

Borden

Citizen.

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MAJOR WILLA VILEY JOHNSON By Dorothy Dennis



Magnolia Land & Cattle Co. (MK Ranch) 1894
Left to right: C. A. Joplin, H. A. Kincaid,
D. Dorward, Bob McGuire, R. D. Dorward, Fred
Walther, John Tillar (Salty), Calhoun Ladd,
W. S. Turner.

A man about whom citizens of Borden County know very little, but one who figured in its early history and certainly should be remembered was Major Willa Viley Johnson. He was born in Scott County, Kentucky on March 4, 1837 and was a cotton planter in the Mississippi Valley. He married Miss Lily Tilford, daughter of Frank Tilford and Emily Johnson in 1860. Johnson served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. He requested of the War Department on April 24, 1862 that he be made an officer as he felt he could better serve his country. His wish was granted and he was made a Major. He and his family lived in Alabama, Mississippi, Helena, Arkansas and St. Louis, Missouri before moving to Colorado City, Texas in 1882.

Major Johnson was also an officer and director of the firm Bartley-Johnson & Co. that distilled "Belle of Nelson- Handmade Sour Mash Whiskey". The distillery was located in Nelson County, Ky. with offices in Louisville. President of this company was Wm. T. Bartley, the 2nd husband of Emily Johnson Tilford. Mr. Bartley took into this business the sons of Emily's first marriage, namely: Henry J., Claude and Robert J. Tilford, all brothers to Lily Tilford Johnson. Major Johnson was fascinated by the livestock and land craze that began in the 1880s and he interested the Tilford men in organizing the Kentucky Cattle Raising Company in 1882. This ranch was also known as the Two Buckle and was located in Crosby County. Major Johnson bought around 233 sections and leased some 14,000 acres for this company. He had purchased from Col. Ranald S. Mackenzie a brand of cattle, receiving them 'range delivery' on Deep and Bull Creeks in Scurry County. He then conveyed this brand of cattle to the Two Buckle Company and retained a profit for himself, while most of the stock was sold to the Tilfords and other capitalists in Louisville. Shortly after this Company got underway, Mackenzie and Johnson disagreed over the management of their affairs - Johnson wanted to buy and lease the land in order to secure a permanent range but Mackenzie advised the stockholders that it was much more profitable to manage the cattle on open range and take advantage of the free grass than it was to go to the expense of buying and leasing.

In 1883, Major Johnson resigned as Vice President of the Two Buckle but evidently he acted in an advisory capacity as he is mentioned as a frequent visitor on the ranch in copies of letters that are contained in a Letter Press Book belonging to Kentucky Cattle Raising Company and now in the hands of the Crosbyton Museum. Johnson returned to Louisville where he interested wealthy associates and friends to organize another company on October 10, 1883. This was known as Magnolia Cattle & Land Company - or MK - and was located mostly in Borden County. They began with a capital of \$100,000 but it was increased until it eventually amounted to \$800,000. Johnson began buying T & P Railway land and eventually purchased approximately 236 sections and then leased from the State and individuals about the same, making a total of about 500 sections that he set about to fence. Major Johnson and his wife had purchased Survey 226, Block 97 in 1883 and this Survey was later to become the townsite of Durham. They also owned Survey 227 for a time but these were never considered part of Magnolia. The headquarters for the MK was located on Sur. 40, Blk 30, T5N, T&P and is the site of the OB headquarters today. The cistern at this place was believed to have been built by John Henry Smoot in 1886, the same time the jail in Gail was constructed. Except for a few individual leases on Block 97 and the purchase of 7 sections in Block 25, Magnolia did not try to get any more of these two blocks.

Since the first project the Major began in 1883 was the fencing of the MK, one can imagine the trouble it caused. C. C. Slaughter and his manager, Gus O'Keefe, brought suit against the Magnolia, naming Johnson in it, for damages of \$55,500.00 on April 6, 1886 - saying Johnson had fenced in some Slaughter cattle causing some to die and others to lose weight. Slaughter had been using the land now owned and leased by the MK as free grass range for his cattle. However, in the ensuing suit, Slaughter lost and case was dismissed at Plaintiff's cost.

In 1890 Magnolia had some trouble concerning a section of land that had been purchased from the State by C. L. Wasson. This section had been enclosed by the MK and even though Wasson had applied for purchase, Johnson contended that the purchase was not complete and he claimed that Mr. Wasson was permitting his cattle, horses and sheep to range in the daytime on Plaintiff's property and only penned the sheep at night on Sur. 24. Magnolia asked \$30,000 damages to their lands. However, the jury found in favor of Mr. Wasson, even though they did specify that he was to keep his sheep under herd.

Some of the men who worked for the MK were Jack Rogers, father of Aubrey Rogers of Gail; Austin Bouchier, father of Tom and Phil Bouchier of Post; W. D. and Luther Nevils; Henry Snyder. Bouchier had come to Colorado City in 1883 and this was the first job he ever had and he stayed with the MK until 1894, after which time he went to work for the Square & Compass.

In 1886 Johnson purchased 4 leagues of land in Lynn County for his personal use. He fenced this place, including some land leased from the State - a total of about 50,000 acres. He set about establishing a system of windmills for supplying water on the range - this ranch was known as the Dixie. He solved the problem of how to store the water quite by accident. He had noted that where cattle watered at troughs the ground became like cement and held water like a jug. So he built a large earthen tank, taking the dirt for the embankment from the outside and not from the inside of the reservoir. He then turned the windmill loose and pumped water into the storage tank, keeping the cattle tromping and packing the ground as the water soaked it. Major Johnson was instrumental in discovering that milo maize and Kaffir corn were especially adapted to the high altitude and dry climate of the Plains.

All the while - from 1882 until 1894 - these ranches were beset with terrible drouths, die-ups, severe blizzards, market failures - any one of which would have been sufficient reason to go out of the business. But the Two Buckle and MK both went into the hands of receivers in 1894. Some of the people buying the major portion of the Magnolia were: Bush & Tillar; the Ellwoods; A. B. (Sug) Robertson; T. Trammell; J. F. Coates; T. D. Love; H. C. Dillahunt; R. D. Hunter; W. N. Waddell; B. T. and R. C. Ware; W. J. Turner and R. H. Looney.

Major Johnson and his wife, Lily, had four children:

- (1) Emily - - while the Johnsons were visiting on the Two Buckle in 1887, Emily ran away and married Wes Allen, one of the cowboys. Mrs. Johnson saddled up a horse and rode after them, hoping to stop the ceremony. On the way, her horse tired and she stopped at a neighbor for a fresh horse. After saddling up, she asked the neighbor lady 'please sod my horse' (What she meant was for her to throw clods of dirt at the horse to make him go). However, Mrs. Johnson was too late as the couple married at Estacado. Wes Allen was the typical young cowboy, but in his early years he and some other wild young boys at Colorado City had chased an outlaw in an old outhouse - there they fired on the poor man, killing him. After that, Wes changed his name to Tom Peeler, but by the time he and Emily were married he had taken his own name back. Emily and Wes lost a son, Willie, at age 1; a daughter at the age of 6 years. Their third child, Lily Allen married Charlie Thomas and left a son, Allen Thomas, who lives in Ft. Worth. Lily died at age 26.
- (2) Mary Bell married (1) _____ Menzies and they had a daughter, Elizabeth. She then married (2) Charles Blanc and Elizabeth took his name. Miss Elizabeth Blanc lives in Denver, Colorado.
- (3) George, who married Lutie Lamb (sister to Clabe Lamb), lived for a while on the Dixie Ranch, where George was Postmaster at Percheron from 1888 to 1890. Evidently Lutie didn't like living on the south plains as she told a friend one time that she would gladly go to Hell with anyone who would pay her way. They had one son, Charles Lamb Johnson, who lives in La Jolla, California.
- (4) William B. - after William finished college and discovered that he was going blind, he tried to commit suicide. The family obtained the services of Robert S. Peters, who was a kinsman, and he was William's constant companion until his death in 1932.

Major Johnson became deaf and Lily Johnson lost her eyesight, as did all the children. The Johnsons were a regal, handsome couple and numbered among their friends in Colorado City the R. H. Looneys, Marcus and D. H. Snyder; the C. M. Adams, the F. M. Burns and many others. They were members of the All Saints Episcopal church and gave much of their time to the development of the city. The Johnsons loved to play cards and they were excellent. Since the Major was quite deaf they adopted a system whereby when a bid was passed, the player knocked on the table. Even after Johnson's death, all these friends kept up this custom. The home in which the Johnsons shared with their daughter and son-in-law, the Wes Allens, faced the railroad and was torn down a few years ago by a member of the Vaught family.

The wild, speculative years - 1882-1894 - in ranching history will never be repeated but men like Major Johnson set the wheels in motion for generations to come with his great foresight. He purchased and leased the land for the Two Buckle and MK companies; he fenced the first large pastures in the western part of the State in 1883; he experimented with crops on the South Plains and built a system of windmills and tanks thereon. After the failure of the ranches, Johnson invested in a leather factory in Chihuahua, Mexico but it was doomed to fail due to the Revolution that began in 1910. Major Johnson died in 1913, Lily Johnson died in 1930 - Wes Allen died in 1933 and his wife, Emily in 1937. William died in 1932 and his companion in 1933. All these, with the children of the Wes Allens, are buried in the family plot in Colorado City.

To conserve space, I did not use footnotes but wish to thank the following people for their assistance:

Edna Clark Miller

Frank Hill, Tahoka

Miss Martha Earnest, Colorado City

Mrs. Jessie Standifer, Wilson

Mrs. Ella Tilford Ellis, Louisville, Ky

Tom Bouchier, Post

Also the County and District Clerks of Crosby, Scurry, Mitchell, Lynn, Dawson, Howard and Borden.

Crosbyton Memorial Museum



Back row: Pressley, Whatley, Frank Crossland, Austin Bouchier, Jim Weatherford.

Front row: Dennison, J. D. Mitchell, Jim Mitchell.

The date was April 21, 1894 and the following was taken from Mrs. Austin Bouchier's diary: "Laura Stonemets, Frankie Rydant, Mary Kennedy and Sadie O'Hara all left Colorado City bound for the Two Buckle Ranch. We stopped the first night at the Jumbo where Mrs. John Beal was our chaperon. Next day we rode on and arrived at the Two Buckle Ranch at 5 P.M. We danced all night and until 11 A.M. next day. Four of us couples climbed to the top of the hill near the ranch house to watch the sun come up. Some of the young men at this party included Frank Crossland, Ben Townsend and Jim Weatherby, all had just arrived from South Carolina. Others were Tom Mitchell, Jim Mitchell, J. D. Mitchell, Dee Potts and Austin Bouchier. The trip and the occasion were the most glamorous of my life." (Laura Stonemets and Austin Bouchier were to marry that same year, 1894 - - Mr. and Mrs. Bouchier were given a beautiful bed, dresser and washstand - all in oak - by the cowboys who had

worked with Bouchier in the past. Bouchier worked for the Magnolia from 1883 until 1894 - then for the Square and Compass. The furniture is in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Bouchier, Post, Tex. today).

Taken from the files of Frank Hill, Tahoka, Texas a clipping from The Dallas Morning News in the '50 Years Ago' Column - undated: "80 miles of wire fence of Magnolia's in Borden County was cut - a bitter controversy attending cattle with advocates of free range."

The Borden County Historical Survey Committee has been involved in various activities since last we visited.



Left to right: Bill Nixon, Ottus Boyd, Jim Walls, Glenn Toombs, Vivian Clark, Pauline Clark and Sibyl Gilmore.

On April 6, 1971 at 10 A.M. in the Borden County Museum, the American Magnesium plant represented by Ottus Boyd, well supervisor who instigated the plan, Jim Walls, maintenance superintendent and Bill Nixon, industrial relations superintendent presented to the Museum committee a 40 lb. ingot of magnesium. Those present to receive this much appreciated gift were: Glenn Toombs, county judge, Pauline Clark, Museum chairman, Sibyl Gilmore, co-chairman and Vivian Clark, chief handy man.

Mr. Buck Sitton from the Snyder Daily news covered the event and took pictures of the group. The American Magnesium plant has been in operation about 2 yrs. Located 6 miles west of Snyder in Scurry County it gets most of the magnesium from Borden County wells. There are about 14 wells in all but only 4 are equipped for full time operation. With a total of 188 employees this plant is in operation 24 hours a day turning out

these 40 lb. ingots of magnesium which are specially shaped to fit snugly together in shipping. The company produces almost 10,000 tons of magnesium and 25,000 tons of chlorine a year. Their waste water is pumped back into the ground which doesn't help their cause, but certainly helps the oil producers. Magnesium is used for many things of which I will name only a few: wheels for automobiles, especially Volkswagens, and Mercedes; rockets that we send to the moon; lawn mowers; chain saw motors; catcher's masks; Sampsonite luggage and many more. This ingot of magnesium is on display in our museum and may be seen on Tuesday, Thursday or Sunday afternoons from 1 to 5 P.M.

Report by Sibyl Gilmore.

On Wednesday, April 28, the Lubbock Historical Survey Committee hosted the Regional meeting for the Historical Survey Committees of Region 2, consisting of 28 counties. A program on Pointers for Historical Preservation, touching upon virtually every phase of the work now being carried on in Texas, was presented by professional staff members from the Austin office. Wayne Bell, restoration architect, Bob Watson, director of field operations, Mrs. Deolece Parmelee, director of research and Miss Diana File, state museum consultant were among the speakers. The Borden County Historical Committee was represented by Edna Miller, chairman, and Sibyl Gilmore of the museum committee.

The Scurry County Historical Survey Committee dedicated an historical marker for the O.K. Wagon Yard on April 19th. The Borden County Committee was invited by Scurry Chairman Brud Boren to participate in the dedication and to furnish a speaker for the occasion. Chairman Edna Miller spoke on the work of the Borden County Committee including our Newsletter and our Museum and of the urgency to preserve our fast disappearing historical heritage.

On April 23rd the Museum committee entertained the special education class from the Snyder school and their sponsor, Mrs. Borden Gray with a tour of the Museum and historical markers. Refreshments were served by Pauline Clark, Sibyl Gilmore and Opal Stephens.

Our congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. David Paul Sabo, Sr. of Dallas who celebrated their Golden Wedding on May 16th. Mrs. Sabo is the former Madie Hopkins who grew up in Gail.

At the invitation of Superintendent James McLeroy a series of lectures on Borden County history was prepared and delivered to the Senior class of Borden County High School by County Chairman, Edna Miller. The purpose of the lectures was to promote appreciation and preservation of local history. The high point (literally) of the series was a visit to the Mushaway Peak where the seniors sat on the highest escarpment overlooking the Mushaway Valley and reviewed some of the event occurring there since 1870.

The final event of the series was a visit to the Borden County Museum, where many articles once in daily use but no longer familiar to many of our youngsters were viewed. Members of the Museum Committee served coffee, punch and cookies to the seniors and Mr. Ben Jarrett, their sponsor.

The Ranch Headquarter Association of Snyder has published a souvenir edition newspaper devoted to stories of historic interest to this area. This Coming West is available at the Borden County Museum or by writing the Borden County Historical Society.

A distinguished former resident of our county, W. Mitchell Jones, former Dean and more recently Professor of Education and Psychology at West Texas State University in Canyon, was an honored platform guest at Spring Convocation, May 9, 1971, upon his retirement after many years of service to the University. Dean Jones, who lived in Borden County at the Treadway Community from 1914 to 1920, is acquainted with many Borden County residents.

A note on current history - the Tri-County News, published weekly in O'Donnell and serving Borden, Lynn and Dawson Counties with local news coverage, rolled off the press this past month. This is the first newspaper for Borden County in many years.

We wish to acknowledge recent donations from: Mr. and Mrs. Lee Frances York of Lubbock. Lee Frances is Executive Vice President of the First National Bank of Lubbock and a former Borden County citizen; Mr. Raleigh Usery, a teacher in the Lubbock Schools and a friend and patron of the Borden County Museum and an admirer of our newsletter; and from Dr. and Mrs. E. E. Middleton of Abilene. Mrs. Middleton is the daughter of the late L. S. Munger of the Munger ranch in our county.

MICHAEL ALLEN MASSINGILL, 7, was killed April 11 when a pile of gravel on which he was playing caved in. Survivors include his parents and a sister and brother of Vealmoor. Grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Bert Massingill, formerly of our county and Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan of Vealmoor.

Our sincere sympathy to Mr. Jap Jones on the death of his brother, CHARLIE JONES, of Throckmorton.

MR. W. L. MAXWELL, 81, of O'Donnell passed away April 12. He is survived by two sons and two daughters, one of which is Mrs. Dick Cantrell of Gail.

GEORGE CLAYTON, 50, Mentone, Texas was killed in a pickup accident near his home on April 17. His survivors include two cousins, Mardes Clayton and Mrs. John Anderson of Borden County.

D. F. (SHORTY) COATES, passed away April 17 in California. He was born in Borden County on February 4, 1910. Among his survivors are his sisters, Mrs. C. J. Engle, Mrs. Ernest Rainey and Mrs. Floyd Hull, all of Big Spring and a cousin, Mrs. Gladys Williams.

MRS. JO MURPHY CHAMBERLIN passed away May 13 in Portuguese Bend, California. She was a niece of Joe York, Mrs. Edd Murphy, and Mrs. Cub Murphy. Also surviving are one son and one daughter, one sister, Mrs. Vada Bell Bledsoe, and one brother, York Murphy.

BY: Blanchard

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 519

In Memory
of
Mr. J. B. Cotten, Sr.

WHEREAS, The outstanding and productive career which distinguished Mr. J. B. Cotten throughout West Texas came to an end on February 14, 1971, at the age of 83, and is a sorrowful loss to Seagraves and the entire State; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Cotten had given freely and untiringly of his time and talents in both civic and business matters, and as an eminent attorney, associated with his son, J. B. Cotten, Jr. in Cotten and Cotten Law offices in Seagraves and Odessa, was an invaluable friend and adviser to many families and businesses in West Texas; and

WHEREAS, He was born in Ballinger and spent most of his life in the West Texas area; and

WHEREAS, He was recognized in 1967 by the Texas Bar Association for 50 years of service after having attended Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene and Baylor University in Waco; and was admitted to the Bar in July 1917; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Cotten moved to Crane, Texas in 1927 where he was instrumental in organizing Crane County and served as county attorney there for two terms; and

WHEREAS, He moved to Seagraves, Texas in 1939 and practiced law and was involved in farming operations for many years; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Cotten was an active and noted historian, the author of several articles on the history of the area and West Texas ranches; he was serving as director of the Permian Historical Society in Odessa at the time of his death; and

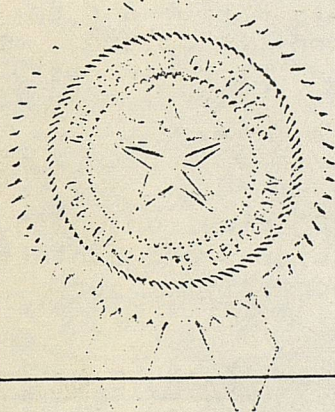
WHEREAS, He also held membership in the West Texas History Association, and the Borden and Nolan Counties historical societies; and

WHEREAS, In 1960 he was elected president of the Texas Cowboys Association at Stamford and was very active in this group for many years; and

WHEREAS, The Senate of the 62nd Legislature wishes to express sympathy to the family of this outstanding citizen of Texas, Mr. J. B. Cotten, and extend its sincere feelings of loss to the State of Texas; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By the Senate of Texas, that the Texas Senate express its sincere consolation to his son, J. B. Cotten, Jr. of Lubbock; his daughters, Mrs. Virginia Hassell of Seagraves, Mrs. Dorothy Browne of Gail, and Mrs. Jean Barnes of Wilcox, Arizona; a sister, Mrs. Arline Sherfy of Dallas; and eight grandchildren; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution be prepared, under the seal of the Senate, for members of his immediate family; and that when the Senate adjourns today it do so in his memory.



Ben Barnes
Lieutenant Governor

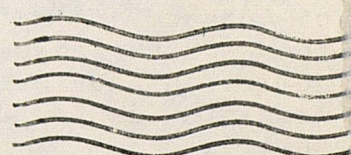
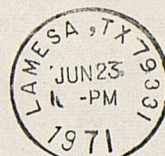
I hereby certify that the above Resolution was adopted by the Senate on March 1, 1971, by a rising vote.

Frank Schnabel
Secretary of the Senate

The Resolution reproduced on this page honors a distinguished former resident of this county - the late J. B. Cotten. Mr. Cotten resided in Gail in 1907 and 1908. He and his cousin operated the Cotten and Cotten Confectionery here at that time.

In 1924 Mr. Cotten married Miss Rosa Virginia Davis of Borden County. She preceeded him in death in 1963. Mrs. Cotten was the daughter of the late John Gilmer Davis who moved to Borden County in 1898.

We extend our thanks to Mr. Cotten's daughter, Dorothy Browne of Gail, for allowing us to share this Resolution with you.



Borden Citizen.

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