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806-414-1076 + Fax 806-383-8452

P. O. Box 5644 + Amarillo, TX 79117-5644

4512 N. E. 24th Avenue

Email: sgarner@dioama.org **NEW**



VOLUME ONE

SPRING

2020

Folks in Liberty Coummunity Gapsed at Orders to Move in 14 Days

Payment Still Awaited For Pantex War Site

By Lewis Nordyke (News Staff Writer, Amarill Daily News)

Thursday Morning April 18, 1943

At Dusk on April 6, 1942, the lights came on in Liberty Hall on the Metcalf land, three and a half miles east of St. Francis in the Liberty Community. The air bore the freshness of spring, the people of the community left their homes and started for Liberty Hall. White-faced cattle grazed on the greening pastures; rank green wheat waved in the fields beside the community roads. J. N. Garretson, who homesteaded his place in 1899 and started chiseling out a home with little equipment save his bare knuckles, was going over to Liberty Hall with his folks. The Garretsons were like most farmers; they lived on the hope that the next year would be a good one. And that good year appeared to be in the making. Wheat never looked more promising. But there were disturbing thoughts among the Garretsons. There had been rumors in the community.

Center of Community Life

Going to Liberty hall had been pleasant for years. Mr. Metcalf gave the land for the hall. Women of the community paid the biggest part of the cost of building Liberty Hall with cream and egg money.

Liberty Hall had been the center of things—golden wedding anniversaries, community dances, meetings of the 4-H Club boys, and practically every community activity. Going to the hall was a thing to which the folks looked forward with pleasure

But on the evening of April 6, 1942, there was a feeling of doubt; no one could guess what might happen. Even Father John Steinlage, who knew all the folks, Catholic and Protestant, had no idea what might happen.

Man in Uniform Speaks

Father John was in the Hall when the Garretsons arrived and took their places in the hall. Mr. Garretson waved at Harve Lusk and Charlie Russ, who had been renting some of his land for years. There was a man in uniform and some important looking city men not in uniform. The man in uniform started talking.

"Your land has been condemned for war purposes," he said. "You have 14 days in which to move all your belongings." Faces lengthened. There were as many gasps as there were Liberty Community folks in the hall. The

man in uniform kept talking. He said something about the government paying full value for the land; he remarked on the patriotism of the people. Few heard him. Two men managed their voices well enough to ask questions. Mr. Garretson cleared his throat and looked over at Harve and Charlie; they were staring at the man in uniform.

Loans Promised

Someone with the Farm Security Administration said loans up to \$100 could be made to cover the cost of moving.

Then the people learned their improvements were condemned, too. And that promising good wheat crop. They filed out of Liberty Hall. There were so many aching hearts the folks didn't linger and talk as was customary; they went home. They would have homes only 14 days. In that period they would have to gather up their belongings, their livestock, hardwood floors, the machine shops, the fences, the heating system would have to be left. In the case of the Garretsons there was among other things, a new windmill wheel. It sold for salvage.

"Your land has been condemned for war purposes,"

Had to Go to Court

Nearly every family in the Liberty community in Carson County was uprooted by the words from the man in uniform.

They had only two consolations.

1. By moving from their homes they would aid the war effort.
2. The government would pay them.

By now, more than a year later, many of the people doubt whether all was patriotic in the "Pantex deal" and they've had to go to court try to get what they think their land, improvements and crops were worth.

Pantex Ordinance Plant stands on 15,000 acres they were talking about in Liberty Hall that night a year ago.

Ask Questions

A great many of the people including Father John have asked this question: "Why was it so essential to put Pantex in the most thickly populated farming section in this vicinity?"

Other questions asked by the people: "Was it water, as they said at the time? Or were there pressure and Politics? Why didn't the bomber plant for Amarillo Materialize? Why did the government pay \$60 an acre and above for other land nearby?"

Very few of the people in Liberty Community have received any money. Government appraisers set a \$450,000 value on the land; this was raised to \$575,000 as compromise. Appraisers for the people set a value of \$984,274.22. When the case went to court a special commission appointed by Judge James C. Wilson set a value of \$700,000. Government attorneys appealed to Judge Wilson, and the case was due for jury trial in May.

Gave Up Wheat

The people wouldn't have sold the land for \$2,000,000. Jess Vance, for example, had improvements worth at least \$70,000. His place was not for sale at any price for his life's labors were there. The Garretson's wouldn't have thought about selling their old homestead; they loved the soil that had been so stubborn with them.

And all the folks hated to give up that wheat crop. The government sold \$100,000 worth of wheat off the land; Amarillo men got right at \$6 an acre for harvesting it, and that price is double the usual cost of harvesting. The government seemed to be able to pay everyone well except the people who were forced out of their homes on 14 days' notice, counting the one that had passed just previous to the twilight meeting in Liberty Hall.

And, incidentally, Liberty Hall went too. It was moved away for use at Pantex. The man who had given the land for the hall was docked \$2,100 for the land donated.

Governed by Hard Law

Only comparatively few people have received any money. About \$129,000 of the \$450,000 available has been claimed. The law covering such cases specifies that the money offered by the government can be taken without prejudicing a person's case if more money is sought. The people were told of that law. They know that the \$450,000 is available. But they think that to accept it would prejudice their case.

The law governing the condemnation of land for such purposes is a hard law. It does not provide for sentiment or inconvenience. But it doesn't demand that the victims be drive-like cattle and treated with contempt.



Father John Steinlage

A government man told Jess Vance that any man big enough fool to improve a place as he had done with years of toil, ought to lose the land anyhow.

Lost His Feed

The army officer who broke the news in Liberty Hall ended his talk with the threat that if the people weren't off the land in 14 days they would be put off.

W. H. Lusk lost 65 head of fine hogs because he had no place to move them; that would mean lots of pork in a meat storage.

In the 17 affected families are at least 40 children. They were uprooted from their homes with no place to go. Take Frank Grabber. He moved to St. Francis in the spring of 1916. He worked as a farm hand until he entered the army. Returning home from the trenches in France, in 1919 he married Clara Detten. They rented a farm and started improvements. They raised a family of 10 children; the eleventh was born since they were forced off the land. The

“Why did they pick out a farming community for the plant?”

Grabbers were renters, but they had lived on only one farm; they were good renters. Even the AAA didn't put them off the land.

Unvalued All Possessions

These people were caught in a mighty vise. They didn't want to complain. First of all, they were willing to do the patriotic thing, although there was much discussion of the question of why that particular vicinity was chosen. Ten miles north and not a family would have been uprooted.

They didn't want to be accused of “hogging” the government. They didn't want to be accused of upping the price just because it was the government who wanted the land.

But the condemnation involved everything they possessed, and they had no place to go. The people say they have been asked to pay all the 1942 taxes although they were put off the land in April.



OFF THE LAND --The Frank J. Grabber family were victims of the “land squeeze.” Although they were tenants they had lived on the same farm since the parents were married. Ed, the baby, was born after the family's hurried move from the land. Left to right (bottom row) Bernard, Mr. Grabber and Ed, Eugenge (top row) Teresa, John, Lillian, Florence, Margaret, Leona. Mary, the oldest daughter, was away from home and does not appear in the Picture.



The Frank Grabber family moving their belongings from St. Francis in the spring of 1942, after being forced to move when the Pantex Ordinance Plant was built.

Frequent Wonder

And another thing, many of these people had debts-long time mortgages on their land. These must be paid at once. They didn't make the debts with the intention of paying them at once; they intended to handle them on a long-time basis. To pay all long-time debts on a week's notice could break the biggest business in the country.

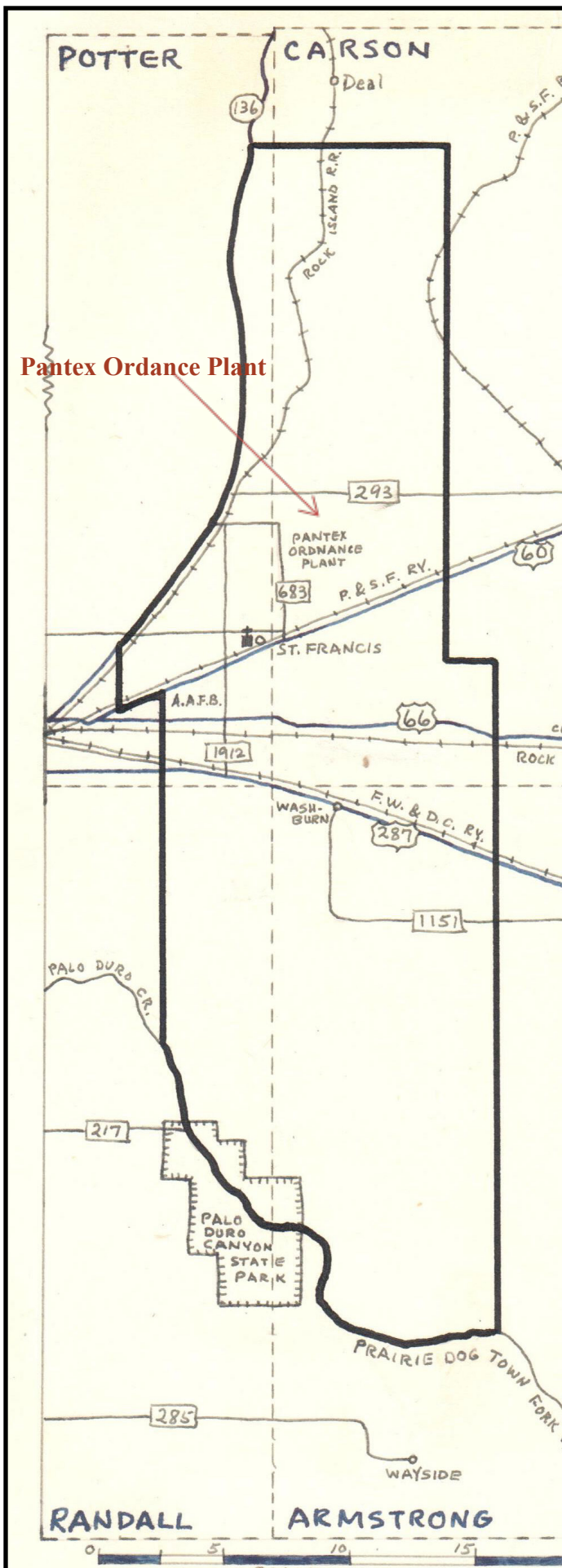
The law covering such cases is heartless and hard. But not so hard as the faces of these dispossessed people. At times they wonder what the war is about.

Here are some case histories, a representative few:

W. W. Lusk, Mrs. Lusk and their two children farmed a section and a half. They came there in 1934 in time to fight all the dust storms. They lived in a basement. But they worked hard and improved their farm, which was the first they ever owned. They had a fine home on April 6, 1942. They are now living in a “shackled” old house. They lost 65 head of hogs, other stock and equipment. “Why did they pick out a farming community for the plant?” the farmer asked. “Couldn't they build railroads elsewhere?” Asked to pay all the 1942 taxes although they were put off the land in April.

Turned Down \$38,000.

Mrs. Marie Metcalf owned 800 acres. Forced to sell 45 head of cattle at a loss. Others died in the quick move. Two horses lost. The late Mr. Metcalf built their home 35 years ago. He gave the land for the community club house. The government's offer docked Mrs. Metcalf \$2,100 for that land. Mrs. Metcalf was offered



(-a few weeks previously) she had turned down \$38,000 for 640 acres of the land. It was a fine home, two story house, full basement, electric lights, running water, two double garages, steel grainary, large machine shed, two large chicken houses. Her sons tried to purchase some of the buildings; the government's bureaucrats wouldn't listen. Mrs Metcalf is the mother of 10 children. She has been ill much of the time since she was forced out of her home to live with the children.

Charlie Russ, tenant on the Garretson place, lost a big flock of chickens, several sheep and a good brood sow. Had an extra feed bill of \$975. Was not permitted to haul out 18,000 bundles of feed; left 30 acres of cane that had not been grazed. Cost him \$450 to move to a place near Lark. He suffered a total loss of \$2,500 because he was not permitted time enough to move.

Lost a wheat Crop

Paul Obrecht: His half section of land was cut in two. Pantex taking half and leaving the rest for him. His pasture was taken and he had to sell most of his cattle, reducing his herd in half at a time the nation needs meat. He was offered \$20 an acre. He can draw \$6,400 on the government offer. There was a \$2,800 long-time loan which must be paid as soon as there is settlement. Mr. and Mrs. Fred Haiduk: Married in 1930 and bought the farm the same year. Four hard years improving the farm. Planted trees, flowers, shrubs, grass. "We moved with my father and lived in a garage for four months." Contracted for a farm and moved again. The contract is about to expire and the Haiduks cannot buy it because they have not received fair pay for the land from which they were uprooted. Lost a 25 bushel to the acre wheat crop. Mr. Haiduk is unhappy. He said, "It seems very foolish that the government would award a contract to a Polk Street farmer and pay him \$5.65 per acre to cut the wheat when everyone knows that is about \$3.15 above the prevailing price. We wanted them to let us cut our own wheat and they refused. We had a nice home with all conveniences. No one had given it to us. We worked for it. "Mr. Haiduk is 38 years old. He has a wife and one child.

"Kicked Around"

A.P. Bichsel: had 40 acres of wheat. The family was sent to town. The machinery was stored with a neighbor, the stock was pastured west of Panhandle, the chickens moved to a place east of Panhandle. Traded for a place near Washburn. About to lose it because he hasn't received fair payment for his Pantex land. Had to sell his feed at 80 cents; now he is buying the same feed at \$1.80. Lost last year's row crop. "There is something wrong some place," said Mr. Bichsel.

I don't think the government wants us to be treated like this. I feel there is nothing wrong with the government itself, but the wrong lies with the people who are representing in this particular case. We've been kicked around for a whole year and everybody is disgusted with the whole thing. Why did they decide to put Pantex in a farming community? Only a short distance away there were no farms.

John Slater: Lived with wife and two children on 650 acres owned by his father. Highly improved home. Had to sell livestock, including 50 head of cattle. Farm machinery left out in the weather. Owned 240 acres four miles away and could have kept at work had he been allowed to move improvement there. He had lived on the land 29 years. "If we can get established we can help produce the food," he said. "I can't understand why they picked a farming community for the plant. There were no farms a short distance away."

Moved to Shack

Case by case they run through 17 families. Jess Vance had one of the finest farms in Texas. He couldn't in 50 years of hard work replace the things he had chiseled out of his soil.

Bennie Bentley, his wife and two children were good tenants. They were forced to sell their stock. They moved from a fine home into a shack.

Joe Berg, who lost land and crops but not his home site, confirms the "good year" theory the folks had when they were called to Liberty. "In my 36 years in the Panhandle," he said, "last year's crop was by far the best in that section. It would have been much more profitable if the government had allowed me to harvest my land in the usual manner. I was offered \$2.50 an acre for the crop, the crop was worth at least \$30 an acre."

Want to go to Work.

One by one these people have been interviewed. They want only fair play. They know there will be only fairness and justice in Judge Wilson's court when the case comes up, but they fear the bureaucrats will keep it in court on appeal for at least another year. What they want is a fair offer from the war department and settlement out of court so they can go to work as war time produces and to start the long hard toil of building new homes when their boys come back from the war.



Margaret and Florence Grabber in matching dresses, with their cousins from Alabama: Bernadine Grabber, on the left and Dolores Grabber, on the right. The girls are on the Buschkoetter place, before it became the west gate of Pantex, in the late 1930s.

1942 – World War II

- Constructed in 1942 on 16,000 acres
- 18,000 acres today
- Last of 14 bomb-loading plants constructed during WWII
- Amarillo Air Force Base, 1941-1968



Giant Industry Rises in Wheat Fields

By Raymond Holbrook
News Staff Writer 1942

ST. FRANCIS, April 17- Two Weeks ago the war preparation was something read about in the newspaper, heard over the radio and discussed at the cross-roads store of this prosperous agricultural community. Today the war is literally in everyone's barnyard. A dozen and a half farm families are feverishly packing their household goods and moving their livestock to make-way for the many-million-dollar Pan-Tex Ordnance plant that is already beginning to rise on the wheat fields here.

Pictures are coming off the wall of houses that have been homes of some families for decades, farm machinery is being moved to neighbors, cattle and hogs are being driven to other pastures or markets, and farmers are looking for other places or moving in with relatives.

The country roads in the ordnance plant "area" for the first time in history have a traffic problem. Combines and plows towed behind tractors and trucks, wagons loaded with feed, droves of cows, and cars laden with household goods on the way out meet station wagons full of government officials and surveying crews, trucks loaded with lumber and heavy machinery, workmen's cars and road-building equipment coming in.

Across a wheat field and a lake, railroad crews are busy laying track on a high fill that will help serve the war industry plant. On another field, buildings are taking shape. Temporary electric lines festoon the skyline.

A two-room building in a farmyard that a few weeks ago might have been the hired hand's, now has a big sign "Police Headquarters, Pan-Tex Ordnance Plant."

In several barnyards, well drilling crews are hard at work, and many pastures are dotted with the stakes of surveying crews.

In the hamlet of St. Francis, the main highway is torn up-end impassable as road construction crews hasten to make it a four-lane route. Trucks are lined up and trailer-houses are beginning to appear. In the not far distant Panhandle, the county seat, the activity is reflected as farmers having to move, crowd the county agents' office to get help in moving, advice on handling stock, and to see if he knows of any available farms.

For the construction forces, the transition and the speed with which the plant is being built is nothing new; but to the farmers who have measured time in the terms of plantings and harvest, spring and fall, and who now must be off the land by Monday night, it is a new experience.

What do the farmers think of the government acquisition of the land? How are they meeting the situation? And where are they planning to go?

Nineteen farms are affected by the establishment of the new wartime industrial plant—17 farm families and two non-resident operators who live in Amarillo but run their own farms. In a farm-to-farm trip over the area this summary was obtained:

1. The persons affected—residents and non-operators—have not one word of protest for the government taking the land. Its war and it's going to take industrial plants to the win the war. They recognize it as a wartime necessity and accept it wholeheartedly as such.
2. They feel that two weeks, in view of the season and the heavy rains that have fallen since the order was issued, is entirely too short for them to move.
3. They feel that there is unnecessary delay in the appraisal of the land and settlement with the government. They are unable to make definite plans until they know what they are going to receive and some are becoming fearful lest the proceedings drag on indefinitely or that they "have to take a "skinning," as one farmer expressed it.

Proud of Record

The St. Francis community is one of the oldest and one of the most prosperous in the immediate Plains area. The farm houses are larger than are usually found in the Panhandle; a number of them are two stories and prac

tically are all well improved. Rural electric lines lead to almost every house and electric refrigerators, power cream separators, and electric lights in homes and barnyards are commonplace. The farmers are justly proud of their 35-bushel-an acre wheat yields, their well improved places, and their abundant stocks of feeds and grains.

Years of labor have gone into the makings of these farms. Take for example J. J. Vance, one of the most successful farmers here, who has been a resident of the community since 1902 and has been on his present place since 1912.

The Vance farm is the show place of the community. His home has electricity, sewage system, and its own butane system with a 800 gallon underground storage tank, a double hot water heating system and a water softening system. There is a grain storage elevator that rivals commercial elevators in construction and capacity: a brick machine shop has over head cranes, complete machine equipment and storage space; there is a four-vehicle brick garage; out-houses are constructed of either concrete or brick. There are concrete driveways, and the fences around the house and barnyard have steel posts set in concrete.

Wife Goes to Clinic

“While it does seem that areas in the unoccupied sections to the north and west of here with equal rail and highway facilities that could be selected, if the government say this is what they need, it’s O.K. with me,” Mr. Vance says place. I am just too old to start all over again now.”

The delay in getting appraisals and definite settlement for the property is a concern which Mr. Vance shares with his neighbors.

Appraisal is Problem

“I am afraid that some are going to be disappointed,” he says. “They have had their hopes pretty high, and though they have been assured that they will be satisfied, I am afraid they won’t all be.”

Harve Lusk, who has been in this community three decades and on his present farm for three years, is worried too.

“We thought we would have our appraisals before we moved, but it doesn’t look like we will,” he said. “I intended to be off the land by Monday as the government asked me to, but it isn’t good business to be off before you know what you are going to get.

“The real estate men have burned up lots of gasoline coming out to try to sell me another place but I can’t even start dealing until I know how much I am going to get. I am trying to find temporary quarters for my family and as soon as we get the settlement then we will start getting another place of our own.”

Moving in with Parents

The Fred Haiduks are also forced to delay making plans until they know what their settlement will be. So for the present they are moving in with his parents, the Ben Haiduks of White Deer.

“We would like to know definitely what we are going to get but we haven’t worried much,” Mrs Haiduk, an attractive young woman, declares. “Maybe that’s because we are younger than most of those who have to move and haven’t been here so long.: The Haiduks moved on their present place when they were married three years ago.

“As far as having to move that’s all right with us. The boys on the front lines are making lots of sacrifices and we can make some, too.” she concluded.

The Vances, Lusks, and the Haiduks are the only resident operators who own their own land. However, many of the others who are renting have lived on their places for many years.

Long Search for Place

For instance the Leo Gables have been on the same place since 1918, or all but two years of their married life. and both have lived in the community for even longer.

“Our main concern is getting another place,” Mrs. Gable, mother of 10 who was hanging out her last washing at their farm, said. “My husband has been out almost every day looking for another place. I hope he comes home with good news tonight.”

J. W. Jones, an elderly farmer, is also concerned about getting another place. “The one we have is all a man could ask for. I don’t think we will be able to find another philosophically.

“As to my own plans, I am storing my household goods and then my wife and I are planning a trip to Temple so she can go through the clinic, and then perhaps we will go to Hot Springs. After that I will start looking for another place. I probably will turn “town farmer,” living in town and operating a place in the country. After

getting used to electricity, gas, and other modern conveniences, I don't think we could go back to kerosene lamps, which we would have to do if we started developing another place as nice," he relates. "I have found a place for us to move for the present and pretty soon we will start looking for a permanent one. Right now my big job is trying to find some truckers to help move my stuff."

Complicating the moving problem is the fact that this is the "off season" for getting a farm. Most tenants move between harvest and planting season and very few farms and practically no really desirable one are now available.

Beehive of Activity

They are leaving a wheat crop that promises to be the best since 1924. Sub-soil moisture is excellent and pasture has been luxuriant. Last Year this community had a bumper feed crop and though some farmers have moved their grain, many are leaving their big stacks of fodder because of the cost of moving and the fact many do not have any place to move it.

R. B. Lathem, who lives in Amarillo but operates his own farm, is one who is planning to leave some of his feed.

Already the Lathem place is a beehive of activity as water well digging crews are busy there.

"How do I feel about having to move? It's all right with me but I admit I was pretty well aggravated when I came out here the other day and found them drilling in my hog pen with the fence torn down and the hogs out. I thought I was going to have the full two weeks to get out."

Notice is Short

"But I got the hogs altogether again and I am all over being aggravated," he related with a broad grin. "It's all OK. I am selling some of my stock and moving the rest to available pasture."

Moving within the time limit is a problem to a number of farm families in the area. Although there had been talk of the establishment of the ordnance plant for some time, it was not until a week ago Monday night that those affected were officially notified to move.

"The rains have made it difficult for us to start moving," Miss Martha Metcalfe, who lives with her mother, Mrs. M. J. Metcalfe, says. The Metcalfes have been on their place for 35 years and have a number of large barns filled with feed, stock and equipment. Almost completely moved are the A. P. Bischels, who have been on the same farm 13 years. Only one milk cow remains.

Equitable Allotments

Mr. Bischel has rented a house in Amarillo for his family and his equipment is being placed on farms of neighbors.

Other families who are moving are those of Henry Covington, Doyle Barnes, Gilbert Bellinghausen, John Bellinghausen, Frank Grabber, J. P. Obrecht, Charles Russ, Bennie Bentley, John Slater, and W. C. Metcalf, Jr., W. H. Kimbell of Amarillo is the other non-resident operator.

Farmers who move to other counties will be assured that they will get equitable crop allotments as result of a recent Agricultural adjustment Administration ruling, W. K. Gottingame, Carson County agricultural agent, who has been helping the farmer move, reports.

To the task of moving and the many accompanying problems facing the farmers in the affected area, the government officials in charge are taking a sympathetic attitude.

Forced to take Shortcuts

"In obtaining possession of the land, we want to do so with the least possible inconvenience to the farmers," Major H. P. Burgard, in charge of the construction work here for the army, declared. "Although the time limit has been set for two weeks, we realize the farmers face many problems and we intend to give them every possible consideration."

"We have tremendous job to do in limited time," he continued. "Because of the urgency of this construction, we have had to do some things we otherwise would not have done. For instance, we are retaining all windmills and water facilities on the farms. We would have liked to have been able to allow the farmers to take this with them, because we know it will be hard for them to get new equipment. However, we simply had to have an immediate water supply and the windmills are the only present source of water in that area. Had they been removed, construction work would have been seriously delayed."

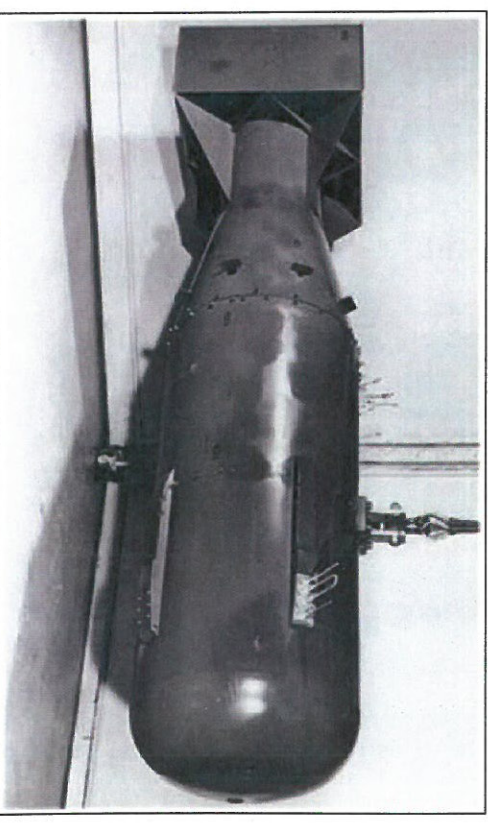
To Speed Settlement

"As to the settlements for their property, it is only right and fair that this should be made as soon as possible. We understand the problem the farmers are facing and though this phase of work-

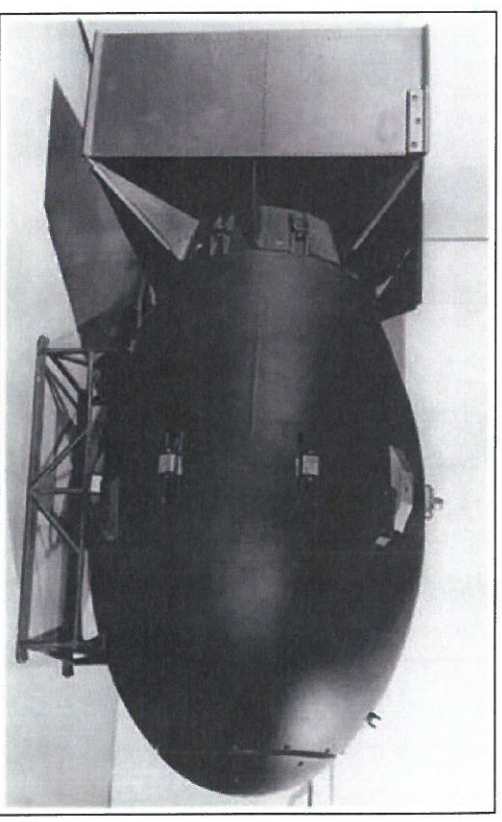


1945 – World War II

- August 6, 1945 - Little Boy
- August 9, 1945 - Fat Man



Little Boy



Fat Man

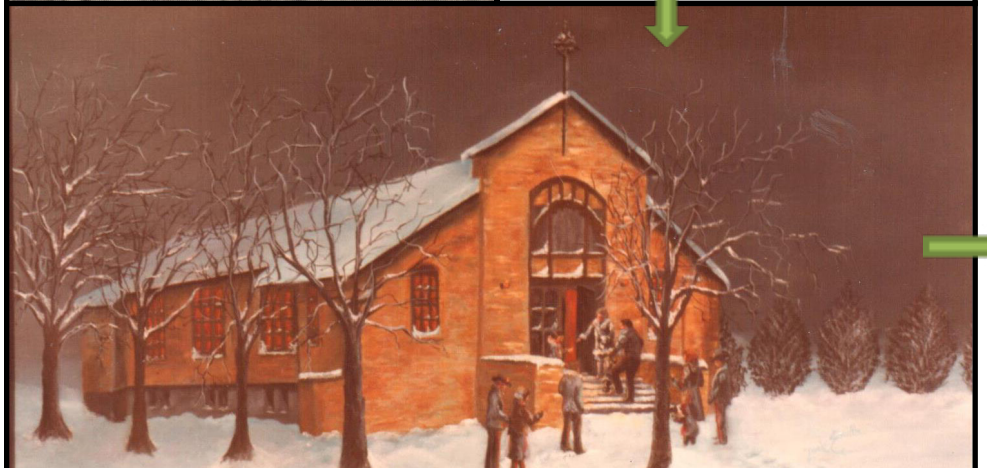
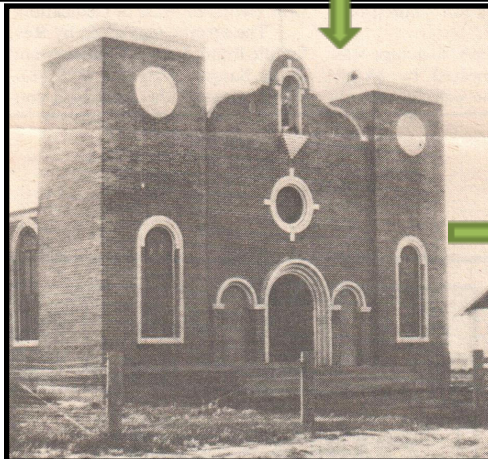
A Fire at the First St. Francis Church Preceded Two of Their Later Churches Burning to the Ground

Some of you are aware that 2 of St. Francis of Assisi Church, Amarillo, have burned down. In reality it almost happened three times... I was reading the diary of Father Charles J. Bier, *Convalescing in Texas 1905 – 1913* and on page 66 I came across this:

Jan. 8, 1911. Sunday. St. Francis. After reading Mass at Amarillo at 6 a.m., I went by train to St. Francis. The weather was cold but the church was well heated with a furnace in the basement. Shortly after entering the church I noticed that it was filling with smoke. Going down to the furnace I discovered a fire under the church floor. Some loose boards that had been placed too close to the flute pipes were burning. To remove these boards it was necessary to crawl through a narrow opening that led from the furnace pit to the unexcavated space under the church floor.

There was not a soul within three blocks of the church to help me. So I ran as fast as I could to call Mr. Meyer at the store. We each brought a bucket of water but could not throw it in far enough to put out the fires. Finally Mr. Meyer (wearing his best Sunday clothes) crawled into the opening and pulled out the burning boards one by one and handed them to me to be carried out side. Fortunately only one end of the boards was burning so that they could be handled without too much injury to our hands or danger of setting our clothes on fire.

And so the church was saved that day from being destroyed by fire. But M. Meyer was truly an object of pity with hands and face all black and dirty and his best clothes badly soiled and damaged. Yet after the



Painting by Doris Smith of St. Francis Parish. Original painting was missing after the fire. The Fire Marshal speculated that it was taken as a trophy...a remembrance of the deed.



excitement was over he was thoughtful enough to sympathize with me as I was not supposed to do any strenuous work, being a so called “one-lunger” who had come to take the rest cure.

In a 112-year history the parish has had five different churches. The first, built in 1908, was a small frame structure which was torn down in 1927 to make way for a larger, brick-veneered building.

The second church was a construction disaster. By 1934 it was obvious that something would have to be done. The walls were bulging outward and the roof was in danger of falling in. Sometimes plaster from the ceiling fell on the heads of worshipers and a tragic accident was a constant threat.

Reluctantly, the parishioners tore the church down and built a new one. It was completed in November of 1934, and dedicated on Nov. 11.

The following Feb. 7, 1935 less than four months later, a fire completely destroyed the church. There was a debt of \$6,100 on it at the time.

That was enough to discourage some of the people to the point of giving up, but encouraged by the late Msgr. John A. Steinlage, then pastor, the congregation tucked in their belts and went back to rebuilding. At the time the church account showed a deficit of \$70.30. The present beautiful church costing \$9, 258, was complete in 1935. It has long since been paid for, and a rectory and parish hall has been added.

Arson Ruled As Cause of Texas Church Fire

Investigators ruled arson as the cause of a blaze that destroyed a Catholic church 12 miles east of Amarillo in the community of St. Francis April 29, 1997.

The fire, which destroyed St. Francis church, marked the second time in the parish’s history that fire destroyed the church building, according to diocesan records.

“There are a number of places the fire was set,” said Potter County sheriff Jimmy don Boydston at a press conference in the St. Francis Parish Hall.

Boydston added that the Potter county Fire Department had no chance to save the structure because they were fighting so many fires at one time within the church.

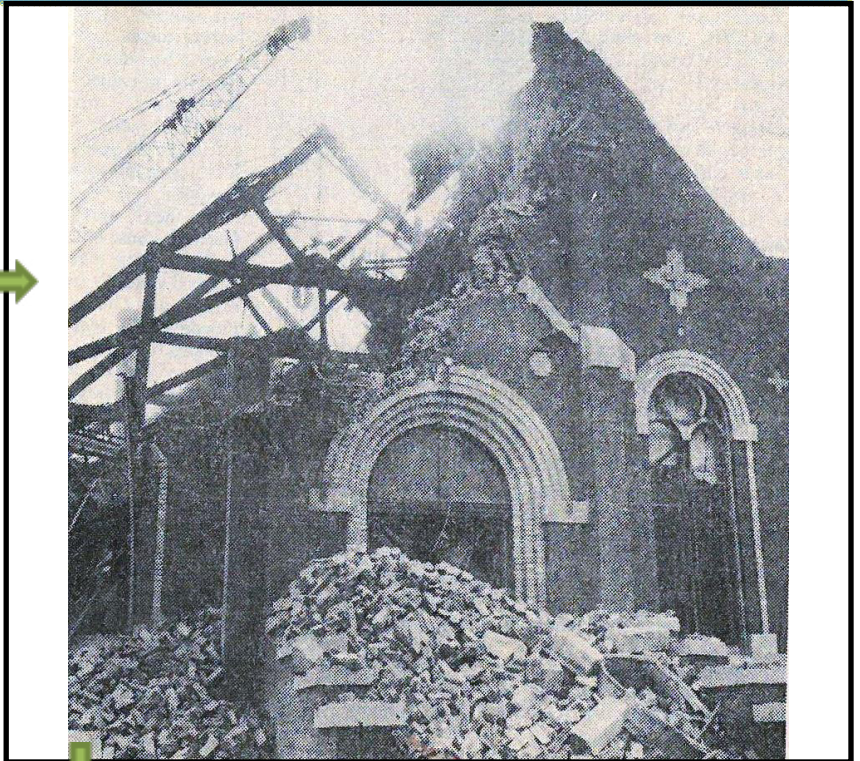
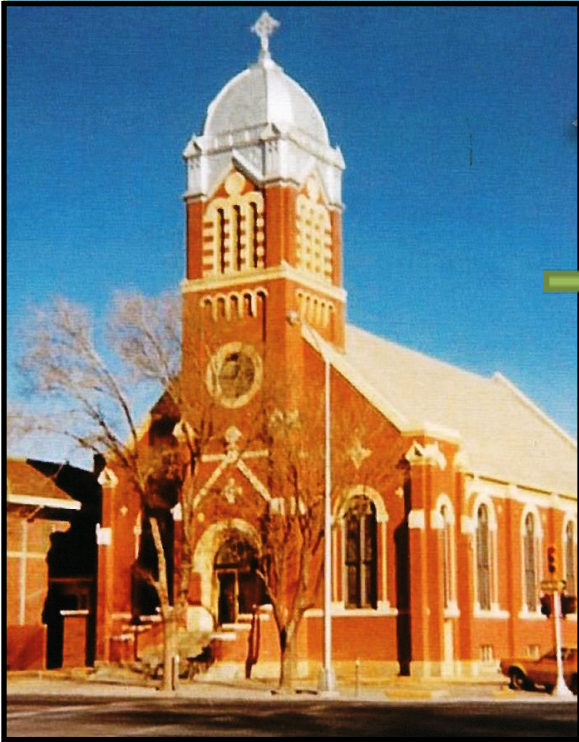
The investigation into the blaze included the U. S. Bureau of Alcohol, tobacco and firearms, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Texas Fire Marshall’s Office, Potter County Sheriff’s Department and the Potter County Fire Rescue Department, Boydston said.

Bobby Dowlen, ATF resident agent in charge from Lubbock, said it was premature to discuss any suspects. He said the method used to set this fire was not an unusual method.

Richard Beals, investigator with the State Fire Marshall’s Office, said there were several points of origin in the basement and upstairs in the church. He said the work of the local sheriff’s department and fire department has given “quite a bit of evidence of what went on in the church.”

“In my opinion, it is a total loss,” Beal’s said.

One Hundred and Three Year Old Cross From Sacred Heart Cathedral



Would you believe we now have the 103 year old cross that sat on top of the original Sacred Heart Cathedral? Patrick Kratochvil donated the cross that was given to him by Msgr. Harold Waldow. As you can see, the cross was in dire need of repair after it was knocked to the ground with a wrecking ball in 1975. . The cross was stored in a garage at St. Mary's Cathedral for close to 45 years after having graced the Cathedral from 1916 to 1975.

The cross has been repaired and is now housed in the museum in the Sacred Heart Cathedral section waiting for Fr. Richard Zanetti to bring the finish closer to it's original appearance.



Walked into the museum last month and had quite a surprise finding glass and wood on the floor from one of our display cases.

Had anything crashed into the glass? No. Had there been vandals in the museum? No. Was it the earthquake in the Caribbean? No again.

According to our carpenter and the glass installer the huge glass door developed too much pressure on the side that opened, it began sagging and it exploded. We repaired it with 2 doors with two panes each so this cannot happen again. This could be the true cause, but we all know what happens at night at a museum. They even made a movie...

Visitors to the Museum

We have had several groups visit the museum: St. Thomas the Apostle's Adult Formation Group. The fifth grade class from St. Mary's Cathedral Academy and in March a Circle from St. Mary's Cathedral will be joining us. Why don't you call and make an appointment for your group or class? Call Susan at 383-2243 ext. 120 or email to sgarner@dioama.org. We would love to have you visit the museum where the past is truly present.



The Adult Fromation group from St. Thomas Parish tour the museum.



Theft of Gravestones, Plot Marker Under Investigation.

St. Francis -- October 2, 1977 --

The Potter County Sheriffs Department is investigating theft of three gravestones and a plot marker from St. Francis' on St. Francis Ave.

Msgr. L. T. Matthiesen, pastor, discovered the theft Sept. 19 and notified authorities.

There was no vandalism., but one other gravestone was partially lifted from the ground and another was off its base. Apparently in both cases the effort to lift the stones failed because of their weight.

Authorities theorized that the gravestones might have been removed as part of a scavenger hunt in which participants are directed to collect a list of unusual items. The gravestones were carried out of the cemetery by hand as there was no evidence of tire tracks.

Headstone Found in Repossed Automobile

Amarillo -- December 4, 1977 --

One of three headstones stolen two months ago from St. Francis cemetery has turned up in a repossessed car in Amarillo.

The gray granite headstone, dated "Born and died Dec. 6, 1932" for Edward Theodore Raef Jr., was reported to Randall county sheriff's office Wednesday by Hockley county sheriff deputy Jerry Moffitt of Anton. The case is being handled by Potter County sheriff's investigators.

The headstone is one of three reported stolen about Sept. 20 from the cemetery one of the oldest in Amarillo. A maintenance keeper discovered the missing headstones and vandalism of two others as he was mowing the lawn.

The cemetery has been kept up by the congregation of St. Francis Catholic Church since 1909.

Still missing is a white headstone with an arched top, a lamb engraved on it, and the name of a child, Georgine Ann Bichsel, which is dated just after Christmas 1938 and another is a gray granite stone dated June 14, 1952, for Henry Leven.

Msgr. L. t. Matthiesen, pastor of the church, said the church would not press charges against the man, but it would be up to the family to decide if charges should be files.

A statue turned up at the cemetery several weeks after the gravestones were discovered stolen which didn't belong to the cemetery. Church members speculated that someone was "trying to make up for what they took.

Dec. 2, 2019 - Feb. 19, 2020

CONTRIBUTIONS

M/M Thomas Albracht	50
Donald & Judith Allen, Sr.	125
Gerald & Truetta Brandt	100
J. Thomas Campbell	25
Elaine Clarke	25
Msgr. Norbert Kuehler	200
John Doucette	25
Jeanette Herring	50
Jim Jordan	100
Ron Kershen	25
Lori Monceballez	50
M/M Jerry Poirot	25
Dee Ramirez	50
Dorothy Ray	20
Jane Roberts	50
Lawrence Schmucker	20
M/M Robert L. Wieck	100
Donald R. White	50
Leo & Audrey Wink	1000
Bishop John Yanta	175
Total	2265

BNSF Matching Gift

Donor: Toby & Beca Vincent	500
Total	2765

MEMBERSHIP

Gerald and Truetta Brandt	25
Marlene A. Casasanta	25
Dwayne & Terri Huseman	30
Disciples of the Lord J. Christ	50
Angela D. Keller	25
Ron Kershen	25
Total	180

HONORARIUM

IN MEMORY OF:

Orville R. Blum:	
In memmory of Carolyn Blum	100
Maida Villasenor:	
In memory of Manny Perez	25
Total	125



*May the Lord's Blessing be with you
at Easter and always.*



Fr. Victor Hugo Andrade greeted the Adult Formation Group from St. Thomas Parish when they visited the Museum in February.

Catholic History Society Board Members

Bishop Patrick Zurek - Honorary Chair

Susan Garner - President/Editor

Msgr. Norbert Kuehler - Vice-President

Kathryn Brown - Secretary

Ann Weld - Treasurer/Curator

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Rev. Francisco Perez

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Doris Smith

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Don White



You may stop by daily (Monday through Friday) to view the museum, for a guided tour it is recommended that you make an appointment.. The museum is open by appointment for church and school groups. This includes evenings and weekends.

Susan: 383-2243 Ext. 120 or even better: sgarner@dioama.org

Thank you for
your continued
generosity!