

Fischer Store History

MYRA LEE ADAMS GOFF:

Trip down Devil's Backbone leads
to Fischer's Store

Ranch Road 32 West is worth a drive into a scenic part of Comal County. From New Braunfels, drive out Farm-to-Market Road 306, right on Purgatory Road, then left at Ranch Road 32 over a section called Devil's Backbone that winds back and forth until you are sure to get car-sick if you are prone to such an affliction.

At the intersection of Ranch Road 32 and FM 484, you'll come to a settlement called Fischer. Just to tell you how long this settlement has been there, the area (Hermann Fischer Ranch) received the Texas Department of Agriculture Family Land Heritage 150-year designation in 2004, which is given for continuous agricultural operation in the same family beginning at 100 years.

Hermann Fischer and his wife Anna were the first to settle in the valley on 160 acres, where they built the first log cabin in the area. They came to Texas in 1846. Otto Fischer bought land next to Hermann's, and both brothers were in the cattle business.

Otto married Adolfinia Schlameus. Other Germans that settled in the area included the Schlameus, Spangenberg, Linnartz, Luehlfing, Sachtleben, Pantermuehl, Kaderli, Haas, Schubert, Wersterfer, Krause and Wiechman families.

With this many families in the valley, Hermann decided to build a store in 1866 at one end of his log cabin. The store became the center of the

community. With a large assortment of merchandise, Hermann soon expanded the store to three buildings selling groceries, farm machinery and household goods.

When the settlement received a post office named Fischer's Store in 1876, it became well known across Texas. Then the name changed to Fischer Store and then, in 1950, to Fischer.

A dance hall, bowling alley, school, blacksmith shop, cotton gin, rodeo grounds, grist mill and last, but certainly not least, a cemetery were eventually added.

Not far from the settlement on Ranch Road 32 is a large cemetery that has the earmarks of a caring group of people. A Historic Texas Cemetery, many Fischers are buried in there. Of the almost 500 graves present, there are several other prominent family names as well.

In 1886, Otto Fischer gave 30 acres of his land to the Fischer's Store Community for the purpose of building a school. It was on the highest point of this land that the cemetery informally got started. It was appropriately called Fischer's School Graveyard at Fischer's Store. The Fischer Cemetery Association was later organized in 1976.

The first burial was the infant son of Monroe and Nettie Smith, nearby landowners and also the cemetery caretakers. Besides family members interred, there are also 21 graves of people whose remains were moved from the area that would eventually

become Canyon Lake. Throughout the years, four graves also were moved from the Pantermuehl Ranch and single graves from Dripping Springs, Pleasant Valley, Schlameus Ranch and Suche Ranch.

So what happened to the rest of the 30 acres that was to be used for education? A school was built on this property, and it still stands today.

It is now the Fischer Community Center. All the one-room county school houses were consolidated under the Comal County Rural School, which led to the current Comal Independent School District.

Under this consolidation, the district claimed ownership of the land given by Otto Fischer. In 1976, CISD transferred 3.851 acres of the original 30 acres to the Fischer Cemetery Association. The association divided the land into 1170 burial plots.

Leaving the cemetery, A right turn on Ranch Road 32 leads you into the Fischer settlement. Located in the old Fischer Store is the Fischer Store Museum. There is so much history in that museum and so many genuine antiques that tell the history of the Fischer community.

One relic of interest to me was the old telephone booth located inside the store. It is beautifully constructed of wood, and inside is a phone that, at one time, had 16 parties on the one line

The old cotton gin ledgers are there, as is their liquor license — No. 84. The shelving and tables are all authentic to the store. Another interesting relic is a large cabbage slicer. Guess what that was used for. Right. Sauerkraut. Many people that live in the area still make their own sauerkraut.

Just down the road from the museum is the old dance hall. Private dances and receptions are still held there, as well as a public dance once a year. Next to the dance hall is the bowling alley where, to this day, nine pin bowling takes place.

Did you know that Fischer Store had a polo team? In the museum are homemade mallets made primarily of a type of bamboo. The open grass field measuring 300 feet long and 160 yards wide is still there, just across from the dance hall.

The game was played with four players. One game lasted six chukkers, or periods, each lasting 7 minutes. Cecil Smith, who died in 1999, is given credit for starting the polo team at Fischer Store. Smith bought horses from the ranchers and trained them to be polo ponies. Polo ponies cannot be used as ranch horses once they are trained to be polo ponies. These trained ponies were temperamental and had a mind of their own. Part of the sport was the pony trying to throw off the rider.

The Comal County Fair will be this next week, Sept. 24-28. There won't be a polo game, but there once was. Back in 1932, the fair was reeling from the Depression, trying to stay afloat. They asked for local talent and the Fischer Store polo team challenged the

New Braunfels team. The Fischer Store team was made up of Bill Fischer, Raymond Fischer, J.W. Bode, Bubie Vollmering, Reagan Calhoun and Pape himself. The New Braunfels team was E.A. Maier, Hilmar Staats, Clifford Startz, Tommie Specht, Dickie Tausch, Roy Meredith, R.R. Coreth, Jackie Bergfeld and Herbert Marion.

Between chukkers, a burlesque polo team from New Braunfels put on a comedy act. That team was made up of Ernst Stein, Charles Scruggs, Paul Jahn, Pete Nuhn, Coach Rode, "Red" Babel, Barney Koepp, Dr. Rennie Wright and Jack Eiband.