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MARCH 2012

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Reaching a Milestone

Christy Taylor and
Janetta Kruse commemorate
100 years with a celebration.

Comfort and Joy
At Home With
Luke & Kristy Haynes

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Preserving Parker County
Caring for You and Your Ride
In the Kitchen With
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These March blossoms
will become July's
Parker County
Peaches.

Photo by Melissa Rawlins

Contents

March 2012 • Volume 2, Issue 3



6

6 Reaching a Milestone
The goal of Girl Scouts of the USA is to make the world a better place.

12 Comfort and Joy
At Home With Luke and Kristy Haynes.

18 Preserving Parker County
Amberley Parker uses digitization to modernize local history.



12

23 Around TownNOW

24 BusinessNOW

26 FinanceNOW

28 CookingNOW



18

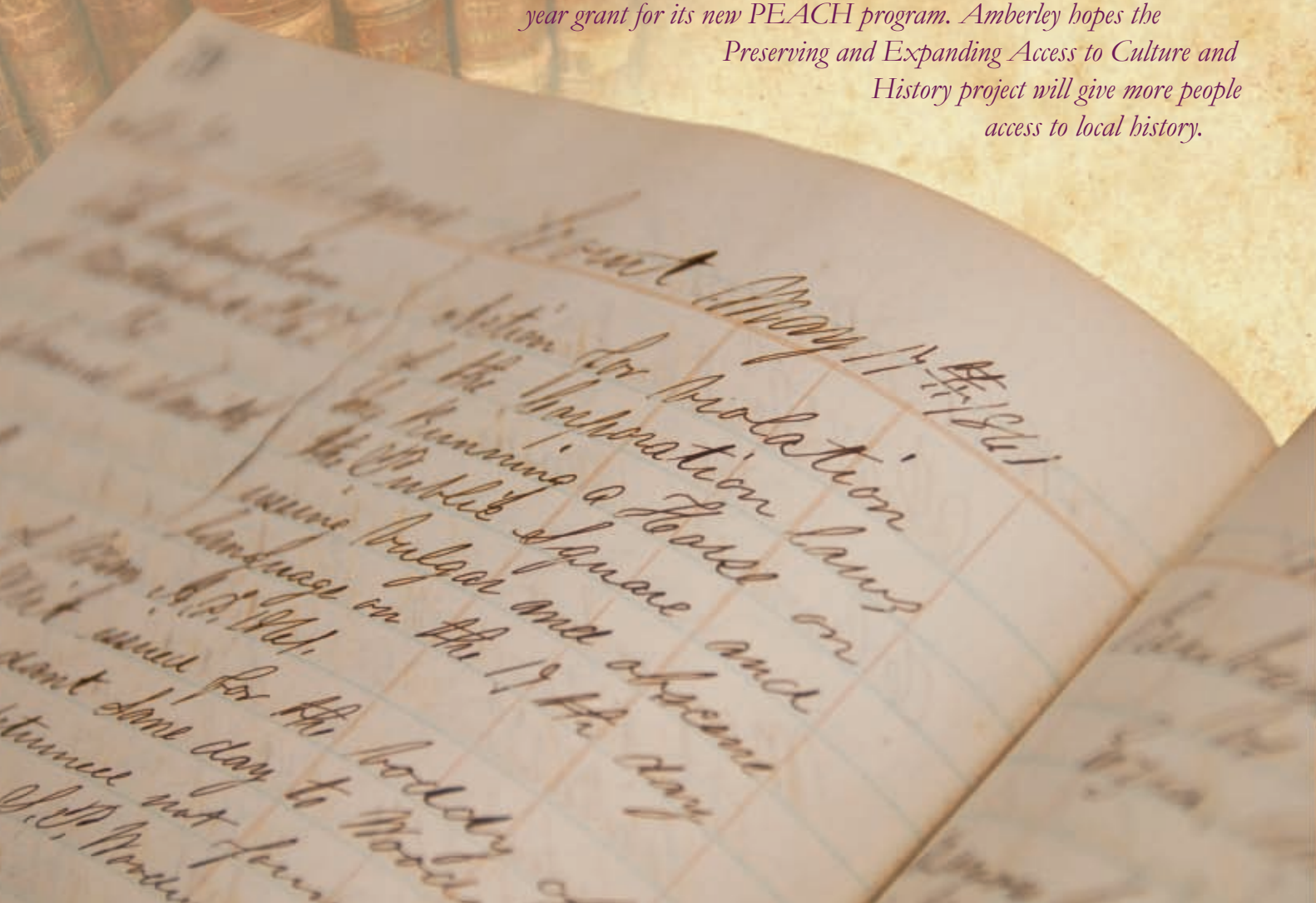
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Preserving Parker County

— By Amber D. Browne

Preserving the history of Parker County is Amberley Parker's top priority at the Weatherford Public Library. She has worked part time as the library's digitization clerk since September, when the library received a \$75,000 one-year grant for its new PEACH program. Amberley hopes the Preserving and Expanding Access to Culture and History project will give more people access to local history.



Although they are still waiting on some of the digitization equipment, Amberley and her co-worker, Christy Bellah, are sifting through old documents and prioritizing them. There is not enough money or time to digitize all the paperwork and other donated items that are sitting in boxes and on dozens of cabinet shelves at the library. Part of Amberley's job is to go through the information and prioritize it for preservation. She reads through the documents, many of which are hand-written, and thumbs through old photographs to find what must be preserved first. "They were basically sitting in boxes turning to dust, so we have a responsibility to do something to preserve it," Amberley explained. "We're focused on preserving the deteriorating things quickly, and obviously the things from the 1800s are

the most fragile." Current technology is helping her convert the papers, photographs and audio recordings into a digital format.

Amberley is using high-quality microphones and audio software to convert old audio cassettes of oral histories, which were recorded back in the 1970s. They will be saved as digital recordings to be posted later online.

Many of the recordings are of late residents who were talking about their parents and growing up in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. "The quality is compromised on some of them, so we have audio software I'm familiar with to remove some of the background hiss to have clarity," Amberley explained. She is also recording new oral histories to preserve for future generations.

Amberley Parker and Christy Bellah enjoy digitizing local historical records.



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“It was very surprising,” Amberley said, realizing she enjoys history, which was not her favorite subject in school. She learned about modern technology through digital media studies at Texas Christian University (TCU). Amberley graduated from TCU in 2010 with a bachelor’s degree in film, television and digital media and now uses cutting-edge technology to help preserve the past. She reads courthouse records, notes in family Bibles and even personal diaries, which are mostly two-line entries lacking any emotion. Some were as simple as, “Today I sowed wheat. Today I went to town and sold five watermelons,” Amberley said. “Once you realize all these people were real people with actual lives and feelings, all of the sudden, it’s real. It’s interesting, and it’s exciting.”

The physical geography has changed so much over the decades. Having a bridge built was a big deal in the local community, because residents often trekked through the creeks and rivers on horseback or in wagons. People living on farms and ranches outside of town came to downtown Weatherford more often than what many might think. The square was the hub, where all the activity and social events took place. “They had a more active social life than modern people do, because there was no television. We have some great pictures of all these clubs and revivals,” Amberley said, grinning.

They may have had some free time for socializing, but early residents made

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everything from scratch. “The women would have contests to see who could spin the most wool, like it was a game,” Amberley chuckled. They would then make that wool into clothing for their families.

Christy explained that more than a century ago, residents’ lives were basically scheduled around the seasons and growing crops. “You can’t make it go fast. You’ve got time. The wheat is going to grow, and the cattle are going to eat. It’s not like every second is filled,” Christy said.

Reading the now brown-tinted papers and seeing the black-and-white photographs of decades past gives Amberley more of a sense of what it was like in the late 1880s. She recently visited a local graveyard and often wonders what those from the past went through. “You can see stories in the gravestones,” she said.

Amberley and Christy never know what they will find hidden away in a box or buried under a pile of old books. They are always looking for more historical information and welcome any local residents who might find something in a cedar chest or even purchased at an estate sale. Community members do not have to donate the item, but instead can allow the library to make a digital copy. Having the historical records available on the Internet will make it easier for genealogists, historical societies and anyone else to find the information and simply know it is out there, and not lost forever.

Weatherford, like many small Texas towns, has a downtown core that has been preserved. “It makes it more real. It’s not just shopping mall after shopping mall,” Christy explained. “We have pictures from the 1880s and 1890s where the Trade Days are happening in that square with the exact buildings all the way around it, that we see every single day,” Christy said.

The library already has a thriving genealogy section. Amberley hopes to excite the general population about local history by posting it online for better access.

Amberley has always been interested in art and started working with computers in middle school. Her uncle was a graphic designer and became an inspiration to her. She began designing artwork for the Aledo High School newspaper. Her first job at 16 was as a sketch artist making T-shirts for a local company. She crossed

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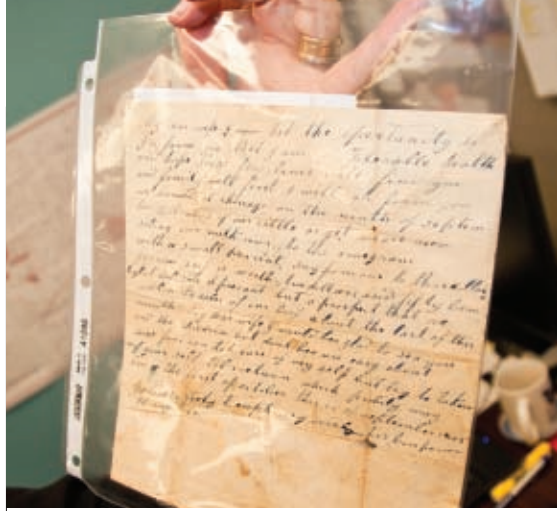
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over into digitization after watching the digitizer turn her sketch into a digital image. “I was just hooked after that,” Amberley admitted. Besides preserving Parker County history, she works as a freelance graphic designer and as a Web master.

Amberley moved to Aledo in the seventh grade and graduated from Aledo High School in 2006. Her parents, Lynette and Tracy McCracken, still live there. Ron and Lila Parker, the parents of her husband, Aaron, live in Hudson Oaks. Although Amberley was born in Tarrant County, the 23-year-old has roots in Parker County, and it has become her home. “I feel even more connected with it after learning about the lives of the people who have lived here for so long,” Amberley said. She often finds herself driving around the area and trying to imagine what it looked like 100 years ago.

Amberley believes many people are interested in local history because of Texas pride. “I think they are very proud of their heritage and their families,” she said. “I think people tend to focus on the positive parts like the heartiness of the people, their survival through sickness, starvation and bad conditions. They pride themselves on being Texas people.” **NOW**

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