

# Worth Ranch History

## The Property—Before 1930

*By Majka and Moller*

The following paragraphs are excerpts from pieces still in the research and assembly stages that will one day go into a book on the history of Worth Ranch. Hopefully, you'll enjoy some light reading over the next several newsletters.

### Indians at Worth Ranch

Long before Boy Scouts arrived, what was to be known as Worth Ranch was the site of an Indian village. The people that lived here were probably a branch of the Wichita, part of the western most group of the Caddo Indians. They planted crops such as gourds and hunted the unlimited deer and buffalo in the area. Many of the Indians decorated their bodies with tattoos.

Evidence of the village can be found on the Worth Ranch parade ground. Raised circles of dirt - usually twenty two feet in diameter - mark where thatched huts made of branches and wood bark were located. The WR old-timers reported up to thirteen 'circles' or locations where these huts had been maintained. However, because of time and erosion, few of the circles now remain visible. The most prominent circle is just to the east of the infirmary building. Another circle is fading away near the old box hockey courts and two other circles are now enclosed in the fenced area by the cabin.

### Early settlers with whom we are familiar

Some of the river bends and landmarks are named for early settlers. Dalton Bend - just down river from WR - is named for Marcus Dalton, who arrived with his wife in the mid 1850s and ranched just northwest of the property. He drove cattle north for years, selling for a nice profit and raising a family on their prosperous ranch. In 1870, while returning from Kansas after selling 600 cattle for \$15,000, he dropped by relatives in Weatherford and purchased more items that he needed for the ranch and two trunks of things for his wife. On their way - he was accompanied by two of his wranglers - to the ranch, about a day's ride away, the three were ambushed by about 30 Indians and all killed before they could draw their guns. The person who found the corpses took everything back to Weatherford. When Mrs. Dalton arrived, she picked up a pair of very old boots that her husband had taken with him and quickly found \$11,500 in greenbacks, wadded up in the toe of one boot. The Indians were not interested in those boots, and it was the first time her husband had taken his payment in anything but gold coins. The Indians, of course, made off with the purchased horses, mules, clothes, tools and anything else they wanted.

Chick Bend is just slightly upriver from the boat docks at WR. 1978 Palo Pinto County History book mentions that Mr. Jim Chick and wife settled there in 1858. As he prospered because of good land and plenty of rain, more families moved there and they started the Chick

Bend School. Although a real town never got off the ground, the location was referred to as the Chick Bend Community, and the 1978 book describes the community as having more female children than male children, so that "the boys from other Bends would come and date the girls in Chick Bend and take them to church".

COL Simpson Crawford was another rancher who gave his name to one of the bends - upriver from WR - as his ranch, like Marcus Dalton's, was in the fertile Keechi Valley. He arrived in the 1850s and died naturally in 1908, having raised a large family. He had served in the Ross Brigade in the Mexican War and liked Texas so much that he immigrated here after mustering out of the army. He prospered well and left a large family when he passed away. One of the mesas to the southwest of WR is also named for this family.

### Victorian House

About a mile south of Dark Valley, 50 yards east of the highway, a wealthy county resident built a 4 story Victorian house around 1885. That site is pretty high and the view was spectacular from the upper floors. It was a real landmark on the landscape for its time. Sadly, the house burned completely prior to 1900. With no efficient means to fight the fire, the residents were helpless as buckets of water had no effect on the fire which could be seen from the hills in Mineral Wells. The stone sidewalk leading to the house from FM 4 was visible for decades as the last evidence of the structure.

### Wolf hunts

Around the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, wolf hunts were carried out in the area of Kyle Mountain. Wolves were the bane of ranchers and they offered a \$15 bounty on them. The County of Palo Pinto added another \$5 and the pelt could be sold for another \$5. In those days, that was a huge sum. The cowboys would socialize in their encampment at night, and head out with their mounts and dogs during the day to take the wolves. Junipers were not so prevalent then as now, because range fires would periodically clear woody growth, so riding pell mell through the scrub and live oaks which sometimes were able to grow above the grass fed fires, was fairly easy to do. John Winters, long time Palo Pinto County Clerk, said this was a great party time for all involved. Usually, punching cows was a lonely, solitary affair.

### Daniel Carter Beard and a real adventure for Scouts

Daniel Carter Beard was the first National Commissioner of the movement besides being one of the founders of the Boy

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Scouts of America. Obviously, he was an advocate of Scouting and cheered the program on at every opportunity.

While on a 1928 national promotional tour, Uncle Dan - the man with a million nephews - as he was to be called, visited Fort Worth and met with local Scout leaders. (While in Fort Worth, he also visited the family of his soon-to-be son-in-law.) Beard made a visit to Camp Leroy Shuman on Lake Worth, the council's only camp which had been in operation for several years and offered Scouts the opportunity to enjoy swimming and boating on the new lake. Much to the embarrassment of local leaders, Dan Beard declared Camp Shuman to be "too civilized".

Because of the continued growth in the number of boys becoming Scouts in the Fort Worth area, (and maybe also because of the observation of Commissioner Beard) a site for a new camp was sought in the late twenties. On February 22, 1929, the property south of Kyle Mountain on the old Orace McClure Ranch, was purchased by the Boy Scout Foundation. It was also Baden Powell's birthday. The first summer camp was held there four months later (there were no structures on the property at that time).