

IMAGES
of America

AROUND ALEDO

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Foreword by Homer Norris

FOREWORD

Aledo was thousands of years from having a name when Upper Pleistocene-period hunters roamed the Clear Fork Valley. Gravel deposits yield the bones of mammoths, camels, bison, and big cats with 6-inch fangs. The mammoths had 9-foot tusks, and the bison *latifrons* had a horn span of 6 feet. I have dug up some of the mammoth ivory and a bison *anticus* skull with a 3-foot horn span.

Those ancient hunters risked their lives going in close range to large game, as do modern citizens, driving into herds of vehicles on the highways—all to provide food for loved ones. These ancients were not hazy myths and legends, but living, loving people whose remains sleep in the sandy slopes along our streams.

We have evidence of bands in the Clovis, Folsom, Plano, and the long Archaic period of habitation here. This was followed by those excellent horsemen, the Comanche and Kiowa, who ruled the plains so impressively. Every time I left a hayfield, shimmering in the summer sun, and dropped off into our living streams, I forgot all cares and reverted back to the age of the flint artifacts found on the gravel bars. In a world of shady cool and the smell of willow, connection with the ancient ones transcended all mundane concerns.

In the early 1850s, covered wagons rolled into this area, bringing folks from Kentucky and Georgia. They brought a walking plow, a few seeds, and a lot of faith. Conditions had not changed much by the time I was a young boy in the early 1930s. Lest we should become soft, the Great Depression came to discipline us.

Aledo would not have public electricity until World War II; wagon travel was still common in my boyhood, and we would go to the front door to watch a car pass. To us, the mere idea of a traffic jam in Aledo was about as feasible as Buck Rogers traveling in space. We knew a world of biscuits cooked in a wood range, adventure books read wide-eyed by a kerosene lamp, and ice cream freezers cranked by hand. To us, radio was more exciting than television. Despite hard realities, life was rich and good. When we snuggled into bed and went to sleep, listening to whippoorwills and wolves, we knew that Mama was right: everything would turn out fine.

Now we want either the central heat or air conditioning to be on at all times. If our feet touch earth, it is because we slipped off the sidewalk on the way to the car. Comfort is the key word. Comfort is honorable, but have we become so far removed from the earth that we rob ourselves of a better reality?

The Aledo I grew up in has been largely vaporized. Old Bob Ball no longer sits by our hearth and tells about cattle drives. Mama no longer puts a drop of kerosene on our tongue to cure a noisy cough. The old ones have gone on. I've watched a whole town of people slip away, usually taking their wit, wisdom, and tales of struggle and adventure with them. Blessed are those who chronicle and point us back to the people, the simple faiths and philosophies that can set us more solidly on this land.

—Homer Norris
Annetta, Texas
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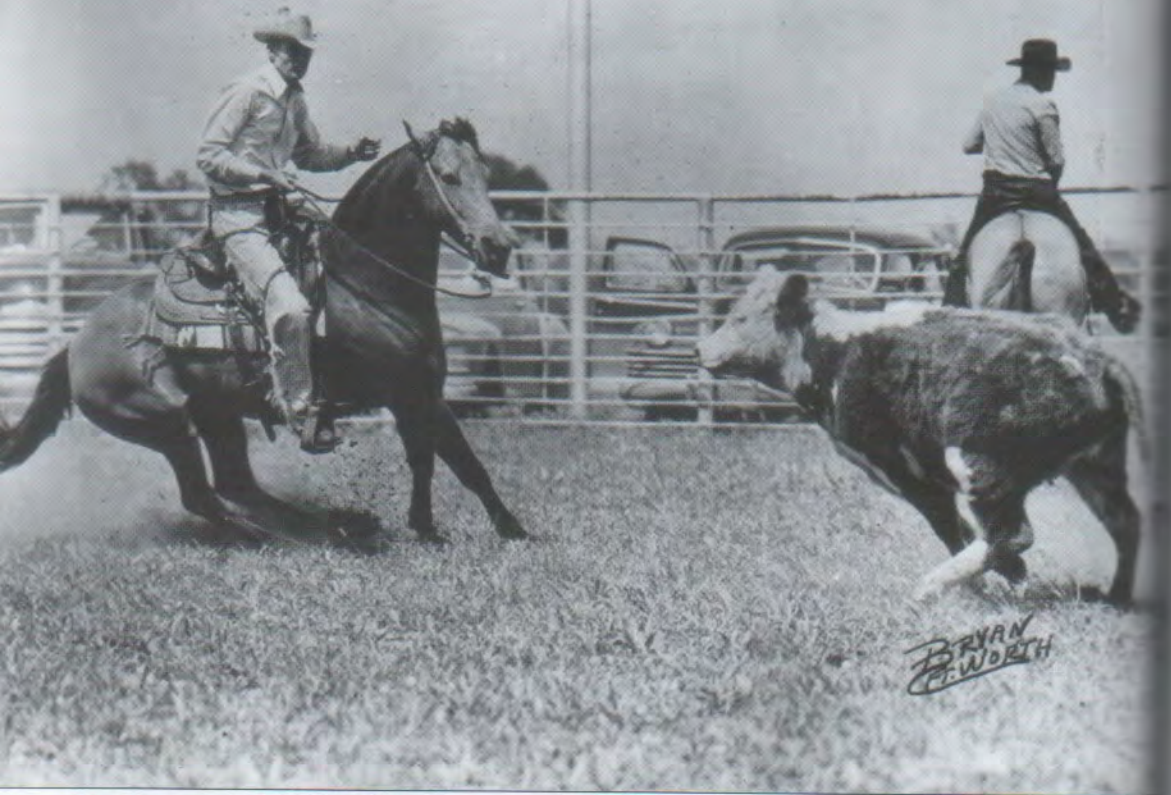
This book would not exist if not for Homer Clyde “Tot” Norris and Reubene Gressett Scott, two gifted storytellers who live in eastern Parker County, love its history, and write about it. Reubene’s homespun, humorous *Ramblin’ Reubene* column in the *Community News* first introduced me to the area’s history. Homer Norris, a remarkable artist and writer who captures vignettes of local life on canvas and in his *Parker County Prairie Sketchbook* series, offered a second nostalgic portal. Reubene’s folk humor evokes the likes of Will Rogers; Homer’s humble brilliance touches the heart. I defy anyone’s imagination to elude the magic woven by those two voices.

I owe deep and special thanks, also, to my editor at Arcadia Publishing, the ever-patient and encouraging Luke Cunningham; and Jean Bennett, Evlyn Wiley Broumley, Randy Keck, Doyle Marshall, Aledo mayor Kit Marshall, Brenda McClurkin and Cathy Spitzenberger of the University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections, John Scovil and his staff at the Doss Cultural and Heritage Center, and Vickie Ballow Slagle and members of the East Parker County Genealogy and Historical Society (EPCGHS).

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International award-winning author and Aledo resident Sherrie McLeroy led me to the most enjoyable writing project of my career. I owe her a debt of gratitude.

At age five, I announced my intention to grow up, move to Texas, and marry a cowboy—a far-fetched aim for a child of the Chicago suburbs born into a fourth-generation Illinois family. For almost 30 years I’ve been firmly rooted in Texas. If a 5-acre “ranch” and weekend cowboy qualify, my life’s dream is in place. I thank the warm, welcoming folks of Parker County for making the achievement a rich satisfaction.



RAY SMYTH, 1948. National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA) cofounder Ray Smyth is shown on Barney, a horse bred by Barney R. Holland by crossing banker Fred Smith's stud with his mare so his son, Barney B. Holland, would have a horse upon his return from Princeton. World War II changed everything, and young Barney became a submarine officer in the Pacific. After epic haggling (Smyth said he was "just a broke cowboy"), Holland sold him the pair. Smyth gelded the colt and trained Barney for ranch work, where he excelled at cutting. NCHA records are incomplete, but Smyth related that Barney was the first NCHA-registered horse—or the first to earn a Certificate of Merit, as it was termed in 1946. (Courtesy of Barney B. Holland Jr.)



**THE BARNEY HOLLAND
"CASTLE," 1937.**

Businessman Barney R. Holland and his wife, Ellen Bowie Holland, began work on their house in Annetta in July 1934. Fourteen-year-old Barney B. Holland worked with the construction crew and was paid \$1.50 a day. Young Holland paid for his meals at the carpenters' mess and contributed the occasional rabbit or squirrel to the stew pot. (Courtesy of Barney B. Holland Jr.)



AERIAL VIEW OF HOLLAND FARM. For his country home, Holland purchased several hundred acres from the railroad and a small piece of land from the Gratts family of Annetta. The original property deed for the small parcel was signed by Gov. Sam Houston. Roy Gratts built the guesthouse on the property. (Courtesy of Barney B. Holland Jr.)

BARNEY R. HOLLAND, 1949.
Founder of Barney Holland Oil Company and son of Weatherford mayor, banker, and historian G. A. Holland, Barney poses here with Roby Jr. Holland married Ellen Bowie of Weatherford, author of *Gay as a Grig*, a memoir of her father's emigration from Scotland to Texas. The Hollands built a country home in Annetta. (Photograph by W. D. Smith, courtesy of Barney B. Holland Jr.)



MARSH FARMER, TRACK STAR.
As a member of the Texas Tech track team from 1938 to 1940, Marsh set world and collegiate hurdle records and was considered one of the finest track stars of the day. A partial left arm from birth was inconsequential to the All-American at Texas Tech. Farmer and track experts always believed he would have been a member of the 1940 U.S. Olympic team, but the Olympics were cancelled during the buildup to World War II. (Courtesy of Jon Vandagriff.)