

My Early Recollections of Floresville and Wilson County (As remembered by J. Harvey Black and printed in the April 15, 1949 issue of *The Floresville Chronicle – Journal*)

I was born in Wilson County on the Cibolo River some three or four miles from Stockdale, in the year A. D. 1871. I recall many people and events that occurred as early as 1875. I shall write entirely from memory and not from hearsay.

The territory along the Cibolo River was settled some years before the interior because of the abundance of water and the productive soil of the Cibolo Valley. Some of these settlers whom I recall by name around La Vernia and Sutherland Springs are the Houstons, Murrays, McAllisters, Newtons, Polleys, Sutherlands and Dr. Messengers. Others that lived on down the river included the Hankinsons, Col. Mays, Dr. Batt, the Wheelers, Butlers, John McDaniel, Dr. Grey, Col. Peacock and others.

My first recollection of a store was one owned and operated at Stockdale by a man named Bunker. Dave Wheeler ran a saw mill, grist mill and cotton gin on the Cibolo.

Along in the middle 70's people began settling out in the post oaks. My father was one of those, settling on a small tract at the edge of the Rocky Hills north of Floresville in 1876. The open country was fenced and wild stock ranged everywhere. The settlers had to build houses and clear the land of timber which was plentiful. Houses were built mainly out of logs. Their fences were made of rails split out of the timber, logs, and brush. Think of a brush fence around your field. It is my purpose to tell you some of the problems and hardships of the sturdy and determined settlers.

Among those besides my father, W. W. Black were T. S. Simpson, Isaac Sims, the Richardsons, Ferd Robinson, Mrs. Mima West, a widow; Jack Rawls, the Donahos, Fosters, Franklins, Criers and others. The settlers were all poor and were very poorly equipped. They had to do everything the strong-arm way. Their first great problem was water. There was no inland permanent water supply, only natural ponds here and there. So water had to be hauled from the Cibolo River. It would take a man nearly a day to go to the Cibolo with a wagon or ox cart and get a couple of barrels of water! How they would skimp and save that precious water! Everyone had their rain barrels, and when it rained they put a plank up beside the house to run the water into the barrel. They also would put tubs, buckets, pans and other vessels under eaves to catch water. But soon everyone had his own water tank. They would dig a tank in the ground in a low place

with ditches to run the rain water from the slope into the tank. Then they build a rail fence around the tank to keep the stock out. As soon as it rained enough to fill the tank, the water problem was solved temporarily. Later they began putting down wells. As soon as one man would complete a well, several of his neighbors would start hauling water from his well. The first of these wells as I remember was at Isaac Sims and another at Wylie Franklins. The water was drawn from the well with buckets and ropes, wound around a windlass. At times there would be several men to come for water at the same time. They would stand in line and take their turns to get water. When a young boy would come for water, the men would often fill his barrel for him. Those pioneers were the "salt of the earth".

Another problem was bread. Everyone had to buy corn for bread until they could raise a crop of their own. The earlier settlers along the Cibola had corn which they would sell to settlers for bread only. The corn had to be shelled and carried to Wheeler's Mill to be ground. Many a small boy could not handle a sack of corn, so they would have the corn placed on a horse by some member of the family. Then he would get on top of the sack and ride to the mill. Uncle Dave, as he was familiarly known, would take the sack off the horse, grind the corn into meal, and put it back on the horse for the boy. This new meal had the bran in it and had to be sifted at home in a sifter made in the shape of a pan. This sifter had a fine mesh wire bottom and was shaken between the hands to separate the bran from the meal. This bran was also saved by some and roasted nice and brown to be used as a coffee stretcher.

Then, there was the soap problem, for everyone had to make their own soap. Each family had an ash hopper which was made by cutting down a hollow tree and cutting a trench in one side of it. Then they would clean it out and place it with the open side up, having one end slightly higher than the other. Then boards were put up end wise in this trough, leaning outward and forming a hopper. This was then filled with wood ashes and water was added. As the water seeped down through the ashes, it would drain out through the side of the trough, and it was then lye. The women would take this lye, put it in an iron kettle over a fire, and add grease of any kind that was at hand and made a crude sort of soap. This was used for washing clothes and scrubbing floors.

Another problem was that of fire. Every fall or winter by some means, fire would get started in the tall grass that covered the range. The fire would sweep across the country like an avalanche of destruction. The settlers had to fight it to save their fences and homes, but sometimes the fire would get to a man's fence in spite of all they could do. Then

the fence had to be rebuilt, and the neighbors would all help with this work.

Sometimes, they were unable to get kerosene for their lamps. They would make what they called a grease lamp. This was made by twisting a cotton string very tight for a wick, placing it in a saucer or other shallow vessel, and submerging the wick in melted tallow. This would make a fairly good substitute for a lamp.

There were great herds of cattle driven up the trail to the Indian Territory and Kansas, sometimes as many as three thousand in a herd. Trains of freight wagons hauled cotton to Port Lavaca and Indianola and returned loaded with freight for the stores. It would take three to six weeks to make a round trip in ox wagons, depending on the weather. If they were caught in a rainy spell, they would have to wait until the ground dried out enough to hold up the wagons, for the road beds were just plain dirt. Many a wagon bogged down and had to remain for days before it could be moved. There was a little school house built in the woods called Post Oaks School. All the children had to walk to school, some as far as three miles.

The Marcelina Baptist Church was organized.

Marketing was done in San Antonio. It would take from four to five days to make a trip to market and back.

All the clothing was made at home except for hats and shoes. The women would spin yarn on the old spinning wheel and knit socks and stockings for the entire family.

Floresville was an infant. There was a store run by John Griffith and Oscar Rhodes. A drug store was operated by W. C. Agee. A hotel was owned by A. G. Thomas. The old courthouse was a wooden structure and stood in the rear of the present bank building. The jail stood across the street from the present office of the Chronicle-Journal.

Sometimes a severe drought would dry up all the stock water and a great many stock would die on the range.

The settlers would have to drive their milk cows to the Cibolo River for water.

Floresville was growing and some of the residents had to buy fire wood. We, out in the sticks, would cut and haul in wood to sell to them. A "two horse load", as they called it, would be cut up ready for the stove or fireplace and would sell for a dollar.

Then, in 1886 came the railroad and Floresville got a boom. They built a new courthouse. On August 20, 1886, the great storm swept over the town with destruction to crops and timber.

Before I close, I must mention another man who did a lot for Floresville. He was Professor Washburn, who built the Floresville Academy.

There was a man named Anderson, who published a little newspaper at Sutherland Springs called the Western Texas Chronicle. That little paper played a great deal in helping me learn to read.

Mr. Anderson moved the paper to Floresville and the name was subsequently changed to Floresville Chronicle.

I have written this entirely from memory. If there are any mistakes found in the record, please blame them to lapse of memory.

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