

[Mrs. W. M. Anderson]

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FOLKLORE-WHITE PIONEER,

Miss Effie Cowan, P.W.

McLennan County, Texas,

District 8.

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REFERENCE.

“Interview with Mrs W.M.Anderson, Durango, Texas.

“I was eighty-six years old on the 11th day of March, 1938. I came to Durango from Hunt County with my husband in 1873. It was just a short time after the railroad came to Dallas, Texas, near our home, and I can recall its coming. It was an occasion for celebrating when the first train came into Dallas. A big crowd assembled at the depot and when the train stopped a group of gay young ladies climbed on the train and when the bell rang and the whistle blew for it to start, the conductor tried to get us to get off the train but we girls just stood waving and stayed right on the train and had our first train ride on the first train into Dallas.

“We arrived in Durango about the time the white people had the last encounter with the Indians. There was a band who were captured at Gatesville for stealing horses and

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several Indians were caught and a white man who was thought to be the leader. We made our first two crops before we saw barb-wire. Brush fences and rails were used. Our farm was part of the land formerly owned by Joe Jackson. Of course we had live stock of our own, but oftentimes in those days we bought beef and never asked questions as to where it came from. We had the idea many times that we were eating meat that had been stolen and sold to us, but there was nothing we could do about it.

“When we went to Marlin, the county seat of our county(Falls), we crossed the river on a ferry boat. Some times when the river was low, people would wade across to save the fare of the ferry. [???] 2 “Money was desirable but more of a curiosity and we often resorted [?] resourceful-ness in getting what we wanted by trading. Mr Anderson went into trade negotiations whereupon the three mules and horse which brought us here was exchanged for 28 acres of timber land along Deer Creek. The family stretched a tent in which we lived for ten months, our nearest neighbor being three miles away. We then started grabbing the timber and when the land was cleared we planted corn and cotton. We kept warm in the winter and cooked on a open fire at the mouth of the tent.

“Between times Mr Anderson cut logs and hewed boards with which to build our home. Our first crop was made with one work animal and the use of a neighbors horse, which we borrowed. In six years time we had saved enough outside of our living expenses to buy a sewing machine and have buscuits to eat on Sunday 's, once in a while, which were a great luxury. Some times fortune was not so kind and we had failures in our corn crops, and then we had to dig down into our saving and buy it. I can remember when i corn cost \$1.10 a bushel.

“In 1878 we had ailstorm hailstorm which fell with destructive force in late May, roasting ears, cotton and oats, which showed fine prospects were mowed completely down. We had to plant all over again. Then in 1887 there came a drouth and things got so desperate that the work animals and stock had to be moved over to Salt Branch, near Cego, where they were kept for two months. For our clothes we spun the wool [?] to make thread for

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knitting socks and stocking and suits and dresses, and dyed the thread with copperas or pecan bark. 3 “And then a cyclone came! This was in May of 1892. Crops were in good condition, except for the need for rain. Farmers work all done at the close of the day. We looked at the clouds and thought “there would be rain at last”, but it was more than rain. Funnel shaped clouds formed quickly in the northwest above Durango and there was a whirlwind of dust and debris, then came a roaring, crashing sound. The funnel shaped cloud swept to the ground in terrific roar and force. It cut a path south-eastward, uprooting trees, tearing up houses and splintering trees. Crops were destroyed, and then it was all over in a few minutes.

“The people of Durango awoke to find that a number of their relatives , friends and neighbors had been killed or wounded. Mr and Mrs Tom Weathers were killed with two of their children almost instantly. Miss Bessie Farmer (sister of Lee Farmer) a young lady in her teens, was mortally injured. Others were injured, some seriously, others less seriously. Many, many marvelled at the miracles that happened seemingly to save their lives. he The cyclone swept by the house of Lee Farmer, fearful of the tragedy he ran to the home of his parents which was squarely in its path a mile away. He found the house a wreck and his sister badly hurt and suffering. She died next day. The four of the Weathers family were buried in one grave. (they were the people of Mrs Farmer.)

“Mr and Mrs Parnell who live a few miles east of Durango saw the whirling wind and the dark cloud. They heard the din and roar of the trees and saw bits of household belongings blowing through the air. This was followed by a heavy rain, they were so impressed by it they put the date in the family Bible— May 30, 1892. 4 “There was not a public school near our home and our children were first taught in a room of our home, and when the weather got warm in the spring and summer, the men built a brush arbor joining our house for the pupils which by that time had embraced the near neighbors. Plank boxes were used for desks, and there were eight pupils at one time. As time went by and Durango became a

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village there was a school there and our children went in a cart, a distance of five miles, carrying their lunch for themselves and the horse.

“Moscow was the first post-office in this section. It was located in a field on the farm [of?] [Jerrell?] Jackson, known today as the Sam Hart farm. The next post-office was West Falls, not far from the old Carolina cemetery. It was moved from there to the present site of Durango. And with the coming of the rural routes it was discontinued and the inhabitants received their mail from Lott, Texas. Lee Farmer whose family has been identified with the settlement since the seventies, claims that Dodson Wells was known before Durango. These wells were watering places for the travellers on the pioneer trail which connected Marlin and Belton, county seats of Bell and Falls counties. Many travellers camped at these wells for the night when on their journeys through this section.

“One of the earliest mail carriers was J.P. Weathers. His route was from Marlin to Belton and he often had to swim the river on his horse. He had many and varied experiences. Later, when a Waco to Cameron road was laid out it crosses the Marlin-Belton road north and slightly westward. Naturally the post office was more convenient at the cross roads. 5 “Automatically the spot became known as West Falls and the post-office went there. For a long time it was known under this name, but later it became known as Durango. The town was a thriving business place until the coming of the San Antonio and Aransas Pass railroad which brought the towns of Lott, Chilton and Rosebud into existence. It was then that many business men moved to these other towns.

“As late as 1892 Durango was a thriving settlement of 250 inhabitants. An old directory reveals that the following were engaged in business and professions at that time. W. H. Barnes contractor. R.R. Boyd teacher, Davis and Anderson grocers; J.C. Dulaney, druggist; A.E. Ellis blacksmith; S. Forenander, contractor! J.W. and W.A. Henslee, merchants; G.E. Hocutt, Methodist minister: A.R. Joyce, grocer; J.S. Llewellyn, physician: T.J. Laughlin, postmaster: J.L. Russell, teacher: Stuart and Cox, dry goods: J.D. Storey, blacksmith; and R.B. Whitesides, physician.

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“In years succeeding, Darango dwindled, as many of its inhabitants moved to the towns located on the railroads only seven miles, leaving only a farming community and a people devoted to good citizenship , instead of the thriving business center it o ce once was — where stores and workshops helped to keep the town alive and where the first West-Falls county nespaper was published.

“This story would not be complete without mentioning the names of the first settlers of the Durango community. Long before the Civil War the Jackson family settled near Deer Creek, not far from where Darango is today. Another pioneer who came before the Civil War was Uncle George Storey. His house stands today. He was a black-smith and made ploughs 6 and wagons for people all over the country. Over near where Chilton is today the Weathers, Coxes, Landrums, Gardners and Wrights lived. Uncle Bruce Storey, Uncle Ben Bouchillion and Mr white came after the Civil War from Alabama and settled near where the twon of Durango stands. I mentioned Mr Weathers carrying the mail during the war, and because he was carrying it for the Confederates he failed to receive any pay.

“Mr Dodson settled on his farm among the first settlers near Dodson's Wells, which were used to furnish water for the community. Others who came to the Durango settlement right after the Civil War were the Lewellyns, Farmers, Stewarts and Uncle Drive Currie. Mrs Cox was a long time resident of Durango. She died only a few years ago, She had a good mind to the last and often related historical incidents, she was personally acquainted with Gen. Sam Houston.

“Another settlement which played a historic role near us was the old Carolina settlement located on the site of what is now the Carolina cemetery and church, all deserted except these two landmarks. [This?] community was so closely related to Durango in its pioneers and their activities that it may rightfully [?] be considered the progenitor of Durango. If the history of Durango were carried back to the fifties it would lead to old Carolina. The earliest pioneers west of the Brazos river settled along the sandy -loam ridge upon which Carolina sprang up first as a center of activity, then Durango. A church was built about 1853 at

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Carolina, and it is supposed the same building was used for a school. 7 “It is generally conceded that the same building used for the school was also used for the Presbyterian church, and as far as history goes the first Presbyterian church that came into existence west of the Brazos river. In the upper story of this building a Masonic lodge was organized, but it was finally moved to Chilton, where it is in existence yet.

“It was on the 12th day of October that the Carolina Presbyterian Church was organized with eleven members and two ruling elders., namely A.V.Lee and J.Hobbs and Rev.J.T. Black. The organization took place at the home of A.V.Lee on Elm Creek, five miles from Cameron. This church was first named Elm Creek, but as most of the members soon after, [?] declined to move to Deer Creek in Falls county, it seems that the name was changed to Deer Creek, before the organization was reported to the Presbytery.

“The name was changed to Carolina in October 1864. A young man named A.B. Frazier, was appointed clerk of the session, but it does not appear that he was an elder. He was drowned soon after in Elm Creek. Rev. A.L. Tenney took charge of the church in the fall of 1854 and was installed as pastor in April of 1856, by the Presbytery, which held its spring meeting then and this relation continued until the end of 1859.

“The first church building was erected in 1859, built of lumber sawed by Mrs Lea's sons, by hand. Later a church was created in 1883 and dedicated in 1884. H.C.Smith preaching the sermon. Mr Balch preached for the church several times and ordained the elders chosen in 1854. L.Tenney preached to the church most of the time from '63 until '68 and again supplied from '71 to '75. 8 Rev. S.A.King was S.S. during 1868 and J.A. Walker in 1870: R.M.Longhridge from 1876 to 1800: J.F.Paxton in 1881 to 1890: S.W.Mitchell 1890 and '91: S.J.McMurry,1892 -'93: J.M.Cocbran from Oct. some time uncertain , (The above figures were taken from History of Presbytery of Central Texas, by Rev. L.Tenney) who took charge as I have stated of the Presbyterian church at Old Carolina in 1854, and installed as pastor in 1856.

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“Total number of communicants enrolled was 154, as against the number enrolled in 1895, as being 48. This decline in enrollment in 1895 shows the effects of the passing of the railroad east of Carolina. Today it is known as one of Falls counties most well known cemeteries. Graves mark the resting place of many pioneers who wrought in western Falls county. A small church still stands nearby, but it is seldom used. The communicants of this church are now listed on the rosters of other churches.

“If the real story of Durango and Carolina could be brought to light, with the struggles of its pioneer families, it would be an inspiration to the younger generation. These two settlements occupy as unique and important a place in the history of Falls county as does Blue Ridge on the eastern section. Both communities wrought indelibly in history, yet the spirit of these [pion ers?] were modest. Most of the oldest settlers can recall vividly the untiring work of the country doctors doctor's as they rode horseback over the muddy roads in the winter and were always ready for the most [?] call. Chief among these was Dr John Llewellyn, father of the late attorney Nat Llewellyn of Marlin. Dr S.P.Rice father of the lat late Dr S.P.Rice of Marlin, and Dr R.B.Whitesides, who lives at Lott today. 9 “I failed to mention another organization which came into existence during the hey-dey of Old Carolina which was the United Friends of Temperance. This is revealed in ancient minutes of that organization in possession of Mrs Annie Poulson of Lott, Texas. This organization flourished in the seventies and the roster of its membership is a glimpse into the early families of Carolina and Durango. The charter members were W.E. Jackson, Joe Lea, Hugh Lee, Ben Freeman, Tilman Busby, Jesse Hedrick, Milton McLain, Bud Peters, James Snodgrass, Sam Jackson, Dick McCullough, And the following Sister of the organization, Kate Lea. Sue Wright, Ida Freeman, Annie Wright and George Bonner.

“Other members who joined this order soon after formation were, J.S. Johnson, Joe Huneycutt, LaFayette Hood, J.W.Storey, S.Cramp. W.A.Cook, Miss Annie Wright, Mamie Harwell, S.E.Peters, Tom Gaither, Millie Gaines, Charner De Graffenreid. L.H.Hall, Forrest Gaither, James Gaither, Ed Lane John Edge, John English, J.H.Bone, Lida McCutcheon,

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T.B.Garland, Miss Josephine Daffin, Mrs Mary Gaither, I.R. Richard and many others I do not recall.

“Jesse Hedrick, charter member and recording secretary of the United Friends of Temperance lived at Durango when it was a thriving community and was publisher of a newspaper known as “The Durango Enterprise”. He was justice of the peace at Durango, county commissioner and deputy sheriff of Falls county at different times. 10 “In 1919 my husband W.M.Anderson died . Eleven children were born to us, five of whom are now living. They are Mrs Mary Gardner of Durango, Mrs Lois B. Marshall of Marlin, Mrs Joe Waite and Gillis Anderson both of Durango, and Captain Charles Anderson of San Antonio. I may claim to be the sole survivor of the first families which came to the Durango, Carolina settlement in the early days.

“On the 11th day of March, 1838 I celebrated my eighty-sixth birthday at my home a half mile west of the Durango -Bell Falls road, where the school and church is located. Yes , I have seen lots of things that have happened in the early days of this community. There's much I love about Falls county, of course I've experienced dissapointments and heart aches and for many years was not satisfied about leaving Hunt county in 1873. I felt that perhaps we should have stayed there, but our destiny, brought us here. I've lived a long and comparatively happy life and am ready for the call Over There to the Great Beyond.