

Just an Old Chimney

Westlake First News

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By David A. Brown

There's an old chimney that stands out in a field, away from everything, on Circle 12 Ranch in Westlake, and I wish I could talk to it.

If it's anywhere near as old as it seems, it must have seen a good deal of history pass by.

Who built it and when and why?

Was it some settler making a home for himself and his family, with a fireplace to keep them all warm on the coldest winter day?

Was it a defeated Confederate soldier returning from the horror of the Civil War to find that nothing was left of his former home?

Or was it a farmer with his crops gathered for the winter building a new and larger home for his growing family.

It might have been any of these or someone else entirely different. No matter; that old chimney symbolizes our past and our heritage as well as anything in the area.

It's a shame that we have this propensity for destroying old things rather than admiring and learning from them. I know of an old stone ice house - where people used to store ice in the winter so they'd have it in the summer, long before anyone thought of an indoor icebox, much less an electric refrigerator or freezer.

Builders flattened it with a bulldozer faster than you could say ice cube. With a little forethought, it could have been moved to a site where future generations could have viewed it and perhaps realized how tough it used to be eke out a living.

There's a little hill not far from Ponder where famous outlaws used to hide from the long arm of the law. It's still as picturesque as ever and still a living memory of the days when this really was the wild and woolly West. But rumor has it that elegant homes soon will cover it and the memories of yesteryear will be blotted out. It could be made into a park or picnic grounds so that future generations could enjoy it, without the cost of our history being lost.

Old seems to be a four-letter word these days. If something isn't the newest, shiniest, glitziest, most high-tech, cutting edge, wave of the future, then we don't care much about it.

We forget that our future is largely based on our past and if we don't know our past, we cannot know how to create our future.

There's a little two-lane road not far from Trophy Club where the infamous Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow once gunned down a couple of Texas peace officers.

Horrible? Yes, but it did happen and it is part of our legacy. There used to be a stone plaque marking the spot but it was taken down so the road could be widened. It is supposed to be returned and I hope that it will be, because we need to know and remember these things.

In both Argyle and Ponder still stand old bank buildings, both of which were robbed by Bonnie and Clyde, but you'd never know it by looking.

Not that far south of Haslet there's an old building that, indirectly at least, helped push us into World War II. It is all that's left of a Navy helium plant, and 60 or 70 years ago you could have watched the Navy's great dirigibles - the Shenandoah, the Macon, the Akron and the Los Angeles - come in to top off their helium gas supplies there. Non-inflammable helium was the gas that kept these 700-foot-long monsters aloft and we had the world's entire supply back then.

Hitler's government asked to buy some to fill the Graf Zeppelin and the Hindenburg, but we refused to sell because we thought Hitler might use the airships as weapons in some not-so-distant war.

As a result, the Hindenburg was filled with flammable hydrogen and when it exploded, Hitler blamed us. Only one part of a long chain of events, perhaps, but who today even knows there was a helium plant there at one time?

This whole area is filled to overflowing with fascinating bits of history that need to be preserved for and presented to our progeny.

It's good to have our eyes looking forward, but it's always wise to see behind us as well. That old chimney might tell us something we need to know.

At least, that's how it seems to me.

- David A. Brown

(P.S. The Westlake Historical Preservation Board would like to know more about that old chimney, also. If you have any information about it, please call Mary Midgette at the Westlake Town Hall 817-430-0941 ext. 5 or Ruby Held at 817-379-5456. And by the way - does your town have a historical preservation group? If not, why not do something about it? - DAB)