



The Gunsight Mountains as they appear today.

## The Rich History of Gunsight, Texas

BY SHIRLEY DUKES

If you happen to be traveling through Stephens County, down U.S. Highway 183 between Breckenridge and Cisco, you can spot them: a group of picturesque mountains known in that area as the Gunsight Mountains. Approximately 15 miles south of Breckenridge and a mile east of Highway 183, they sit back among the broom weeds and scrub brush; without knowing their history, they are not that spectacular.

But once the history has been revealed, these beautiful mountains take on a whole new meaning. I had the wonderful privilege of visiting with some of the people who knew this history. There are legends passed down

through time and stories passed down from parents and grandparents who lived through the times. As I looked across the valleys and mountains and heard the tales, I felt history come alive. I could almost see the wagon trains and hear the Indian war whoops.

I felt sadness hearing of the tragedies and losses of the pioneers who settled here, as well as for the Indians who were forced to accept them into what they had once considered their land. I felt joy for the triumphs they shared as this little oasis grew from a settlement, into a town, then a boomtown. And I felt a certain emptiness as I looked across this majestic, once thriving area and saw

that so little remains of a community so rich in history, legend and folklore. Just about every little town in our great United States has a history of some kind that needs preserving, and Gunsight is no different.

There are several stories about how Gunsight got its unique name. The first is that the name came from the unusual shape of the mountains through which the original road passed. From a distance, these mountains appeared as a sight on a gun: "straight as a gun barrel with a peak at one end." The second story is based on a legend of an Indian fighter who took

*continued on page 20*

# TWO STUDENTS TO REPRESENT COMANCHE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE ON YOUTH TOUR

Once again, the membership of Comanche Electric Cooperative will be well represented in Washington, D.C.

Congratulations go to Lupe Esquivel from Comanche High School and Lauren Svoboda from Mullin High School. These two young ladies have been chosen to represent the membership on the 2008 Government-in-Action Youth Tour in June. David Volleman of Comanche is the alternate.

Twenty-four essays entitled "The Advantages of Coal as a Power

photo session on Capitol Hill, visit their congressional representatives, tour the House and Senate chambers and visit the Supreme Court and the Library of Congress.

Lupe is a junior at Comanche High School. She began her involvement in extracurricular activities in elementary school, where she was a member of the G/T program for three years. She was president of the sophomore class and a member of the superintendent's cabinet for two years. She is a member of FHLA, and she was a published author in the

Young Poets Creative Writing in her freshman year. Her civic activities include participation in Relay for Life (two years) Pow Wow service (two years) and Santa's Helpers (three years). Lupe's career goal is to be a dentist.

Lauren is a junior at Mullin High School. Lauren has been involved in UIL academic speaking events for six years

and a class officer for six years. She has been involved in one-act play two years and yearbook one year, and she is involved in sports, participating in basketball, volleyball and golf. Lauren's career goal is to be a lawyer.

These winning students receive airfare, transportation, lodging, meals, and insurance and admission charges associated with the tour. This trip is available to any high school student, sophomore and above, who attends a school where Comanche Electric Cooperative has facilities, or if the student's parent or guardian is a member of Comanche Electric Cooperative.



Lupe Esquivel, left, and Lauren Svoboda, right, have won a trip to Washington, D.C. on the Government-in-Action Youth Tour in June. David Volleman is the alternate.

Source" were turned in by students at four schools. These essays were sent to an independent judging firm in the metroplex, where the top 10 were chosen to present their essay in the form of a speech. All 10 speeches were phenomenal.

Lupe and Lauren will meet with about 125 other Texas students and fly to our nation's capital, where they will see some extraordinary sights, a few of which are: Arlington National Cemetery, the Lincoln Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Mount Vernon, Ford's Theatre and the Smithsonian museums. They will also have a



**COMANCHE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**

**HEADQUARTERS**

201 W. Wright St.  
Comanche, TX 76442  
(325) 356-2533  
1-800-915-2533

**EASTLAND OFFICE**

1311 W. Main St.  
Eastland, TX 76448  
(254) 629-3358  
1-800-915-3358

**EARLY OFFICE**

1801 CR 338  
Early, TX 76801  
(325) 641-1111  
1-800-915-2533

**OFFICE HOURS**

7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
Monday through Friday

**FIND US ON THE WEB AT  
WWW.CECA.COOP**

**YOUR "LOCAL PAGES"**

This section of *Texas Co-op Power* is produced by Comanche EC each month to provide you with information about current events, special programs and other activities of the cooperative. If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact Shirley at the Comanche office or at [sdukes@ceca.coop](mailto:sdukes@ceca.coop).

**COMANCHE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**



Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

## GUNSIGHT *continued from page 18*

aim at a warrior, only to have the Indian shoot first, knocking the sight from the settler's gun. Thus the name Gunsight arose from the area where the incident occurred. And the third story was that the Indians could sight settlers in the valley from their position in the mountains as if using the sight of a gun. When looking at the mountains from a distance, you can indeed see the likeness of a gunsight between the mountains.

The details of how the settlement came to be are sketchy at best. No one seems to know for certain just when or why the first settlers came here. Per-

haps they just liked the country; perhaps they were being forced to relocate after the Civil War; perhaps it was because of some railway grants (all land in this area is called the TP Railway Survey); perhaps it is just where they happened to be when they got tired and felt they could travel no farther. And perhaps we will never know for certain.

What we do know is that in 1858, Gunsight was on a wagon road from Fort Griffin to Stephenville, and the first settlers began to appear after the Civil War, somewhere around 1865, with the greatest migration occurring between 1870 and 1880. Life was harsh during this time, and, sadly, life and death went hand in hand. The earliest death recorded here was of 4-year-old Lewis B. McCleskey, who

died in 1877. Lewis was the son of James Benson McCleskey and Sarah Nixon. It is unclear how he died, but following his death, James and Sarah donated land for the Gunsight Cemetery, and Lewis became the first person interred there.

The cemetery itself is beautiful. Like many old country cemeteries, it is nestled deep in a grove of oak and cedar trees. During a wet year such as the one we have had this year, the grass grows plentiful around the gravesites, making this final resting place extremely peaceful. Cemetery records state that there are more than 450 people buried here. There are three veterans of the Civil War from the Confederate States. Two are Spanish-American War veterans, 12 come from World War I, 21 are

**The Brown Pen Mountains got their name from a set of rock pens that were built here by a Mr. Brown. These mountains are where a stash of Spanish gold is allegedly buried. Just at the base of these mountains is where Mr. Stillwell dug his last hole looking for the gold. The story is also told of a man who was hunting on this mountain when his horse spooked and he was thrown. He was found when residents of the area began to hear too many shots. Upon investigating, they found that the hunter's dogs had turned on him and he had to shoot them to protect himself. Monte McIntire says that his grandmother used to tell many stories about these mountains. She took him to these mountains and showed him where the wagons came down off the hills and where the wagon wheels had worn grooves into the rock.**





This valley is the site of much pioneer and Indian activity; it's the valley I was looking over when I said that I could almost see the wagon trains and hear the Indian whoops. Monte McIntire tells the story handed down from his grandmother about a Mr. Wagley and the young boy who had gone to Picketville for groceries. On the way home they were spotted by Indians. The Indians began pursuing them and chased them to the creek. The creek was running high, but they managed to cross it where they set up a stand and shot Indians across the creek until dark. After that, the boy did not like Indians. One day while the Indians were fishing, the boy stole all their horses and went to sell them at Fort Griffin. The Indians caught him in Shackelford County and killed him at the creek. This valley is also the site of an Indian massacre. W.A. McIntire says that when he went off to war there was still considerable evidence of the massacre: arrowheads, wagon parts, broken pottery and even some bones. But the area has since been pretty much picked clean, and rarely are any relics found there today. This valley is also the site of several Indian fires that have been investigated by research professors at the University of New Mexico. It has also been reported that there is an old Indian burial ground somewhere between the Gunsight Mountains and another, unnamed mountain not far from them.

World War II veterans, and two are from the Korean War.

John W. Shepard was appointed postmaster of the first post office on March 31, 1880. The post office was housed in the general mercantile store of J.W. and Anna Maxwell. This store also served as a rally point for stagecoaches. These stagecoaches were hacks with four seats pulled by teams. The teams were changed for fresh ones about every eight miles. Many a passenger on the stage ate meals at the Maxwell Store, and some even stayed overnight on occasion.

According to the history recorded in the museum, the Gunsight

Methodist Church dates back to a group meeting in an old log schoolhouse as early as 1882. On October 11, 1907, Mr. and Mrs. J.A. Noel deeded an acre of land to the Methodist Episcopal Church South in the town of Gunsight. The first church building was damaged by a storm in 1939 and rebuilt on a smaller scale. The church remained in operation until 1972, when the Gunsight congregation joined with the St. Paul United Methodist Church in Breckenridge. On September 17, 1973, the church building was sold to The Society for the Preservation of the Gunsight Church Property. The society then

donated the building and all assets to the Gunsight Cemetery Association, at which time the building was relocated to its present site across from the Gunsight Cemetery.

Gunsight public schools also date back to around the mid-1880s. Students from first grade up met in a one-room schoolhouse with two teachers. The building itself was two stories, with the upper story used as a meeting hall for Woodmen of the World. The teacher, Miss Frankie Wragg, was paid directly by the parents. In about 1916-17 this school and

*continued on next page*

## GUNSIGHT *continued from page 21*

Dyeville consolidated and became Pleasant Hill School. At some point, this building burned down, and the town of Leeray donated its old school building to the community. It was moved to the original school site but was later donated to the cemetery association as a community building and moved next to the old church building. Both buildings still stand and remain in use for various purposes. In 1949, the Gunsight school consolidated with Breckenridge Independent School District.

The year 1920 came gushing in with an oil boom! The once quiet little town became a tent city almost overnight as people flocked to the area to make their fortunes. I am sure the

citizens of Gunsight had no idea what vast changes lay ahead for them. Big business came to the little rural community in the form of casing crews and oil-field construction companies. Construction was done almost entirely by hand. Automobiles were still a rarity, so hauling was done by wagon teams. I can almost smell the oil and feel the vibrations as holes were dug and wagons rumbled through the busy streets. All sorts moved into the area, including speculators. Some made their fortunes and moved on to bigger and better things, while others lost all they had sunk into the local economy and were forced to move on to find other means of support.

And what historical story can be complete without the mention of a railroad? Railroads at that time were considered progress in the making. No town could thrive without a railroad

running nearby to transport cattle and transfer people and goods. In 1880, the first Texas and Pacific train came to Eastland. But it was during the oil boom that the now-thriving city of Gunsight began to entertain hopes of having a railroad of its own. John Ringling, of Ringling Brothers Circus, was extending rail lines at the time, and the townspeople, believing that Ringling would run a line nearby, began what was known as "New Gunsight." It was located two miles from downtown and served as a stop for the trains. But by 1921, the oil boom had ended, royalties declined and people's fortunes ebbed. Unfortunately, the railroad never brought the prosperity that was hoped for to Gunsight, a fact that earned the town the nickname "the town that was gonna be."

One of the most colorful town legends tells of a group of men who

**This ancient oak tree was once used as a rest stop for weary travelers. It was most commonly used by gypsies who passed through the area and camped for days as they sold and traded their goods for food and other essentials. It now very appropriately shades a roadside park on U.S. Highway 183.**





Apparently, the Gunsight name is unique enough to make it desirable to passersby. Roger Broyles of the Gunsight community tells the story of how the highway department would place a sign showing the direction to Gunsight and it would be gone within a few days. After several tries at replacing the sign, the highway department finally printed this sign with “Cem.” added and has had no more thefts.

were crossing the mountains with a pack of 20 mules, loaded down with Spanish gold being transported from an army camp up north. Scouts were placed ahead of and behind the party to check the area for danger. And danger was found, in the form of Indians. The trailing scout spotted Indian movement behind him and rode ahead to warn the convoy. They quickly buried the gold near a creek at the foot of what is now commonly known as the Brown Pen Mountains. According to the legend, only one person survived the massacre that followed. The man, a Mexican, managed to escape and was aided by a man named Stillwell. When the man finally died, he left Stillwell a map that supposedly showed where the treasure was buried. I am unclear as to whether this Mr. Stillwell ever searched for the gold, but the map was passed down to the next generation’s Mr. Stillwell, who did begin digging—and dug his entire life, never finding the alleged treasure. It is said that if he had been digging holes for outhouses he would have been a millionaire. I don’t know how much they paid for digging outhouse holes, but by my calculation, that’s a lot of holes! The last hole he dug was at the foot of the Brown Pen Moun-

tains about 40 years ago.

All this was long ago. The town began to decline after World War II, and today all that remains of Gunsight is the cemetery and the two buildings across the road from it, along with a few houses. In a history of the area, Gwendolene Peacock pretty much sums up the attitude of the residents who remain in Gunsight: “In each community there was lots of love flowing from one to the other, neighbors helping neighbors, friends being truly friends. Keeping close contact was the key, and when a need arose, there was someone there to render aid. Most of our entertainment was out of our own making, doing things we enjoyed, just being together as a family or as a community.” That still holds true today in this distinctive little community with the rich and powerful history.

*A special thank you goes to the Swenson Museum of Breckenridge for help in the research for this article. Also thanks to Roger Broyles, Monte and W.A. McIntire, and Phil Taylor for their help and for their recollections from the past that helped to formulate this story. And special consideration goes to the late Lenora McIntire, whose written history of the area provided much of the facts for the story.*

## STATEMENT OF NONDISCRIMINATION

Comanche Electric Cooperative is the recipient of federal financial assistance from the Rural Utilities Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and is subject to the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, and the rules and regulations of the U.S. Department of Agriculture which provide that no person in the United States on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability shall be excluded from participation in, admission or access to, denied the benefits of or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any of this organization’s programs or activities.

The person responsible for coordinating this organization’s nondiscrimination compliance efforts is the assistant manager. Any individual, or specific class of individuals, who feels that this organization has subjected them to discrimination may obtain further information about the statutes and regulations listed above from and/or file a written complaint. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 1-800-795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Complaints must be filed within 180 days after the alleged discrimination. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible.