of her own interests or time for school, when one day she found herself at the age of twenty, unmarried and unspoken for, still living at home. An opportunity came to go to Waxahachie and work for her uncle, Allen Lasswell, the county clerk of Ellis County. She says she was a green country girl, but she learned to type and take dictation, and became one of the finest clerks in the office, affectionately known as “Miss Mac”. Due to a political upset, Clara was forced to return to her home in Iredell. These were unhappy times for her, after such success as an independent career girl, to go back to a life of domestic drudgery in her mother’s home.

Living in Iredell at that time was a widower with two small children, John Williamson, who owned a grocery-hardware store. He was ten years her senior, but he convinced Clara to marry him and help him raise the children. Clara’s experience with her siblings gave her an advantage in gaining the trust and support of the Williamson children, John Jr. and Faye. She and John sold the grocery and eventually opened a dry goods store. She later gave birth to her own son, Donald.

Clara was a devout Methodist and John a devout Baptist, so before they married Clara insisted strongly that the children be raised as Methodists. Once, during a severe drought, she had cause to reconsider. The drought was so harsh that both congregations were meeting daily to pray for rain. When this endeavor failed, it was decided that the two should meet together and join forces. They met in the Baptist church the first night and the Methodist church the next. There she was with her husband, praying in the Baptist and then the Methodist Church, her prejudice almost melted away. Lo and behold, it rained and rained and rained. However, as soon as the rains were over, Clara and the children returned to the Methodist Church.

Later, John and Clara moved to Dallas and ran a grocery until John's health began to fail. When John died in 1943, Clara found herself alone, and for the first time in her life, no burdens of work or caring for others. She began to sketch her surroundings, first with pencil and charcoal, then watercolor, and then oils. She enrolled in a drawing class at SMU, and after that she attended evening painting classes at the Dallas Museum. By 1945 she was successfully competing in local exhibits, and by 1951 she was being exhibited in several galleries. She was honored with a perspective on her life and work by the Amon Carter Museum in 1966.

"Aunt Clara" drew from her early life in Iredell, and painted some of the finest primitive paintings that give a beautiful and accurate lesson of daily frontier life. The Bosque Collection has a copy of the book, *Aunt Clara, The Paintings of Clara McDonald Williamson*, brimming with her paintings and wonderful stories of growing up in the frontier.

Steven Fromholz

Even though Steve was not born in Bosque County, he spent most of his youth here, growing up in Kopperl, "Kopperl always felt like home to me." His father worked for an automobile company and his mother, Georgia, worked in the fashion industry, so they were on the road a great deal. He and his brother Jimmy and sister Angela grew up under the watchful eye of his maternal grandmother, Hirstine Elizabeth Hughes. Here is what Angela Blair, who is Steven's sister, manager and general guardian angel, had to say about the Greer family:

"One of the big things is that it was our Granny who was a Greer. She was Hirstine Elizabeth Greer Hughes and her daddy was the late Reverend William Greer ("Brother Billy"). He was quite a legend in his own right and said to be the last circuit riding preacher in Texas before finally settling down to the Baptist Church in Kopperl until his death in the mid-fifties. His father was "Uncle Babe" Greer and his mother was Sophia Greer. They were quite "prominent" Kopperl, Texas citizens (and also had 9 kids of whom the Rev. Greer was one.)"

Steven's grandfather, Steve Hughes, died from an accident at the Kopperl cotton gin.

Steven has had a great career as a songwriter, singer, poet and teller of tales. In 1967 he wrote *Texas Trilogy*, which has been called the best song ever written about small town life. He has

recorded or performed with Steven Sills, Lyle Lovett, Michael Martin Murphey, John Denver and Willie Nelson.

In April of 2003, a stroke hit Steven, and he was told there was little hope of improvement. Never giving up, he had to relearn everything: how to walk, talk, sing and play guitar. In 2007, Steven Fromholz was named Poet Laureate of Texas, and published *Texas Trilogy*, a prose version of his song. The book features stories and photographs from Steven about life with his "Granny". *Texas Words & Music Program* was designed and developed by Steven for Texas school children, focusing on literature, music and poetry.

Now living in Clifton, he continues to be a creative force, still entertaining all over the state. Some of his achievements are:

Texas Music Hall of Fame Governor's Promotion of Texas Music Worldwide
Awards for *Texas Trilogy* and *Steven Fromholz: New and Selected Works*
10 best river guides in US (*Paddler Magazine*)
American Society of Composers, Authors, Publishers Award Winning Writer

The Collection has copies of *Texas Trilogy* (\$20.00) and several of Steven's CD's (\$15.00).

Sherrod Fielding

Nominated in 2004 for Poet Laureate of Texas, Sherrod likes to be known as a "Cowboy Poet", and he has written several poems, such as: Trail of Steers, Chisholm Trail - Then and Now, I Saw the Flag Today, The Day America Cried (about 9-11-2001) and a tribute to President George W Bush.

Clare Ogden Davis

Clare Ogden Davis was born in Kimball Bend in 1892. She became a newspaper woman, writing for the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Austin American*, and was bureau manager of several newspapers in Houston. Here is a listing of her accomplishments:

1923-1925 - She worked in Europe as international correspondent, and while there she obtained the last interview of writer Joseph Conrad.

1925 - She worked as Governor Miriam Ferguson's press secretary

1926 - Moved to New York, reported on the Lindbergh baby kidnapping

1929 - Wrote the novel, *The Woman of It*, based on the life of Miriam Ferguson

1938 - Wrote a gardening book, *In Our Country Garden*.

She also helped found the garden center in Zilker Park in Austin

Mrs Davis died on May 17, 1970.

Other authors from Bosque County:

James K Greer (Iredell) – *“Buck Barry” Texas Ranger* and *Colonel Jack Hays*

Doranne Poulson Stansell (Clifton) – *In This House* and *Those Hilarious Years*

Lana Robinson - *The Best of Little Spouse on the Prairie*

Bryan Sowell (Walnut Springs) – *Texas Central Railroad – Walnut Springs, Seeds of Destruction: The Current Crisis in U S Foreign Policy*, and he co-authored *A Dream Come True, The Story of Flat Top Ranch*

William C Pool – *Bosque Territory, An Historical Atlas of Texas, Battle of Dove Creek*

Other artists from Bosque County: (Bosque Seven)

George Hallmark

George Boutwell

James Boren

Melvin Warren

Martin Grelle

Bruce Green

Tony Eubanks

and Lillian Lempke-Jacoway

Judges

Arnold Wilson Cowen

Judge Wilson Cowen died of pneumonia October 28, 2007, at the age of 101. He was preceded in death by his wife Florence Walker Cowen, and two sons, Wilson Walker and John Elwin.

A native of Norse, born December 20, 1905, he was the son of John R and Florence McFadden Cowen. He graduated from Clifton High School in 1923, and then received a degree in law from the University of Texas. After graduation, he moved to the Panhandle and practiced law for four years, and then was elected County Judge. This was during the Great Depression, and he described the hardships of that time on a public television program, “American Experience: Surviving the Dust Bowl.”

Judge Cowen later worked for the Farm Security Administration and the War Food Administration. In 1964, President Lyndon B Johnson appointed him to the federal claims court. In 1982, he became senior circuit judge for the US Court of Appeals, where he served until he retired in 1997.

As Chief Justice, one of his responsibilities was to write to family members of those who served in the Federal Court system in Washington, who had passed away. His letters are very warm and sincere and compassionate. These letters are on file in the Collection.

Judge Cowen was an ardent supporter of Bosque County, and especially the Collection. He contributed to the restoration of the Lumpkin Building, and in 1996 he donated his private collection of certificates, letters from presidents and chief justices, his diploma from the University of Texas, photographs, his robe and gavel.

After his death, his personal secretary donated to the Collection some of his law books, his written decisions, his calculator on which he tabulated settlements and fees, and some personal memorabilia. These items, along with his robe and gavel, and certificates that are signed by US Presidents all the way back to FDR, are displayed on the top floor of the Collection.

Someone wrote on the day of his retirement, "Wilson Cowen has worn the robe of his high office with humility but with dignity. He has always been willing to listen. He has been without conceit."

C.M.Cureton

Calvin Maples Cureton was the grandson of J J "Capt Jack" Cureton, Indian fighter and former sheriff of Bosque County, and the son of W E Cureton, local rancher and two term State Representative. C M, along with his brother Hugh Cureton, formed the law firm of Cureton & Cureton in 1905, in Meridian. These two brothers wrote the booklet *An Early History of Bosque County*, which was read at the celebration of the county's 50th anniversary. Calvin also served in the Texas legislature, and in 1918 was elected as Attorney General of Texas. In 1921 he was appointed by Governor Neff as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas, and served until his death in 1940.

Sports

Bobby Joe Conrad

Bobby Joe Conrad was born November 17, 1935, in Clifton. His parents were Eldor and Johnnie Conrad. He married his high school sweetheart, Betty Ann Hefner, on August 9, 1957. The couple recently celebrated their Golden Anniversary. They are the parents of one son and one daughter.

Mr. Conrad graduated from Clifton High School in 1954, where he was part of a championship football team. He then went to Texas A & M University, once again with an outstanding football record. He was coached by the great Paul "Bear" Bryant, and played with such talents as John David Crow. After graduating college with a degree in Business Administration, the New York Giants drafted Mr. Conrad, and then he was traded to the then Chicago Cardinals, later known as the St Louis Cardinals. Mr. Conrad's professional football career spanned ten years, and they were very successful years. He finished his football days playing with the Dallas Cowboys. In 2002, Bobby Joe was inducted into the Texas Sports Hall of Fame.

After retirement from football, he and his family returned to Clifton. Mr. Conrad was employed by the Farmers Home Administration, and in 1973 went to work for the Texas Land

Bank. Bobby Joe Conrad was the 29th person to serve as Bosque County Judge, a position he held for eight years. It was during his term that the grant was allowed for the courthouse renovation, and the first phase of that work was begun. Mr. Conrad and the Commissioners toiled many hours on this project, and they deserve our thanks.

Frank Pollard

Frank Pollard was born in Clifton on June 15, 1957. He grew up in Meridian, where he was very successful in football and track. He wore number 27 on the 1973-76 Meridian Yellow Jackets team, where in 1974 Pollard racked up 1,210 yards in nine games. In 1976 Pollard became the highest scorer in Texas history at a high school track meet. Pollard signed with Baylor in 1976, again having a very successful football run, and then he was drafted by the Pittsburg Steelers, where he played for nine seasons. Mr Pollard is currently working at the Methodist Children's Home in Waco.

Donnie Sadler

Donnie Sadler was born in Clifton on June 17, 1975, and graduated from Valley Mills High School. He was an all-state short stop, and was drafted by the Boston Red Sox in 1994. In the 1995 he stole 41 bases. His cousin, Ray Sadler, is an outfielder for the Tampa Bay Rays.

Did you know..... that in 1883 an election was held on a petition to move the county seat from Meridian to Morgan? (Election Book Vol 2 page 94) 1,160 voted for remaining in Meridian and 590 voted for removal to Morgan.

Gloria Hewlett has donated to these veterans for the month of July: Pat Perry Duncan, Lee M Elder, Barron N Fallis, Edgar Finstad, Marvin E Fossett.
Thank you, again, Gloria.

Other donations:

Derwood Johnson - *The Ole Reiersen Realm*

Elizabeth Torrence - six beautiful Lantana bushes, given in honor of Duncan Seawright

Ben Tiller - paving bricks around the flag poles and walkways at Pool Park (Ben will be receiving his Eagle Badge for this project)

Meridian Lion's Club - 24" x 18" framed original charter, with signatures of all charter members, dated March 16, 1938 (for display only)

Gene Blakley - several historical articles

Raymond & Valeria Whitney - memorial in honor of Marguerite Bonds, former BCHC member

The Collection had 205 visitors since April and 60 research requests!

Bosque County Collection, PO Box 534, Meridian TX, 76665

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The mission of The Collection is to gather, document, record and preserve the history of Bosque County.