Lost But Not Forgotten Grapevine Homes

In the past, we have written about Grapevine’s oldest homes that have had a hand in shaping our history, but what about homes that were just as important, but have been forgotten and destroyed? This month Larry Groebe looks at the old “Wagon Wheel Ranch” and Ken Slade remembers the old Williamson home.

There is another important historic home that met a tragic end. The home of Nannie Williamson Boyd, Mack Williamson’s sister, whose home burned down in 2013. Nannie moved to Grapevine just before World War I with her new husband William Ross Boyd. They opened a new printing press company on Poydras Street in downtown Dallas. In the early 1930s, they purchased a home and farm on the 500 block of Wildwood in north Grapevine built somewhere between 1907 and 1913 by Zebulon and Florence Jenkins. The since coined Jenkins-Boyd home would remain in the Boyd family until the 100-year-old home met its end in 2013. On that January morning, 10 fire units and 40 firefighters arrived at about 4 a.m. to the house consumed in flames. The current family was able to escape through a second-floor window, but the house and its contents were a total loss.

When Nannie first moved to Grapevine from Tennessee, she loved it so much she quickly convinced her brothers and sisters to follow her, Mack Williamson being one of them. Mack and his wife Julia had two daughters, Betty and Emma Jean. Jean married Robert Wickman and together they ran the Williamson family farm, to be discussed in Ken Slade’s article. Jean Wickman, for whom Jean Street was named, was an officer in the Grapevine Historical Society for years. She is listed as the Corresponding Secretary in the first 1979 printing of the book “Grapevine Area History.”

All three of these homes experienced tragic fires, the Wagon Wheel Ranch horse barn, the Williamson home, and the Jenkins-Boyd house. Despite no longer standing, they played just as important of a role in Grapevine’s history as the buildings that still are. These homes are no longer here, but that doesn’t mean they have to be forgotten.

Aislyn Gaddis

Do you know where this is?
You don’t often think of mid-century modern homes when you think about Grapevine, but this 1963 photo demonstrates that such homes did exist. In fact, they do exist even now. These circa-1957 houses still stand, although the area around them has changed considerably - almost unrecognizably.

(Answer next month)


Larry Groebe
Silver Lake and Wagon Wheel
A Grapevine Farm’s 130-year History

If you drive to the Gaylord Texan resort complex going the back way -- up Texan Trail, past the longhorn cattle pasture, and north along Ruth Wall Road, over on the east side of the road, well hidden behind a stand of trees, is a deteriorating old wooden house with a large 1980s-era satellite dish angled next to it. If you venture up to the “Keep Out” sign, you’ll find yourself staring at a bit of Grapevine’s earliest history - the remaining structures of the Dunn family farm, still on the same site 130 years or so after they were built.

The homestead has seen (and gone through) amazing changes since these sagging buildings were originally constructed in the 1890s: many eras; many owners. It was the Dunn family farm. Later it was known as Silver Lake Farm, and still later as the Wagon Wheel Ranch. Now it serves mostly as a storage site.

The Dunns were one of Grapevine’s original pioneer settler families. Irenius Plato Solon Dunn helped E.M. Jenkins run the first general store in the new settlement of Grape Vine in the middle 19th century. Solon Dunn was the town's first postmaster; and as such, the town earned the nickname “Dunnsville.” He soon settled his family a mile or so northeast of Main Street by the Quayle Branch, planted fruit trees, and raised sheep and cattle.

As the Dunn family expanded with children and grandchildren, the homestead grew from a basic log cabin to proper houses and barns. The buildings still behind the bushes today are thought to date from the 1890s. But by 1920, the families were dispersing and an in-law, Lon Ingraham, oversaw the sale of the Dunns’ land. By the late 1920s, prosperous Dallas businessman William Johnson Wyatt (owner of Wyatt Metal and Boiler Works) purchased the farm as a money-making property, while continuing to live in a Swiss Avenue mansion in Dallas.

(Continued on page four)

The Mack Williamson House

Some may be surprised to learn that all of the land south of Nash Street between present-day South Main and Texan Trail used to be a 200-acre farm. The Mack Williamson farmhouse sat on a high hill not far from where Bob’s Chop and Steak House is today. A long lane lined with pear trees led up to the house which was surrounded by cotton fields.

The house was built about 1910 by John Berry. Mack Williamson acquired the farm in 1939 and lived there until his death in 1972. The house sat vacant until 1987 when it burned. Soon afterward, the property was sold to developers. The land was leveled off and much of the dirt was hauled elsewhere. The photos and captions below tell more of the story.

Ken Slade

(Silver Lake from page two)

The livestock was reduced and horses became an important component. Barns were expanded; stables added. About 1933 an unusual combination Aeromotor windmill and water tower was installed on the farm. It would have been visible for miles around. And it’s still visible today because in 1997 this 30-foot windmill/water tower was relocated to Grapevine’s Historic Cotton Belt Railroad District, where it sits today next to the blacksmith shop.

Also in 1933, Mr. Wyatt had part of the creek dammed up to create a charming little lake that gave a name to the property for the next four decades - Silver Lake Farm. And that name continues in the Silver Lake subdivision today. It was a nice place to picnic. That small silver lake was replaced by giant Lake Grapevine when the Grapevine Dam was built just northeast of the farm in the early 1950s. The new reservoir engulfed the old orchards and overfilled the creek, but the primary homestead survived. Meanwhile, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers created Silver Lake Park from some of the newly-generated shorelines.

Silver Lake Farm was offered for sale in 1958 as 30 acres of prime “lakefront property” for $75,000. Soon after, the “Silver Lake Farm Guest House” was being rented out to churches and other organizations for parties. One sunny morning in 1963, a small plane leased by an Ohio company called State Aerial Farm Statistics flew low over Grapevine. A photographer leaned out the window taking pictures of interesting-looking buildings hoping to sell them to the owners below. One image captured Silver Lake Farm looking prosperous. The old country lane, now named Ruth Wall Road, passed in front of the farmhouse and a second tenant house. A curved track led to barns and stables. The windmill soared above them all, while a finger of Lake Grapevine wound off in the distance.

In 1986, Silver Lake Farm got new owners - the Richard and Kathy Brunson family - and a new name - the Wagon Wheel Ranch. For the next 20 Year's, Wagon Wheel Ranch was home to equestrian events of all kinds: lessons, trail rides, even old-west-style gunfights. It hosted summer riding camps and provided stables for local horses.

In the early morning of July 27, 2001, about 80 horses were sheltered at the ranch when a fire broke out in one of the barns. Workmen from the under-construction Gaylord hotel spotted the blaze and called the fire department. 33 fire personnel responded to the blaze, but 7 horses and one pony perished in the fire, and the 19th-century barn was destroyed. Although a temporary barn was quickly raised, plans for a permanent replacement ran into trouble. What had been unincorporated open country land a century earlier was now hemmed in by a lake, a large hotel complex, an airport, a rapidly growing city, and all sorts of rules, regulations, and requirements. In 2006 the Brunson family made the decision to relocate to Tyler, where new generations continue to run an equestrian center, now called the Texas Rose Horse Park.

The Gaylord Texan has consumed much of the nearby property, reshaping and reducing the once giant homestead to just a couple of buildings. But behind the 1890s-era buildings, where Lake Grapevine fingers its way through what was once a creek bed, there’s still an earthenware mound that divides the waters visible on Google Earth - the old 1933 dam that once created a Silver Lake.

Larry Groebe
Black-Eyed Peas and New Year’s

Did you remember to eat your black-eyed peas this New Year’s Day? For at least 1,500 years, eating the peas on January 1 is believed to give you good luck and prosperity in the coming year, but how did this tradition begin? There may be as many legends about how this custom began as there are peas in a bowl.

One legend dates back to Sherman’s March to the Sea during the final days of the Civil War. Sherman and his men pillaged and stole all the animals and crops they could find, but left the black-eyed peas untouched - believing they were only fit for animal consumption. Southerners felt lucky to have been left with a basic food to help them get through the winter and peas became a symbol of good luck. An interesting story but since Sherman's March was during the winter months in 1864 - it is unlikely they would have encountered standing crops of black-eyed peas. Another belief is the peas are a symbol of African-American emancipation from slavery, who were officially freed in parts of the country on New Year's Day after the Civil War.

Believed to have originated in West Africa, the black-eyed pea is grown and consumed throughout the world today. West Africans have long considered black-eyed peas as a good luck charm that warded off the Evil Eye. Slave ships relied on the peas as the primary food to sustain the enslaved families on their long trek to North America. It was recorded as a crop in Virginia during the 17th century and Thomas Jefferson grew them in his Monticello garden.

The tradition of eating black-eyed peas with rice is of African origin and spread throughout the Southern United States. In Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago it is a tradition to cook rice and black-eyed peas in a dish called “cook up rice” that is served on New Year’s. According to their local tradition “cook up rice” should be the first thing consumed at the start of the new year. Talmud, the Hebrew text written around 500 AD, states it was a Jewish custom to eat black-eyed peas on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year.

Photo by Getty Images

Perhaps the James Beard Award-winning chef and writer, Adrian Miller, best summarizes the New Year's black-eyed pea custom, “So now you know the recipe for an enduring tradition - Take one part European superstition, one part West African culinary memory, one part cultural exchange, combine in the antebellum South, and let simmer for a couple of centuries.”

John Boyd

“No matter where you stand, no matter how much popularity you have, no matter how much education you have, no matter how much money you have, you have it because somebody in this universe helped you to get it. And when you see that, you can’t be arrogant, you can’t be supercilious. You discover that you have your position because of the events of history and because of individuals in the background making it possible for you to stand there.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Grapevine Valentines’
Sexy Legs
1939 Style

Calvin Price Dorman left his memoirs in the book “Life on the Grapevine Prairie,” which is available for purchase at the Grapevine Historical Museum when we reopen. In his book he recounts his experience of working at Buckner’s Cash Store in 1939 when “Nylon Hosiery Comes To Town.” $700 in 1939 equals $12,950 today! Who was the enterprising sister-in-law who authorized the first order? Find out next month!

Sallie Andrews

“On a quiet day, with the storeowner and manager out on other activities, a salesman from Rollins Hosiery called displaying a line of nylon women’s hose replacing their silk hosiery. At this time, we were not a Rollins customer. Wholesale companies liked to do business with Buckner’s Store because of its large market share and history of prompt payment of invoices. This salesman showed the new nylon line to the main dry goods clerk who was the storeowner’s sister-in-law. She called me over from hardware and asked me to take a look at the line and sales contract. After a brief assessment, I told her it looked good but I was not telling her to buy since I had no such authority. She did place a sizable order to cover the several sizes, different lengths and several color shades. I knew that she had placed an order but she told no one else of her action.

“Several weeks later, a huge box arrived with an invoice of about $700. The storeowner and manager were present and she said I encouraged her to buy. The manager stayed out of the ensuing discussion not wanting to criticize the owner’s sister-in-law. Mr. Buckner, without looking at the sales contract, took me aside and wanted to know what convinced me that this was a good deal. I explained that I had recently bought my two sisters each a pair of silk hose and had to go up the street because of the poor selection in our store and paid $1.29 for each pair. Also the new nylon hosiery came three in a box, individually wrapped, with size, length and color on the box. The wholesale price was 60 cents per pair which could be sold at 89 cents for a one-third margin of profit. This wholesale price was guaranteed for one year. The contract also gave Buckner’s exclusive sales rights for two Year’s in Grapevine. Finally, I said the contract had a 2% discount if paid in ten days. To my relief, he said, “We will take that.” Meanwhile his wife had bought three pair and suggested that the existing silk hose be put on a closeout sale. This was done and an ad was displayed, touting nylon hosiery, on the screen of the local theatre, also owned by Mr. Buckner. I don’t remember receiving any complimentary hose but my sisters soon switched to the new nylon fashion.”
2021 GHS Membership

Happy New Year everyone and I hope this message finds you well and staying safe! The dawn of a welcomed new year means it is time to renew your Historical Society Membership. We are excited to tell you there are simplified options to renew in 2021! You can now sign-up and pay All membership levels Online with a credit card on the Grapevine Historical Society webpage at http://grapevinehistory.org or you can complete the attached Membership Application or download the application from the webpage and mail a check. As always, we thank you for helping us spread the word about our organization and encouraging other friends to join. Jan Luers

COVID-19 Vaccination

First, check with your medical doctor on your best way to get scheduled for a vaccine. However, you can also register directly with Tarrant County to get a vaccine: www.tarrantcounty.com/endCOVID

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Future Meetings

At this time we have no scheduled meetings or an opening date for our museum. Continue to watch our newsletters, emails and website as we strive to resume meetings and events as soon as it is safely possible.
Grapevine Historical Society
2021 Membership Application
(Dues are payable annually in January)

[ ] New Member [ ] Renewing Member [ ] Business Organization

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** Business level & above will receive special recognition in publications & directory
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