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*Thanks for allowing  
Lawrence to record  
our history -  
Sonja Clayton*



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# SEVENTEEN

## CHIMNEY CREEK RANCH: AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT AND PERSONAL VIEW OF A SHACKELFORD COUNTY RANCHING HERITAGE

### THE BEGINNING

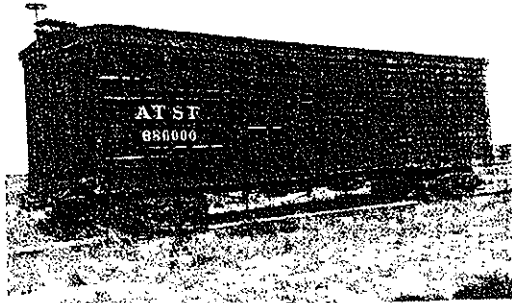
Southwest of present-day Albany the land rises on limestone hills where, especially in rare wet spring seasons, the rolling landscape is covered with waving grasses and wildflowers. Even in the more frequent dry years rich grasses sustain wildlife and livestock, although in some places the land is choked by mesquite, prickly pear, and other thorny brush. Before the white man came, this then almost treeless plain was the range of buffalo and Comanche Indians, lords of the South Plains, who trailed the migrating herds, and from the backs of their fleet horses, took from the moving brown masses what they needed for life—food, clothing, and shelter. Legend says one of the nearby canyons was a commonly used route over which the Indians traveled as they moved in their annual migration. It is an eerie feeling to look over these panoramic landscapes from the high ground at the junction of State Highways 351,

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180, and 6, and imagine those horsemen of old riding past.

Today, this is cattle country. It has been since the great buffalo hunts in the 1870s eliminated the shaggy bisons from the Plains and, in 1874, Col. Ranald Mackenzie ended the threat of Plains Indian hostility. This was unfenced range in those days, but adventurous men came, tamed the wild cattle, and dug in deep to make homes here.



Cattle Car at the Chimney Creek Ranch

Ranches in this area today are well fenced and cross fenced. Cattle drink from carefully monitored stock tanks. Modern grazing practices prevail and blooded cattle roam where once longhorns grazed almost as freely as buffalo had. How this land was brought under fence can be illustrated by several of the area ranches, but an excellent example is the Chimney Creek Ranch, located west of Highway 351 about fourteen miles west of Albany. Highways 180 and 6 run across the northern part of the ranch.

When this was open range, the land and its rich grasses belonged to whoever controlled it. No thought was given to ownership. As the frontier became settled, this feeling changed; people began to homestead or buy property at very low cost. The formal ownership lineage of the property on which Chimney Creek Ranch and a Butterfield Stage station rest is somewhat detailed, and characteristic of many ownership changes. Joe Blanton's research of the records indicates that the first owners of part of the property were George B. and John F. Horsful. They conveyed it to A.W. Rhode on June 19, 1883, and he sold it to Joseph Kite on August 15, less than two months later. Nearly six years later, on February 28, 1889, the property was patented by Governor L.S. Ross to R.B. Thompson, a trustee of the estate of the late Joseph Kite. J.M. Kite, a descendant

of Joseph Kite, and his wife transferred ownership of the land to Virginia A. King on January 12, 1903.

The most historic portion of the ranch, however, was that which Frank Conrad came into control of on December 19, 1888, including surveys nos. 220 and 221 of the East Texas Railroad State School land in Shackelford County, Texas. Running across this part of the property is a small creek flowing from the northwest to the east and then south. Called Chimney Creek, it is thought to have been named, Joan Farmer says, "because of the old chimney still standing from the Overland Mail Station established there." A.C. Greene in his classic *A Personal Country*, ponders the reason for the name because when he visited there he found no trace of chimney or cabin.

One of the principal historical attractions on Chimney Creek Ranch is the site of Smith Station, a stop on the old Butterfield-Overland Mail Line, whose coaches once charged across the prairie. John Butterfield's Overland Mail Company began service on September 16, 1858, when the initial coach left St. Louis, Missouri, headed for San Francisco, thus linking the still sparsely settled area along the Mississippi River with the pockets of civilization on the West Coast. The line cut its way along the 32nd parallel across vast stretches of territory still hostile from the threat of Indians, weather, and geography. It was indeed a bold step.

In order to accomplish the trip of 2,700 miles in just over twenty days (the first trip took twenty-three days and twenty-three hours), the stage needed fresh mules at regular intervals. In the area near Chimney Creek, these were obtained at Fort Belknap, on the Brazos River in present-day Young County, near Graham. Later, Franz Station would be built between there and Clear Fork Station on the banks of the Clear Fork of the Brazos. Then the stops were Smith Station and Fort Phantom Hill, the old military fort by this time abandoned and burned. The road continued to Abercrombie Pass and Fort Chadbourne, then on to Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos River, and eventually to San Francisco.

Waterman L. Ormsby rode this first coach as a newspaper corre-

spondent and describes the area of interest. At Clear Fork Station, later Stribling Station, he says, "A log hut and corral were under construction." At Smith Station, twenty-three miles south, the line's employees lived in a tent, and a corral of brush was "nearly finished." Ormsby notes there was no timber nearby to use in constructing a pole corral. The chinks in the brush corral were filled with mud. For supper, Mrs. Smith offered "cake cooked in the coals, clear coffee, and some dried beef cooked in [her] best style." Little other record of Smith Station remains. A station house was eventually constructed of the useable chunks of limestone found in the area, and it stood unnoticed for decades. When historians and archeologists began searching for the structure, however, no trace could be found. It was later discovered that it had fallen victim to "progress." The stone had been sold to be crushed by a contractor who used the resulting gravel to form part of the base for nearby State Highway 351. Later, removal of mesquite brush by dragging a heavy chain across the area scattered any remaining evidence. The landmark is irretrievably lost, but in 1992, an archeology team from the Texas Archeological Research Library began studying the site to determine the accuracy of the location and to find any remaining artifacts.

During the late years of the 1870s or early '80s, a house was erected on the property by persons presently unknown. What is certain, however, is that the structure was adapted to the needs and potential dangers of the frontier setting. This original dwelling is today part of the north side of the main house on Chimney Creek Ranch. Built of native limestone quarried from near the site, the square house consisted of a bedroom and a living room with a fireplace all on one level. Legend has it that Confederate arms were once cached here, in case there was a need to fight the Yankees during the Civil War, but the probable time of construction, the 1870s, likely makes this account legendary rather than factual. Up about five steps was another level, which included a second bedroom with a screened-in porch. A separate kitchen stood away from the house, and the privy was down the slope from the kitchen. Between the

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house and the privy stood a springhouse, a small structure covered in the summer by trumpet vines, and naturally cooled by spring water flowing through it.

The coming of the railroad eliminated the need for trail drives to markets. This expanding rail system brought the demise of bypassed towns and gave birth or new life to others. This was the case for Fort Griffin and Albany. When the fort closed, the buffalo were all killed, and the railroad passed Fort Griffin by in favor of Albany, Frank Conrad and other citizens left the banks of the Clear Fork in search of a better life. The Texas Central Railroad made Albany a far better choice for a businessman, so Conrad reopened his mercantile business there in early 1882. Conrad ran a successful business. In her application to the Texas State Historical Commission for a marker for the Bud Matthews railroad pens, Joan Farmer quotes one of Conrad's advertisements in the Albany News: "We were here in Indian times, we sold goods in soldier times. We did a little business here in buffalo times. We went slow here in hard times. We handled wool here in sheep man's times. We boomed things in booming times." Indeed, Conrad had seen the boom and bust of the frontier economy. Conrad sold his store in 1891 to devote full time to ranching. For unknown reasons, he committed suicide on May 4, 1892, the day he turned fifty years of age. He left Ella, his wife, with five children between the ages of two and ten. Following her husband's death, Mrs. Conrad relied heavily on the advice of her brother, John A. Matthews, area rancher and prominent county judge. His son, Watt Matthews, can recall traveling by buggy and wagon to visit his Aunt Ella. He remembers that his father and mother sat on the front seat because his father drove the team, and the children sat in the back. They followed the rutted trail of the Butterfield-Overland Mail, which provided the most direct route across their Lambshead Ranch to Smith Station on Chimney Creek Ranch.

No doubt with the encouragement of Matthews, Mrs. Conrad granted a right-of-way to the Texas Central Railroad Company to lay railroad tracks through her property, to move the line toward Stamford in 1900, and then on to Rotan by 1906. A set of cattle pens

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and a loading chute, to enable Mrs. Conrad and her neighbors to load cattle into railroad cars for shipment to market in the northern and eastern outlets, was designed and constructed by Mr. Matthews, and named "Matthews, Texas," by Mrs. Conrad. When she learned that the name "Matthews" was already used by the railroad to designate another site, she added her brother's nickname to make it "Bud Matthews, Texas." It was located at Texas Central Milepost No. 201.9, a number meaning the distance of this point from Waco, Texas. Farmer notes that many ranchers are known to have used the facility over the following years, including the Monroe Cattle Company, which controlled about 30,000 acres of range nearby; George W. P. Coates, whose ranch was southeast of the pens about five miles; Reynolds Cattle Company; W. I. Cook; Dawson and Company; and the Rafter Three Ranch.

On July 20, 1909, Mrs. Conrad purchased additional property from Virginia King to swell the acreage of Chimney Creek Ranch to 14,000.

#### G.R. DAVIS—THE LEGACY BEGINS

In 1920 the ranch was purchased from the Ella Conrad heirs—John N., Louie B., and George Reynolds Conrad—by George Robert Davis, a member of one of several families already established in ranching east of Breckenridge. G.R. was born July 18, 1869, one of eight children of John Love Davis and Loiza Crawford Davis. The family came to Stephens County in 1890 from Kaufman, east of Dallas. These early families made an impact on the area. G.R.'s sister Alice married Breck, actually Breckenridge, Walker, regarded as the first white child born at a settlement in Stephens County. The town of Breckinridge is named for him. Today it is the county seat of Stephens County and is an important trading center.

G.R. married Hattie Collins (born January 19, 1870), remembered by her granddaughter, Mary Frances "Chan" Driscoll, as "a delicate, sensitive, pretty school teacher." G.R. himself she recalls as a hard-working, intelligent, personable, honest rancher, who soon became the village druggist as well. Davis sold ranch property east

of Breckenridge to pay for the Chimney Creek Ranch, and enlarged the original house by adding first a dining room and then a makeshift kitchen. Later, Mr. Davis bought another house and moved it to the site, where he joined all the units together to form a single dwelling. This latter section provided room for a spacious kitchen and pantry, and allowed the old kitchen to become a dining room. In the 1920s he arranged construction of a rock wall around the yard and, north of the house, a small bunkhouse for the cowboys. A large barn constructed of sheet iron on a wooden framework, which stands to the northeast of the house, served to store feed and shelter animals and wagons. Built around the turn of the century, it has been strengthened and modernized, but it still has the flavor of an old ranch barn. South of the house stood a carriage house that sheltered the Davis's car until the structure was torn down because of damage by termites and habitation by skunks.

Mr. Davis granted an easement to the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad Company and agreed to construct "stock pens and cattle concentration yards." From these pens cattle continued to be shipped, especially by the Davis family, to pastures operated by Glen Hawthorne in Eureka, Kansas. There the stock was pastured and then shipped to feedlots, or to market in Kansas City. Later shipments went to Fort Worth by rail and truck. The MKT agreed to an annual payment of \$9.65 for a period of fifteen years, and further agreed to negotiate the contract on an annual basis for as long as the agreement was beneficial to both parties. Farmer notes that these new pens were enlargements of the existing pens at Bud Matthews switch. The MKT evidently used the existing rails for access because only one set of tracks has ever crossed the ranch. The agreement later terminated at an unknown date, and the rails have since been removed.

G.R. Davis ran the ranch from its purchase in 1920 until his death on December 31, 1955. The operation produced quality Hereford cattle and horses trained for cattle work, not for the show ring or racetrack. During many of these years he was aided by the efforts of his son, Louie.



## CHIMNEY CREEK RANCH

As G.R. grew older, Louie's role in running the ranch became significant, especially during the middle fifties when a terrible drought gripped the area. Frugal by nature, Louie kept a tight grip on the operation and saw it through the trials of a time when many ranchers went broke and gave up. The ranch was his life, and he was uncomfortable any time he was away from it. He was both a good cowboy and a good rancher/businessman, and he devoted his life to Chimney Creek Ranch.

On days when the ranch conducted its annual roundup and shipping, the work began early. Cowboys from other ranches had risen well before daylight, saddled their horses, and ridden in to help. No trailers were available to haul horses in those days. Pastures were large and required many riders spreading the dragnet to assure gathering all the cattle, a chore which usually required until nearly noon to accomplish.

The lunch of chuckwagon food typically included roast beef, pinto beans, cole slaw, sliced tomatoes, lightbread, and coffee. Peach pickles or homemade pies served as dessert. Mrs. Davis herself prepared this food and had it ready for the crew when the appropriate time came.

After the men had lunch, they separated the stock into desired groupings, and those animals to be shipped were loaded aboard rail cars and started on the long journey to Kansas City, Fort Worth, or some other distant market. A problem that regularly caused difficulty around railroad shipping corrals was an apparent requirement that the train crew had to sound the whistle on the train at given times. This whistle blowing often interfered with gathering the cattle. Unaccustomed to this sound, cows became extremely frightened and tended to bolt wildly into stampede when the whistle surprised them. More than one crew of cowboys had to repeat rounding up the cattle after an engineer had seen fit to sound his whistle.

After many years living on the ranch, the Davis family moved to Abilene to a house which they had built at 718 Victoria Street. Mrs. Davis had longed for a prairie mansion in town, and Mr. Davis built a fine one, with three floors, a basement, and servants' quarters over

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a two-car garage. After years of heavy labor, Mrs. Davis had a maid to help with the hard work, and the family assumed the lifestyle of the cattle baron, alongside such other ranching families in Abilene as the Guitars, Caldwells, and others. Mr. Davis also purchased other ranches; the Throckmorton County ranch, part of which is now called Comanche Crest, earlier known as Box Springs, was bought in the late 1930s from Reynolds Cattle Company. In the 1940s, Mr. Davis purchased a ranch located on FM 1492 between Midland/Odessa and Crane in Upton County. He knew the land was of little use in ranching, but its potential for mineral income would later be important to the family. The part of the Box Springs Ranch inherited by Mary Frances Driscoll has been named Comanche Crest by the family. Her portion of the Upton County ranch is known as Buffalo Basin.

During this time, oil was discovered on the Davis property. Near Chimney Creek Ranch, on a draw southwest of the headquarters, a large power "station" was constructed in the 1930s to help pump some of the oil wells in the area. Referred to by the family members as "The Power," it was a device featuring a large wheel to which several cables were attached. The cables ran exposed over the top of the ground, and were kept out of the dirt by threading them through holes or "eyes" cut in pipe set upright in the ground. These cables provided the power to pumpjacks of six to eight oil wells in the vicinity. The entire unit was run, Louie Bob Davis remembers, by a very noisy pumping unit likely fueled by natural gas from one of the wells. The device was certainly an awesome sight on the rolling prairies of Shackelford County.

Once the family had moved to town, G.R. regularly came to the ranch to supervise its operation. Louie had primary responsibility for much of this work, with the help of a man whose efforts at Chimney Creek and other Davis ranches came to be appreciated by the family.

Grady Smith began working for the Davises in the spring of 1924, first on a ranch near Chimney Creek, formerly owned by the Cauble family. Later Smith moved to Chimney Creek, living and

working as a foreman on the ranch for several years. When the Davises moved to Abilene, the Smith family moved into the main ranch house, and two of the Smith's children were born. Florene, one of the Smith's daughters, recalls sleeping on the screened-in porches during the warm months. She has very fond recollections of playing outdoors around the back of the house during the summer when the weather was simply splendid. She also remembers sleeping in the north bedroom during the wintertime. Her principal recollection of the large basement underneath the house is that on more than one occasion her parents heard rattlesnakes there. Since snakes have long been a problem in this part of the country, it was not unusual to find them in such a setting. She does recall that her father killed snakes in that basement. Mr Davis also left a loaded Colt .45 caliber pistol for her mother to use against snakes when he was gone. On one occasion, Florene remembers, her mother saw a snake not far from where the girls were playing. After she had moved them safely into the house, she emptied the gun into the snake and literally shot it to pieces.

Florene's recollections also include going to Albany to school. On the neighboring Buck Nail Ranch, a family named Meadows had a daughter who joined her on the school bus. Also on an adjacent ranch was a family named Harris, whose children made the bus ride from the ranch country into Albany to school.

Smith's routine work on the ranch ran as did that of most other cowboys—sunup to sundown, seven days a week. He spent many hours riding horseback, checking cattle in the pastures five days a week, usually Monday through Friday, and then Saturdays and Sundays were spent building or repairing fences, or performing other tasks required to keep the place going during those depression years when everyone was strapped financially, and had to carry the load regardless of the imposition.

Florene has strong memories of the people who visited the ranch, especially those from the Swenson Ranches, one of which was located near Lueders. In addition to Eric Swenson, one of the family members was a man whose reputation lives on, "Scandalous" John

Selmon figured prominently in Swenson Ranch history for many years, and his role in the Texas Cowboy Reunion at Stamford is fondly remembered by those who attended during the long time he was active.

Smith's role with respect to the Bud Matthews' pens is also noteworthy. Around 1930 Smith undertook the task of rebuilding the pens. He made a deal with Parker Sears, who ran a lumber yard in Albany, to purchase pine lumber for the project. The lumber, as Florene recalls, was beautiful pine that did not warp when left out in the sun and was free of knots, certainly a remarkable condition considering the inferior quality of contemporary pine lumber. Smith hauled the lumber from Albany to the site in a new 1929 Ford truck which, characteristic of motor vehicles of the day, could not carry much weight but finally accomplished the task. During these depression years, cash payment for the lumber was supplemented by a number of swine raised on the ranch. Sears took the hogs in trade and sent them to East Texas, where members of his family had a great deal of corn available to feed the hogs. For many years thereafter, Sears humorously reminded Smith how disastrous the trade had proved for him because he ended up selling the hogs for less than he had allowed Smith on the trade. The posts, used in the repair of the pens, though of poor quality because the bottom ends were so much larger than the tops, were purchased by Louie Davis and Mr. Smith in Palo Pinto, a community in a cedar growing area between Albany and Fort Worth. Smith's efforts, however, kept the pens from falling into complete disrepair for many years.

One amusing incident related to the use of the pens involves the time when persons, whose identity Florene cannot recall, drove a herd of buffalo into the pens with the intention of shipping the animals out by rail. Buffalo are very difficult to manage, but the cowboys finally succeeded in penning them in the corrals, which held up to their battering. Once the rail cars were in place, the men began loading, but the buffalo, distressed at being confined, began bursting boards off the sides of the rail cars. The conductor, a man who had some ranch experience himself, encouraged the men, "You

men need to get these animals loaded and gone before they tear up those cars." Florene recalls that the project succeeded, but barely, and only because of the strength of the lumber used in the construction of the cars.

Another amusing anecdote from the above story involved Eric Swenson who, like many a cowboy, had a desire to rope one of the buffalo bulls. Grady Smith wisely declined the opportunity, but when Eric said, "If I head him, will you heel him?" Grady responded in the affirmative, but was relieved when Eric changed his mind and decided not to rope the bison.

Later, Smith was moved to the Goodwyn Ranch, adjacent to the Cauble, when the Davises bought it in 1937. In all, he worked for the Davis family for nineteen years. He left ranch work in 1945 because he had not fully recovered from an injury sustained earlier when, as he stepped up onto a horse, his foot slipped and he pulled the horse over onto himself. Smith felt he could no longer contribute to the workload on the ranch. He purchased a store in Hamby, between the ranch and Abilene and operated it for many years. The Davises were good customers. Grady Smith died December 16, 1986.

Other cowboys who helped run the ranch over the years included Clarence Holt, and Lewis Burfield, and Duncan Leech. Leech lived on Chimney Creek Ranch when G.R. Davis passed away.

#### THE CHILDREN OF G.R. DAVIS

The family of G.R. Davis consisted of three children—Louie, Robbie, and Oma Frances, whose nickname was Pet. Louie and Oma remained at home and took care of the parents until late in the lives of these children. Louie married Ouida Beavers in 1938, and they had one son, Louie Bob. Louie died March 29, 1966, and his wife died June 24, 1987. Oma married Claude Touchstone. She died tragically in an automobile accident near Merkel in the summer of 1941 while still a young woman, on her way to visit the new infant, Louie Bob Davis.

On July 18, 1921, on Chimney Creek Ranch the second child,

Robbie, married T. Edgar Johnson, a lawyer trained at the University of Texas and Oxford University. The ceremony was held under the large pecan tree in the backyard of the main house. Johnson practiced law in Breckenridge but, in those depression days, his clients were often unable to pay for services rendered. With the help of his father-in-law, Johnson purchased a Ford automobile agency in Vernon. He added a Ford tractor distributorship and other outlets, for not only for Ford products, but for Lincoln and Mercury as well. Mr. Johnson came to bill himself as the oldest car dealer in North Texas.

On April 20, 1922, Robbie gave birth to Mary Frances. Because of Robbie's many physical problems, Mary Frances spent a great deal of time on Chimney Creek Ranch with her grandparents, and grew to love it. She spent every summer there in her early years. She recalls seeing bob white quail and other game, but especially clear are her memories of Uncle Louie using string to harness two large grasshoppers to an empty match box for a make-believe stagecoach to go along with his stories of the Butterfield Stage stop on the ranch.

Mary Frances recalls that the regular meat choice for Sunday lunch was chicken in those early days. She can still remember watching her grandmother wring the chicken's neck. The flock of chickens from which this Sunday lunch regularly came had to be penned up at night to keep predators from killing them.

Other memories are strong. Like many families in similar situations, they made lye soap in the washpot, with lye leached from the ashes of the fireplace and cooking fires. There was an outhouse, with a half moon cut in the door, featuring facilities for two people, thus being called a two-holer, complete with the Montgomery Ward catalog. The ranch had no electricity, so lighting came from kerosene lamps. Butter was churned from cream which rose to the top of the milk from a cow kept for the purpose, and canning provided vegetables during the winter. There was a smokehouse where pork was cured. Mary Frances remembers that her grandmother taught her to cook and sew, and "Mamaw," as she was called by her only grand-

daughter, patiently pieced quilts to provide colorful coverings for the family bedding. This kind of life was normal for many families of this period. Cattle and horse operations continued in much the same manner with shipping still done from the Bud Matthews Switch.

Upon the death of G.R. Davis on December 31, 1955, Robbie Davis Johnson inherited Chimney Creek Ranch from her father. Mrs. Johnson knew that she would be unable to operate it, so on July 1, 1957, Mrs. Johnson leased the ranch to C.B. "Charlie" Waller and Robert and Ruby Waller, operating as Waller Cattle Company. Thus began the period of absentee landlords on Chimney Creek Ranch.

Waller Cattle Company has been productive. Charlie, along with his wife Ella, ran the ranch in partnership with their son, Robert, and his wife. When Charlie died December 28, 1973, Robert, a Texas A&M University graduate, continued operating the ranch, and later formed a partnership with his son, Robert C., a graduate in Texas Tech University. Together, they have worked to improve the ranch in various ways. When Robert and his father first took over the ranch, the fourteen thousand acre spread was still in very large pastures. One pasture contained eleven sections. Ever since they have taken over, however, they have been cutting the pastures up into smaller, more manageable tracts. For example, on the southwest corner a four-section pasture has now been cut into four single-section pastures. Early fencing on the ranch was done with barbed wire and cedar posts, but in more recent times, five-wire construction on steel posts, with four-inch pipe corners set with braces has been used. Now, about two-thirds of the ranch is fenced in this more contemporary and longer-lasting fashion.

Water for the cattle comes from surface tanks, supplemented by water pumped from a well not far from the house into twenty-two knee tubs scattered across the ranch. These were originally metal tubs, but as the metal began to deteriorate, cement linings were placed in the tubs. Water is pumped by a one and one-half horse-power submersible pump, which in addition to keeping the tanks

full, also provides water for the house. The pipeline is of plastic pipe, either the kind glued together in sections or soft-laid plastic pipe.

Only five or six geldings trained for working cattle are kept on the ranch by the Wallers. When new horses are needed, the Wallers buy desirable animals rather than raising their own. Mr. Waller felt that ranchers raising their own horses have trouble getting the animals broken to ride and trained to work, and then face the dangers inherent in riding unpredictable young horses.

The Wallers' cattle operation includes about five hundred mother cows, a hundred and fifty replacement heifers, and about forty bulls, continuing the commercial cow-calf endeavor begun by the Davises. Originally, the ranch stocked Hereford cattle, but by 1973, the Wallers were using Black Angus bulls on first-calf heifers and keeping these cross-bred offspring as replacement heifers. Gradually, the Herefords were phased out in favor of the Angus crosses. Still later, looking for additional new blood to cross-breed with, the Wallers selected Chianina and black Maine Anjou bulls. They have also used Charolais and Limousin bulls. Although they keep a hundred registered Angus cows on the ranch, the Wallers buy Angus bulls from the R J Ranch at Briggs, and Chianina bulls from Black Champ at Waxahachie. The Maine Anjou bulls come from Billy Dillard and Herman Boone.

Shipping on the ranch is still done from the Bud Matthews pens. From the beginning of their time on the ranch until the early 1970s, the Wallers shipped on the railroad. In the early '70s, however, the tracks were torn up, and the Wallers began shipping by truck. On a typical shipping day around the first of June, nine or ten day workers are hired to help. The cattle are shipped out on large cattle vans provided by the contract buyer. The Wallers will congregate the cattle in one or two pastures close to the pens and, on shipping day, push them into the pens for separating and shipping. The pens have recently been restored and the original sign, rescued years ago by Watt Matthews and kept safely for the occasion, was returned to the site. Robert Waller can remember during his tenure shipping on the



railroad that such ranches as Bluff Creek, Cook, Dawson Conway, and McComas also shipped out of the pens. He thinks more cattle were shipped from the Bud Matthews pens than from the rail shipping point in Albany.

The cattle shipped from this area typically go to pasture, often wheat fields in Kansas and Nebraska, to condition and toughen them before going into the feedlot. Waller indicates that the calves coming off the cows are "juicy," with a low tolerance for disease. The animals need time on pasture to be ready for the feedlot.

One exception to this pattern occurred during the early 1970s when a government program caused large numbers of dairy cattle to be put on the slaughter beef market. The buyer contracted for that year declined to take the Wallers' cattle, and they were put into a feedlot. It was not a good experience because the calves were easy victims of disease and other ailments, and just did not grow off well. The government program helped dairy farmers but proved harmful to those raising beef cattle.

Ranches bordering Chimney Creek include the Newell Ranch across part of the east and the Merrick Davis Ranch on the south. About four miles of fenceline is shared with the Akers Ranch and the Buck Nail. Schkade Brothers, Pete Baker, and Dawson Conway touch the ranch on the west and part of the northwest. Bluff Creek Ranch covers the north boundary. About 1700 acres of the ranch is north of U.S. Highway 180 and State Highway 6.

Leasing of hunting rights for deer and quail on the ranch is handled by the owners. There are two hunter's cabins—a trailer house on the southern part of the ranch and a hunter's house on the northern part.

When Watt Matthews had the Buck Nail Ranch leased, he transplanted nineteen antelope onto the ranch. These later migrated to Chimney Creek Ranch. Rather than prospering, however, the group has shrunk to a small herd of six or eight antelope. Coyotes and poachers take too many of the animals. Waller has noticed that if any big bucks grow up in the herd, they soon disappear, probably victims of poachers. He also said that recently no buck had been

with the does on the ranch until the great range fire in the 1988 destroyed the net wire fencing and burned about 3,000 acres. Then a buck from the Akers Ranch came over. Net wire had been an effective barrier against antelope, because their tendency is to crawl under fences rather than to jump over them, as deer do.

Waller and his son, Robert C., are still running a prosperous ranching operation and providing an opportunity for Robert C. and Carolyn's children, Rob and Will, to grow up in a ranching atmosphere. Carolyn is a librarian in the Albany school system, and she and Robert C. live in town rather than on the ranch. This is a more convenient arrangement since children tend to be involved in school activities and unnecessary travel is required to get children to and from the ranch, especially since some of this must be done at night.

#### THE NEXT GENERATION

In 1973 the ownership of Chimney Creek Ranch passed to Mary Frances "Chan" Driscoll, the only surviving child of Robbie and T. Edgar Johnson. Robbie Lou, Mary Frances' sister, had died in infancy.

Mary Frances recalls clearly many of her adventures on the ranch, but one of those uppermost in her mind is her abortive career as a horsewoman. When she was small, her grandfather bought her a Shetland pony, and proudly outfitted it with a black saddle trimmed in white with silver mountings. On her first ride, the cankerous horse pitched her off and stepped on her stomach, a tactic requiring X-rays to determine that no serious damage had been done to her. From then on she rode only in front of her grandfather on his horse, if she rode at all. He enjoyed her company as he rode the pastures of Chimney Creek, checking stock, grass, and water. She never became an avid horsewoman, and later discovered she was allergic to horses. She still remembers that at summer girls' camps, especially the Glen Rose Girl Scout Camp, she was always expected to be an expert horsewoman because she was "a ranch girl." She never lived up to that expectation, and came to accept her non-equestrian preferences.

Under Mary Frances' ownership, Waller Cattle Company has continued to operate under a lease agreement. She maintains a small home on the ranch, a building constructed in the early 1980s just south of the main house, on the site of the old smokehouse and chicken coup, designed to be a very nice, modern, rural retreat or weekend cottage. There is a two-car carport on the north side, a stone fence around the yard, and an area for pitching horseshoes, playing baseball, croquet, badminton, as well as for target shooting. The décor features old wagon wheels. No all-night guard lights interrupt the serenity of the nights on Chimney Creek Ranch. Care is taken to watch for rattlesnakes, and many of them have been found and killed in the house area. Mary Frances often remarks, "This is my heaven on earth. Chimney Creek Ranch is a peaceful spot."

#### CONCLUSION

Today, Chimney Creek Ranch remains a working operation under the careful management of Robert and Robert C. Waller. In many ways it is unchanged. The waving grasses have flourished in the wet years of the early 1990s, and in the spring and summer sleek cattle and horses graze on the hillsides where the buffalo and Indians once roamed at will. The winter winds still whip across the land in the cold months, and the wild game flourishes. Admittedly, contemporary life has made its impression on the ranch in the form of improvements in watering facilities, fencing, brush and cacti control programs, and buildings. But the land still stands in mute testimony to its original condition, with its nourishing forage on the limestone enriched soil and its history stemming from the Butterfield Overland Mail and the other historical figures who once traveled the area: Waterman Ormsby, Robert E. Lee, and others.

Two historical markers on the ranch witness to the part played by the shipping pens at Bud Matthews Switch and by the Butterfield Overland Mail. The descendents of G.R. Davis are a credit to themselves for reserving for the rest of us these remnants of a past that reinforces our hold on the future.

APPENDIX

Two historical markers have been erected on the ranch property. The first, for Smith Station, erected in 1982, reads:

Smith's Station

From 1858 until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, a station of the Butterfield Overland Mail Route was located here. Despite a brief existence, it was an important stop on the early stage line that reached from Missouri to California. Stages made the trip in under 25 days, a marked improvement on earlier communication links with the rapidly developing West. Located on Chimney Creek between stage stops at Clear Fork (26 Mi. NE) and Fort Phantom Hill (12 Mi. SW), Smith's Station was the only Butterfield stop located in present Shackelford County.

The second marker is for Bud Matthews Switch, erected in 1993. It reads:

Bud Matthews Switch of the Texas Central Railway

In 1900 the Texas Central Railway extended a line Northwest from Albany across this portion of Rose Ella (Matthews) Conrad's cattle ranch. Ella and her brother John A. "Bud" Matthews, for whom this site is named, promptly constructed cattle pens and a loading chute at this location. Surrounding ranchers soon were shipping their cattle from this switch to markets in Fort Worth. As many as 105,000 head of cattle were shipped annually until the railroad ceased operations in 1967. Since that year local ranchers have continued to load cattle onto trucks from this site.

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