

A TIME FOR PLANTING; A SOCIAL HISTORY OF  
SELECTED RURAL COMMUNITIES IN BRAZOS COUNTY, TEXAS

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A Thesis

Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of History  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by  
Janice Jean Schultz  
December, 1973

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A THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to show the establishment, the development, the survival and/or decline of selected rural communities of Brazos County, Texas, from their beginning to the present. It is centered on the social history of the small farmers who arrived here between 1830 to 1900 to begin a new life.

The small farmers came to Texas in search of cheap fertile land and individual freedom. Both goals were achieved. The rural communities in Brazos County were established and developed as a result of the desires of the farmers to create a better environment for their families. In order for the rural communities to exist, there had to be a community-wide attitude of friendship. When the community residents could rely on their neighbors for assistance, it was a sure thing that the community was not going to collapse because of a lack of people.

Practically all research in this study was done through personal interviews with the people of these rural communities. Some correspondence was done between the writer and former residents who moved away. There were secondary sources to supply needed background material for reasons of the farmers' migration into Texas and to

describe certain events connected with the people of the rural communities which occurred in books, bulletins, and newspaper articles.

The study revealed that the Brazos County rural communities were similar to other rural communities in most of the United States, particularly in the people's desire for land and individual freedom. Yet the rural communities existed on the close relationship attitude expressed by these small farmers for their fellow residents.

In the conclusion of this study, the social history of the small farmers has explained their way of life in the last rural frontier of Brazos County. This way of life was clearly pictured as the path of endurance, patience, and simplicity.

Approved:

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Milford F. Allen  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Rural life in Texas during the nineteenth century has often been described in a general way. Rural life from one community to another follows somewhat the same pattern. Eight to fifteen families who had land within a given circumference would become a part of one rural community and help erect a church, a school, and a general store. The farmers set their own working hours and spent considerable time with their families on the farm and in community activities. What brought many of these small farmers to Texas was their search for individual freedom. The farmers had felt an infringement of their rights when the plantation system and industrial expansion squeezed them out of their homelands in the United States, continental Europe, and the British Isles. Some of the farmers suffered religious persecution or heavy church obligations that they could not meet. In any event, their own rural community in Texas gave the farmers the opportunity to feel free of occupational pressures. A group of rural communities in Brazos County, Texas, has been selected to illustrate. These rural communities were the last phase of rural frontier life in Brazos County, Texas, before modernization took place within the county. In this thesis, the social history of the farmers in their rural communities will be studied to show establishment, the development, and the survival of the rural communities and how the small farmers lived here.

The emergence of the rural communities in the northwest, northeast, east, and southwest sections of Brazos County, Texas occurred during the period from 1830 to 1894. These areas, containing the rural communities of Rye, Thompson Creek, Alexander, Tabor, Blanton, Cottonwood, Harris, Zack, Wixon, Wesson, Edge, Macy, Fickey, Kurten, Tryon, Reliance, Steep Hollow, and Harvey, were settled by the migrant farmers. Driven from their small farms in the United States, continental Europe, and the British Isles by the plantation system or industrial expansion, by high taxes, religious persecution, or climatic conditions these farmers came to Texas by ox wagon, horse, foot, or ocean vessel to improve their living conditions. There were many somewhat isolated communities established within the northwest, northeast, east, and southeast sections of Brazos County because of the primitive means of transportation over bad roads. The farmers built churches, schools, general stores, cotton gins, syrup mills, and grist mills in convenient locations. They created somewhat isolated communities and were reasonably content.

Brazos County, a 578-square-mile triangular strip of land located in the south central region of Texas, was established in 1841 by the Texas Congress. The county was created from the northern portion of Washington County, with an additional 15,000 acres from Robertson County, by the Texas Congress as a result of a petition from the inhabitants of that area. The narrow low-banked Navasota river to the east and southeast, the wide high-banked Brazos river to the west, and

the Old San Antonio Road to the north serve as the fixed boundaries for the county. The terrain of Brazos County changes from land that is gently rolling to flat with varied soils and vegetation, and with occasional overflows of its numerous creeks during heavy rains. Once the underbrush was cleared and farm houses were built, the land was broken and made ready for planting. The yields of cotton, corn, sorghum, and other local products proved Brazos County to have fertile farm land.

The people who settled in the rural communities in Brazos County were of German, Irish, Scotch-Irish, Swiss, Hungarian, and Czechoslovakian heritage. They were hospitable, conservative, and practical. Their experience in farming had been acquired through the teachings of their fathers. Their ability to cultivate the land and receive good yields at harvest time contributed greatly to their success as farmers. The farmers and their families experienced a close relationship with other families in their communities. No one in his own community or in any other surrounding rural community was ever treated as a stranger. Everyone in the rural community was considered as a reliable neighbor. These rural communities gave him the chance to put his past behind him and to establish roots for a new beginning.

Religion and education were prime factors in the Brazos County rural communities. The farmers believe in God just as they believed in giving their children a chance to learn to read and write. Nearly every community had a church or a school building or both. Church

services through the nineteenth century were conducted by circuit riders whose long-winded, hell-fire-and-brimstone sermons gave the congregation enough religion to live on for a month of Sundays. Children who attended the one-room rural school often found the school teacher strict and their mischievous pranks doubly reprimanded by the teacher and their parents. Although the cotton picking season interrupted the normal school session, the farmers gave the harvest of the cotton crop top priority despite the efforts of the Texas education officials to keep the children in school for the entire term. Most of the community activity was centered around the church and the school.

In these rural communities the farmer depended upon the local cotton gin to process his cotton, the grist mill to grind his corn into meal, the syrup mill to cook his sugar cane into thick molasses. He depended upon the general store to have his shoe size and the country doctor to bring his child into the world. Pleasures were few, but meaningful and appreciated. Church and school "box suppers", community picnics, weddings, quilting bees, dancing, horse racing, and gospel singing were welcome diversions. The decades of the 1920's and 1930's saw the creation of farmers community clubs, 4-H clubs, and Future Farmers clubs. Had not these activities involved all the families in a diversified manner, the monotony of constant routine would have been hard to endure.



It is not difficult to see the superiority of life on the farm as compared with that of the city. On the farm, children were more welcome and more needed. The parents worked in the field and if there were many children in the family, then the share of the work load on the farm could be evenly distributed and accomplished in less time. There was love, economy, wholesome food, good cooking, simple and abundant hospitality, and the inescapable relation of cause and effect, effort and reward. The children assumed responsibility for certain farm chores early in their life and grew up in a less pressured atmosphere than that of today.

After World War II, the Brazos County rural communities, with the exception of Rye, abandoned the planting of cotton for cattle raising. The Rye community cotton gin operated until 1960.<sup>1</sup> Although there were various breeds of cattle throughout the county, the English Hereford was introduced to Brazos County in 1898.<sup>2</sup> Some of the farmers found the dairy business to be profitable, and today dairy herds are prominent in the Harvey and Wixon rural communities. Cattle raising and the growing of cattle feed is evident throughout the rural communities.

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<sup>1</sup>John Kopecky, Interview, November 15, 1971. Kopecky has been a resident of the Rye rural community for seventy-seven years. He owned and operated the Rye cotton gin for nearly forty years.

<sup>2</sup>W. S. Barron, Interview, September 10, 1971. Barron was a county judge for Brazos County and a Texas Congressman from the Brazos County District. He is now eighty-three years old and is a practicing attorney in Bryan, Texas.

The Brazos County rural communities remained in a primitive state for half a century before they began to modernize. They modernized only because the present generation of farmers found the ways of their fathers obsolete. Homes, transportation, and farming equipment began to take on a new look. Roads were graveled and later asphalted. The early 1900's saw the enclosure of the open range of the rural communities by the barbed wire fence which marked off each man's property. Telephones and electricity were brought to the homes. If the rural communities were to survive they had to change.

The advancement or decline of the rural communities in Brazos County depended largely upon the attitude of the people. The influence of the farmer to stress the needs of the community or his disgust over the turn of unexpected failures could decide the status of the community. The farmer was here to make his living off the land. His ancestors had come to search for cheap fertile land, to escape high taxes, and obtain individual freedom. Today the twentieth century farmer is faced with the same problem of high taxation that his ancestors faced in the land of their birth. Some of these farmers find if there is not enough capital to build up their farms, it is uneconomical to stay. Others are holding on to their land in the hopes of the farmer to maintain his farm and to strive for more unity within the community in this modern age is indeed crucial.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RISE OF THE RURAL COMMUNITIES

Rural communities originated under a variety of circumstances. A fixed landmark or a respected person was the rock or the foundation around which the community was based. Those farmers who established these communities in Brazos County, Texas, arrived from different parts of the United States, continental Europe, and the British Isles during the period of 1830 to 1900. With the exception of early events in Brazos County which provide a short background history before the coming of the farmers, this study is focused on individual leaders, whose main interest had been in creating a better environment for their families.

Brazos County, located in the south central region of Texas, probably had the appearance of a plush garden with its fertile soil, numerous trees, creeks, and vegetation when the colonists of the Stephen F. Austin colony arrived in the area during the autumn and winter of 1821-22. The Austin colony, which included Brazos County, bordered from Matagorda Bay to Port Bolivar along the gulf coast and upward to about Normangee and across to Bastrop. To the head of each family in the Austin colony, the Mexican government gave a certain amount of land, depending upon whether the farmer wished to raise crops or to raise cattle. For farming and harvesting crops, the colonist received one labor of land, which amounted to 177 acres. A stockfarm



totalled 4,428 acres or one league of land. The map on the following page indicates some of the colonists who settled in the area where the rural communities were established.

The rural communities established in Brazos County were Rye, Thompson Creek, Alexander, Tabor, Blanton, Cottonwood, Harris, Zack, Wixon, Wesson, Edge, Macy, Fickey, Kurten, Tryon, Reliance, Steep Hollow and Harvey. These communities are located in the northwest, northeast, east and southeast sections of the county. There are no fixed boundaries for these rural communities. The size of these communities was determined by the number of farmers who had united to establish each community. Some of the rural communities were to become country towns with a United States Post Office, usually within the community general store. Most of these post offices were open until after World War II; Kurten has continued to operate its post office for the benefit of all these rural communities.

The reason for the large number of rural communities is the lack of or primitive means of transportation. Travel over dirt roads by ox wagon and horse was slow and difficult, just as it was to cross the rivers by ferry. Roads and rivers could not be traversed in bad weather. Therefore, it was necessary for the community store, church, and school to be in a location that could be reached by all the families in a particular community.

Assessment of the population in Brazos County was done by county precincts, and the census takers were volunteers who distributed the



forms. The Brazos County Census of 1880 required the name of the head of the household, the wife's name, names of the children and other dependents in the house, the place of birth, and the state in which the person and his family had resided.<sup>2</sup> The number of families in a rural community would range from five to fifty with four to fifteen children per family. The population in each rural community was from forty to three hundred persons until the invention of the automobile after 1900. Then the population of the rural communities began to decline.

Eleven years prior to the creation of Brazos County by the Texas Congress, the rural community of Rye came into being. Founded in 1830 by Robert Henry of Londonderry, Ireland, Rye is located in the northwest section of Brazos County along the Old San Antonio Road. It received its name from the abundant yield of rye grass which Robert Henry sowed in his plowed fields.<sup>3</sup> Henry's land had a total of "twenty-five labors originally a part of Robert Henry acquired title from the Mexican government on December 22, 1834."<sup>4</sup> This property became a part of Brazos County in 1841 when the Texas Congress added 15,000 acres of Robertson County to Brazos County.

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<sup>2</sup>Brazos County Census of 1880, (Microfilm, roll number unavailable). Texas State Library, Archives Division, Austin, Texas, December 28, 1971.

<sup>3</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle, Bryan, Texas, July 10, 1937. This article was a sketch of Robert Henry written by his great-grandfather, Ola Henry.

<sup>4</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from the General Land Office, Austin, Texas, December 13, 1971, 2.



The Rye rural community had no schools, churches, or general store until after 1900. None of the early settlers other than Robert Henry and his family are known. Henry built a horse-drawn cotton gin in Benchley in 1850, two miles northeast of his home.<sup>5</sup> Henry died in 1965 and is buried on the Joseph Kopecky place in Rye.

Joseph Kopecky, a Czechoslovakian who came to Rye in 1885, is given credit for bringing in more community activity. In 1892 Kopecky purchased a horse-powered two-story cotton gin from J. M. Conway of the Thompson Creek rural community, two miles south of Rye, for \$1,605.15.<sup>6</sup> In 1904 a one-room school house was erected at Rye, with Cora Dulaney and Rufus Meads as its teachers.<sup>7</sup> The Kopecky commissary was built in 1910 for the gin workers and included a United States Post Office which was operated by Joseph

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<sup>5</sup> Bryan Daily Eagle, July 10, 1937. The horse-powered cotton gin was the early model gin which used two horses or mules to supply power to operate the gin press which pressed the cotton into bales.

<sup>6</sup> John Kopecky, Interview, October 26, 1971. Kopecky is the son of Joseph Kopecky and has lived in Rye for seventy-seven years. Kopecky has the original bill of sale of the cotton gin from Conway to his father. The two-story part of the gin was at one section where the cotton bales were stored until a buyer came. The entire apparatus had been set upon logs that were driven into the ground (this had been the gin parts only) until the platform could be built. Kopecky helped his father operate it.

<sup>7</sup> Lizzie Peyton Bade, Interview, December 1, 1971. Mrs. Bade was a resident of Rye during her childhood and adolescent years and attended the Rye school. She later taught school in the Thompson Creek area.

Kopecky for about twenty years.<sup>8</sup> The community came to an abrupt standstill when Kopecky's son, John, closed down the Rye cotton gin in 1960. The families who lived and owned land in Rye at the turn of the century were Tom and John Peyton, Joseph Kopecky, Walter Wipprecht, the Merkas, and the Zemaneks. Much of this land is now being prepared for a city power lake for Bryan.

The land adjoining the lake site situated along Thompson Creek in the northwest section of Brazos County is in the Thompson Creek rural community. This land belonged to James Henry, a younger brother of Robert Henry of Rye. James Henry had sent his oldest son, Robert, to locate his brother at Rye; then Henry and the rest of his family followed his son to Texas from South Carolina in 1852.<sup>9</sup> A small segment of the Henry land was subjected to a written agreement. The agreement, written on a sheet of legal ruled paper in the hand of James Henry on July 11, 1875, in the presence of J. M. Conway, Jesse Taylor, and George Young, stated that

Four acres of the James Henry land along the Thompson Creek would be donated for the Thompson Creek church, school, and cemetery grounds. This land was not to be bought or sold under any circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>John Kopecky, Interview, October 26, 1971.

<sup>9</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle, June 15, 1938.

<sup>10</sup>Mrs. Horace Jones, Interview, December 1, 1971. Mrs. Jones is the daughter of J. M. Conway, one of the witnesses of the Thompson Creek community agreement. She was a resident of Thompson Creek until her marriage. The original written agreement was given to her on the event of her father's death.

This agreement is still valid.

Reverend William Bartlett Eaves, A Georgian, ordained into the Baptist Ministry in Burleson County, Texas, organized the Thompson Creek Baptist Church in 1875.<sup>11</sup> The Thompson Creek church was a one-room structure fashioned of rough oak boards with the church pews of beer kegs with boards placed on top of them.<sup>12</sup> The building stood about a hundred yards in front of the cemetery site. Many of the members of this church were baptized in the Brazos River or in Thompson Creek. After Eaves' death in 1895, the Reverends Rollins and McClung held worship services until it was demolished in the 1930's.<sup>13</sup>

There were two schools in the Thompson Creek rural community. The first school was erected on the four-acre site designated in the agreement sometime after 1875. The first teacher is not known. After the turn of the century, Rufus Meads, Lavita Goins Weedon, Mrs. Ed Purcell, and Lizzie Peyton Bade taught school until the 1930's.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Mrs. Hettie Robinson Haygood, Interview, November 2, 1971. Mrs. Haygood was the granddaughter of Reverend Eaves. She spent the majority of her youth in Thompson Creek. In 1874, Eaves was preaching at the Tryon Baptist Church in the Tryon rural community fourteen miles east of Thompson Creek.

<sup>12</sup>Mrs. Hettie Robinson Haygood, Interview, November 2, 1971.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

After 1905, another school, constructed two miles southwest of the four-acre site, was named for T. W. Parker, who had served as a Brazos County Superintendent in 1900.<sup>15</sup>

The Thompson Creek rural community had no business enterprises and very little recreational activity. The nearest general store and cotton gin was at Rye. The farmers attended regular meetings of the Grange, a national farmers' organization for farm education and benefits, in the Thompson Creek school house. The Pamona Grange No. 372 met in the Thompson Creek rural community school house in 1889.<sup>16</sup> There were occasional ice cream suppers and dances in the homes. Rudolph (Bud) Dozier played the fiddle while Hall Cunningham picked guitar for the Thompson Creek dances.<sup>17</sup>

Where the farmers of Thompson Creek had plowed their land and planted their crops a century ago, the land now lies desolate. There are no barren unpainted homes in Thompson Creek. The past for the Thompson Creek community is not obvious to a casual observer, but it is there in the memory of the descendants left behind.

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<sup>15</sup> Mrs. Myrtle Parker Rawls, Interview, December 19, 1971. Mrs. Rawls is the daughter of the late T. W. Parker, for whom the Parker School was named. She lived near the Parker School and attended the school there while Miss Manford was teaching all ten grades.

<sup>16</sup> Bryan Daily Eagle-Brazos Pilot, Microfilm roll 1889-1899. The Brazos Pilot was a small weekly newspaper begun in 1889 by Amos W. Buchanan in the Steep Hollow rural community. The Brazos Pilot merged with the Bryan Daily Eagle in 1907.

<sup>17</sup> Mrs. Hettie Robinson Haygood, Interview, November 2, 1971.

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On the northeast side of Brazos County, seven miles from the city of Bryan, is the small rural community of Alexander in the George W. Singleton league. It is apparent that many families, perhaps some of the Austin colonists, settled here and constructed a small log school house. This school house was the scene of a gathering of families where Robert Alexander, a Methodist preacher on the Boonville and Galveston circuits, verbally declared the establishment of the Alexander Methodist Episcopal Church in 1854.<sup>18</sup> On October 2, 1856, Elizabeth Boatwright and John Singleton deeded ten acres of the George W. Singleton league for a church building and cemetery grounds.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Church Minutes, Alexander Methodist Episcopal Church, Tabor Community, Brazos County, Texas 1856-, 1. This church still functions today and is the oldest Methodist church in Brazos County.

<sup>19</sup>Brazos County Deed Records, Vol. E., 196.



The Alexander rural community was then begun in 1856.

According to the Alexander Methodist Episcopal Church Minutes, these transactions took place:

The first church trustees paid ten dollars to John Singleton for the ten acre church site in October, 1856. The logs of the first church were hewn by some of the first settlers. This plain building faced northward with large double doors and stood until 1908. The present church, built in 1939, faces east with double entrance doors, asbestos siding, and a front entrance porch. The Memorial Education wing, erected in 1957, was dedicated to Dr. Monroe Vivian, a lay leader. The pulpit speakers from 1856 to 1882 were Mordecia Yell, O. M. Addison, W. H. South, J. M. Wesson, Robert Alexander, Joseph D. Moore, J. R. White, J. B. Huckabee, H. V. Philepot, and King Vivian, who served the Boonville circuit. There were no pastors from 1882 to 1904. In 1957, the church had begun two worship services with Clifford Edge as its full time minister. The present minister, since June, 1971, is Evan Henderson.<sup>20</sup>

The Alexander community school, built on the Lefevre land prior to 1865, had William L. Glass as its first teacher.<sup>21</sup> The local newspaper listed the succeeding teachers from 1897 to 1921 as follows:

Mary Johnson, Jessie Johnson, Abbie Arnett, Sue Benbow, Professor Ed Rollins, Joe McGee, John L. Cobb, Willie Boyett, Emma Orr, Eva McDonald, A. S. McSwain, Winnie Washburn, Minna McMillan, Bessie Stallings Benbow, Ola Henry, Professor Green, Mrs. Evie Hearne, Ruth Fuller, Mrs. Mary Ewing, and Mrs. Emma Montgomery.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Church Minutes, Alexander Methodist Episcopal Church, 1-7.

<sup>21</sup>"Early School Days at Tabor Area Revealed in 1916", Bryan Daily Eagle. This undated clipping belongs to Mrs. Herman Blanton, Tabor community. The article also said that a Mr. Berton taught at the Alexander school during the Civil War.

<sup>22</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle, September 13, 1957.

The school was consolidated with the Central High School in the Tabor community in 1921, when the Alexander rural community became a part of Tabor.<sup>23</sup>

Captain John Tabor and Major M. J. Tabor of Mississippi, both Confederate soldiers, had come to Texas at the close of the Civil War. M. J. Tabor purchased 207 acres of land at five dollars an acre from the Francis Quota league on December 31, 1873.<sup>24</sup> John Tabor built his two-story general store on the land in 1883, and as a result of this action, the Tabor community came into being.<sup>25</sup> The first floor of the building housed the general store which stayed in operation until 1955, while the second floor, called the Woodmen Hall, was used as a dance hall and recreational center.<sup>26</sup> On May 24, 1888, John Tabor received approval from the United States Postal officials to include a post office in the store; this post office served the Alexander,

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<sup>23</sup>Edna Harris, Interview, October 18, 1971. Miss Harris was a teacher in the Harris school in the Harris rural community three miles southeast of Tabor. She verifies that the small schools of Harris, Alexander, Blanton, and Cottonwood were consolidated with Tabor in 1921.

<sup>24</sup>Brazos County Deed Records, Vol. O., 365.

<sup>25</sup>John Nance, The Early History of Bryan and the Surrounding Area, Bryan Centennial Committee, Bryan, Texas, June 1962, unpagged.

<sup>26</sup>Will Presnal, Interview, November 9, 1971. Presnal is a life-long resident of Tabor. Like his father before him, Presnal owned and operated the Tabor store until 1955.

Tabor, Blanton, and Cottonwood communities until May 31, 1944.<sup>27</sup>

The general store was demolished in the spring of 1972.

It is not known if John Tabor constructed a cotton gin in the Tabor community. John Hickman of the Cottonwood community and Archie McCallum of Tabor engineered and built a cotton gin on the Hickman place in 1906 and moved it to Tabor in 1908.<sup>28</sup> This gin was referred to as the Cap n' Ball cotton gin and was operated until the late 1940's.<sup>29</sup>

In 1915 the Central High School in the Tabor community was constructed on five acres of land purchased at fifty dollars an acre from Robert Hudspeth of Hondo, Texas, by the school trustees, John L. Cobb, J. B. Walker, and J. W. Harris.<sup>30</sup> The writer observed that the school was a T-shaped frame structure with four large classrooms in front and a large gymnasium and auditorium to the rear. The school enrolled twenty-five students on September 20, 1915, with Charles Bobo

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<sup>27</sup>Letter of Janice Schultz from the General Services Administration, National Archives, Washington, D. C., November 8, 1971. The postmasters were Millard F. Jackson, Zachariah R. Guess, Charles H. Holmes, Peter Thomas, James C. Shaw, James L. Broach, William E. Thompson, James K. Polk Presnal, and Will Presnal.

<sup>28</sup>H. Grady Castle, taped interview made by Anna Koontz Smith for Janice Schultz, November 17, 1971, Abilene, Texas.

<sup>29</sup>Will Presnal, Interview, November 9, 1971.

<sup>30</sup>"Early School Days at Tabor Area Revealed in 1916", Bryan Daily Eagle. This clipping belongs to Mrs. Herman Blanton of Tabor.

as its principal and C. C. Scott as the first teacher.<sup>31</sup> In 1950 the school trustees decided to use the school as a permanent recreational community center, since the school had been consolidated with Kurten four years earlier. When the school land was sold in the early spring of 1972, the school building was demolished.

The Tabor community at present has several stock farms. The cotton fields have been erased from the land for nearly thirty years. Many of the Tabor residents who own land in the Tabor community work at an eight-hour job elsewhere and keep the land because of its high value.

One mile north of the Tabor community is the small rural community of Blanton. According to Herman Blanton, his grandfather, G. W. Blanton, came from North Carolina in 1863, purchased land in the Joseph D. Allcorn league, and settled there to farm.<sup>32</sup> An article in the Bryan Daily Eagle, that was written by a high school student who lived in the Tabor area said that

G. W. Blanton donated the land for the school house in 1893. The school was named in his honor. The first school trustees were Will Gallatin, Tom Gallatin, and Jeff Castle. Sallie Haneman was the first teacher.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>"Early School Days at Tabor Area Revealed in 1916", Bryan Daily Eagle. Later teachers at Tabor were Sue Benbow, Pauline Thompson, Bertha Locke, I. A. Seacord, Mr and Mrs. Sam Pate, Herbert Smith, Ruby Fry, Mr. and Mrs. W. G. Coleton, Mr. and Mrs. A. W. Williams, R. L. Scarborough, Mrs. Pat Dooley, Alton Taylor and Dave Bunting.

<sup>32</sup>Herman Blanton, Interview, October 13, 1971. Blanton is a lifelong resident of the Blanton community as is a farmer.

<sup>33</sup>"Early School Days at Tabor Area Revealed in 1916", Bryan Daily Eagle.



A later article elaborated on the succeeding school teachers:

Minnie Bullock, Roy Zimmerman, Bertha Graham, Henry Hudspeth, Mertle Hester, Stella Covington, Mrs. Lula Blaylock, Pinky Ferguson, Joe McGee, Eugene Sample, Nannie Williams, Lena Gilpin, and Minnie McCallum taught in Blanton from 1893 to 1921.<sup>34</sup>

Blanton school was consolidated with Tabor in 1921.

There were no business enterprises in Blanton during its twenty-eight years as a small farming community. The school was the only community center. Blanton, like Alexander, became a part of the Tabor community and those who own land here are descendants of the original settlers.

Three miles northeast of Tabor is the Cottonwood rural community. Cottonwood was made up of a sampling of settlers of different nationalities, some of them German. The community received its name from a large clump of cottonwood trees. Near these trees, the Cottonwood Baptist Church was built and probably organized in 1860 by Frank Kieffer, a German immigrant. Since the early church records were destroyed by fire in 1893, there is no documentary evidence available to give Frank Kieffer the credit, but it is believed by many of the senior residents of Cottonwood that he is the one who established the church.<sup>35</sup> Kieffer established the Missionary Baptist Church in Washington-on-the-Brazos after his conversion from the Catholic religion

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<sup>34</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle, September 13, 1957.

<sup>35</sup>Mae Stevener Wilson, Interview, April 25, 1972. Mrs. Wilson was the Cottonwood Baptist Church secretary for many years. She is a resident of Kurten and a second cousin to the writer's father.

to the Baptist faith.<sup>36</sup> The Cottonwood Baptist Church was rebuilt after 1893 and was served by circuit preachers. The church minutes report that

Thomas Eaton, Frank Nash, John Jackson, David S. Lloyd, and J. M. Bullock were among those in the Cottonwood pulpit. These ministers were paid by Sunday collection from one dollar to five dollars which depended upon how much the farmers could spare. In 1910 a new church dwelling was constructed near the Ed Schram estate on FM 974, which was more convenient for the members. The church is a frame structure with an auditorium with curved pews making a semi-circle around the pulpit.<sup>37</sup>

Today the full-time minister is Arthur Smith, who served before in the 1940's; he has been repeatedly invited back by popular choice.

According to the Bryan Daily Eagle in an article concerning the early school days in Cottonwood:

The Cottonwood school used the same building as the church in 1860 until the 1893 fire. In 1895 the school house was rebuilt on land donated by J. K. Collins. The school trustees were J. K. Collins, J. W. Bickham, and Frank Kieffer. Will Kelly was the first teacher.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Mrs. Ted Cook, Interview, April 12, 1972. Mrs. Cook is a life-long resident of Kurten. The information concerning Frank Kieffer was told to her by her late grandmother, Lela Koontz Gallatin. Kieffer's sister, Catherine, married Henry Koontz, Lela's father. Kieffer had come from Germany to Pennsylvania in the early 1850's with his sisters and brothers. The Kieffers stayed in the Tryon rural community for about two years before going to Cottonwood. Because Kieffer was a devout man, he may have helped establish the Tryon Baptist Church.

<sup>37</sup>Church Minutes, Cottonwood Baptist Church, Cottonwood community, Brazos County, Texas, 1860-.

<sup>38</sup>"Early School Days at Tabor Area Revealed in 1916", Bryan Daily Eagle, undated clipping.

Later school teachers at the Cottonwood school were

"Preacher" Paige, Steve Horton, Robert Scott, Joe McGee, Eugenia Thompson, Coma Gandy, Minnie Bullock, Rose McDonald, "Professor" Lee, John L. Cobb, Willie Boyett, Flora Cameron, Eugene Sample, Jessie Watson, John Thompson, Mrs. Will Hall, Pansy Hall, Phinie Graham, Mrs. Jim Francis, Mrs. Charlie Ball, Mrs. Will Presnal, and Mary Cahill.<sup>39</sup>

The Cottonwood school was consolidated with Tabor in 1921.

There was considerable business activity in Cottonwood. J. W. Bickham, one of the early settlers in Cottonwood, constructed a general store near the present Bickham cemetery about 1865 and hired Bob O'Rear to manage it until the 1880's.<sup>40</sup> Bickham also opened his private cemetery to a travelling couple whose young daughter had died and who asked permission to buy her there.<sup>41</sup> Since that time, the Bickham cemetery was opened to the Cottonwood and Tabor residents, and it has been used for one hundred years. Cyrus Koontz owned a grist mill and a syrup mill in Cottonwood.<sup>42</sup> Most land owners who had a considerable amount of land had one or both types of mills. There were three cotton gins at Cottonwood. Each of them was built about the same time but on different properties by three different individuals. Since cotton was a prominent crop in Texas, some of the rural people believed that there was money to be made in operating a cotton gin in farming communities.

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<sup>39</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle, September 13, 1957.

<sup>40</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith on collaboration with H. Grady Castle and Earl Castle, Abilene, Texas, March 16, 1972, 6.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., February 14, 1972, 4. There are numerous letters which the writer has used from the above source.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

According to H. Grady Castle and Earl Castle, former residents of Cottonwood, the following information concerning the three cotton gins is taken from three lectures written by Anna Koontz Smith:

J. W. Bickham built a cotton gin on the Bickham property about 1850 and it stood until 1889. That year it caught fire from friction in the gin stands. The Gallatin gin, owned and operated by Tom and Will Gallatin was built about the same time and whether it caught fire or was torn down is not known for sure. The remains of the Gallatin gin and Bickham gins were seen on the premises until the 1930's. The Kieffer gin, operated by Frank and Peter Kieffer, was located south of Ferrill Creek in the woods. It was in operation from about 1860 to 1883 when it was burned to the ground by Joseph Zabo over family trouble.<sup>43</sup> Zabo was caught and hanged on the Robert Hudspeth place.

These business activities in Cottonwood were short-lived.

The community of Cottonwood has declined because many of its residents lost interest in the land or found it uneconomical to remain on the farm and moved into the city. Some of the descendants of the original settlers live on the place of their ancestors, and as long as they remain, the Cottonwood Baptist Church, the oldest Baptist Church in Brazos County, will remain with them.

Two miles southeast of Cottonwood, on the Cyrus Koontz place, is Zack, Texas. Zack was a small community with one general merchandise store built by Zachariah R. Guess in 1904.<sup>44</sup> On March 29, 1904, the little area of Zack, Texas, was put on the Brazos County map when

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<sup>43</sup>Letters to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith, Abilene, Texas, 29 February 1972, pp.2, 16 March 1972, pp.7, 14 February 1972, pp.4.

<sup>44</sup>H. Grady Castle, taped interview made by Anna Koontz Smith for Janice Schultz, Abilene, Texas, November 17, 1971.



Zachariah R. Guess applied for and received a post office to be housed within his store.<sup>45</sup> Because there were not enough people to support his store, Zachariah R. Guess sold his interest to Cyrus Koontz and 1906, moved to the Macy community, where he built another store.<sup>46</sup> After 1932, the store was boarded up and a few years later it was torn down. There is no visible evidence of the existence of Zack, Texas, now. It has gone with the winds of yesterday.

Two miles south of Zack, as the crow flies, is a small community known as Harris. The only central point of interest in the Harris community was the school. Until 1899 the school was called the Clarmont school for a family by that name in the community.<sup>47</sup> A news report said that

The people of Harris took up a collection to build the school house in 1878 on the Jim Lawrence land. It was later nicknamed the William Harris School. Robert Hudspeth, James Lawrence, and William Harris were the first trustees. Miss Robbie Mickel was the first teacher. The school house was rebuilt in 1905 twenty yards from the old one. Mr. Sheffield taught school in the new building. In 1911, another room was added and John M. Moore and Miss Helen Kelley were the teachers.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from the General Services Administration, November 8, 1971. The postmasters were Zachariah R. Guess, Cyrus Koontz, and C. E. Locke. The post office was closed February 15, 1932.

<sup>46</sup>H. Grady Castle, taped interview made by Anna Koontz Smith for Janice Schultz, November 17, 1971. Guess was a tall, persistent man with a temper and a shock of black hair.

<sup>47</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith, Abilene, Texas, March 16, 1972, 5.

<sup>48</sup>"Early School Days at Tabor Area Revealed in 1916", Bryan Daily Eagle, undated clipping.

Another article in the Bryan Daily Eagle concerning the rural schools said that

The teachers following Miss Mickel were Bessie Benbow, Captain J. A. Hester, Victor Hudson, Little Boggs, John Drummond, Arthur Drummond, Sam Rosborough, Coma Gandy, and Margaret McLaughlin. Joe McGee taught there during the 1890's. In 1908 John M. Moore, a teacher-principal, had as his assistants Mae Stevener, Helen Kelley, Sue Benbow, and Maggie Benbow. Moore's salary was sixty dollars a month while his assistants received forty dollars a month. Miss Una Edge and Miss Edna Harris taught in the school before it was consolidated with Tabor in 1921.<sup>49</sup>

There were no business enterprises in the Harris community. It remains as a small area where the land is idle or stocked with cattle on small individual farms.

Migrant farmers from Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama came to Brazos County to settle along the Wickson Creek three miles west of Kurten near the close of the Civil War.<sup>50</sup> The people established Wixon as a farming community and gave it a different spelling than the original name of the creek. Wickson Creek had been named for Byrum, Dyron, and Eli Wickson during the 1840's, when Brazos County was founded by the Texas Congress; Wickson Creek is the longest creek in Brazos County.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle, September 13, 1957.

<sup>50</sup>Jim Beard, Interview, December 14, 1971. Beard is a life-long resident of Wixon and a retired Bryan banker. The Beards, who came from Alabama, were among the first settlers of the Wixon community.

<sup>51</sup>The Handbook of Texas, The Texas State Historical Association, Austin, Texas, 1952, 905. The Wickson brothers were among the first settlers of Brazos County. Wickson Creek began at the Navasota river southeast of Harvey and travelled northward for thirty-five miles. Its four branches are Steep Hollow branch, Sandy branch, Little Wickson, and Mathis.

The Brazos County Deed Records show the following transaction:

On July 22, 1873, Reverend J. H. Mitchell donated six acres of land for the Wixon school. Trustees for the school were Mitchell, R. T. Short, J. D. Whitten, Z. P. Pearson, Harrison Crenshaw. Mitchell also gave six more acres of his land for the Wixon Cumberland Presbyterian Church which was constructed at the same time.<sup>52</sup>

The school and church buildings were torn down in the 1930's.

The school teachers were Robbie Mickel, Ernest Beard, Georgia White, and Edna Harris.<sup>53</sup> The church had no pastor after Reverend J. H. Mitchell died in 1891; but J. A. D. Robinson, John White, and John Beard lay leaders in the church, helped to keep the congregation together by conducting services.<sup>54</sup>

The Wixon community had one early business and one more recent enterprise. The first was a cotton gin owned by Wiley Kelley, "a six-foot-two-inch barrel-shouldered man with a voice like a steamboat," who operated the gin on the southeast corner of the Beard place from 1865 until his death in 1916.<sup>55</sup> The present business in Wixon is the Roy Barnes Jersey Farm. Barnes started the business in 1948 with fifteen Jersey cows and presently has four hundred cows which produce eight thousand gallons of milk for the Lilly Dairies processing plant in Bryan.<sup>56</sup> Most of the residents of Wixon moved to other rural communities

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<sup>52</sup>Brazos County Deed Records, Vol. 0., 136.

<sup>53</sup>Edna Harris, Interview, October 18, 1971.

<sup>54</sup>Mrs. Ted Cook, Interview, February 8, 1972.

<sup>55</sup>Jim Beard, Interview, December 14, 1971.

<sup>56</sup>Pauline Rahnert Barnes, Interview, September 10, 1971. Mrs. Barnes was reared in Kurten and has lived in Wixon since 1940.

or to Bryan after the 1930's. There have been many newcomers who built many new homes in the area, but only five families who were descendants of the original settlers remain in Wixon.

Wixon's neighboring community, Wesson, received its name from J. M. Wesson, a Methodist circuit preacher who helped the farmers to organize the Wesson Methodist Church about 1869.<sup>57</sup> The church building site may easily be determined by the monuments on the cemetery hill. Wesson was a small farming community. According to Mattie Bell McGee, life in Wesson was something like this:

Many of the black people, like myself, were brought in from Grimes County to work on the John M. Moore thousand acre farm while Moore taught school in Harris. Some of the Wesson farmers also worked on the Moore farm. These farmers had their cotton ginned at the Wiley Kelley gin in Wixon and their children went to the Wixon school. The Wesson community is predominantly black now. The black people's church, the New Bethlehem Baptist Church, was built about 1920 and stands not far from where the old Wesson Methodist Church stood years ago.<sup>58</sup>

Where Wesson was a small farming community with little community activity, the community of Edge, seven miles northeast as the crow flies, gave the impression of a bustling country town. Though the three brothers, Dr. John Edge, William Harrison Edge, and George Edge, came together to Texas during the 1890's, only Dr. John Edge can be given credit for establishing the Edge community. Dr. John Edge

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<sup>57</sup>"Tabor Methodist Church Passes Centennial Mark", Bryan Daily Eagle, September 13, 1957. Wesson had been a presiding elder of the Alexander Methodist Episcopal Church in Tabor about 1868.

<sup>58</sup>Mattie Bell McGee, Interview, October 18, 1971. Mattie Bell McGee is a black woman who was born in Grimes County, brought to the Moore farm as a girl, and has lived in Wesson for nearly seventy years.



built a general merchandise store and wanted to name the town Maude after his youngest daughter, but since there was another town in Texas by that name, he called it Edge and opened a post office in 1894.<sup>59</sup> The Edge post office was established September 14, 1894, and continued until March 31, 1957.<sup>60</sup>

According to Ethel Payne Winn, a resident of Edge for many years, the Edge community had three schools:

There were two seven grade schools called Liberty and Concord. Liberty school was located on the Will Henry place, while the Concord school was one mile northeast near the New Church cemetery, which belonged to the Presbyterian Church. The teachers at the two schools were Sue Benbow, Allie Montgomery, Grace Morgan Bethany, Paul Ferguson, Eva McDonald, D. J. McDonald, Mr. Pinckney, Mr. Pink Graham, Eugene Sample, P. S. Magnum, Emily Tatum, and Kathryn Wilson. Both schools were consolidated with Kurten in 1946. The Edge High School, built in 1912, was a two-room school where Mr. and Mrs. X. Smith taught. The high school was located on the Fort Martin place and burned to the ground in 1940.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Altha Edge, Interview, September 26, 1971. Miss Edge is the daughter of the late Dr. John Edge, who established the Edge rural community. She lived in Edge for many years, but now resides in Bryan. Her father was a medical doctor and practiced medicine in Edge and in the neighboring rural communities.

<sup>60</sup> Letter to Janice Schultz from the General Services Administration, National Archives, Washington, D.C., November 8, 1971. The postmasters in Edge were William H. Edge, Charles H. Holmes, Warren McMichael, William Closs, Travis Beard, Mayte Ola Thompson, John W. Thompson, John E. Payne, Morgan Closs, Charles M. Payne, and Frank Rychlik.

<sup>61</sup> Ethel Payne Winn, Interview, September 28, 1971. Mrs. Winn lived in Edge for eighteen years. She was reared by Mrs. Charles Drew after her mother died. Mrs. Winn believed there was a school called Blackjack that was on the Elizabeth Payne place and it may have been the first school of the first settlers before Edge was established.

The first church in the vicinity of Edge was the Presbyterian Church called the Brazos Church. There were sixteen people present when Reverend James Wilson of Illinois, an immigrant of County Tyrone, Ireland, founded the Brazos Church on April 18, 1873.<sup>62</sup> Wilson came to Texas as a travelling missionary and decided to settle down in Brazos County. His nephew, James Wilson, who came from Illinois and stayed with his uncle from the time he was fourteen and took care of the farm at Edge, described the Parson Wilson as

"a preacher roaming around doing missionary work who married a Texas gal and settled along the Brazos. Parson Wilson was an old fashioned, hellfire and brimstone preacher with long-winded sermons."<sup>63</sup>

Though Parson Wilson died in 1904, the church remained open until 1913. There is no record of any pastor conducting services after him.

The Missionary Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, and the more recent Church of Christ served the Edge farming community. The Missionary Baptist and the Methodist churches were served from about 1895 to 1915 by circuit preachers about once every month, while the Free Will Baptist Church preachers and members used the Liberty school house in 1900 for its worship services.<sup>64</sup> The only church in Edge now

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<sup>62</sup>Brazos Presbytery Minutes, Vol. IV., 1869-1874., 132. (Xeroxed copy included in a letter to Janice Schultz from the Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, Montreat, North Carolina, October 21, 1971).

<sup>63</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Paxton J. Lewis, Nauvoo, Illinois, October 18, 1971. Lewis is the great nephew of Parson Wilson.

<sup>64</sup>Ethel Payne Winn, Interview, September 28, 1971.

is the Church of Christ, begun about 1939. James Roberts is its present minister.<sup>65</sup>

Edge was a thriving little town during the early 1900's. There were three general stores, a drugstore, barber shop, and a cotton gin which Ethel Payne Winn describes:

The Edge store, built by the three Edge brothers, was the first but no longer stands. Dr. John Edge devoted most of his time to his medical practice. In 1900 William Closs' general store and Tim Echols' drugstore were erected by the Edge store. About 1905 Travis Beard bought the Closs store which still remains intact. Elbert Moore and Ed Payne became partners in 1906 when they built a general store. Then Payne bought Moore's share and added farm implements to the merchandise. In 1927, Frank Rychlik came into partnership with Payne; later Rychlik was full owner. About 1905 Clifford Frame operated a barber shop near the Beard store where haircuts were twenty-five cents and shaves were ten cents. Charles Payne owns the present buildings where the stores are. Tom Closs operated a cotton gin at Edge in 1900 which changed ownership first to Will Thompson and then to Joseph Opersteny, who operated it until 1945 when it was closed. Presently, Belle Jackson's grocery store is the only business in Edge.<sup>66</sup>

About one block east of the Jackson store was the main part of Edge. The tall, unpainted, empty silence of the once active general stores lined along the main street of Edge are in strong contrast to the modern stores of today.

Five miles to the north of Edge near the Old San Antonio Road is the community of Macy. The Macy community residents and the residents of the surrounding communities agree that Macy, Texas, was

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<sup>65</sup>Vaughn Robert Wilson, Interview, September 24, 1971. Mr. Wilson is a life-long resident of Edge. He is a great nephew of Parson Wilson.

<sup>66</sup>Ethel Payne Winn, Interview, September 28, 1971.

one of the roughest places in the Brazos County area. Macy's wild reputation, achieved as a result of the duels, arson, and robbery that occurred here was the talk of Brazos County. The famous James boys, Frank and Jesse, who were nephews of William James, a resident of Macy, stayed at the William James home for a time when they were on the run from law officials.<sup>67</sup> Whether these outlaws had anything to do with stirring up the trouble in Macy is not known. The causes of the unruly behavior are speculative.

Vick B. Robinson, a resident of Macy for eighty years, tells about the establishmen of Macy:

Before the Civil War broke out, William Macy of Indiana, came to Texas on an exploring trip which took him to the northeastern part of Brazos County. He found the land that he liked and had planned to settle here then. But he learned of the war's declaration and returned to the north to join the Union forces. About 1869, Macy came back here with his wife, Mary, and purchased one hundred acres from William James in the Thomas James league. During the 1870's many farmers came to this area. My mother's people, the Corgeys, came here in 1867. Macy took on the appearance of a farming community which it continues even now.<sup>68</sup>

The Samuel Lipscomb general store, built in 1870, housed the post office in Macy from July 13, 1874 to February 28, 1905.<sup>69</sup> The mail route, the

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<sup>67</sup>Mrs. Mitchell Keith, Interview, March 7, 1972. Mrs. Keith lived most of her youth in Macy. She is a great-great-granddaughter of the late Colonel Walter Williams, C. S. A. The information of the James boys came from her grandmother, Mrs. Horton, whose maiden name was James.

<sup>68</sup>Vick B. Robinson, Interview, November 15, 1971. Robinson has been a resident of Macy since his birth eighty years ago.

<sup>69</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from the General Services Administration, November 8, 1971. The postmasters were Samuel Lipscomb, T. Burr, William Newman, Nathan McKinney, Felix Newman, George A. Hunt, Matthew McDonald, Jr., William Reed, William C. Newman, and Robert McCoy.



Star Route as it was called, ran from Wheelock to Macy.<sup>70</sup>

The J. J. Manning cotton gin, built about 1905, was destroyed by fire not long after it began operating in Macy, it was the only gin in Macy at the time.<sup>71</sup> It was rebuilt a few years later.

The one-room schools of Shiloh and Macy were consolidated with the New King's Highway school in Macy. Leonard McDonald gave two acres of land on August 11, 1922, for the new school and changed the name of the community from Macy to King's Highway at the same time.<sup>72</sup> The teachers at the school were

Allied Donahue, Lela Lathrop, Jimmy Walker, Jewel Ball, Ola Henry, Mr. O'Connor, Cuther Bounds, [principal], Miss Greenwood, Corinne Adams, Bonnie Little, Lena Gilbert, Maud Lewis, Cora Lowry, John A. Heath, Inez Heath, Lena Novasad, Mary Horton, and Ada Zulch.<sup>73</sup>

The houses of God did not escape the arsonist's wrath. All of them, the Pecan Grove Methodist Church, Church of Christ, the Free Will Baptist Church, and the Masonic Lodge were burned in the early 1900's along with their records.<sup>74</sup>

The only present business in King's Highway is the B-5 grocery store which faces the old San Antonio Road. The old King's Highway

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<sup>70</sup>Vick B. Robinson, Interview, November 15, 1971.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Brazos County Deed Records, Vol. 145., 365. The school trustees were Albert Kopetsky, Norman Williams, D. J. Williams, and Robert Beshier.

<sup>73</sup>Vick B. Robinson, Interview, November 15, 1971.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

school which still stands, about one-fourth mile from the grocery store, is the only other building left in the community. And the community is at peace.

Seven miles southwest of Macy is the small community of Fickey. The only interest in the Fickey community was the one-room school house built by Frank Fickey in 1892 near the Richard Schram place.<sup>75</sup> According to Henry Schultz, the school building was

Fifteen feet wide by thirty feet long, made of unfinished oak boards one inch thick by eight inches wide with one inch thick by four inch oak sidings. The entire building was set upon oak blocks that measured about eight inches wide by twelve inches tall.<sup>76</sup>

The school teachers at the Fickey school were

John M. Moore, Lee McDonald, Lillian Crenshaw, Edelweiss Koppe Jones, Clara Wallin, Beatrice Rogers, Mary Lou Prinzel, Annie Locke and Clara Lueck.<sup>77</sup>

The school had housed the Zion United Church of Christ about 1894, before their church building was built.<sup>78</sup> The school operated until the

<sup>75</sup>Angela Lopez Bonifazi, Interview, October 2, 1971. Mrs. Bonifazi was adopted by the Frank Roth family when her parents died. The Fickeyes and the Roths were close friends and through Frank Fickey she learned of the establishment of the school. Fickey taught school there for two months before John M. Moore arrived.

<sup>76</sup>Henry Schultz, Interview, April 10, 1972. Henry Schultz is the writer's father and was reared in Kurten. His father attended the Fickey school.

<sup>77</sup>Joe Fickey, Interview, October 4, 1971. Joe Fickey is the son of Frank Fickey, the founder of the school.

<sup>78</sup>Zion United Church of Christ Bulletin, October 13, 1957. This booklet is a history of the church during its sixty-fifth anniversary.

1930's and then was disbanded. The school house is presently being used as a hay barn on the Arthur Yeager place in Kurten.<sup>79</sup>

Four miles south of Fickey is the German community of Kurten. Kurten was founded in the late 1860's by Henry Kurten, who came to Texas from Cologne, Germany, in the spring of 1851.<sup>80</sup> Kurten purchased 14,291 acres of land on July 16, 1864, from Eli Baxter of Cherokee County for the sum of eleven thousand and seventy dollars in Confederate bills.<sup>81</sup> In 1865, Kurten decided to send a notice to Germany through a friend in the German consul in Galveston to acquire immigrants who could farm his land; and for those who came, he gladly paid their passage.<sup>82</sup>

In 1876, Henry Kurten donated land for the first two-story school house from hewn logs which stood until 1900.<sup>83</sup> Horace Raymond was one of the first school teachers, while later teachers were Mr. Mims, Mr. Templeton, Mrs. Maggie Kelley, Johnnie Moore Stockton,

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<sup>79</sup>Gretchen Kasiske Pfluger, Interview, September 26, 1971. Mrs. Pfluger is the daughter of the late Reverend Julius Kasiske and was reared in Kurten. She is a friend of the Arthur Yeager family.

<sup>80</sup>Alice Odom Norman, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kurten, German Immigrants, Bryan, Texas 1948, 6. This is an unpublished paper.

<sup>81</sup>Brazos County Deed Records, Vol. G., 165. (Also see Vol. B., 357). Not all of the 14,291 acres is in Brazos County. The immediate area of Kurten extends from Mathis Creek to the Navasota River.

<sup>82</sup>Alice Odom Norman, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kurten, German Immigrants, 6.

<sup>83</sup>The writer calculated this date from a newspaper article written in 1957 stating that the school was eighty-one years old at the time. Charles Gerke and Lilly Holmes Edge attended the two-story school in the 1880's.

and Amy Rosier Kurten.<sup>84</sup> The second school was smaller. The third school, a large red brick structure built in 1937 for ten thousand dollars and used until 1968, still stands.<sup>85</sup>

Henry Kurten also gave land for the four churches in the community, including the Negro church. According to the Bryan Daily Eagle, the Zion Lutheran Church, begun in 1888, had circuit riders from North Zulch until World War I and is described as

having the beautiful simplicity of the early congregation. The severity of the inside of the building is broken by the white altar and pulpit which have coverings of the white linen trimmed with needle work with the design of the Cross and the Chalice. The walls are of wood and a woven grass trailer rug reaches from the door to the altar. There is an old wood burning stove in the front of one section of the pews and on the other side there is an antique organ.<sup>86</sup>

Recent pastors of the church were Carl Frieling, H. Trangott, and William Petersen. The Church had a Christian Day school for children through the eighth grade until 1955.<sup>87</sup> On April 3, 1955, the church building was sold to Will Klintworth of Kurten for one thousand and sixty dollars; ten years later the church building burned.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Maggie Easters Kelley, Interview, August 25, 1971. Mrs. Kelley is a life-long resident of Kurten and taught school in Kurten from 1917 to 1962. Her mother, Mary Ruth Cloud, helped teach school in Kurten when she was fifteen.

<sup>85</sup> David Bunting, Interview, September 3, 1971. Bunting taught school in Kurten and Tabor and is the Brazos County School Superintendent.

<sup>86</sup> Bryan Daily Eagle, September 13, 1957.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Church Book of the Zion Parish, Kurten, Texas, unpagged.



The Zion Evangelical and Reformed Church was established at Kurten in 1892 with the Reverend P. W. Vollbrecht of Gay Hill, Texas, as its first pastor.<sup>89</sup> One of the most outstanding pastors of the church was Reverend Julius Kasiske, who not only gave inspiring sermons but also organized the Kurten community orchestra, the Kurten Telephone Company, the community water well, and the Kasiske creamery.<sup>90</sup> The Zion United Church of Christ received new buildings in 1910 and 1942, new Sunday School room in 1951, and new furnishings from the First Faith Evangelical and Reformed Church in Houston, Texas.<sup>91</sup>

The Kurten school house served as the first meeting place for the Christian Home Free Will Baptist Church from 1892 to 1894; then the

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<sup>89</sup>Zion United Church of Christ Bulletin, October 13, 1957. This church had its beginning in the homes and then had moved to the Fickey school house until the first church was built. The first building was constructed of rough oak boards in 1896 at a cost of two hundred and twenty-five dollars. The name of the church was changed to the Zion United Church of Christ in 1957.

<sup>90</sup>Emanuel Kasiske, Interview, September 26, 1971. Kasiske is the son of the late Reverend Julius Kasiske. He was reared in Kurten, but now lives in Austin, Texas. Reverend Julius Kasiske was musically inclined and the community orchestra flourished under his teachings. The orchestra played in concert at Texas A&M University and in community outings. He also directed the church choir. The Telephone Company had a switchboard station near the Prinzel store that was operated by Kate Lawless. There was a system of rings set up for each family and the doctor. Kasiske went to Chicago to get the telephones and installed them and worked on the poles himself. The two hundred and fifty foot water well was dug in the center of town and water was piped underground to the businesses and nearby homes. The creamery was an extra income for the farmers. The milk would be run through a separator to get the cream. The cream was then put into five gallon buckets and shipped to the Texas Creamery Company in Houston, who paid the farmers five cents a pound for the butterfat. These transactions took place in Kurten between 1920 and 1925.

<sup>91</sup>Zion United Church of Christ Bulletin, October 13, 1957, Kurten, Texas, unpagged.

members constructed a church building northeast of the school.<sup>92</sup>

This church and the Tryon Baptist Church, which had been moved from the Tryon rural community to Kurten in 1912, stood side by side and the members were served by pastors one Sunday a month at each church on alternate Sundays.<sup>93</sup> When the Christian Home Free Will Baptist Church disbanded in 1945, the church property went to the Free Will Baptist Church in Bryan.<sup>94</sup> The Tryon Baptist Church disbanded in 1945, and the church building was bought by the First Baptist Church in 1946 and converted it to the Northview Mission.<sup>95</sup>

While the religious activity in the community was important to the soul, the Kurten businessmen were interested in making a profit. Henry Kurten owned a blacksmith shop that was run by Ernest Lueck and also owned a cotton gin in partnership with his daughter, Johnnie Kurten Koppe, the gin changed hands, going first to Paul Holubec and Louis Opersteny and then to Adolph Opersteny, who closed it in 1947.<sup>96</sup> August Prinzel, Wade (Hamp) Buchanan, Dr. W. F. Odom, Hugo Jopp, John Beard,

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<sup>92</sup>Christian Home Free Will Baptist Church Minutes, Kurten, Texas. Some of the pastors were W. T. Woods, N. W. Orr, J. P. Brown, and C. B. Thompson. The minutes record that in 1922 the pastors received a salary of one hundred and sixty-five dollars a year.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Tryon Baptist Church Minutes. Kurten, Texas. This church book belongs to Mrs. Maggie Kelley. Her husband, Will Kelley, was the last secretary of the church.

<sup>96</sup>Adolph Opersteny, Interview, September 10, 1971. Opersteny is related to the writer through marriage and resides in the Tabor community. He operated a dairy in Tabor from 1952 to 1965. He also operated a barber shop in Kurten in the 1920's.

and Claude Brocksmith owned the general store in Kurten.<sup>97</sup> The post office was housed in the August Prinzel store from 1890 to 1940; it was then moved to the Jopp store.<sup>98</sup> The Feathercrest Farms, which has been operating an egg production business since 1955, are located in the Kurten community and are part of a statewide firm.<sup>99</sup>

Kurten has remained a farming community since its beginning in the late 1860's. Many of the farmers are descendants of the original settlers who rest in the cemetery on the hill facing the old Kurten home. As long as there are people in Kurten who gather at church or community celebrations, the Kurten community will remain alive and active.

Two miles south of Kurten, not far from the Valentine Fridel farm, is the Tryon rural community. All that is left of it is a cemetery surrounded by ancient trees. The cemetery is still used today. The area of Tryon is in the John Stewart league and was, in the early days, referred to as Seale's neighborhood where the Tryon church was begun.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> The Prinzel store was first, followed by Buchanan, Odom, and Beard, so Mrs. Edelweiss Koppe Jones recalled. She is the daughter of Johnnie Kurten Koppe. Claude Brocksmith said the Hugo Jopp store was operating before the Brocksmith store opened in 1939.

<sup>98</sup> Letter to Janice Schultz from the General Services Administration, November 8, 1971. The postmasters were Horace Raymond, August Prinzel, Henry Prinzel, Mrs. Gussie Plagens, and Margaret Jopp. The post office, begun January 29, 1890, is still open.

<sup>99</sup> Delwyn Barrett, Interview, September 27, 1971. Barrett is President of Feathercrest Farms.

<sup>100</sup> Bryan Daily Eagle, Bryan Centennial Papers, June 24, 1962.

According to a news report, the establishment of the Tryon rural community is as follows:

Pioneering families established the Tryon Baptist Church on August 1, 1857, for Reverend William M. Tryon, a Baptist circuit rider and veteran of the Texas revolution who died in 1847. Elder Thomas Eaton, I. G. Thomas, Frank Nash, W. B. Eaves, S. C. Martin, and J. M. Bullock were among the pastors that served the church. When the Cedar Creek Masonic Lodge No. 300 built a two-story log building, the congregation had to use the first floor for its worship services because the first church was too small. The church was moved to Kurten in 1912 and was disbanded in 1945. The Cedar Creek Masonic Lodge No. 300 moved to Kurten in 1902, but the building in Tryon was sold to the First Methodist Church in Bryan for one hundred dollars.<sup>101</sup>

Located two miles south of Tryon and covering a ten mile area are three rural communities that were established during the 1870's. They were Reliance, Steep Hollow, and Harvey. The community of Reliance was first called Little Georgia by Billy Morgan of Georgia, but the name was changed to Reliance by David S. Lloyd of Mississippi, who founded the Reliance Baptist Church in a log school house in 1873.<sup>102</sup> Steep Hollow takes its name from two steel branches of the Wickson Creek, which were given to it by Charles Peters.<sup>103</sup> Harvey was named for Harvey Mitchell, who is referred to as the father of Brazos County.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle, Bryan Centennial Papers, June 24, 1962.

<sup>102</sup>Reliance Herald Bulletin, Vol. 1., November 30, 1941. This bulletin is published by the Reliance Baptist Church. This information had been obtained from some of the original settlers of Reliance. Morgan came from Macon County, Georgia at the age of twenty-five.

<sup>103</sup>Esker Martin, Interview, February 2, 1972. Martin is a life-long resident of Steep Hollow and is well versed in community happenings.

<sup>104</sup>O. L. Anders, Interview, December 10, 1971. Andrews has lived in Harvey since before 1890.



The Saint's Rest Baptist Church in Steep Hollow was established in 1873 under some large oak trees; the church received the name Saint's Rest from Jim Willis, the church clerk.<sup>105</sup> There was a Methodist Church in Steep Hollow at a later date, but it did not grow. The Bethel Baptist Church in Harvey was established in 1870.<sup>106</sup> In 1886 the Bright Light Free Will Baptist Church was founded two miles south of the Bethel Baptist Church because of a difference of opinion among the Baptists.<sup>107</sup>

The rural schools that were in operation were ten grade schools in Reliance, Steep Hollow, and Harvey. James Riley, James Murdock, Horace and Miriam Ferguson, and Lillian Yardley taught at Reliance.<sup>108</sup> Bertie Risinger, and Mamie and Edna Tobias taught at the Steep Hollow and the Holligan Chapel schools.<sup>109</sup> Mr. Robinson, Mr. Jackson, and Mr. Ennis taught at the Bethel Academy school in Harvey in 1887, when the attendance reached one hundred and fifty-five.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Esker Martin, Interview, February 2, 1972.

<sup>106</sup> O. L. Andrews, Interview, December 10, 1971.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Mrs. Charles Shealy, Interview, September 12, 1971. Mrs. Shealy was the former Florence Shirley, daughter of Davis Shirley, and is a life-long residence of Reliance. Her husband took over the Morgan general store in Reliance from Davis Shirley.

<sup>109</sup> Joe Bond, Interview, October 5, 1971. Bond was born at Prospect community in the 1880's and moved to Steep Hollow in 1930, where he has resided for forty-three years.

<sup>110</sup> O. L. Andrews, Interview, December 10, 1971.

All three communities had cotton gins, general stores, grist mills, and syrup mills. Lee Andrews of Harvey reflects on the early days:

Billy Morgan had a cotton gin and a general store which he sold to Davis Shirley in the 1880's. It went to Charlie Shealy after 1900 in Reliance. Amos Buchanan had a store with a post office in Harvey about 1890. Steep Hollow did not have a post office. Reliance had a post office in the old Morgan store. In Steep Hollow, A. B. Syptak and Walter English owned a cotton gin and English had a general store near the gin. The general store at Harvey was run by C. S. Jones. Jones also had a steam cotton gin and a grist mill. John Conlee had a gristmill in Steep Hollow. Dansby had a horse-drawn cotton gin in Harvey. I had a commissary in Harvey until the late 1940's.<sup>111</sup>

These three rural communities have active participants in their rural church and community clubs, but there are no business enterprises other than the Travis Weedon dairy farm in Harvey.<sup>112</sup> Harry Stiteler operated a dairy farm until the 1960's in Harvey and sold out. About the only social activities in these communities are the community picnics, church socials, and reunions.

The establishment of these rural communities in Brazos County was done with the construction of a church or a school, or by a concerned immigrant who opened his land for fellow immigrants to live on and farm. These communities gave the farmers and their families freedom from outside pressures. There were no large landowners or industrial tycoons trying to take over their land. The people who constructed the churches, schools, general stores, cotton gins, grist mills, and

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<sup>111</sup>O. L. Andrews, Interview, December 10, 1971.

<sup>112</sup>Chester A. Jones, Interview, December 19, 1971. Jones was born in Harvey, the son of Dr. W. P. Jones, a physician. He works at the Weedon dairy part time and lives in Bryan.

syrup mills, created their own somewhat isolated world in these communities. These communities were primitive in the sense that they lacked the modern conveniences. Their goal was not to achieve fame; they were created as farming communities where the farmer and his family could work with each family in the community in harmony in all community activities.

## CHAPTER III

### RURAL COMMUNITY HERITAGE

Most of the people who migrated to Brazos County, Texas, during the period from 1830 to 1900 were small farmers, country people, and pioneers. It is important to emphasize the reasons for their migration and to examine their character and their family histories in order to determine what these people were like and how they lived.

These farmers came from different parts of the United States, continental Europe, and the British Isles. Their nationalities were German, Irish, English, Czech, Austrian, Hungarian, and Swiss. The Germans, Austrians, Swiss, and Hungarians were prominent in Kurten and Cottonwood, while the Irish and English settled in Thompson Creek, Alexander, Blanton, Tabor, Wixon, Wesson, Harris, Edge, Macy, Tryon, Reliance, Steep Hollow, and Harvey. The Czechs settled in Rye, Kurten, Fickey, and Macy.

Why did they move to Texas? They wanted freedom to own land, to work the land, and to raise a family in a better environment.

These farmers, particularly in the United States and in Germany, had suffered from losing their lands to the plantation system in the southern United States and to the industrial expansion of factories and corporations in American and German cities. Because they did not have enough influence to change the decisions of government officials, their only chance to survive was to move. This situation posed many problems,



especially in Germany, as one historian reports:

These small farmers were people who relied on their own resources and skills and wished to do so in the future. They had property that could be turned into cash. Most of them travelled on their own resources. Yet these were people who had something to lose and who were losing it, squeezed out by interacting social and economic forces, a growth of population without a corresponding growth of economic bases and the increased cosmopolitanization and liberation of the economy.

The principal means of production was agriculture; the main capital resource was land, which permitted little expansion. In southwestern Germany, an area of divisible inheritances, agricultural lands had been divided and subdivided to match increased intensification. The family plot decreased in size and remained marginal or submarginal in terms of its capacity to support those who depended upon it, so that in Baden, Wurrtemberg, the Rhinish Palatinate, Rhinish Prussia, and the Hessens, a large part of the landowning population stood perpetually on the verge of hunger.<sup>1</sup>

When a German family chose to emigrate to the United States, it had to obtain permission from the German government. The family had to obtain certificates from the tax collector, the past of their church, and school district officials showing that the family owed no taxes or tithes; they had to fill out elaborate forms and relinquish their citizenship.<sup>2</sup> Then the family was allowed to come to America.

Emigration from Germany and other European countries continued in a steady flow into the United States; however, the flow of immigrants from Europe and the British Isles to Brazos County, Texas, seemed to taper off about 1900. Germans came into Texas either by ship to New York and then overland to Texas via train, or they sailed

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<sup>1</sup>Mack Walker, Germany and the Emigration 1816-1885, Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1964, 47.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 75.

directly into the Texas port city of Galveston.<sup>3</sup> One Galveston historian reports on the Germans' arrival and their reasons for leaving their homeland:

Because Galveston was a seaport city, possessing the usual cosmopolitan characteristics found in a maritime trading community, the citizens were accustomed to associating with foreigners. During the 1850's this was particularly true, because in that decade the port was the entry point for large numbers of German immigrants. Since providing accommodations for entering newcomers and servicing the ships which brought them were lucrative enterprises, the Germans received a warm welcome from those Galvestonians who were engaged in catering to this flourishing trade.

While sublimer urges such as the search for religious or political freedom induced some Germans to come to Texas, most of them immigrated for the same reasons that motivated native Americans to come--because they believed that their own chances for advancement would be better in Texas than they had appeared to be in the localities from which they had come. The prime motive of most of these immigrants was the desire to acquire the cheap land which Texas offered to the newcomer. The wish to enjoy more political freedom and to escape services in European armies was usually only a secondary consideration.<sup>4</sup>

Although many of the immigrants were peasants and city craftsmen, there were some immigrants who were rich. Some acquired substantial land holdings in Brazos County, such as Henry Kurten of the Kurten rural community and Henry Koontz of Cottonwood.

In Cottonwood, the original German settlers were Henry Koontz, Frank Kieffer, Peter Kieffer, Nicholas Thomas, Will Hudspeth, and Carl Zerbst. Henry Koontz had been in the Cottonwood area prior to

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<sup>3</sup>Charles Gerke, Interview, August 20, 1971. Gerke came to Kurten with his parents about 1886. The Gerkes travelled by train to Texas from New York.

<sup>4</sup>Earl Wesley Fornel, The Galveston Era; The Texas Crescent on the Eve of Secession, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1961, 125.

1841 but had returned to Pennsylvania, where he had originally settled after leaving Germany, to marry Catherine Kieffer in 1852.<sup>5</sup> The Kieffers (Frank, Peter, Joseph, Mary, Louis, and a second younger Catherine Kieffer, who may have been a cousin or a niece, and who married Wilhelm Albert Schultze, Jr., the writer's great-grandfather) had come with the Koontzes to Washington-on-the-Brazos after 1852, to Tryon in 1857, and then on to Cottonwood.<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Thomas, father of Peter Thomas, came to Cottonwood about 1849.<sup>7</sup> Will Hudspeth was a relative of Robert Hudspeth, who was formerly from Wheelock.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Mrs. Ted Cook, Interview, February 8, 1972. Mrs. Cook is the great-granddaughter of Henry Koontz and a Kurten resident. Her grandmother, Lela Koontz Gallatin, passed on this information. The Gallatin Bible records the marriage of Henry Koontz and Catherine Kieffer as taking place on December 27, 1852. Henry Koontz died March 19, 1858. Their two children were Cyrus and Lela. In 1861, Catherine Koontz married Tom Lewis and had one child, Addie Lewis.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. Frank Kieffer, a Catholic in Germany who converted to the Baptist faith, founded the Missionary Baptist Church in Washington-on-the-Brazos sometime after 1852. The Kieffers stayed in Tryon for a time before going to Cottonwood. The writer believes that the Koontzes were in Cottonwood in 1854, because her great-great-grandparents made contact with Henry Koontz in the summer of that year in Cottonwood to make arrangements with him to farm a section of the Koontz estate. After Koontz's death, Frank Kieffer was made the administrator of the estate. Frank Kieffer never married.

<sup>7</sup>Mrs. John L. Cobb, Interview, January 9, 1972. Mrs. Cobb was the daughter of Peter Thomas of Cottonwood and the wife of John L. Cobb, a school teacher in the Cottonwood and Alexander area. Nicholas Thomas' children were Peter, Louis, Annie, and Mary. Nicholas Thomas died in 1868 and is buried in the Schultze-Thomas cemetery in Kurten. The Thomases are related to the Kieffers and the Samples through marriage. Peter Thomas had been a postal clerk at the Tabor general store from August to October of 1894.

<sup>8</sup>Will Presnal, Interview, November 9, 1971. Presnal is a lifelong resident of Tabor and is a grandson of Robert Hudspeth.

Carl Zerbst and his family left Berlin, Germany, in 1849, distressed with high property taxes and the required military obligation that their son would have to face, and came in search of the cheap land in Texas.<sup>9</sup>

Other families in Cottonwood in 1860 were of Irish and English descent. Among them were the families of Jasper Sample, Bob O'Rear, J. W. Bickham, J. K. Collins, and the Elliotts. John Hickman, Jim Fuller, Sanford Webb, and Frank Nichols came from Indiana, while the Jeff Castles arrived in Cottonwood from Louisiana.<sup>10</sup> E. T., Will, and Sam Gallatin were of Swiss descent; it is not known if these Gallatins were related to Albert Gallatin, a soldier in the Texas revolution, who settled in the Cottonwood area in 1836.<sup>11</sup> The Lockes--Fred, Silas, Digby, Al, Harry, and Ida--fled from England to Canada and on to Cottonwood before 1860.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Alice Odom Norman, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kurten, German Immigrants, Bryan, Texas, 1948, pp. 2-3. Carl Zerbst had contacted cholera before the Zerbst were to leave and sent his family on ahead. The Zerbsts lost a child at sea on the voyage to Galveston and waited there for Carl Zerbst three months. All the Zerbsts then went to Washington-on-the-Brazos via the Brazos river barge where they obtained an ox cart and continued overland to Cottonwood.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith in collaboration with H. Grady Castle and Earl Castle, Abilene, Texas, February 29, 1972, 2. The Fullers and Hickmans arrived in 1883, while Webb came in 1872.

<sup>11</sup> Bryan Daily Eagle, July 10, 1937. The article stated that soldiers of the Texas army in 1836 were given a grant of land for their services.

<sup>12</sup> Minnie Locke, Interview, November 12, 1971. Miss Locke is a life-long resident of Cottonwood. The Lockes lived near the church.



Most of the Germans lived in the Kurten community about seven miles southeast of Cottonwood. These Germans had come in response to Henry Kurten's offer to farm his land. There were also a few Czech families who were among the immigrants. Kurten, who had originally come to Texas on an army furlough in 1851, stayed in Texas since his passport and papers were stolen and worked as a freighter for a man in Galveston.<sup>13</sup> During the time that he worked as a freighter, he made trips to Millican, Bryan, Boonville, and Wheelock. Evidence indicates that in 1859 and 1860 Kurten was in Wheelock where he brought freight to the Robert Hudspeth general store and purchased certain items, as the account ledger shows:

## HENRY KURTEN

October 8, 1859	-Freight	
" 14	rope 1.25, Buckets 1.00	2.25
" 17	1 qt. whiskey, oysters	1.75
	1 plug tobacco 35¢, ½ gal. whiskey	.85
November 8	Meal 50¢, 1 keg 85¢, 1 gal. whiskey	2.35
	2 plugs tobacco 50¢	.50
	3 gals. grease	1.45
December 8	-----	
January 1860	withholding note	7.33
	total	\$16.48 <sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Alice Odom Norman, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kurten, German Immigrants, 2. On his first night in Galveston, Texas, Henry Kurten's passport was stolen. The name of the Galveston man for whom Kurten worked is not known.

<sup>14</sup> Account Ledger of Robert Hudspeth General Merchandise Store, Wheelock, Robertson County, Texas, 1857-1860, 435. This ledger belongs to Will Presnal, grandson of Robert Hudspeth. It is a credit ledger which records accounts of farmers who bought items on credit and paid for them when the crop came in each year. This account of Henry Kurten is a good example of the price of items in 1859. Kurten may have left freight there in December, but there is nothing written to indicate that that was what occurred.

Kurten often brought freight such as flour, sugar, coffee and bolts of cloth in bulk quantities, and exchanged his load for cotton to go to Galveston and Matamoros, Mexico. Kurten remained a freighter about fifteen years. He married Augusta Zerbst, daughter of Carl Zerbst of Cottonwood, on November 18, 1863, and had Adolph Gerke and Peter Winter, both brickmasons, build the Kurten home of brick made from Kurten clay soil.<sup>15</sup>

Early German settlers in Kurten were the Utechts, the Stroppers, the Langs, the Hedtkes, the Gerkes, the Mantheis, the Kindts, the Franzes, the Polfs, the Forstoffs, the Brockschmidts, the Burmeisters, the Conrads, the Sabos, the Plagens, the Wittmanns, the Kehlenbrinks, the Hahns, the Klinkworths, the Metzgers, the Luedkes, the Hinzes, the Herzogs, the Honecker girls, Alice, Mary, and Clara, the Seemans, the Endlers, the Prinzels, the Marouns, the Steveners, the Schultzes, the Herrlings, the Yeagers, the Koppes, the Halls, the Huffs, the Roths, the Luecks, and the Rahnerts.<sup>16</sup> The Czechs were the Valentas, the Fickeys, and the Strasripkas. Other families in Kurten were the

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<sup>15</sup> Alice Odom Norman, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kurten, German Immigrants, 4,6. The Kurtens had twelve children, six lived to adulthood. The children died young from typhoid fever and they were buried at the cemetery on the hill which Mr. Kurten gave to the residents of that community. Adolph Gerke was an architect and helped design the house. Peter Winter, who came from Alsace-Lorraine, ran a variety shop in Bryan.

<sup>16</sup> Most of these Germans came in by ship to Galveston and on to Kurten via ox cart. August Franze came from Alsace-Lorraine. Anton Conrad who came from Muelheim, Germany, worked as a gin hand for the Kieffer gin in Cottonwood. John Sabo's father, Joseph Zabo, was born in Hungary, and herded sheep for Henry Kurten. Ernest Lueck was a blacksmith. Phillip Endler, the writer's great-grandfather, came from the Hessen province in Germany; he worked as a store keeper for August Prinzel.

were the Lawlesses, the Buchanans, the Beards, the Kelleys, the Kellers, the Jopps, and the Kasiskes, who were German but not of the first settlers.

The Conrad Gerke family came to Kurten in 1886 from Hamburg, Germany, via train from New York.<sup>17</sup> Adolph Gerke jumped ship in New York during the Civil War and was inducted immediately into the Union army; at the end of the war, he travelled to Kurten where he married Pauline Stevener.<sup>18</sup>

The Steveners, whose original name was Stebner, came to Kurten in 1865, a year after Marie Huff Stevener lost her husband, Ferdinand, a cavalryman, to a cholera epidemic.<sup>19</sup> The Stevener family left Germany because of its cold climate, had their passage paid for by Henry Kurten, and came to farm his land.<sup>20</sup> The Stevener children were Gustav, Emil, Pauline, Rosa, and Theresa. Rosa married at seventeen and became the second wife of Wilhelm Albert Schultze, Jr., on December 19, 1872.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Gerke, Interview, August 20, 1971, Gerke's half brother, Adolph, came earlier and bought land in Kurten.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Pauline Stevener Gerke was relative of the writer. Her mother was Marie Huff Stevener.

<sup>19</sup> This information came from the Stevener-Schultze family tree.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Marie Stevener wanted to come to a place where there was a lot of wood for fuel; and when she heard about Kurten's offer, she and several children came in 1865 to Kurten, while the others came a year later. Marie Huff Stevener was born in 1827 in Poznan, Germany, which is now a part of Poland. She died in Kurten in 1914.

<sup>21</sup> This information came from the Schultze family Bible. Wilhelm and Rosa Schultze had twelve children; ten lived to adulthood. Schultze had two daughters, Dorathea and Catherine by his first wife, Catherine Kieffer Schultze after 1865 who died in 1870.

The Schultzes--Wilhelm Albert Schultze, Sr., his wife, Dorathea Kurten Schultze, and his son, Wilhelm, Jr., better known as Billy--arrived in Galveston in the summer of 1854.<sup>22</sup> It is apparent that Schultze knew Henry Koontz in Germany, for he went to see him in Cottonwood and obtained an ox cart from him to carry his family and belongings from Galveston to the Koontz farm.<sup>23</sup> The writer believes that the Schultzes were tenant farmers for Henry Koontz from 1854 to May, 1859, when Billy Schultze purchased 205 acres of the Koontz estate in the Colbert Baker league and also obtained his American citizenship.<sup>24</sup>

A few years after Schultze purchased this land, the Civil War broke out, and he enlisted at the age of twenty-nine in a cavalry company formed in Boonville. This Brazos County company, Company I, 21st Texas Cavalry, was formed in 1862 with an enlistment of three years and included such enrollees as Robert Hudspeth, Carl Zerbst, Jr., Peter Kieffer, Joseph Kieffer, George Fullerton, James Walker, and John Walker.<sup>25</sup> The company served as a Confederate scouting party

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<sup>22</sup>This information came from a paper written by the writer's cousin Dorothy Holick Ryer, which said information was obtained from their grandmother, Emma Endler Schultz.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid. There has been some thought that Wilhelm Schultze, Sr., was a professor at a university in Germany, but this has not been established.

<sup>24</sup>Brazos County Deed Records, Vol. F., 21. There is no record of the Schultzes ever leaving Cottonwood or Kurten between 1854 and 1859. The writer's great-great-grandparents were still in Kurten in 1880 and were already in their mid seventies.

<sup>25</sup>Grady Marshall, A History of Brazos County, Texas, University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas, 1937. This is a thesis.



along the Arkansas river.<sup>26</sup> Henry Kurten avoided the war and always hid when the army officials came looking for him. Myles Payne and his brother, Jerry Payne, who lived at Edge, were apparently beyond the enlistment age, but they carried supplies to troops between Galveston, Houston, and San Antonio via ox wagon during the war.<sup>27</sup>

During the Civil War Texas port towns were blockaded by Union gunboats and the only open trade route was from San Antonio to Matamoros, Mexico.<sup>28</sup> This Mexican town contained a number of merchant houses that were willing to exchange Texas cotton for goods needed by the South.<sup>29</sup> To safeguard this supply route, to control border violence, and to intercept shirkers and Unionists attempting to cross the Rio Grande, Texas kept a number of troops on patrol duty along the international river.<sup>30</sup> This route was the only way to export cotton to foreign countries during the Civil War.

After the Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan was established to restore order and return the Negro to the cotton field. The members wore white robes and hoods and rode at night raiding the Negro homes and

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<sup>26</sup>Will Presnal, Interview, November 9, 1971. Presnal's grandfather, Robert Hudspeth, relayed this information to him.

<sup>27</sup>Ethel Payne Winn, Interview, September 28, 1971. Mrs. Winn was a resident of Edge until her marriage when she moved into Bryan.

<sup>28</sup>Allen Ashcraft, Texas in the Civil War; A Resume History, Texas Civil War Centennial Commission, Austin, 1962, 12.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

and declaring that they had not had a drink of water since the Battle of Shiloh and had lived in hell and had ridden twice around the world since supptime.<sup>31</sup> The Ku Klux Klan was present in Bryan. It got a few riders from the rural communities, but some of the rural settlers said that if any of the Klan called on those settlers who opposed Klan actions, they would be met at the door with a loaded shotgun.<sup>32</sup>

Firearms were used quite often for deer, squirrel, rabbit, opossum, raccoon, quail, dove, geese, and ducks. Good marksmanship meant good food on the table. It was customary in the James Henry home in Thompson Creek for strangers and neighbors to share dinner with the family; if they refused, the Henrys considered it an insult.<sup>33</sup> The farmers were generally good marksmen. Yet accidents could happen as in this case:

Peter Kieffer of the Cottonwood community wanted to get some venison, and he knew that Robert Hudspeth of Tabor was the best marksman with a rifle. Kieffer told Hudspeth about seeing for several days a huge buck in a pasture not far from his place right before dawn. Hudspeth agreed to come and kill it for him. The next morning, they went out. When Kieffer shined his lantern in the direction where he had seen it, two big eyes shone. "There he is, Bob!" Hudspeth raised his rifle to his shoulder and shot. Much to their dismay, they had killed Cyrus Koontz's colt! When they offered to pay Koontz for killing the colt, Koontz refused to accept the money, saying that it was a misjudgment and no one was to blame.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>David M. Chalmers, Hooded Americanism; The First Century of the Ku Klux Klan 1865-1965, New York, Doubleday, 1965, 9.

<sup>32</sup>Emanuel Kasiske, Interview, September 26, 1971. Kasiske was born and reared in Kurten and is the son of the late Reverend Julius Kasiske.

<sup>33</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle, July 10, 1937.

<sup>34</sup>Will Presnal, Interview, November 9, 1971.

There was very little law and order in the rural communities until after 1900. A group of men, or vigilante committees as they were called, took charge of seeking justice because the sheriff in Bryan was too far away to summon when a crime was committed. A group of men chased Joseph Zabo all over the countryside because he supposedly burned down the Kieffer cotton gin in Cottonwood in 1883 and was accused of stealing horses; Zabo was caught and hanged on an oak tree on the Hudspeth place.<sup>35</sup> In almost every community, cotton gins were deliberately set afire. The Gus Stevener cotton gin was burned down about 1880 near Kurten.<sup>36</sup> Peter Kieffer was murdered at the Navasota river bridge on May 28, 1872, as the inscription on his tombstone reads, but whoever murdered him remains a mystery.<sup>37</sup> Frank Sabo was ambushed and killed at the Wickson

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<sup>35</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith in collaboration with H. Grady Castle and Earl Castle, Abilene, Texas, January 28, 1972, 5. Other information of Joseph Zabo, who was Hungarian by birth, has been obtained from Johnnie Sabo Hefly concerning his occupation and wife, Mary Kieffer. Zabo was a sheepherder for Henry Kurten's 500 sheep. After his tragic death, Mary Kieffer Zabo, who had been married first to Anton Burmeister who did not return from the Civil War, lived in a sanitarium until her death in 1901 and is buried in the Schultze-Thomas cemetery in Kurten.

<sup>36</sup>Mae Stevener Wilson, Interview, April 3, 1972. Mrs. Wilson has been a life-long resident of Kurten and is a cousin to the writer's father. The culprit who burned down the gin was supposed to have been Stevener's partner, Wueckmuller.

<sup>37</sup>Permanent Cemetery Marker, Schultze-Thomas Cemetery, Kurten, Texas. There has been some speculation concerning Kieffer's death, but there is no actual evidence to set the record straight.

Creek bridge one mile west of Kurten cemetery in 1900 by Charley Ellison of Wheelock over family problems.<sup>39</sup> In Macy the cotton gin and school were burned. Sol Mabry and Tom Wilson fought an old-fashioned duel with dueling pistols in 1906 in Macy over a woman, and Wilson was shot and killed.<sup>40</sup> There was a considerable number of murders in Macy up to 1910 and a good many fires. A fire started in the first Odom home in 1916 in Kurten and burned the home to the ground.<sup>41</sup> Dr. Odom's barn also burned down sometime after that when his sons were shooting firecrackers inside.<sup>42</sup> In Kurten some men robbed the August Prinzel general

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<sup>39</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith in collaboration with H. Grady Castle and Earl Castle, Abilene, Texas, January 28, 1972, 5. Ellison was caught and sent to the state pen.

<sup>40</sup>H. Grady Castle, Taped Interview made by Anna Koontz Smith for Janice Schultz in Abilene, Texas, November 17, 1971. Castle said that it was not a fair duel because Mabry had buckshot in his pistol while Wilson's gun contained birdshot.

<sup>41</sup>Emanuel Kasiske, Interview, September 26, 1971. Kasiske lived across the street from the Odoms when his father was the pastor of the Zion United Church of Christ. He remembered that Mrs. Henry Kurten, Jr., yelled for someone to get the mattress out of the house because money had been sewn in it. Most of the farmers did not trust banks and preferred to keep their money at home.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid. Dr. Odom whipped the boys with a bridle not because they burned the barn down, but because they used vile language to his face when he questioned them about it.



store and took the safe as far as the Wickson Creek, where it was pried open; but all they got was thirty-five dollars for their trouble.<sup>44</sup> After 1900 each of the rural communities had a constable to keep the peace.

There was some trouble before 1900 with a group of roving gypsies throughout the rural communities and in Wheelock. Hugh Henry, the son of Robert Henry of Rye, acquired one-fourth of a league of the Robert Henry land in Alexander in 1863; he acquired an additional 150 acres when he traded a fine race mare for the tract.<sup>45</sup> Not long after he and his bride, Mary Foley, settled there, they had trouble with a gypsy thief, his granddaughter, Ola Henry, reports:

In the early days the log houses had no screens on the windows. Henry always slept with a pistol under his pillow and when he heard a noise in the kitchen, he called out. No answer. He called again saying that he would shoot if whoever it was did not speak up. No answer. He fired and found that he had shot a gypsy woman dressed in men's clothes. He then sent a rider to Wheelock for Dr. Cameron. He then chained her to the bedpost while he checked her sack which contained jewelry, trinkets, and kitchen items. The gypsy died after Dr. Cameron arrived. Henry then asked the doctor to tell people in Wheelock that if they missed anything to come and collect it. Henry then gave the gypsy a decent burial under an oak tree.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Minnie Prinzel Conrad, Interview, August 20, 1971. Mrs. Conrad was born in Kurten, the daughter of Phillip Prinzel, who ran a freight wagon to North Zulch for supplies for the Prinzel store. Her mother's people, the Marouns, settled in Kurten after coming from Germany.

<sup>45</sup>Ola Henry, Interview, October 5, 1971. Miss Henry is the granddaughter of Hugh Henry and was a teacher in the Alexander and King's Highway schools. The Henrys are related to Patrick Henry of the American Revolution. In the early days, land agreements or trades were made by a handshake or a man's word and the man would return the money for the land.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid. These gypsies also robbed the Cavitt Inn in Wheelock.



Henry's parents, Robert and Elizabeth Henry of Rye, did not have an encounter with gypsies, but did have some trouble with Indians in the early 1830's. There is no knowledge of any of the other families in rural communities having any trouble with Indians although they did see them roaming around the country. A speech made in 1971 by Mrs. Hazel Richardson, Bryan librarian, at the Historical Society meeting at Robert Henry's gravesite, explains the incident as follows:

Mrs. Henry had been sitting in the hallway of her home at her spinning wheel when the Indians came upon her while Robert Henry was away. The Indians had been charmed by the music of the spinning wheel and began to dance. When they moved out to the barn, Mrs. Henry went with them and showed them the corn crib and indicated to them that this was all she and her children had to eat. One of the Indians walked over to her and patted her shoulder, "Brave squaw", he said. Then the Indians departed.<sup>47</sup>

According to a Texas Indian historian Newcomb, these Indians, the Tonkawas were

a friendly tribe who roamed from the Edwards Plateau to the coastal plains to the south and the Brazos bottoms on the east and northeast Texas. They concentrated their home sites along streams and rivers in central Texas. The tribe had referred to themselves as the most human of all people. Tonkawa was a word derived from the Waco's term tonkawaya, which meant they all stayed together. The Tonkawas were slender and smaller than the Comanches and were never a direct threat to settlers, although their thieving and begging made them nuisances. The Tonkawas were driven extinct by the Comanches who hated their friendship with the whites.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Mrs. Hazel Richardson, "Ceremony Placing Marker at Robert Henry's Grave", (Speech) Rye Community, May 2, 1971.

<sup>48</sup> W. W. Newcomb, Jr., The Indians of Texas; From Prehistoric to Modern Times, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1961, pp. 133-137, 343.

The Comanches raided through central Texas in 1833, taking livestock and killing white families.<sup>49</sup> The Henrys lost some livestock as did their neighbors at Rye and, though Henry had promised to help retrieve the stolen livestock, he did not want to leave his wife and children alone.<sup>50</sup> Their decision was that Mrs. Henry would take the children and some of their belongings and travel up the Old San Antonio Road to Fort Nacogdoches to stay until Henry returned.<sup>51</sup> The Old Antonio Road had been the road that the Henrys, as well as many other migrating families from the southern United States, travelled into Texas up to 1900.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> John Nance, The Early History of Bryan and the Surrounding Area, Bryan Centennial Committee, Bryan, Texas, June, 1962, unpagged.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. Mrs. Henry travelled to the Macy vicinity to find that the Navasota river had swollen from the recent rains. She left the wagon, unhitched the horses, put the children on horses, swam the river, and continued on to the fort. There were a group of settlers on the west bank who were waiting for the river to subside and Mrs. Henry learned later that they were massacred by the Comanches. Robert Henry located the livestock and brought them home. Because of the strife between the Texans and the Mexicans, he felt that his family was safer at the fort and he enlisted in the Texas army. Henry fought at the Battle of San Jacinto and was in the escort squad taking Sam Houston to Galveston to catch the ship for New Orleans for treatment of his wound. He was granted an additional 320 acres of land for his service in the war. Then he went to Fort Nacogdoches and took his family home to Rye.

<sup>52</sup> The Old San Antonio Road was the first trail blazed by the early Spanish explorers which began at the Rio Grande and entered the Texas county of Maverick, went through Dimmit, LaSalle, upward to Bexar, Bastrop, Brazos, and on to Sabine and across to Fort Nachitoches, Louisiana.

Roads like the Old San Antonio Road in the early nineteenth century were primitive and difficult to travel upon, wet or dry. The Dilly Shaw Tap Road, one of the main roads to Bryan from the rural communities, named for M. E. and M. G. Dilleshaw of Tabor and Edge, was a road that wound through half a dozen pastures and gates.<sup>53</sup> The Brazos County Deed Records show that M. G. Dilleshaw purchased 104 acres of land from J. J. Holland in the Mary Lawrence league in Edge in 1874, while M. E. Dilleshaw bought 100 acres in the Francis Quota league in Tabor in the same year.<sup>54</sup> The Democrat Crossing Road started at Kurten and went across the Navasota river bridge into Grimes County, it is not known how the road received its name.<sup>55</sup> Though the earliest mail delivery in Kurten was made to the Kurten

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<sup>53</sup> Ethel Payne Winn, Interview, September 28, 1971. Mrs. Winn remembered travelling this road in a wagon as a young girl. She said that when the family went to Bryan, they would have to get up and away by four in the morning to get to Bryan.

<sup>54</sup> Brazos County Deed Records, Vol. P., 241,402. There is no evidence that the Dilleshaws remained in Brazos County very long.

<sup>55</sup> The writer found much speculation concerning the Democrat Crossing Road. Some of the rural residents thought that there might have been a democratic convention in that area at one time.

home, the first mail route carrier was James Lang, who tells of his experiences in carrying the mail over these primitive roads:

I began carrying mail by horseback April 1, 1908. Letters could be sent for two cents sealed or one cent unsealed, while post cards cost a penny. The route was twenty-five miles long at first and later increased to sixty miles. At first, I carried the mail by horseback, then switched to a buckboard and horse. Often when it rained, I never got home before dark. The roads were man-made trails with gulleys and creeks to cross. It was hard for the horse to pull the wagon through mud, and my wife had to meet me halfway with another horse so that I could finish the route. John M. Moore got up a petition to get the postal officials to make a five mile route through the woods from the Fickey school house to Wilhelm Huff's place. Through that route, the stumps of trees were left, and I had to dodge them with the motorcycle that I bought in 1916. After that, I bought a car, which seemed to always get stuck in the mud.<sup>56</sup>

The roads were not graveled until the late 1920's in the rural communities. The road from Bryan to Madisonville which passes by Kurten was asphalted in 1933.<sup>57</sup> A few of the community residents purchased Ford cars even before the roads were improved.

Following the roads were the telephone lines. In Kurten, Reverend Kasiske had installed the telephones in 1925, giving each family its signal from a system of rings. In Harvey, Dr. W. P. Jones'

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<sup>56</sup>James Lang, Interview, September 1, 1971. Lang is a life-long Kurten resident. His salary as a mail carrier was seventy-five dollars a month. He served thirty-seven years in Kurten and five years in Bryan.

<sup>57</sup>Gussie Odom Dansby, Interview, September 29, 1971. She was reared in Kurten and is the granddaughter of the late Henry Kurten. Her husband, Horace Dansby, was courting her that year that the road was constructed. Gussie Odom Dansby's father was Dr. W. F. Odom who had a general store in Kurten and was a general practitioner.



telephone was the only one that was connected with a direct line to Bryan.<sup>58</sup> The system of telephone rings for the doctors was known to everyone in the communities. When the doctors received a call, everyone would pick up his telephone to listen to see who was sick.

The country doctors often received call day and night by telephone or, as in the early days, by rider. Most of their practice was delivering babies. They also treated patients having diphtheria, measles, whooping cough, typhoid fever, broken bones, and gunshot wounds. The doctors often gave quinine and calomel tablets for almost every ailment.<sup>59</sup> Most of the doctors kept records of their patients and the services that were rendered. The doctors did their own bookkeeping and kept track of every patient and how the bills were paid. The record book kept by Dr. W. P. Jones of Harvey indicates that he delivered about 585 babies between 1887 to 1912 in the rural communities of Brazos County.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Chester A. Jones, Interview, December 19, 1971. Jones was reared in Harvey and is the son of the late Dr. W. P. Jones. People who wished to talk with someone in Bryan had to call Dr. Jones to put through the call to the number in Bryan. Dr. Jones made calls as far as Edge. There were no midwives in the Harvey area during Dr. Jones' time.

<sup>59</sup> O. L. Andrews, Interview, December 10, 1971. Andrews has been a resident of Harvey since the late 1880's. He came from Louisiana as a young boy, married Lillian Yardley of Reliance, and ran a commissary in Harvey. Andrews recalled that at one time there was a Dr. Todd who lived between Harvey and Steep Hollow.

<sup>60</sup> Chester A. Jones, Interview, December 19, 1971.

Some of the records are as follows:

Jan. 8, 1887	W. W. Graham	6 a.m.	boy-normal
Aug. 15, 1898	H. Rush		Too late-girl
Oct. 18, 1899	R. A. Clark	6 & 7½ a.m.	Twin boys n. & br.
Mar. 11, 1900	Mollie Cross ng.	11:45 a.m.	7 Mo.-hemorrhage
Apr. 16, 1906	S. Johnston ng.	1½ a.m.	girl-instrumental
May 27, 1909	E. M. Cook	5:45 p.m.	girl-cord around neck. <sup>61</sup>

The doctors who practiced medicine in the rural communities were the following: Dr. Wallace Drummond, Dr. E. A. Mondrick, Dr. John Edge, Dr. W. P. Jones, Dr. W. F. Odom, Dr. Grice, Dr. R. Wilson, Dr. Wade Hadrick, Dr. Todd, Dr. Barlowe; from Wheelock, Dr. Curry, Dr. Gilstrap, Dr. Cameron, and Dr. Collard.<sup>62</sup> The doctors often received cash for their services, but the poorer families gave them garden vegetables and other produce as payment. The doctors during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century made the majority of their regular visits to the homes.

The homes in the rural communities of the nineteenth century settlers were generally constructed with a large hall which ran the length of the house from the front porch to the back porch; the house had several large rooms with high ceilings on both sides of the hall.<sup>63</sup> The Kieffer home in Cottonwood was a two-story structure made of unfinished red cedar boards; this house was torn down in the 1920's, when

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<sup>61</sup>Birth List of Dr. W. P. Jones, Harvey community, Brazos County, Texas, pp. 102-120. The cost of delivering each child was ten dollars. The account lists the birth date, the parents, time of birth, sex, and conditions of the delivery. The term ng. refers to negro, while n. is normal and br. is breach. Dr. Jones made his own medicine that he prescribed for his patients.

<sup>62</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith in collaboration with H. Grady Castle and Earl Castle, Abilene, Texas, December 4, 1971, 5.

<sup>63</sup>Alice Odom Norman, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kurten, German Immigrants, 6.

Ed Crenshaw, a Bryan banker, bought the land and had all the lumber of the house shipped to Pennsylvania to a man who owned a pencil factory to be made into pencils.<sup>64</sup> The Francis home in Cottonwood was restored to its original condition and still stands.<sup>65</sup> The second Schultze home stood intact until 1960 but has deteriorated since that time. The first home, located on a hill, burned in the early 1920's.<sup>66</sup> There are a few old homes such as those owned by the Seemans and the Odoms that still remain. The homes were always open to neighbors and strangers alike. In times of trouble, such as a death in the family or heavy rains that caused strangers to seek shelter, the farmers never turned anyone away. The farmers were hospitable and, as one of the Fridel girls said, "There was a kind of togetherness; a closeness that developed among the families. When you needed help, your neighbors were there."<sup>67</sup> The people who bought homes and land here encouraged their relatives and friends to come to Brazos

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<sup>64</sup>Mrs. Lucille Hudspeth, Interview, February 8, 1972. Mrs. Hudspeth was a life-long resident of Cottonwood. The Kieffer home was not far from her property in Cottonwood.

<sup>65</sup>Mrs. W. G. Francis, February 16, 1972. She is a Cottonwood resident. The Francis family restored the old home. The original Francis came from Georgia in the 1870's.

<sup>66</sup>The writer's father, Henry Schultz, recalled that the first Schultze home was quite old and may have been built by the writer's great-great grandfather, Wilhelm Schultze, Jr., in 1854.

<sup>67</sup>Victoria Fridel, Interview, August 16, 1971. Miss Fridel taught school in Kurten. The Fridels came from Austria and settled in the Tryon rural community sometime in the 1880's. Her father operated a syrup mill which served the Kurten residents.

County to live. Lee Edge came to the Tryon area from Georgia in 1868 and purchased an exceptional place which he describes to his sister:

Dear Sister I will write you a few lines which leaves myself and family all well Henry's family are also well. There is no news that will interest you more than that we have bought land here. You may think that I am very picky but circumstances always alter cases. Henry is so well pleased with this country that he thinks it bad policy to undertake to find---better one. In fact we bought a good place for less than one half its value. We bought 337 acres of land that is as fine as there is in the country. 150 under fence that will make 2/3ds of a bale of cotton per acre, with 4 good residences on it and the best barns and out houses on it that there is in the county. Also 3 good wells of water and a very fine orchard. We bought the hole thing for 2000 dollars. With good luck the place will make the money this year. The improvements cost over 2500 dollars, so I consider that we made 500 dollars, and the land clear. You sed that I can't help but make a trade when I see money in it. So, if you and Buddy wants to come to Texas, just come along next winter. We have plenty of houses and land. So you must not think hard of me for not writing sooner for I have a great deal more writing to do than you have. Go tel Billy and Sissy that I want to get a long letter from them. Tel Billy to come next fall, and I will help him get him a good place somewhere nearby. Tel John Lumpkin that he can never make a rise there, so just come out here next fall, and he will make a start. Tel George Johnson that Henry and Sally has alreedy picked him out a place, and it is a good place to. It has a good farm and a fine house on it. And I have a good place picked out for Tip and one for Joel. They all by immediately ajacent to ours. So you see that we have it all managed. Thes places all happen to be on the market at low figures. Tel the boys to come out, and when we get redy if we want to, we can go by up such lands as we want our children to have when we are gone. Tel them that they need not be afraid of sichness here for this is a helthyer country than that is. Henry thinks that the next country that he finds that is better than this will be the happy land of Canaan. So please write soon and give us all the news. Jany sends love. Goodby your brother Lee Edge.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Letter written by Lee Edge, May 14, 1868, to his sister in Georgia. This original letter is in the possession of Minnie Ruth Edge Collins in Houston, Texas. Lee Edge's son, Monroe, married Mathilda Schultze, a great-aunt of the writer.



One family, that of Billy Morgan, came from Macon County, Georgia, and purchased the Abner Lee league in Reliance in 1872.<sup>69</sup> Other original settlers in Reliance were the Shirleys, the Shealys, the Rileys, and Smiths, the Saxons, the Lloyds, the Griffiths, the Mathises, the Yardleys, the Fergusons, and the Hoods.<sup>70</sup> Nearby in Steep Hollow and Harvey, were the Buchanans, the Fosters, the Risings, the Englishes, the Schultzes, the Pattersons, the Dansbys, the Martins, the Carrolls, the Bonds, the Smiths, the Andrews, the Williams, the Joneses, the Weedons, the Goins, the Coles, the Peters, the Bullocks, and the Halls. These families were predominantly small farmers.

Farmers who lived in Edge and Macy were the Williams, the Moores, the McDonalds, the Lisses, the Skubals, the Rychliks, the Scastas, the Robinsons, the Hollands, the Alonzo Houses, the Paynes, the Closses, the Davidsons, the Hortons, the Thompsons, the Wilsons, the Holidays, the Jameses, the Martins, the Frames, the Beards, the Operstenys, and the Jacksons. In Wesson and Wixon, the original families were the Beards, the Freemans, the Pearsons, the Mitchells, the Robinsons, the Closses, the Hesters, the Crenshaws, the Grahams, the Slaughters, the Whites, the Kelleys, the Arnetts, the Whittens, the McDonalds, and

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<sup>69</sup> Ella Floyd, Interview, October 5, 1971. She was reared in Reliance and is related to the Morgans and the Smiths. The Morgans operated a general store and cotton gin in Reliance and were one of the prominent families there.

<sup>70</sup> All of the family names which are listed in three consecutive paragraphs have been taken from the rural community cemeteries where the original settlers are buried. These are the people who made their communities thrive for their descendants.

many negro families. In Tabor and Alexander were the Henrys, the Tabors, the Raineys, the Hudspeths, the Brogdons, the McCallums, the Thompsons, the Benbows, the Broaches, the Walkers, the Presnals, the Fullertons, the Singletons, the Hesters, the Wilsons, the Deans, the Holdens, the Leathers, the Boyetts, the Nichols, and the Elliotts.

In Thompson Creek on the northwest side of Brazos County, there were the Eaves, the Blackmans, the Doziers, the Peytons, the Conways, the Youngs, the Henrys, the Hedspeths, the Bells, the Scotts, the Brockmons, the Parkers, the Rollins, the Hughes, the Sikes, the Weavers, and the Dillards. All the farmers in all the communities were among the last pioneers to the Brazos County rural frontier to clear the land, build their homes, and begin farming.

These farmers came to Brazos County by ox wagon, horse, foot, train, or ocean vessel to begin a new life on new land. They were simple folk whose chief occupation was that of farming. Their main interest was to cultivate the land and plant the crops as they pleased. They did not want to live in fear of finding their homes snatched away by anyone. They did not want the government dividing and subdividing their land until there was not enough for a decent living. Some farmers were reluctant to leave their homeland in the United States, continental Europe, and the British Isles, but living conditions in these places made the move necessary.

The migration of the land-hungry farmers of different backgrounds and nationalities into Brazos County occurred from 1830 to 1900. The courageous people, as their family histories indicate, went forward with faith and a strong desire to be free and independent

landowners. They enjoyed the hospitality and the close community relationship. They were people not controlled by materialism. They were accustomed to the inconveniences of their day. They lived off the land, killed wild game, and paid their bills once a year after the crop was harvested. Although there was some violence among them, the farmers generally held a mutual trust for each other. Long hours were spent in the fields plowing with a team of mules or horses, planting seed, or picking cotton which often produced one bale per two or three acres even when no fertilizer was used. Women spent hours making bread and canning vegetables besides working in the fields while the children went to school. On the farm there was a mutual sharing of chores by all the family members. Farm work was hard but those who were accustomed to it appreciated the land felt a sense of accomplishment when the harvest was plentiful.

These pioneers of Brazos County cleared the way for their descendants. They had built something not only for themselves but for their children. They looked toward the future. They could not foresee that after World War II, cotton would temporarily lose importance as a cash crop and that cattle would then graze the land. Now these farms are stock farms with new homes and high taxes. In order to keep the land, the descendants must find jobs in the city. Some of the land has been sold to newcomers who found city life uninviting and moved to the country for a more relaxed environment.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL RELIGION, EDUCATION, AND BUSINESS

Man's need to survive is linked with his need to worship, to learn, and to make a living. The cultural pattern everywhere is the same, but the methods differ with changing customs from one generation to another. Old ideas might become obsolete and new ideas arise to meet the needs of a changing world. In Brazos County rural communities religion, education, and business enterprise were important factors; their development in these farm areas, and in some areas their decline, will be examined in this chapter.

During the time when Texas was ruled by Mexico the only acceptable religion was Roman Catholic. It was the law of the Mexican government that Protestants were forbidden to conduct worship services anywhere in Texas.<sup>1</sup> Robert and Elizabeth Henry, who settled in Rye in 1830, were of a staunch Presbyterian group called the Ulster Presbyterians of Ireland, who were despised by the English crown.<sup>2</sup> When Texas acquired its independence from Mexico in 1836, the Texas Republic allowed freedom to worship to all denominations.

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<sup>1</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle, July 10, 1937. This article was written by Ola Henry about her great-grandfather, Robert Henry of Rye.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. The Henrys practiced their faith in their home in spite of the Mexican religious rule.



It was during the Texas Republic that the circuit riders of the Baptist and Methodist faiths appeared. In Boonville, the first county seat of Brazos County, the Boonville courthouse served in 1841 as the worship house for Boonville residents with circuit preachers such as William Tryon and Robert Alexander.<sup>3</sup> The earliest mention of circuit riders in Brazos County rural communities was in 1854, when the Alexander Methodist Episcopal Church was founded by Robert Alexander, a Methodist circuit rider.<sup>4</sup> The Tryon Baptist Church in the Tryon community followed suit in 1857. Judging from the early records of the Baptist rural churches in Tryon, Cottonwood, Reliance, Edge, Steep Hollow, Harvey and Kurten, there were more Baptist circuit riders than there were in other rural churches. Circuit riders came to the Lutheran church from North Zulch in 1888, but the Tryon Baptist Church records that there were twenty-five circuit riders who preached there on the average of two years each.<sup>5</sup>

The Baptist denomination was the largest church in most of the rural communities. In the Cottonwood, Tabor, Blanton, and Alexander area about eight percent of the people were Baptist and

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<sup>3</sup> John Nance, the Early History of Bryan and the Surrounding Area, Bryan Centennial Committee, Bryan, Texas, June, 1962, unpagued.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Methodist Episcopal Church Minutes, Alexander Methodist Episcopal Church, Tabor community, Brazos County, Texas, 1. Documentary evidence shows the church was actually founded in 1856. Alexander declared it verbally established before witnesses in 1854.

<sup>5</sup> Tryon Baptist Church Minutes, Kurten, Texas. These church records are in the possession of Mrs. Maggie Kelley, whose husband Will Kelley was the last church secretary of this church before it disbanded.

the rest Methodist.<sup>6</sup> In Kurten about forty-five percent were Baptist, while in Reliance, Steep Hollow, and Harvey, ninety percent of the people in each community were of the Baptist faith.<sup>7</sup> Church records of the Tryon Baptist Church in 1857 list the names of Peter Kieffer and Joseph Kieffer as charter members.<sup>8</sup> From about 1893 to 1920 Edge was predominantly Baptist, but the community now has only one church, The Church of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

The Zion Church of Christ and the Lutheran Church were quite prominent in Kurten, but only the Zion Church of Christ still remains. Fifty-five percent of the people belonged to these two churches. Most of those who attended these churches were Germans.<sup>10</sup> In the Lutheran Church there were many songs brought over from Germany which were sung in German before World War I. Some of the

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<sup>6</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith in collaboration with H. Grady Castle, Abilene, Texas, March 20, 1973. 1. Castle also said there were two or three families who were Presbyterians.

<sup>7</sup>Mrs. Maggie Kelley, Interview, August 16, 1971. Mrs. Kelley is a life-long resident of Kurten and is a retired school teacher of the Kurten school where she taught from 1917 to 1962.

<sup>8</sup>Tryon Baptist Church Minutes, Kurten, Texas. Peter Kieffer moved to Cottonwood rural community sometime after 1857, but it is not known if Joseph Kieffer went with him.

<sup>9</sup>Mrs. Ethel Payne Winn, Interview, September 28, 1971. Mrs. Winn was reared in Edge and after her marriage, she moved to Bryan. The Missionary Baptist Church and the Free Will Baptist Church were both served by circuit riders.

<sup>10</sup>Mrs. Maggie Kelley, Interview, August 16, 1971.

hymns were the following:

Wir danken dir Herr Jesus Christ(Lord Jesus We Give Thanks  
to Thee)  
O Wilt, sich hier dein Leben(Upon the Cross Intended)  
Macht Hoch die Tur(Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates)  
Troestet, Troestet, Meine Leben(Comfort, Comfort, Ye My People)  
Wie sill ich dich empfangen(O Lord, How Shall I Meet Thee)  
Nun danket alle Gott(Now Thank We All Our God)<sup>11</sup>

There were services in German in these churches until World War I; but because of prejudice on the part of many Bryan residents, the worship services were conducted from that time on in English.<sup>12</sup>

The other denominations were Presbyterian and Catholic. The Wixon Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Brazos Church in Edge began operating in 1873.<sup>13</sup> Reverend J. H. Mitchell in Wixon and Reverend James Wilson in Edge died in 1891 and in 1904, respectively. For a time there was no pastor in either church. Laymen conducted services for a few years to hold the congregation together, but it gradually diminished. Most of the Czech families in Macy and Kurten, about ten percent, were Catholics who attended mass in Wheelock or in

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<sup>11</sup>Lutheran Church Hymnal, Bryan, Texas. The German translation was made by Mrs. Frank Kocman of Bryan. Most of these songs are still sung in churches today.

<sup>12</sup>Emanuel Kasiske, Interview, September 26, 1971. Kasiske is the son of the later Reverend Julius Kasiske of Kurten who preached in the Zion United Church of Christ from 1907 to 1928. Reverend Kasiske was ordered by a group of Bryan men to preach only in English. Rather than cause trouble, Kasiske preached his worship services in English.

<sup>13</sup>From the impressions the writer received from residents in both Wixon and Edge, the percentage of Presbyterians was rather small. These Presbyterians either drifted to another faith or went to the Presbyterian Church in Bryan.

Bryan. It is interesting to note that Germans, such as the Kieffers, who were Catholic in Germany, changed to the Baptist faith when they came to America because the Catholic Church at one period imposed harsh obligations that its members found impossible to meet. Other Catholics who remained in their faith in America did not find the obligations as strict here and did not convert.

In many of the communities the rural church faces a great challenge of survival. It is now the only organization left to hold a rural community together. An article in the Farm and Ranch magazine discusses the plight of rural churches and focuses upon the Reliance Baptist Church:

Many people have felt that because the farm population has decreased, the rural churches will move into town as the rural school did. The Reliance Baptist Church in Reliance feels that it offers as good a youth program as the churches in town do. Sunday school attendance has risen from forty-nine in 1957 to one hundred and thirty in 1959. The church offers a family supper every Friday night and four socials a year. Reverend Billy Hudnall reported that the Sunday school classes are kept small for better class participation. The church has a community center, educational wing, parsonage, a miniature built-in kitchen for the beginner's department, and a good music program. Dr. Russell of Texas A&M said that people should hold on to their rural churches because they are the backbone of the larger denominations.<sup>14</sup>

This article speaks for most rural churches in the rural communities. Some rural churches have continued to thrive because of a leader or a

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<sup>14</sup>Harold Fritts, "Can Rural Churches Survive?" Farm and Ranch, July, 1959. Clippings belong to Mrs. Maggie Kelley of Kurten.



group of church goers who were interested in reviving the community. Reverend Arthur Smith, who is now pastor of the Cottonwood Baptist Church, found that in 1948 members were less and less interested in the church and in the community. He talked with the people and got a soil conservation program started to revive not only the soil but the souls of the people as well.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the Cottonwood Baptist Soil Conservation group won a first place award in the state soil conservation competition in Fort Worth in 1956.<sup>16</sup> The program was so successful that members sent the Reverend and Mrs. Smith on a trip to the Holy Land. The church minutes record one incident involving Victor Harris, a deacon of the church, and some of his land:

Harris set aside ten acres of his best land with all profits to go to the Lord. For himself, he kept one hundred acres of the poorest land. Both plots were planted in oats and vetch. The Lord's land yield was forty bushels, while his one hundred acres brought a yield twice as much as was expected. Soil technicians who analyzed the poor land could find no technical reason for its abundant production. But the church members knew.<sup>17</sup>

One who works for the Lord reaps a bountiful harvest!

Even when conditions are primitive, church goers come with enthusiasm, as Reverend E. Wilking wrote about his stay from 1903

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<sup>15</sup>Cottonwood Baptist Church Minutes, Cottonwood rural community, Tabor, Texas. These minutes date back to 1910.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

to 1907 as pastor of the Zion United Church of Christ in Kurten:

The circumstances in Kurten at that time were most primitive; there was not even water on the place. The members were to a great extent still paying for their passage from Germany. The church was built from raw boards, as they came from the saw mill; sun, moon, and stars shown down through the cracks. A year later, Mrs. Wilking joined me, coming from Germany, and soon after, the first organ was bought, of course, from Sears and Roebuck. Mrs. Wilking became the first organist- and choir leader. A Young People's League was organized and flourished, both male and female members coming eagerly to the meetings on horseback. In 1904, the parsonage was improved and later a back porch was added. I planted some Catalpa trees on the church grounds which I brought from New Baden on horseback. The church received inside improvements, especially wainscoting. Due to the limited means of the members, other improvements had to wait. Of the church board members, I remember especially Gus Stevener, who was president during my time, and was of great assistance.<sup>18</sup>

Land which belonged to Dr. W. F. Odom that was adjacent to the church was bought by the church sometime after 1907. Reverend Julius Kasiske finally got the eight acres from Dr. Odom at one hundred dollars an acre, but this was better than having the odor of hogs float through the open windows when the south wind blew during a Sunday worship service.<sup>19</sup> Sunday school rooms, a steeple, a new parsonage, and a remodeling of the church came about through the years of the existence of the Zion United Church of Christ.

In every rural church the enthusiastic church workers hold that church together. There are now about eight churches. The churches which closed did so when the members lost interest and

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<sup>18</sup>Zion United Church of Christ Bulletin, October 13, 1957. This bulletin was put out on the sixty-fifth year of the church.

<sup>19</sup>Emanuel Kasiske, Interview, September 26, 1971. The eight hundred dollars came from the church members.

moved into town. Not enough people paid a minister for him to stay, nor was there enough money to make any improvements on the church dwellings.

Many of the first rural settlers who organized churches were illiterate. These people were interested in education, so they came together to build schools not far from the community churches. Cottonwood used its church building as a school for thirty-three years until the building burned; then the Cottonwood residents built a new church and a new school.

The first schools were generally one-room structures, except at Kurten where the first school was a two-story log house which Henry Kurten built in 1876.<sup>20</sup> The second school in Kurten had a Cistern inside a classroom beneath a hole in the roof to catch rain to be used as drinking water.<sup>21</sup> The Kurten school, built in 1937, had some modern conveniences which the old schools lacked.

One modern convenience was the school kitchen. The food was purchased under contract with Bryan merchants from a fund in the First National Bank; Mrs. Maggie Kelley, Kurten teacher, was authorized

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<sup>20</sup>Charles Gerke, Interview, August 20, 1971. Gerke was a life-long resident of Kurten. He and Mrs. Lilly Holmes Edge confirm that the school was a two-story building because both went to school there.

<sup>21</sup>Mae Stevener Wilson, Interview, August 22, 1971. Mrs. Wilson is a Kurten resident and was a teacher in the Prospect school. She is also a cousin to the writer's father. She married the great nephew of Parson Wilson of Edge in the early 1900's.

by David Bunting, Brazos County Superintendent, to use this money.<sup>22</sup> In the early days school children brought their lunches from home-- usually biscuits or homemade bread, syrup, and sausage.<sup>23</sup> Some children from the poorer families did not bring lunches.

Students came to school generally for only about seven months because they were required in the fields at cotton harvest time.<sup>24</sup> There was not much that Texas education officials could do about the problem. Cotton was the farmer's source of income and since he was often too poor to pay any hired hands, he needed his children to help. When school was in session, the children often stayed as late as six o'clock in the evening to make up for the time lost in the cottonpatch.<sup>25</sup>

Teachers taught all grades. Their classes were usually small, and the teacher was able to give more individual attention to those who needed it. Some teachers were so strict that some children dropped out. Mrs. Maggie Kelley disciplined her naughty pupils by sending them outside to sit beside a fence post until they behaved.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>David Bunting, Interview, September 10, 1971. Bunting is the Brazos County School Superintendent. He taught school in Kurten.

<sup>23</sup>Mae Stevener Wilson, Interview, August 22, 1971. Mrs. Wilson recalled that the children used to punch holes in the biscuits and pour the syrup in the holes before they ate them.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Miss Edna Harris, Interview, October 18, 1971. Miss Harris was reared in the harris community and taught school there.

<sup>26</sup>Mrs. Maggie Kelley, Interview, August 5, 1971.



Most children caused no trouble, but there were a few name callers, particularly those who liked calling the German children clodhoppers and dutchmen.<sup>27</sup> Some of the best remembered school teachers were Horace Raymond of Kurten, John M. Moore of the Fickey school, John L. Cobb of the Cottonwood and Alexander schools, and Mrs. Maggie Kelley of the Kurten school.<sup>28</sup>

Mrs. Maggie Kelley, who taught school in Kurten from 1917 to 1962, told her children that if they ate their carrots for lunch, their eyes would be bright; this carrot lesson coincides with a Bible story that she told her first graders:

I was telling the children a Bible story about the tabernacle in the wilderness, the House of God. One child wanted to know if God was really there. I told him that He was and that God could see all the people, but the people could not see Him. Another child wanted to know how God could see through the roof and walls. Gary Wuerz, Reverend Wilhelm Wuerz' son, said that God ate a lot of carrots. When I saw Reverend Wuerz again, he said jokingly, "I hear you have been teaching my son a carrot theology."<sup>29</sup>

Some of the subjects taught in the rural schools were reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, English, history, algebra, agriculture, physical education, geography, geometry and trigonometry.<sup>30</sup> The Kurten curriculum in the 1940's included a school garden which

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<sup>27</sup> Charles Gerke, Interview, August 20, 1971.

<sup>28</sup> The writer heard many favorable comments about these respected and dedicated teachers.

<sup>29</sup> Mrs. Maggie Kelley, Interview, August 5, 1971.

<sup>30</sup> Ethel Payne Winn, Interview, September 28, 1971. In Edge the books on reading and spelling were used from the first to the seventh grades.

was designed to give children lessons in getting plants to grow. Each child had a section of the garden to work.<sup>31</sup> Gardening was studied the last hour of school and seemed to be one of the most liked subjects.

The children walked or rode horseback, rain or shine, to and from school. They had chores to do on the farm besides doing their homework. Some dropped out of school after a few years to devote their time to farming at home.

The new Kurten school was built in 1937 with modern conveniences and in 1946 all the rural schools of Tabor, Edge, Reliance, Steep Hollow, and Harvey were consolidated with Kurten.<sup>32</sup> This school operated full time with five teachers until 1968, when the people in Bryan opposed keeping it open for only one hundred rural children.<sup>33</sup> Since operation of the Kurten school was taking more money to function each year, the school was closed and the children were bussed into Bryan. Many students and their parents opposed consolidation with Bryan because the overall atmosphere would be different. The adjustment of the students from the small informal rural community to the large city school was a cause for concern. They were concerned not only with farming, ginning cotton, syrup and grist mills, and community stores, but also with their schools and churches and private businesses.

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<sup>31</sup>Mrs. Maggie Kelley, Interview, August 5, 1971.

<sup>32</sup>David Bunting, Interview, September 10, 1971.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

One popular business was the cotton gin. Almost every community had a cotton gin, either powered by horses or steam engine. Early gins used horses or mules to supply the power to operate the gin press. Joseph Kopecky of Rye, Henry Kurten of Kurten, and Durant Dansby of Harvey operated horse powered cotton gins in Brazos County. C. S. Jones of Harvey used steam engines as did many others after the Civil War. These gins were driven by power generated by steam boilers; water for steam came from the gin tanks nearby.<sup>34</sup> Ginners had to keep books on how much cotton was ginned, for whom it was ginned, and the cost of ginning and wrapping.<sup>35</sup> In 1900 the usual ginning fee was from forty to fifty cents per hundred pounds of lint cotton.<sup>36</sup> After 1910, the ginning fee was about one dollar per hundred pounds.<sup>37</sup> Payment for ginning cotton was usually in cash, although the gin operator would take the cotton seeds as payment.<sup>38</sup> Joseph Kopecky

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<sup>34</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith in collaboration with H. Grady Castle and Earl Castle, Abilene, Texas, February 29, 1972.

<sup>35</sup>John Kopecky, Interview, October 26, 1971. Kopecky is a life-long resident of Rye community and the owner and operator of the Kopecky cotton gins at Rye and Benchley.

<sup>36</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith in collaboration with H. Grady Castle and Earl Castle, Abilene, Texas, February 29, 1972.

<sup>37</sup>John Kopecky, Interview, October 26, 1971.

<sup>38</sup>Letter from Anna Koontz Smith, Abilene, Texas, February 29, 1972.

and his son had the following bookkeeping system for their gin business:

Henry Bowman #23

Mo.	No.	Mark	Wt.	gin cost	seed
Aug.	75	H. B.	495	\$3.15	\$7.60 <sup>39</sup>

The Kopeckys also made out receipts to the person whose cotton was ginned:

No. 696 Benchley (Rt. 2) Texas October 18, 1932

Ginned for Henry Bowman

Gross Wt.

Wt. of Bale 490 lbs.

Ginning \$3.05 wrapping \$1.00 total \$4.05

By John Kopecky, weigher

Seller Alden Smith<sup>40</sup>

Although most cotton gins shut down after World War II, the Kopecky gin did not close until 1960, when most of the farmers in Rye and in Benchley discontinued their cotton crop. The Kopeckys did have a commissary in Rye, especially for the gin hands, which functioned from 1910 to 1930. The records for the commissary showed the name of the purchaser, date, and list of items and their prices.<sup>41</sup> This commissary received its supplies in large quantities since all general stores in the rural communities purchased in this way.

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<sup>39</sup>Account Ledger of Kopecky Cotton Gin, Rye Community, 1913-1914. The system indicates the name of the farmer, month in which cotton was ginned, number of bales ginned, initials of farmer on the bale, weight of bale, cost of ginning, and the cotton seed used as payment. The cotton ginner could sell the seed to another farmer for planting or have it made into cotton seed meal for feeding livestock.

<sup>40</sup>Kopecky Receipt Book, Kopecky Gins, Rye, Brazos County, Texas

<sup>41</sup>Account Ledger of Kopecky Commissary, Rye community, 1912. This ledger belongs to John Kopecky of Rye, Brazos County, Texas.



For general stores in the rural communities, the supplies came by freight wagons, train, or by contract with the Bryan merchants. The writer recalled that her great-grandfather, Billy Schultze, and his cousin, Henry Kurten, often went to Galveston in an ox wagon for supplies. Dr. W. P. Odom, who owned a general store in Kurten from 1910 to 1930, contracted with Bryan merchants such as Edge Dry Goods, Sanders Bros., Tyler Haswell, E. J. Jenkins, Parker-Astin Hardware, Holmes Bros., Bryan Ice Company, Magnolia Petroleum Company, Butler Bros., Dansby Furniture, International Coffee, Chambers and Wilson Auto, and the Galveston Hat Company from Galveston, Texas.<sup>42</sup> Odom had ten stockholders in his store who put in one hundred and sixty dollars each in December, 1910.<sup>43</sup> In Odom's credit ledger, where he kept a record of all customers who charged items on credit, one example of his record had been that of Reverend J. E. Smith, a Baptist circuit rider, who accumulated four months' credit on forty-six items for a total of \$15.45.<sup>44</sup> Dr. Odom made an inventory entry in the ledger in 1914 which indicated how cheap items in his store

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<sup>42</sup>Cash Book of Odom General Merchandise Store, Kurten, Texas. This book is a 1910 record book belonging to Mrs. Gussie Odom Dansby of Bryan, Texas.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid. Most of the stockholders were Kurten farmers.

<sup>44</sup>Account Ledger of the Odom General Merchandise Store, Kurten, Texas, 106. This book belongs to Mrs. Gussie Odom Dansby of Bryan, Texas.

were at that time:

9 Fascinators(cloth mufflers)	\$6.57
1 Corsette	.71
18 Backcombs	3.24
1 Men's dress shirt	.38
1 baby cap	.30
11 buggy whips	2.20
1 straw hat	.20
42 boxes shotgun shells	15.05
100 calomel tablets	.08
1½ yds. fancy linen	.20
9 prs. heavy drawers	3.01
1 pr. ladies shoes	1.40
118 prs. children's hose	6.37
50 cards pearl buttons	2.75 <sup>45</sup>

The general stores had items of school supplies, footwear, dresswear, groceries, medicine, hardware, and farming equipment. These rural businessmen, who had almost every item imaginable in the store, made a profit because it was too far for the farmers to go to Bryan for supplies, except on rare occasions when the farmers needed some items that the country general store did not have.

While the general store in the rural communities took care of the material needs of the farmer, the syrup mills and grist mills ground the farmers' sugar cane for molasses and their corn for grits or meal.

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<sup>45</sup>Account Ledger of the Odom General Merchandise Store, Kurten, Texas, 106-120. Before Dr. Odom contracted with the Bryan merchants, he received supplies by train and by freight wagon from as far away as Galveston. Although the Odom general store operated from 1910 to 1930, Dr. Odom died in 1928. The store was kept open by his wife, Ella Kurten Odom until 1930. Mrs. Odom, who is in her nineties, lives in a local nursing home.

According to H. Grady Castle grist mills and syrup mills operated as follows:

Grist mills had two rollers, horizontally mounted, driven through gearing from long levers (usually a long log) which was harnessed to a single mule or horse. Corn, fed into a top hopper, came through the rollers cracked and/or mashed and was called grits. The grist mill owner would retain a toll which was usually twenty-five percent of the grain that was processed in payment. The syrup mill had two rollers, vertically mounted, driven through gearing as with a grist mill. Sugar cane was hand fed into the rollers, with the juice running into a collection vat (about fifty gallons). The juice was dipped out and transferred to a cooking vat for an initial cooking for about one hour. After that, it was transferred to a finishing vat, then put into jugs as syrup. The mill owner received twenty-five percent of the syrup as payment. Generally, the farmers would load the wagons with sugar cane or sacks of shucked corn upon harvest and go to the mills to have them processed.<sup>46</sup>

For meal, the corn was ground finer. The molasses that was left over from several boilings was called "blackstrap." At the Kurten grist mill, Henry Kurten gave the widows' families free sacks of meal.<sup>47</sup> Farmers went to the mills on Saturdays, picked up supplies from the general store, and got their hair cuts at the community barber shops for twenty-five cents. These small businesses provided most of the farmers' needs.

While the small businessmen were able to make profits, the farmers had to depend upon their land for profitable yields. To make a living from the farm, they were involved in hard physical labor to obtain a good crop so that they would be able to pay their

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<sup>46</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith in collaboration with H. Grady Castle, Abilene, Texas, January 28, 1972.

<sup>47</sup>Alice Odom Norman, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kurten, German Immigrants, Bryan, Texas, 1948, 8.

bills. These small farmers were in the business of selling their cotton crop and receiving a good price for it. Land sold on the average from one dollar to twenty dollars an acre from 1841 to the 1880's.<sup>48</sup> Many farmers saw that buying land was a good investment and would often buy tax-delinquent property from the county at low figures.<sup>49</sup> Land along the Navasota river, uncleared and subject to frequent overflows, was sold from ten to fifteen dollars an acre.<sup>50</sup> The improved land the uplands brought twenty to forty dollars an acre.<sup>51</sup> On his land, the farmer could set his own working hours. If he had a large family the work load could be evenly distributed, from washing dishes to picking cotton.

To the farmer, cotton was a cash crop. Cotton often sold as high as fifty cents a pound up to the 1929 depression; after that, the farmer in Brazos County was lucky if he could get five cents a pound.<sup>52</sup> Farmers made only two or three bales from an acre of cotton without fertilizer; when the fertilizers were used after

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<sup>48</sup>The writer examined several land sales in the Brazos County Deed Records and found that price about average for that period of time.

<sup>49</sup>Large landowners could buy the land sell it for a profit.

<sup>50</sup>J. O. Veatch, Soil Survey of Brazos County, Texas, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1916, 25.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Arnold Stevener, August 22, 1971. Stevener is a life-long resident of Kurten and a could to the writer's father.



1920, the yields increased dramatically.<sup>53</sup> Almost all of the available land was in cotton. But one of the reasons for the discontinuance of cotton eventually was because of the destruction by the boll weevil.<sup>54</sup> A Negro song that had been sung in the Texas cotton fields appropriately describes the farmers' situation:

Farmer went to the merchant  
To get some meat and meal  
Merchant says to the farmer  
Boll weevils in your fiel'!  
The merchant got half the cotton  
The boll weevil got the rest  
The farmer's wife got nothing  
But one old cotton dress.<sup>55</sup>

About 1947 the Department of Agriculture found that there was a large surplus of cotton so the farmers were told not to plant any more; they were paid by the government to plow up the cotton in their fields.<sup>56</sup> Farmers were slow to graduate from mule team to tractor mainly because they did not have the ready cash and also because they were reluctant to change. They did use corn planters, cultivators, and sulky plows, but no expensive combines. No more cotton was planted

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<sup>53</sup>Arnold Stevener, Interview, August 22, 1971.

<sup>54</sup>Charles Gerke, Interview, August 20, 1971.

<sup>55</sup>H. Y. Benedict, The Book of Texas, New York, Doubleday, 1916, 146.

<sup>56</sup>Adolph Opersteny, Interview, September 10, 1971. Opersteny, a relative of the writer by marriage, operated the Kurten cotton gin until 1947 and ran a dairy in Tabor from 1952 to 1965.

in the rural communities covered in this study after 1947.<sup>57</sup>

Although cotton was for many years the main source of income, some farmers found other ways to make money. Emil Stevener of Kurten grew some tobacco and cured it for commercial purposes.<sup>58</sup> This Havana long leaf tobacco was thirty inches long curred and shaded in any color; it was sold to a Bryan cigar factory in 1905 for \$1.50 a pound.<sup>59</sup> Peanuts were grown in the communities for livestock and personal use, not for commercial purposes.<sup>60</sup> Will Manthei and Herman Schram of Kurten sold horses for a profit.<sup>61</sup> Reverend Julius Kasiske started a creamery in Kurten in 1925.<sup>62</sup> Other small businesses were the barber shops, the blacksmith shops, and wheelwright shops. Bert Frame of Edge and Adolph Opersteny of Kurten operated

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<sup>57</sup>The Rye cotton gin remained open until 1960 because it served farmers in Benchley, Robertson County. Whatever happened in the Brazos bottom lands is not the concern of this paper.

<sup>58</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from E. M. Stevener, Waco, Texas, February 16, 1972. Stevener is a relative of the writer and was reared in Kurten. His father came from Germany to Kurten in 1865.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Henry Schultz, Interview, July 14, 1973.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Emanuel Kasiske, Interview, September 26, 1971. Kasiske had his own cream separator which he used to collect cream from milk brought to him by the farmers. He put the cream in five gallon buckets and shipped the cream to the Texas Creamery Company in Houston. The company paid each farmer five cents a pound for the butterfat.

barber shops, charging twenty-five cents for hair cuts and a dime for shaves.<sup>63</sup> The blacksmith shop, owned by Henry Kurten, was operated by Ernest Lueck before 1900.<sup>64</sup> John Gurley had a saw mill in Kurten and for a small fee sawed wood for those who hauled it to him.<sup>65</sup> Reverend W. B. Eaves of Thompson Creek operated a wheelwright shop in Bryan, and Will Thompson made wagons in Tabor.<sup>66</sup> Many of these businesses were short-lived.

Religion, education, and business were developed to meet the farmers' needs so that they could remain in the community. Most of the farmers believed that there was no need for them to go to Bryan when almost everything they wanted was right there in their own community. They had good preachers, teachers, cotton ginner, millers, doctors, and merchants to keep them happy. If they could not find what they wanted there, they usually did without.

It seemed that the only thing that the rural residents could not be without was religion. Schools and businesses might close

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<sup>63</sup>The price was standard in the rural communities. Both men operated the barber shops until the 1920's.

<sup>64</sup>Alice Odom Norman, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kurten, German Immigrants, 8. Mrs. Norman said that her grandfather owned the blacksmith shop, but Joe Fickey supplied the name of Ernest Lueck as the blacksmith.

<sup>65</sup>Charles Gerke, Interview, August 20, 1971.

<sup>66</sup>Eaves' granddaughter, Mrs. Haygood, said her grandfather did a good business in Bryan, while Mrs. Reagan Warren said that her father, Will Thompson, operated the Edge cotton gin before he went to Tabor.

their doors, but religion seemed to have the strongest hold on the people--perhaps because they belonged to God. Evidence indicates that rural churches provided for spiritual needs. Outstanding leadership of pastors and church workers kept the church alive. Today, the rural churches that are still functioning with good attendance are the Cottonwood Baptist Church, Alexander Methodist Episcopal Church, Church of Christ in Edge, Zion United Church of Christ in Kurten, Reliance Baptist Church, Steep Hollow Baptist Church, and both Bethel Baptist Church and Bright Light Free Will Baptist Church in Harvey.

In all the rural communities schools were important to the farmers because they sought to give their children knowledge of the world about them. The rural school, open seven months of the year, provided the same basic education as the city school. Teachers who taught school in the rural areas in the nineteenth century taught all grades; after 1910 there were more teachers in these schools. Because there was insufficient room and equipment, the smaller schools were consolidated with the larger schools. In 1946, the schools in Tabor, Edge, King's Highway, Reliance, Steep Hollow, and Harvey were consolidated with Kurten to form one rural school which operated until 1968. The school in Kurten was limited to the elementary level because there were not any qualified advanced-grade teachers in the communities or any room for higher grades. Insufficient funds caused the schools to close.



A lack of sufficient capital was often the cause for the decline of business in the rural area. This was true of the general stores. As for the cotton gins, most of them closed because the Department of Agriculture found a surplus of cotton in 1947 and ordered the farmers not to plant any more cotton. Only the Rye cotton gin remained in operation until 1960 because it served the farmers in Benchley, Robertson County. The farmers lost interest in cotton after 1947 and turned to cattle as a means of profit.

Rural business and education declined particularly because, in this rapidly changing world, rural people seemed to go along with the trend of wanting more, learning more, and becoming more materialistic. As the years went by, living from the farm was not enough. Religion, however, has remained strong in rural society and may remain for some time in rural communities. There are no guarantees that the rural communities will thrive as they have in the past, particularly because it takes more capital for survival of small businesses, schools, and churches than ever before.

## CHAPTER V

### RURAL COMMUNITY SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Farmers in rural Brazos County found social activities to be welcome and enjoyable diversions from the routine of field work. Many social activities gave the people the opportunity to improve their talents because recreation was not only for personal pleasures, but also for the personal growth of all those who participated.

On Saturdays and Sundays, everyone enjoyed box suppers, community picnics, fish fries, horse riding, weddings, quilting bees, baseball, volley ball, basketball, card games, dominoes, literary societies, school plays, singing conventions, community bands, dancing, and children's games.

Box suppers on Sunday evening were benefit socials for the church or school. The women would prepare boxes of food to be auctioned off to the highest bidder; the men would bid against each other for boxes prepared by the fairest ladies.<sup>1</sup> The boxes, that contained food, were decorated with crepe paper or made in different shapes like guitars, boats, saddles, and jewelry chests.

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Schultz, Interview, July 22, 1973. Schultz was reared in Kurten and is the writer's father. After the supper, the men who were courting the girls usually were allowed to take them home.

The person having the most original box won a prize.<sup>2</sup> The proceeds of the box suppers would go for a worthy cause for the church or school.

Singing conventions always drew large crowds. Singers formed community choirs and participated in the Tri-County Singing Society formed in 1890.<sup>3</sup> Choirs from Brazos, Madison, and Grimes counties would select a place for their singing contest and sing church songs all and then eat "dinner on the grounds" with the visitors.<sup>4</sup> In 1899 the singers met at the Wixon Cumberland Presbyterian Church in the Wixon rural community.<sup>5</sup> Reverend Julius Kasiske of the Zion United Church of Christ in Kurten made sure that his choir members showed up for choir practice; he even hauled them to the church in his Model T. Ford!<sup>6</sup>

For years annual community picnics were held in open pastures. In Kurten the people met in Will Mathei's pasture.<sup>7</sup> Residents

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<sup>2</sup>Henry Schultz, Interview, July 22, 1973. Prizes that were awarded were donated by community residents. These prizes might be animals, cans of jellies, or trinkets.

<sup>3</sup>W. S. Barron, Interview, September 10, 1971. Barron is a resident of Bryan and a former County Judge and Congressman.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. The society held the singing contest on the second Sunday in May and in October of each year. Barron was one of the singers.

<sup>5</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle-Brazos Pilot, Microfilm roll 1889-1899. The main singers were C. E. Bullock, O. K. Freeman, N. L. Outlaw, E. J. Beard, W. D. Hicks, and John Mathis.

<sup>6</sup>Emanuel Kasiske, Interview, September 26, 1971. Kasiske was reared in Kurten. The car was a 1914 model.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

of Edge also held an annual July 4th picnic on Cedar Creek or Hall's Lake up to 1912; then these picnics were held on Ed Payne's Prairie until 1927.<sup>8</sup> There was to be a picnic a Bee Creek on July 4, 1906, but an unexpected cold spell arrived and everybody almost froze to death!<sup>9</sup> Henry Kurten, Jr., and Wallace Sabo staged a boxing match at the 1932 Kurten community picnic, but the reporter who put this item in the local newspaper failed to say who won.<sup>10</sup> Although the community picnics were happy occasions, one picnic at Kurten might have been a tragic mistake for Lee MacDonald, as Marta Utecht, Kurten resident, recalls:

Lee MacDonald was a teacher at the Fickey school. It was no secret that he was in love with Lena Gilpin. Lena, however, did not love him. When she showed up at the Kurten picnic with another boy, that was the end for Lee MacDonald. It seems that he brooded about it all night. The next day was a school day and we kids found the door of the Fickey school locked. We looked through the window and saw Lee MacDonald mixing up some kind of chemical concoction. He stared at it for a long time. I thought he was going to drink it and end it all right there! Instead, he came out of the building and threw the stuff on the ground and walked away. We didn't have school for two days after that.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ethel Payne Winn, Interview, September 28, 1971. Mrs. Winn was a resident of Edge until her marriage. She now lives in Bryan.

<sup>9</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith in collaboration with H. Grady Castle and Earl Castle, Abilene, Texas, February 14, 1972. This seems to be unusual, but the story is true. The picnic was probably cancelled because of the cold spell.

<sup>10</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle, April 7, 1932. The Bryan Band from Stephen F. Austin High School was invited to play at this picnic and gave a superb performance.

<sup>11</sup>Marta Utecht, Interview, October 27, 1971. Mrs. Utecht is a life-long resident of Kurten. Her parents came from Lithuania and East Prussia to North Zulch, and then settled in Kurten.



In some communities a band would provide the music at picnics and other events. In Kurten, Reverend Julius Kasiske of the Zion United Church of Christ organized the band which not only played at the picnics, but also played concerts at Texas A&M University on many occasions.<sup>12</sup>

The string section of Kasiske's bank provided the background music for the Literary Society programs. Organized in 1903, the Literary Society entertained in the community with plays, dialogues, speeches, and even refreshments for about five years.<sup>13</sup> Because dancing was considered a sin by some religious fundamentalists, it was omitted from the programs. The programs were held in the community school house; they were put on by the young people. The Young People's League of the Zion Lutheran Church presented a play entitled "Amy From Arizona" for the Kurten community in the school house in 1932.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Emanuel Kasiske, Interview, September 26, 1971. Kasiske's father played every musical instrument except the saxophone. Kasiske's sister, Gretchen Kasiske Pfluger, identified the members of the band from the church booklet. The members are as follows: Ernest Wiese, Henry, John, and Carl Mathei, Will Metzger, Gus and Hugo Jopp, Henry, Anton, and Adolph Conrad, Will Homburger, August Prinzel, Alvin Dittfurth, Ed Plagens, Henry Endler, Robert Lang, Rinehardt Lenz, Emanuel Kasiske, Arthur Hinz, Fritz Rahnert, Emil and Albert Keller, Otto and Henry Lockstedt, Arnold and Arthur Stevener, Herman, Louis, and Will Kehlenbrink. The band was transported to Texas A&M's Guion Hall in James Lang's big Dodge truck. The band was awarded the blue ribbon for a performance at Texas A&M.

<sup>13</sup>Mrs. Maggie Kelley, Interview, July 25, 1973. Mrs. Ke-ley is a life-long Kurten resident. She taught at the Kurten school from 1917 to 1962. Her husband's sister participated in the literary programs.

<sup>14</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle, March 21, 1932.

Since the Germans loved music and dancing, they had dances on Saturday nights in their homes until the Sons of Hermann Lodge hall was built.<sup>15</sup> Some of the old German music played at these dances was later replaced by the popular country and western tunes. In other communities, dances were held in the school house. The writer recalled that her grandmother, Emma Endler Schultz, was supposed to have gone to a dance at the Sons of Hermann Lodge with Henry Schultz, but when he failed to show up, she went to the dance with one of the Brockschmidt boys and had a great time! Most Baptists frowned upon dancing, but some did participate.

There was nothing in the beliefs of any church group that denied having community gatherings at lakes and rivers for the annual fish fry. Tabor residents went to Pin Oak Pond, Cottonwood residents to Bee Creek, Edge residents to Hall's Lake, Macy and Kurten residents to the Navasota river; and Reliance, Steep Hollow, and Harvey residents to Wickson Lake or to the Navasota river.<sup>16</sup> To prepare for this event, the men would leave home at dawn to go to the community places to seine for fish bait. The women and younger children would

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<sup>15</sup>Ella Keller, Interview, September 1, 1971. Mrs. Keller was a life-long resident of Kurten. The Sons of Hermann Lodge was built in 1910. The Sons of Hermann is an insurance company in which most of the Germans had their insurance. The Kellers came from Switzerland in 1882; they came because living conditions there were crowded.

<sup>16</sup>This information came to the writer in numerous interviews. There were occasions when Kurten residents held their fish fries at Hall's Lake.

come later in the wagons with the cooking utensils and pastries and get the iron pots ready to fry the fish.<sup>17</sup> The day was spent eating and visiting and talking about crops, cotton prices, politics, the quilt that Mrs. "so-and-so" was making, and recent sermons.

Everyone enjoyed the fish fries, but to men horse racing was something extra special. One of the earliest races which took place on the land near the Kurten cemetery was a contest in which the men tried to leap onto a running horse.<sup>18</sup> This took considerable skill and timing on the part of the horseman. In Cottonwood and Tabor, horse races occurred before 1900 and sometime thereafter on Robert Hudspeth's place; the tracks were six hundred yards long, and the spectators usually made one dollar bets.<sup>19</sup> Those who participated in the races were Charlie Brown, Clarence Elliott, George Dunn, John Dunn, Tom McCallum, Charlie Presnal, Roy Hudspeth, Dee Cargill, Charley Smith, Henry Koontz, Will Locke, and Ike Kelly, who was deaf and dumb.<sup>20</sup> Cyrus Koontz owned a thoroughbred and the others also had excellent horses.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Henry Schultz, Interview, July 22, 1973.

<sup>18</sup>This information came to the writer from her relatives. The writer's great-grandfather, Billy Schultze, who had been in the Confederate cavalry, had been trained to leap onto a running horse and had the advantage over the other men. He never missed getting on the horse.

<sup>19</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith in collaboration with H. Grady Castle and Earl Castle, Abilene, Texas, February 29, 1972.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid. Ike Kelly won these races many times.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

Emil Stevener's son, Ernest, recalled one particular horse race:

One Saturday, in the summer of 1900, a young stranger astride a fine horse rode into Kurten about the time the horse races were going on. He made the remark to Mr. Minus Easters that he would like to race his horse against Easters' tan filly. The two men bet 500 dollars. Easters won the race. The stranger got off his horse, walked over to Easters, took out his wallet, and paid off! Then he asked Easters, "What will you take for that filly?" Easters replied that she was not for sale. "Name your price," the stranger insisted. "One thousand dollars," stated Easters. Calmly the stranger handed over the thousand dollars. Some of the men claimed that Easters had tears in his eyes. Then he said, "I wish that I had made no price, but you bought her fair and square, and I won't go back on my word."<sup>22</sup>

Weddings were also big Sunday afternoon affairs. The early marriages took place in the homes, the circuit preacher performing the ceremony, a small reception being held later; honeymoon trips were unknown because the bride and groom had to be at work in the cottonpatch the next morning.<sup>23</sup> Anna Koontz Smith recalled that her parents, Henry Koontz and Ruby Susanna Sample, were married by Reverend J. E. Smith while they sat in their car on January 3, 1917.<sup>24</sup> Cyrus and Anna Bell Koontz were married in the Lela Koontz Gallatin home in 1874.<sup>25</sup> Billy Schultze and Rosa Stevener were

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<sup>22</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from E. M. Stevener, Waco, Texas, February 24, 1972. Stevener is a distant relative of the writer, Minus Easters was the father of Mrs. Maggie Kelley of Kurten.

<sup>23</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith in collaboration with H. Grady Castle and Earl Castle, Abilene, Texas, February 29, 1972, 1. Brides' dresses were lace but had no train while the groom had ruffled shirts and regular suits.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid. Both Cyrus and Anna Koontz were teenagers when they married.



married December 19, 1872, probably in the Stevener home in Kurten.<sup>26</sup> The Goodson wedding in the Harris community during the 1880's was elaborate, as was Udel Rudasill's wedding in Cottonwood.<sup>27</sup> One elaborate wedding in Kurten during the early years of the Model T Ford was the Annie Lange-Ben Metzger wedding which Adolph Conrad recalled:

I remember this wedding because on that day it had rained and after the church ceremony, we drove over to the Lange home. When we arrived there, the car got stuck in the mud axle-deep. Some husky farmers came to our rescue, picked up the car, and moved it to dry ground. It was one of those weddings that had all kinds of food on the table throughout the entire evening and dancing through the wee hours of the morning. I was at that time playing the violin for dances. Along with one or two other fiddle players and guitar pickers, music flowed freely.<sup>28</sup>

The writer's grandparents, Henry Schultz and Emma Endler were married December 31, 1912, by Monroe Edge, Justice of the Peace.<sup>29</sup> For a wedding gift, Billy Schultz gave his daughter, Dora, who married Anton Conrad, sixty acres of land which the newly weds

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<sup>26</sup>This information is recorded in the Schultze family Bible which is the possession of Mrs. Pearl Presnal in Bryan.

<sup>27</sup>This information came from Miss Edna Harris who remembered the Goodson wedding because Lee Edge had driven a pair of mules hitched to a buggy from the Tryon community and one of the mules got so hot that it died. H. Grady Castle said that Udel Rudasill's wedding was so elaborate that he believed Will Rudasill must have spent a thousand dollars on it!

<sup>28</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Adolph Conrad, Houston, Texas, November 22, 1971. Conrad was reared in Kurten and is the writer's relative.

<sup>29</sup>The writer's grandmother Emma Endler Schultz, gave this information years ago. Monroe Edge had married Mathilda Schultz, the writer's grandfather's sister. At the time Monroe Edge, who was a Justice of the Peace, had married Emma Endler and Henry Schultz, the writer's grandparents.

cleared to begin farming.<sup>30</sup> After the wedding the couple settled down to married; the groom spent most of his day in the field while his bride kept house.

One of the things that the women did whether they were young or old was to make quilts. Six or eight of them would gather at one house to piece quilt blocks and sew them on to the cotton bed ticking that had been placed on the quilting frame in the center of a room. In the 1860's the women had to scratch the seed from the cotton with cotton graders so that the cotton could then be spun into thread on the spinning wheel.<sup>32</sup> Quilting bees gave the women a change to make use of their sewing talents as well as to catch up on all the local gossip.

Both girls and boys participated in sports. Schools competed in basketball, baseball, volley ball, track, discus, shotput, pole vault, and broad jump.<sup>33</sup> There was a girls' basketball team in

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<sup>30</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Adolph Conrad, Houston, Texas, November 22, 1971.

<sup>31</sup>This information came to the writer years ago from her grandmother, Emma Endler Schultz, who made quilts for her family.

<sup>32</sup>Edelweiss Koppe Jones, Interview, August 25, 1971. The women also made feather beds of goose feathers or chicken feathers. She is related to the Kurtens.

<sup>33</sup>Henry Schultz, Interview, July 22, 1973.

Kurten as well as the boys' team.<sup>34</sup> Some of the Tabor High School baseball players were Sam and Sherman Walker, George Broach, Stanley Cooper, Fred Locke, Jim Huggins, and Joe Walker; those who played in Kurten were Gus Byer, Adolph and Louis Opersteny, Henry Endler, and Frank Fridel.<sup>35</sup> Emanuel Kasiske recalled that on numerous occasions the baseball players in Kurten used broom handles for bats.<sup>36</sup> In Cottonwood John L. Cobb was the baseball umpire while some of the players were Will, Charlie, and Joe Locke, Earl and Grady Castle, Estie Mitchell, Nat and Bud Harrison, Bob Turner, and George Marr.<sup>37</sup> Football was not played much because rural schools did not have adequate teams or equipment.

The children who did not compete in sports joined clubs like the 4-H and the Future Farmers of America. Community 4-H clubs gave them an opportunity to learn modern ways of farming and to

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<sup>34</sup>Henry Schultz, Interview, July 22, 1973. Schultz, who played basketball for Kurten, said that basketball was a popular game in the rural communities. Some of the girls on the Kurten basketball team were Lillian Buchanan, Johnnie Sabo, Virginia Kurten, Gussie Odom, Edelweiss Schultz, Alma Kindt, Pansy Odom, and Lurleen Lawless.

<sup>35</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Adolph Conrad, Houston, Texas, November 22, 1971. Conrad played baseball in both communities.

<sup>36</sup>Emanuel Kasiske, Interview, September 26, 1971. They used the broom handles when the school was locked.

<sup>37</sup>Letter to Janice Schultz from Anna Koontz Smith in collaboration with H. Grady Castle and Earl Castle, Abilene, Texas, November 20, 1971.

"develop their character" in leadership and cooperation.<sup>38</sup> The Future Farmers of America was an organization in which school boys studied agriculture, a subject which was taught in the high schools of Edge and Tabor. After school the children went swimming in the cotton gin tanks or stock ponds using two crock jugs tied with a rope for life preservers.<sup>39</sup> Children often went hunting and fishing not only for pleasure, but for food on the family table. They would also have persimmon fights or play games such as spin-the-bottle or drop-the-hankerchief, or see-saw with a board that had been placed on a fence.<sup>40</sup>

Games and community clubs were also a part of the entertainment for the adults. One of the card games played by the Germans was called SKAT which was a three-handed card game; the person who scored first yelled, "SKAT!" and laid his cards down.<sup>41</sup> SIXTY-SIX was another German card game played by the old Germans in the early years of the Kurten community; the winner had to have

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<sup>38</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle, January 18, 1931. That year, Edelweiss Gerke was president of the 4-H club in Kurten and the girls had projects of sewing, yard planning, and making trellises.

<sup>39</sup>Emanuel Kasiske, Interview, September 26, 1971.

<sup>40</sup>Henry Schultz, Interview, July 22, 1973.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.



sixty-six points.<sup>42</sup> Domino games were "straight domino," "forty-two," and "moon."<sup>43</sup> Some of these games were played at the Henry Kurten home where the women folk always prepared a huge Sunday dinner for anyone who came to visit.<sup>44</sup> Horseshoes was a popular game; it tested one's ability to throw a horseshoe accurately at an iron stake driven in the ground to make a ringer of five points from a distance of thirty feet.<sup>45</sup> In the farmers' community clubs, the men discussed soil conservation, feed crops, advantages of Spanish peanuts and corn over other feeds for hogs, and demonstrations in the art of pecan budding.<sup>46</sup> Although this club was designed to keep the farmer informed on current farming methods, the farmers often attended farming conventions for more general information. On August 26, 1889, there was a Brazos County farmers' convention in Bryan; the topic discussed was the economic outlook for cotton.<sup>47</sup> Beef Clubs were clubs in which the members would take turns

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<sup>42</sup>Henry Schultz, Interview, July 22, 1973.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Alice Odom Norman, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kurten, German Immigrants, 6. The visitors always brought a keg of beer along.

<sup>45</sup>Henry Schultz, Interview, July 22, 1973.

<sup>46</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle, June 9, 1930.

<sup>47</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle-Brazos Pilot, Microfilm roll 1889-1899. Some of the attending farmers were Dr. John Edge, Davis Shirley, August Prinzel, Gus Stevener, Cyrus Koontz, Adolph Gerke, J. S. Francis, A. A. Dean, Robert Hudspeth, Anton Conrad, B. F. Bullock, J. H. Horton, Joe McGee, A. W. Shealy, John Merka, W. R. Thompson, J. W. Cloud, and Joe Lloyd.

in slaughtering a certain number of cows each week and distributing equal portions of beef to each member.<sup>48</sup> The writer's great uncle, Louis Schultz, peddled beef to many of the community residents in Kurten and other areas during the 1920's. Home Demonstration Clubs supervised by the home demonstration agent for the women were held in the community centers. In Kurten, Mrs. E. M. Seeman gave an accurate report of her canning and gardening work in 1929, which cut her food expenses by fifty percent as compared to 1926, when she did not canning.<sup>49</sup> In 1962, women in the Harvey Home Demonstration Club planned a political rally.<sup>50</sup> Some of these clubs still exist today.

Members of these rural communities responded to community social activities with eager community-wide interest. They enjoyed being together. They loved to compete in sports and in the singing conventions, because they believed that they were good performers. Weddings were happy and emotional; yet they afforded a serious beginning for the bride and groom. The community clubs were designed to keep the people informed on better ways to farm and to conserve food. Community picnics and fish fries provided a happy and relaxing

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<sup>48</sup>O. L. Andrews, Interview, December 10, 1971. Andrews was a life-long resident of Harvey since 1890. The Beef Club, which was a part of all the rural communities was held on Saturdays. There was no charge for the meat unless one member wanted a larger portion.

<sup>49</sup>Bryan Daily Eagle, February 6, 1930.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., March 16, 1962.

day away from farm work.

The majority of these social activities took place before the introduction of radio, television, and motion pictures. Since that time, some of the activities have been eliminated. There are still church socials, community homecomings, and Sunday visits, but the competitive sports have long since faded from the scene. These social functions were necessary morale boosters to the farmers to lessen the burden of constant farm work and crop failures. Without them, the people would find their world boring and themselves tense, restless, and unsatisfied. Although rural life was somewhat isolated, the social activities helped to make it more tolerable and kept the people reasonably content.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The pioneers of rural Brazos County, Texas, during the period 1830 to 1900 were small farmers who came from the United States, continental Europe, and the British Isles. Their goals of obtaining cheap fertile land, individual freedom, and a better environment for their families were achieved here in rural communities. Land had become less and less available in Europe because of the spread of industry and in the American South because of the rapidly expanding plantation system. It seemed that governments in Europe favored big business enterprises and allowed agricultural lands to decrease rapidly in size until the small farmers, who had depended on the land for their income, were forced to move. Because the plantation system in the American South controlled the best land, the farmers found that they could not make an income from poor land or compete with the larger farms, so they migrated to Texas. In Texas they found land in abundance, and here they could escape religious persecution, high taxes, climatic conditions, and military obligations which had plagued some of them in Europe.

The migrant farmers came by ocean vessel, ox wagon, horse, or foot to Texas. They were simple, practical, and conservative folk from England, Ireland, Switzerland, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria-Hungary, Alsace-Lorraine, and different parts of the United States. Many of them were uneducated, spoke little or no English, had few



possessions; but they shared the desire to make their future in Texas. Many of them arrived in Texas during the reconstruction period when Texas was under a provisional government set up by President Andrew Johnson of the United States. Radical rule during reconstruction did not seem to affect the farmers too much, since their main concern was in purchasing land and getting ready to farm it. Some farmers did join the Ku Klux Klan to force the negro to return to the cotton fields, but many more were opposed to this organization and did not join. To farmers, Texas was a place for better living and better land than that which they had had before.

Land in Brazos County sold for one dollar to twenty dollars an acre up to 1880 depending upon its location. Most farmers bought what land they needed and could afford. They encouraged people back home to come to Texas and take advantage of good land. When Lee Edge boasted about his land in Tryon as being the best land this side of Canaan, it was quite evident that he wanted his friends in Georgia to come to Texas to live.

When most of the farmers came to Texas in the 1870's, only the communities of Tryon, Rye, Alexander, Cottonwood, Wesson, and Kurten were established. Thompson Creek, Harris, Wixon, Macy, Reliance, Steep Hollow, and Harvey were founded in the 1870's while Tabor, Blanton, Edge, and Zack were established from 1883 to 1904 by the farmers who came to acquire this land. The communities were named in honor of an outstanding leader or some certain landmarks. The

size of each community was determined by the number of families who resided there. After they were established, there developed a close relationship among the people which meant that each farmer could depend upon his neighbors to help him when he needed them. This community-wide friendship contributed to the survival of the community. The people shared in building churches, schools, and businesses to help the community thrive.

Churches were community centers. They offered good youth programs and church socials which required community participation. To keep residents from moving away from Cottonwood, Reverend Arthur Smith of the Cottonwood Baptist Church proposed a soil conservation program which benefited the soil as well as the souls of the Cottonwood residents. Reverend Julius Kasiske of the Zion United Church of Christ in Kurten not only organized a church choir and church clubs, but formed a community orchestra, established the Kurten Telephone Company and the Kasiske Creamery, and had a community water well dug in the main parts of Kurten. Reverend J. M. Bullock, perhaps concerned more with souls than with society, was reputed to be one of the best preachers in the Baptist faith and gave inspiring sermons. These and other clergymen, then, were outstanding leaders serving the people in every way. Tabor, Edge, Cottonwood, Kurten, Reliance, Steep Hollow, and Harvey had active churches that drew the people together in thriving communities.

Where there was a church, there was usually a school. At first, the school might be a one-room log house or a two-story log house such

as the one built in the Kurten community in 1876. Land was generally donated. Rural schools grew from the one-room to four-room frame buildings as the number of pupils increased. Edge and Tabor had high schools which operated until the 1940's. In 1937 a red brick school building, one of the most modern in the rural district, was built in Kurten. With few exceptions, teachers were permanent residents where they taught. They were transferred from one rural school to another from year to year. Salaries were forty to sixty dollars a month, which was considered quite good at the time. Schools were faced with the problem that pupils must be in the fields when the cotton was ready to be picked. The Kurten school operated from 1876 to 1968. Efforts to close it by Bryan taxpayers were successful; they believed that it was costing too much money to operate for an attendance of one hundred pupils and five teachers. From 1865 to 1968 rural schools were offering the same basic education that is offered today. They became obsolete when the trend of attending modern, city schools, well-equipped to offer more diversified instruction to rural students, took hold.

As rural schools and churches enriched the minds and souls of country folk, small businesses supplied material needs. General store owners, depending on the trade of farmers, were wise to have considerable capital, because most farmers had to buy on credit for months at a time until their cotton crop was sold. General stores were at first supplied by freight wagons from Galveston; later

contracts were made with Bryan merchants for supplies. In Kurten, Tabor, Edge, Macy, Reliance, Rye, and Harvey, the general store owners received permission from United States postal officials to have post offices within their stores. The post office in Kurten is the only one operating at the present time. Prior to the establishment of the post office in the general stores, Kurten residents picked up their mail at the Henry Kurten home. Other small businesses like the cotton gin and the syrup and grist mills were not year-round businesses but were in operation during the harvesting of cotton, sugar cane, and corn. The cotton ginner was paid in cash but occasionally accepted the cotton seed as payment. After the cotton was baled and sold, it was shipped by river barge or train to the northern industries. Some farmers saved their best cotton seed for planting the next cotton crop. Although cotton was their income, farmers planted sugar cane and corn to feed their families and their livestock. When these products were harvested, local syrup mills and grist mills would process sugar cane into molasses and corn into meal for a toll of twenty-five percent.

Although the local millers accepted a portion of the molasses and meal for payment for their services, it was not unusual to find the country doctors being paid with garden vegetables and meat by the poor. These practitioners generally served their own communities where they lived but might be called to other communities in case of an emergency. Much of their practices were in delivering babies;



Dr. W. P. Jones of Harvey delivered 585 babies between 1887 and 1912, charging ten dollars per child. These doctors made their own medicine--usually calomel tablets and quinine which were supposed to cure every known ailment. Whether the people survived their ordeal of sickness often depended upon the speed of the doctor to get to the patient. Horses or horse-and-buggy transportation were for many years the only means of travel over difficult roads.

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It was not only difficult for the doctors to travel over primitive and impossible roads to get to their patients, but equally as had for most travellers throughout the communities to cope with. When it rained, the dirt roads became quagmires, the creeks rose and flooded farmlands and roads; on those days people were better off staying at home. It was not until the 1920's that the roads were gravelled; the main highway from Bryan to Madisonville was not cemented until 1933. Most followed what had been only trails. The Old San Antonio Road, which marks the northern boundary of Brazos County, was blazed by Spanish explorers and was travelled by early settlers who came to Texas in search of land. The Dilly Shaw Tap Road, named for M. E. and M. G. Dilleshaw, had been a trail which travellers made through pastures and gates from the Edge community to Bryan; people in these north-eastern communities considered this to be the main thoroughfare to Bryan. The first mail route through Kurten in 1908 was extremely difficult and did not improve until the 1920's when the roads were gravelled.

Transportation was indeed difficult, but people were eager to go to any social activity. Community affairs of any sort were always welcome, for the isolation and monotony of farm life made the farmer seek his own kind for fun and fellowship. Eventually radio, television, and motion pictures would take the place of the old social functions. Of course the automobile enabled people to move about more freely and often to leave the rural community and the backbreaking struggle of the farm for the city. Those who stayed turned to cattle raising when government officials ordered farmers not to plant any more cotton because of a cotton surplus in the country.

Cotton had been a cash crop requiring much labor. Now as farmers turned to cattle, their lands were plowed and sowed with coastal bermuda, sudan, mexia, maize, oats, and sorghum. When this was done, farmers had more leisure time, particularly if they used modern equipment.

The small farmers who had struggled to make their living on the farm with cotton and cattle have somewhat ironically found themselves in the same predicament that their forefathers escaped by migrating to Texas. The present generation of farmers are faced with high taxes.

To survive, farmers must have considerable capital, not a few dollars sewn into mattresses, but cash reserves and expensive equipment. Farmers must have much more land for an adequate income.

Otherwise, there is no recourse but to find work in the city, which many farmers have done. Generally the farmers in these rural communities have kept the land. What their forefathers toiled for before them has become a priceless investment.

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Vita was removed during scanning