

# BOSQUE

## LETTER

May 2011

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### **Charles Kirby Word, Jr.**

Charles Kirby "Chock" Word, Jr. was born in Meridian May 17, 1932 and was laid to rest on May 17, 2011. His parents were Charles Kirby "Jake" Word, Sr. and Rosemary Dorman Word. He graduated from Meridian High School and then Texas Wesleyan College. After Chock got his law degree from Baylor Law School he returned to Meridian to work in his father's business, Meridian Abstract Company. In 1956 Chock married JoAnn Cole. JoAnn graduated from Kopperl and North Texas State University, and after graduation began teaching school. Charles Cole was born in Midland in 1958 and Terri Ann was born in Meridian in 1967. In 1965 after the death of their father, J.P. and Chock assumed the management of Meridian Abstract, which was started in the early 1900's. Chock was elected as mayor of Meridian in 1967 and then as Bosque County Judge in 1972. After serving 10 years as judge, he was elected to the Texas State Legislature in 1983. He also served as president of Texas County Judges and Commissioner's Association.

### **Personal Notes on Chock and JoAnn**

What a love story! Around the abstract office whenever Chock would leave JoAnn would sigh and say, "Elvis has left the building."

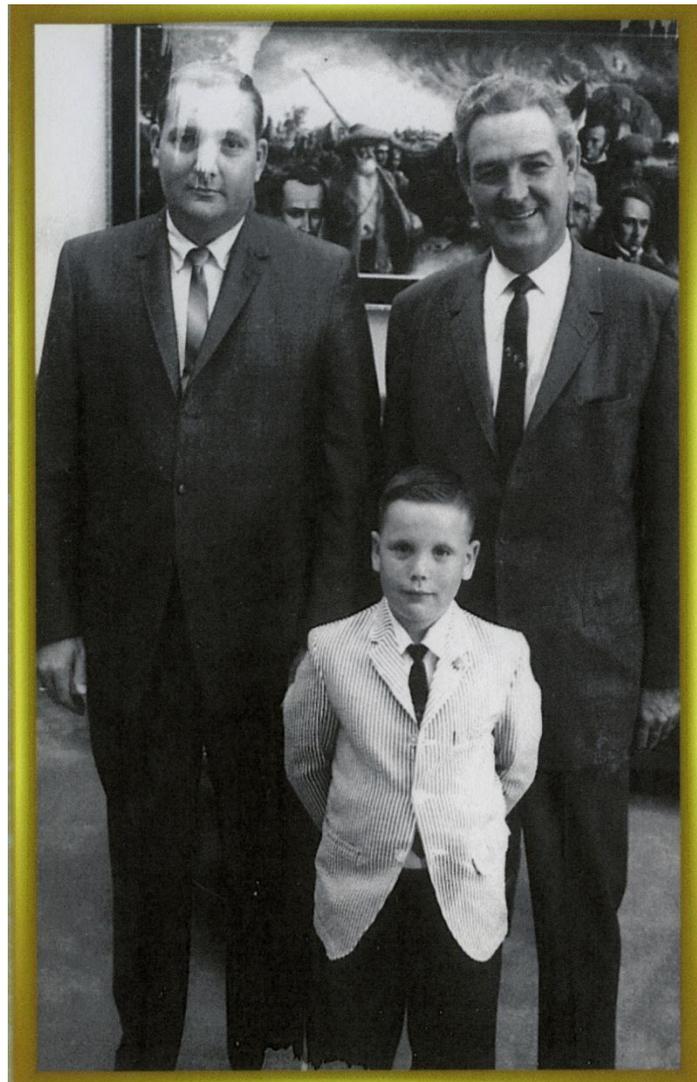
Chock and JoAnn loved each other, and they loved life!

The Word family has been through tough times these past few years. Dear family members have been lost. Circumstances out of their control caused the closing of the family business, the oldest family business in the county. Both JoAnn and Chock have struggled with illness. However, if you were not aware of these things, you wouldn't know it by looking into the faces of the Word family. It is said that character is truly shown when difficulties come. The Word family has shown their character. Heads were always high and smiles were always big.

The first time I met Chock I was a new clerk in the County Clerk's office. I was intimidated! Here was this big man with a booming voice, slapping his big hand on the counter and asking for such-and-such record. Being new, not knowing what a such-and-such record was or where it was filed, I

became rattled very easily. I learned later that was just his method of endearment. Years later when he came in one morning, he slapped his big hand on my desk and demanded, "Is this where they keep the records? I need records!" I calmly looked up and asked, "Do you want 45's or LP's?" His jaw dropped open a bit and he just stared for a moment, then he shook his head and walked over to the deed books. Chock knew everything that was filed in that office and where he could lay his hand on it. He had grown up in that office. Many hours were spent there with his father while he worked on title or legal matters. He and his brother J.P. were known as the courthouse mascots. They grew up across the street from the courthouse.

Chock and JoAnn began at a fast pace and until last year have not slowed down. Their contributions to the county and this community are innumerable. His presence will be missed.



**Governor John Connally with Chock and Cole Word**

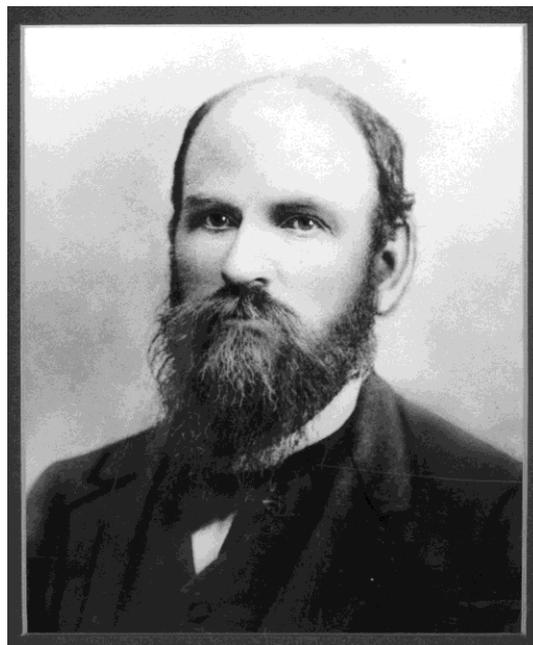
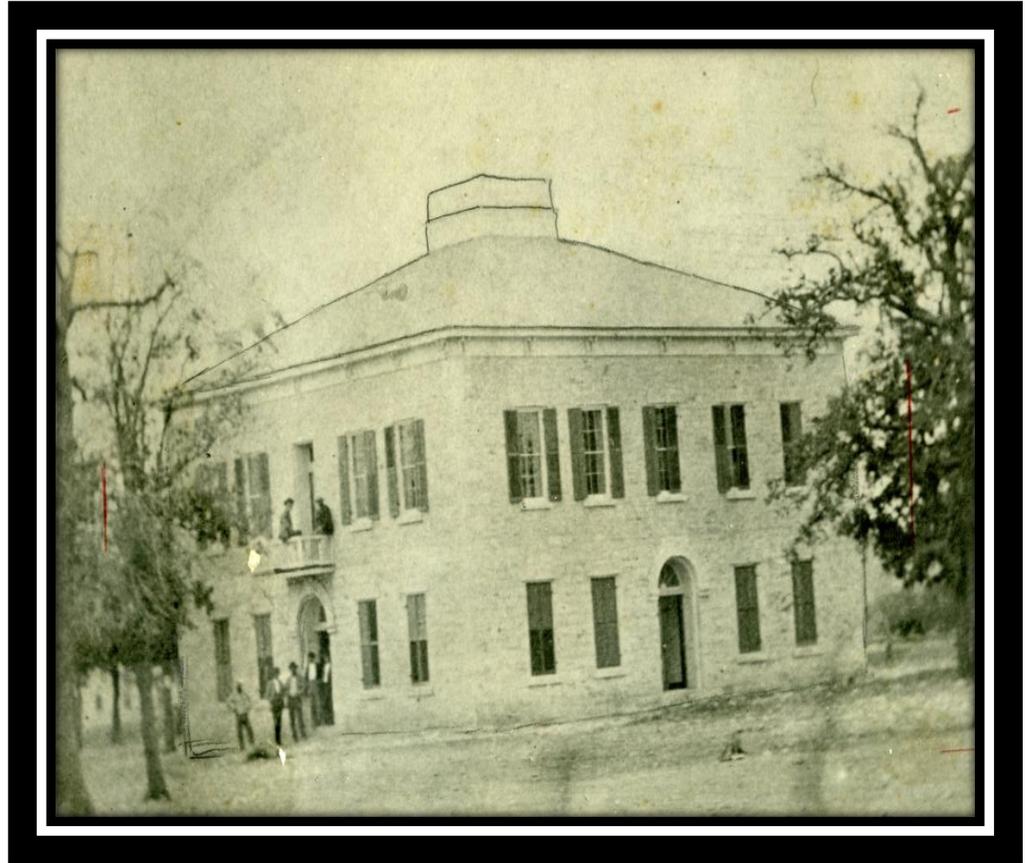
Linda Weir, a BCHC member, related this story:

Her mother was Willie May Gandy Bowman and she lived next to the school. One day she caught and dispatched a possum that had just killed one of her hens. She was disposing of the possum *and*

the chicken behind their house. Chock, about eight years old, was on the school playground and had observed the episode. He commented, "Miss Woolie May, if you had just let that possum eat the chicken first then you would just have to carry off the possum."

## Bosque County Courthouse Turns 125 in 2011

**Third  
courthouse**



Rufus Green Childress was born October 1838. He served as Bosque County Justice of the Peace and was elected County Judge in 1882. When he took office it was apparent that the courthouse, built only seven years before, was headed for collapse. The limestone walls had not been braced and were crumbling so badly that the window casings were coming loose.

Serious debate began about what should be done. Some felt that repairs could solve the problem, others felt the best option was to tear down and rebuild. At the Saturday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1886 session of Commissioners Court, Tom M. Pool made the motion to build a new courthouse. A vote was taken, with Commissioners Tom M. Pool and John S. Goodman voting *for* and Commissioners A.J. Walton and J.W. Ogden voting *against*, and "R.G. Childress, County Judge, giving casting vote in favor".

War was declared! The "Anti-Courthouse Party" was formed, petitions were circulated, heated arguments were common, and threats were made. The *Bosque Citizen* was full of articles and accusations from both sides.

The main objection was the fear of higher taxes and that the county would go bankrupt from the construction; however, one "tale" gives another side of the story. In the early 1880s word was out that the railroad had bought easements east of Meridian, and several entrepreneurs also bought up land and began to subdivide in the area of the proposed railway route. Since the railroad wouldn't come to Meridian, they wanted Meridian to move to the railroad, so they began to lobby to rebuild the courthouse in East Meridian (as it is called).

Despite all the debate, the courthouse was built on the original square. However, so bitter were the feelings of those involved that one afternoon Tom M. Pool kept his Colt revolver visible until things settled down on the square. Commissioners Pool and Goodman, along with County Judge Childress, were not re-elected nor ever served in the new courthouse.

Contractor P.J. Loonie was never paid all the money owed him by the county, and almost lost all that he owned. The grand old courthouse still stands, and she must have had the last word, for if you notice carefully on the 1886 cornerstone the names of the opposing commissioners were left off.

## **1900-1934**

The 1886 courthouse was never quite finished, and after Anti-Courthouse Party members were elected (with A.R. Barry as county judge), the courthouse was severely neglected. Architect J.J. Kane swore in Commissioners Court on May 17, 1887 that if contractor P.J. Loonie had been given an additional \$200.00 the stonework would be complete and in compliance to the specifications. In 1914, when a small tornado did extensive damage to the courthouse, it was discovered that the walls were crumbling and the roof was in great need of repair. The walls were braced with concrete and the roof was patched. The clock tower was twisted, so the tower and the clock were also repaired.

On Arbor Day in 1904, Judge B.J. Word was presented with five shade trees by the US Department of Agriculture for the beautification of the courthouse square.

In 1925 the ladies of the Meridian Study Club donated a beautiful drinking fountain, placed above the artesian well located on the NE corner of the square. This well had been the main water supply for the city of Meridian since November 1886.

By the 1930's bats had invaded the bell tower and attic of the courthouse. Judge Jack Cureton says that, as a young boy walking past the courthouse on his way to school, he would have to cover his face because of the stench. District court was unbearable, and the district judge was insistent that something be done. When the 1935 work was being done, the contractor was paid to remove the guano. When the commissioners found out how valuable the guano was they claimed any money from the sale of the offending material be placed in the county fund. A small legal battle raged; however, it ended with the contractor removing the guano and keeping his profits from the sale.

**The following is a transcription and will be featured as a series in the Bosque Letter for the next few issues. The manager has edited out certain sentences or words, replaced by ( ).**

## **Looking Backward At The Course Of Human Events**

**By Redmond G. Gaines**

In 1864 in the month of December my home was located five miles south of Waco, Texas. My mother became alarmed over the war. She was fearful that the Yankees would capture Galveston and come up the Brazos River to Waco, as reports were coming in from the east that Beef or Spoon Butler had captured New Orleans. My mother decided it would be best for us to go farther west so she called a council of war consisting of the following persons: Mother, Redmond G. Gaines, a six year old; Maud B. Gaines, 8 years old; Ed Gaines, 4 years old; Edward Fleming, 16 years old, my cousins, and two Negro women, Agnes and Perry. ( ) The council decided to move to the Joe Patton ranch on Hog Creek, 25 miles west of Waco. There was a good settlement there, enough to keep the Indians off of us.

We packed all of our earthly belongings into two ox wagons and one wagon with two horses. We turned our faces to the west. It took two days to make the twenty-five miles. Landed in good shape with all the milk cows, loose horses, chickens and dogs. It was just a few days until Christmas. We found on this ranch a most excellent house for that day and time, one log room chinked and painted with lime and rock, a fine rock chimney with a clapboard frame room on the end of the log house, a shed room on the side for a dining room and a kitchen built on to the end of it with a fine rock chimney with pot hangers built into it and a great big hearth in front to put the skillets and ovens on for baking. The kitchen and dining room both had dirt floors. A good smoke house stood in the yard. A fine railed fence staked and ridged was around the house. A log crib and fine circle ( ) pen was built partly around the crib and here is where we got most of our living. Milked 25 cows night and morning. Each one would give about a quart of blue milk. This milk would have to be kept in tin pans resting on water or the milk trough until the cream rose. The milk was then allowed to sour, then the whole thing poured into a big churn. Then we children would take turns pounding that churn for two hours in order to get butter enough for the family.

Everybody lived on the creek so there was only two ways to talk about, up the creek and down the creek. Up the creek lived Dick Simpson, wife and two children; Buck Smith, wife and two children;

Dr. A.M. Barnett, wife and six children; Bosque John McLennan, wife and five children. Bosque John McLennan was captured when he was thirteen years old and recaptured back when he was twenty-one and had to be guarded for two years to keep him from going back to the Indians. He finally got married and settled down. He comes back into my life later on.

Down the creek lived Silvester Smith; Zeb Fitzhugh, wife and nine children; John Morris, wife and five children; Dave McFadden, wife and three children; John Cordell, wife and four children. The Dozier family lived on the lower end of the settlement, five children in the family. From the Doziers to Waco was twenty-one miles and there was only one house, the Neal McLennan Ranch.

We had plenty to eat, such as it was, dried beef, corn bread, butter and clabber. We all had some clothes as everybody had spinning wheels, reels and looms. There was enough sheep in the country to supply wool for all purposes. In the winter of '64 and '65 I had a pair of homemade jeans pants, cotton stripe shirt, a pair of bed-ticking galls and a roundabout jacket with brass buttons on it. And when I got this on I was hard to hold. I had no shoes or hat for two years and was busting January '65 wide open without.

I had two dogs both black and their names were Bravo and Carl. ( ) These two dogs were my constant companions up or down Hog Creek. We roamed the year of 1865. We knew where all the haw bushes were, all the grape vines ( ) all the pecan trees and every hollow tree or log that a cottontail rabbit would hide in. We covered the creek every day one way or the other unless it was pouring rain and mother would hold me down when it was raining. The Tonkawa Indians were stationed at Waco about where the fine residence is now. They would roam up in our settlement and to some of the up-creek settlements. We cared nothing about the Tonk but we did fear the Comanche. My mother and some of the women had warned me time and again if I saw smoke coming out of the woods or branches or gulleys to never stop until I found what that smoke meant.

One fine morning I called for the dogs, found them eating their breakfast which was given them every morning, noon and night same as the family. When they finished we started out on an expedition up the north side of the creek about one and a half miles from home. In a deep branch that made in from the parrall(?) I saw some smoke coming up where the bank of the branch was very high. I deliberated to go home and not (?) tell mother what I had seen and then not be able to tell her what the smoke was all about. So I crouched down and started to the branch. Both Bravo and Carlo crouched down and stuck their heads down to the ground. When we got in some fifty feet of the bluff I dropped down on my belly and began to slide, both dogs followed. We all reached the bank at the same time and slowly peeped over and to our great surprise we saw Tonk bucks cooking a couple of rabbits on the fire. I was expecting to see a painted up bunch of Comanches.

IN April, 1865, I took the dogs and crossed the creek one afternoon and went into a belt of timber that skirted the creek. Just stirring around to see what I could jump. In a little while I heard something tearing through the brush and briers. I yelled to the dogs "Sickem!" They both went like a shot. In a few minutes I heard them begin to bay. I started running to them as fast as I could go barefooted, as the briers were awful bad. When I reached the dogs they were both looking up a spreading walnut tree. I was to the side of the animal; he was standing on four limbs of the tree and looking straight at the dogs, stretched out like he was in order to stand and jump.

Me standing on the ground and looking up, that Bobcat looked as big as a cow. It was the first one I had ever seen and I did not know what it was. But I made a little noise and he turned his head and caught a glimpse of me and jumped right in front of the two dogs. They both went on him, but he

threw himself on his back so he could rake them with both hind legs. Bravo was too quick for him and got an eternal grip on his throat, then swinging his body around so he could not reach him with this hind paws. Carlo was gnawing his ribs, I grabbed a good strong stick and went to work on his hind legs. Soon got one out of commission. Carlo saw the opening and grabbed the disabled leg, then, you ought to have seen them string him to the end! He was too heavy for me to carry or drag home. I got Perry and Agnes to string him on a pole and carry him home.

A little while after this we began to hear rumors of soldiers returning home, the last of May or about the first of June. We heard that soldiers had been seen going west on the road to Meridian which was ten miles north of us. There were rumors that the war was over. But no one came to our road that could tell us anything about it. Mother told me one day to get on the high part of the fence and look east and see if any one horseback came in sight. I finally saw what looked like an army captain up the road from the east. It proved to be eight men, all soldiers, coming home. They gave us our first real news that the struggle was over. Father got home about the tenth of July and Mrs. Joe Patton came out to spend the summer with us on the ranch, she being an educated woman and all, the people in the settlement got after her to teach us a school, as they had no school for four years. So she plunged into the school game.

I got my first schooling in the log schoolhouse at Patton. Studied the Blueback Spelling Book and the McGuffey first reader. We had about 40 attendance, most of them were full-grown, but on account of the war couldn't go to school. In the fall of '65 several parties were pulled and one or two dances were given.

In December '65 my father came home one day and said he found us a fine house to live in, that it was built out of pine lumber, floors on every room, four rooms with a ten-foot hall through the center with three glass windows in each room. I could hardly believe this, as I had never seen a glass window anywhere except in Waco. A few days after we got the good news of the move to the fine home, mother was discussing the move to the new home with we children. When she remarked to me "Son, do you know that you are seven years old?" I said no, I did not. But I knew that I was old enough to nearly ketch a cottontail rabbit.

About the middle of December we packed and loaded the ox and horse wagons and moved five miles up the creek to our new home. When we arrived we discovered that we had moved to town, and that the name of the town was Searsville. The town consisted of three residences, two vacant stores. The war had stopped it's progress and it stood there for six years waiting for something to happen.

### **To be continued**

**For all who** might be interested, in the June issue of **WildWest** magazine, on page 54 is an article called "Murder at the Palais Royal". The story was written by Tonya Fossett, and tells about an 1899 notorious Fort Worth saloon murder case involving Frank Fossett, son of Henry Fossett, Bosque County Interim Judge 1858.

#### Donations:

Two photographs from Pat Harrington; Glass enclosed pendant in the shape of Bosque County from Carolyn Cotton on behalf of Ivanne Farr.

The correct answer to the previous Trivia question: Smith, Johnson, Thomas were the most common surnames and John and Mary the given names.

**Thank you to all members who continue to support the Bosque Collection!**

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

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