

Martha Hunter's Log Cabin on Sanchez Creek

Not many houses in Parker County have survived for 150 years in their original locations and certainly not many that witnessed so much of the history, the trials, the hopes and the tragedies of early Parker County. The log cabin Martha Hunter built on Sanchez Creek when she arrived in Parker County in the mid 1850's is one of those rare treasures.

Henry Hunter married Martha Murray in Cole County, Missouri on August 29, 1833. A story preserved in the family is that while hunting in Missouri Henry had the tip of his nose shot off. He did not know who did it or whether it was intentional or an accident, so he and Martha decided to move to Texas. They settled in Henderson County in 1844. Unfortunately Henry was accidentally killed in Henderson County in 1847. Martha never remarried.

Henry and Martha were the parents of eight children, four boys and four girls. The youngest child, Martha Matilda Hunter, was born eight months after Henry was killed. The oldest child, Jonathan Dock Hunter, was twelve when his father was killed.

At an early age the children in this family learned the meaning of thrift, the meaning of responsibility, the necessity to help their mother and to help others, and to be cooperative. These were things they passed on to future generations.

About 1854 Martha, a widow, moved to Parker County with her family, settling on Sanchez Creek where she and her sons built the log cabin.

She probably moved in company with her brother-in-law, Andrew Jackson Hunter, who became an early Judge in Parker County and whose name is inscribed on the cornerstone of the Parker County Court House.

All four of Martha's sons served in the Texas Rangers before and after the Civil War, and all four served the Confederacy during the Civil War.

One son, Captain Thomas Jefferson Hunter, died of wounds he received in the Red River Campaign in Louisiana. His comrades returned his belongings to the family. These included his horse, the belt he was wearing, with the bullet hole of the bullet that killed him through it, his knife and his gun. The horse was later stolen by the Indians, but the belt, knife and gun are still in the family and are treasured heirlooms.

After the Civil War the three remaining sons again served in the Texas Rangers and helped restore law and order to West Texas. At the same time they were helping to remove the Indian threat. This time they had a more personal interest in totally destroying the Indian threat.

Serrepta Rachel Hunter, the oldest daughter of Henry and Martha, married Pleasant Boyd. Pleasant was killed and scalped by Indians on July 4, 1866.

Pleasant and Serrepta were the parents of six children. The youngest, Henrietta, called Pleasant, was born after her father was killed. Serrepta did not remarry until 1899, after the last of her children had married and gone on their own. She probably thought "now my responsibility is over, I can start my life over."

When Pleasant was killed she moved back into the old log cabin with her mother who helped her care for those six young children, the oldest of whom was seven.

Later they built a separate log cabin for Serrepta and her family, but that cabin was destroyed by a fire set off by lightning.

The story of the death of Pleasant Boyd is preserved by Joseph McConnell in his book *From the West Texas Frontier*, page 172:

"Pleasant Boyd - during the summer of 1866: Pleas Boyd was herding cattle about two miles south of Lipan, when several savages charged upon him. He was armed with a six-shooter, only two chambers of which would shoot, and the pony he was riding was not exceptionally fast. As a consequence, in his race

for life, Pleas Boyd was soon killed.”

"A short time afterwards, Bidge Gilbert and Frank Hill, who were going to a roundup on the Divide, between Kickapoo and Paluzy, found Pleas Boyd dead and scalped."

So in the space of two years Martha had gone from the pleasures of a grandmother seeing her daughter start a new life and family, her sons starting their own families while creating law and order on the frontier, into mourning the tragic death of a son and a son-in-law.

Life on the frontier was a series of tragedies, relieved by hard work and punctuated with the pleasures of seeing the world around gradually turn into a better, safer place. The change was so slow it could be seen only from a distance, but those who were doing it knew.

Martha and that first generation of Texans brought with them a code of conduct, a work ethic, and a sense of justice that was then honed by the struggle to survive. They understood the meaning of what it meant to walk tall, to say I did it and I'm proud, although they would never have thought of themselves in those terms. Those who did not measure up to this ethos were not tolerated or did not survive.

Because they understood the difference between right and wrong the justice system they brought with them did not require a lot of lawyers.

These characteristics they impressed on their children and grandchildren. Their children were taught the meaning of right and wrong, to walk with their backs straight and their eyes looking directly ahead, to say what they meant and to do what they said they would do. They were taught that it's good to help others, not because it will make you feel good, but because it will make others feel good. They were taught to be sparing of praise, but to never let a good deed go unnoticed.

The characteristics this first generation left on the land and people of Texas, as the children of Martha continued to demonstrate, have evolved into what the unknowing call the Texas swagger, but what is really nothing more than a Texan expressing pride in him as his forbears had done since Texas became Texas.

Texas and the country are a better place because of Martha Hunter and the families that grew up in that old log cabin.

She was born in Campbell County Tennessee June 5, 1811, went to her final resting place on August 30, 1890 and was buried in the Dean Cemetery near several of her children and grandchildren, and near the Savage children, her neighbors, who were also killed by the Indians. Hers had been a hard life, but it was her choice. I'm sure she was proud of the choice.

On January 20, 1981 I expect Martha was resting on her cushions in heaven with a smile on her face as her 3rd great grandson, Michael Deaver, took the oath of office as Chief of Staff to President Ronald Reagan. She probably whispered something like "Go get 'em boy, that's the way I raised 'em."

The people of Parker county owe it to those generations yet to be born to preserve the old log cabin and the story of how it came to be and the contributions those who grew up there made to what became Texas and the United States.

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