

**Restored Butterfield Stage Station at Fort Chadbourne**



**Butterfield Line was nation's longest**

[Editor's Note: The information for the following article appeared in the July 21, 1989, issue of The Observer/Enterprise, with credit given to Mrs. Jessie Yarbrough's "History of Coke County".]

Of much historic interest to Coke County is the old Butterfield Trail which traversed Coke County for about 35 miles, entering the county near the site of old Fort Chadbourne and following a southwesterly direction to a point on Grape Creek and then southwest to the county line. It was regarded as the "longest stage line in the world" and lasted only until the outbreak of the Civil War.

Modern highway US 277 follows as nearly as practicable the Overland Mail Route, and is designated as the Butterfield Trail Highway.

The Butterfield Mail and Stage route was established by a law of 1857 under which the postmaster general awarded a contract to John Butterfield, who

was to organize and put into operation, a stageline extending from St. Louis, Missouri, and Memphis, Tennessee, to San Francisco, California. Branch lines from the two eastern terminals united near Fort Smith, Arkansas, and entered Texas at Preston Bend near the present city of Denison, westward through Sherman and the line of frontier forts, including Fort Belknap, Fort Phantom Hill, Fort Chadbourne and on west.

Scheduled time for the entire trip was 23 days and 23 hours of continuous driving. The only through passenger on the first stage west was W.L. Ormsby of the New York Herald and his series of articles describing the trip are considered the best source material to be had on the old Trail.

There were two stations in Coke County, Fort Chadbourne and a station on Grape Creek, site of which is unknown. It is generally accepted that the

Grape Creek Station occupied a site (now lost) on Grape Creek in the southwestern edge of Coke County. It is recorded that in February 1861, the Grape Creek station was besieged by some thirty Comanches, who took all the horses and mules and returned one month later to burn the station.

Local citizens said that there were four people in the Grape Creek Station - Joel Pennington, Mrs. Pennington, Charles Cox (a brother-in-law of Pennington), and Elijah Helms. After the Indians were repulsed, Helms made his way to Fort Chadbourne for help, as Pennington had been severely wounded while trying to escape. He was taken to the post hospital where he was attended by the post surgeon and recovered.

Mrs. Yarbrough, who has been studying for many years on Coke County historical information, believes that there was an alternate route from Fort Chadbourne west, probably used when the Indians were rampaging on the other route. This theory is that the other station was on what is now called Yellow Wolf Creek (then also called Grape Creek), 16 miles west of Fort Chadbourne. She has talked with old timers of that area and found that once there was an old road leading due west from Fort Chadbourne to the crossing on Yellow Wolf Creek (some early land abstracts refer to it as Grape Creek); a huge oak tree on the site was burned on the side (which could have happened when the Indians burned the station).

More to substantiate this belief came after Mrs. Yarbrough had finished her book when the remains of an old stage coach were found on the property of Mrs. Nora Gee, by some men opening up the area for oil development.

Service on the Butterfield Trail was disrupted by the Civil War. After the close of the war, some segments were restored under contracts, but in time, most of it was forgotten.

**Confederate reunion held**

[Editor's note: The following article appeared in the Coke County Rustler on July 28, 1899.]

People from adjoining counties began to arrive last Friday noon to attend the big basket dinner and Ex-Confederate Reunion of Richard Coke Camp.

The celebration began Friday at dark with a dance in the Hoon Hall and a wedding soon after the dance.

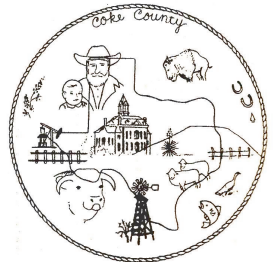
By 10:00 Saturday about 1500 people were on the ground some having been camped since Friday afternoon.

Judge J.I. Guanoof Ballinger the orator of the day made one of his characteristic fine speeches which was enjoyed by about five hundred of our people then as the arbor would hold no more.

Any compliments the Rustler might pay Jude Guano's address would be superfluous as he is known all over this section as one of the profound thinkers, as well as one of the best (not readable) in West Texas. The Rustler will print his excellent address.

Shortly after the conclusion of Judge Guion's address, dinner was announced, and the Editor felt real bad because he could not accept all the invitations to dinner. Every body had plenty to eat, and they had the good and wholesome kinds of food that keep editors and professionals fat. Numbers of our people failed to find friends enough to eat one fourth of their good dinners.

There were some interesting recitemants in the noon by Misses Lottie Hayley and Ella Caraway and by Mrs. D.T. Averitt, and Mrs. W.L. Hayley.



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