

[Mrs. Amelia Steward Christoffer]

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FOLKLORE.

Miss Effie Cowan, P.W.

McLennan County, Texas,

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Interview with Mrs Amelia Steward Christoffer, White Pioneer, R.F.D. Mart, Texas.

"I was born in the province of Posen, Prussia (which was later a part of Germany) in the year 1850. I lived with my parents at this place until I came to Texas with some immigrants from Prussia when I was twenty years of age. We came in a sail boat and we were from March until in May on the trip. I found work on reaching the Texas port of Galveston and in the year 1872 my father and his family came and joined me in Galveston.

"In January 1873 I married Rhiner Christoffer who was on the same boat that I came over on and whom I later met, but did not know him before I left the old country. We lived four years in Galveston, then moved to Texas City and lived nine years. We were engaged

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here in farming and livestock business and when we sent our produce to Galveston to the market we took it in a sail boat, everybody had their sailboats just like they have their automobiles now. There were only two erman German families in Texas City, but we were happy in our new country and had the future to / look forward to.

“We moved to the community where I now live about the year [?], and came by way of Houston, then by way of empstead Hempstead thro' the Navasota river bottom, thro' the old towns of Marquez and Grosbeck and the Tehuacana Hills , which was the home of the Tehuacana Indians in the earlu early days of Texas. Thence on to the prairie country between the 2 towns of Grosbeck and Waco. The community we moved to was called the Kirk and Victoria communit es communities . We settled on the Brown ranch and my husband looked after it for Mr Brown until it was divided into farms and sold. We bought our farm from him and just stayed on to the present day. The country was thinly settled and our houses were poor and open. We went to Waco and Grosbeck for our supplies. At first we did not raise any cotton, just grain and fruit, vegetables and our live-stock.

“Before this ranch was cut up into farms, Mr Brown had red barns all over it to keep his feed for his stock in the winter when the grass was gone. Then we had better houses to live in also. When the round-ups on the ranch were on, it took all the men on the ranch and sometimes from the adjoining ranches. They would take two or three days to get the herd rounded up and then they had to be held together until they were driven to the train to be shipped to the market up north. The cow-boys would ride around the herd day and night and to keep the herd quiet they would sing the cowboy songs, this had a soothing effect on the herds, and they seldom had a stampede. When the herd became frightened this was when they would stampede and run in every direction, then the round-up was all to do over again.

“The Texas grass was in abundance and the range was sufficient for the cattle until the winter months. The priarie was beautiful in the spring with its coat of wild flowers, such as we had never seen before, and the life on the ranch was full of interest and excitement

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as we had plenty to keep us busy. I am reminded of the cowboy song of the 3 Grass of Uncle Sam”, “Now people of the eastern towns, its little that you know, About the western prairies, where the beef you eat does grow; Where the horses they run wild, with the mountain sheep and ram; And the cowboy sleeps contented, on the grass of Uncle Sam”.

“When they had the last round-up on the Brown ranch, Mr Brown, who lived in Calvert Texas came up to see to it. There were between a thousand and fifteen hundred head of cattle. This was in the spring of 1894. Most of the men in the community helped in this last roundup r rown Mr Brown stayed untill they were loaded on the train at Grosbeck to be shipped up North, then he went to his home in Calvert and committed suicide. Whether it was despondency over the last of the herd being gone or whether he was sick, no one knew, it was a shock to the whole community.

“After this , his son Bob came to look after the business until it was sold off into farms. This was about the year 1896. To the north extending clear across, was the Smyth ranch, which belonged to the father of the Smyth brothers, Alva, Lee, Dr Tom and Dr Ed, the first two are deceased, but the latter ones still are living, D Dr Ed lives in Mart. There were several girls in this family also, they first lived at old Springfield, but later moved to Mexia. Most of this ranch is still owned by the Smyth family.

“Some of the first settlers of this community, now known as the Victoria community with their families were, W. R. Williams, Cave Johnson 4 “Other names of the first families were Boman, Kahler, Hardwick, Vickers Drinkard, Dyer and Fogity. Some of the first ministers were, Baptist-Brother Jennings and Tatum. The Methodist were Lemmon, Mcglaughlin, Moon, Maxwell. The names of the first teachers were Adkins, Adams, McJunkin, Laird, this was at Kirk school where we first sent our children to school. Later on the Victoria school was organized and Miss Ollie Pearce was the first teacher.

“Then the Victoria church was organized and Brother Tatum and Grundy were the first Baptist ministers. Brother's Moon and Davis the first Methodist ministers. There was a

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preacher named Parker whom they called a Campbellite in those days, now the name of this church is called, "The Church of Christ, all of you I'm sure understand the difference mostly is in the music in their way of carrying on their services. They do not believe in any musical instruments and try to carry on their services as near like the apostles in the Bible days as they could. This man held some very successful meetings.

"For the public travel there was a stage line in the early days from "Old Springfield" to Waco. The stop between Springfield and Waco was called "Midway", being midway between the two towns. This stage stop was located on the old Vickers Farm , now known as the Corley farm. This was known as the old Waco and Springfield road and passed between the Drinkard farm and our house.

"The stage station was one big room made from cedar logs and would hold as many as six horses. They were kept here to change for fresh horses. The fresh horses were brought, and by the time they were 5 changed the driver would call "All eady ready " and away they went. The stage waited for no one, if anybody wanted to stop over they took the next stage. If a traveller were taking a long trip they often stopped at some town and waited for the next stage.

"When we first came to Texas stage travel was at its height of usefulness. There were several long routes for hundreds of miles which reached the distant towns and military posts. Very few railroads had been built and the stage drivers, soon to be gone , were seeing their best days. They were heroes in their way, an important factor in the settling of the country. There were many stories in those days of the different stage lines. One was of the Overland Trail from Little Rock Arkansas, thro' Texas and across the continent to California which was marked along the way by rude stones bearing silent testimony of where some stage had been robbed and the driver killed. It was said that the drivers were often killed by robbers or Indians as he slept with his gun in his hand, as he rested by the corral or in the rude stable where the horse were kept.

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“On some of the lines there were the splendid “Concord Coaches”, with four and six horses. Then the “Dirt wagons “ and “jerkies “ in the less thickly settled routes. The stage driver in those days would have look looked with contempt on the vehicles that now remain to supply remote places, untouched by a railroad or bus line.

“But to return to our own little stage line, when it reached Waco it was a matter of great enjoyment to the people old and young , to see it start on its return trip. The driver would mount his box (from where he drove) 6 and gather the lines and the agent and his helpers would hold the horses heads while the travellers got on and the mail was being loaded. Then at a signal they would let go and the driver would pull out in a dead run. The spirit of adventure was there the same as it is now in the air ship. Who knew but what the desperadoes would hold up the coach, or if it would reach its destination in / safety from the Indians, floods or robbers?

“When we came to this part of the state we came by wagon train from Texas City to our present home. The trip had a wonderful interest to us. We never wearied of the life in the open air which gave us such fine health. We had breakfast around three in the mornings, after which the wagons were ready with its occupants, the horses saddled for those riding, and at early dawn we were on the road. The beauty of the morning in this climate must be experienced to be realized. No fog as in the coast country, which hangs over the landscape, no wet grass to chill thro' and give you symptoms of rheumatism or ague, but the morning fresh and invigorating, as the sun bursts on the horizen in its blaze of glory, gives one the desire to be up and catch a glimpse of this beauty and a breath of the freshness of its pure air before the heat of the noon day sun.

“Close to the end of our journey up the fertile Navasota river country the little city of Grosbeck was our last stop / before we reached our destination, which was to be our future home, midway between Old Springfield and Waco / Texas. The country was rapidly recovering from the effect of the Reconstruction days, the after effect of the War between the States 7 and many new home seekers were coming to our part of the country. he The

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advantages of soil and climate were being advertised through out the old states and many were seeking new fortunes here.

“We began to raise cotton in the year 1886 on the prairie, the people thought at first th that it would not grow on the prair praire's, and so for years the section where the cotton was raised in this country was in the bottoms near the rivers. We first tried the small patches and as they did well, we then planted larger acreage. We took it to Kirk and Prairie Hill to be ginned, Tom Johnson had a gin at Kirk and a r ampkin Mr Lampkin at Prairie Hill. The first gin at Victoria was built by Henry Blake and John Mitchell. This was built on the Morgan, - Coker place, but was later moved to its present site, near my home.

“When the men had to go to court they went to Grosbeck in Limestone County. A distance of twenty miles. ne One of the judges who was on the bench so long was Judge Kirvin, who fterward afterward went to Congress. Then there was Judge Cobb who was so solemn that it was said he was never known to smile. One of the first doctors who came to the Kirk and Victoria communities was Dr Briscoe, who served us long and faithfully.

“My husband died in 1902. We had eight children, one, Fred, is now deceased. Those living are Lizzie, Annie, Rhiner, Katie, Betty, Lillie, & Oscar. Fred married Vida Deadman, Lizzie married Wiley Mitchell, and lives in the old home location. Annie married Elmer Deadman and lives at Lomesa Texas. Betty married Steve Collins, who is the secretary of the Mart Chamber of Commerce. Mart, Texas. 8 “Lillie married Ernest Vickers, Katie married Charlie Mitchell and lives at the town of Dawson, Texas. Oscar became a doctor, married a Miss Kelly and is practicing medicine at Mexia. Rhiner has never married and [has?] remained with me and cared for me since the death of my husband in 1902.

“It is a long way back to the days of my girlhood in Prussia, and dreaming of the new country “America”, the reality is better than the dream. I am rich in the blessing of my home and family. This has become my own country, but it does not mean that I have

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forgotten the other country or the other friends and relatives, but always in my heart there is the echo of the farewell in our German language.

“Aufs Weidersehen”.

(‘Till we meet again).