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JUNE 2004

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Exhibit examines important role prisons played in county's history

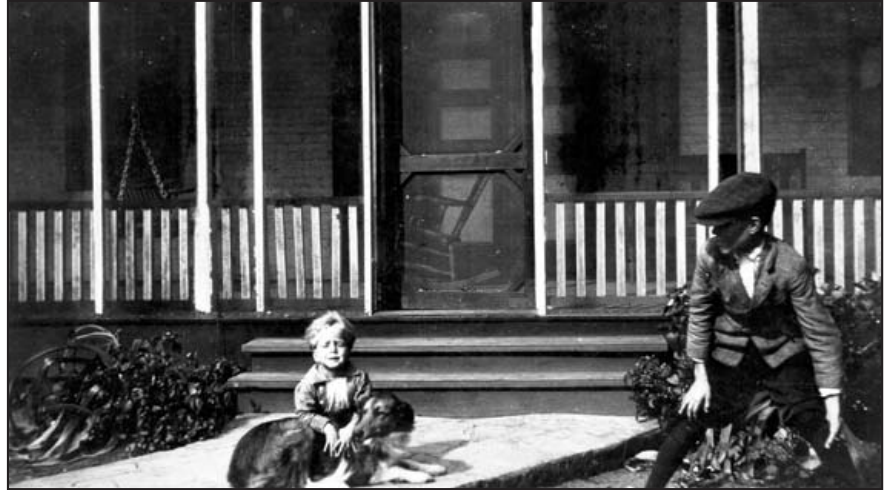
The Brazoria County Historical Museum opened a new exhibit to the public entitled *Plantations to Penitentiaries*. The exhibit features maps, images and artifacts from the Museum's collection that depict the history of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice prison farms located in the County. The exhibit will be on display for six months.

The State Prison Farms operated in Brazoria County represent a long-standing, unique undertaking in the area. The 1845 Constitution of the State of Texas states in Section 14, "[t]he Legislature shall provide for a change of venue in civil and criminal cases; and for the erection of a Penitentiary at as early a day as practicable..." Later, the Second Legislature passed "An Act to Establish a State Penitentiary" in 1848, which laid the foundation for the creation of and site selection for the Texas Penitentiary System. Remnants of Brazoria County plantations were purchased and converted into the agricultural-based prison facilities, which housed not

only inmates but also provided homes for family members of prison officials. The Prison Farms located within Brazoria County came under complete control of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice in the early twentieth century. [Following is an excerpt from the text of the exhibit *Plantations to Penitentiaries*.]

ROPING SQUIRRELS M. D. Seay

In August of 1932 a hurricane hit the Texas Gulf Coast and went inland to the Ramsey Farm. They suffered only minor damage but it destroyed all of the natural food for the squirrels in the river pasture. My father told me that a cornfield between Ginnings Bayou and the river pasture was full of squirrels that had left the woods to find food in the corn field. The next Saturday I rode over to this field and sure enough squirrels were all over the place. I had a sixteen gauge single barrel shotgun that I shot a few with, but shells cost a nickel each so I figured that there must be a cheaper



John and Coy Gentry playing at Clemens Prison Farm. Date unknown. Brazoria County Historical Museum Collection

way to take these squirrels. I rigged a long cane pole with a noose on one end made from stout cord. I rode around in the corn field making a lot of racket which made the squirrels go to the nearest tree. There were only a few trees in the field and they were all small. I could reach the squirrels with my pole and snare them with the noose

and snatch them out and put them in a sack. Over a period of several weeks I caught over a hundred squirrels. I had a chicken wire cage that I kept them in until they were killed and dressed.

My father sent dressed squirrels packed in a wooden box on cracked ice to friends in Houston. I called this method of taking the squirrels "roping

squirrels". I am the world's champion squirrel roper.

M. D. Seay: **Growing Up on the Big Ramsey**, Unpublished manuscript, 1983.

M. D. Seay lived on the Ramsey Prison Farm from 1925 to 1935, where his father, Ed Seay, was the Assistant Manager of Number 4 Camp.

Hats galore at Museum's Spring Tea



The Brazoria County Historical Museum held its first *Spring Tea* on Thursday afternoon, May 20.

Many of the ladies who attended that afternoon chose to wear their favorite hat. Hats ranging in all colors, shapes and sizes were seen, and the scene itself was like a museum style show!

Mrs. Martha Munson made an appearance at the event wearing a beautiful, brilliant green suit with a complimentary green hat. Several members of the Texas Glitzy Chicks of the Angleton Red Hat Society also attended the afternoon affair.

The *Spring Tea Committee* created beautiful table decorations and served delicious refreshments, which were enjoyed by all. Thank you to all who attended the *Tea* and for the generous contributions you made to the Museum.

A very special thank you goes out to the ladies who worked to make the *Spring Tea* such a success: Lillie Alcalá, Sybil Andrus, Cathy Buettner (Committee Co-chair), Marianne Carter, Ginger Deal, Doris Gatton, Beth Griggs, Lola Kay Hood, Nancy Mod, Heloise Murray, Jean Nigbor, Susan Potts, Anita Rau, Tissie Schwebel (Committee Co-chair), Melba Starsel, Emma Jean Tanner, Mary Ann Thomas, Doris Tielke, Shirley Tolleson and Pat Woods.

The Adriance Library and Research Center

By JAMIE MURRAY

In the May newsletter, we left William Pierce Duckett in Velasco during the fall of 1889.

He recently had arrived in the brand new town after having been advised by his doctors to move to the coast. William wrote in his memoir "quite a little city was built up in a few weeks." By December, his health had improved and he had returned to Bluffdale, Texas, to move his family to the booming town of Velasco. He loaded the family's household goods and some supplies to stock a store onto three wagons and a hack.

The oldest boy, Jim, drove the hack, and drivers were hired for the wagons. William and his wife, Eliza, took the three younger children Nora, Walter, and Nata on the train to Waco, then Houston, and finally Columbia. There, they boarded a steamboat on the Brazos headed for Velasco. On the first night after William's arrival, he learned of a store that was for sale; by 9:00 a.m. the next morning, he had bought the store and was back in business.

A new baby was born to William and Eliza in February of 1890. They named him Stephen Austin Duckett to honor "a pioneer of the area." Stephen was the first boy

born in Velasco and narrowly missed winning the \$1000 prize for the first baby to be born there. The money went to the family of a girl born before Stephen.

William purchased a house and lot in town, but soon he found a grove of live oak trees for sale across the river and about a mile from the town. He bought it, built a house on it, and moved his family there in August of 1890. It was not long before William determined that they could not live there because of the "mesquitos", which "almost ate the children up."

At about this same time, William was asked by one of his wife's relatives to help him promote a new venture. The relative was Lewis Bryan, and the new venture was the town of Angleton. Mr. Bryan and his partner Faustino Kiber owned land approximately 12 miles from Velasco. They shrewdly deeded the Velasco Terminal Railroad some right-of-way and a plot of ground for a depot. When Mr. Bryan asked William Duckett for help, the new town did not have a house or a name. William agreed to build a house near the new town and move his family and his store there. He entered into a contract that promised him 10 percent of every land sale. He agreed to "advertise the new town and ...property for sale in

the northern papers and try to influence imigration [sic] to that country." At that time, Angleton was only some "white painted stakes out on the bleak prairie."

Kiber and Bryan named their town for Mr. Angle, the president of the Velasco Terminal Railroad. William built the first house there. When he built his house, he could see only one other house about two miles away across the flat prairie. William's 16-year-old son, Jim, was appointed telegraph operator as well as ticket and freight agent in Angleton. Jim had learned telegraphy from books and was the youngest telegraph operator in the State of Texas.

William started off with a stock of dry goods and groceries, but soon added hardware, a lumberyard, a meat market, and a saddle and harness shop. He was working 18 hours a day, promoting the sale of land and keeping up with his business. William had "too many irons in the fire...working almost day and night...and his mind was over taxed and his eyesight began to fail." He sold his businesses and worked for two years as supervisor of the road-grading project for Angleton.

A few years after William settled in Angleton, "saloons were voted out of Angleton"

and it became "a nice quiet little city and was settled with a refined class of people." In 1897, William built a two-story home in town, one block from his store. His health had again deteriorated, and his doctors advised him to move to a higher and dryer climate. He decided that he would move as far north as he possibly could without leaving the state of Texas. William traded his Angleton property for the Alexander Hotel in Van Alstyne, Texas, and he and his family left Angleton in December of 1898. Not the type of person to stay very long in one place, William moved to Fort Worth the next year, and then on to Tolar in Hood County, where he went into the confectionery business. Three years later, he was in Ft. Worth again, this time in the feed and grain business. He bought a farm and lived on it for one year, but moved back to Fort Worth because "the farm was too lonesome."

William described himself as "of a restless nature." The last few pages of his memoir certainly support this description. One move after the other and a series of business ventures demonstrates that William was a man who constantly sought new challenges. How interesting that he was in on the earliest development of Angleton, yet

his involvement here has gone unreported. This is probably due primarily to the fact that he moved away from the area just as Angleton was beginning to thrive as the new county seat for Brazoria County, leaving no descendants in the area to perpetuate his name and history. It seems we owe a debt to William Pierce Duckett for his early efforts in promoting the new town of Angleton.

Where was William's property? Where was the store that he built here? An interested researcher could check the early tax rolls on microfilm or look in the deed records at the courthouse to complete the story of William Pierce Duckett in Angleton. Anyone who comes up with additional information on William Pierce Duckett and his family is asked to contact Jamie Murray in the Museum Library. William should have more in his file than just the memoir, fascinating though it is.

You can enjoy reading William's memoir as well as other memoirs of early Brazoria County citizens by spending some time in the Museum's Adriance Library & Research Center. The Library is open Tuesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Researchers and volunteers are always welcome!



Lonestar Bluegrass Band delights audience at concert

The Brazoria County Historical Museum hosted a toe-tapping performance of the Lonestar Bluegrass Band on Friday, May 21, on what turned out to be a very pleasant evening.

The Band entertained more than 160 attendees who gathered on the Museum lawn with traditional songs such as "Orange Blossom Special," "I am a Man of Constant Sorrow" (made famous in the movie, "O Brother, Where Art Thou"), and an Ace Filipp favorite, "Gimme Three Steps."

As a special treat, the band even took requests from the audience. Sandra Pollan of Clute remarked, "We had fun at the blue grass concert. Y'all ought to do it again sometime." And that we may!

Preservation News

By JAMIE MURRAY

For the second installment of historic preservation stories from Brazoria County, I have chosen two properties that have undergone restoration in recent years as done by Dorothy and G. J. Wilbeck of Angleton.

Area residents with a love for old houses will immediately recognize these structures. Both the Charlie Bennett Home at 234 South Arcola and the Stockwell/Williams Home at 303 Peach Street are local landmarks.

Dorothy grew up in the house owned by her parents on the corner of Arcola and Peach streets. It had been built in 1901 for a lawyer named Elmer P. Stockwell, who still has descendants in Angleton. The story related by G. J. Wilbeck is that the house is believed to have been constructed from lumber salvaged after the 1900 Storm. The outstanding architectural feature of the Stockwell Home is the round tower on the southwest corner of the second floor. I grew up here in Angleton, and the house looked like something out of a fairy tale to me. What local child has not passed by this house and wished, as I did, to have a bedroom located there in the tower? I had to ask. Was Dorothy's bedroom in the tower? The answer is no. The tower was a storage area during the many years that the Williams Family lived there.

The John Williams family bought the Stockwell home in the 1930s, and Dorothy was born there. After living in the house for 50 years, Dorothy's mother willed it to the Catholic Church in 1987. The Church sold it to a man who planned to repair it. He began working on the house, but unfortunately lacked the resources to complete the job. In the 1990s, Dorothy was able to buy back her childhood home at an auction on the Court-house steps. It needed a great deal of work, and so the Wilbecks have begun to

restore it. At this time, it is a work in progress. Someday it will be restored to the same level of excellence that the Wilbecks achieved earlier, when they restored the Bennett Home across the street on Arcola.

The Bennett House was built in 1907 and was owned

lund and Erma Thompson.

The Wilbecks have done a beautiful job of restoration on this lovely old home. Surprisingly, they do not live in the house, even though the renovation is now complete. Why did they expend resources, time, and effort to restore it? There is never just

one reason for such an undertaking, but it no doubt had something to do with an appreciation for the architectural

styles of the past and a conviction that old houses deserve to be saved as a part of a community's history.

Congratulations to the Wilbecks for a job well done on the Bennett Home. We will be watching with interest as work continues on the Stockwell/Williams Home. The restoration of these two properties is a gift to the people of Angleton, who share the Wilbeck's love and appreciation for old houses.

The restoration of these two properties is a gift to the people of Angleton.

by members of the Bennett family until the Wilbecks bought it in 1987. Eventually, the Bennetts moved, and the house became rental property. During World War II, a Mormon family lived there. At some point, it was made into a duplex. Among those who lived in the house for a time in the late 1930s or early 1940s were the Rains twins, Norma and Erma, who were in later years known to many here by their married names, Norma Swed-



Stockwell Williams House



Bennett House

Cemetery Committee Report

By JAMIE MURRAY

A near record number of 25 members assembled for the May meeting of the Cemetery Committee.

The main agenda item involved to finalizing plans for the Historic Cemetery Marker Dedication Ceremony at Sandy Point Cemetery on Saturday, May 22, at 2 p.m. Invitations designed by Alice Royalty were mailed to Historical Commission Members, donors who have helped with the cemetery restoration, the County Judge and Commissioners, and some of the descendants of those buried in the cemetery as well. Invitations for the general public to attend were extended through local newspapers.

The main problem anticipated, besides the possibility of rain, was the limited parking space in the cemetery itself. The Committee decided that, if necessary, members could transport visitors by the carload from the Sandy Point Bible Church parking lot to the site of the dedication. Nancy Howard agreed to assist with any parking necessary at the cemetery. It is impossible to know how many people will attend an event of this type, but if there are too many cars for the church parking lot, there should be no problem with parking along the road. In case of rain, the church may allow us to have the ceremony there.

Bill Fletcher agreed to provide drinking water and a few chairs for those who are not able to stand for the short ceremony. He also promised to set up a table for the Sandy Point notebook compiled by Committee members. The notebook contains information about Sandy Point Cemetery and the "before and after photos" that document the restoration of the cemetery and the mausoleum. Melodey Hauch, chosen to present the history of the cemetery during the ceremony, offered to sit at the table that also will have a sign-in list and nametags for guests. Cemetery committee members will wear their new photo I.D. nametags provided by Michael Bailey, Museum Curator.

By the time this newsletter is published, the dedication date will have come and gone, so look for a report on it in the July newsletter. Hopefully, the weather will have cooperated so that the ceremony can take place inside the cemetery.

David Roberts reported that the cemetery database, with over 20,000 names of those buried in Brazoria County, is still viewable on a temporary server after having been down for a couple of weeks. Jamie Murray reported the Museum now has a used server onto which the Cemetery Database will be transferred, along with the Museum web site, as soon as this can be accomplished. This should guarantee plenty of Internet space for the Museum's photographs, databases, and other projects, for years to come.

Traversia Viola stated that he and Sampson Thompson are keeping the Pioneer Cemetery mowed. Mr. Viola also told the group that a sign and a flagpole, formerly located in the Texas Department of Transportation's right-of-way for SH 35, have been relocated by TxDot to another site within the cemetery.

We are so fortunate to have a surveyor as a member of the Cemetery committee. Terrance Mish has been surveying old cemeteries in Brazoria County on a volunteer basis and also conducting research in the courthouse prior to the survey work. In the course of his research, Terrance has found a document relating to Island Cemetery near West Columbia that shows this cemetery to be at least 83 years old.

Dee Chance received a note from Mary Whigham of Washington County thanking our members who participated in a cemetery workday there in April. Mary has since lined up some prison labor and the volunteer fire department to assist with further clearing of the Old Washington Cemetery. Dee has joined the genealogy society in Washington County and will keep us posted on progress being made in the old cemetery.

Meeting dates for June, July, August, and September were

(See Museum Page 4)

The Windows Book and Gift Shoppe

By ROSEMARY D. DUKE

I am sitting here thinking that after work I have to go home and do my laundry.

I think that it is the worst job of taking care of one's self and home. I forget that all I have to do is make three piles of clothing: one for whites, one for colors, and one for towels. Then I put them in the machine with a little soap and

let modernization take over. I forget when I complain that my great-grand mothers did not have it quiet so easy.

No way can I see myself pounding my clothes on a rock, or rubbing sand to remove odor and stains. It was not until 1797 that the first scrub boards were invented. Pioneer women had to carry their water into the house in buckets. Question: how many gallons of water does it take to wash a few clothes? Answer: it takes around 50 gallons. You need water to let the clothes soak, then you need clean, hot boiling water to soap and scrub your clothes. Finally, you need more water to rinse your clothes. If the pioneer woman was lucky, the well or water pump was located not far from

where she did her laundry. After rinsing, these heavy wet clothes were rung out by hand and then hauled out to a line to where they were hung up to dry, on hopefully a nice day.

For centuries the people on a ocean voyage had it made. All they had to do was put the dirty clothes in a bag, secure it tightly and toss the bag overboard, letting the ship drag the bags for hours. The only problem with this was that if the rope broke or the bag tore loose, you lost your clothes.

The first manual washing machine was patented in the United States in 1846. It imitated the motion of the human hand on the washboard. It was not until 1861 that the wringer was added to

a machine. I still remember my mother wringing out the clothes. At least she did not always have to do the scrubbing. I remember that sometimes she had my father help her, because some of the clothes were either too heavy or they would get stuck in the wringer.

I am also glad that I have the convenience of the dryer. The first dryer was invented in England in the early 1800s. It was a ventilator, which was a barrel-shaped metal drum with holes in it. It was turned by hand over a fire. I know when I was first married I did not have a dryer. I had to hang up all the wet clothes. That was not so bad in the summer, but when we moved to a cold climate, the clothes would freeze! So you would

bring them in, and after they defrosted, you still had wet clothes. It was not long before my husband and I got a dryer. If one is careful, take your clothes out of the dryer at the right moment, and then you do not have to iron.

The Bookstore does not have any books on washing, but we do have books that tell how some of the pioneers did their household chores as well as lots of books that mention how the pioneers and settlers lived.

The Bookstore is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Visa and MasterCard are accepted, and Museum members receive a 10 percent discount on most items sold in the Bookstore.

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Cemetery Committee Report

(Continued from Museum, Page 3)

selected. All meetings are on Saturdays, one Saturday per month, at 10 a.m. in the Museum auditorium. Anyone who is interested in the Cemetery Committee and its projects is invited to attend. The next meetings are scheduled for June 26, July 24, Aug. 21, and Sept. 25.

If you are unable to attend the monthly meetings but would like to be involved with the work of this committee, contact Jamie Murray in the Museum Library at 979/864-1208.

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PRISON FARM WORD SEARCH

From the word list below, find and circle the words in the puzzle. The words can be found forward, backward, or diagonally.

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| DARRINGTON | PRISON |
| RETRIEVE | PICKSACK |
| CLEMENS | FARMING |
| RAMSEY | PLANTATION |
| COTTON | SUGAR |
| HANDCUFFS | CORN |
| CELL | JAIL |

Mystery Photo update

Peggy Baker called to suggest that the boy in the goat cart photo might be Glen Corrigan, whose family ran a dairy on Valderas Street in Angleton. Glen had a goat cart, and while she cannot make a positive identification, she says that Glen looked very much like the boy in the mystery photo.

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