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# Borden Citizen

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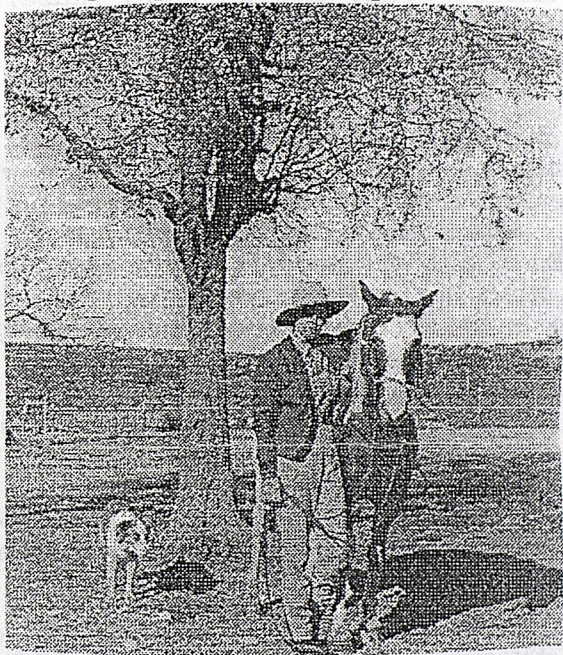
Spring, 2000

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## MY FATHER, JAMES PRATT

By May Pratt Stephens

James Pratt was born on August 1, 1859 in Buckinghamshire, Lee Common, England. His father was an attendant at the Royal Palace and James Pratt often saw Queen Victoria, whom he admired and loved very much. He also played with young Kaiser Wilhelm, a grandson of the Queen. Many times he remarked that he (Wilhelm) was the meanest little devil he ever saw! James Pratt had an uncle who was an English General during the Boer's war and saw him and his soldiers arriving in their ships in London. At the early age of nine, he ran away from home and became a cabin boy on a ship, living on the sea for many years and sailing to different countries Switzerland being the most beautiful of all. He weathered many storms at sea, but never was shipwrecked. He spoke often of the beautiful sunsets at sea. This was a very rugged life for a young boy, but the experiences were great factors for the future ahead.



May Pratt Stephens

At the age of sixteen, he came to the U. S. A., taking jobs here and there and finally became involved in doing construction work. At the age of twenty-six he became a U. S. Citizen, obtaining his citizenship papers at Presidio, Texas on August 26, 1885. In this rugged country, he helped build the Southern Pacific Railroad in the late 1870's. At that time in building railroads, they used mostly Chinese and Mexican labor. He said the Chinese were hard workers and dependable. He was robbed many times and once a band of Mexican bandits tried to rob them. He and some of his men fled on horseback and he was grazed in the earlobe. He jokingly would show his scar and say what a narrow escape they had. Incidentally, they did not get robbed that day!

After working for a few years on the railroad, he went in to Old Mexico and worked in the silver mines. Later, he came to Haskell, Texas, building roads, tanks, and hauling freight to Albany, Texas. He had his mules, horses, and camping equipment and he and his men lived outdoors most of the time. A young man by the name of J. R. Jenkins worked for him. It was here in Haskell that he met Rosa Kelley who had come with her family from Winn Parish,

Louisiana. They were married on December 16, 1889 in Haskell. They came West to find a home bringing part of the railroad and dirt moving equipment, wagons, mules and horses. Rosa drove the wagon which had their earthly belongings such as bedding, pots, pans, and a few clothes including a wash pot, a rub board and tubs. The chuck box was on the back of the wagon. My father drove the wagon with equipment and a young man by the name of Buddy Alsup drove the loose mules. As they were near Merkel, my mother was driving the lead wagon and leading an old gray mare behind with a bunch of young mules trailing. Young mules will always follow a mare and for some reason, I could never figure out why, they prefer a gray one. Anyway, they were coming along and a train came up on one side. The train passed but by this time, the team was scared by the train and they began running. My mother, being the type that was not frightened of anything, except a mouse, held the team straight. They passed the train. The old mare that was being led was not quite as fleet as the team and was pulling back, but running as fast as she could. All of the young mules were also running and braying, staying as near the old mare as they could. My mother said the look of amazement on the people's faces who were on the train was something. The team ran until they were tired and the train went on. No one was any worse off for the escapade. The old gray mare's neck was probably sore and perhaps they made an extra mile that day.

Wild game was plentiful, such as quail, rabbit, curlew, plover, dove and antelope. It was in February that they camped near Frank Good's place southwest of Gail, some twenty-five miles. They spent the winter there, as grass and water were plentiful. The Goods were wonderful neighbors. They became good friends. My father bought a young horse from Mr. Good and named it Frank. At this time, people were taking up claims or buying claims from other people. My father bought a claim from Arthur Cotten. (Arthur Cotten was an older brother of Dorothy Cotten's father.) They moved there in the fall. This claim was Section 44, T-6-N, fifteen miles northwest of Gail. After living in a wagon all of this time, my mother was real happy about the house, as it seemed like a mansion at that time, and a lot of other people lived in dugouts. At this time, the country was beautiful. Grass was fine and springs were all over the country. My father bought Section 43 from M. F. Robinson, who lived in California.



The rains became scarce and a lot of the springs dried up and water was a problem for many people. Some had to haul water from tanks several miles away. My father began digging wells for water as many others did. Many dry holes were dug before finding water, which sometimes was a very small amount. They dug these wells by hand, using a pick and shovel with a pulley consisting of a large rope and a heavy bucket on a windless, turned by hand to draw the dirt up as it was dug by the man in the well. This was very hard work for the one who drew the dirt up as well as the one doing the digging. One of the neighbors dug a well and his wife handled the pulley. She could let him down in the well, but didn't have the strength to pull him out. She lowered his water and dinner to him and when night came, my father would go pull him out. Neighbors were usually eager to help each other. Many of the early settlers didn't get water and they would move on. My father, after digging wells all over, found some water, but it was never plentiful. Windmills were wonderful. After drawing the water, they were a luxury.

There were four children born to James and Rosa Pratt. They were Tama (August 5, 1900), Jim (February 22, 1904), Ruth (March 22, 1905) and May (December 23, 1908). All the children were born in the one room house with the help of a midwife except Tama, who was born in Gail with the help of a doctor. James and Rosa built an upstairs on the house, with the stairs on the outside and this was the only outside shelter at this time. When it came a rain, your father would put the harness under the stairs. The upstairs was used for bedrooms for company, which was often in those days. A fireplace and cookstove were used for heating. In 1909, they built a new house and hauled the lumber from Snyder by wagon and team.

My father raised horses and mules and also a few cattle, and cleared out some land for cultivation. The mesquites were not so numerous then. The land had to be grubbed by hand and it was very hard work. At this time, there were only small fields. They planted corn, maize, and cane for livestock feed and raised a few bales of cotton which was picked by hand. I think when I was a child, I hated to pick cotton more than anything that I ever did.

The neighbors on the West were the Streets who, in the early 1900's, had built a small house under the caprock. But as the wells they dug were either dry or didn't furnish much water, they moved their house two miles North where they had plenty of water. I don't remember when they lived under the hill, but remember hearing what excitement it was to move the house up the caprock. The neighbors came from all around to move it, which they did by putting it on wagons. The Streets had three children, Blanton, Ora and Euna who all became school teachers and many of the children can recall having Mr. Blanton and Miss Ora as their teachers. Blanton married Lenora Roberts and they both taught at several schools at Mesquite and other adjoining schools.

The Tom Smiths lived about 1-1/2 miles South for awhile and my mother and Mrs. Smith would visit by pulling the children in the little wagon. This little wagon was very useful as it was used for many things besides a toy. The Smiths moved to Gail where they operated a hotel. The Orsons, Marleys, Yorks and Turners lived South and Southwest. In the earlier years the families got their mail at Gail. They would bring each others mail, as they did not all go to town very often. Grandfather Orson also came from England and he and my father had many enjoyable hours talking about the old Country.

The neighbors built a little one room schoolhouse just on the rise known as West Point, South of Buck Canyon Creek. This was used for Church services also. The teachers boarded in the homes and usually with the family with the small children, so they could drive the horse and buggy. The children who attended this school were the Marley, Massengill, Turner, Doe Howell, Gray, Carroll and Pratt Children. The teachers were all young girls. One of the earlier ones was Miss Ray Doyle, who was raised in Borden County and was the first teacher for the older Pratt Children. The school was heated by a bachelor heater, burning wood, and was hauled by the patrons of the school. Sometimes the wood pile got pretty low! The children either walked, rode horseback or went by buggy to school. They carried their drinking water from home in buckets or jars AND THEIR DINNER (lunch) in buckets. We had beans, cornbread, biscuits, homemade light bread, meat in winter, home canned peaches, and sometimes fried, dried peach pies. (The Pratts had an orchard.) The games the children played were "Wolf Over the River" and "Town Ball". (We made our own balls by unravelling a hand knit stocking and wrapping it real tight around a rock). The bats were usually made from planks. A real bat was something! We also played "Ante-Over". This was done by choosing sides and getting on opposite sides of the schoolhouse. The one who had the ball (the one used for Town Ball) would yell "Ante-Over" and the other side would hollar back "over". The ball was then thrown and if it was caught, the other side would run around the house and tag as many of the opponents as they could. This would determine who won as the players were tagged. Other games were "Red Line" and "Pop The Whip".

By this time, the country on the plains was being settled and the mail came to old Tredway. There was also a ~~XXXXX~~ school at Mesquite. This was a large one room structure that had a partition near the middle that would open and close. The smaller grades were in one end and the older ones in the other. There was a stage that was used for different things. Different denominations worshipped here on Sunday. Sometimes in the summer they would have all day preaching, singing and dinner on the ground. We were transferred to this school.

We four children, Tama, Jim, Ruth and May grew up on the Pratt place in Buck Canyon. The canyon and creek were both names for an old Buck deer that must have lived in the canyon, too for he was always there. My parents, Rosa and James Pratt lived there until his death in 1936. Bill Stephens and I had married on Jan. 1, 1927. We moved to the Pratt Place and lived there with my mother, to care for her, for most of her life. She died in 1968.

\* Editor's Note: The Dorothy Cotten mentioned in this story is Dorothy Browne, your Editor.



MORRIS MILLER, 83, of San Angelo, a Borden County Rancher, passed away Oct. 24, 1999. He was born in Ozona, moved to Borden County in 1933 to join his father in ranching. He married Willena Wyatt in 1933. Their only child, Margaret Ann died in 1993. He is survived by his wife, a sister, Mildred Bond of Brookesmith and many friends.

C. C. NUNNALLY, 84, died Oct. 26, 1999 after a good fight with cancer. Born April 2, 1915 in Borden County, he graduated from O'Donnell High School and Texas Tech University in 1938. A U. S. Army Veteran, an assistant County Agent in Crosby County from 1938-41, and County Judge in Borden County from 1953-71. He married Florence Cowherd in 1943. He was a farmer and rancher in Borden County and is survived by his wife, two sons, Bill of Columbia, Mo. Don of Lewisville, a sister, Aline Giffin of Carrizo Springs, 6 grandchildren and 1 great.

OPAL KEY, 89, a longtime resident of Snyder passed away Oct. 30, 1999. She married Marvin Key who died Jan. 4, 1988. They had ranching interests in Borden County. A son, Wayne, preceded her in death and she is survived by 4 sons, 15 grandchildren & 19 Grands.

CAROLYN FAYE CARLISLE STONE, 52, passed away Nov. 19, 1999 in a Lubbock Hospital after a long battle with cancer. She was born in Midland and married Jerry Stone June 3, 1965 in Post. She was a resident of Borden County for 25 years. She was active in 4-H projects, Cancer Society, American Heart Association and was Justice of the Peace since 1976. She was active in The Justice of Peace Assn. of Texas and served on many Committees. Survivors include her husband, her parents, a daughter, Kristi Curruthers of Burnet, a son, Cody, of San Angelo, per parents and two grandchildren.

FRANCES BENNETT, 83, of Lubbock, died Dec. 25, 1999 in Lubbock. She worked for 25 years in the Borden County Sheriff's Office. She attended Grade School in Gail and later married Milton Bennett who died in 1981. She is survived by two sons. Wayne Bennett of Cleburne and Ronny Bennett of Lubbock, a daughter, Sue Gantt of Albuquerque, NM, a brother, D. R. Covey of Seagoville, 2 sisters, Claudine Aynes & Doris Selman of Granbury, 6 grands, 8 greats.

MARY MITCHELL, 93, of Wolfforth, passed away Jan. 1, 2000. Born Jan. 9, 1909 in Gail, she married Pinckney Coates Mitchell on June 2, 1928 in Gail. He died in 1986. She was a graduate of Borden County High School and attended Abilene Business College. Survivors include two daughters, two sons, 13 grandchildren and one great-great.

ALBERT GERVIS "BUD" MINNICK, 86, of Abilene, recently passed away. We have ~~No~~ further information. He was a former resident of Borden County.

BURL J. BELEW, 83, passed away Jan. 6, 2000 in a Snyder Hospital. He was a long time resident of Fluvanna, being born there in 1916. He was a farmer and worker for farming interests in Borden and Scurry Counties. He is survived by his wife, Virginia and 2 sons, Denny of Tahoka and Joe of Fluvanna and four grandchildren.

D. J. DYESS, 96, of Spur passed away Jan. 6, 2000. He was a barber in Spur for 65 years. Among his survivors are two sons, Bill of Waco and Bob Dyess, former Coach of the Borden County Football Team. Mr. D. J. Dyess was often seen rooting for The Borden County Coyotes.

DORIS MELBA PEARCE BENNETT, 80, of Snyder died Jan. 18, in Snyder. Born Sept. 20, 1919 in Gail, she was reared in Borden County and married Willis Bennett in 1942 in Gail. He preceded her in death. Mrs. Bennett was a receptionist at Scurry County Senior Center. She is survived by a son, Kenneth Bennett of Gail, a brother, Delmo of Austinn, and 4 grandchildren.

EDNA MAE DAVIS ADDISON, of Snyder passed away Jan. 15, 2000. Born in 1928 at home, in Borden County, near Knapp, she married Frank Kerby, who died in 1978. She married Clistus Addison in 1988. She is survived by her husband, two daughters, two step-daughters and was a cousin of Dorothy Browne, your Editor.

SADIE ESTELLE LONGBOTHAM, 82, died Feb. 22, 2000 in Midland. Born in Fluvanna in 1917, she was a sister of Mary Mitchell (See above). She married Bernard Longbotham in 1936 and lived in Snyder. She was a bookkeeper and accountant, was a member of The Daughters of the American Revolution, The First Baptist Church and wrote about the History of Borden and Scurry Counties.

KARAN LYNN ROBINSON KEY, died April 14, 2000. Born in Snyder, she grew up in the Knapp Community, graduated from Snyder High School and Texas Tech and had been a teacher at Borden County School where she was also sponsor for the cheerleaders. She had lived in Borden County for 33 years. Survivors include two sons, Brice of Gail and Grant of Lubbock, one daughter, Raylnn Kirkpatrick of Post, her parents, 2 brothers one sister, & 2 grandchildren.

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# Up and away at 102...



**FIRST PRIVATE FLIGHT** — Agnes Sorrells, 102, took her first flight in a private plane this morning. Her granddaughter, Patti Barnes, and great-grandson, Mark Barnes, accompanied her. Weldon Key was the pilot. Local pilot Bob Stanfield was also on the flight. Mrs. Sorrells has flown commercial airlines, but has never been up in a small aircraft. Saturday will mark the third century she has lived in, and she has seen a wide variety of transportation in her lifetime. (SDN Staff Photo)

I will visit again the miniature canyon which broke through a sandstone wasteland. There were many funny eroded forms and overhanging sandstone ledges, caves, crevices and shelters. It was a fine wildcat haven and they knew it. I loved to go there. One morning when I was a little boy, I was riding an old plug horse named Sam. We had gotten out of sight of the house and we were entering a cove in the bend of the mountain. Here we interrupted the play of four little half-grown wildcats. Panic seized them and they took off at their best speed toward the mountain a few hundred feet away. Our yells had no calming effect on them whatever but only seemed to speed them. Up, up and up the mountainside they scrambled with little cascades of gravel and small stones rolling down the steep slope behind them. I watched them until the four little wildcats disappeared over the rim of the mountain.

I will stand again on a brilliant day and watch the black cloud coming up from the South, a cloud that came on and on Northbound until it extended to the horizon in the South and in the North, with some sky showing low in the East and in the West. It was a flight of birds, and I never saw it repeated or heard of it again.

I will revisit my old boyhood playground which was a half County from Mushaway to the Caprock in the West. I will watch the great cattle herds and listen to the singing and cursing of the cowboys and ride along with each one as it passes through my Country. I will watch the cowboys, pistols strapped down along their hips, as they sat and watched from the porch of the Hotels in Gail.

I will watch the land rushes as newcomers tried to get a foothold in that vacant land. I will live again all the memories of my childhood. I will live again those exciting last ten years of the cattle empires, which, practically speaking, were ALSO THE LAST TEN YEARS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. Gee!!!

WRITTEN BY ARTHUR PRINCE.

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AGNES von ROEDER SORRELL HAS BEEN A PART OF Knapp Community all her life. She also has been a part of the MURPHY COMMUNITY. Living at the edge of the two Communities, both were proud to claim her as their own. Your Editor has known her thru all the years and has been proud to claim her as a friend. D. Browne

Hope this check will take care of a couple of years dues. We miss the fine neighbors in Borden Co. I always enjoy the BORDEN CITIZEN. Nancy Telchik Edwards Abilene, TX.

Just wanted to let you know that I am back in Medford. I spent 8 months 30 miles in the Country. It is beautiful but I knew I did not want to live that far from town. I want to get the "Borden Citizen", I enjoy it LOIS GREATHOUSE JACKSON

WHEN I GET OLD

When I get old and get into my second childhood, I think I'll just live the first one over again. I've heard we do that anyway.