



# THE CYCLONE



## Lubbock Site for 2006 Conference

The eighty-third conference of the West Texas Historical Association will take place at the Holiday Inn Park Plaza in Lubbock on March 30 - April 1, 2006. For those arriving on Thursday evening there will be a special birthday tribute to Elmer Kelton including reception and dinner beginning at 6:30 p.m.

On Friday morning at 9:00 a.m. there will be a tour of the United Spirit Arena at Texas Tech and the Lubbock Lake Site. Conference sessions will begin Friday at 1:00 p.m. at the Holiday Inn Park Plaza. Over 45 papers will be presented in sessions from Friday afternoon through Saturday morning covering all phases of West Texas history and culture. The United Spirit Arena will be the site for the Friday evening president's reception and banquet. On Saturday, the awards and business luncheon will be held at the Holiday Inn Mahogany Room featuring an address by WTHA president J'Nell Pate.

A special Saturday evening program is available including a tour of pioneering and ranching in West Texas with visits to the museums in Floydada and Crosbyton and the Ranching Heritage Center in Lubbock. An evening meal and program will be provided. Hotel accommodations for the conference have been made for \$79 per night at the Holiday Inn Park Plaza; 3201 South Loop 289, Lubbock, TX 79401, Phone: (806) 797-3141 or (800) 465-4329, code WTH for reservations.



Elmer Kelton

## The MacKenzie Trail

By Bob Burton

Ranch to Market Road 1142 cuts across Scurry and Kent Counties in a route as straight as surveyors transit, property lines, and topography allow. It is a narrow and unremarkable stretch of asphalt. Yet for many miles in the Brazos valley it approximates a noted wagon road of the unfenced past: The MacKenzie Trail.

I followed the road northward on a Sunday afternoon exploration. As I climbed out of Colorado River drainage and over the divide into Brazos River drainage, I caught glimpses of MacKenzie Mountain directly ahead. It was a double mountain—two caprocked mesas joined by a saddle. At the crest of the last ridge of the divide, I pulled off the pavement and consulted a map. Before me, RM1142 crossed a small draw, then doglegged around a projecting bluff. According to the map, MacKenzie's military road passed down the draw and angled across the valley to pass west of the mountain. I followed the route with my eyes, seeing the logic of it. I caught myself automatically looking for an embankment, and remembered that there would not be one. Was that a faint trace of the old trail?



Imagination took over and I saw blue-coated soldiers go down the trail. These were members of Ranald S. MacKenzie's 4th cavalry. I once heard a Comanche say that MacKenzie's troops were murderers of women and children. There are usually at least two sides to every issue. MacKenzie was in the wilderness to end similar actions by the other side. He did so with the aid of a system of wagon roads. It was redoubtable quartermaster Henry Lawton who established the roads. Lawton's supply trains allowed MacKenzie to operate in Fall and Winter when food and forage was limited for his foe. This particular road ran from Fort Concho to the supply camp near the mouth of Blanco Canyon.

After the Llano Estacado was denuded of roaming bands of warriors of both sides, West Texas began to settle. A few farmers came, but most of the land was claimed for livestock. The military roads became arteries for driving livestock. It was not a movement on the scale of the great Kansas migration, but the beasts came: woolly, horned, and maned. The trails also became supply routes for remote clusters of humanity. The north-south trail from Fort Concho forded the Colorado River close to the place where the Texas & Pacific Railroad chose to bridge that stream. This did not go unnoticed and the city of Colorado was born. With the railhead paused on the eastern bank of the river while a bridge was erected, freight wagons began creaking outward along the convenient wagon road. To the north, there was no other railroad except the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe in distant Dodge City, Kansas. A vast section of Texas dealt with merchants in Colorado, purchasing goods and shipping cattle. The construction of the Roscoe, Snyder & Pacific Railway by Abilene businessmen may have been an attempt to tap into the trade on the trail. But construction of railroads (Continued page 2)

## From the Executive Director



Dear Fellow Members:

Many thanks go to Association members who presented papers at our joint sessions with the East Texas Historical Association meeting (September) and the Center for Big Bend Studies Conference (November). Scott Sosebee, Leland Turner, Sam Prose, and Kenneth Davis carried the flag in Nacogdoches. Tiffany Fink, Paula Marshall-Gray, and Leland Turner ventured forth in Alpine. The papers were well received and, as Clint Chambers once said, just like the Comanche of old, we spread across the state carrying word of our presence.

Our joint session in Alpine this fall reminded us of the raw beauty found in the Trans Pecos region and of the great annual meeting we had last spring. We had an outstanding turnout and here is a brief list of some of the sites and events that impressed folks: The Marfa Lights; The McDonald Observatory; Ted Gray's Friday night banquet talk about his life as a cowman; Fort Davis—"From Retreat to Tattoo," Fort Davis (the town); the Indian Lodge; Chinati Foundation (Marfa); and El Paisano Hotel (Marfa). Though it did not make the "A-list," the early-risers commented "fondly" of air horns blaring at the wee hours as the trains rumbled through town. We have posted some of the conference photographs on the Web site-WTHA.org. If you have any to contribute you can email those to our offices at WTHAyb@ttu.edu.

We leave Alpine in our collective memory as we turn to our upcoming meeting in Lubbock March 31-April 1. There will be plenty to do including a Saturday afternoon trip to Blanco Canyon in search of Coronado. Donald Blakeslee with Wichita State University will be with us for that once in a lifetime visit. We have already sent out conference registration forms and information via email and "snail" mail. Also, Becky and Jim have included conference information in this issue, and it can be found on the Web site at WTHA.org. See you in Lubbock.

Tai Kreidler  
Executive Director

### MacKenzie Trail

(Continued from page 1) and new roads brought a decline in the trail. Fences cut its path, and, although new routes were established, it ceased to be a main thoroughfare.

The process of evolving pathways continues today. A dirt road passes on the east side of the mountain and winds to a connection with state highway 208 just south of the Brazos. RM 1142 crooked to the west side of the mountain and the pavement ended north of Polar community. Private roads behind locked gates continued to follow the general route of the MacKenzie Trail beyond the river. The end of pavement is connected with the road that passes east of the mountain.

I did not go that way this day. My interest was the new county road from Polar westward to US 84. Years ago, there was a different dirt road here, but the Kent County section was closed off recently. A new section has opened, some distance north of the old and close to Lake Alan Henry.

I drove north towards the mountain, but did not abandon my musings. Indian graves are said to be atop MacKenzie Mountain. I passed the mountain, recalling many years before when, up on that cliff, my mother

passed on to me something a white-haired rancher had told her.....The Indians called the Brazos valley around the mountain the land blessed by God, because there was always food and water here. I pondered that statement as I turned west off the pavement at Polar school. I've seen deer on the mountain, and quail. Roadrunners are out in force today and turkey lurk about, and, if a person's medicine forbade the eating of birds, doubtless other toothsome creatures are hidden in the brush. The brush no longer hides buffalo, but the modern infestation of mesquite and sunflowers, themselves edible, have not entirely crowded out plum trees and agarita bushes. Grape Creek and Little Grape Creek were not named foolishly. And a century ago there was a small population of mulberry trees. The grapes and mulberries were anomalies. They were out here at least fifty miles from their nearest kin. But the true anomalies were, and remain, the live oak trees that are hundreds of miles out of place. It may be that Indians dropped seeds by accident. It might also be that favorite nuts and berries were deliberately planted. If this was Coronado's Cona, as has been claimed, it may have been the eastern agrarian Indians who came to Cona every year to hunt buffalo. They did not have time to

cultivate crops in west Texas, but they may have planted perennial plants that would produce fruit in time to be mixed with meat for pemmican before the long journey home.

This area also seems to receive more rain than others. Scurry County residents claim that rain usually falls in the Brazos drainage. I count myself in that number. Many times I have watched storms to the north or east of Snyder, close enough to hear the thunder, but the rain would not cross the divide. This means that the Brazos drainage is more heavily washed. The Brazos valley appears to be flat, but there, unseen until a few feet away, are canyons and gullies deep enough to hide full-grown trees. It was these abrupt washes that convinced surveyors that to build a railroad line down the valley was "impracticable." Instead, the railroad was routed over the divide into less-broken Colorado drainage.

As I followed the dirt road westward, Flat Top Mountain turned its unfamiliar face away in favor of a facade well known to me. The Blue Mountains, the northern tip of the Callahan Divide, loomed ever closer. Soon I was stopped at the shoulder of Highway 84, a road I have traveled thousands of times, but there always seems to be something new on it. I turned onto the four-lane and accelerated west.

# Grass Fires of the Southern Plains

by J. Evetts Haley

[Editor's note: Because of the recent grass fires that have swept through West Texas and Oklahoma, we thought Haley's history of grass fires would be of interest. It is a condensed version of a much longer article which was published in the 1929 Year Book.]

Essential to almost every form of animal life of the Great Plains forty years ago were the native grasses, buffalo, mesquite, grama, blue stem, and a few other varieties. At that time few weeds appeared upon the extreme southern portion of the Great Plains—the Llano Estacado—to offer supplemental forage, no feed crops were available, and except for a very scant growth along the breaks, there was no brush for browsing. Grass alone, with scattering water, accounted for the immense herds of buffalo, antelope and mustangs of the prairies. Some herbivorous animals live without evident water supply. None lives without forage. During drouths, upon the exhaustion of the water holes, the longhorns of South Texas used to live for weeks upon prickly pear. The great mule deer of Sonora may never drink but live by eating the juicy fruits of the viznaga and the cholla. But upon the Plains no watery cactus grew as food for thirsty animals, and more remarkable was the abundance of animal life that required little water. Prairie dogs thrive without it; jack rabbits do well, though drink heartily when water is available; and antelopes sometimes live for months upon nothing but the grass of the high plains.

Strangely enough upon first sight, consideration of the settlement of the entire western range country shows that grass has been more important than water. Where grass is good, men have produced water—produced it through wells and windmills, surface tanks, dams, and reservoirs. Since the grass in any country is of such great importance to pastoral life, and it was the sole reliance of the animal life of the Plains until the last few years, its preservation was of the utmost importance.

Laying aside the natural phenomena upon which its growth is dependent (drouth), the greatest struggle cowmen of broad prairie and plain country have had has been the protection of grass from sweeping fires. Undoubtedly since men began traversing the grass grown Plains, carrying fire or its implements with them, there have been grass fires. For the Plains Indians such fires have been producers of rain, an offensive weapon of war, and a defensive measure. Prairie fires terrorized many early western explorers, were a curse to the Santa Fe traders and the bane of many cowmen. Extensive fires made great scopes of country



First United Methodist Church of Cross Plains during recent grass fires. Photo by Reggie Pillans

uninhabitable for animals and sometimes impassable for men who depended upon horse flesh. But of all western men, those who lived from the grass of the Plains suffered greatest from the ravages of fire. Perhaps nowhere were their troubles worse than upon the Staked Plains of Texas.

Indians effectively used prairie fires in their wars. Sometimes they concentrated game, burned off their enemies' ranges, or invoked the gods of rain by burning grass. During March, 1854, Captain John Pope, on reconnaissance of a southern route for the first Pacific railroad, camped just above the junction of the Delaware and Pecos rivers in southeastern New Mexico. There he observed how Indians placed grass fires to offensive use. On March 9, he wrote:

This day we . . . became aware of the vicinity of the Indians. About sundown we perceived the prairie on fire about two miles from camp, up the river; the wind blowing from the northwest and directly toward us. As the grass and weeds were dry and the wind strong, the flames rushed onward with great rapidity. Instant and prompt measures were taken against this appalling danger. The prairie was fired round the camp from the river to the creek. We were thus in a triangle, the Pecos and Delaware being the sides—the belt of the Prairie we had burned, the base . . . This was an act of the Indians, as we could clearly see the plain fired in many different directions at the same time. The fire swept on round the camp, and crossing the creek some hundred yards above us, and seizing the dry grass on the right bank, illuminated the whole plain during the night. Happily, our energetic proceedings defeated the designs of the Apaches. In the first intimation of danger, the animals and the stock were driven

into camp—the former tied to the wagons, the latter well guarded.<sup>1</sup>

In 1841 the Texan-Santa Fe Expedition, while crossing the Panhandle, carelessly let out a fire which came near resulting disastrously for the entire party. George Wilkins Kendall, the faithful chronicler of that expedition of woe, wrote vividly of what happened. The wagons of the expedition were camped upon the rim of a Panhandle canyon while a party of the men, Kendall among them, had gone down into the canyon after water. Upon hearing a loud report from the direction of their camp, those in the canyon, fearing an Indian attack, hurried toward camp. Kendall described what had happened.

As we neared the camping-ground it became evident that the prairie was on fire in all directions. When within a mile of the steep bluff, which cut off the prairie above the valley, the bright flames were seen flashing among the dry cedars, and a dense black smoke, rising above all, gave a painful sublimity to the scene . . . Before we could reach the base of the high and rugged bluff the flames were dashing down its sides with frightful rapidity, leaping and flashing across the gullies and around the hideous cliffs, and roaring in the deep yawning chasms with the wild and appalling noise of a tornado. As the flames would strike the dry tops of the cedars, reports, resembling those of a musket, would be heard; a strange accompaniment to the wild roar of the devouring elements.

. . . [A]s night in vain attempted to throw its dark mantle over the earth, the light from . . . miles and miles of inflammable and blazing cedars illuminated earth and sky with a radiance even more lustrous and dazzling than that of the noon-day sun.<sup>2</sup>

As in the camp of the Texan-Santa Fe Expedition, most grass fires were and are the result of carelessness. Inexperienced cooks along the Santa Fe trail let out many fires. Josiah Gregg, noted historian of the Santa Fe Trace, tells how his cook let out a fire. In 1839 Gregg camped in what is now western Oklahoma. One of the cooks kindled his fire upon the tall grass of the valley in which they stopped, and it spread at once, Gregg said, "with wonderful rapidity, and brisk wind springing up at the time, the flames were carried over the valley, in spite of every effort we could make to check them. Fortunately for us, the fire had broken out to the leeward of our wagons, and therefore occasioned us no damage."<sup>3</sup>

Trail outfits, composed of men experienced in range lore, sometimes unavoidably, sometimes carelessly, let their camp fires set the grass.

Other causes contributed to many fires. When barbed wire was enclosing most of the range of Texas in the early eighties and the struggle for free grass was at its bitter height, grass was burned in retaliation for alleged grievances held against the fence men. In 1884 Texas finally passed a law making the burning of grass a felony. But most grass burning offenses upon Texas ranges were matters for settlement outside court.

When Ira Aten, ex-Texas Ranger, was brought to the Excarbada Division of the XIT Ranch to fight the cattle rustlers of eastern New Mexico and the western Panhandle, he put into effect a vigorous system of frontier law. Men rode the western XIT fence line, which followed the New Mexico boundary, with Winchesters on their saddles and sixshooters upon their belts, taking a shot at anyone seen upon the fence without evident good business. Texas men told Aten that the thieves would burn him out if he did not quit fighting them too viciously.

I told them that I could not help it if they did [said Aten], but if I caught one doing it, I was going to kill him if it was the last thing I did. . . . [The rustlers did indeed set several fires. Aten explains:] The rustlers knew that the Company would fire me if they could keep me burned out, and I knew that I had to stop the devilment if I held my job, and I made up my mind to kill this man [Brown, who had set the fires]. . . . I set out after him. His friends suspected what I was going to do, so Brown left and went to Cripple Creek, Colorado, and did not come back for five years.

Aten had moved to California before Brown returned to the Panhandle. "That," said Aten, "was the last time my range was set afire maliciously."<sup>4</sup>

As they rode the range the cowboys sometimes dropped a match or a cigarette stub to start a fire. The XIT Ranch lost so much grass that some of its foremen ordered their cowboys to smoke only when they were around mills or other waterings, where all the grass had been eaten and tramped away. Cowboys did not observe this rule faithfully, but it caused them to be more careful.

When the grass had cured and had become dry during the winter, there was always danger of fires. When the drouths came and dried the grass prematurely, there was danger during the summer, spring, or until the country began to "green up." Prairie fires, once started before a brisk wind, traveled rapidly, spread over much country, and were extremely difficult to check. The most dangerous period was during the fall and winter, but what is said to have been the most destructive prairie fire to have swept the South Plains came in the month of June, 1879. It originated on the Z-L Ranch in Crosby County, where there was considerable "shinery." Hundreds of wild hogs ranged this

dwarf oak country, prolific and hardy upon the acorns that grew there. Hank Smith, the first settler in the South Plains region, described this fire and the hogs.

One day a cowboy decided he would set fire to the shineries and run them out. He did it all right, but it is to be hoped that no one else will ever try to drive wild hogs out of a shinary country with fire. The fire got away and started on a wild rampage in a northeasterly direction. No one has ever learned for certain which way the hogs went. The fire swept the country now occupied by Crosbyton, Emma, Ralls, Lorenzo, and spreading as it went sped across the Blanco [Canyon] moving before a terrific wind from the southwest . . . . Crossing the Blanco on it went into the Quitaque, Boggy Creek, North and South Pease River and Tule Canyon country, while before it fled and swarmed countless thousands of antelope, turkeys, hundreds of deer and a sprinkling of cattle and horses. The fire swept thousands of square miles of country to the south and southwest, north and northeast of Mount Blanco. All through the country at that time, especially along the streams, were hundreds of magnificent groves of fine timber, particularly cottonwood and hackberry. This fire killed the timber and in effect literally wiped it out.<sup>5</sup>

Settlement of the Plains country with farmers was well under way when the next largest fire of that section dealt perhaps the heaviest destruction in the history of the country. This fire started about the first of November, 1898, was supposed to have resulted from somebody's throwing a lighted cigar into high, dry grass. Starting about noon near Eagle Springs in Hale County, it moved east before a very high wind. Before night a change of the wind to the north switched the course of the fire and it swept south. Thus the fire burned south over a course just as long as the distance it had traveled from west to east, burned a great scope of country embracing more than four counties in area and burned itself out only when it struck the Yellow House Canyon.

All other sections of the southern Plains suffered losses. Fires destroyed much of the XIT range from year to year. The north end of that ranch, lying against the Panhandle of Oklahoma, was stocked during the summer of 1885 with 22,000 cattle. During the fall a fire broke out in the Arkansas River country of western Kansas, swept south before strong winds, jumped the Cimarron River near the 101 Ranch, and roared south through No Man's Land toward Texas. The Cimarron cowboys fought the fire along its sides. With a chuck wagon they worked into Texas but did not extinguish the fire until after it had burned most of the Beaver Country. They always fought hardest during the very early morning hours,

while dew was falling. During the middle of the day the fire burned more rapidly, and cowboys rested a little and killed more beeves for drags. Finally this fire broke across into the North Plains of Texas and swept south toward the Canadian.

It crossed into the Panhandle just west of Buffalo Springs, the northern division of the Capitol Freehold Land and Investment Company, Ltd [XIT]. Mac Huffman, cowboy at the ranch, described attempts to save their grass.

George Collins was the range boss. He was badly excited when he saw the fire coming and sent riders out to bring in men. We left the ranch and went sixteen or twenty miles to a point a little south of where Texline is now. We rode up to the fire at night. It was burning through the blue stem grass, three feet or more high in the Perico Draw. The flames looked like they were going sixty feet high. Collins told us to look out for cow paths or some other advantage to fight the fire along. We fought the fire along its east side all that night and went in to Buffalo Springs about ten o'clock the next day. After dinner we hooked up a wagon and Hugh Perry drove it full of men farther north to the Corruppa and we fought the remainder of the day and all that night. But all the grass we saved was about two miles square in the Dallam County Pasture. We lost all of the Middlewater Country as the fire did not stop until it got into the Canadian Breaks.<sup>6</sup>

The XIT alone must have lost near a million acres of grass in that one fire. Collins threw 4,000 head of his cattle across the line into New Mexico to drift far and wide before the severe blizzards of winter that followed. He threw the remaining 18,000 head south to the unburned country along the Canadian. By the next summer, losses had depleted the original herd of 22,000 to 16,813 head.

Spring Lake cowboys fought a prairie fire upon that division of the XIT in 1887 until a snowstorm put it out. Lightning weirdly played over the Plains during the storm. A "sort of preacher" in the crowd prayed and sang during intervals of rest, while the boys "cussed" and swore loudly they would "rather be anybody's yellow dog in an ash hopper than a waddie out working for the Syndicate at \$30 a month." This fire traveled sixteen and one-half miles in about two hours. Finally it struck the sage grass in the sand country of the western Panhandle. Flames shot high into the air where the wind caught their tips and hurled them back to the ground to set fire to the grass as much as sixteen feet ahead of the burning portions. Finally the snow stopped the fire. The weather was bitter cold and the cowboys, completely lost, attempted to re-set the fire to keep from freezing to death, but the snowstorm was too heavy.<sup>7</sup>

One of the worst prairie fires of the western Panhandle broke out in the LFD country of New

Mexico late in November, 1894. A west wind sent it racing toward the Spring Lake ranges. For a week, as diverse winds slowed its progress, smoke hung over the Texas plains like the heavy haze of Indian Summer. Every night Syndicate cowboys saw its red glow rise and fall like the distant aurora of the northern lights. Checked here and there by fighting cowboys, it broke forth afresh and crossed into Syndicate range where Running Water Draw is cut by the New Mexico line to the south of Farwell, Texas.

Seldom did prairie fires result in loss of life. Experienced western men worked their way to one side of the advance path of flame, the lead fire, outran it to a nearby lake, to barren ground, or to short grass country, or back fired to give a zone of safety. Charles Goodnight says that he does not know of a plainsman who has lost his life as the direct result of a grass fire. A mule skinner named Bill Elkins, while freighting a load of corn from Amarillo across the western Panhandle to the 7D Ranch in 1896, laid aback upon his sacks of grain and slept while his six-horse team walked on down the road. A prairie fire blew into his horses and he whirled them to run before it. The fire caught him. One horse dropped dead in the harness and the others were singed to the skin, but Bull escaped from his burning sacks of grain.

J. Wes Dalton, a ranchman south of where Idalou now stands, went out in a buckboard in company with two other men to fight the Big South Plains fire of 1898. It was passing north of Dalton's ranch burning in an easterly direction. They began fighting the fire along the south edge. When the wind suddenly veered north, making a lead fire out of the entire south side, Dalton and his companions found themselves directly in its path. Instead of forcing through to burned ground, they turned and ran their horses before it. Just as their team was giving out and the heat was pressing upon them, they came to a spot of short grass and the fire went around them.<sup>8</sup>

About 1893, when a big fire swept the tall grass country of the eastern Panhandle, thirty big steers were burned. If cattle would turn into a fire and attempt to go through it to the burned side, very few would be lost. But they always run before fires until they are exhausted and fall in the path of the flames, or are finally caught against some obstruction.

The LE Ranch, along the Canadian in the high grass country, lost a number of steers in the fire of 1885. The XIT lost few cattle in the big fire of 1894, but a fire to the north of the Canadian in the high sage grass of the Middle Water Division took a toll of 200 head of cattle. More small calves were lost in fires than cattle of any other age. Calves, left by their mothers while they go to water, remain lying in the grass until their mothers return. Lacking parental guidance, small calves have no idea what to do when a fire approaches.

Even though losses in cattle were sometimes of a serious nature, losses in sheep were much greater. The same fire that came near catching Dalton and his men caught a sheep herd five miles directly north of Ralls. The herd of 4,000 head, owned by J. B. Posey of Floydada, was in care of a Mexican herder and a shepherd dog. When the herder saw the fire coming, he threw his sheep into one of the dry plains lakes, devoid of vegetation, and made track for his camp. The fire roared like a cyclone and scared the sheep out. The flames split around the lake and caught them as they came out on the opposite side. They jammed together so closely when the fire hit them that they smothered the burning grass beneath their feet. The fire split again, raced around the running sheep, burned to the edge of the herd around its flanks, along the swing, and closed the gap again beyond the leaders. The sheep in the lead, 1,400 of the 4,000, were left practically untouched and were the only ones saved, as the fire burned off.



J. Evetts Haley

About 1,500 head died in a pile. When cowboys reached the herd soon after the flames had passed on, many of the sheep were running around with their wool on fire. The boys began catching them and rubbing the fire out. The ears of many sheep were burned off, eyed burned out, and hoofs baked so severely that the toes came off.<sup>9</sup>

The rate of speed of prairie fires varies with the speed of the wind, the dryness and the length of the grass, and its thickness upon the ground. When grass was dry, high, and of unbroken turf, a high wind might carry a fire at the rate of more than twenty miles an hour, or in some cases as fast as an ordinary cow horse could run. In 1898, R. B. Smith of Crosbyton saw a fire break out on T. M. Montgomery's ranch. Just as he came to Montgomery's pasture, a high northeast wind sent a storm of burning cow chips rolling across a plowed fire guard and set the grass immediately in front of Smith afire. He whirled the good fast horse he was riding and headed southwest for a lake he had passed a mile back. He claims he hit his horse down the hind leg almost every jump, and when he got to the lake and pulled up amid dense, boiling white smoke, the fire was passing around the lake on either side.<sup>10</sup>

When the wind was high, grass fires rarely advanced upon a solid front miles in width, but pushed forward as wedges, driven fiercely and swiftly into the grass country. These wedges of flame moved much more rapidly and were much more dangerous than the side fires, those flames that spread to either side. Cowboys, went to the point of its beginning, and fought along the side fires, which burned more slowly as they worked wider and wider against the force of the wind. Always they fought with the wind to their backs, advancing with the fire, putting out every fragment of flame. When grass was high and dry and the wind strong, few fires were put out until they reached a natural obstruction such as a creek, a river, or barren hills.

Back-firing to check grass fires has long been resorted to. Frontiersmen back-fired around their houses, wagons, or camps as a fire advanced upon them, and fought the back-fire off until it had encircled and isolated the spot to be protected. Successful use of back-fires depended upon some advantage along which to set the back-fire, a cow trail, a furrow, a fire guard, a creek, or an arroyo. While the fire was still a few miles distant, a cowboy would soak his rope in some kerosene, if it were to be had, set the rope on fire and trail it behind his horse, thus firing the grass just to the windward of the fire guard. Men on the ground with saddle blankets and slickers watched to see that it did not jump over the guard and race away with the wind. As soon as some little space had been burned, making it unlikely that the grass to the leeward would ignite, the fighters moved on down the fire guarding against it breaking over in other places. The back-fire was thus forced to burn slowly into the wind until the other fire met it and both burned out.

The most effective way of fighting grass fires was the use of drags. When cowboys arrived at a fire, one roped a yearling or two-year-old, another shot it or cut its throat, and one side was quickly skinned from belly to back. The head was cut off so as not to be in the way and ropes were tied to a front and hind leg. With skinned side down and ropes on their saddle horns, two cowboys dragged this along the line of fire, one on either side of the blaze. The loose hide flopped out behind and helped extinguish the flames. (Continued on page 8)

<sup>1</sup> John Pope, "Report of Exploration of Route for the Pacific Railway, 1854," (War Department), 61.

<sup>2</sup> George Wilkins Kendall, *The Santa Fe Expedition*, (New York, 1844) 177-182.

<sup>3</sup> Thwaites, *Early Western Travels*, XX, 116.

<sup>4</sup> Ira Aten to J. Evetts Haley, February 26, 1928.

<sup>5</sup> *The Crosbyton Review*, February 29, 1912.

<sup>6</sup> M. Huffman to J. E. H., November 30, 1927.

<sup>7</sup> J. Frank Yearwood to J. E. H., December 9, 1927.

<sup>8</sup> John D. McDermett to J. E. H., April 28, 1929.

<sup>9</sup> R. B. Smith to J. E. H., February 17, 1929; John D. McDermett, as cited; *Crosbyton Review*, February 29, 1912.

<sup>10</sup> R. B. Smith, as cited.

## NEWS FROM AROUND WEST TEXAS

**Jean Stuntz** from West Texas A&M University has published her first book *Hers, His, and Theirs: Community Property Law in Spain and Early Texas*, released in Fall 2005 by Texas Tech University Press.

**Joe Early** has had three books published this year, *A Texas Baptist Power Struggle: The Hayden Controversy*, *A Student's Guide to the New Testament*, and *A Student's Guide to the Old Testament*. He has also published three journal articles.

State House Press in Abilene, Texas, is pleased to announce the publication of its newest book *The Women There Don't Treat You Mean: Abilene in Song* by **Joe W. Specht**. The book focuses on songs written about Abilene—the one in Texas—as well as all the songs that mention the Key City. The book includes thirty-six illustrations and a special six song compact disc which features local Abilene performers debuting their own renditions of classic Abilene songs.

**Ty Cashion** had an essay appear in the Winter 2005 issue of *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, titled: "What's the Matter with Texas? The Great Enigma of the Lone Star State in the American West."

**T. Lindsay Baker**, Director of the W.K. Gordon Center, Tarleton State University, at the Thurber ghost town, spoke on January 30, 2006 at the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Dallas Legacies History Conference on "Harvey Bailey's 1933 Escape from the 'Escape-proof' Dallas County Jail." The paper was drawn from his current book project under contract to the Texas A&M University Press for a heritage tourism guidebook to twentieth-century organized crime sites in Texas. Baker's latest book, *American Windmills: An Album of Historic Photographs*, is currently in press at the University of Oklahoma Press, and this spring he is completing the manuscript for *Confederate Guerrilla: The Civil War Memoirs of Joseph M. Bailey* under publication contract to the University of Arkansas Press.

WTHA board member **Tom Alexander**, who is a Commissioner on the Texas Historical Commission, has recently been appointed to the Advisory Council of the Center for Big Bend Studies at Sul Ross University in Alpine, Texas.

**H. Allen Anderson** is currently processing the Irl and Irene Smith Photo Collection from Pampa, Texas. He and **Tai Kreidler** are also in the process of editing and publishing a new book, *The Last of the Wildcatters: The Life and Times of Harvey Rhoads, in His Own Words* through Eakin Press.

**Lou Rodenberger** has been asked to serve on the Texas Institute of Letters council for the next two years.

**Brenda L. Haes** has been elected vice-president of the Lubbock community group West Texas Native American Association. Ms. Haes is also vendor chairperson for the organization's annual Pow-Wow, which is located along Avenue O between 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Mac Davis Lane. The event is held in conjunction with the National Cowboy Symposium on September 8-10, 2006 in Lubbock. Indigenous arts and crafts, as well as food are available on site during the venue.

**Gary Lindsey** completed doctoral studies at Texas Tech University and received a Ph.D. in History (with a minor in Historic Preservation) in December. His dissertation, titled "Willard B. Robinson and The Maturation of Historic Preservation," was completed under the direction of Dr. Paul Carlson. Lindsey is now working at Texas Tech University's National Ranching Heritage Center as Manager of Adult and High School Education Programs.

**Patricia Clark** joined the Southwest Collection staff on February 1, 2006, as the new Head of Reference. She comes from Waco where she worked at the Waco-McLennan Library. **Randy Vance** joined the reference unit as an Archival Assistant on January 1.

**Mac Harris**, director of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum since 1999, resigned December 30 to become director of the South Dakota State Agricultural Heritage Museum in Brookings, S.D. **Toni Laumbach**, the New Mexico museum's chief curator, has been named the interim director.

**Barbara McCandless**, curator of the photographic collections at the Amon Carter Museum for 17 years, passed away on November 5. Previously, she had worked as research associate of the photography collection at UT's Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center.

The **College Baseball Foundation**, in conjunction with the **Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library** at Texas Tech University has secured the complete print archive of the Collegiate Baseball Newspaper, becoming its official archive of record. Editor Lou Pavlovich, Jr. announced he would also assist the organization's efforts to locate key individuals in the future that could help tell the history of the sport. These interviews and artifacts will assist in documenting the comprehensive history of college baseball for the first time in the new College Baseball Hall of Fame in Lubbock, Texas. In that area, the group announced that legendary **Texas Tech Coach Larry Hays** has donated the first of his private coaching archive to the Southwest Special Collection. Hays became the third-winningest coach in NCAA baseball history when the Red Raiders defeated Louisiana-Monroe, giving him his 1,428th career win in 36-plus years.

Dr. Kaz Fujita, son of **Theodore "Ted" Fujita**, formally presented his father's papers to the **Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library** at Texas Tech University. The gift has established the university as the single largest repository of wind-related documents in the world. It further cemented its place as a premier center for wind studies in the United States. Fujita is known best for creating the Fujita Scale to classify tornados by intensity. He defined and assigned wind speeds to six wind categories ranging from F1 to F5, with F5 being the most destructive.



Tiffany Fink presents her paper for the WTHA session at the Center for Big Bend Studies.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

*April 15, 2006.* **Permian Historical Society** will meet at the Permian Basin Petroleum Museum in Midland, 9:30 a.m. to noon. Four presentations will precede a short business meeting. Among presenters will be Melanie McDonald, a student at the University of Texas - Permian Basin. She is currently working on a project involving the larger landholders in Midland County. Other presenters include Julia Cauble Smith who will present a program on Oliver Loving's last cattle drive and Gordon Hooper. PHS members also are due to vote on a new slate of officers, and discuss a proposal to increase membership dues beginning in 2007. Persons interested in preserving the history of the Permian Basin are invited to attend and become members of the society.

*June 23-25, 2006,* **Texas' Last Frontier Heritage Celebration**, with a Texas Buffalo Soldier encampment, and a variety of other events in Morton and Cochran counties. The Texas Buffalo Soldier Living History Program sponsored by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department will set up at Cochran County Park. Additional educational programs and exhibits will emphasize the multi-shared western heritage about the Buffalo Soldiers, Vaqueros, Black Cowboys, Frontier Women, Native American Indians and other cultural groups in Texas during the

1800's. The program is part of the Texas State Parks - Community Services Education & Outreach Program. The Community Services effort is accomplished through the **Texas Buffalo Soldiers, Exploring Texas Roots, Blazing New Trails and Texas Buffalo Soldiers Heritage Trail Programs**. For more information, contact Dorothy Barker, Chair, Cochran County Historical Commission, jodaphi1@juno.com, (806) 266-5484.

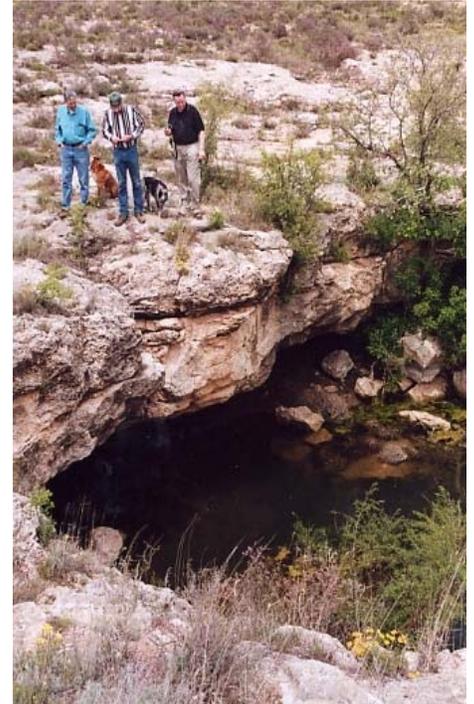
## CALL FOR PAPERS

**Earl Elam at Hill College Press** has announced changes in publication policies. The earlier mission of the Hill College Press was to publish works related primarily to Texas and the Civil War, and an impressive number were published from 1964 to 2001. He now wants to expand the mission to include topics that relate to Texas and Texans in any of the wars in which Texas and the United States have been involved, including the present. He also will be interested in historical topics of regional interest in central and north Texas. Please send inquiries to him at Hill College, Box 619, Hillsboro, TX 76645, telephone 254-582-2555, ext. 374 or e-mail to <eelam@hillcollege.edu>.

**West Texas Historical Association** has issued a Call for Papers for Joint Sessions with *The East Texas Historical Association*, September 21-23 in Nacogdoches, proposals due April 1. And

*The Center for Big Bend Studies* November 10-11, proposals due on September 1.

**The Cyclone** needs short articles about historic sites on private property or in out-of-the-way places. Please query the editors with your ideas. Contact Jim or Becky Matthews at 4230 Briarcrest, San Antonio, TX 78247 or <jbmatthews2@juno.com>



Paul Carlson and Monte Monroe with the manager of the Yellowhouse Ranch overlooking the water hole known as the Devil's Ink Well.

## Did You Know? West Texas Facts and Trivia

COMPILED BY VICKIE GINTHER

-----Lubbock's first fire department was organized in 1909. Its first chief was Charlie Frederick.

-----From 1905 to 1906, Walter P. Chrysler was the general foreman of the Childress, Texas railroad roundhouse. He later went on to found the Chrysler Motor Corporation.

-----Several Threatened and Endangered Species inhabit the Texas Panhandle, including the Whooping Crane, the Black-footed Ferret, and the Interior Least Tern.

-----The Hangar 25 Air Museum in Big Spring, Texas is located on the former grounds of Webb Air Force Base, which closed in 1977.

-----Carol O'Brien Sobieski, who wrote the screenplay for the movie "Honeysuckle Rose" (starring Willie Nelson), was born in Amarillo in 1939. She also wrote scripts for the TV shows "The Mod Squad" and "Peyton Place."

-----There are a number of places in West Texas that have women's names. How many can you think of? Here are a few I found: Ada (Nolan County), Allison (Wheeler County), Bonita Creek (Potter County), Dawn (Deaf Smith County), Emma (former seat of Crosby County), Idalou (Lubbock County), Lela (Wheeler County), Lelia Lake (Donley County), Maryneal (Nolan County), Patricia (Dawson County), and Rowena (Runnels County).

## Grass Fires (Continued from page 5)

The horsemen gauged their speed by how fast the cowboys on foot were able to follow the drag, beating out with wet tow sacks, saddle blankets, or slickers, fragments of fire left after the drag had passed over. Often the horses went in a trot, the boys working on the ground in reliefs. The horse pulling from the burned side was changed every twenty or thirty minutes, perhaps more often in fighting a very hot fire, else the hot ground baked his hoofs. Failure to promptly change an XIT horse because he was so good at working in a fire resulted in all his hoofs coming off. Other good horses were similarly ruined by losing one or more hoofs.

Finally, the advantage of fire guards was realized and most big outfits began plowing guards as precautionary measures. Guards were made by plowing two strips of land two or three furrows wide, and from twenty to sixty or even a hundred feet apart, around the country to be guarded. When the grass became dry in the fall, the cowboys chose a day when there was no wind and burned the grass from between the furrows, watching to see that the flames did not break over.

But in spite of back-fires, fire guards, drags, and every other precautionary resource of the ranchman, grass fires continued to take too heavy a toll of pasturage for many years after the beginning of settlement. In 1889 settlers were moving in around Tulia and Kress who knew nothing of the dangers of grass fires nor the difficulty of their control. When they arrived at their claims with a load of lumber

from Amarillo, they piled it upon the ground and prepared to burn the grass around it for safety. Very often the fire immediately went beyond their control, and twelve days out of the fifteen that the Tule cowboy were "working" their range that year, they had to turn their roundups loose and go fight fires.<sup>11</sup>

While guards were the most effective protection, they by no means made a range immune to fire. Cow chips detracted much from the efficiency of any guard. When burning cow chips are caught in a wind they are often blown from the ground and roll along on their edges like a tin plate, carrying fire far from the burning grass, setting other grass, and destroying houses and barns. In the nineties, a fire burned within a mile of Old Emma in Crosby County. Several houses and sheds were burned in the town when fragments of "prairie coal" blew in from the fire and lodged in shingles or underneath floors. The fire was over a mile from the businesses, but chips, blowing upon edge, rolled until they lodged beneath the floors of Old Emma's mercantile stores. The townspeople swarmed out in an attempt to intersect these rolling bits of fire.<sup>12</sup>

But with many roads, with fields, with over-grazing, with greater precautions, serious grass fires today have been reduced to a minimum. Many fires start but few do great damage, and the number has steadily decreased since the days of open range. But they have not entirely disappeared. The Midland Country recently reported a fire that burned a hundred sections of grass. There, the high school dismissed its boys to help fight big

fires. Nothing less serious could shake the standardized procedure from its rut. The city keeps heavy brooms on hand and it quickly becomes a woman's town when the grass begins to burn.

<sup>11</sup> Fred Scott to J. E. H., April 7, 1929.

<sup>12</sup> R. B. Smith, as cited.

[J. Evetts Haley (1901-1995) specialized in the history of West Texas ranching. He is best known for his biography of Charles Goodnight, *Charles Goodnight: Cowman and Plainsman*. He obviously collected much of the information for this article while doing research for his book *The XIT Ranch of Texas and the Early Days of the Llano Estacado*, which was also published in 1929.]

### THE CYCLONE

*A Newsletter for members of the West Texas Historical Association*

Editors: Jim & Becky Matthews

Published twice a year (February and August) by the West Texas Historical Association, Lubbock, Texas. Members also receive the *Year Book*, published each fall, containing articles, news notes, and book reviews about West Texas history. Annual membership fees are \$10 for students, \$20 regular, \$25 family, \$35 sustaining, \$20 institutional/library. All back issues of the *Year Book*, published since 1925, are available for \$15 each.

**Check out back issues of the Cyclone at our website <[www.wtha.org](http://www.wtha.org)> maintained by webmaster Lynn Whitfield.**

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