

THE SETTLEMENT

by Annie Phinney

In the late 1800's there were no farmers, only ranchers. Two of these early ranchers were Bud Roberts and Dave Rotan. The Slaughter Ranch had big holdings as well as the Busch and Tiller. All of their supplies had to be hauled in from Colorado City. As the railroad came through in 1882, supplies could be bought in Big Spring.

Mrs. Shives had a little trading post just East of Coahoma and a few railroad workers stayed on to work on the big ranches. Mr. Echols had a trading post about a mile south of Coahoma. That little building was still there in the thirties. My grandfather bought supplies from Mr. Echols.

I used to sell Avon products and about every two weeks I would go on Thursday to visit Myrtle McGettes. I could listen to her all day tell stories of early day Coahoma. She told me that her father and mother came to Coahoma when she was just a little girl. They came with a wagon loaded with all their possessions drawn by a couple of oxen. Mr. Echols could see them coming a long way off and he was waiting for them on the porch of his store. When they got within hearing distance he was playing his fiddle and dancing a jig. After they got to the store, Mr. Echols played the fiddle and he and Myrtle sang "From Greenlands Icy Mountains." Myrtle thought that was the prettiest song she ever heard.

Someone of Jesse Robinson's family had already purchased some land East of Coahoma and had a little house on it. The house was a box house and the cold wind whistled through its many cracks. That winter was very severe and the oxen froze to death on the south side of the house. In Myrtle's words, "Them was hard old times."

When the right of way for the railroad was surveyed, every other section was public school land. School sections were free for the taking. Ranchers came in and used the free grazing sections. They could be very aggressive about anyone else using their free graze land. When the settlers came, who were mostly farmers, the cowboys would harass them and it was not unusual for the ranch hands to shoot them. One fellow was standing in his yard with his family when a group of cowboys rode up and shot him there before his family. The family did not leave, but stayed on in spite of the hardships.

When Grandpa Wheeler came in 1891 he made a half dugout and he and the older boys dug a well about a mile East of his house. The ranchers would hang around his well and drive his cattle off. He always carried a rifle on his saddle and was prepared to use it. Grandpa's place was three miles North of Coahoma located on the mail traveled road from Big Spring to Colorado City. Ranchers were not friendly to farmers and when Grandpa broke the first farmland in Howard County the trouble started. Ranchers had no use for "squatters."



One day one of the ranchers, his wife and kids all came down with the smallpox. It was a dreadful disease in those days and the man and his wife could not take care of themselves or the children. Grandpa and Grandma were immune to the pox so when Grandpa heard the rancher was very ill and in trouble he and Grandma left their older children to watch over the younger ones and went and stayed with the ranch family until they were able to take care of themselves. When Grandpa and Grandma went into their house, the man said, "Get out of here. We don't want you here." Grandpa said, "There's not a thing you can do about it." They cooked, cleaned, and washed for the family until they were strong enough to carry on themselves. After that the rancher's family and the Wheeler family were good friends and Grandpa never had any more trouble with them.

Raymond and Mae Elrod lived about a mile South of the Wheeler place. Mae was pregnant and about time for her to deliver when they decided to visit their neighbor (The Shives) who lived about two miles East of them. When they got to the Shive's house they looked back and saw their own house was burning so Raymond turned the wagon around and started racing back home. Mae began having labor pains so Raymond had to stop the wagon so Mae could give birth to their son. After the Elrods lost their house and all the things in it, they had no place to go, so my parents invited them to stay with us until the neighbors could build them another house.

