

THE SPURLOCK STORY

TEXAS PANHANDLE ERA

PANHANDLE TIMELINE, STORIES AND HISTORY

Pre historic – Archeological evidence indicates that the cultural history of the Texas High Plains region is about 12,000 years old.

Historic Indians – The first Indians in the Panhandle to be recognized by Europeans were the early Apache. Many other tribes such as Comanche and Kiowa, were also attracted by the lush grass, streams and springs and plentiful game.

1541 – Francisco Vazquez de Coronado with huge unwieldy caravan passed through Panhandle in search of Quivira (Seven Cities of Cibola). He did not come to colonize.

1598 – Don Juan de Onate- came to colonize. He brought the horse and a new way of life to the many Plains Indian tribes that inhabited the area. He was the first white man to traverse the Panhandle.

1680 – Pueblo revolt against the Spanish in New Mexico.

1739 – French traders Paul and Pierre Mallet followed the Canadian River to reach Santa Fe with trade goods.

1819 – Spain decided to allow colonists from the United States to settle in southern Texas.

1820 – Mexico won independence from Spain.

Early Traders used the Canadian River as a highway to Santa Fe.

1835-36 – Texas War of Independence. Republic of Texas created.

1840's – Comanche and Kiowa were masters of the plains.

1845 – United States annexed Republic of Texas. This led to the Mexican American War.

1849 – Fort Smith-Santa Fe road mapped by Captain Randolph B. Marcy followed the Canadian River through the Panhandle. The first white children (twin boys) born in Panhandle were part of this expedition. The Fort Smith-Santa Fe Road was one of the many routes to the gold fields of California.

1861–1864 – Civil War (War Between the States)

1864 – Colonel Christopher (Kit) Carson ordered to lead expedition against the Kiowa and Comanche who wintered on the Canadian River.

1867 – Medicine Lodge Treaty in Kansas. The United States government assigned the Plains Indians to reservations. This met with much resistance but was the beginning of the end of native domination of the Great Plains.

1871 – Eastern tannery's started buying buffalo hides. Professional hunters swarmed the plains beginning the end of the huge buffalo herds. The near extinction of the buffalo helped solved the "Indian problem."

1873 – Surveyors enter the Panhandle region. The establishing of land records begins.

1874 – Battle of Adobe Walls. 28 men, 1 woman held off the Confederated Tribes with superior weapons. (One shot with .50 caliber Sharps rifle fired by sharp shooter Billy Dixon felled a warrior 1538 yards away to end the battle. Bat Masterson was one of the sharp shooters.)

1874 – Red River War. U. S. Government drove the Plains Indians to reservations. End of free roaming tribes of the southern plains. Battle of Palo Duro ended the war.

1876 – The new Texas Constitution created 54 counties in the Panhandle. Many counties that had no population were attached to other counties for governmental services. Moore County attached to Jack County and later Wheeler County, still later it became part of the Oldham Land District.

1870's – 1880's – The era of the huge Texas cattle ranches. The big ranches – the LX, LIT, Frying Pan, and the LS brought the first signs of permanency to the county in 1870's. None had headquarters in Moore County but there were camps scattered over the area. The largest fenced ranch in the world, the XIT, was in the western Panhandle. Many of the big ranches were owned by big land and cattle companies from England, Scotland and Ireland.

1878 – Earliest settlers in Moore County were a couple of Fort Worth surveyors, who surely had crossed the southeastern part of the county in their work or travels. In 1878 Mr. Martin and B. C. Evans established a ranch and built a small rock house at the wide mouth of a creek now known as Evans Canyon. The next tributary downstream is now known as Martins Canyon. Martin and Evans sold their herd of 3500 cattle to the LX in 1882 and left Moore County.

1880- 1885 - The big ranches begin building drift fences to keep cattle from the north plains from drifting into their ranges. Hundreds of miles of barbed wire fences were built. They were constructed on level ground north the Canadian River and when complete extended 200 miles across the northernmost counties from near Higgins to the vicinity of Dalhart and into New Mexico. This solved some problems but created others that changed the cattle industry of the Panhandle forever.

1880's – Railroads: In the central Panhandle, tracks of the Fort Worth and Denver and of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe were built in the 1880's. The FW&DC connected Denver with the Gulf by way of Fort Worth. AT&SF tracks, from the rail head at Dodge City, junctioned with the FW&DC in Carson County. FW&DC tracks entered the southeast corner of the Panhandle in 1886, crossed the Canadian a few miles west of Tascosa in December the following year, and were completed in 1888. The railroads dramatically influenced land sales in the Panhandle in two ways: by ownership of nearly half the land, secured with

State of Texas land certificates; and by promotion of land sales and of town sites on their routes. In the Panhandle the original surveys, paid for by the railroad companies, were made beginning in the 1870's. The State General Land Office in Austin required that for each section claimed by a railroad company another section be set aside for the benefit of schools. In order to realize a profit from land secured with certificates, the railroad companies had to sell land.

1884 spring – John and George Leverton, with their brides Mollie and Cora moved into Evans and Martin's rock house in Evans Canyon. Typical of first-wave frontiersmen, the Levertons had moved west step by step from their home in Sharp County Arkansas to Central Texas and finally in 1878 to the Panhandle, where they punched cattle for Charles Goodnight. **Charles Goodnight**, (March 5, 1836 – December 12, 1929), was a cattle rancher in the Texas Panhandle, perhaps the best known rancher in Texas. He is sometimes known as the "father of the Texas Panhandle. Essayist and historian J. Frank Dobie said that Goodnight "approached greatness more nearly than any other cowman of history." Much more will be recorded later on the Leverton branch of our family.

1885 January 6th –The Big Blizzard. Unprecedented cold descended on the Great Plains. This historic, huge blizzard reached south to the Gulf coast and east to the Atlantic. It blew all night, all the next day and the next night, then another day and night before its massive energy was spent. On Jan 9 the temperature at Tascosa fell to -9 degrees. And the wind registered 58 mph. Cattle up and down the Plains humped their backs and turned their tails to the blizzard. They stumbled into railroad cuts, draws, rivers, canyons and fences where they suffocated, froze, starved, drowned or were trampled to death. Cattle piled up along the drift fence that stretched across the Panhandle, where they died by the thousands. Estimated cattle loss in the Panhandle alone was 150,000 to 200,000. LX cowboys sent out to salvage hides from dead cattle skinned 250 per mile for 30 miles along their section of the drift fence. That spring the Panhandle Cattlemen's Association asked members to take hides to Dodge City in order to tally the loss -- 400,000 were delivered. The open range would never be the same again.

Massive cattle losses during the 1886 blizzard, other economic problems, and the influx of settlers stimulated by railroad construction forced the large ranches to change their operations. They began storing feed for winter, providing shelter and selling land for needed cash. These changes brought to an end the enormous, colorful round-ups of earlier years, when Panhandle ranches cooperated to gather and sort their herds each spring. With remudas of up to 1,600 saddle horses, 200 cowboys herded as many as 30,000 cattle in one loose herd.

THE FIRST SETTLERS

1884 It would be difficult to say just who the first settler in Moore County was. Several who lived here and then moved on as in the case of the surveyors and the cowboys. The first, however, who came and stayed were **John and Mollie and George and Cora Leverton**. They settled in Evans Canyon in the southeast part of the county in 1884. This was a part of the sprawling LX Ranch but the Levertons believed it to be in Potter County.

The Levertons lived in a rock house that had been built a few years earlier by B. C Evans. Evans, a surveyor, evidently had lived in the house but did not remain in the area very long and did not have a family living here. For that reason the Levertons are generally conceded to be the first pioneer family of Moore County.

Soon after their arrival, other families began to arrive and a small community was started along the banks of the Canadian. Among these were the L. D. Meek, G. W. Meek and R. A. Spurlock families.

Ike and George Meek settled seven miles below the Levertons in Hutchinson County and the Spurlocks lived just west of the Levertons in Martin Canyon. According to an article in the Amarillo Globe news Golden Anniversary edition, George and John Leverton had left their homes in Arkansas in 1877 with hopes of finding gold in the Black Hills of the Dakotas. Disappointed there, they began a long and adventurous journey to Texas which eventually ended in tragedy in a little rock house in the LX pasture.

With their mother and stepfather, Allie Lucretia Williams Leverton English and Henry English, they settled in Jack County and then in Parker County. George and John became cowpunchers and by 1878 had begun their trek toward the Panhandle.

They worked for Charles Goodnight and for the Diamond F and S Half Circle outfits and in the fall of 1884, they moved to Evans Canyon for the purpose of filing application for purchase of a section of state school land.

Just prior to moving here, both brothers had married and brought their wives to the canyon with them. The summer of 1885 was spent plowing for a few feed crops, fencing small fields and building corrals and a shed.

That fall, George, in company with George Meeks, a boy the Levertons had hired, a man named Loudermilk and one or two other settlers, drove a small herd of cattle to Dodge City.

In 1886 the second family moved into the area: The Robert Archibald Spurlocks. The story of their life in Moore County has been taken from a family history written by their son Richard Austin Spurlock, who at the time this was written resided in Mexico, a daughter Allie Spurlock Pincham Rybolt and by a cousin, Miss Grace Foreman who resided in Amarillo until her death. Other books that reference the Spurlock family are: A Wind Swept Land: FHL 976.4822 H2m. God, Grass and Grit: FHL 976.4813 H2m. 100 Moore Years: FHL 976.4822 H2m.

Robert Archibald Spurlock and Elizabeth Phoebe Leverton Spurlock settled on the north bank of the Canadian River in 1886, at the mouth of Martin's canyon in Moore County. They had five living children David Reed, age 11, Mary Allie Lucretia, age 9, Franklin Webster Butner b. 1879 d. 1881 had died in Arkansas, George Frederick Napoleon, age 6, Festus Columbus age 4 and Flavious Theodore a nursing baby.