

## Homes of History: Murley home still owned by descendant

Written by By Ava Barlow, Staff Writer  
Thursday, 07 April 2011 11:30 -

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March 31, 2011 - In the community of Pleasant Grove, two and a half miles north of Leonard, William Thomas Murley and wife, Mary Blackshear Murley, built an eight-room home in 1918. Downstairs, the home had two bedrooms, a living room and dining room, and a kitchen and a bathing room - with no running water - that could only be accessed from the back porch. The stairs were in the middle of the house - as was a wood-burning fireplace - and the stairs led to two bedrooms upstairs.



As all the houses being built during this era, the house had hardwood floors and plank walls. The porches and house were built high up off the ground because Murley thought this would keep the chickens off the porch. The house was surrounded by a brick foundation and there was an outdoor toilet in the backyard. The fireplace was the only source of heat in the home, but their son Joe can remember a portable kerosene heater that was carried from room to room later on.

The children in the community went to the Pleasant Mound School and some of the children lived in some of the seven homes on the Murley farm of 120 acres, 60 acres where the house sat and 60 acres across the road that is now State Highway 78. One year there was a bad outbreak of seed ticks among the school children and the school and community was from then on called Seed Tick.

Joe was born in 1928, the youngest of five children of his father and the youngest of three of his mothers. Joe's oldest half-sibling was a brother, Thad who played on the Leonard High School sports teams in 1921. Thad became a coach and coached the LHS athletic teams, girls and boys, in 1926 and again in 1946 to 1950.

Electricity was added to the house in 1936 or 37. Joe remembers carrying water to the bathing room and his mother adding hot water from a kettle to take the chill off. He also remembers

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when his father added running water in 1939 and added a toilet to the bathing room, but you still had to go out on the back porch to get to the bathroom.

Seven families lived in homes on the land owned by Murley. He provided the teams, equipment and housing and the families worked the land and paid Murley half of what they received from their crops for their rent.

W. T. Murley built a grocery store across from the house around 1929. The mud roads were very hard to access to get to Leonard, so he stocked goods for the people living on his farm and in the community, and also sold gasoline. He relayed a story to his family and friends of a day he would never forget. That day, one particular car pulled in for him to pump gas in the 1930's. The man driving - who was alone - never got out of the car and carefully watched Murley during the filling up process. When finished he paid for his gas and drove off. All the time, a group of men were on the porch of the community store playing checkers or dominoes and never even took note of what was going on. After the car drove away, Murley asked the men if they had noticed who was driving the car. It was none other than Clyde Barrow - the second half of the famous Bonnie and Clyde duo from that era. A photo of Barrow had been widely circulated for people to be able to recognize him and Murley did recognize him from his photos.

Murley also built a water tower where water was pumped by windmill power to store for house and farm use. He also provided blacksmith services and gristmill services and bought and sold land up until his death in 1952. A report in the The History of Leonard Book II says he owned as much as 1000 acres at his death.

Murley, or one of his descendants, has always owned the home. Tommie Cole, Joe's older brother resided there from 1960 to 1964, and his mother Mary lived there after her oldest son moved out and before Joe moved back into the house in which he was raised in 1974.

The house had carpet added in 1964 and the walls were sheetrocked over the planks. Joe added paneling on top of the sheetrock and put siding on the house in 1972 while his mother lived there.

The bathroom has been relocated to the northeast corner of the house and the former bathroom is now a storage and laundry room. It is unknown when this change took place.

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In the history of the home - besides the Murley family - others who have lived in the home are the Virgil McBroom family, Burris Oakley, the Med Williams family, and several other renters, including Donald and Jeanette Feagan who live there now.

In 2007, when the Feagans moved into the house they discovered that the only electricity to the upstairs part of the house were lights in the two bedrooms. They had two electrical outlets added to each bedroom.

**(Pictured) This home was built in 1918 by William Thomas and Mary Blackshear Murley.**