

PIONEER TRAILS

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DALLAS, TEXAS

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THIRD QUARTER 1981

Dallas County Pioneer Association held its regular quarterly dinner meeting at Wyatt's Cafeteria in Preston Center on June 4, 1981. Those of you who failed to attend just have no idea what you missed! There was a snafu in the reservation somehow - The Aggies got our private room and we had to hold forth in the open area toward the front on the right as you enter the cafeteria. The employees of the cafeteria did the best they could, but we had to keep going over and asking parties who were not members to please sit elsewhere! At the time it was most frustrating, but now it is humorous. One family was foreign and could not understand what we were trying to tell them! Of course, with all the noise and confusion, we could not attempt a formal meeting. Everyone visited and looked at the "Show and Tell" displays and swapped stories about ancestors. Doc Miller set up his camera and took about twenty pictures for the beginning of our collection on early Dallas. We did have fun!

We are trying the same location again for the next meeting on September 17, 1981: Wyatt's Cafeteria in Preston Center at 6126 Luther Lane. The time is 6:00 p.m., and we will go through the line for our dinner, as before. The management has promised faithfully that the Aggies will not be there that night and we will have the private room.

Our program for the meeting will be presented by the Historic Preservation Program of Urban Planning for the City of Dallas. It will be a talk and slide presentation on the history and restoration of Dallas' Historic Wholesale District.

"THE GOOD OLD DAYS"

One hundred years ago in Dallas - "The Good Old Days"!

In the 1880's in Dallas there was no electricity, gas, refrigeration, air conditioning, screens on the windows or running water in the houses. The only cooling for the summer months was a self-propelled palm leaf fan. Heating in the winter was by fireplace and wood stove or coal grate. There was no paving - all the streets were either muddy or dusty, depending on the weather. Transportation was by horseback, buggy or wagon -- or foot! Ladies rode horses "sidesaddle" - heaven forbid that a "lady" should wear a pair of pants!

Ladies fashions were important then, as now. Dresses were voluminous garments, skirts below the ankle, dragging the ground. The riding clothes of a woman were usually of velvet, dragging the ground when she sat upon (not astride!) the horse. It was quite the thing to wear ostrich plumes (the longer, the more chic) on the hats. A house wife was fortunate indeed if she had "help" - most of the food was grown, prepared and cooked at home. Preserving of vegetables, meats and fruits was an accepted duty of the housewife. Grocery stores were few and only handled staple items such as flour, sugar, coffee and tea. There were no food processors, freezers, microwave ovens - not even refrigeration! All the food must be dried, cured or canned to keep it for the future seasons. Cows had to be milked and butter made -

eggs gathered and gardens made. Even the meat (mostly pork) was home grown. Chickens were a double source of food - eggs and meat - and tending the chickens was definitely "woman's work". Doesn't sound too bad, does it, but how does it sound like this - going to the smelly hen house to clean it every week - making nests - or hunting nests in the fields - going out in a spring rain to save the chicks from drowning because the fool hen didn't have sense enough to get out of the rain!? Chasing a chicken (with all those long skirts on), wringing its neck, scalding it and picking it - cutting it up and then cooking it - do you believe you could eat it? How about making an angel food cake - beating all those eggs by hand - I do well to get them done well with a mixer! In addition to all of the food preparation, she also kept the house (usually spotlessly), did the washing (over a rub board and wash pot, outdoors, winter and summer), ironing (with flatirons heated at the fireplace or on the wood cook stove - how does that sound for a day's work in August?), sewing, nursing the sick, and the countless other duties of women. When the work was all done, then she could "relax" and rest with a little crochet, knitting or quilting! Or mending! There were some women's "clubs" - usually "reading" clubs. The ladies met at one of the homes and crocheted, sewed, or one of the other favorite "relaxations", while one of the members read aloud. Killing two birds with one stone - gathering culture and doing handiwork. Ladies "called" upon one another, also. The ladies had different days for their "at home" days - when it was convenient for them to receive visitors. The house was cleaned rigorously, refreshments prepared, and guests awaited. How many broken hearts do you suppose there ever were because no one came to call! Telephones were not common - there was one in Dallas in 1885, I believe. The ladies sent notes - perfumed, of course - or their personal calling cards, with the date and time written in on the day they were to be "at home".

Sending notes was also the "way of a man with a maid" in those days. He had to send his note and await an answer to find out if he could call on the young lady. If she was receptive to the idea, then he could go in his buggy and take her for a ride, if this was permitted, or some young men did their calling on high bicycle. Parties for young people were spelling bees, musicales (singing and instruments, both), croquet parties, picnics and candy pullings. There were also "car parties" - street cars (mule drawn) were rented for these parties and the guests went for a car ride!

Barber shops were sacred to the men-only. No "lady" would dare to set foot in a barber shop! Some men kept their mug and brush at the barber shop. With so little accommodations at home for hot water, etc., it was much more convenient to go to the barber shop for the weekly shave! Safety razors were unheard of and the razor the barber used was a straight razor kept sharp by "stropping" on a soaped leather strap.

Breakfast was a big meal, no mere cup of coffee, juice and toast. There was ham and eggs, biscuit, fried potatoes, mush or grits, sausage, sometimes fried chicken! The table for most of the other meals were laden, too. It was the mark of a good housekeeper and cook to "set a good table", two or three kinds of meat, several vegetables, several pies or cakes.

When I hear people speak of the "good old days" I just wonder - was it really so good? I doubt if many of us would have survived!

SOME FIRSTS FOR DALLAS

One hundred and forty-one years ago the Republic of Texas marked out the route of the First National Road from Austin to the Red River. The road was to cross the Trinity River at the most convenient fording place, the future site of Dallas.

That same year a lawyer who ran an Indian trading post in Arkansas visited the Three Forks area of the Trinity with his Indian companion, Ned. This lawyer was John Neely Bryan. His first camp in the area was in an oak grove which still stands near present Baylor Hospital. Bryan determined to come back to the area and set up another trading post.

The next year, 1841, when Bryan returned to the Three Forks area, most of the Indians were gone, due to Texas' efforts to settle the land. Bryan decided to build a town. This time his camp (and later home) was located near the spot where present Main Street and the Triple Underpass cross. At that time it was a bluff overlooking the river.

The same year, 1841, two of the veteran's of the Texas Revolution filed their claim for their section of bounty land near the center of present day Dallas; the Lagow claim and the Grigsby claim. These claims were surveyed at 45 degrees to the compass rather than squarely north and south. This survey is reflected in the angle of the streets in that area today.

Also, in that same year, 1841, a group of English promoters and musicians signed the contract with the Republic of Texas to colonize North Texas; thus, the forming of the Peters Colony.

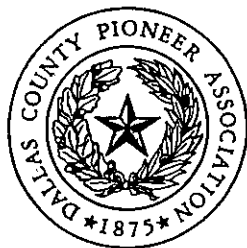
In 1842 John Neely Bryan made a visit to Bird's Fort trying to convince some of the settlers there that his settlement was a better location. One of the men he convinced was John Beeman who moved into the area of White Rock Creek, near present Dolphin Road and South Haskell. Here it was that the first crop in Dallas County was grown.

By late 1842 the settlers had begun to come into the area. Cedar Springs and Farmer's Branch were settled. Hord's Ridge across the river (present Marsalis Zoo) to the west had started. The settlements were all growing. This same year, John Neely Bryan married the daughter of John Beeman, Margaret. They travelled to Fort English (present Bonham) to be married. They built their first home, a one-room log cabin, on the section of land he got from the Peters Colony as a Texas settler. The land was situated along the area of the river where he had settled, running north and south. He had the land surveyed and divided into a grid of city blocks. The next year, 1844, he talked the Republic of Texas into designating his land as the first official post office in Peters Colony. He named his town after his friend, "Dallas".

The same year, 1844, the Second Republic of Texas road, the National Central Highway, was laid out from Fort English to the Trinity. There it met with the end of the road from Austin right beside the Bryan's cabin.

This was the infancy of Dallas - city and county. By 1851, within ten years of the first settler, the county had been formed and the town chosen for the county seat; there were grist mills, a river ferry service, the first newspaper had come; a cotton gin opened. While the other settlements in the county were primarily farming communities, Dallas was busy industrializing. The small village on the flat prairie land which began one hundred and forty-one years ago is our present city; our county is almost one vast urban area.

John Neely Bryan was a dreamer, but do you suppose even his wildest dreams imagined what Dallas has become? He was not only a dreamer, but a schemer and a "wheeler-dealer". True, his story had a sad and tragic ending, but he certainly left his mark on this area. There were others following him with the same attributes, dreams and deals. Even yet settlers are pouring into the Three Forks area -- and even yet we have our dreamers and dealers, but he was the first -- a Dallas business man!



Dallas County Pioneer Association

Founded 1875. Reorganized 1979

200 King Lane, Ste. 209
Garland, Texas 75042

Mr. & Mrs. J.M. Howell II
3500 Dartmouth
Dallas, TX 75205