

Homes of History: Melton home still stands, barely

Written by By Ava Barlow, Staff Writer
Thursday, 17 March 2011 15:42 -

March 10, 2011 - In the early 1900's A. L. and Nellie Melton built a large two-story home on what would become 501 N. Main in the city of Leonard. The Meltons had lived in Leonard since 1885 where he was in the grocery business and in the new home they raised five children - sons Horace, Hugh and June and daughters Mary and Marge. In 1914, Nellie died and the children continued to reside with their father.

The house had a living room, entryway with a double coal burning fireplace, dining room, kitchen, sunroom, one bedroom and a bathing room downstairs and three bedrooms upstairs.

Presently, there is a detached garage connected to the home with a breezeway, but it is not know when this was built.

Every door in the home had skeleton key openings and glass doorknobs. There were four doors leading into the house - front, back door out of the kitchen, east end out of the sunroom and west end. Eventually three of the four doors had screened-in porches built around them.

Mr. Melton owned a grocery business in Leonard from 1885 until 1914 when he began to serve as the Leonard postmaster until 1922. In 1922, Mr. Melton and his son June decided they wanted to have a dairy farm and had the house moved to some property outside of Leonard off of Highway 78. This process required the house to be moved in two parts, but it was moved and reassembled at its new location. They sold milk around town that had been milked from the cows until the father died in 1935. June moved to Honduras after his father's death, but his sisters continued to manage and rent the old homestead. Four of the five children are buried in the Leonard Cemetery, Mary, Marge, Horace and Hugh.

Wilbur and Mary Lou Joiner rented the house from the Melton sisters and jointly ran a turkey farm and then a chicken farm on the place. Mr. Joiner did all the work and the Melton sisters provided the money to buy the hatchlings. The Joiners also had a window air conditioning unit in their bedroom, the first one resident Eddie Sudderth ever saw. They resided in the home until the mid-1950's, where Sudderth visited with their son, Dwight Joiner on several occasions. The Joiners also had a daughter Nancy and a son Johnny.

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Sudderth also relayed that he had been told all of his life that the pond in front of the home was created when white rock was excavated for the foundation of the brick streets in downtown Leonard.

June and Gladys Duncan rented the place after the Joiners and ran a hog farm for a number of years at the location.

Jerry Lee Davis bought the house from the Meltons, but his family never resided in it - Rob and Mary Gattis wanted to live there. Mary is remembered for putting new wallpaper in the upstairs part of the house while renting the property.

Dick and Dot Sikes bought the place from Davis in 1974 for a weekend home. They came to Leonard nearly every weekend and they had one daughter, Lea Ann Sikes (now Lea Ann Thomas).

Both of the Sikes had been raised around Leonard and dearly loved visiting every weekend, but Dot insisted on living in Dallas near their jobs. Dick ran ductwork under the structure and put in central heat and air. Varmints, like skunks and a raccoon, ate their way through the ductwork and made him or herself at home, and the Sikes made themselves scarce until the smell went away.

After a few incidents, Dick put new underpinning around the structure so that the varmints had no way to get underneath the home. The Sikes also added new wallpaper upstairs and remodeled the kitchen and added a small bathroom.

On one occasion during a visit to the home, they discovered bees in the exterior wall of one of the upstairs rooms. They called for a beekeeper to remove the hive and restore their home to the peace and tranquility they had come for. Dick and Lea Ann rode horses and Dick made several trips during the middle of the week over the years to check on things even while Melvin Barr, Gene Gray and Johnny Whisenhunt were employed to take care of the animals and property.

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Lea Anne recalled another time when she was riding horses with her cousin Becky and they found a log cabin in the woods behind the house. They came riding back to the house in a hurry to report their finding of a "pioneer cabin in the woods" to the Sikes, who had a good laugh at the imagination of the two girls. The cabin was actually a Boy Scout cabin and the adults had known about it all along.

Dick also added a riding arena that allowed many hours of enjoyment for him and Lea Ann. Dot Sikes related a story where they had a palomino horse named Honey Boy. Barr worked for them and rode Honey Boy when scouting around for cattle to buy. Barr would bring the horse back to the farm and lock him in his stall and the next day the horse would be out of the stall and the stall still closed. This was puzzling but he decided to make the lock more secure. Honey Boy still escaped the enclosure though. Finally he locked him in and stayed to observe the horse, who got down on his knees and crawled out of the stall.

Honey Boy also liked to ride in a trailer - so much in fact that when they were out on a buying trip, if left unattended for a minute and a trailer door was open on anybodies trailer, he would enter and make himself at home. Barr would have to search for the content horse and put him in the right trailer.

The Sikes sold the house and land on three occasions, with the final sale taking place in July of 1999 when they sold it to Georgina Cantoni. According to tax records, Cantoni moved in a mobile home onto the property that same year, and then built a large brick home in 2003 near where the old home stands.

Cantoni sold the property- including the old house, mobile home, new house, several out buildings and the riding arena - to Don Spurgin in 2005, who still owns the property today. The old house still stands - though empty - and is in much need of repair.