

THE OBSERVER/ENTERPRISE

Published Weekly

The Observer/Enterprise, LLC

(325) 277-9210

observerenterprise@gmail.com

www.ObserverEnterprise.com

Periodical Rate Postage paid at Robert Lee, Texas

POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to
Observer/Enterprise
PO Box 1329, Robert Lee, Texas 76945

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Ashley McCutchen Braswell, Social Media Coordinator

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Per Year in Coke County ... \$35.00

Per Year Elsewhere in Texas ... \$40.00

Per Year Outside of Texas ... \$45.00



Independence of the Peasants

By James M. Decker

On October 28, 1785, Thomas Jefferson wrote a famous letter to his friend James Madison. This is the letter in which Jefferson famously called small landholders “the most precious part of a state.” This was no mere philosophical musing.

Jefferson was on a diplomatic mission to France on behalf of the new American republic. While he was there, he observed the plight of the French peasants. Jefferson saw a countryside in which opportunity was lacking and he saw a clear cause: a small aristocracy disproportionately controlled the country’s power and resources. The aristocrats doled out most of the jobs to laborers, servants, and artisans. Living wages were hard to come by and affordable rent was even more scarce (sound familiar, America?) It was very difficult for an average person to improve their lot in life in a meaningful manner. And yet, Jefferson looked around and saw large swaths of land lying fallow. Jefferson saw opportunity for the French peasants to grow crops, pasture livestock, and forage for wild game and plants, but instead, these lands were protected as giant game reserves for the aristocrats’ sporting pleasure.

Jefferson was incensed. He wrote to Madison, “wherever

there is in any country uncultivated lands and unemployed poor, it is clear that the laws of property has been so far extended as to violate natural law.” Jefferson saw it as crucial to prevent this from happening across the Atlantic. The “yeoman farmer” was the archetype of a deeply agrarian society, but he was also an exemplar of something larger that should permeate through society: the small, independent property owner who could make a living on his own. Whether he farmed, hunted and trapped on the frontier, ran a store in town, or worked as an artisan or craftsman, this American could provide for himself and his family, dependent on neither big business nor big government to survive.

That will preach, even moreso today.

The famous Kentucky author and activist bell hooks (pen name for Gloria Jean Watkins) wrote of her own family’s outlook in the aftermath of her ancestors’ emancipation from enslavement, in “Belonging: a Culture of Place”:

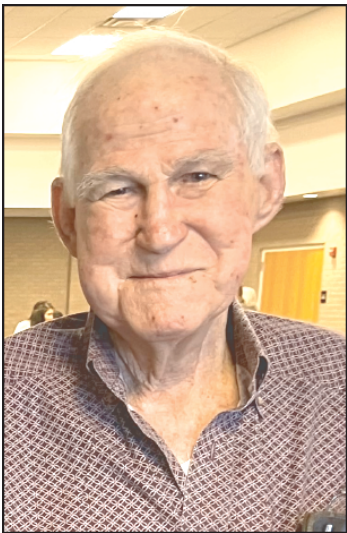
“Both grandparents owned land. Like Booker T. Washington, they understood that black folks who had their ‘forty acres and a mule,’ or even just their once acre, could sustain their lives by growing food, by creating shelter that was

not mortgaged. Baba and Daddy Gus, my maternal grandparents, were radically opposed to any notion of social and racial uplift that meant black folks could lead us away from respect for the land, that would lead us to imitate the social mores of affluent whites.

This independence has universal appeal. French peasants longed for it when Jefferson encountered them. It underlies the “forty acres and a mule” promise that hooks speaks of, thwarted by Jim Crow. It brought immigrant settlers to North America in the first place and it pushed them across the prairie to build homesteads despite great danger and hardship. It drives the European farmer protests that we are seeing today. It inspired Wendell Berry to abandon a promising career in New York City and head back to Kentucky to spend a lifetime farming in an independent manner, deemed archaic by the agricultural policy establishment, while writing books and essays advocating for the expansion of this sort of self-sufficient living.

Why did I open this series on the future of localism by taking a hard right turn into Jeffersonian philosophy and 18th century history? I believe that this notion of independence is fundamental to the renewal of our rural communities and a successful localism built on solid

Obituaries



Davidson

Lynn Davidson of Robert Lee, Coke County, Texas finished his earthly journey and entered Heaven’s Gates on Marc 9, 2024. He passed away peacefully surrounded by his family.

Lynn was born on January 20, 1937, in Coke County Texas at the Old Davidson home place. He attended Robert Lee High School where he set numerous records in athletics. He was also very involved in 4H and the raising and showing of livestock. During his senior year, he married his high school sweetheart, Janelle McGilvray. After graduation, Lynn went on to attend Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas. Lynn performed his student coaching at Rising Star High School. Lynn and Janelle divorced in 1965. Lynn moved to Illinois in 1966 and became a Union painter. While in Illinois Lynn married his second wife, Tommy Davidson. In 1987 Lynn and Tommy returned to Robert Lee upon inheriting the Davidson Ranch from his aunt, Dolly Davidson. Tommy passed away in 2006. In 2008, Lynn met and married his last love, Shirley Davidson, recently from Austin, Texas. Lynn and Shirley thoroughly enjoyed their married life on the ranch, short pleasure trips and watching the grandchildren’s activities.

Lynn was preceded in death by his parents, Elbert and Louella Fields Davidson of Robert Lee; sisters, Doris Price of San Angelo and Bobbie Box from Robert Lee; and daughter, Doll-Ellen Davidson Petrelli of

Florida.

Lynn is survived by his wife Shirley of Robert Lee; three sons, Elbert Lynn (Davy) Davidson Jr. and wife Sherry of Robert Lee, Mickey Ray Davidson and wife Leslie of Big Lake, Texas, and Casey Earl Davidson and wife Miranda also of Big Lake, Texas; plus one bonus daughter, Kandra O’Dell and husband David O’Dell of Robert Lee, Texas. Lynn’s blessings included 12 grandchildren and 17 great grandchildren along with numerous nieces and nephews.

Funeral services were held at 2 pm, Tuesday, March 11, 2024, at Pecan Baptist Church, 14081 TX-158, Robert Lee, Texas 76945, with Pastor William Hood officiating. Burial and committal immediately followed at Terry Memorial Cemetery in Robert Lee.

Honoring the family by serving as pallbearers are Tyler Davidson, Tres Davidson, Jordan Davidson, Mark French, Denver O’Dell, and David O’Dell. Honorary pallbearer is Trent Davidson.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Robert Lee Care Center, Robert Lee Volunteer Fire Department or any charity of your choice.

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Area Churches Invite You to Worship

Bronte

Bronte Church of Christ

PO Box 346
118 S. Jefferson • Bronte
Sun. 10 am & 6 pm, Wed. 7 pm

Central Baptist Church

324 S. Franklin • Bronte
(325) 473-4811
Dale Patterson, Pastor
Sun. 10 am Sunday School
11 am & 5 pm Worship

First Baptist Church

424 S. Washington • Bronte
(325) 473-2331
firstbronte@gmail.com
Pastor George Cooper
Sunday 9:45 am Sunday School,
10:30 am Worship
Wednesday 6 pm - 8 pm
Children and Youth

Bronte Methodist Church

Corner of Washington & Holmes
Bronte • (325) 650-4836
Pastor Keith Fletcher
Sun. 10:00 am Sunday School
11:00 am Worship

St. James Catholic Church

215 N. Washington, Bronte
(325) 365-2687
Rev. Timothy Hayter, Pastor
Sunday Bilingual Mass 8 am

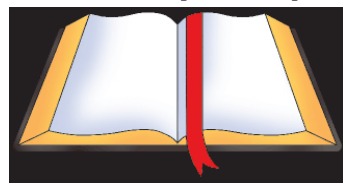
Bread of Life Church

314 Fayette • Bronte
(325) 227-0010
Michael Crane, Pastor
Sunday, 9 am
Wednesday, 6 pm

Coke County

Pecan Baptist

PO Box 542 • 12 miles West of
Robert Lee on Sterling City Hwy
(325) 453-2065, Bill Hood, Pastor
www.pecanbaptistchurchrl.com
Sun. 10 am, Sunday School
11 am & 7 pm, Worship



Robert Lee

Bible Baptist Church

PO Box 938 • 9th & Austin
Sunday 10 am Sunday School,
11 am and 5 pm Worship,
Wed 5 pm Bible Study
Emmanuel Pentecostal
PO Box 794 • 1004 Hillcrest
Pastor Brantly Robertson
(972) 841-2009

Sundays 10 am, Wednesdays 7 pm

First Methodist Church

PO Box 144 • 9th & Chadbourne
Pastor Gary Karschner
Robert Lee • (325) 453-2417
Sun. 11 am Worship,
Iglesia Bautista Betel
101 Houston • Robert Lee
Sun. 9:45 am • Sunday School
11 am Service • Bible Study Wed. 6 pm

Southside Church of Christ

PO Box 698 • 8th & Houston
Robert Lee (325) 453-2176
Sun. 10 am, Sunday School

11 am Worship

Wed. 6 pm, Worship

Northside Church of Christ

PO Box 508
9th & Chadbourne • Robert Lee
(325) 453-2685, (325) 763-2118
or (325) 473-1053

Services: Sun. 10 am

Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church

601 W. 10th, Robert Lee
(325) 365-2687

Rev. Timothy Hayter, Pastor
Saturday Vigil Mass 6 pm

Robert Lee Baptist Church

PO Box 493 • 22 W. 11th
(325) 453-2724
Chris Walls, Pastor
Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School
11 am Worship

Wed. 6:30 pm, Prayer Meeting

Victory Assembly of God

(325) 453-2208, PO Box 638
202 E. 6th Street, Robert Lee
Rev. Rocky Youngblood, Pastor
Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School
10:45 am & 6 pm, Worship
Wed. 6 pm, Bible Study