The Lives, Fortunes, Family, and Tragic Ends of the Carter Family of Young County

Compiled by Tony Widner
President of Board of Directors, Young County Museum of History & Culture

Note: Originally posted in segments on the Museum's Social Media

Barbara Ledbetter was one of Young County history's most dedicated biographers, having written several documents and published numerous books on the history of Young County, especially the stories from family and landowners in the area surrounding Fort Belknap.

In her book "Fort Belknap Frontier Saga", Mrs. Ledbetter tells the AMAZING story of the Carter family. This book is rare, and difficult to obtain, having been out of print for years.

Inarguably, the most famous member of the family was Millie Durkin, aka Millie Durgan, or by her Kiowa name of Sain-Toh-Oodie-Goombi (translated as "Kills with Blunt Arrows").

Millie Durkin was kidnapped by Kiowa and Comanche Indians in the Elm Creek Raid of 1864, but the story of her life and that of her family rivals any daytime soap opera or TV mini-series.

Over the next several posts, we will "briefly" explore the travels, triumphs, and tragedies of Millie Durkin and the Carter Family, starting with her grandfather, Edmund Carter.

Edmund Carter was an African American, born in a small shanty on the banks of the Watauga River on a plantation in Tennessee in 1790, 14 years after the birth of the United States.

Born into slavery, he was a freed black man, a rarity in Tennessee and most southern states, with numerous siblings; Elijah, Joshua, John, Joseph, Mary, Isaiah, and even a George Washington! While considered black, there were stories told among the family of both white and Indian ancestors, with "rumors" of descendants from Native Americans as notable as Pocahontas to his grandmother Togo among his African ancestors.

Edmund's father, also a former slave, was the Marse, or master, of a plantation. This is where Edmund grew up and became acquainted with the Tarrant family, specifically a youth named Edward H. Tarrant.

Tarrant would figure prominently in Texas and Young County History, as well as that of the Carters.

Ironically, one man (Carter) was born as a slave on a plantation, and the other (Tarrant) was a plantation owner, and both would have a dramatic impact on the course of history in Texas. One would be placed in a monument in a county named after him, the other, just as successful, would be buried in an unmarked, undiscovered grave along the banks of the Brazos River.

Moving on with our story, Edmund married a young African American/South Carolina beauty named Susanna and in 1816, their first child, Alexander Joseph Carter was born.

Around 1830, Edmund, who had become a successful, well-liked man with a freighting business in his community, made the decision to move westward with his family and seek their fortunes

in the West, eventually, the Texas West. They tied their destiny to a wagon train of fourteen wagons; the Carter family, the Tarrant family, and others, including most notably Moses Johnson and his family and slaves, (a family who would also figure prominently in Texas/Young County history), and together proceeded west.

The undertaking for the Carter family would already be more difficult than that of the Tarrant's and most of the others. An African American and his family moving through numerous states of the deep south at the height of slavery would time and again find themselves in danger of arrest and re-enslavement.

Only the extensive letters documenting his freedom by his family's former owner, letters of testament from Tennessee officials, members of his community, and the protestations of Tarrant, Johnson, and other members of the wagon train would keep them free.

Edmund Carter and family had stopped their westward advance at Arkansas, but Edmund visited Texas several times, in the company of his brother Emanuel Carter and Edward Tarrant.

In Texas, the Texas Revolution was in its' infancy, and stories of land grants, fertile fields, business opportunities, and adventures had drawn their attention ever farther westward.

Texas politics towards African Americans however, would complicate how and when the Carters would arrive.

In 1832, the Mexican Provinces of Texas and Coahuila, had passed new colonization laws pertaining to slavery. They read in part, as quoted from Ledbetter's book:

> "No free person of African descent either in whole or in part shall be permitted to reside permanently in the Republic, without the consent of Congress; and the importation of Africans into this republic, excepting from the United States of America, is forever prohibited and declared to be piracy."

Emanuel, Edmund's brother, had arrived in Texas prior to the enacting of the 1832 colonization laws, and even though he owned no property, he was exempt.

Edmund would be applying for permission to emigrate to Texas during the height of the Texas Revolution.

It must be remembered at this point in our tale that Texas was a Republic larger than any state in the territory of the United States or Mexico, and was largely unpopulated. There were concerns that Mexico or the United States, with its "manifest destiny", might take measures to procure Texas land rights. Texas was short of military men, settlers, and Indian fighters and so it took action to increase its population through land grants. Through this series of land grant acts, Texas hoped to increase its tax base as well as encourage settlement. The land grants recognized "headrights" and were apportioned in this manner; First Class Headright, Second Class Headright, Third Class Headright, Fourth Class Headright, Preemption Grants and Colony Grants.

Additionally, Texas also made provisions for Military, Bounty, Donation, Veteran Donation, and Confederate Scrip Grants, but we will stick with the previously mentioned categories as they apply to our story. For more information on Texas Land Grants, visit the digital collections of the General Land Office of Texas website.

Emanuel Carter (Edmund's brother) and Edward Tarrant had arrived in Texas, in 1836, and though not landowners were considered naturalized Texans. Edmund Carter, still in Arkansas with his wife and son, had begun a freighting business. When Edmund heard of the land grants being offered in Texas, he was desirous of obtaining land, but needed Texas citizenship to qualify for these valuable land grants.

Attorney Amos Morrill (another acquaintance and business partner of Edmund Carter) accompanied by Emanuel Carter and Edward Tarrant, had made landfall in Texas in the Red River Valley. Tarrant and Morrill found the frontier town of Clarksville a perfect place to open a law practice. The area and property lines were often disputed by Texas and Arkansas at the territory level and between the United States and Mexico at the federal level. These disputes combined with the laws applied to those areas by each government, left an open market for attorneys to profit as they argued the merits of each case in court for landowners and speculators.

Texas was busy with economic issues, political pressure from bordering governments and Indian Tribes and had little time for discussions about allowing “persons of African descent” to gain citizenship. It would be difficult, without serious political pressure, to get the Texas Congress to entertain Edmunds’s petition for citizenship.

Edmund Carter, who had freighted regularly into Texas and worked directly under Tarrant at his properties in Texas, was an uneducated but extremely intelligent man, and knew how difficult admission would be without a plan.

With Amos Morrill as his attorney, Morrill provided a fiery oratory for granting Carter Texas Citizenship. Upon petitioning the Texas Congress, Carter produced numerous petitions on his behalf which included his legal paperwork, Letters of Character from the members of his former church, and a document from his community in Tennessee signed by fifty-five of his former neighbors, as well as letters from forty individuals in Red River County where he was currently living and working.

Notable individuals who signed passionate appeals for Carter’s citizenship included Captain James Graham, Sheriff William C. Young, Reverends Gilbert Clark and Joseph Bishop, the Red River County Clerk Plumlee, and Deacon John Wooten. Perhaps the most powerful argument was made from the “up and coming” political influence of Edward Tarrant, now a member of the Texas Legislature.

With these powerful friends arguing on his behalf, Edmund Carter was granted citizenship in Texas in January of 1837 and was eligible for a Second Headright Land Grant (1,280 acres) which he took and acquired property chosen by him in a northwestern portion of the state on Elm Creek, an area that would be later organized into Young County.

Upon relocating to Texas, he and his family at first settled in Red River County, and his son soon married a white woman, Miss Mildred Susanna Carter.

At this point, Edmund Carter had built a growing freighting business, and had surrounded himself with some of the most powerful men in that portion of Texas. He had acquired social and business connections and built a distribution network running from Tennessee to Texas.

By 1850, Carter would become a wealthy man and would be ready to move to his land grant with his family. One has to ask “how did he acquire so much wealth in so short a time as a freighter?”

Emigrants, receiving large tracts of land from the Mexican government, and later under the Republic of Texas, needed a labor force to make the land profitable, and slavery, whether permitted or not, was the answer they chose to solve the problem. It was here, as has been suggested by Ledbetter in her book (Fort Belknap, Frontier Saga), that Edmund Carter found his niche. Ledbetter states it was "highly believed" that Carter, unable to read or write as previously stated, but with a dynamic personality and industrious work ethic, would use his connections as a freighter, to quickly amass fortunes for himself, Tarrant, and others through the import of slaves.

As we stated in Part 2 of the Carter Saga, Alexander Carter had married his 16-year-old white bride, Elizabeth Ann in 1842. Elizabeth would eventually become the controlling partner in the Carter family business, and a full partner in the booming ranching enterprises of the family. This was an uncommon role for a woman in the 1800’s.

Elizabeth gave birth to two children, Mildred Susanna (Little Milly as she would come to be called) in 1844 and Elijah Joseph Carter (Little Joe) in 1851. As was traditional in the South, both children bore family namesakes.

Edmund Carter was a busy individual between 1840 and 1850. His family had moved to the small town of Milford Texas. This move had put them closer to the largest center of commerce in north central Texas, a place known as Fort Graham, (not Graham Texas, which would not be organized until 1872). It was here that Edmund Carter engaged in commerce, raising stock, farming and freighting.

While living in Milford Texas, Edmund Carter's wife Susanna, died and he never remarried.

During this same period of time, the Army had made the decision to move west, and under the command of General William Goldsmith Belknap, the United States 5th Infantry Regiment established Fort Belknap on the Brazos River on November 1, 1851.

Shortly thereafter, various wandering individuals would find their way to the post to leave their mark on the territory. From Elijah Skidmore and his son in law Chesley Dobbs, (Dobbs being considered a scoundrel by the Fort Commander for selling spirits to the Indians at the Brazos River Indian Reservation) to men like A.M. Anderson, who would open a Sutlery, or General Store and help supply the fort and local settlers with the items necessary to make a living.

In 1855, one the worst winters in the history of this area, arrived almost simultaneously with the arrival of the 2nd Cavalry under the command of Future Confederate General Albert Sidney

Johnson. Men and horses froze to death in the bitter cold, with the Fort losing twenty-two horses and two soldiers.

As early as 1853 Edmund and Alexander had traveled up the Brazos River to inspect Fort Belknap, located near their land. They were accompanied by Conrad Neuhaus, an ex-army man who had opened a Sutlery (Trading Post) in Fort Graham and had naturally become acquainted with the Carters and their freighting business.

In an interesting side note, in 1853 Edward Tarrant and Allan Johnson, (son of Moses Johnson and owners of slave Britt Johnson) had entered into a government contract with the quartermaster at Fort Belknap for 5,000 bushels of corn and it is more than likely that the Carters were the freighters who made the deliveries. So it was that in 1855 that separately several notable figures would end up in Young County as residents.

They were The Edmund J. Carter family, The Britt Johnson family, Conrad Neuhaus and his two brothers, Private Owen Durkin, Private Thomas Fitzpatrick, Lt, Owen Sprague, Edward Tarrant, Moses Johnson family, and hundreds more.

As Edmund Carter planned his move he realized that a wealthy black man, moving across the Texas Frontier, might stand out and draw the attention of bandits, racists, and other opportunists. With the cleverness, and intelligence he had displayed in all his other business dealings, he willing indentured himself, or more simply put, "Sold himself into slavery to his daughter in law, and partner, Alexandra Ann Carter.

A rich white woman moving across the frontier with slaves and property would draw much less attention, and probably make establishing the Carter Ranch and properties much easier.

Elizabeth Carter (Alexander's wife) had come to Young County to live in style. In quick order, shortly after their arrival, the Carter Trading Post had been established on the Carter Ranch, and the dwelling was soon known across the frontier as the first stop for travelers planning to cross the Brazos headed northwest.

The Carter Ranch was a large complex, with large barns, chicken houses, horse and hog pens, smoke houses and corrals. It had a full-time blacksmith and several other ranch hands. Livestock production was so profitable for the carters that Elizabeth would often be able to pay her bills in 54-pound sides of bacon, and bartered Beeves.

Along with the Trading Post, Elizabeth owned and operated a boarding house. By this time "Little Milly" had begun to become her mother's shadow, and the children grew up quickly on the frontier. At the age of 12 she and her mother Elizabeth were involved in every part of the Ranch's operation, from major purchases to seamstress duties mending shirts and creating gingham dresses for fifteen cents-a-piece.

This prosperity would not last long, and tragedy would soon strike the Carter Family. Edmund Carter was 67 years old by now, and more and more of the responsibilities of the family business had fallen to Alexander and Elizabeth. Alexander and Edmund were often gone from the ranch, with Alexander running the freight business while Elizabeth stayed home to run the ranch and livestock.

In 1856, Young County had finally been organized and reported to the state government, which was excited to add another tax paying entity to its coffers. Accordingly, in 1857 a tax list was prepared as required by law by Attorney James Franz. The Tax role was composed of a list of approximately 80 landowners, and reflected the large holdings of the Carter family, and a half dozen other taxpayers who were found to have “money at interest to the state and county.

The list noted that Carter had no slaves, had purchased no lots within the town of Belknap, and was one of three individuals who paid no poll tax. Elizabeth Ann’s taxes were assessed higher than any other taxpayer, exceeding those of Conrad Neuhaus, who had settled south of the Carter Holdings and was a friend and close associate.

Edmund J. Carter, the illiterate Black man from Tennessee, was found to be the wealthiest man in the county, holding ten times more property than even the County Judge. Carter owned land, oxen, mules, wagons, homes, money, 700 head of cattle and nine horses that were prized stud horses.

With wealth comes notoriety, and unfortunately envy and jealousy.

Carter had amassed wealth unequal to any other man, black or white, on the Young County frontier.

On September 30, 1857, two years after their arrival in Young County, Alexander and his father Edmund were ambushed while riding along their property on the Brazos River. Alexander was killed instantly, and Edmund lived approximately 28 days before succumbing to his wounds. There were fingers pointed at some of the soldiers at the Fort, but no facts appeared to present themselves so that the criminals could be brought to justice.

Edmund, knowing he was going to die, had his friend Edward Tarrant prepare a Sale Document, in which Elizabeth sold to Edmund Carter half interest in the land and home, (Remember, Edmund had been indentured as a slave, and all the property and wealth had been in her name before the family moved to Fort Belknap) half interest in all real property, half the cattle, and several horses. Interestingly, Edward Tarrant dated the document September 31, 1857 (September only has 30 days), a legal issue that would undoubtedly cause problems later.

Edmund then prepared a will on October 2, 1857, leaving all these items equally divided to his two grandchildren, Milly and Joe. This left Elizabeth Ann with 50% of the property and her children with 50%.

The deaths of the Carters would never be solved, no case would be brought before the court, and the only official note of their murder was a two-line entry in the court records “noting the passing of Edmund J. Carter and his son.

Now Elizabeth Ann Carter, a white woman, the widow of a black man, would try to run the largest ranch in Young County with her newly married Milly. Milly, only 14 years old, married Private Owen Durkin on October 17, 1857, only 19 days after the death of her father, and 9 days before the death of her grandfather.

They would face a frontier becoming more dangerous because of Indian depredations, legal complications and the looming war between the states.

On October 27, 1857, Edmund Carter, the wealthiest man in Young County, ambushed on his own property along with his son Alexander, who died instantly, was buried along the bank of the Brazos.

His Daughter-in-Law Elizabeth, sole adult heir to the Carter fortune, was also the sole survivor left to run the Carter ranch and businesses.

Elizabeth moved on, trying to run the businesses, bury her husband and father-in-law, and prepare for the marriage of her 14-year-old daughter Millie to Army Private Owen Durkin.

During this same period of time, in what seems an unrelated event, the El Paso and Fort Yuma Wagon train would arrive in Fort Belknap with Lieutenant Owen A. Sprague.

Lieutenant Sprague, a member of the group of engineers that had arrived with the wagon train, had not intended to stay in the Belknap area, but winter had set in with a vengeance, and the teamster in charge of his wagon had fallen ill, grounding the wagon to Belknap. Because of these facts, Sprague made accommodations to stay at the Carter Boarding House.

The Carter house in 1858 would spiral downwards in a whirlwind of cascading events.

Elizabeth was being treated by two doctors, Dr. James Swindell (also a part time attorney who drafted Edmund's Will) and Dr. W.H. Robinson over the last couple of years for Epilepsy.

In the 1800's, as Barbara Ledbetter so aptly describes in her book “Fort Belknap, Frontier Saga” Epilepsy was described by most people of the period as a person "having fits", and the person afflicted with the disease was considered either demon-possessed or mentally ill.

Elizabeth began to lean on long-time family friend, neighbor, and sutler, Conrad Neuhaus. Elizabeth had entered into an agreement allowing Neuhaus to graze his cattle on Carter land before the death of Edmund and her husband Alexander, and she now began working for him in January of 1858 as a seamstress.

Fourteen-year-old Millie Carter, now Millie Durkin, was living at home with her new husband. Since he was still a soldier, his duties at the Fort would keep him from being much help. To make matters worse, In March of 1858, just four months after the wedding, General Rene Paul and the Infantry units under his command were ordered to Jefferson Barracks in Missouri. Owen Durkin was being marched away from his new wife.

On February 13, (the day before the couple's first Valentines as man and wife) Private Owen Durkin marched out of Fort Belknap.

Within a distance of less than 30 miles from Fort Belknap, Owen Durkin would desert from his unit. Desertion was a big problem for the Army. It was too easy to enlist, draw your bonus pay, and then disappear. Your identification and home were often the names you gave the recruiter, true or falsified. Many soldiers, unhappy with assignment or duty station, would simply drop out, reappearing somewhere later, and most were never captured or punished.

Owen Durkin, ran home to the Carter Ranch. Fort Belknap was still occupied by elements of the 2nd Cavalry and other soldiers who would know Durkin and know he was a deserter on sight. Although no documentation has been found to show he was court-martialed, there is little doubt that he was arrested for the crime, and surely shamed and shunned before the companies occupying the Fort and the community.

Within two weeks of Owen Durkin's return, the family dynamic would change again on February 22, 1858 with the surprise marriage of Elizabeth Ann Carter to her boarding house occupant, Lieutenant Owen Sprague!

In less than four months after the death of her husband Alexander, Elizabeth had remarried. We have to wonder if there was a whirlwind romance, or a marriage of necessity to help manage the ranch and businesses?

The Last Will and Testament of Edmund Carter would take over five years to process, and the frustration of running ranch, business, family issues, and a new husband undoubtedly aggravated Elizabeth's "fits" of epilepsy and her extroverted personality that was used to getting things done quickly and done her way.

Now enter into the mix Former Lieutenant Owen Sprague. Not much was known about this outsider to the Belknap community, but that he soon showed an affinity for strong cigars and liquor, and consumed large quantities of quinine, the cure-all for any and every ailment of the 1800's, or so many thought.

Owen Sprague left the army, quickly involving himself in the Carter families' legal affairs. It was not uncommon for a man to leave his estate to a husband of one of his daughters, as women were not expected to be able to handle the legal issues and operation of an estate.

On March 31, 1858, five weeks after the Marriage of Owen Sprague and Elizabeth Ann Carter Sprague, the County Court of Young County met for the purpose of probating the will of Edmund Carter. Edmund Carter's will stated the probate court should have NOTHING to do with the estate. This written mandate was completely ignored and the County Judge, Peter Harmonson took the "responsibility" of handling the estate.

On April 26, the appointed executor of the estate was Edward Tarrant, now an aged man and suffering numerous health issues. Within hours, administration of the estate would pass again to Sheriff Patrick Murphy.

Apparently being involved with the estate was predominant on the minds of the elected officials of Young County.

On May 29th, General Tarrant was again appointed as executor. In June the estate issued a promissory note in the amount of approx. $1300 to Tarrant, possibly to "clean up" the desertion of Private Durkin.

By August, the new County Judge appointed Conrad Neuhaus as administrator, while three county commissioners "appointed themselves" as appraisers of the estate.

You have to remember that a woman in charge of so large an estate was almost unheard of in 1858. Add to that her “decision” to re-marry within four months of the death of her husband, and her “mental condition” and you can see that many could argue that she was no longer fit to oversee the business and the interests of Millie and Joseph Carter, her children.

Whether their motives were honesty or greed, many individuals were becoming involved in the Carter business and estate.

All of the events discussed in this article happened in less than eleven months after the death of Edmund and Alexander Carter. In the next segment we will discuss the lives of Owen Durkin and Owen Sprague and the ongoing battle for control of Elizabeth Ann Carter Sprague’s inheritance!

It is 1858 in Young County, Texas. Prosperity was reaching its peak, with wagons of settlers and supplies passing through Young County via Fort Belknap for destinations to the west as far as California. There was little else between Belknap and California but unexplored land and Indians. Elizabeth was well known in the area and across Texas for the success of her ranch and businesses, but storm clouds were on the horizon.

Indian attacks were few and far between at this time and the Indians of the Brazos River Indian were becoming surprisingly good farmers. Approximately 2,000 Caddo, Anadarko, Alabama, Delaware, Waco, and Tonkawa had settled on the lower reserve located in Young County. They were glad to have protection from the warlike Comanche. They were peaceful towards the white people moving into the area, and no major confrontations arose until 1858.

There were some individuals who coveted the land the reservation was on, and had no respect for the treaties or the number of times the tribes had been forced to move in the past. The military found the tribes to be extremely helpful, and used warriors from the tribes as scouts. The warriors were proud and eager to assist, to the point that 100 to 150 were armed and ready to move out any time the army requested. Unfortunately, 150 armed Indian Warriors was a growing concern among the settlers.

A great deal of the tension was being stoked by Captain John R. Baylor, the first Indian Agent for the Reserve. It is unclear why he was dismissed and replaced by Mathew Leeper, but his anger burned hot towards the Indians, and he began an anti-Indian movement in the county.

With all this happening, trade and expansion was slowing as war between the states was looming, and the state of Indian Affairs was uncertain. This may have been some of the reasons that Elizabeth had taken on the job of seamstress for Conrad Neuhaus.

Finances, probation of the will and the growing number of “concerned parties” becoming involved and over seeing what was spent, how it was spent, who it was sold to, and for how much must have taken a toll of Elizabeth. There were rumors about her “fits” happening more and more regularly, and were possibly causing a rift between Elizabeth and her new husband Owen Sprague.

For whatever reason, on October 27, 1858, exactly one year to the day of Edmund Carters burial, Owen Sprague appeared in Belknap and paid off all of his personal debts. Then, without a word to anyone, he disappeared, never to be seen or heard from again!

There were rumors he might have left to rejoin the service, or head west, but no one knows for sure.

So now we have Elizabeth single again. Her friend, Conrad Neuhaus, has been made administrator of the estate. He petitioned the court to him to rent the lower floor of the Carter dwelling in order to generate some revenue for the dwindling estate. By the time the auditing process and inventorying had been completed and outstanding debts of the Estate paid, the inventory of the Carter Estate, with 185 head of cattle added, was valued at only $1,688 not including the land.

On November 1st, Conrad Neuhaus engaged Thomas Fitzpatrick, a 34-year-old man to be his ranch hand. He would also employ a Gravell Martinez just days before Christmas, but it would be Fitzpatrick who caught Elizabeth's eye.

On December 26, 1858 the family of Choctaw Tom, the oldest native living on the reservation, and fifteen others had received permission to go hunting in Palo Pinto County. Choctaw Tom had been known around the area as the friendliest of the Indians on the reservation, teaching newbies how to survive, the uses and identification of native plants, and directions around the county. That first night out on their hunting trip, a party of seven white men from Erath County, under the orders of Captain John Baylor, attacked the part in their sleep. Eight of the Indian party were found dead, murdered in their bedrolls, and Choctaw Tom's wife and daughter were among the murdered victims.

The reservation Indians were enraged, and the members of Baylor's party were quick to spread the fear of an imminent attack on the settlers everywhere they could. The white men responsible for the attack were identified, but again, there was no justice metered out and no indictments made.

In March of 1859, Baylor and his associates trespassed onto the reservation, and warned all the individuals they encountered that if the Army tried to intervene, they would fire on them as well. While on the reservation, they came across an elderly Native man, whom they greeted with friendly signs and then promptly scalped. When they discovered an elderly native woman tending her garden nearby, they killed her to keep the matter secret. They were pursued to the Marlin Ranch where two of Baylor party were killed in exchanges of gunfire with Indians who had pursued them off the reservation, and troopers from Fort Belknap.

Because of the unrest and out of his concern for the Indians, petitioned the government for their removal to Oklahoma. He hoped that the Indians might be safer deeper in Oklahoma's Indian Territory, but this was interpreted as another broken promise to the tribes who had successfully settled in the area, only to see it seized by greedy settlers as they were marched north. Resentment would simmer for years over the attack on the reservation and the loss of the land. Again.

In January, in the middle of this upheaval, Elizabeth had been forced into a position to petition the court for custody of her son Joseph. Elizabeth's temper tantrums and "fits" had driven a wedge between Elizabeth and her daughter Millie Susanna Durkin. Millie reported to the court that her mother was incompetent. Now, the court that had been asked to stay out of the probate

by Edmund carter himself, quickly agreed with Millie, and custody of Joseph was given to presiding Judge Dechman's brother-in-law, William Withers, (Along with control of Elijah Joseph Carters portion of the estate.)

Tragedy struck again only this time it was a pregnant Millie who would suffer. Her husband, Owen Durkin, disgraced deserter, had apparently let the stress of his infamous desertion in town become too much for him to handle without the support of strong liquor.

On February 4, 1859, Durkin got into a fight with two soldiers at Vollentines grocery store where Durkin had been drinking and a fight ended when Durkin was shot to death.

Millie now found herself in her mothers' shoes. She was single, had no visible means of support and her portion of the estate was tied up in court, where its assets were disappearing because no one could legally operate the business and ranch for profit until it was settled.

On February 28, as the last two companies of the 2nd Cavalry withdrew from the now abandoned Fort Belknap, the county court was in session debating the Carter will and the guardianship of Elijah Joseph Carter, Elizabeth's son. It seems odd that no other family members were considered. Thomas Fitzpatrick quit his employment with Neuhaus and on April 1, 1859 began working for Elizabeth Carter Sprague.

Conrad Neuhaus, who had sincerely worked hard to protect the Carter family estate, now found himself forced to spend more time at his own ranch, as trade at his sutlery had dwindled with the loss of the Indians, the government employees and the troops from the fort.

As economic conditions bring hardship to the settlers of the Belknap area, Kiowa and Comanche begin to take advantage of the lack of troops in the area, and the period of Indian attack begins like a wildfire. It would soon strike at the heart of the Carter family and blaze a new legacy for one member in particular.

On February 28, 1859, the last Union Troops had vacated Fort Belknap. Over the next three years, almost every able-bodied man had enlisted and left the area to fight.

Those men that remained, over 1,000 strong, would become the core of two companies of Rangers of the frontier regiment.

According to Charles Goodnight, he commented that the majority of the men who were left, who formed these companies, were union sympathizers and that was why they had remained.

Young County had become a dangerous place in the last three years. On January 14, 1860, Reverend Pleasant Tackett and his sons had been attacked by Indians, and although they had killed one and wounded others, they had not fared much better.

Reverend Tackett had received an arrow in the foot and it took 8 days before it could be removed. His oldest son Jim had received an arrow in his forehead and it was five months before someone could be found who could remove it.

The rest of Texas fared no better. No less than 10 different attacks occurred in the first two months of 1860, from as far north as Montague County to as far south as Burnet. The raids were successful in providing almost 100 horses taken from settlers, with few Indian losses.

The Comanche and their Kiowa allies were taking advantage of the lack of troops and the white settlements dwindling as settlers moved back towards the relative safety of eastern and southern Texas to establish their dominance and claim to the lands of North Texas.

Settlers were killed, houses were burned and women raped and murdered with little ability for settlers to respond.

In the midst of the Civil War and Indian attacks, Elizabeth had remained in Young County trying to operate the ranch and care for her family.

Thomas Fitzpatrick, who had been working for Elizabeth when the war broke out, was a rancher who was making a name for himself among the ranks of the Rangers. He responded to the call for assistance from Young County to as far as O'Neal station in Montague County.

On August 26, 1862 Elizabeth Ann Carter Sprague would marry Thomas Fitzpatrick in a ceremony performed by Reverend Pleasant Tackett. Elizabeth had now been married three times, and with her new husband, a widowed daughter, and a ranch she was trying to save her ranch from bankruptcy and scrape a living from the land that had been so promising only 7 years earlier.

On August 29 of that same year, William Neuhaus, (Conrad Neuhaus's brother, who had been appointed as guardian of the Elijah Joseph Carter estate) had ridden off to join the Confederate cause. He would die of scurvy while serving with the Confederacy less than a year later on August 22, 1863.

Conrad, the staunch friend of the Carter family, who had tried to wade through the political intervention in the Carter estate and help Elizabeth, would now have a falling out with her over the sale of some cattle. In the latter days of October 1863, Conrad had driven some of his cattle herd and part of the Carter herd to Louisiana. As payment for taking the Carter herd, he had cut some calves out of the Carter herd for payment. This infuriated Elizabeth, sending her into one of her famous "fits" and severing a relationship she would later regret. At the time she was so angry that she was willing to take the matter to a court and had Chief Justice Tackett write out a document of protest.

Elizabeth had separated herself from the family's closest friend in Young County and things were only going to get worse. On February 2, 1864 her husband, Thomas Fitzpatrick would be murdered for unknown reasons by a man named "Outen".

In the short span of 18 months, Elizabeth had become a widow again.

Along the Canadian River at their winter encampments, Kiowa Chief Little Buffalo and his warriors had seen the omens and the promise of ripe pickings along the Texas Frontier. Speaking before his warriors, Little Buffalo had, no doubt, related dreams of glory and plunder, and soon runners were sent to other tribes, even the Comanche, and soon approximately seven hundred

warriors, decked out in warpaint and ready to reclaim dominance over their lands, were ready to blaze across the unprotected settlements of Texas. Ironically, Little Buffalo would be killed early in the raid.

On October 13, 1864, morning had come on a cold brisk note, and many of the men from Young County were either away on a cattle drive, or ironically, serving with the frontier Regimental Companies to the north and the east.

The first hint settlers in Young County would have of the attack that would become known as the Elm Creek Raid of 1864, were unusual smoke signals. The Kiowa and Comanche raiders fell on the scattered settlements along Elm Creek northwest of Belknap with a vengeance. They passed over crops, cabins, and communities in waves, confident and eager, and there was no force that could rush to the defense of the settlers within a hundred miles that could match the size of the raiding party.

The Indians carried off cattle and horses, burning and slaughtering, leaving nothing untouched in their wake. They ran across Peter Harmonson and his son, Perry, who had a lame arm from an attack only 30 days earlier by some of the same Indians attacking now.

The Harmonsons had been out trying to locate stock, and seeing the warriors rushing towards them, made a break for the brushy creek. When the Indians rushed them, Peter killed the leader and then he and his son made a break for Fort Belknap, and to warn others settlers they passed.

Ambushes were taking place all up and down the river, with the warriors descending on the Carter Trading Post at about noon that Thursday morning. Inside the two-story house were:

Mrs. Elizabeth Ann Carter-Sprague-Fitzpatrick, age 38 and her two children:
Elijah Joseph Carter age 13, and Mrs. Milly Susanna Carter-Durkin, age 21.

Milly Susanna Carter Durkin's' children were also in the house identified as:
Charlotte Elizabeth "Lottie" Durkin (Milly's eldest daughter) age 5;
Milly Jane Durkin (Milly's youngest daughter) age 28 months;
And a recently born, and as yet unnamed son.

Also in the house were Mary Johnson, age 24, the wife of Britt Johnson (A name you have probably heard of! If not, check our previous posts!)
Mary's two sons, ages 5 and Jim, 7 years old,
and daughter, just over 3 years old.

Milly Susanna Carter Durkin had grabbed a shotgun, fighting madly to try to defend the family. After her capture she was dragged outside and beaten repeatedly in the head with a tomahawk as the family watched.

Hours later, as the men returned, they would discover the tragic fate of Milly Susanna Carter Durkin. They found Milly's body lying in the yard, her head beaten, her body raped and scalped, as well as the body of Britt Johnson's son Jim.

The body of Milly's unnamed baby was found lying at the base of a wall he had been thrown against.

All of the homesteads were put to the torch by the Indians, and the Indian raiding parties rode off that day leaving 12 people dead, thirteen ranches on fire, and taking 6 human captives from the Carter Ranch, and thousands of stolen cattle and horses from other ranches and ranges northwest to their winter camps.

The Carter Trading Post, lying in the woods by the Brazos River, was now bloody, burned and vacant.

Elijah Carter, 13, had been a frail child, in poor health before the attack, and would have to try to survive the return trip to the Kiowa Winter camp.

The Indians had learned that the white settlers and their government would pay ransoms for captives, so they quickly adopted the tactic of taking the ones they wanted as prizes, and then ones that would likely garner the highest ransom.

One can only imagine the thoughts going through the mind of Elizabeth Carter Sprague Fitzpatrick. She had watched her fortunes soar, to become the daughter in law of the richest man in the county, the wealthiest and most successful woman of her time on the Texas Frontier, only to end up as a captive of warriors, and then forced to watch her daughter tortured and murdered.

She would now have to find the courage and wits to try to protect herself, her son, and her grandchildren from the wrath of the Kiowa who had taken them hostage.

The Kiowa war party was headed home. The foray in North Central Texas had been successful and they were happy with the horses and captives taken in the raid. Losses had been slight, with the exception of Chief Little Buffalo, but revenge had been taken on the hapless settlements encountered. Among the prisoners was Elizabeth Ann Carter Sprague Fitzgerald. For the sake of shortening my typing, I will refer to Elizabeth as Elizabeth Fitzpatrick.

It must be remembered, as we mentioned earlier, that the Kiowa and the Comanche that accompanied them, had been relocated numerous times in treaties. Those treaties had been broken and or ignored by both sides. The natives considered this area their tribal lands, their homeland. It had been taken from them, they had marched away because of white settlers starting trouble on the reservation lands, forcing Indian Agent Robert Neighbors to petition the U.S. government to move them to Oklahoma. They had lost more of their land, again. Now it was time to reassert ownership.

Robert Simpson Neighbors is famous in the annals of Texas History. He arrived in Texas in the spring of 1836. From 1839 to 1841, with the rank of lieutenant and later of captain, he was assistant quartermaster and acting quartermaster of the Texas army.

In 1845, he began his service as Indian agent of Texas. As agent for the Lipan Apache, and Tonkawa, he instituted the field system of Indian control; instead of remaining at the agency headquarters and waiting for the Indians to pay him a visit, as was the common practice, Neighbors dealt with them directly in their home territory. Later, when he was overseeing Comanches, he continued this practice, with the result that he spent much time far beyond the frontier and exercised greater influence over the Indians in Texas than any other White man of his generation.

As a member of the Fourth Texas Legislature from 1851 to 1853, Neighbors successfully sponsored a law that opened the way for establishing Indian reservations. In 1853 he was made supervising agent for the Texas Indians. In 1854 he joined Capt. Randolph B. Marcy to make extensive explorations in Northwest Texas in search of sites for Indian reservations. Two locations became known as the Brazos River Indian Reservations.

When the anti-Indian movement started, Neighbors complained that the United States Army officers located at the neighboring posts of Fort Belknap and Camp Cooper failed to give adequate support to him and his resident agents. The unsympathetic attitude of the military aroused the hostility of many frontier civilians, who charged that the Indians of the reservations were committing depredations on the White settlements.

In spite of threats of lawless characters to take his life, Neighbors never faltered in his determination to protect the Indians. With the aid of federal troops, he had managed to hold back the White people from the Brazos River Indian Reservations, but as we reported, in August 1859 he eventually succeeded in moving the Indians without loss of life to a new reservation in Indian Territory.

It was on his return that he stopped at the village of Fort Belknap, and there on September 14, 1859, while he was engaged in conversation with another man, Edward Cornett walked up to him shot and killed him. To the Indians that had been displaced, they had now lost one of the few white men they trusted. Who were they supposed to trust now?

Both the Union and Confederacy had attempted to make treaties with the tribes, but the earlier promises of helping to feed the tribes had been poorly executed or more often ignored, and this, as well as monetary payments were late or never made, and land considerations were ignored showed they were very low on the list of priorities of those warring governments.

Prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, the U.S. Government had paid for the return of captives taken in raids, and when the government failed, the remaining settlers had paid for the return of their loved ones afterwards. So, even though some of the captives had been taken for ransom, there was no investment in keeping them alive when there were always other captives.

As the Kiowa were returning to their home from this North Texas Raid, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick was tied to her horse, as were the other hostages, no doubt still in shock at the murder of her daughter. The raiding party she was with travelled quickly, riding all-night and all-day Friday heading north.

It is possible the Kiowa and Comanche were concerned about being pursued, but that fear was unfounded. The settlers who had survived the attack were too busy trying to shore up defenses at Fort Murray and Fort Belknap to pursue, with the exception of Britt Johnson, who was anxious to pursue, but knew that the winter was about to set in, and alone and without shelter and protection, he would not survive.

On Saturday October 15, 1864, 13-year-old Elijah Joseph “Little Joe” Carter, already ill and weak, whom had also been tied to a horse, became too ill to sit up or travel. The Indians, refusing to slow down, built a pyre of scrub brush and mesquite and placed him on top of it. They then set

the brush on fire. As the child began to burn, they ordered Elizabeth to ride over and watch. She screamed in defiance and refused, even with some of the braves repeatedly striking her with their quirts, short leather whips used to spur their horses and cattle along.

She realized the she was being made an example of for the other hostages and knew only way to save her own life and possibly the lives of her grandchildren was to agree to their demands, and so she was forced to watch as her last surviving child burned to death, at a location somewhere along the banks of the Pease River. With no further regard for “Little Joe” they continued their trek to their winter camp on the Canadian River.

Unknown to the Indians, their raids had finally caused an uproar that demanded military action. General James Carlton, Commander of the Department of New Mexico, had been literally buried in daily complaints of Indian raids during the months of August through October.

In response to these acts, Gen. Carlton had enlisted Colonel Christopher “Kit” Carson to give the Indians a taste of their own medicine. Kit Carson had already earned fame for his services as an explorer during the 1830’s and 40’s. He had served as an Indian Agent to the Ute and Jicarilla Apache in the 1850’s and would become famous as an army officer during the Civil War after the battle of Valverde in New Mexico when he would defeat Confederate troops with his regiment of Hispanic soldiers. And now, the famous Kit Carson enters the Carter Saga. It is this Colonel Kit Carson who was ordered to raid the Indian Camps along the Canadian River.

Colonel Carson and his 400 strong troop moved south, closing in on an old abandoned trading post known as Adobe Walls. What Carson did not know at the time, was the combined strength of the combined forces of the Kiowa and Comanche were well over a thousand, with the same number of noncombatants, such as women, children, and captives. Carson gave strict orders to his troops to not kill any women or children.

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick and the other captives from the Elm Creek Raid were undoubtedly as surprised as their Kiowa captors on the morning of November 24th,1864, when U.S. Troops and their Apache Scouts rushed into the camps. The army began setting fires to the Teepees and stacks of winter stores, unaware that there were captives in the Indian village.

The battle was long and furious. Carson’s forces had set up their base at the Adobe Walls, and the main force of troops and scouts had been deployed against the villages. The Indians had fled only far enough to mount and attack the main camp at the Adobe Walls ruins.

The Indians, over 1,000 strong, repeatedly attacked the troops but Carson’s forces were supported with two howitzer cannons. The Comanche and Kiowa, in a mobile skirmish-type battle were experienced and almost unbeatable, but when attacking a well defended position, they were at a disadvantage, and they had not fought against artillery.

Another thing working against the Natives was the fact that they had made no plans for protecting their winter stores. As they engaged in numerous failed charges, Carson’s troops were systematically destroying their stored-up winter supplies. When the Indians finally retired from the battle, Carson’s senior officers urged an attack, but Carson, taking heed of the warning from the Apache scouts about the quality of Kiowa and Comanche in "hit and run" tactics on a

pursuing enemy, chose to settle with the completed destruction of the winter supplies and over 500 permanent skin lodgings.

The raid by Carson was a minor victory, with few real casualties inflicted, but the destruction of the winter stores would be devastating. The Winter of 1864-65 would be cold and brutal.

Upon arriving at the camps of the plains Indians, the Kiowa learned of the November 28, 1964 massacre of 600 Cheyenne and Arapahoe at Sand Creek in Colorado. This battle, another army victory over the Indians, was under the Command of Colonel John Chivington.

John Chivington, who had been a Methodist Pastor, did not show any of the restraint of Carson. Chivington's 700 strong unit of militia-men killed three Chiefs, their families, and tribesmen, two-thirds of which were women and children in a surprise sunrise attack.

Ironically, these slaughtered Indians had answered the summons of Governor John Evans to return to their camp where they would be given safety and provisions. Over the bodies lying in the camp was the thirty-four-star American flag the Indians had erected days before the attack.

Chivington would become infamous for the actions of his command, who killed and mutilated the members of the tribe, reportedly taking scalps and body parts as souvenirs.

The Kiowa and their allies, relocating hopefully out of the range of U.S. troops, suffered horribly from the winter weather of December 1864 through January 1865.

The combination of these harsh elements, and the lack of supplies, would kill both Kiowa and their captives. Those captives had been separated as spoils among the various sub-tribes, and it was later reported that Millie Jane was one of the captive children who had died, a fact Elizabeth would not become aware of for some time.

Elizabeth and her grandchildren, along with Britt Johnson's family and other Elm Creek captives are now separated and used as slaves in the camps of their captors, trying to survive abuse and the elements, hoping for rescue.

The story of Britt Johnson and the rescue of his family is a part of the Legends of Texas. Britt and his family lived close to the Carter family, and his wife and children were at the Carter Ranch when they were captured.

Britt was one of the few men who actually took an active part in attempting to find and rescue his family after their capture.

Depending on which historians you listen to, the reports of the actions of Britt Johnson range from highly overstated to legendary. There is no doubt that this man, a slave belonging to Moses Johnson, commanded the respect of everyone in Young County who knew him. He was known as an inhumanly fast runner, a crack-shot, a loving husband, and father.

Mary Johnson (Britt's wife), Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, and other survivors of the Elm Creek raid have been captives of the Kiowa and Comanche for five months. Dragged into differing camps, they have been stripped of their clothes and given rags to wear. While Elizabeth, a prominent white woman, might hope to be ransomed, Mary and her daughter had little hope other than Britt.

During the Civil War, many African American Slaves had fled into Indian Territory where escaped slave hunters were scared to follow. These refugees had no love for the country of their enslavement, and there was a common feeling of animosity and hate for “white ways and government”. It is not unreasonable, that by all accounts, Britt Johnson, a charismatic man with a dynamic personality, a fine judge of horseflesh, and an excellent shot with a rifle would be able to form a kinship with the Kiowa, who respected all these attributes.

Britt Johnson took up life with the Comanche. He was fearless, and respectful. During his four visits with the Comanche, he was able to relate to government agents information regarding Indian strength and locations, the whereabouts of captives, and the ransom requirements of the captors. He personally returned two abducted children to their families in Montague County.

While in the company of the Indians, Britt was allowed to meet with Elizabeth Carter Sprague Fitzpatrick, whom we shall identify as Elizabeth Fitzpatrick for the remainder of this saga. She was able to confirm who in his family had survived and her knowledge of their locations. It took him longer to earn the trust of the Kiowa clan holding his wife and children.

Carrie Crouch, in her book “A History of Young County Texas” states that Britt had waited for the Spring thaw and then left in March of 1865 in pursuit of his family and the other captives.

Crossing into Indian Territory he came across a Kiowa village where there were several horses he recognized as having come from the Elm creek area.

In the middle of the family tribulations an important event would pass almost unnoticed. On April 9, 1865, the Civil War ended, and the country’s attention would again turn toward westward expansion.

The country was war weary, and though westward expansions would move to the forefront of its future, there was too much damage that had been done during the war to allocate money to spend on this expansion.

During the Civil War, the Indians had reestablished their dominance over the land stretching from Texas to South Dakota, and were confident in their ability to hold it.

The Carter family descendants, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick and her granddaughters, had been separated and dispersed among the tribes. It must have weighed heavily on the mind of Elizabeth during her captivity. It would be easy for her captors to compel her to act with a simple threat to the lives of her grandchildren. Watching the murder of her two children at their hands left her certain that they would be willing to carry out their threats if she disobeyed.

On October 14, 1865, a meeting was held between the Chiefs and Indian Agent Colonel Jesse H. Leavenworth and Commissioner General John B. Sanborn. The purpose of this meeting was to establish peace between the U.S. and the tribes and to secure the safety of travelers on the Santa Fe Trail.

One of the key negotiation points would be the release of the captives in Indian custody. At the end of the meeting, Colonel Leavenworth would lead and begin scouring Indian encampments looking for captives. These captives had been valuable bargaining chips for the Indians during

the peace talks, and some tribes were reluctant to surrender them. A good white female slave could be ransomed for up to 50 horses, and what the natives of the plains needed were horses, rifles, and ammunition.

Barbara Ledbetter states in her book “Fort Belknap, Frontier Saga states that Mary Johnson, Britt’s wife, and his two children, one born while in captivity, were rescued by Comanche Chief Asa-Harvey and delivered to Indian Agents in August, a full nine months after they had been captured.

Carrie Crouch, in her book "A History of Young County Texas" relates that Britt was able to bargain for his family's freedom and legends says that he was able to spirit them out of the camp and return home, but this multi-part saga is not his story.

Regardless of which account you choose to believe, on August 15, 1865 Britt Johnson and his family were reunited, and Charlotte Elizabeth “Lottie” Durkin, one of two of Elizabeth Fitzpatrick’s granddaughters, was also released.

It would not be until November 2, 1865, 380 days after she had been captured on Elm Creek, that Elizabeth Fitzgerald was freed.

Government officials, at the behest of a pro-Indian movement, and completion of exhaustive peace treaty talks with all the Indian nations were now finally scouring the Indian camps, attempting to rescue as many captives as they could.

The two captives would later relate to rescuers how they were fed only raw liver, greasy buffalo meat, roasted tortoise and dog meat. They were often beaten for being slow with their duties, both by the men and women of the tribe.

Now rescued, Elizabeth would delight in hearing that her namesake Elizabeth Lottie Durkin had been recovered, and then have the heartbreak of hearing that her other granddaughter Milly Jane Durkin, had died of starvation during the winter. The Indians had blamed the white soldiers for destroying their winter supplies, causing her death. An angry Elizabeth refused to believe the death report.

With what is inhuman stamina and character, Elizabeth arrived at the Kansa Indian Agency in Kansas. For the first time in over a year, she felt the return of civilized life. She yearned to be with her granddaughter and looked forward to a reunion. She was still wearing the few rags she had been given by her captors, as no provision had been made to bring clothing for civilians along.

Awaiting news that she would be leaving for Texas; Elizabeth was placed with other captives who had been relocated to the Kansa Indian Agency Outpost. Among the captives who had been rescued from the Indians were Mrs. Cola Caroline Taylor McDonald, heavy with child, age 26; Rebecca Jane McDonald, age 1; orphans James Taylor, age 1; Dorcus Angeline Taylor, age 3; and James Ball, age 9; to await return to Texas.

The Kansa Indian Agency was an eight room, small, two-story stone mission/outpost located where Council Grove, Kansas now stands, and was the start of the Santa Fe Trail. The small agency was under the direction of H. W. Farnsworth. There had been no facilities, medical

support, or staff prepared to look after the freed captives, so Elizabeth took on the duty of caring for the six other freed captives and herself, and would become employed by Leavenworth to provide for their care.

Elizabeth Ann Carter Sprague Fitzpatrick has survived the Elm Creek Raid, The Battle at Adobe Walls, and one year of captivity at the hands of the Kiowa. It may have been a saving grace that she was now placed in a position of control and support for the other women and children at the agency. She provided meals and medical care with what little supplies were available. Living on the Texas frontier could not have been better training for this role.

Now she would wait on government red tape to supply the agency with food and return her to Texas. Because of the remoteness of the Agency post they were located at, news, supplies, and word from home were almost nonexistent. Leavenworth was in the field, still searching for captives, and those at the agency were left to make due with what was available.

Part of the difficulty in getting home appears to come from Leavenworth hoping to make his successful recovery of captives a footstool into politics. Officials involved in the Indian Agency knew that the time for getting the Texas captives home was taking too long, but no one seemed to want to do anything about it.

One of her fellow captives, Mrs. Cola Caroline Taylor McDonald, who had arrived at Kansa Agency ahead of Elizabeth was pregnant, frail, and despondent over the whereabouts of her daughter Mahala, also taken during a Texas raid and separated from her. Elizabeth had seen Mahala, and told McDonald she knew of the child's location.

Life seemed to crawl to a halt for the small band of survivors at the Indian agency. They made repeated requests to be returned home, but the requests were falling on deaf ears. Elizabeth brought her talents to bear, making clothes for her wards, feeding them and seeing Mrs. McDonald successfully through her pregnancy to childbirth.

In June of 1866, Leavenworth was able to locate 8-year-old captive William Ball of Wise County among the Kiowa. Mrs. Fitzpatrick, who had become a voice crying out in the wilderness (and corresponding with authorities in the Indian Agency and Congress) seized upon the return to loudly proclaim that she knew where little Mahala McDonald was held, and putting Leavenworth in a bind, he added Elizabeth to the members of his search party to quell the sensation she was causing.

She was good to her word, and two weeks later rode back into the Indian Agency with Mahala, and presented her into the arms of her jubilant and grateful mother. Here was a woman who had been beaten and almost starved, now riding out to rescue children in camps from which she had been emancipated.

Elizabeth had not been idle in and around the agency either. The captives had at first requested to be transported back to Texas via Fort Smith Arkansas, a route that would return them to Texas without passing through Indian Territory. The government was dragging its feet, neither supplying the captives with supplies or transportation, nor paying Elizabeth her wages for the

care of the others. She was an intelligent woman, and probably saw that she and the others were being used as pawns for funding and political gain by others like Farnsworth.

She covertly had made contact with Thomas Green, an elderly individual, and a wagon team owner by the name of Joseph Dunlap. Green had come to the Kansa agency from Wise County in Texas, searching for the Ball children. Now that they had been recovered, Green was trying to make arrangements to return to Texas. Dunlap was freighting from Kansas to Texas and though it would require them to pass through Indian Territory, they were willing to brave the trip, as opposed to spending the approaching winter in the upstairs of the Kansa Indian Agency again.

Elizabeth had promised to finance the return of all of the captives from her own estate funds, upon their return to Texas. They would be leaving on their own, without government assistance. This would be an embarrassment to both Leavenworth and the other officials within the Indian Agency.

Leavenworth could feel control of the situation slipping away. Indian depredations since the signing of the treaty were on the rise, and once again, both sides were not living up to their promises. The tribes had not received their promised allotments of food and supplies, and the Indians were riding roughshod across the territories.

In August, Washington was beginning to see the disarray in the Indian Bureau and had sent Senators to investigate. State Congressman Samuel Pomeroy, Edmund Ross of Kansas, and US Congressman Sidney Clarke were part of the team involved, and they gave Leavenworth a letter of assurance they would return to Washington and see that he expenses for the captives return to Texas would be paid for. Pomeroy and Ross were not altruistic in their motives. Both, as Leavenworth would later become, heavily invested in railroads. These railroads were clamoring for rights to pass through Indian Territory on their way to the gold mines of California.

Now embarrassed at their inability to resolve the situation, the government employed Dunlap to transport the captives home to Texas, and Colonel Murphy, a part of the political red tape of the Indian Agency, paid Elizabeth all her back wages out of his own pocket before the wagons would leave.

On August 27, 1866, Elizabeth and her fellow captives, climbed into 5 wagons for the six-week trip through weather, Indians, and terrain bound for Texas!

Elizabeth and her party would pass through the heart of Indian Territory during one of the most active periods of Indian Depredations in the history of the West!

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, Cola Caroline McDonald and her daughters Rebecca and Mahala, Tom Green, James Ball, James and his sister Dorcus Angeline Taylor, and Joseph Dunlap had loaded up in wagons on August 27, 1866 and began the six-week trip back to Texas.

Many of us complain about riding for an hour in an airplane with a child. Imagine a six-week trip with 5 children, most under the age of 5, one 9-year-old, and only three healthy adults among the four adults onboard. They would have to keep up with the children, keep them quiet if dangers were lurking close by, feed, care, and entertain them until they arrived at their

destination. All of this under the care of Elizabeth, who had begun their care almost a year before at the Kaw Indian Agency in Kansas.

For Elizabeth, the trip was uneventful. They would hear many stories of Indian attacks and U.S. troop reprisals, they would pass through once inhabited towns, now ghostly in appearance, having been evacuated and never repopulated during the Civil War. Bandits, deserters, and other outlaws had fled to Indian Territory to escape justice, and now preyed upon the settlers and travelers, but in a rare instance of good luck for Elizabeth and her wards, the wagons were unmolested the entire trip back to their arrival in Decatur, Texas.

Upon her arrival. She found the inhabitants of North Texas to be an “uncharitable rebel community”. The citizens of North Texas had been divided in their sympathies for the Union and Confederacy, and now found themselves living under a form of martial law that would continue for several years. It is not unreasonable to perceive that the townspeople, seeing wagons with orphaned children and penniless adults, would not receive them well. Regardless of these circumstances, Elizabeth would continue to care for all of the children until they were returned to their families. This responsibility took her as far south as Austin before it was completed.

There are few, if any legends or pioneers of Texas, who could have boasted or demonstrated the indomitable spirit and strength of character of Elizabeth Fitzpatrick. Regardless of what cards fate dealt her, she met it head on and survived and overcame it. Her compassion for others was only exceeded by her drive and spirit. Even with all of this, the last two years were taking their toll. Malnourished, recovering from exposure to the elements, abuse at the hands of her captors, and the loss of loved ones had caused Elizabeth to become so weak that on her journey home she stopped in Hood County to rest and recover.

Meanwhile in Young County, her old friend, Conrad Neuhaus had taken on the responsibility of looking after the cattle, property, land and financial matters of all those individuals who had been taken in the Elm Creek raid of 1864. Conrad Neuhaus had been the last administrator assigned to the probate of Edmund Carter’s Will and even with Elizabeth’s fiery temperament, had remained steadfast in his duty. Neuhaus had continued to operate his sutlery stores in several communities, but his attention had become focused on protecting his cattle and horses, including one of the late Edmund Carter’s most prized possessions, the sorrel race horse Redbuck. Redbuck had remained, over the last 15 years, one of the most prized breeding horses in the state, and breeders continually sought after Neuhaus to possess him. Neuhaus would eventually sell Redbuck in late 1868.

By 1867, Young County had disorganized and the records and most of any form of government had moved east to Jacksboro.

Neuhaus had hired several cowhands and herdsmen who stayed with the horses and cattle night and day to prevent the theft of the livestock. Even being armed and being with the animals did not always provide enough security. In July of 1867, Reuben Johnson, Urias Carrollton, and Patrick Ewell Proffitt, employed by Neuhaus, were murdered and scalped and the cattle and horses taken.

Despite these acts, with the end of the war and with Federal Troops moving back into the area, settlers slowly began to move westward into Young County.

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, now recovered, moved into Parker County where she was reunited with her granddaughter Lottie Durkin. During Lottie's captivity, the Kiowa had tattooed a blue moon on her forehead and had tattoos of several other symbols on her arms, a typical custom among the Kiowa at the time. Lottie had been brought back earlier and had been living with Mrs. Lucinda Miers. Lucinda and her children were survivors of the Elm Creek raid who had watched her husband Joel, murdered. After the raid they had relocated south to the safety of Parker County. Elizabeth remained there with the Miers, visiting withhold friends and enjoying the company of those who understood some of the loss she had suffered.

Ironically, Elizabeth credited her Kiowa captors for curing her Epilepsy. Elizabeth told her friends that during that bitter winter of 1864-1865 that when she would have a "fit", her captors would roll her in the snow until the cold would cause her to almost pass out, then the healers in the tribe would force her to drink a "vile" concoction created from local roots and herbs. After this they would wrap her in skins and place her near a fire until as Elizabeth stated "Thought she would sweat to death."

It was while she was living in Parker County that she met the Clifton family. Isiah Clifton was a farmer, a man eleven years older than Elizabeth, who had children of his own from a previous marriage. A romance struck up with the handsome Isiah Clifton, and in 1868 they were married.

Elizabeth had suffered enough in Young County and would never reside within its borders again. As Elizabeth Clifton, she and her husband would relocate to the Fort Griffin area where business was booming.

After Fort Belknap had been evacuated, Federal Troops had established a new outpost in the second line of Forts along the frontier, and this would be christened Fort Griffin, near present day Albany. Settlers would follow the troops and build their homes within the vicinity, and just north of the fort, at the base of the bluff, the town known as Fort Griffin would spring up and prosper. This small town would become the "Las Vegas" of Texas.

The town of Fort Griffin, also known as The Flat or Hide Town, was considered one of the West's five wildest towns with streets thronging with soldiers, buffalo hunters, drovers, gamblers, saloon girls, surveyors, outlaws, clerks, merchants and ranchers. As early as 1868, The Flat's gaming tables, restaurants, livery stables and bordellos provided general amusement for the soldiers at nearby Fort Griffin.

In The Flat's stores, dance halls and "dens of iniquity," a passer-by could encounter notorious characters such as Wyatt Earp, John H. "Doc" Holliday, "Bat" Masterson, John Larn, John Selman, "Big Nose" Kate Elder, or "The Poker Queen" Lottie Deno.

From 1876 to 1885, thousands of Texas longhorns carved the Great Western Cattle Trail from San Antonio, through Fort Griffin, and on to Dodge City, Kansas. Because of this wild west atmosphere, soldiers from the fort were often called upon to police the town.

Contacting Neuhaus on September 1, 1869, she had him sell all her holdings, land, cattle, etc. There is little doubt that during her three-year absence, her losses in the estate were considerable, with buildings that had gone unoccupied and were now in disrepair, her cattle, horses and other livestock greatly diminished, and her cultivated fields now overgrown.

Elizabeth never gave up hope of finding her other granddaughter, Milly Jane Durkin. She was in constant contact with Indian Agents and other government representatives. She sent numerous pleas and letters, begging the government to send troops to locate her granddaughter.

On January 24, 1871, Britt Johnson, a man described by Barbara Ledbetter in her book "Fort Belknap, Frontier Saga" as a veteran of the Texas frontier for over 13 years and who had won every encounter with the Indians would fatefully fall. Britt Johnson, as well as Captain Henry Warren were freighters, constantly traveling from Weatherford to Fort Griffin with supplies.

Britt had left Weatherford with supplies on January 23 with two hands, Dennis Cureton and Paint Crawford. After camping on Turtle Hole Creek on January 24th, they were attacked by approximately 40 Kiowa under command of a Mexican captive-turned-Kiowa-Chief named Quitan, and Man-man-ti, a medicine man. Outnumbered by at least ten to one odds, Britt and his companions fought valiantly. When his body was discovered, witnesses found 173 spent cartridges around his body alone. It is apparent he and his companions had taken a heavy toll among the attackers because when he and his two companions were killed, they were scalped and mutilated.

Britt Johnson had rescued his family from the Kiowa, either by negotiation or stealth, and this may or may not have played apart. His body had been scalped, his abdomen cut open and the body of his dog had been stuffed inside him. All three victims were buried in a common grave where they were discovered.

On May 15, 1871, General William Tecumseh Sherman stopped at Fort Griffin where Isiah and Elizabeth Clifton and Elizabeth's now 12-year-old granddaughter Charlotte Elizabeth "Lottie" Durkin, among others, would meet with him to express their concern that not all captives had been returned by the Indians. Elizabeth expressed her displeasure with the government's handling of missing captives and told Sherman of her last sighting of Milly Jane in 1865 in Kansas, before they were separated by the Kiowa. General Sherman, who did not believe the Indian problem to be as serious as had been reported, had come to Texas to investigate the issue. While he would remain largely unsympathetic to the captive situation, his mind would be changed dramatically about the ongoing threat the Kiowa and Comanche posed.

On May 16 1871, one of Henry Warren's Wagon trains, headed down the same route as Britt would be attacked by over one hundred seventy Kiowa and Comanche, and seven of the twelve teamsters would be murdered in similar fashion to the fate of Britt Johnson.

Sherman had proceeded from Fort Griffin to Fort Richardson in Jacksboro, and had unknowingly been watched by the same Indians that would attack the Warren Wagon Train later that day. Only the greed of the Kiowa for horses and livestock prevented them from being attacked and quite possibly annihilated. The Warren Wagon Train attack had been carried out by the same Indians who had taken Elizabeth captive at Elm Creek seven years earlier.

Sherman and the nation would now see the threat as a major concern of the U.S. Government and would eventually bring the Kiowa Chiefs Satank, Satanta, and Aido-etee (Big Tree) to stand trial in a civilian court for murder.

Elizabeth would continue to correspond with Indian agents for another search for her missing granddaughter. In June of 1877 (Milly would have been 15 -years-old at this time) she wrote the Office of Indian affairs in Washington D.C. reporting that rumor among the Kiowa was that Milly was with a squaw named Ama. Milly would be fifteen-years-old at this time.

By 1880, Elizabeth and her husband had become permanent members of the Fort Griffin community. In another ironic twist, their closest neighbors were Tonkawa Indians, a tribe which had almost been exterminated by other tribes, and sought the relative safety of Fort Griffin for protection. These neighbors would be employed by the aging Cliftons to look after stock and do chores around the ranch.

Fort Griffin, as important as it was to protect the Texas frontier, was just a stopping point for settlers who were moving farther west, so ranches and permanent homes in the area were relatively sparse. One of the more notable, often considered notorious figures of Fort Griffin was Town Marshall David Barker. With the antics of this community, Barker kept the small- town jail, still preserved today, full to capacity. On November 12, 1874, at the age of 22, he married a local young lady he had met in the community, 15-year-old Charlotte Elizabeth “Lottie” Durkin.

Isiah had been in declining health and with the onset of winter, in the midst of the cold snowy morning of November 19, 1880, Isiah suffered a stroke and died. Isiah’s children had never accepted Elizabeth into their family. Even in the community of Fort Griffin, her life story was well-known, including her former marriage to a black man. It is unknown if this was the primary source of friction between her and her stepchildren, but her inability to be accepted by them and the loss of Isiah, as well as the realization that she would probably not live to see her lost granddaughter, finally broke her indomitable will.

Charlotte Elizabeth “Lottie” Durkin Barker and her husband had moved westward, where Lottie hoped the dry air would be good for her, taking away Elizabeth’s two great granddaughters, Ada and Ida.

Elizabeth began to isolate herself from others, sunk in depression and loss. She had overcome every obstacle life had thrown at her, but the loss of family, companionship, the lack of acceptance by some in the community, and the life on the frontier slowly eroded her will to live.

In 1881 the township of Fort Griffin was dealt a deathblow. This blow would not come from the Indians or outlaws, it would be delivered by the railroad. In 1881 the railroad had laid out the routes of its new lines through the territory and Fort Griffin did not become a destination point. With the wholesale slaughter of Buffalo underway, the railroad stations and their ability to transport hides would attract all of the hunters and businesses and create as well as destroy many communities across the West

As the town began to disappear, so did Elizabeth’s circle of friends. On June 7, 1882 her closest friend, Mrs. Reynolds moved away after the death of her own husband. Now alone and without

her confidant Mrs. Reynolds, Elizabeth surrendered her will to fate. On June 18, 1882 the unknown Texas Legend, Elizabeth Ann Carter Sprague Fitzpatrick Clifton, died at the age of 57. Only Lottie and her two daughters would attend the funeral as she was laid to rest next to Isiah in a small Mesquite shaded dry prairie country cemetery.

The story of this woman might have been told better perhaps, if it had been written during her lifetime. I learned only at this point in my research that she never learned to read or write. Apparently, any correspondence she sent to Washington in search of Little Milly was dictated and written by another party. Barbara Ledbetter truly shines as a historical researcher in piecing together this account of the Carter Family.

Charlotte "Lottie" Durkin Barker, would follow her husband westward in pursuit of his law enforcement career, ending up in Tascosa. Lottie Barker soon became a local legend in Tascosa. She was easily recognized by the moon tattoo on her forehead and her husband often told the story of her life, capture and freedom from her Indian captors.

The nomadic life of her lawman husband had left her raising five children in dugouts and tents during the harsh winters and cruel summers. Lottie didn't have her grandmother's stamina, and her time among the Kiowa, her nomadic lifestyle destroyed her health and led to her untimely death on August 10, 1887. She had given birth to a baby boy on July 10, but never recovered.

Thus ended the Carter saga, or so one would think. Lottie was considered the last surviving heir to the Carter state with the death of her grandmother, however …

In 1930 an elderly Kiowa woman who could not speak English arrived at Fort Belknap and the town of Newcastle Texas. She was accompanied by her daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. George Hunt. When asked who the Kiowa woman was, her family told the onlookers she was Sain-Toh-Oodie-Goombie, but at the tender age of 18 months, her mother had called her "Little Milly Durkin".

There is little to no physical evidence that this woman was in fact Milly Susannah Durkin, the child taken and presumed dead after the Elm Creek Raid of 1864. Barbara Ledbetter appeared convinced she was not.

To the small Fort Belknap community, suffering through the great depression, this was a story that lifted the hearts and minds of the people of Texas and Oklahoma, where Sain-Toh-Oodie lived.

Sain-Toh-Oodie Goombi had been raised by Kiowa's Apesoant-sai-mah (Kind-of-Quiet-Fellow) and his wife Ah-man-ti (Medicine-Hunt-Girl). She was raised among the Kiowa her entire life.

The Fort Belknap Historical Society, upon hearing her story, proclaimed that she and her family would become honorary lifetime members. Members of the Kiowa Tribe would bring her to speak before High School Assemblies and the Governor of Texas himself would meet with her. She became a media event, the little girl who had survived for over 60 years among the Kiowa, and her legacy was accepted without much question at the time. Her fame in her lifetime would be fleeting for on January 14, 1934, Sain-Toh-Oodie Goombui passed away at her home in Mountain View Oklahoma.

Hopefully, when the Gates of Heaven opened, there was a family celebration 70 years in the making.

For us as readers, this is where this story ends … but you have to ask yourself at this point,

“How many other stories like this remain hidden in the lives of some of our local families?”

This is the reason for the existence of museums, so that future generations might know and understand the lives and struggles of our ancestors. In doing so, it can help us to understand and overcome the challenges, struggles and opportunities in our own lives and glimpse at how fleeting time with family can be.