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Autumn 1991

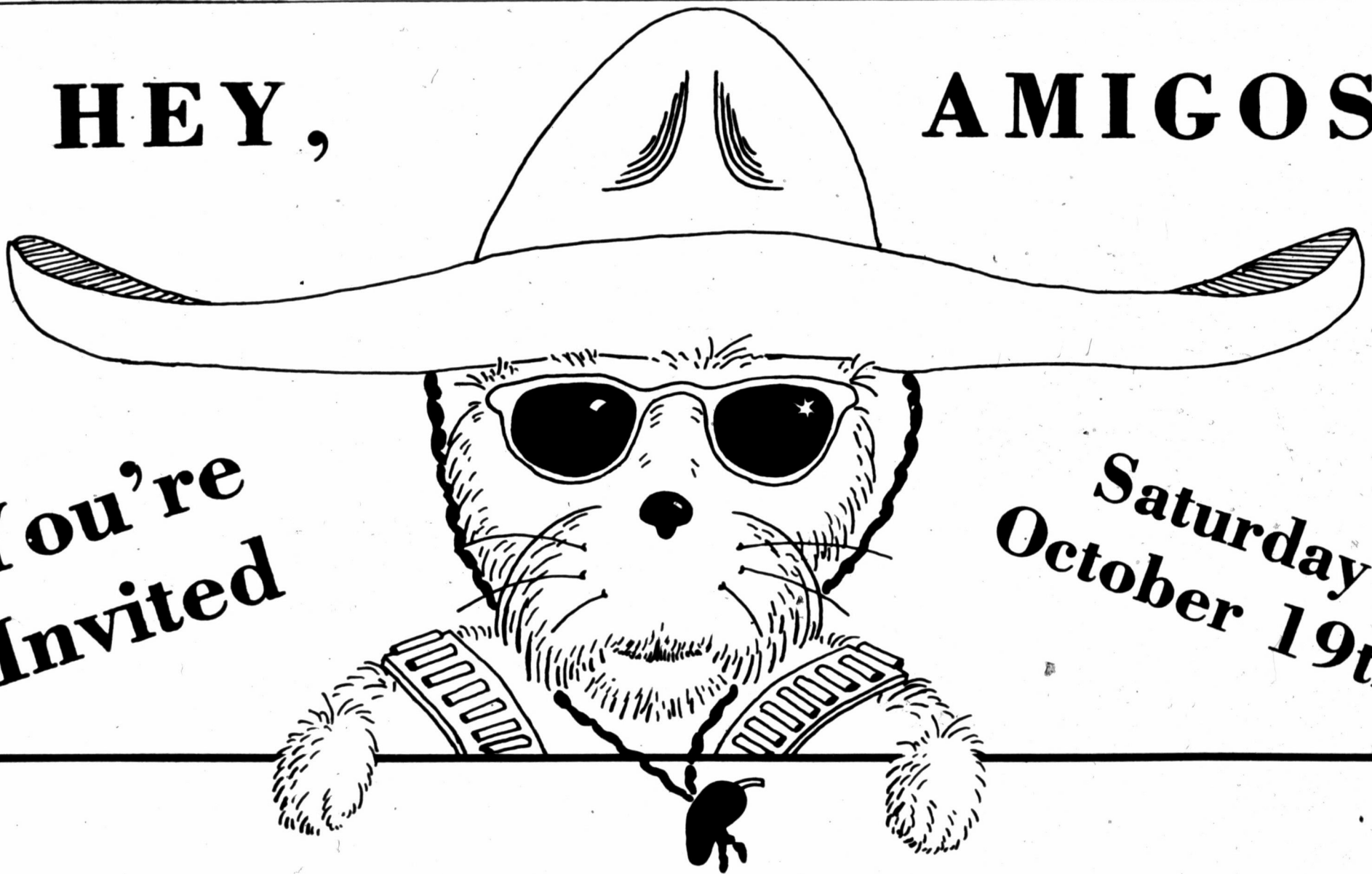
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CONTENTS

Autumn 1991 Vol. 1, No. 3

QUITAQUE.....4-5
Blankenship Building
Caprock Public Library

CLAUDE.....6-7
Corinne Goodnight
Goodnight College

TURKEY.....8-9
Aunt Zona
Memorial Dedicated

MAP OF AREA.....10-11
Business Directory

WESTERN ARTS....12, 13, 14
Special Section
Visual Artists
Bards in Boots

SILVERTON..... 15
Santa Fe Expedition

CLARENDON.....16-17
RO Ranch

OL'PETE.....18

**CALENDAR &
ATTRACTIONS..... 19**

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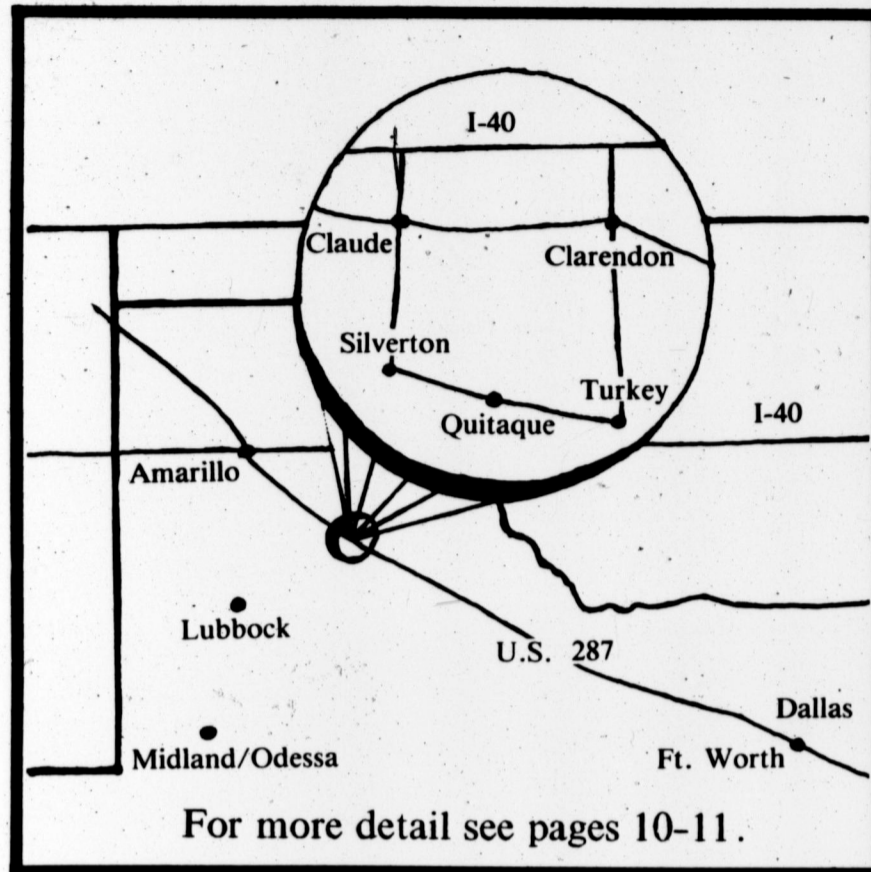
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*Prairie Dog Gazette Staff:
Kevin Welch, Judy Welch,
and Pat Sikes*

SETTING THE SCENE



For more detail see pages 10-11.

"The West of the Heart" is this region of the Texas Panhandle where the Llano Estacado tumbles down the rugged Caprock Escarpment, finding comfort at last in the gentle, rolling plains. A drive through the land stirs up ancient dust. Every particle, as it settles, has a tale to tell. Here, still, the values of the West's most potent symbol, the quintessential cowboy, remain in the hearts of the people.

Clarendon - One of three earliest centers of Panhandle government. Donley County seat, 1890. Settled 1878 as a "Christian colony." Strict moral codes of colonists conflicted with free-spirited life of cowboys, prompting nickname "Saints' Roost." On Salt Fork of Red River, cattle range of JA, RO, and many other pioneer ranches.

Claude - Armstrong County seat, 1890. Established as a stop on FW&DCR line and named for train engineer. Nearby landmark is JA Ranch Headquarters, still home of original owner Adair's descendants. To the east is the site of house and grave of legendary plainsman Col.

Area Lakes

Greenbelt, near Clarendon, 3-1/2 miles North from US 287 on TX 70. Spring-fed 1,990 surface acres. Northern Pike Capital of Texas. Permit required. Public marina, ramps, bait house. Concessions. RV parks. Contact Manager, Greenbelt Water Authority, P.O. Box 665, Clarendon, TX 79226, phone 806-874-3650.

Mackenzie, 12 miles NW of Silverton via TX 86W or 45 miles S of Claude via TX 207S. An 896 surface-acre reservoir in historic Tule Canyon. RV hookups. Ramps,

Charles Goodnight in the town named for him.

Quitaque - In Briscoe County. Probably named for early Quitaca tribe which scouted for Spanish explorers. Gateway to Caprock Canyons State Park. Sidewalk museum recreates ranch/farm life and times. Heart of infamous Comanchero-Indian trade territory. Nearby campsite of tragic 1841 Texas Santa Fe Expedition.

Silverton - Briscoe County seat, 1892. Named by Mrs. Z.T. Braidfoot, wife of ranch settler, for aesthetic appeal. East of historic Tule (Indian name for "marsh grass") Canyon and region of U.S. Cavalry-Comanche wars. Landmark 1894 jail house represents Old West struggle for law and order.

Turkey - In Hall County. Originally named "Turkey Roost" for wild turkeys on nearby Turkey Creek. Grew around a line camp cabin which became general store and settlers' mail exchange. Official post office established 1892. Museum, memorial and annual celebration honor Western Swing King Bob Wills.

floating docks. Contact Mackenzie Water Authority, Rt. 1, Box 14, Silverton, TX 79257, phone 806-633-4326.

Theo, in historic Caprock Canyons State Park, 4 miles NW of Quitaque on FR 1065. One of two Texas habitats for salt water herring on 120 acres. Annual rainbow trout stocking in December. Concessions. Various shelters and comfort facilities. Vehicle access fee; overnight is extra. Contact Superintendent, Caprock Canyons State Park, P.O. Box 204, Quitaque, TX 79255, phone 806-455-1492.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

This issue of the *Prairie Dog Gazette* contains a special section titled "Western Arts." Although less than comprehensive, it is intended to impart the flavor of some local painting and poetry.

The artist's eye has always been captivated by the American West, and this area called "The West of the Heart" is no exception. From Indian pictographs to glossy, full-color photographs, our characters, landscapes, and wildlife have been depicted frequently. In old campfire songs and modern cowboy poetry we also find written expressions of this region.

Before this area was settled, the local Indians' art was strongly symbolic, entwined with their religion.

The art of Europeans during the frontier era struggled to record first impressions of a new world in the less-than-adequate Old Masters style. Many times the High Plains were made to look like English meadows. Frontier adventures were reported in the manner of formal, stuffy chronicles.

Contemporary western artists range from those mainly interested in revealing the physical beauty of the region to those exploring the soul beneath the surface.

We have included a sampling of art created in The West of the Heart territory. We will continue to do so in future issues because the emotions expressed in this art breathe life into cold artifacts of history.

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Blankenship Building Has Colorful Past

The outward appearance of the J.D. Blankenship building in Quitaque has always been deceiving. Since it was built by A.C. and Ida Hunsucker in 1927, it has been anything but the simple country store/gas station it seems to resemble.

Only one year after completion, the building was rumored to be the site of "shady business." Strangers were coming and going constantly. Fish Wilson says Mr. Hunsucker rarely tended to his store. He was "among the missing most of the time," even when a local woman, Mrs. Littlefield, was shot next door. Her assailant then shot the west side of the service station while chasing Mrs. Littlefield's son.

One of the Hunsucker's sons confirmed the townspeople's suspicions when he became notorious as a gunman. Glen Hunsucker left a trail of blood in the mid-1930's while he associated with "Perchmouth" Stanton. The end came for Glen soon after he and Stanton killed the Swisher County Sheriff during a jail break in Tulia. Lawmen pursued them to Alto near Ruidoso, New Mexico, and fatally wounded Glen in a

shootout. Several lawmen from Roswell were killed during the exchange, and "Perchmouth" Stanton was captured, then executed in Huntsville's electric chair in 1934.

After things got out of hand, Briscoe County Sheriff Jake Honea and Quitaque City Marshall "Baldy" Hallman investigated the service station building. The scene looked somewhat suspicious because the water storage tank was overflowing even though the windmill attached to it was not pumping. Upon further investigation the lawmen found the water line had been illegally connected to the city water line. More importantly they found large stores of apparently stolen dry goods under the chicken coop's false floor. Among them were bales of overalls, boxes of Stetson Hats, and numerous harnesses.

In 1941, after all the member of the "Hunsucker Gang" were apprehended, J.D. Blankenship bought the building from the J.C. Woolridge Lumber Co. which had repossessed it.

Blankenship ran a thriving grocery store and gas station there until 1982. However, he never installed electricity or a telephone,

even into the 1980's. He was a well-liked man but ran his business in a somewhat unorthodox manner. According to his family, while filling a car's gas tank he would often put the gas cap into his pocket and forget it. They found a full box of caps in the station after he died. If a customer wanted his windshield washed, Blankenship would spray it with a water hose, explaining, "this is a fillin' station, not service station."

Since 1989 Karol Pigg, J.D. Blankenship's granddaughter, has used the building for her gift shop, Karol's Kountry Korner. Many of the relics from the past remain, including the old Mobil gas pumps, soft drink coolers, and original cabinets. It now has electricity and a telephone but "Blank (Blankenship) would kick the end of his coffin out if he knew," someone observed.

Consistent with its past, the J.D. Blankenship building still is not what it appears to be. It looks like a sleepy country store/gas station, but that's not nearly the whole story.

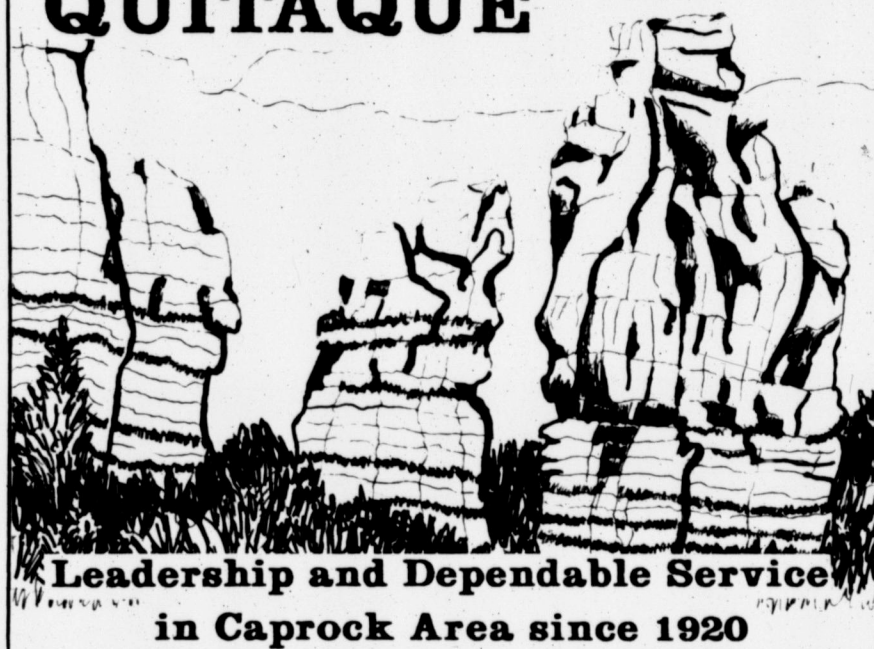
Don't mess with Texas.



J.D. Blankenship in front of the infamous filling station, 1940's
Photo courtesy Karol Pigg

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New Library For Quitaque

In early October, Quitaque will open the doors to a new library. The Caprock Public Library is now a reality, with help from a broad spectrum of interested citizens.

Mayor Elgin Conner and the City Council began the library development process with a community survey months ago. Since then, the City of Quitaque, Briscoe County, Valley School District, and a "Spring Fling" community benefit have contributed more than \$14,000 to the library.

The core collection is being funded by the Amarillo Area Foundation, an offspring of the Don and

Sybil Harrington Foundation.

Among the numerous residents of Quitaque who have contributed to the realization of this project, Janice Henson has helped organize the many elements involved. From the initial planning meeting early this year to the donations of money and books, Mrs. Henson says she has been "impressed with the pulling together and commitment of the townspeople."

Of course, every library needs a librarian. The Library Board has selected Arlene Hinkle to assume that post. Although Mrs. Hinkle is a native of the Quitaque area, she

will be returning to Texas after having lived in Maine for a number of years.

The Caprock Public Library is another good example of what residents of Quitaque and Briscoe County have done to avoid declining into oblivion, the sad fate of many rural communities.

The people of Quitaque now have a place that signifies their belief in the lessons of history as well as the importance of current events. And when the doors to a library are open, so is the way to a bright future.

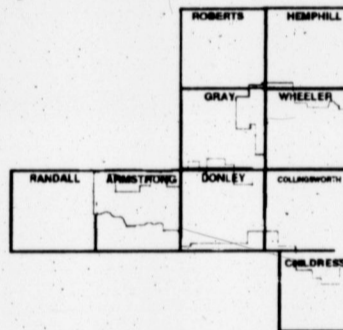
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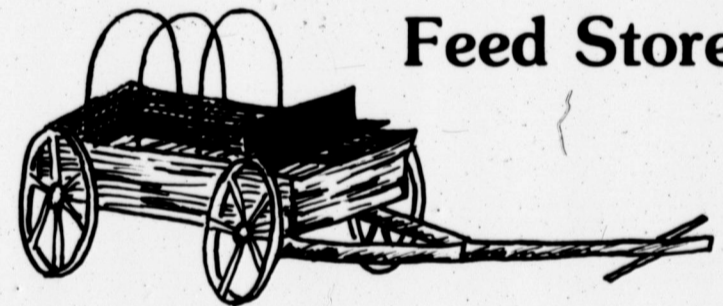


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Mystery Woman Captures Cattle Baron

Corinne Goodnight entered the spotlight of history in 1927 when she married the famous pioneering rancher Colonel Charles Goodnight. She had come from her home in Montana to visit the Colonel after corresponding with him for some time. Within months, the 26 year old Corinne (whose maiden name was also Goodnight) became the wife of Charles who was then in his 91st year of life.

On January 25, 1960, with pencil in hand, Corinne Goodnight replied to an inquire from the publisher of *True West*. Her penmanship style was still bold but more relaxed than her schoolmarm elegance of the late 1920's. What could she say about her husband?

Readers would "probably just be happy," Corinne wrote from Marquette, Michigan, "to hear from the woman he married on his 91st birthday which made headlines in all the papers. I still have the clippings and some splendid glossy prints of him."

Representative of the yellow, brittle clippings Corinne kept (news that the Associated Press carried in Texas, Missouri, Kansas, Montana, even Canada) was one printed in the *Amarillo News-Globe* on March 5, 1927, the day of her wedding:

"Romance flamed again Saturday in the breast of Col. Charles Goodnight...Age apparently has not dimmed the ardor of the veteran trail blazer for he stepped briskly up the steps of his nephew's home at Clarendon Saturday morning, escorting his blushing, bobbed-hair bride and announcing to his surprised relatives that the minister would arrive in a few minutes to perform the marriage ceremony."

One account reported the Colonel saying "that he felt like a boy with his first pair of long trousers, and confidently declared he would live to be 110 years old."

Warm congratulations came from the Colonel's old and gracious friends. He submitted one such letter to the *Clarendon News* for publication. The writer had been a student of the first Mrs. Goodnight, and was intimately associated with her and the Colonel in Clarendon's early pioneer society. Corinne's photograph, the writer said poetically, "indicates both character and poise." The writer continues, "Mr. Goodnight, may the magic hand of your little bride bring order out of chaos, and make you once more, in love with life!"



Charles and Corinne Goodnight. Probable date: September 1927. "...this writer (C.W. Howard of Amarillo) found them sitting on the porch of their home (in Clarendon) enjoying a refreshing west breeze. Col. Goodnight was puffing a cigar and Mrs. Goodnight was reading to him from *The Amarillo Daily News*. This is one of her greatest diversions, for Col. Goodnight, active as a man half his age, keeps posted to the minute on affairs of the state and nation. He speaks with that Texas drawl that is music to a northerner, and drills his listener through with as snappy a pair of blue eyes, under beetling, shaggy brows, as you would want to see..."

Photo courtesy Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon

Not all opinion was so kind. The public appetite for small game must have seemed to the couple as voracious as a circling hawk's in a prairie sky. "For five months (before their marriage) she has been the Colonel's constant companion," the newspapers observed. Still, people suspected the "real" nature of their relationship. And what of Corinne's motives? One correspondent wrote: "An impression has gone abroad in the land that Mrs. Goodnight is the flapper type," a 1920's expression for a "loose woman." Was Corinne a fortune hunter?

On January 11, 1928, the *Claude* editor of *Rural Life Features* responded to the Goodnights' request for advice. Should they allow yet another curiosity-seeker to write their story? The editor suggested

they grant an interview to the writer for "the good it might do to many of the married people whom the world delights to think their marriage is bound to be a failure."

With these memories in mind Corinne concluded her letter in 1960 to the *True West* publisher: "It was a great honor and privilege to have been in his life in those closing years and he greatly appreciated every moment."

Apparently *True West* published her letter since she personally received mail over the next few months from readers, young and old, in Colorado, Arizona, Texas, and Montana. They expressed admiration for the Colonel; recalled some association--almost kinship--with him; asked for photos, samples of

his handwriting, and any anecdotes which had never been published.

The marriage ended after less than three years with the Colonel's death in Tucson, Arizona, on December 12, 1929 at age 93. What was it like for Corinne to live in the

shadow of a giant? Who was the person beyond "Mrs. Goodnight"?

Editors' Note: This article is the first installment in a series of stories, about Corinne Goodnight, to be continued in our next issue.

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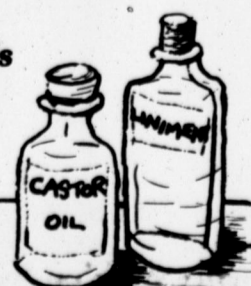
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Winter scene from a Jake Holster Christmas Card.

Early College Stood At Goodnight

Goodnight College, once located in the town of Goodnight, is one of the ghost colleges of Texas. It was founded in 1898 by Charles and his first wife, Mary Ann Goodnight, eventually closing in 1917.

Col. Goodnight glowingly stated his public purpose for endowing such an institution: "An educated man is more easily disciplined than one who is illiterate." Charles was privately more of the opinion that youth should learn the benefits of hard work.

When a circuit-riding Methodist

minister preached a revival in Goodnight, he mentioned that the church had considered Clarendon for a college site; but the town's reputation was a negative factor: "It's kind of a wild town and has some saloons."

Neighbors passed the word to the Goodnights. Mary Ann immediately saw an opportunity and inspired Charles, who was not a church enthusiast, to act generously. He offered the church one or two sections of Armstrong County land for a campus. The Methodists debated the site issue at their An-

nual Conference but discovered that the Goodnight land was mortgaged; they graciously declined the offer.

According to Herbert Timmons, the academy's first student, Charles was "sore about it and started the school anyway." Furthermore, Charles saw to it that Goodnight College opened its door (ironically, in a Methodist church building) one week before the Methodists opened theirs at Clarendon.

He named Dr. Marshall McIlhane its first president. McIlhane and his daughter Annie were the only teachers. Timmons said, "I never did even hear of their ever having a meeting of directors. Mrs. Goodnight was really the whole thing. Anything that Dr. McIlhane wanted to do, he went and talked to her."

By 1904, Goodnight College was financially in trouble. The Baptist church took over in 1905 and renamed the school Goodnight Baptist College.

Jewell Legett Daniels, the college's German and Latin teacher during 1907-08, remembered that there was "little organized sports or social life" on the strict religious campus.

In 1917, after the administration building burned, nothing was left of Goodnight College except the girls' dormitory. It housed an orphanage from 1919 to 1921, and served as a community center into the 1960's. Now only birds, bats, and ghosts occupy the grounds.



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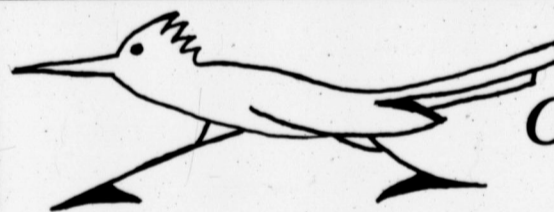
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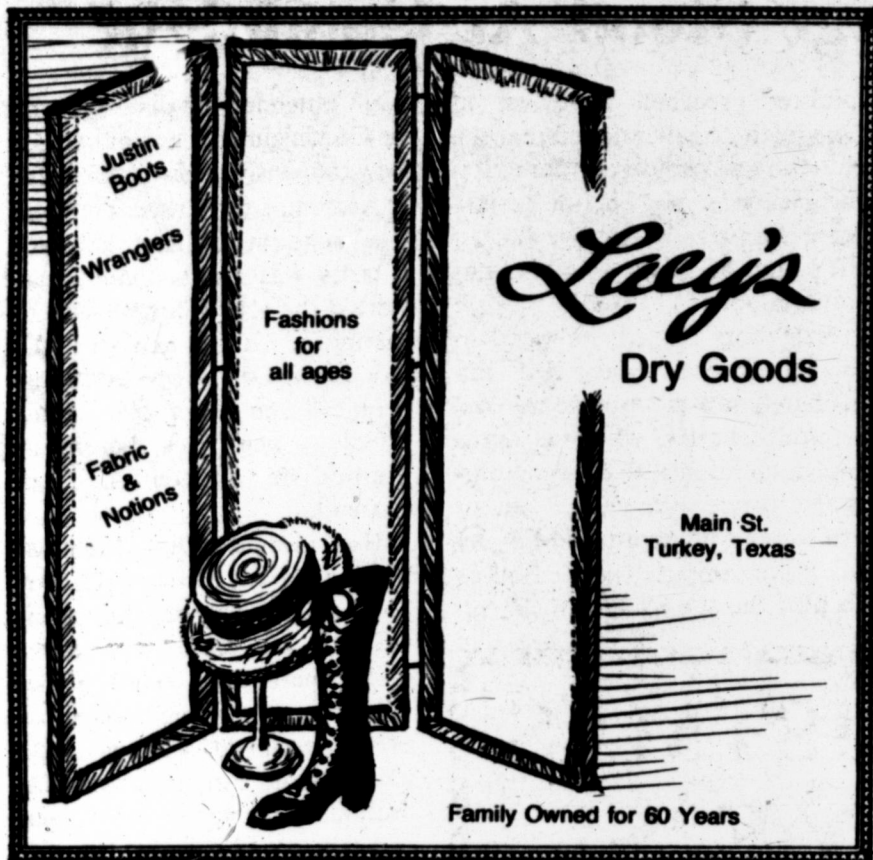
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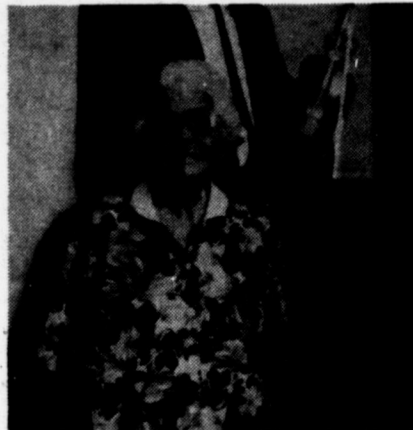


Lifetime of Service Earns Fame For Good Cook

Whether she is frying pies or welcoming visitors, Zona Lane exhibits the strong, positive attitude that has made her an institution in Turkey, Texas. At the age of 93, Aunt Zona, as she is known, lives the life of a much younger woman.

Mrs. Lane came to Hall County from Robertson County in 1907 when she was ten years old. While rearing her family, she helped her husband tend their cotton crops and milked by hand on their 15-cow dairy.

Cooking was always part of her life and eventually led to one of her claims to fame. She owned the Busy Bee Cafe for nine years and then worked in the cafe owned by her daughter, Linda Ferguson. Seven years ago when she began working with Linda, Zona started a ledger to record every fried pie she made. On the day of this inter-



Zona Lane of Turkey, Texas.

view the total was 44,340 handmade pies.

These pies, many made with fruit from her own trees, have attracted such a following that people from as far away as Fort Worth call to order batches of them.

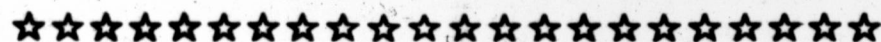
Although her days begin at 6:30 a.m. at the Turkey Drive-In Cafe,

Aunt Zona has another job as well. For 22 years she has been a hostess for the Bob Wills Museum. She devotes 21 hours each week to greeting visitors from the United States and abroad. The Green Thumb program, a federally funded effort to keep rural senior citizens active, helps non-profit organizations to employ people like Mrs. Lane.

Somehow she also has found time to travel. On a trip to Washington, D.C. she visited The White House during the Reagan Administration. After a tour of the bright, neat, chrome kitchen, Zona was asked what she thought of "Mrs. Reagan's kitchen." Her straight forward reply was, "It doesn't look like she's ever cooked in it."

Life in the town of Turkey may have slowed since its heydays, but Zona Lane keeps charging forward. Aunt Zona says she wouldn't change anything in her hard-working life because then everything else would be different, too. She prefers to take the good as it comes and move on past the bad.

For now, Zona fills her days spreading fried pies around the state, sharing hospitality with tourists at the Bob Wills Museum, and living the life that has made her such a popular lady.

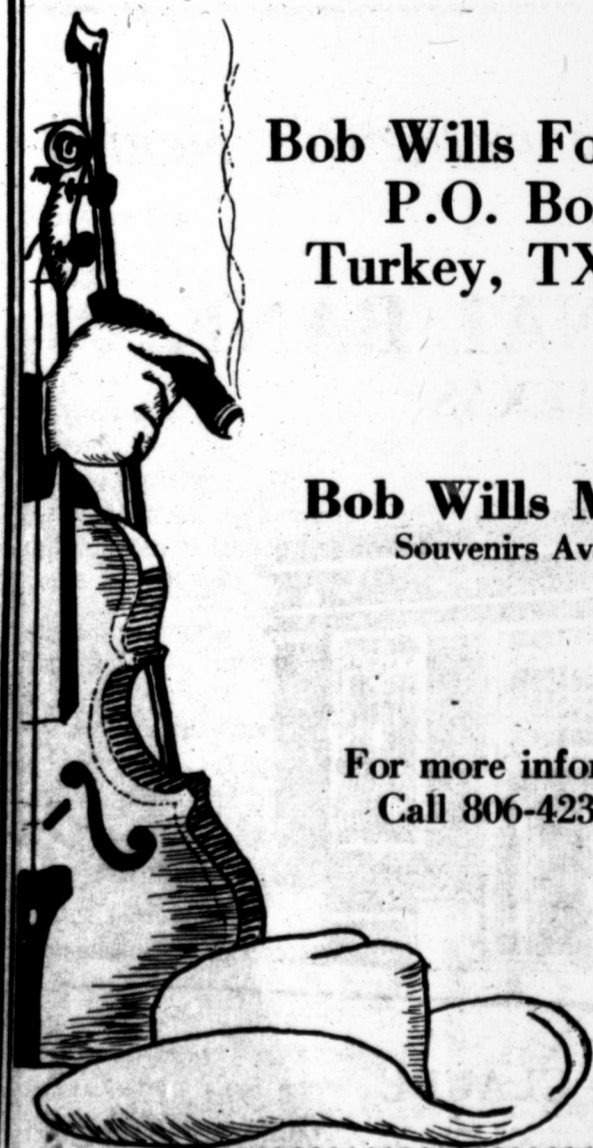


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New Texas Historical Commission marker dedicated to the First Methodist Church of Turkey on the centennial of the congregation's formation in 1891. Members worshiped in homes and in Wolf Flat Community Schoolhouse until 1907. The congregation built a frame structure, but it was destroyed by a tornado in 1928. A basement was then built and served as a place of worship until 1948 when the current brick structure was constructed on the top level.

GIRLS WRITE COWBOY POETRY, TOO

Who said that only good old boys write cowboy poetry? Some women also wrote of days when the West was wild and free. A woman has a gentler touch in writing of the range,

in using words expressing life that cowgirls helped arrange.

The cowgirl loved the land, and life, kept house, did ranching duties, but she could also share the joy of ranch and western beauties. A female heart beats just as fast at sunrise on the plains,

at newborn calf or colt's first steps, at sweep of gentle rains.

Cowboys and girls made history, wrote rhythmic verse and song, yet cowboys claim this field is male and cowgirls don't belong.

--Marianne McNeil

Sparkle Your Season !

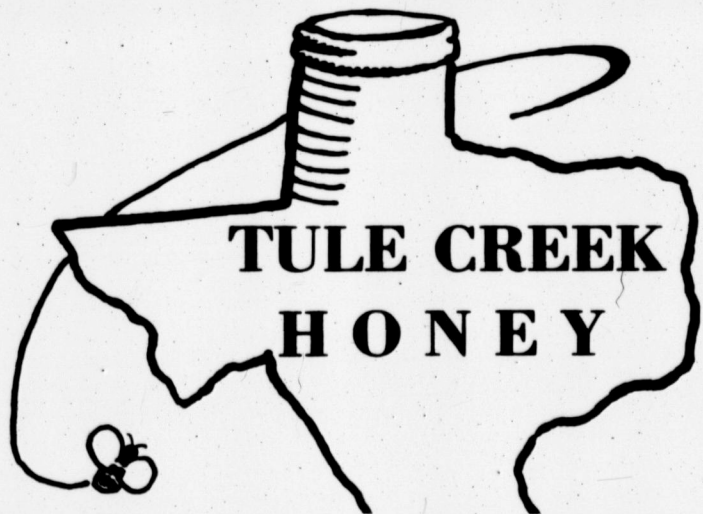


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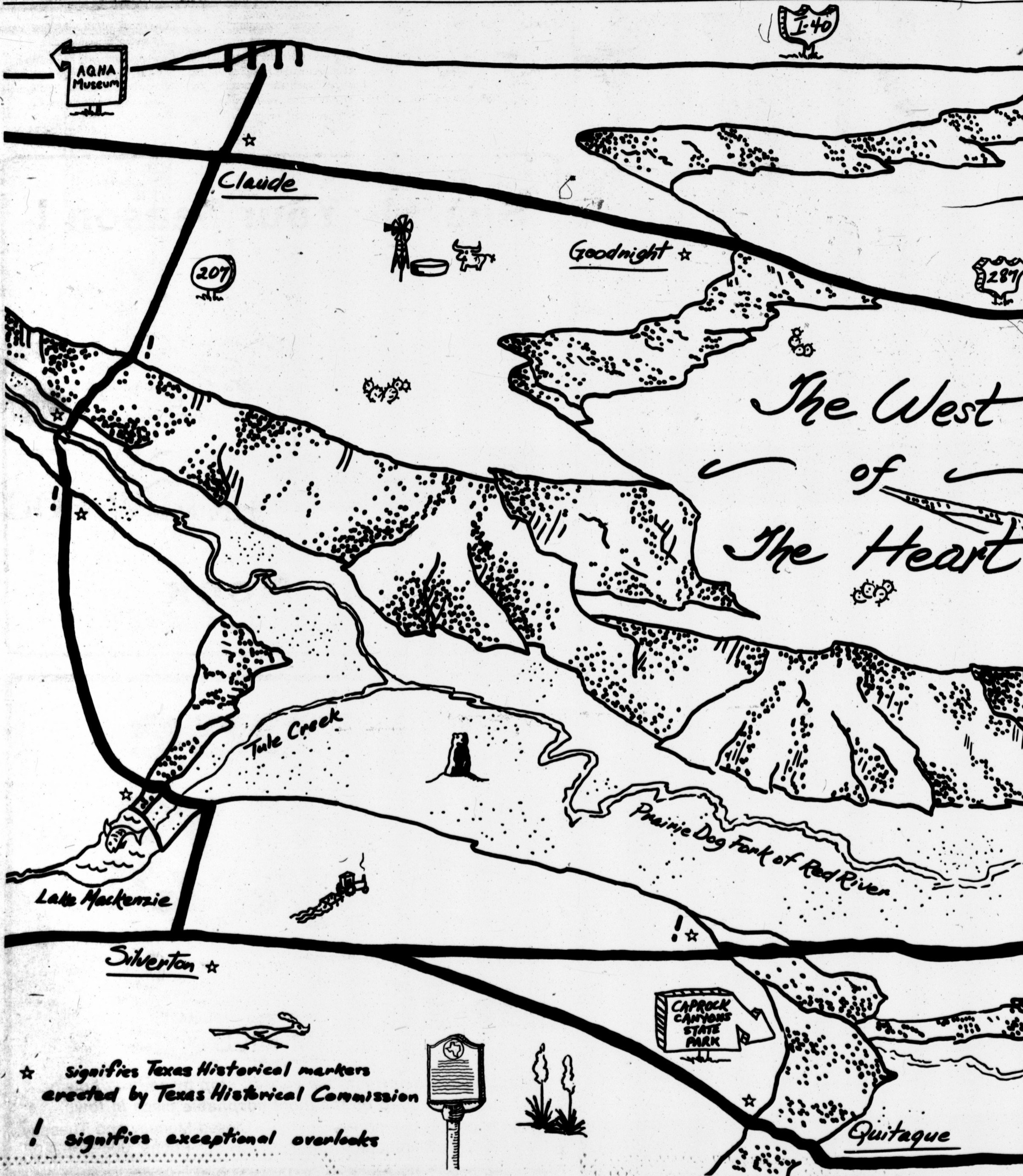
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Restaurant review, Market & Valuation, Spring 1991.

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ARTISTS — BOOKS

Amy Winton, 7108 Brookfield Dr., Amarillo, TX 79124 (806) 358-3319 Book: Canyon Visions: Photographs and Pastels of the Texas Plains - Limited edition print "Summer Patterns"

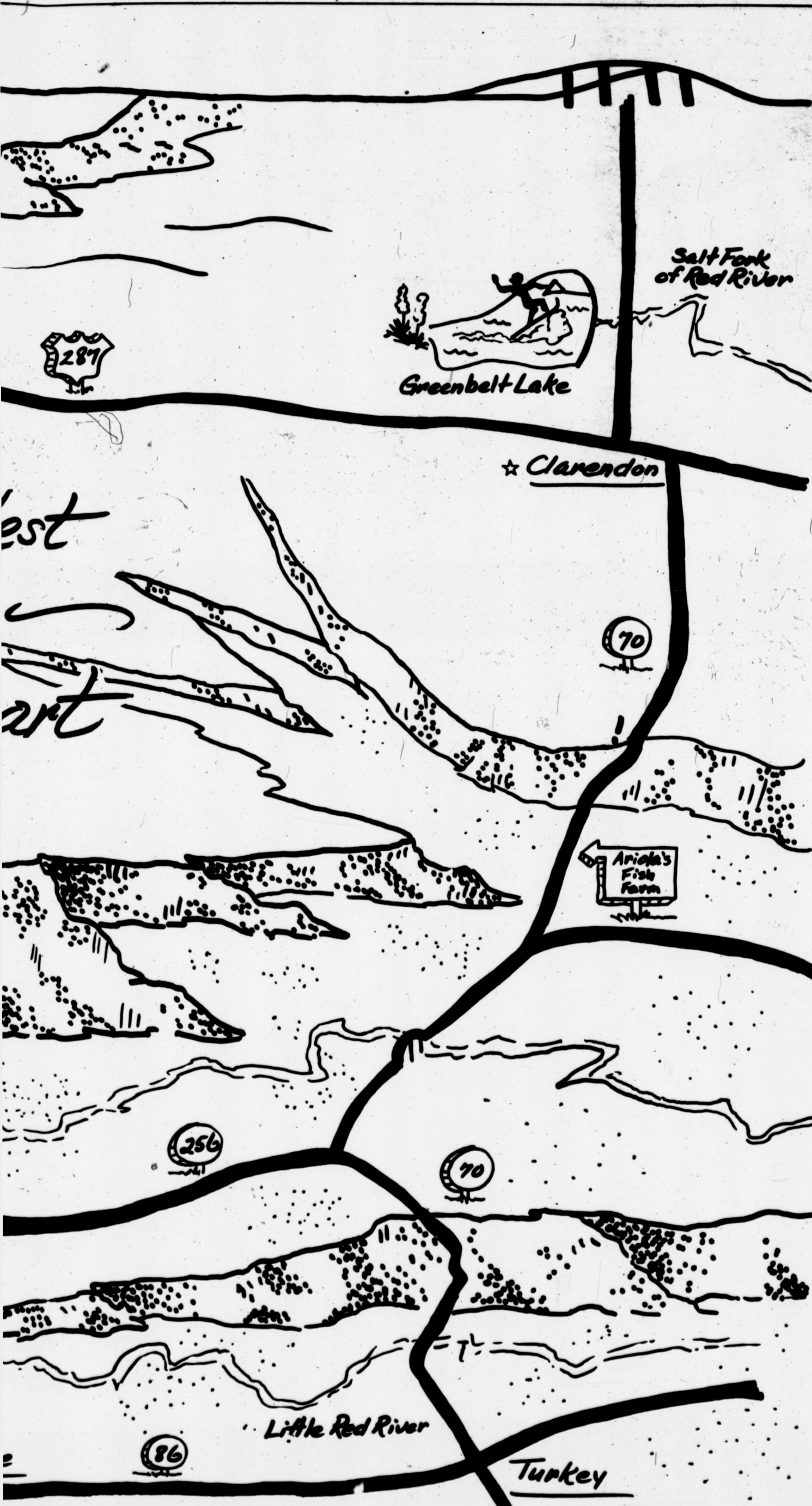
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Western Arts

Putting The West On Canvas

From cowboys to cactus, Western art remains popular throughout the world. There are numerous local artists who work in this field.

Some of the better known visual artists include Kenneth Wyatt, Amy Winton-Messer, and Otho Stubbs.

Kenneth Wyatt frequently captures the cowboy culture in his art but also explores religious subjects.

Amy Winton-Messer (who says she is "a New Englander by birth, but a Texan by the grace of God") creates pastel drawings of nature, especially in the area around

Clarendon and Hedley. Her art has been widely exhibited, and the most recent showing is in New York, at the Knickerbocker Artists 41st National Exhibition.

Otho Stubbs paints and draws traditional Western subjects. His creations are historically researched and include episodes of local history and Indian culture.

These artists are representative of the many other creative individuals who work in this region. Their styles and subjects vary greatly, but all of them give a glimpse of The West of the Heart.



Cowboy poets Jake Holster, Buck Ramsey, and Johnnie Burson at the 1991 JA Ranch Reunion

Cowboy Poets: Bards In Boots

A significant form of Western art has recently enjoyed a resurgence in popularity. Since about 1985, cowboy poetry has garnered new interest throughout the country. Most people remember Frederic Remington and Charles Russell when they think of western artists. However, the poetry of the West was, and is, just as evocative of the frontier, cowboys, and the expansive prairies.

This poetry has its roots in the campfire songs of yesterday. Songs

such as "Goodbye, Old Paint," "Strawberry Roan," and "When The Work's All Done This Fall," are all examples of cowboy poetry set to music.

Singing cowboys in the movies of the 1940's, Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, are good examples of how this poetry is usually best heard rather than read. Even today, the flavor of the poems is more savory when the words are recited. The poets may be a little stage shy, as one would expect of cowboys, but

their deep reverence for the West and its way of life comes through.

Gatherings of cowboy poets from around the country are held in Elko, Nevada and in Lubbock and Alpine, Texas. Of course, any roundup or reunion may move a cowboy poet to recite one of his works, and The Big Texan restaurant in Amarillo will soon begin a Saturday Cowboy Poets Breakfast to provide a regular stage for these bards of the range.

amy winton, psa



"Canyon Visions: Photographs and Pastels of the Texas Plains" by Dan Flores & Amy Winton
Foreword by Larry McMurry \$29.00 clothbound - \$20.00 paperback.

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In frontier days, the cowboys' work helped build the Golden West, and legends of real cowboys' toil show quality was stressed.

But now, we have the two-bit kind with huge ten-gallon hat, and rhinestone cowboys flit around their drugstore habitat.

This question is simple one with tongue in cheek, of course—will two-bit cowboys ever ride the cowman's quarter horse?

--Marianne McNeil

MY COWBOY SWEETHEART

I had a cowboy sweetheart once so many years ago, and thinking back on our romance still kindles poignant glow.

He wore tight jeans and jingly spurs and bragged about his horse; He loved to ride, and rodeo, and shoot the bull, of course.

His dancing eyes had roguish gleam when he was teasing me, and, oh, those cowboy songs he sang still stir my memory.

He had a cowboy's sense of fun; we seldom had a spat; I never heard him swear until I sat on his new hat.

--Marianne McNeil

THE DAY WE BURIED RUBY

Ruby was a little dogging mare—
All the big rodeos Ruby was there.

Many a cowboy rode her to fame,
Whoever rode, she performed the same.

She would put that cowboy at steers' side;
To Hub the cowboy's winnings would divide.

She made them all, New York, Denver and Fort Worth;
No one could say what she was worth.

She was owned by Hub Whiteman, all around cowboy of thirty-two
No one could praise her for what she was due.

Coming home from Denver one rainy night
Hub was blinded by a big truck's beaming light.

The car turned over and splintered the trailer bed
Hub raced to the trailer but Ruby was dead.

He ran back to get his flashlight,
For Ruby it was her last rainy night.

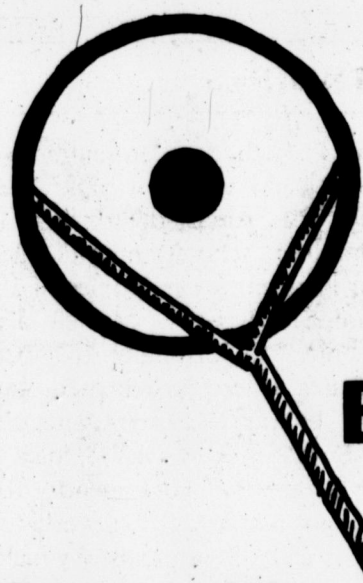
It was a sad time when Hub got home,
But he brought Ruby for us all to moan.

We could not just put Ruby in a hole:
Although Preacher said a horse had no soul

He would preach a funeral for her anyway,
Many came to see her buried that day.

We laid little Ruby to rest with a lot of tears
At the end of the arena, where she ran many steers.

--Jake Holster



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Anthem: A Prologue

And in the morning I was riding
Out in the breaks of that long plain,
And leather creaking in the quieting
Would sound with trot and trot again.
I lived in time with horsehoof falling,
I listened well and heard the calling
The earth, my mother, bade to me,
Though I would still ride wild and free.
And as I flew out on the morning
Before the bird, before the dawn,
I was the poem, I was the song.
My heart would beat the world a warning --
Those horsemen now rode all with me,
And we were good, and we were free.

We were not told, but ours the knowing
We were the native strangers there
Among the things of prairie growing --
To know this gave us more the care
To let the grass keep at its growing
And let the streams keep at their flowing.
We knew the land would not be ours,
That no one has the awful powers
To claim the vast and common nesting,
To own the life that gave him birth,
Much less to rape his mother earth
And ask her for a mother's blessing
And ever live in peace with her
And, dying, come to rest with her.

Oh, we would ride and we would listen
And hear the message on the wind.
The grass in morning dew would glisten
Until the sun would dry and blend
The grass to ground and air to skying.
We'd know by bird or insect flying,
Or by their mood or by their song,
If time and moon were right or wrong
For fitting works and rounds to weather.
The critter coats and leaves of trees
Might flash some signal with a breeze --
Or wind and sun on flow'r or feather.
We knew our way from dawn to dawn,
And far beyond, and far beyond.

It was the old ones with me riding
Out through the fogfall of the dawn,
And they would press me to deciding
If we were right or we were wrong.
For time came we were punching cattle
For men who knew not spur nor saddle,
Who came with locusts in their purse
To scatter loose upon the earth.

The savage had not found this prairie
Till some who hired us came this way
To make the grasses pay and pay
For some raw greed no wise and wary
Regard for grass could satisfy.
The old ones wept, and so did I.

Do you remember? We'd come jogging
To town with jingle in our jeans,
And in the wild night we'd be bogging
Up to our hats in last month's dreams.
It seemed the night could barely hold us
With all those spirits to embolden us
While, horses waiting on three legs,
We'd drain the night down to the dregs.
And just before beyond redemption
We'd gather back to what we were,
We'd leave the money left us there
And head our horses for the wagon.
But in the ruckus, in the whirl
We were the wolves of all the world.

The grass was growing scarce for grazing,
Would soon turn sod or soon turn bare.
The money men set to replacing
The good and true in spirit there.
We could not say, there was no knowing
How ill the future winds were blowing.
Some cowboys even shunned the ways
Of cowboys in the trailherd days
(But where's the gift not turned for plunder?)
Forgot that we are what we do
And not the thing we lay claim to.
I dream the spell that we were under --
I throw in with a cowboy band
And go out horseback through the land.

So mornings now I'll go out riding
Through pastures of my solemn plain,
And leather creaking in the quieting
Will sound with trot and trot again.
I'll live in time with horsehoof falling,
I'll listen well and hear the calling
The earth, my mother, bids to me,
Though I will still ride wild and free.
And as I ride out on the morning
Before the bird, before the dawn,
I'll be this poem, I'll be this song.
My heart will beat the world a warning --
Those horsemen will ride all with me,
And we'll be good, and we'll be free.

— Buck Ramsey

Buck Ramsey

Dr. Zell SoRelle, Clarendon resident and former Professor of Linguistics at West Texas State University in the 1960's, remembers having the opportunity to watch Buck Ramsey, then a student, develop his style.

"He used to bring me his poetry and ask my opinion. I think comparisons are odious, but his poetry reminded me of Wallace Stevens, a well known poet of the 1950's and '60's. I showed him Stevens' blank verse poem, 'The Cry of the Peacock,' and he fell in love with

it," she said. "He could quote T.S. Eliot word for word, time and time again."

In 1962, Buck Ramsey was working on the Bivins Ranch near Amarillo when he was thrown from a horse and paralyzed as a result. The accident was undoubtedly a factor in the direction Ramsey's work as a writer would take. However, as one who was privileged to know Buck in "the early days," his intelligence, perception, love of people and music were quite evident even then. Those talents have been forged by fire into works of remarkable beauty.

—Judy Welch, Co-publisher

Ring-Eyed Bull

Born in the brush from a Rannyhan cow,
Taught by his mother how to get away somehow;
Ran like a wolf, jumped like a deer,
Cowboys approaching, his only fear.
He was caught by two punchers when just a-coming two,
He hooked a horse, broke a rope and bid them adieu.
He was a red whiteface with a big ring-eye,
Sharp horns were black tipped and set up high.
He hid in the daytime, grazed at night;
To see this animal, a cowboy's delight.
He as never caught again, a wild son-of-a-gun!
If you ever did see him, he'd be on the run.
He would turn up a canyon and top the divide,
Run under low trees and lay down and hide.
The best thing about him was the calves he sired,
The ring-eyed calves were the most admired.
Old Ring-Eye died, he was nearly seventeen,
His skull and horns made a hat rack supreme.
Now there is a wild young cow, she's ring-eyed, too;
Has a ring-eyed bull calf — wonder what he will do!

—Johnnie Burson

Poets' Biographies

There's a distinction in the minds of ranch people between a cowboy and a cowman. We're all familiar with a cowboy's outlook on life, but we sometimes forget that a cowman has to take care of the business end of a cattle operation. Johnnie Burson can and does do both, but he must have the soul of a cowboy. His first and biggest love, next to his family, are horses and cattle.

"It took the cowboy poetry movement of recent years to get Dad to start writing down his poems," Burson's son, Briscoe County Judge Jimmy Burson, said. "Dad had always been good at little ditties and verses, but when he started attending cowboy poetry gatherings, he became inspired to seriously write it."

Johnnie Burson's pale blue eyes sparkle from underneath his conservative gray Stetson, he chooses white shirts, he is slender and tall (in or out of the saddle). In other words, he has the cut of a cattleman. Although modest, he confidently relates the tender occasion for which he wrote his first poem. "It was in October, 1989 for my wife on our 50th wedding anniversary," he said.

Marianne McNeil was born into the pioneering McFarland family active in the cattle business since days of the Dakota Territory.

Marianne started her writing career in 1982. She has six poetry books published and many contest awards, as well as over 500 poems in well known magazines and poetry journals.

She devotes a great deal of time and expertise in helping other

writers, such as coordinating the cowboy/girl poets for "Old West Days" in Amarillo, readings at community schools and trail rides, and in opening ceremonies of the Stampede Rodeos. McNeil also organizes opportunities for local and area writers, including Tri-State Fair Literary Contests and the Senior Citizens Writers' Group.

Marianne's work lends the feminine perspective to a world too often perceived as exclusively male. Humor is a tool she uses to great advantage in revealing aspects of Westerners' lives, sometimes at the expense of that fierce cowboy pride.

Jake Holster originally hails from Red River County in Texas, but along the way to Amarillo where he now hangs his hat, Jake's path took some zigs and zags.

The U.S. Navy paid his way to the South Pacific during World War II. Jake was a stretcher bearer at several beachheads, but his painting skills were also put to good use as a camouflage expert.

As Marketing Manager for Burrus Mills, Holster traveled around with the Light Crust Doughboys, promoting flour from Texas wheat.

Holster's multifaceted career still combines agricultural products with entertainment. His Rafter H Corporation provides hay and other bulk feed to hungry cattle, but after the cows are fed, Jake hits the poetry circuit, performing for varied groups around the country.

He's a real pro now, but Jake recalls his first performance in 1985. "I'd ridden bulls in rodeos and lived through the war, but I was never so scared in my life," he said.

Expeditions's Tragic Trail Passes Near Silverton

The land west of Silverton and southeast of Quitaque has a story to tell of Texas, the republic and the state, and a tragic expedition.

By 1841, when Mirabeau Lamar was president of the republic, Texas officially claimed a vast frontier boundary, west to the Rio Grande and north to Albuquerque, all the way to Wyoming. But Lamar dreamed of Imperial Texas as far as the Pacific Coast.

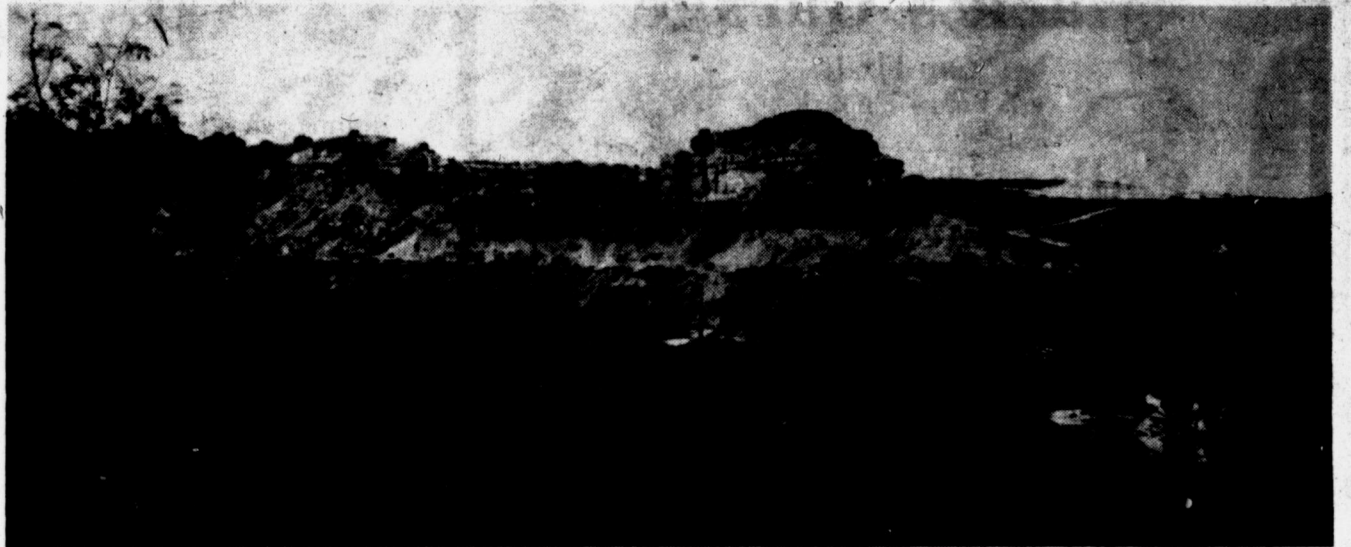
To achieve his dream, Lamar first commissioned treaty negotiations for the removal of Cherokee and Comanche Indians from Texas. The inevitable wars were financially devastating to the Texas treasury.

He proposed to the Texas Congress a scheme for diverting Santa Fe-Missouri trade, thereby collecting trail tariffs. When Congress

declined its support, Lamar independently authorized a so-called trade expedition, ultimately intended to establish a civil commission government in Santa Fe.

Texas merchants filled 21 wagons with \$200,000 worth of trade goods. The 300-man entourage called the Santa Fe Pioneers left Austin on June 19, 1841; it included five artillery companies for protection from West Texas Comanches under the command of Adj. Gen. Hugh McLeod.

Within a month they arrived at the Cross Timbers region of the upper Brazos, supplies nearly exhausted. Then they mistook the Wichita River for the Red. For two weeks they followed it westward, below what is now Vernon and roughly parallel to current U.S. 287. Finally, at Camp Resolution,



Tule Canyon near Silverton. Site of many historical events including Santa Fe Expedition.

a few miles southeast of Quitaque, they saw no way to get the wagons over the 1,000' rim to the Cap Rock. They were vulnerable to Comanche and Kiowa raids which they experienced repeatedly.

In the face of starvation and massacre, McLeod divided his force. Volunteers went west to find Santa Fe. On September 12, Mexican dragoons, alerted to Lamar's scheme, greeted the advance troops with a firing squad. McLeod and the remaining expedition blazed its own road west, eventually crossing the Cap Rock at Tule Canyon near Silverton. But this remnant was captured on October 5 as it ap-

proached what is now Tucumcari from a trail across the Llano Estacado.

Too tired and isolated to resist, the humiliated Texans were brutally marched on foot south to Mexico City and imprisoned in the dungeons of Perote Castle. Their misfortune, including the death of some 60 men, was unknown for months.

Enraged by Lamar's territorial challenge, Santa Anna attacked Texas in 1842 at Goliad, Victoria and twice at San Antonio. The Texan remnants of the ill-fated Santa Fe Expedition remained im-

prisoned until Santa Anna's overthrow and exile in 1844.

U.S. and international indignation made the annexation of Texas a major issue in the U.S. presidential election of 1844. Newly-elected President Polk signed the act on December 29, 1845 which made Texas a state.

This chapter of Texas history is a blood-and-sacrifice heroic epic, every bit as worthy of remembrance as the Alamo. Only the West Texas landscape and a roadside marker remain to testify about the men who struggled along the trail that led through the area near Silverton.

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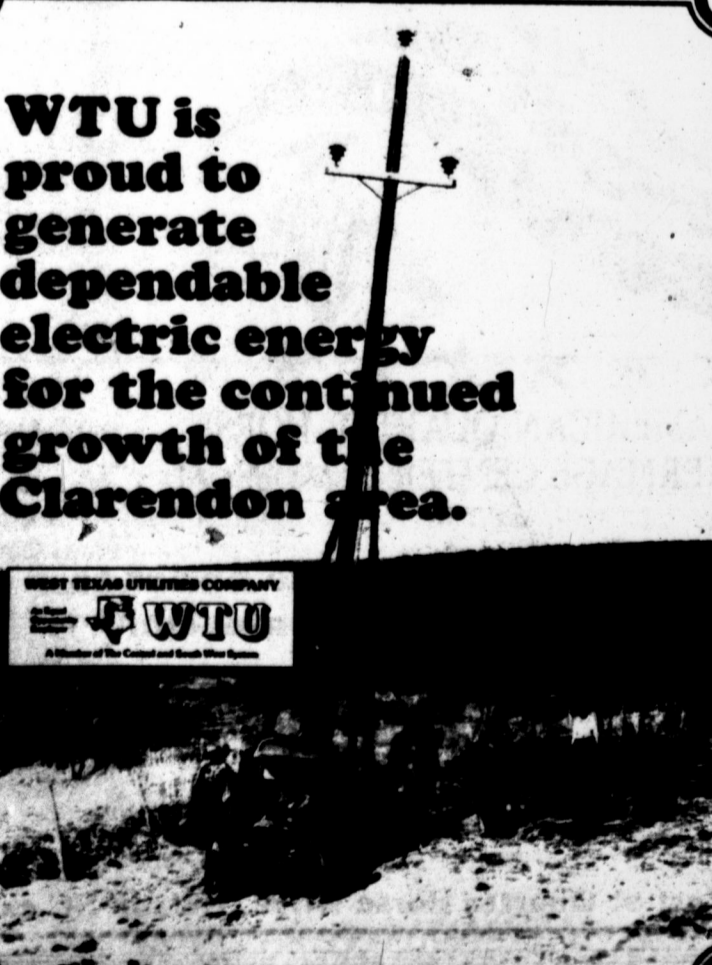
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Legendary RO Ranch Passes Into History

Historic ranches thrived in the Texas Panhandle. From the early 1880's through the 1950's the RO Ranch near Clarendon was always considered to be among the major ranches. Much of the cowboy culture of the area developed around the RO's activities since it was rivaled locally only by the JA and Matador ranches in size and fame.

In 1879 Sir Alfred Rowe, founder of the RO, arrived in Old Clarendon from his native Great Britain. This was an era when many foreign companies and individuals were investing in land throughout the Panhandle.

After a short boom, a shift away from large corporate ranches occurred. From 1882-1887 cattle prices declined about 80% (from \$9.35 per hundred pounds to \$1.90). Combined with the severe winter and summer drought of 1885-86, the poor market proved the ruin of many foreign ranch investment companies. They were prompted to sell their holdings to numerous smaller ranchers, but Alfred Rowe was an exception.

With a herd of Longhorn cattle from South Texas, Rowe established his ranch headquarters near McLean, north of Skillet Creek, on

a firm foundation. He had attended the Royal Agricultural College in Gloucestershire, England before coming to Old Clarendon, then worked as a cowboy to complete his apprenticeship. Also, unlike most foreign investors, Rowe was not an absentee owner, attending to the daily ranch management himself in the early years.

Eventually, the RO encompassed 30 square miles, including public lands and leased acreage. When Alfred Rowe died on the ill-fated voyage of the Titanic in 1912, the first era of the RO ended. Having lived in England for many years, his widow began selling parcels of land to farmers and other ranchers.

In 1917 Mrs. Rowe sold the remaining 77,000 acres to a former cowboy, now a rancher, Will Lewis. He had come with his family from Frederick, Maryland to Clarendon as a young boy. From those early days, Lewis strove to become a man of the West, which meant a life of cattle and horses. Many of his adolescent years were spent working for Alfred Rowe, so he was well acquainted with the RO.

Lewis ran the ranch much as it had been run in the past. Perhaps that is one reason the RO survived the depression of the 1930's. His



William Lewis, Jr.
Photo courtesy Will Chamberlain

Hereford cattle grazed on native pasture rather than being "pampered" with purchased feed.

World War II created a market for beef to feed the military forces, and this helped Lewis to not only maintain the RO but to continue to increase its size through purchases of ranches like the Mill Iron and the Shoe Bar.

Lewis' only son, Will, Jr., was reared in Dallas by his mother Willie Newbury Lewis. However, like his father, Will, Jr. wanted a life on the range. He eventually took over the reins at the RO. He introduced the use of Angus bulls to the exclusively Hereford herd. Also, he and his wife Vera developed a line of Quarter Horses that was highly prized for racing and roping.

Will Lewis, Sr. died in 1960, followed by his son in 1961. With their passing the land comprising the RO spread was gradually sold in smaller parcels, closing the final era of this legendary ranch.

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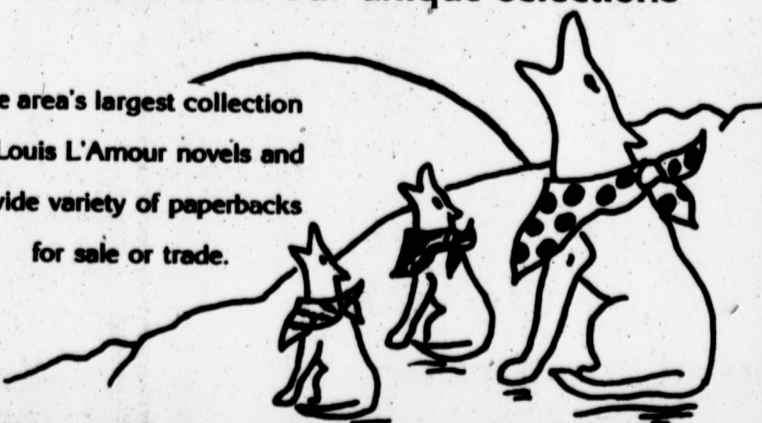


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Ol' Pete

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A Change In The Weather

By now I would imagine nearly everyone has heard about the Bovine Bombshell (that menacing methane cloud emitted by deceptively innocent looking cattle). Of course, cowboys have cussed these cattle since the first cow missed the gate and tore out through a mesquite thicket.

But nowadays some high-tech, high-dollar "Think Tanks," like the Worldwatch Institute are cussing them, too.

In their sudden concern for our environment, these city-type fellas have issued a kind of "Flatulence Alert" (flatulence being a scientific term for passing gas and the odor thereof).

Those well meaning but misguided folks have overlooked a few other environmental offenders. For example, if everyone stopped eating beef and joined the ranks of vegetarians, getting their protein from beans...well, as any cowboy can tell you, the "Campfire Effect" could be devastating. (Haven't these people seen the movie "Blazing Saddles"?)

And what about soaring birth rates? Can millions of new, burping babies be good for the atmosphere?

Possibly the worst methane-producing, flatulence offenders of all are those folks in suits and ties we pay to run the government. Everybody has to tolerate lots of hot air from the U.S. Congress. We've become accustomed to the "ill winds" that blow when they meet.

Closer to home, those good-ole-bubbas down in Austin have left the State Capitol until the next special session crisis. Their methane production tends to be intense, but only in short spurts. For the time being, we can catch our breath.

No, Worldwatch Institute, don't waste your time with state or national legislators. Don't worry about special emission controls, catalytic converters, or mufflers for cattle. During the next year, watch out for the granddaddy, frog-strangler of them all -- the campaign for the Presidency of these great United States.

If it is true that this methane gas is accelerating the "Greenhouse Effect," we can expect a whopper of a heatwave between now and November, 1992. These candidates are going to be spewing more gas than Mount St. Helens.

So let's hope the Worldwatchers ease up on the cows and worry about some really big offenders this year. Good luck to us all.

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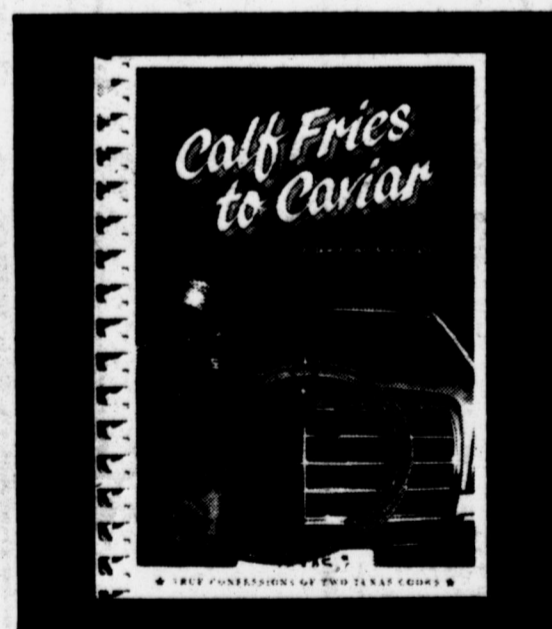
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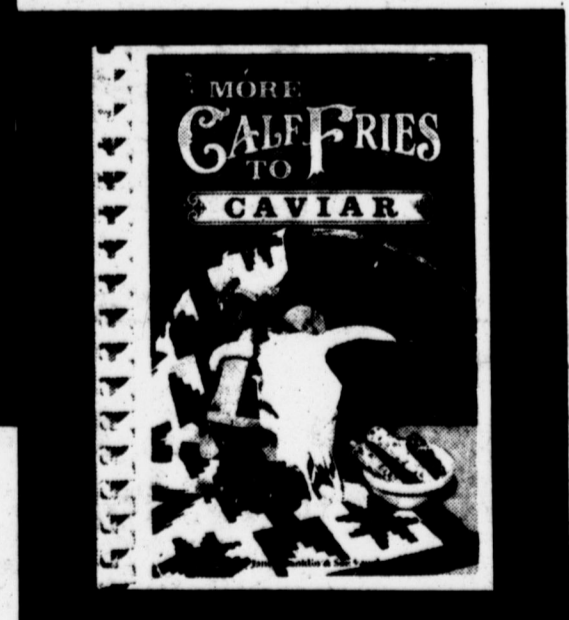
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CALENDAR AND ATTRACTIONS

SILVERTON

Attractions

Briscoe County Courthouse, 1922. County organized 1892. Jail House Museum, 1894, Briscoe County Courthouse.

Special Events

1st Sat, monthly, Caprock Jamboree, 7:00 pm, Silverton Show Barn. Cowboy music. 6:00 pm, mesquite-grilled hamburgers. Contact 806-847-2619.

QUITAQUE

Attractions

Sidewalk Museum, Downtown. Storefront displays depict heritage.

Special Events

1st Sat, Dec., Caprock Country Christmas, all day. City-wide celebration, Open House at shops, businesses. Activities and entertainment.
 Briscoe County Centennial, 1892-1992. Monthly events during 1992 to celebrate. Contact Quitaque City Manager, 806-455-1456, or mail inquiry to Quitaque Area Chamber of Commerce, Box 207, Quitaque, TX 79225.

TURKEY

Attractions

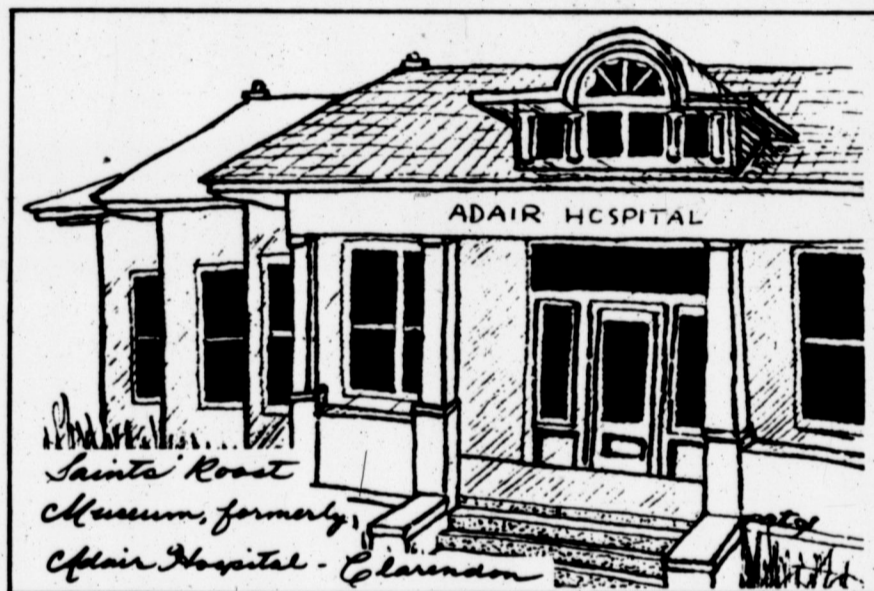
Bob Wills' Museum, City Hall. Bob Wills' Memorial, TX 86W at Turkey city limits, Main St.

Special Events

Last weekend in Apr. annually, Bob Wills' Day, all day, Bob Wills Center. Texas Playboys

Prairie Dog Gazette welcomes calendar entries for public events. Please submit written information to P.O. Box 1286, Clarendon, TX 79226. Include contact name and phone number. Prairie Dog Gazette

verifies to the best of our abilities each entry at press time; however, we cannot be responsible for changes in activities. We suggest calling sponsors of the events for confirmation.



Reunion. Old fiddlers' contest, dance, parade, BBQ.

CLARENDON

Attractions

Donley County Courthouse, 1890. County organized 1890. Saints' Roost Museum, TX 70S off US 287. Open Sun, 1-5 pm, and by appointment. Contact 806-874-3517, 2546 or 3839. Take time to drive around town to see turn-of-the-century architecture, from prairie style to formal Victorian.

CLAUDE

Attractions

Armstrong County Courthouse, 1912. County organized 1890. In the Claude area, the flat terrain and brilliant sunsets have made perfect film settings you will recognize from TV commercials and movies ("Hud," "Sunshine Christmas," and "Indiana Jones: The Last Crusade").



GENERAL

Attractions

All the highways of the area provide beautiful views; however, TX 207 south of Claude and TX 256 east of Silverton have especially dramatic views of canyonland!

Landmarks on the National Register of Historic Places:

- Hotel Turkey, Turkey
- JA Ranch, between Clarendon and Claude
- S.W. Lowe House, Clarendon

Historical markers:

- Armstrong Co. Courthouse Square, US 287, Claude.
- Dugout, TX 207, between Claude and Silverton.
- Overlook, TX 207, near Briscoe Co. line.
- Lake Mackenzie overlook, TX 207.

- Briscoe Co. Courthouse Square, TX 86, Silverton

- Comanchero Trail picnic area, TX 86, between Silverton and Quitaque.

- Sites within towns of Clarendon and Claude.

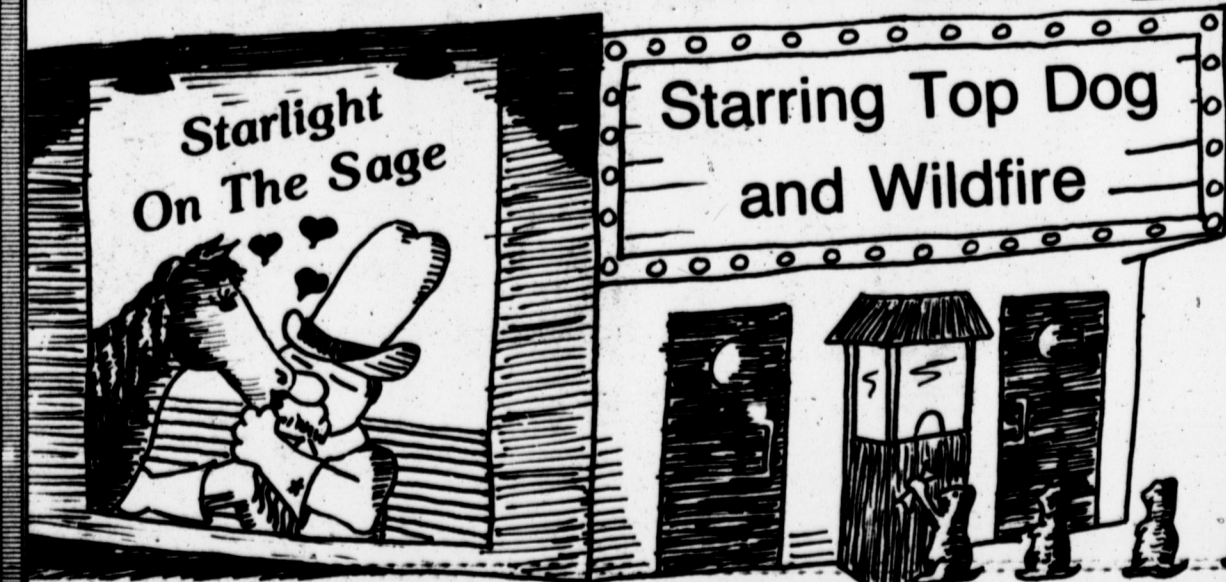
- Goodnight House, US 287, Goodnight

- Caprock Canyons State Park, 13,960 acres, recreation and archeological sites, north from Quitaque. Contact 806-455-1492.

- Three lakes in the region offer recreation and summertime respite: Greenbelt near Clarendon, Mackenzie northwest of Silverton, and Theo in Caprock Canyons State Park.

- Goodnight Cemetery, north of US 287 at Goodnight. Goodnight's grave and a feeling of lonesome prairies.

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