

# *The Elgin Historian* Vol 3 No 3 October 2015

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## Exhibit Opens at Hogeye

This exhibit from the State Texas Historical Commission, Texas Lakes Trail tells the story of Quanah and Cynthia Ann Parker through photos. Many of these photos have never been displayed before. The exhibit represents an important piece of our State's heritage and the Elgin Depot Museum is proud to be able to share it with the people of the Elgin community.

The exhibit lasts from October 24<sup>th</sup> (Hogeye) to December 23<sup>rd</sup>. There will also be a display of artifacts collected locally.

## ***Quanah Parker***

Our focus recently has moved back in time to the inhabitants of our corner of Texas long before the city of Elgin existed. The work being done on the Mary Christian Burleson Homestead and stories of early Texans in this area lead us to questions about the Native Americans who lived here for millennia. We have a few tidbits of information about Mary Christian Burleson's relations with the Indians and there is a lot in the historical literature about Indian "depredations." On October 24<sup>th</sup> we will open the exhibit on the life and times of Quanah Parker, the last Comanche chief. Chances are Quanah and his band came through this way, but we have no written or archaeological evidence to confirm it. Many visitors to the museum ask the simple question "Do you know anything about Native Americans in the Elgin area?" None of our members have been very knowledgeable in this area, until Cristin Embree, a new member, an archaeologist and specialist in the American Indian, came to town. In this issue we feature an article written by her which may begin to answer that question.



The Elgin Depot Museum has a new Facebook page. There is a lot of interesting material there. Just go to: [www.facebook.com/ElginDepotMuseum](http://www.facebook.com/ElginDepotMuseum) and take a look. You don't have to be a Facebook member to see our page. Just browse and if you like what you see then click on *like*. If you want to comment on a post then click on *comment*.



A brief comment in the “acknowledgements” section of a book I was reading recently made me stop and wonder. The book was *The Day We Lost the H-Bomb* by Barbara Moran (2009 quotations below are from this book) about a collision between a B52 bomber on “airborne alert” and a refueling tanker in 1966. In the ensuing conflagration four H-bombs were lost. The Air Force and the Navy spent more than three months searching for the bombs and cleaning up after the incident. Three of the bombs were found on land near the small farming town of Palomares, Spain. The fourth fell into the Mediterranean in over 2,000 feet of water and was the most complicated to find and to recover.

But about the acknowledgement: The author thanks numbers of scholars and librarians and institutions of various civilian and military sorts. In the middle of all

this she writes “Francis Smith shared stories of life on the *Albany* and the best brisket in Austin.”

If it hadn't been for that mention of Austin I might not have taken seriously the name of our 2007 volunteer of the year and dear friend Francis Smith, who died in 2011. But I remembered that he had been in the Navy and in the Mediterranean in the 1960s. After a laborious search of the Internet I found confirmation where I should have searched first: *The Elgin Courier*. In the 2010 Veterans Day Tribute I found his picture and the confirmation that he was a Gunner's Mate on the USS *Albany* 1963-67.

The *Albany* was Task Force 65's flagship. The search for the submerged missile had lasted weeks and when it was found at last it was perched on a steep slope. The first attempt at recovery caused it to slip even farther. “The crew of the USS *Albany*, already operating at a higher state of readiness than usual, responded to the heightened tension. The flagship carried long-range TALOS missiles, which could deliver either conventional or nuclear warheads... On March 9<sup>th</sup>, the gun crews aboard the *Albany* made the switch.” This is where Francis, our Gunner's Mate, was able to help the author. The flagship now bristled with nukes of her own. Mercifully further attempts managed to recover the missile.

And of course there was the brisket.

# Were there any Native Americans in Elgin?

"Absolutely!" says Cristin Embree, archaeologist and expert in historic and prehistoric North America with a focus on the American Indian. Prior to 1900, historians have estimated least 50 and possibly many more groups -- tribes, clans, families, bands, alliances, confederations -- lived in Texas. Prior to Anglo settlement in 1821, all of Texas was inhabited by American Indian groups. Only a half dozen ever managed to establish themselves on reservations in Indian Territory and only three in Texas.

Elgin's unique landscapes have long attracted indigenous populations. Embree explains, "I've uncovered many interesting details about Elgin American Indian populations during my investigations, most recently while conducting background research for the 19<sup>th</sup> century Mary Christian Burleson Homestead. Early Anglo-Texas settlers were attracted to Elgin's two distinctive soil types -- backland prairie and sandyland -- for the same reasons indigenous populations seasonally inhabited the area.

For thousands of years in the vast open prairie to the west and north large herds of buffalo and wild horses attracted bands of bison hunters, such as the Tonkawas. The sandyland provided bubbling springs, ample trees for building and fuel for heating, small game animals, grapes, dewberries and pecans that grew throughout the woods. It was often along this sandyland prairie line that indigenous groups established seasonal hunting camps.

This summer, with the help of the Elgin Depot Museum and a group of middle-schoolers, Embree lead a reconnaissance survey of a site located on this sandyland/prairie line, located along Red Town Road near the Mary Christian Burleson Homestead. Artifacts found indicate that American Indian groups used the camp area seasonally for over 10,000 years.

While perilous interactions between early Anglo settlers and indigenous groups receive most attention in regional histories, not all were bloody or tragic. While the establishment of Austin's Little Colony led to a kind of war of exterminations for many bands of Karankawas, who moved inland from the coast seasonally, Austin recognized that bands of Tonkawa and Lipan Apache provided a barrier between the colony and the Comanches and Wichitas. Austin realized that he preferred to include, especially the Tonkawas, in the colony rather than exclude them.

Vital to the Tonkawa economy was trade in hides and furs and raiding on the Comanche for horses. Some accounts indicate that it was the Tonkawa fur and meat that sustained the first settlers of Austin's Little Colony. Tonkawa trading networks extended as far as Anglo-American-settlements in Louisiana. It is certain that early Anglo settlements appreciated their presence. Evidence exists that the Tonkawa fought alongside the Texans during the Texas Revolution and members of the Texas Congress attempted to recognize their service by reserving them two reservations on the Brazos and Colorado rivers.

The Tonkawa served as guides and fighters for the Colonies' raids against Comanches and Wichitas. Some of the Colony settlers took advantage of this raiding and

trading economy by buying stolen horses. In retaliation some Comanche bands, who also came into the Colorado River area to hunt seasonally, raided the Tonkawas and often visited neighboring Anglo settlements looking for the Tonkawas. The Anglo-Texas farms often became the Comanche source of supply for horses, cattle, hogs, and corn.

It can only be speculated as to why Mary Christian Burleson decided to move twice from the safety of Bastrop with a young family to the colony's most northern frontier, considered dangerous Indian territory. It is likely that Mary's relationship with her stepson, Edward Burleson, instilled confidence in their security in the area. Burleson was elected vice president of the republic in 1841, around the time Mary first moved to the Elgin area. Edward forged a strong alliance with some indigenous groups.

While the Burleson men were involved in many battles with American Indian groups, Edward developed close relationships with local native groups. Placido, principal chief of the Tonkawas, was a close ally of Burleson. The Tonkawa provided a service to the Republic as Army and Ranger scouts against the Caddo, Wichita, Waco, and especially against their traditional Comanche enemies. Sadly, Placido was killed by Shawnees and Kickapoos, supported by Kiowas and Comanches, which some historians indicate was for his allegiance to Texas as Rangers and or refusal to join the Federal cause and fight against Texas during the Civil War.

Mary's youngest daughter, Elizabeth Burleson, was very close with her brother Edward and that relationship is vividly described in the 1914 *A History of Texas and Texans*. Elizabeth was an accomplished horseman, a crack shot and accompanied Edward during his many visits to friendly neighboring indigenous groups. Elizabeth recounts that she sat with her brother in council with friendly tribes. She learned many of their songs, traditions and participated in their rituals. Elizabeth would have been 16 at the time of Edward's death in 1851 and it is safe to assume that Edward visited Elizabeth at the home we are fighting to preserve today. It may be that likely their visits to neighboring tribes may have included the seasonal American Indian camp like the one on Red Town Road near their home on the prairie.

Two occasions shed light on Mary's attitude toward indigenous groups. The first being her overall lack of concern for an impending raid of her first cabin. Accounts state that she was busy getting a piece of cloth off the loom and did not heed the warning of a raid until rather late in the afternoon.

The other incident happened after Mary built her second home on the prairie. Every winter migrating native groups would come into the neighborhood. One day two Indians knocked at her back door and requested two beeves (Spanish for cattle for meat). Mary granted the request and the next winter they returned to the house, whereupon they spread out two lovely buffalo robes saying, "These for the two beeves".

Convictions held by many area settlers perpetuated the belief that all American Indians were fierce, war-like, and some were even savage cannibals, which often pre-

pared them to commit the very acts that so horrified them. Raiding, massacres and even scalping were perpetuated by both indigenous groups and Anglo-Texans.

By May of 1845 it was against the law for American Indian groups to reside within settlements around Bastrop. The Tonkawa could no longer pursue their customary lives, the great herd of buffalo had been decimated in most areas and settlers laid claim to many seasonal food gathering areas. The development of commercial ranching made American Indians convenient scapegoats for cattle stealing epidemic and led to a series of massacres on the remaining groups. Those who survived into the 1850's did so in isolation or were assimilated and worked as farm hands.

Entry in the union brought an influx of newcomers and passing caravans on the way to California. They brought new waves of disease, which some estimates indicate, reduced the Comanche population by half by 1849. At times some bands of the Tonkawa earned money by guiding gold seekers west, rounding-up stray cattle and picking cotton. Statehood brought continued settlement of the Tonkawa hunting grounds and treaties limiting trade denied them the markets necessary to continue their hide trade. During this period, accounts describe starving Tonkawa bands forced to approach military posts and beg for food or starve. The 1850's "take no prisoner" policy provided that most remaining groups lived in constant fear of violence from settlers.

By 1859, the Anglo-Texas farming and ranching economy dominated two-thirds of the state, and only the plains and isolated mountain and desert regions were held by indigenous groups. Severely depleted buffalo populations were all but destroyed by the arrival of white buffalo hunters which came with the railroad. According to an oral history recorded by Charlene Jordan in her fascinating account of the history of Post Oak Island, William J. Moon, who founded Elgin's now famous Southside Market in 1882, had American Indian ancestry, and was said to have brought meat and coffee to reservation-bound Indians camped near his home south of Elgin.

A small quantity of oral histories that exist which account for the lives of some American Indian groups in Texas, and Archaeology provides one of the only avenues for understanding the diverse cultures that once called Texas home.

People often ask: "Why I can't collect artifacts?" Most folks mistakenly assume that the casual collection of "a few points or boxes of points can't hurt!" "Before you collect any artifact, it is important to realize that often these materials represent our ONLY source of knowledge of groups who lived for thousands of years on the land we now call Texas. They are all pieces of Texas' past! Written documents record only about 500 years of history in Texas. By the time the earliest European explorers arrived, humans had lived in Texas for at least 13,000 years. It is only through the study of artifacts and other cultural remains in their context - as an archaeological site - that we can piece together a more inclusive and comprehensive story of past.

"Materials that archaeological sites contain are key to the unwritten past and often illuminate the written record, especially when details of everyday life are uncovered

that do not appear in official records. This is exactly the case at the Mary Christian Burleson Homestead site. Research into the sites deposits offers a unique opportunity to better understand the unwritten histories of lives of women on the frontier, earliest ranching families and possibly insight into the family's interactions with American Indian groups."

Despite the homestead's connection to Mary Christian Burleson and its status as the area's oldest remaining building, the homestead is rapidly deteriorating and potentially threatened by nearby development. If we lose this site, by law, archaeological sites and the artifacts within them are the personal property of the next landowner. The presence of one or more archaeological sites on private property does nothing to curtail or limit the property rights of landowners. Time is running out to conduct this research and we may not get this opportunity later! In Texas alone, an estimated 5,000 archeological sites disappear each year. Although natural forces like flooding and erosion are sometimes responsible, more often it is people who damage the sites.

No matter what form it takes, site destruction results in missed opportunities to learn about Texas' past. Careful study of archaeological materials is vital to a more complete understanding of Texas history—from ancient times to the recent past. When an archaeological site is destroyed, the information it contained is lost forever, and our knowledge of history remains incomplete.

The Council of Texas Archeologists (CTA) awarded Cristin Embree and the Mary Christian Burleson Preservation and Development Foundation a grant to finance Mary Christian Burleson Homestead Community Archaeological Survey, a series of hands-on archaeology field days at the site and open to the public to celebrate [Texas Archaeology Month \(TAM\)](#) this October. The surveys will occur in October and November and are open to the public. Join-in and help the Foundation collect baseline data needed to record the site and determine it's eligibility to the [National Register of Historic Places](#) and for a [State Antiquities Landmark \(SAL\)](#) designation.



# Join the Elgin Historical Association \$10 or \$15 for a family

Name & address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone/email \_\_\_\_\_



Return to any EHA member or to EHA PO Box 1234 Elgin, TX 78621 or drop it off at Elgin Depot Museum



## Thanks to:

Eric and Marge Carlson and Homer Johnson for keeping the flowers alive.

Judy Nelson for solving the mystery of who built 101 North Main and introducing us to William J and C B Miller.

Frances Brown Duey for photos and documents.

Allan Tolbert for his generosity and for all the work he puts in restoring our historic buildings.

LaVerne Arbuckle for the Hogeye Tree.

City of Elgin and Gary T. for prompt attention to our A/C problems

Who are your Ancestors?  
Do you want to learn how to find them?  
Come and learn tips on researching. Lunch included!

November 7, 2015

## The Mary Christian Burleson Preservation And Development Foundation Announces Family History Seminar



### TOPICS:

1. Basic Genealogical Research
2. Researching on the Ever-changing Internet
3. Breaking Down Brick Walls
4. Finding a Military Ancestor
5. Finding your Indian Ancestors

Sharon Wolff and Nancy McLarry are both from Boerne, Texas and are members of many organizations. Both are on the board of the Genealogy Society of Kendall County and have done research for many years. Sharon was Texas State Volunteer Genealogist and Texas Registrar of the Year for two years for United Daughters of the Confederacy. Nancy is a member of the Chickasaw nation and has spoken on Indian Ancestry for many years.

**Sharon Wolff  
& Nancy  
McLarry  
Guest Speakers**

The Mary Christian Burleson Preservation and Development Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of the homestead of Mary Christian Burleson. Mary was one of the first settlers of Texas. Mary and her family granted the land for the town site of Elgin in 1872.

**Elgin High School @ 14000  
County Line Rd. in Elgin, Texas**

**Registration Fee before November 2nd: \$50.00**

**On or after November 2nd Registration Fee: \$60.00**

**INCLUDES LUNCH**

**<http://familyhistoryseminar.eventbrite.com>**

*(Eventbrite accepts credit cards)*

**Seminar:**

**Nov. 7, 2015**

**9:00 am-2:30 pm**

**doors open at 8:30**

**Questions? Email us at:**

**Hello@  
MaryChristianBurleson.org**