

BOSQUE

LETTER

May 2012

John A. Lomax Texas Music Gathering

In 1985 the Bosque County Historical Commission and a committee of business men and other citizens created the Lomax Family Gathering; its purpose was two-fold. The main purpose was as a fund raiser for the renovation of the Lumpkin Building which would house the archives of the BCHC. The secondary purpose was to honor "Ballad Collector" and former Bosque County resident John Avery Lomax. John Lomax grew up about a mile north of Meridian on the Bosque River during the time of the cattle drives. His fascination with the music and stories of the "cowcamp" led to a life's work of collecting music of the people or "folk music" from the four corners of the United States. Most of the songs you sang or heard as a child were part of his collection. Over 10,000 songs are archived in the Library of Congress as part of the John A. Lomax legacy. John realized the importance of these songs and the great need to document them. John and his son Alan can be credited with helping the careers of Woodie Guthrie, Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter, Morgan "Muddy Waters" Morganfield, Willie Brown and others.

The Lomax Family Gathering later partnered with the Chuck Wagon Cook-off and for many years had a steady following for the annual event. Higher gas prices and a slow economy

caused the event to be cancelled the last few years. Local MEDC director David Duke had a dream to recreate and pump new life into the event, and for the last two years has worked diligently to present a fresh face for the gathering.

The revived Lomax Gathering was held April 14 in Meridian at the Bosque Bottoms. The set-up was amazing, complete with a huge sound stage and sound crew leased from Mack Abernathy. Unfortunately the weathermen kept many folks at home by predicting severe weather for much of northern Texas; the wind blew, but the clouds rolled on by leaving everyone in attendance dry and safe.

A wonderful program was designed, featuring:

Chuck Wagon Cook-off: Eleven wagons entered, with each wagon preparing 40 meals of chicken fried steak, gravy, mashed potatoes, pinto beans, a roll and peach cobbler. All meals were cooked over an open campfire. Wagons were judged on an authentic camp presentation and on each of the items on the menu. The overall winner was Mesquite Flatts, first place was Break Away from Stamford, second was Moreland Wagon Shop from Fort Davis and third was Mesquite Flatts. Congratulations to all the winners!



working with the dog and the two have since won many contests and been featured on Oprah, Jay Leno and Letterman. David has just agreed to sell the rights for a movie of his life with Skidboot. The original Skidboot went blind and passed on a few years ago.

After the noon Chuck Wagon meal kids of all ages gathered around under a grove of trees to watch the offspring of Skidboot. David steered them through remarkable and complex feats, such as taking the bridle in the mouth and leading a horse to the barn; or waiting until David counted to three before they picked up an object, and David counts to three like this— one, two, (pauses) fourteen, ninety-five, (pauses) twenty-six, Three! You can see David and Skidboot on youtube.com.



A presentation was made by the Lomax Gathering recognizing John A. Lomax and what he did for music and Texas. The plaque was received by members of the Lomax family.



David Hartwig and Friends

Skidboot and Friends: Farrier and rodeo cowboy David Hartwig discovered by accident one day that his wife's troublesome cow dog named Skidboot had hidden talent. He began

The Glenn Heiney and his family presented a cutting horse demonstration.



John Allred Family Band- John Allred singer/songwriter with a beautiful smooth voice, 16 year old Colette Boyette on fiddle, Western Music Hall of Fame Inductee for 2009 and Western Swing Society Hall of Fame's Rich O'Brien on acoustic guitar and Jack Seale on upright bass who is winner of the Texas Banjo players contest for three years running. After John gave the touching history of the song, the group did a beautiful rendition of "Lorena", a song banned by both sides during the Civil War. The words of the song made the troops feel so homesick and blue generals felt it might encourage wide scale desertions. (editor's note- the fiddle player is my talented granddaughter)



Glenn Moreland

Roots of Texas Music Entertainers:

An awesome collection of singers and songwriters were on hand to perform traditional Texas music, from the legendary Steven Fromholz and Butch Hancock to several original renditions of the songs of the cow camp.



Allred Family Band

Glenn Moreland: Glenn began playing the fiddle and guitar in the late 60's around Austin, Texas. He fell in love with cowboy songs and later took up the fiddle to learn the tunes that were the favorites of the cowhands. He spoke about Gene Autrey and how he was so instrumental in keeping Lomax cowboy tunes

alive, and then sang several songs made popular by Autrey. Glenn is retired from the cattle industry and now builds and outfits chuck wagons in Fort Davis. His chuck wagon team, Moreland Wagon Shop, won second in wagon set-up, first in cobbler, third in bread.

Gary S. Pratt - Gary sang songs from his new album "LOMAX", which is a tribute to the man known as the Ballad Hunter, who over 100 years ago documented cowboys and their songs. His program was taken from the pages of "Cowboy Songs" published in 1910 by John A. Lomax.

Brian Burns



Brian Burns sang songs from his new CD called "The Eagle and the Snake: Songs of the Texans." His program was interspersed with histories about the songs and about Texas. His rendition of Marty Robbins' "Ballad of the Alamo" was led in by his reading of the Travis letter. The two were moving-almost haunting. Brian has been traveling across the state this year presenting a special Texas history program to public school students; his music helps make the history come alive.

His song "Crash at Crush" is about a publicity stunt for the Katy Railroad in 1896. Someone thought people would pay to see two locomotives colliding head on at full speed. 40,000 people did show up! They stood in a field south of West, quickly named "Crush"

after the creator of the event, an employee of the Katy. Crush didn't count on the steam engines exploding and erupting upon impact. Death and multiple injuries resulted; Crush was fired the next day.

Steven Fromholz - Steven headlined along with Butch Hancock, another Texas music legend and Terry Razor. Steven introduced newcomer Aaron Einhouse, who is a very gifted story teller/songwriter with a powerful voice. The four men played "unplugged" with just their acoustic guitars, sharing stories and songs about life and family, just as in the early days, men sitting around the campfire relating their experiences in music and verse, some very moving and others with humor. At the end of the program County Judge Cole Word surprised Steven with a plaque honoring him for his music.



Mack Abernathy - Mack and his band concluded the evening with a dance featuring Western Swing. Mack is from China Springs and is a favorite in the Waco and Central Texas area.

Many thanks to David Duke, the Friends of the Bosque Collection and all the sponsors who helped put on this event!

The Importance of the Chisholm Trail

The War Between the States was devastating to the South; the entire economy was crushed. Cotton had been the major industry for so many years; now the land was ruined by the ravages of war and the labor force was diminished. Texas had fared better than most states, since no battles were fought on Texas soil. However, Indian depredations had wreaked havoc.

During Reconstruction there were not enough Federal forces to enforce and maintain the "police state" and lawlessness ran rampant. Money was in short supply causing agriculture to recover slowly.

Easterners had developed a taste for beef, and demanded all they could get. Thanks to the Spanish, Texans had plenty of beef and plenty of men who needed steady work. The "Beef Trail" or "Santa Fe Trail" or "Chisholm Trail", whatever you want to call it, was the salvation of Texas. For a period of about twelve years anywhere from 10 to 16 million head of longhorn cattle were moved from South Texas northward to Kansas, then some went on to the Canadian border.

Stories of the Chisholm Trail in Bosque County



George Scrutchfield, Will Simpson and other local young men who rode the trail



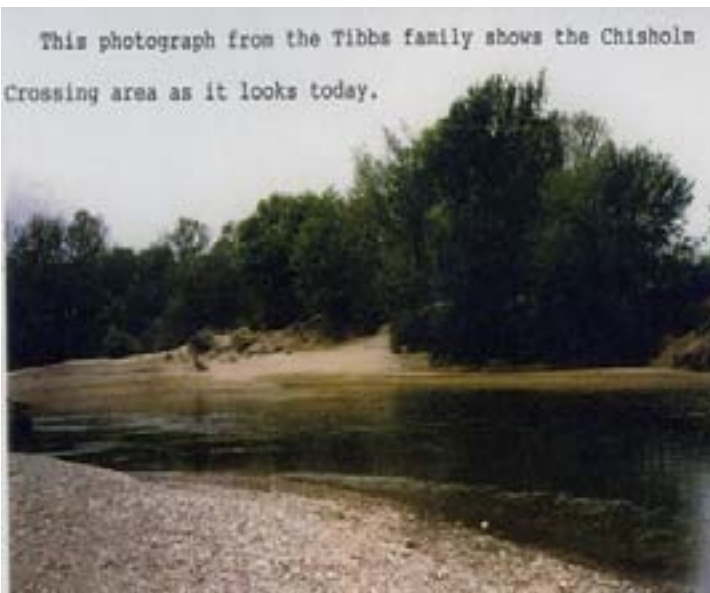
Items from the Chisholm Trail Collection located at the Bosque Collection

Due to the volatile nature of the Brazos, the city of Waco built a suspension bridge over the river to help the cattle and wagons and drovers to cross more easily. Some trail bosses opted not to pay the \$3.00 per head charge for the use of the bridge, so the cattle splintered off from the main herd at Waco and crossed the Bosque at present-day Valley Mills. This was a great opportunity for the cattle to spread over the prairie between the Bosque and the Brazos and fatten up before heading north. It also served as a merging point for herds coming from the west. Enterprising locals waited for these "cowpunchers" with fruits, vegetables, baked goods and the cowboys eagerly bought their wares. Eating beans from the chuck wagon everyday must have been monotonous. Mrs. Higginbotham who lived on Mesquite Creek ran what was known as the "Chisholm Trail Roadhouse" where she sold pies and cakes, bread and butter and fresh buttermilk.

From these cowboys John A. Lomax heard his first taste of the ballads, which was the beginning of his life's work. He recognized this music as the purest form of literature and history and spent his entire life preserving it.



Kimball's Bend of the Brazos River



The crossing at Kimball was the perfect width and depth for the cattle, and at certain times of the year the water level was very low. An enterprising man by the name of Payne built a ferry for those times when the water was up, to help the wagons across. Crossing the large herds took an entire day.

The cattle were herded into triangular cedar rail pens on the banks and then the lead cow was driven into the water and the others just followed, with the cowboys to the rear and sides until they crossed. One cowboy said, "Sometimes that old lead cow would get confused, so we'd just dunk her head under the water and when she came up and saw the bank, she swam just as fast as she could."

Kimball became a prosperous place during the drives. The herds were so large that they stretched from Kimball back to Steele Creek, about 10 miles. The school children would hold their ears to the ground and could tell by the rumble how close the herds were. School was let out and local folks gathered around the town, just to see the herds and those cowboys. Young girls would name their favorite young cowboy as they rode through town.

In 1880 the railroad passed Kimball and went through an area about three miles south. Kopperl, Morgan and Valley Mills had holding pens for cattle brought from the west for several years, where cattle waited for the train and then loaded and headed to Fort Worth.



Holding pen at Valley Mills

Kimball is now a ghost town with only remnants of a few stores and the old academy, located in the middle of a beautiful park off Hwy 174. A marker was dedicated by the Boy Scouts of America in 1963 and the State Historical Commission recognized the area with a marker in 2006.



Other low water crossings were Spivey's, Burk's, McCabe's, Fort Graham and Powell Dale

Ed Nichols

"Ed Nichols could ride a pitching bronc and you'd never see daylight between him and the horse"

John A Lomax

"And the cowboys, ah, there was a real thrill for a boy. To sit on a rail fence, watching those cowboys, and to have one gallop by on his horse and pick you off.

"The cowboys taught me how to ride when I was just a young fellow, on calves first, then on yearlings, then on horses." Ed Nichols

"The old chuck wagon would drive up on the hill about where the school house now stands, and after the steers were taken loose, a fire was started to cook supper. The boys would ride around the cattle and bed them for the night. Then two would stay with the herd for so many hours until another two relieved them. After supper the boys sat around telling jokes and singing the prettiest songs I ever heard! The camp was usually only a short distance from our house, and when it got late my mother would ring a bell for me to come home. I'd go back next morning to watch them round up the herd and start up the trail for Kansas."

Ed started hanging with the cowboys at the age of six. By the time he was sixteen he had been on several drives and was quite an accomplished cowboy. In his book, "Ed Nichols Rode a Horse" he relives his vivid cowboy days.

The Collection owns a set of the Lomax recordings from the Library of Congress. Many thanks to Bill Duncan for digitizing these recordings, making them more accessible. One of the recordings is of an old cowboy being questioned by Lomax about the evening campfire. "Well sir when all the work was done and the night horses were bedded down we'd build up a fire and everybody would sit around and we'd ask see which was the best singer. Then we'd all take turns singing and reciting." Lomax asked what would be recited. "Well some of them fellers couldn't carry any kind of a tune lest they threw it over their shoulder in a gunny sack so they'd kindly have to say it."

Lomax asked another old cowboy his age and he replied sixty-two. Lomax then asked how long he had lived in Texas, "Sixty-two years. Its bad luck to be born anywhere but Texas." He stopped and thought on that statement and added, "Well I reckon some is born more fortunate than others."

Bosque County Land Grants

Charles Lummus, an attorney in Cleburne and a collector of historical memorabilia brought several original land grants to the Collection, which are nicely framed so that the front and back may be seen. These are for sale by the Collection on a commission basis. Here is a listing:

Edward S. **Detherage 160 acres** dated Aug. 15, 1871, signed by Governor Edward Davis

S. **Johnson 160 acres** dated July 12, 1895 signed by Governor C.A. Culberson

A.P. Womack 160 acres dated May 13, 1884 signed by Governor John Ireland

O.P. Foss 80 acres dated March 30, 1876 signed by Governor Richard Coke

R. Jones 145 acres dated January 7, 1895 signed by J.S. Hogg

Eleazer **Higgins 640 acres** dated July 28, 1846 signed by Governor A.C. Horton

Mr. Lummus also brought a Confederate \$100 Loan/Bond Certificate. The certificate reads "On the first day of July 1875 the Confederate States of America will pay the bearer of this bond at the seat of Government or such place of deposit as may be appointed by the Secretary of the Treasury, the sum of One Hundred Dollars with interest thereon from this date, payable at the same place, semi-annually at the rate of eight percent per annum, on surrender of the annual warrants or coupons. This debt is authorized by an act of Congress, approved August 19, 1861, entitled "An Act to Authorize the Issue of Treasury Notes and to Provide a War Tax for their Redemption" and is dated October 21, 1862. Three coupons have been redeemed, each with a value of four dollars. You can read more

about these bonds by visiting www.csacurrency.com/csabond.

For more information on these items please call 254-435-6182, or come by the Collection to view.

Highlighting Area Museums

Bosque County is very proud of its unique past and that history is being displayed in several places. Volunteers work many hours planning and designing interesting ways to exhibit our history. Please visit these museums and support them.

The **Bosque Memorial Museum** is the oldest in our county and the largest. A warm welcome goes to the new curator, William Calhoun. William and all the staff at BMM are currently working on a display on the building of the Whitney Dam. The Horn Shelter exhibit is one of the finest interpretations in the state.

The **Bosque Valley Heritage Society** operates a museum in the old Katy Depot in Valley Mills. George Potter is current President of this society. The museum focuses on the southern end of the county, from Mosheim to Smith's Bend and is chock full of photographs and memorabilia. The society plans an annual Fourth of July picnic.

The **Walnut Springs Historical Association** was formed in 2005 and now operates a museum located next to City Hall. The museum focuses mainly on the impact of the Texas Central and Katy Railroads, but features many other items of interest.

The mission of the Bosque Collection is to gather, document and preserve the history of Bosque County-many thanks to all our members and supporters!

