

**Borden****Citizen.**Published by the Borden County Historical Survey Committee - September 1967  
Vol. III No. 1TELEPHONES IN BORDEN COUNTY

Mr. &amp; Mrs. Ed Davidson, Operators

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Dorward said: "Mrs. Nevil, do you want to be the first to talk over my telephone?" She was willing but quite hesitant and asked "Who shall I talk to?" There weren't many phones on the line into Big Spring. Ethel remembered only one at that time, the Tom Loves who lived twelve miles from Gail. Mr. Dorward said: "Why don't you talk to Mrs. Love?" Well, a number of turns of the crank on the side of the telephone box - was the way to get your party. So he gave the rings and handed Mrs. Nevil the instrument. Bless her heart - Ethel can still see her with her stiffly starched white bonnet pushed back. She yelled loud enough - one could almost hear up on flat top mountain. "Hello, Mrs. Love, Hello!" (Mr. Dorward said "You don't need to talk so loud, Mrs. Nevil" however she could never make Aunt Mallie (Mrs. Love) understand, so she continued to yell, as she spoke. Mr. Dorward finally finished the call, explaining to Mrs. Love the situation.

In about 1906 or 1907, Mr. and Mrs. James Edward Davidson helped install the first and only telephone exchange in Borden County. This was operated on a 24 hour basis for \$50.00 a month wage. The switchboard was mounted on a desk. It had 50 drops or numbers and eight sets of plugs and keys, permitting only eight calls at a time. It was located in the corner of Davidson's front room. There was a small entry with a wall telephone that was called the waiting room. There were no telephone directories. Some that helped with the telephone were Creed Davidson, Thad Durst, a single man, Miss Cora Berry and Sammie Morrow. Mr. Davidson maintained the rural telephone lines with a horse and buggy, later replaced with a car. This was a pickup type job with a large umbrella behind the seat. Note: Information given by Mrs. Mark Davidson Smith.

On the 12th day of April 1909 it was ordered by the Commissioners Court of Borden County that the "Stake Plains Telephone Co." put in a phone in the office of the County Clerk, said phone is to cost \$2.00 per month to be paid quarterly.

(Minutes of Commissioners Court, Book 2.)

In 1912 the Western Telephone Co. of Big Spring, Texas petitioned for and was granted the right to build a telephone system in Borden Co. (Ibid)



The first telephone line connecting Gail with Fluvanna was built before the railroad came to Fluvanna in 1907. Clyde Miller remembers hauling the 2x4's on which the line was strung. He and his brother Ed had been sent to Snyder with a herd of cows and calves. They were teenagers, and Bill who was still younger was driving the wagon. After the calves were shipped the wagon was "coupled out long" and loaded with the 2x4's for the phone line. Then the boys started driving the cows back to Borden County in a pouring rain. They penned the cows and spent the night at the J. Wright Mooar ranch. Bill, attempting to drive the wagon through a gate, cut it too short and hung up on the gate post. Mr. Beaver of Fluvanna came along with a load of freight driving "the prettiest span of grey horses" and pulled their wagon off the post.

In 1912 there were quite a few telephones, one being on the Deshazo ranch, the John Doyles and "49" ranch when Mr. Yantis was foreman. We each had a separate ring - one, two, and three. It was understood (apparently) that when the phone rang all the others jerked their receivers down. You can be sure everyone knew all about the others business. But one good thing back in those days, none of us had any deep dark secrets, and it was a nice way to pass the time away when you lived out so far from town. ( Source -Ethel Morrow Everett)

Most of the Borden County ranches and homes in Gail were served by the Gail telephone exchange until it was closed prior to World War I. At the R. N. Miller ranch there was a telephone to Gail and another one to Fluvanna. Calls could be relayed from one to the other but it might get complicated. Telephone boxes from Long ranch, the York ranch, The Abney ranch and the Miller ranch among others are treasured antiques today. One of them is in the Borden County Museum. Many of these "country" lines used telephone wire only to by-pass gates and splices in the barbed wire fences on which they ran. Wires from the houses were connected to the top wire of the fence and elevated over the gates. These systems worked quite successfully until something "ran into" the fence. Ophelia Dorward Blackard tells how, after the phone exchange at Gail was abandoned, her dad, Jim Dorward, rigged such a line from the Godwin ranch to the Mitchell home in Gail so that she and Blanche Mitchell could talk.

The telephone line which connected the Gail exchange with Big Spring followed the mail route past the Abney ranch and Luther. Some of the old poles are still to be seen but most were given by Nook Beal, who had purchased the line, to Frank Miller. Whether the telephone exchange was discontinued because of hard times - the fact that the day of small private exchanges was passing - or some other reason is not known. Many people had left Gail and Borden County. Subscribers had probably become so scarce that the exchange no longer would pay expenses. Gene Smoot remembers his family trading Johnson Grass hay for phone service. Maybe there were too few with money to pay bills. Many of the rural lines were purchased by the ranchers and used as private lines. The Clayton ranches maintained lines connecting their various "camps". The line to Big Spring was retained to serve the one telephone left in Gail -- once again at the Dorward Drug Store.

It became a familiar sight to see Mr. Dorward going across the street to the Court House or to one of the filling stations or other businesses to summon some one to the phone. Many miles were driven carrying or sending messages to people who lived in the country, mostly without any payment except the love and respect of his friends. Whether it was official government business, important cattle or oil deals, family emergencies, illness, or just a boy talking to his sweetheart, all messages came and went through the Drug Store. Mr. Dorward kept a blackboard in front of the Drug Store and would call in to Big Spring for the latest news and write the bulletins on the board. Thus we learned of the world shaking events of World War I, the death of President Wilson's wife, and finally the joy of the Armistice. In 1932-33 a telephone line from Snyder via Fluvanna replaced the Big Spring line. This line from Fluvanna gave service to some of the ranches along the way. The line was strung on 20ft. iron tubes driven 3ft. into the ground. A home made machine to drive these posts was built. A piece of 2x4 was placed in the top of the post to which an iron cross bar bearing two wires was fastened. The one telephone at Gail used this line until 1953, when the Poka-Lambro Cooperative of Tahoka established an automatic exchange in Gail, and we again had phones.

Poka-Lambro has at least 3 exchanges serving Borden County people. These are Aten - serving those "on the plains," Hatch - toward Lamesa, and in Gail. The people in the North east and eastern part of the county are served by Southwestern Bell of Snyder, Texas. Those in the south and southwestern areas are served by the Vincent, Luther, and Vealmoor exchanges of the Wes-Tex Telephone Cooperative of Stanton. This makes for a very complicated system of communication for Borden County, but we DO have telephones even if we have to call our nearest neighbor long distance!

By Pauline Clark.

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No reunion was held in Borden County this year. You will be kept informed by this newsletter if one is planned in the future.



## EARLY DAY ROMANCE AS REFLECTED IN THE RECORDS OF BORDEN COUNTY, TEXAS

On August 8, 1891, the first marriage license recorded in Borden County was issued to Mr. P. A. Higgins and Miss Bessie Wiun. The rites of matrimony were solemnized that same day by J. A. Petty, Ordained Minister. The records reflect only three marriage licenses issued in 1891 by W. S. Moore, the first County Clerk. On September 30, licenses were issued to Mr. A. B. Spears and Annie Clark and on December 28 to Mr. Harris Cope and Miss G. H. McNew. Mr. Spears owned a saloon and later ran the mercantile store on the north side of the square in Gail. He sold everything from 10-penny nails and Calico to chocolate drops, which were kept in wooden buckets. A Unique service in the store was a counter with stools where one could sit and have their meal. Before you could have your meal, however, you had to buy canned tomatoes, peaches, crackers, chees or anything you desired from the grocery department, take it to the counter, where as a free service, you were furnished with can opener, dishes and pepper sauce. Many a good meal was had at this counter, even if the dishes were somewhat fly specked.

From the time the first marriage license was issued in 1891 until 1916, a period of twenty five years, 193 licenses were issued in Borden County, sixteen of these were performed by Rev. J. A. Petty. Among other ministers, Justice of the Peace, and County Judges who performed the early marriages were: H. C. Jolly, Minister; J. M. Searcy, County Judge; H. D. Pruett, Minister; W. M. Taylor, L.E. - (just what Mr. Taylor's title was we are unable to find out. Do any of you know what "L. E." stands for?); Joe Good County Judge; T. R. Mauldin, Minister (MR. Mauldin was also a school teacher. He taught in the early 1900's at the old school in Gail and again in the new school in the 1930's - Mr. Mauldin was not married in Borden County but his wife was the former Miss Nettie Cotten); C. E. Reeder and E. R. Yellott, County Judges. Mr. Yellott was married to Miss Lucie Trigg by H. D. Pruett, Minister, on June 17, 1904. W. S. Moore, County Clerk who issued the first marriage license in the county was married to Miss Birdie Clark in January, 1897, by J. M. Searcy, County Judge.

On May 26, 1901, a young cowboy druggist, D. Dorward, and the school marm, Miss Minnie Russell, were married. Mr. Dorward owned and operated the only drug store in the county. He filled your prescriptions, sold notions, and made the best orange juleps in the state. Miss Minnie also taught the local Sunday School and gave new testaments for regular attendance.

I am told the first Church wedding was on April 30, 1902. The couple was George A. Clark and Ludie Locklear. They were given a formal wedding supper by Mr. and Mrs. W. K. Clark. Mrs. Clark was fond of young people and entertained them often. She was fondly called Grandmother Clark. Mr. Clark was an early day sheriff of Borden County. Another social event of 1902 was the double wedding of John Clark and Bell Kincaid, Jack Rogers and Lucy Kincaid. Bell and John had set their wedding date. Lucy, knowing Bell loved the color blue, Made Bell a beautiful blue dress for her wedding. Amid the hustle and bustle of the wedding plans, Jack Rogers proposed to Lucy and on December 28, 1901, marriage licenses were issued to the two young sister and their betrothed. There was no time for Lucy to make a new dress and since Bell had a lovely white one, she loaned Lucy her new blue dress for the wedding, and on January 2, 1902, the two young couples were married in the home of H. D. Pruitt, Minister who performed the ceremony. This was evidently a Sunday for they went from the ministers' house to church, then spent the night at the Chandler home.

In 1913 the rains had come to Borden County and the Colorado River was running bank full. Martin Taylor and Ruth Millhollan were to be married, and as in a recent popular song "The bridge was out and his baby's on the other side." There had been a heated argument between Ruth and Martin, she did not want him to wear cow-boy boots in the wedding, since it was reported to be bad luck. Ruth won the argument (probably the last one she ever won). Determined to be married in Gail on the appointed date, Martid forded the river and with his bride-to-be and the only pair of slippers he ever owned by his side, he jumped his team and buggy into the raging waters of the Colorado. The bride probably didn't wear her wedding gown as she crossed the river - but the picture I see is a lovely young bride, with a look of horror on her face (not caused by the raging waters - for this was not new to her since she had swum it may times horse back) holding her beautiful wedding gown above her hi-topped shoes as she watched the slippers float down the river. (It is not known if the waters washed them out or Martin kicked them out.) They were married in Gail on December 5, 1913. A few years later a baby girl was born to this young couple. Martin had agreed to go to the Abney ranch, located on the Colorado River, and get a buggy horse for Doc Hannibus as part payment. When he arrived at the Abney place, Tom Hudson asked him to top off a pen of wild horses that he had for the Mexicans to break. He refused, but when offered a handsome sum of \$1.00 per head, he agreed to top off 15 head. (Today the modern cowboy pays much more than this for chance to come out of the chute at a rodeo on one bronc.) When Martin returned to Gail he had more than enough to pay for his new baby.



Among the licenses recorded in records of Borden County are: J. K. Mitchell and Liza Coates, Dec. 1900; Bob Dorward and Coar Badell, Feb. 1900; Sam Sandford and Eva Hale, Jan., 1901; J. H. Smoot and Lucy A. Bailey, Dec. 1901; W. C. Fullilove and Miss Susie Waskom, March 1901 (the Fullilove family came to Borden County from Louisiana and brought with them the first negro servants. When they attended church, if the baby cried they handed it out the window to a negro servant). James Daw and Letha Smith, Sept. 1901; H. A. Cook and Miss Daisy Culp, 1902; E. B. Cook and Miss Mattie Culp, 1903; John G. Davis and Miss May Hill, 1903; J. S. Petty and Effie Newby, Feb. 1907; L. T. Polk, who worked on the 9-R ranch, was married to Miss Nettie Lyons Setp. 8, 1897. (Mr. Polk started out with Tom Love to capture Bill Cockm noted outlaw. By the time they were west of Lubbock they had ridden their horses down. Mr. Polk turned back and Mr. Love went on to capture the outlaw). J. N. York and Katie Willis, 1909; Zeph Robinson and Grace Hopkins, 1909; Jessie York and Alma Sealy, 1909; James H. Parker and Eula Hollar, Sept. 1910; John Smith and Ethel Cranfill, Nov. 1911; William Miller and Winnie Chandler, 1914; Jess Smith and Myrtle Howell, 1914; C. M. Davidson and Ellen Johnson, 1915; Roy Everett and Ada Derrick, 1915; Harvy Everett and Ethel Morrow, 1908; W. H. Askins and Alice Hood, 1907.

I am amazed to see some of the early marriage licenses issued to the Askin, Coates, Mitchell, Kincaid, Clark, Taylor, Roger, Davis, Smith, Creighton, Everett, York, Smoot, Sealy, Keen, McNew, Lockleers, Hood, Gray, Miller, Reeder and many other families, and find in the later records licenses issued to their children and grandchildren. But why should I be amazed when I look around me & see the descendants of these families still living here.

Other romantic records of Borden County - not as legal but perhaps as permanent - are the names, initials and dates recorded in the stones of Much Que Peak. Some of the carvings that have weathered the storms and are still visible are: George Adrian Clark, Aug-11, 1890; Annie Wiley-A.A. Wiley 1888; A. J. Wilburn, Dec. 17, 1889; JJ Wilbourn, J. I. Wilbourn, Bepetro, Binford, Ballard, D. E. Butree, Dinke W. Smoot, J. H. Smoot, Blandebscruc Dec. 17, 1893, Mklahroloe, Ben Moon, Car 1898, W. W. & A. D. 6/14/1908. (Not typographical error).

Romance still continues in the county because we find carved in a stone on the peak the initials E. B. J. Nov. 28, 1962 and recorded in the marriage records, a license issued in 1966 to the grandson of the old cowboy and his wife, who forded the river in 1913 (things haven't changed much, for the grandson wore cowboy boots to his wedding and had the same arguments with his bride).

I know these things to be authentic, for I have seen the carvings on the peak, examined the records, eaten the chocolate drops, drunk the orange julep, own one of the new testaments. I was the baby the wild horses paid for and clerk who issued the grandsons license.

By Doris Taylor Rudd.

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Mrs. Lee Cumbie (nee Miss Addie Black) passed away August 12, 1967, and was buried in Lovington, N. Mexico. She was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jodie B. Black and attended school at Possum Trot School.

Mr. Ray Skeen passed away in V. A. Hospital in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the 18th of June 1967. Ray was born in Borden County and attended school at Fairview. Sam Skeen, a brother, lives in Gail.

Tom A Slaughter of Big Spring, Texas, passed away July 10, 1967. He came to this county in 1899 with his parents and lived on Rattlesnake Ranch of the late C. C. Slaughter. Survivors include his wife, one brother, Jess Slaughter of Big Spring, and two sisters, Mrs. A. B. Hefferman of Big Spring and Mrs. Ethel Peterson of Sun City, California.

John R. Burkett, 81, of O'Donnell, Texas, passed away July 4, 1967. He had lived in Borden County for forty years. Survivors include three daughters - Mrs. Frank McHaney of Odessa, Mrs. C. L. Taylor of Baileyboro and Mrs. A. F. Allen of O'Donnell, Five sons - J. Elmo of Portales, N. Mex., Jake L. of Maple, Joe W. of Angleton, Dale L. of Odessa and Jim Mack of O'Donnell.

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From: The Borden County Historical Society  
Gail, Texas 79738

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