



Snowy Scene! Traffic filled Main Street in Bronte in the late 1940s following a snow storm. Due to where the picture was taken, the photographer was possibly Ben Oglesby, long time owner of the Bronte Enterprise and eventually the Robert Lee Observer. Looking at the same scene now, you would see Stripes instead of Home Motor Company and the old hotel.

Rabbit not so popular

[Editor's Note: The following article ran in the Centennial Edition of The Observer/Enterprise on July 21, 1989.]

Coke County's longtime "mascot", the rabbit, from whom citizens got the name "Rabbit Twister's", was not always so popular. Populations of the furry animals were a threat to pastures, gardens, fields, and yards, especially early in the century. They also carried lice, ticks, and fleas and were known to spread bubonic plague and rabies.

Rabbit drives were devised to thin their numbers. These were usually held on weekends and were not only necessary; they were great social events.

Neuman Smith told of the events in the Ballinger Ledger a few years ago. We quote his article, Days Gone By, below.

The jackrabbits and cottontail rabbit diet consisted, of course, of grass and other wild foliage – but they seemed to like commercial crops such as cantaloupe; they would eat the vines as well as the fruit.

Watermelons were destroyed by the eating or gnawing of a hole.

The rabbits would eat only a portion, then go to the next melon.

They also cut down small cotton plants, and would destroy all kinds of garden vegetables. They also would destroy wheat, oats, and some varieties of flowers in yards.

There were thousands of rabbits. In the early years of the Runnels County Commissioners' Court passed a resolution to pay five cents for the two ears of each rabbit.

This was incentive to kill the rabbits and in turn get paid for it. Many young boys hunted down the jackrabbit.

Many of the rabbits were skinned and hung up about two feet from the ground. Chickens would then devour the meat.

The meat was high in protein. Many rural residents cooked the rabbit meat and fed it to the coon dogs.

The five-cent reward for the rabbit ears did not solve the rabbit problem, however. Rabbit drives were the most successful method of control.

A group of concerned farmers and ranches would meet, usually at the local rural school house, and organize the drive.

The first thing was the election of officers and committees. The president had a great responsibility in seeing that everything went smoothly.

The area to be hunted had to be outlined, and the noon meal was planned; publicity was a must.

A committee had to have plenty of shotgun shells – 12, 16, 20, and 410-gauge. These were all that were allowed for use on the drive.

The drive would start off very early in the morning in the early

years. Wagons were used to transport the hunters.

One group would be stationed in an area and another group about a mile across the area.

The outriders, some on horseback and later in cars, would be on each side of the drive.

When the captain of each group shot his gun in the air, it was time to start.

The group formed a long line and tried to keep it straight as they went along. The rabbits would jump up, and hunters had to be quick on the trigger to get a shot.

The two groups would come together and many rabbits would run together – this was called the roundup.

The men would come closer together. The captain of each group would holler, "Let him out!" as the rabbits ran and the men shot them.

Hunters had to be very careful,



Snow in Robert Lee! J.N.K Adams, part-owner of J.W. Reed and Company, stands in the street fanning himself, with snow on the ground in 1901. The business was located on the west side of Austin Street. A short time after this photo was taken, the south side of the building was blown out due to Jim Clift accidentally dropping his cigarette in a barrel of gunpowder. Fortunately, no was injured.

as someone could get shot by mistake as the shots fell all around. However, I don't remember any serious injuries.

Sometimes an injured person would have to go to a doctor to get the shots removed.

The drives usually lasted two days. Thousands of rabbits would be killed.

The merchants would always give a discount on the shells. The ammunition committee's responsibility was to order plenty of shells and keep a big inventory on hand.

The sportsmen from a wide area would come to the drives and help the citizens shoot the rabbits.

Ballinger had a number of expert marksmen over the years. Alex "Bill" McGregor, Forrest McMillian, L.C. Daughtery, W.A. Holt, Arthur Giersecke, Roy Holstead, Sam Dunlap, C.T. Parker, Dick Holstead, and many others hunted rabbits over the years.

The highlight of the rabbit drive was the noon meal. Many times the men of the community would butcher a beef and barbecue it. The women would

bring dessert. It was a time of good food and fellowship.

The last rabbit drive in the Hatchel Community was in 1959. The rabbit population seemed to dwindle down to a very few in later years.

Those who remembered and took part in the rabbit drives can say with pride, "I was there to help 'let him out'."

Cousins visit in Robert Lee

By Jane Austin Bruckner

Visiting in Robert Lee on June 27, 2014, were cousins, Jane Austin Bruckner from Fort Worth and Betty Austin Cericola from Albuquerque, New Mexico. Jane Austin is daughter of Isham and Lila Austin; Betty Austin is the daughter of Bartholomew (Bat) and Clara Austin of Colorado State. Betty was accompanied by her daughters Cheryl Cericola and Debra Albrycht of Albuquerque.

Isham and Bartholomew were sons of Jordan and Arminta DeLong Austin of Coke County. Jane's nephew Monty Austin

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