

Continuation of;
THE PROMISED LAND - A HISTORY OF BROWN COUNTY, TEXAS
by James C. White

(15) Williams Ranch Bloomed and Died

A GHOST TOWN with a historic past but an unpromising future is Williams Ranch, formerly included within the territory allotted to Brown County but separated from the Promised Land when Mills County was formed in 1887 by taking parts of Brown, Lampasas, Comanche and Hamilton counties. If unsupported legends are true, Williams Ranch was first settled a year before the Chandler settlement at Brownwood; but the real date is obscure. John Williams, a native of Tennessee, is said to have settled at the site of the ranch in 1855. Another report is that a man named Russell was the first settler there, about 1855, and that a Mr. Jackson was the first to make his home in the neighborhood, at the site of what was known later as the Jackson Springs. However this may be, it is certain that Williams Ranch settlement dates from the very earliest frontier period.

Due to the fact that it was on the route from Austin to Fort Concho (San Angelo) it was visited often by travelers, and within a few years became a real metropolis of this section of the state. Today there is only a small community there, with only the dilapidated remains of buildings which once housed important enterprises-ruins that are mute reminders of the departed glory of a frontier village which, it is said, finally was wrecked by internecine strife among its own people rather than by adversity having its origin elsewhere.

John Williams came to Texas from Missouri, and lived and died on the ranch to which he gave his name. His body, with those of his wife and other relatives, lies in the old cemetery, on an elevation in front of the site where the old Williams Ranch school building once stood. Williams, it is believed, had no intention of making his permanent home here, but stopped at the remarkable springs which used to flow there, and after finding the location a pleasant one remained to make his home.

A son of the founder, J. D. (or J. T.) Williams, was the directing genius in back of most of the little community's development. He built a mill, housed in a stone building and serving the pioneers of a large section. The town reached its peak as a business center in the early eighties, when it accumulated several business enterprises, a hotel, several saloons, a telegraph office and other accoutrements of civilization.

The town was a meeting place for stockmen of this area, who gathered there to discuss sale settlements, plan drives and attend to other matters. The hotel, known as the Florida Hotel, was a pretentious hostelry for its day and time, operated by Captain A. A.

Hutchinson, from Florida. It was a two story structure of many rooms, and housed from time to time many notable people. General Robert E. Lee passed through Williams Ranch while moving a detachment of troops to Fort Griffin from the now defunct port of Indianola, on the Gulf coast. Judge Bert Holden, of the Mississippi Supreme Court, spent some of his youth there. Samuel W. T. Lanham, later a member of Congress, was a frequent visitor at the Ranch.

The telegraph line was built from Austin to Fort Concho about 1876, and the operator at the Ranch is said to have been a nine year old girl, little Hallie Hutchinson, daughter of the hotel proprietor. A little later the telegraph was replaced by a telephone line which at that time was declared to be the longest line in the world.

Alex Ware, Charlie Ware, Tol Ware, William Ware and Dick Ware, with their father, B. F. Ware, operated the leading mercantile establishment. Dick Ware later was made a U. S. marshal and killed the notorious desperado, Sam Bass, at Round Rock. First resident preacher in the Ranch was J. C. Combs, a Baptist from Mississippi, who preached there in 1877. The following year the first Methodist preacher, M. W. Weatherby, came to the Community. He was the ancestor of the Weatherby families now living in Brown, Mills and San Saba counties.

A story of unidentified origin, probably written in the early eighties, was found a few years ago in a scrapbook of the late Henry Ford, Brown county pioneer banker. The story tells, among other things, of the strife which seems finally to have broken up the community, and names several early settlers whose families are actively identified with Brown County history. The story reads in part as follows:

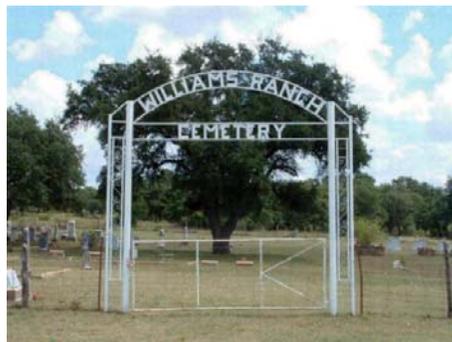
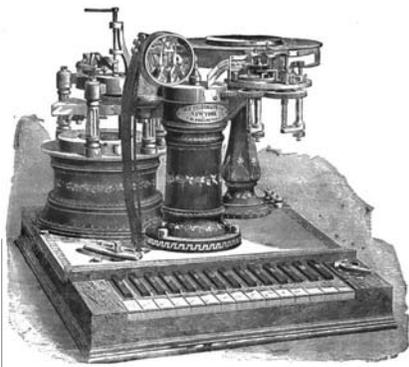
"Williams Ranch was once a lively and thriving village of about 175 inhabitants, situated in the southeastern part of Brown County, surrounded by an industrious and enterprising community of farmers and livestock men. "The first settlement made at Williams Ranch was by a gentleman named Russell, in the year about 1855. Next came a Mr. Jackson with his family who, perhaps, was the first white man to discover what is known as Jackson Springs, to which he removed, and was with his entire family soon after murdered by the merciless Comanche. (This tragedy may be confused with the murder of Mose Jackson and most of his family at another location in Brown county in the early days.) It is said that having returned from a cattle drive, a short time prior to the murder, having a considerable amount of money, he buried .it in some secluded spot known only to himself and his brave, beautiful daughter, a maiden of uncommon intelligence and sagacity, who with the balance of the family was a victim of the red devils' knives, and it is unknown to this day the whereabouts of the hidden treasure. "Next came uncle Jimmy (J. C.) Jones, J. R. (Charles?) Mullins, old Uncle Johnny Williams, with four grownup Tennessee boys, Wm. L., James D., John T. and G. W. together with Bud and Bob Forsythe and Moccasin John Bishop, who with the assistance of the Chandler negroes -Albert, Tobe and John - with the Connors, Vanns and others, redeemed by their bravery, skill and frontier

hardihood and vigilance the village and its magnificent surroundings from anarchy and Indian raiders to civilization and prosperity. About this time there came upon the scene our much esteemed fellow townsman, Henry Ford, who with his manly intelligence, accomplished much not only for our immediate vicinity but for Brown County generally. Although of a naturally retiring disposition and modest mein, he was bound to go to the front in the march of progress and civilization, and was an inspiration and exemplar of honorable manhood and good citizenship. Also with him came John M. Parks and a Mr. Walker, and others who added strength and intelligence to the now important settlements. "Up to this time peace, quiet, confidence and good will reigned supreme. Subsequently a feud arose between the 'old comers' and the 'new comers,' which led to the formation of what was the so-called 'Honest Man's Club,' in the formation of which many good and honorable men were apparently proscribed, which as a matter of course, led to a deadly hatred and combination of another party, who charged the other with being a secret organization for 'violence and bloodshed' called the 'Trigger Mountain Mob,' Crimination and recrimination was the natural consequence.

Dr. T. B. East was notoriously the leader in this section of the so-called 'Trigger Mountain Mob,' and John M. Parks, who was a wily, shrewd and brave man, naturally led the other party, finally culminating in an attempted assassination of Parks. Both of these parties contained good men and both contained bad men; the consequence was a very bad name for Williams Ranch, and the prime cause, perhaps, for her untimely demise.

"Around and contiguous to the Ranch are some of the finest agricultural lands, interspersed with a quality of grazing lands never, perhaps, to be invaded by plough, yet producing an excellent grass, in quantity sufficient for small stocks of cattle, sheep, goats, horses and hogs, suited to the demands of small and independent farmers. The commercial prosperity of the Ranch was proverbially astounding up to August, 1881."

One factor contributing to the decline of Williams Ranch probably was the failure of the Santa Fe railway company to build its line through the community, in the middle eighties.





ELIZABETH C.
Wife of
W. J. FORSYTH
BORN
July 24, 1847.
DIED
Nov. 7, 1934.