

## Lessons from the Traveling Trunk

By Mary Lyle, Director of Education

The Western Heritage Museum and Lea County Cowboy Hall of Fame’s Traveling Trunk program provides teachers with hands-on materials, which help to connect students with the heritage of Lea County’s historic past. Usually we take the Traveling Trunk to the schools as content enhancement. Due to the current school and Museum closures the Museum is initiating *Lessons from the Traveling Trunk* as an on-line program with content that can be used to enhance at-home learning.

When a teacher opens the Museum’s Traveling Trunk, they find a variety of items and a book of stories written by Lea County pioneers. These materials have been curated by our Education Department professionals and are meant to engage the students’ imaginations active learning. Also included are some historic photographs that help to bring the stories to life. Topics range from the early buffalo hunters, homesteaders, and ranchers. As students listen to the story, they interact with authentic and reproduction items in the trunk.

We begin *Lessons from the Traveling Trunk* with excerpts of two stories by Thelma Linam Webber, a member of the Lea County Cowboy Hall of Fame. In her memoir, *Life on the Prairies: Settling the Llano Estacado*, Thelma recounts what life was like in the early days of Lea County. Thelma cared deeply about preserving history, so much in fact, that she created her own museum. The Western Heritage Museum and Lea County Cowboy Hall of Fame is the custodian of her Linam Ranch Museum Collection. On display in the Museum you will find many of Thelma’s treasured artifacts.

The stories reproduced here illustrate what life was like for pioneer children. “Schools in the Early Days” depicts the one-room school house Thelma attended as a girl. A second story, “The Blizzard of 1906” tells of the resourcefulness of the early pioneers who endured extreme hardships to protect their families and their livestock.

- ⇒ Use these stories to start a family discussion. Remember, sharing even the simplest memories can have a lasting impact on children. As the adults recall long forgotten stories, children can appreciate their connection with their family members.
- ⇒ Try activities and lesson ideas suggested for each story.

## *Schools in the Early Days<sup>1</sup>*

By Thelma Linam Webber

In Monument, New Mexico, Mr. Toole was one of the first school teachers. The building was one room with a big iron heater in the center front, home-made wooden desks for the pupils and a home-made table for the teacher's desk. The men of the community took turns hauling wood for heat in the winter. The water was arrived in a bucket from a windmill nearby. A dipper was kept for drinking. The boys had an outdoor toilet out one way and the girls out the opposite. There was no running water except when it rained.

Anyone who came was taught from six years of age and up. All pupils brought their books and other supplies. Some of the students walked to school, others rode horses or were brought by wagon. Students sat together by grade level. One blackboard was at the front of the room.

When we lived in the Monument community it was a rather densely populated community. In addition to the ranchers who had settled and were running their cattle, horses, or sheep on the open range, many homesteaders had come in. [About] five miles north of Monument, several families had settled within a four or five-mile radius. The men decided to start a school. They made adobe in Jimmie Linam's pit, brought lumber from Midland, and built a one-room school house about one half mile northeast of the Linam house.

A typical one-room school in the early days consisted of two or three first and second graders sitting at one desk, larger pupils two at a desk, which was home-made of lumber and unpainted. At recess and noon, they played "Anti-over;" Baseball, if they had one or a string ball and broom stick for a bat; "Pop the Whip;" "Wolf Over the River;" "London Bridge;" or "Mumble [Mumbley] Peg." If it was stormy and they couldn't play outside, they played guessing games, sang or had spelling matches. Sometimes the teacher would read aloud. The last period of Friday afternoon was usually a spelling or arithmetic match.

They usually had a special Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter program. All the families were invited. In most communities, the school house served as church house and community center. Sunday schools were organized regardless of denominational beliefs. God's Word was taught by any who were interested enough to do so.

---

<sup>1</sup> Webber, Thelma A. *Life on the Prairies: Settling the Llano Estacado*. Hobbs: n. p., 1996 Print. Excerpts edited for readability.

## Children's Games

### *Wolf Over the River*

For *Wolf Over the River* two captains choose sides, which line up on each side of an imaginary line — "the river" — about forty-five feet apart. One person who is chosen as the "wolf" stands in the middle between the two teams. When he is ready, he yells, "Wolf over the river! Don't hold hands! Wolf over the river! Catch all you can!" Each team then runs across the field to get to the other team's line and safety. The wolf tries to catch one of the runners as he crosses the field and to hold him long enough to pat him three times on the back. Those the wolf catches stay and help him catch others. The last one caught gets to be the wolf in the next game.

### *Pop or Crack the Whip*

You need at least six people for the game to be effective, but the more the better. All participants hold hands. Someone is picked to be the leader and someone as the caboose. The leader just starts running around like crazy and everyone else follows, being sure not to let go of hands. Eventually, after everyone has been running with full speed and making sharp turns, the caboose and/or people next to him get sent flying because of the force of everyone running and turning.



NOTE: This is a lot of fun but be prepared to get dirty, especially if you are on the end. The caboose can use two hands to hold on to the person they are connected to.

### *Mumble Peg*

Mumble [Mumbley] Peg is a game of skill using a pocket knife. There are many versions of the game, most consist of many prescribed moves, each of which to be successful had to end up with the knife point sticking in the ground firmly enough so the knife would stand without falling over.



## SCHOOLS IN THE EARLY DAYS

Objects mentioned in the story – write the name of the object. Re-read the story if you can't remember the answer.



## *The Blizzard of 1906<sup>2</sup>*

By Thelma Linam Webber

I was born in Eddy County, Territory of New Mexico on October 7, 1906, near the Post Office of Humble City. My parents were living in a two-room mud house, which had been built by an earlier settler, John Underwood. My father bought him out in the spring of 1906.

A mud house is different from adobe, in that forms are built and a heavy mud poured into the forms. When dried, the roof is put on and the forms can be removed. It is usually plastered inside and out with a caliche mud. When dried it is off-white or caliche in color. I was born without the presence of a doctor. They used a mid-wife and my grandmother Eller.

The fall of 1906 was warm and pleasant. Daddy started to Midland and market with a herd of fat muttons. He had one helper and, of course, a chuck wagon with a four-horse team and a gray saddle horse named J.P. It would take about eighteen or twenty days to drive the sheep and five or six days back, loaded with supplies.

Grandpa and Grandma Eller came to stay with my mother while Daddy was away. Daddy had several hundred sheep. He used a camp wagon and would move it from time to time setting up a portable corral for the sheep at night. The camp was about two miles north of the house.

On November 15 at about four o'clock in the morning, a blizzard blew in. The herder, Domingo Luna, decided to turn the sheep out of the wire pen and drive them to the house where there would be more shelter. The storm increased, and he could not control the herd. They were drifting with the wind and going too far toe was not dressed for the extreme cold, so he came to the house and told Nellie, my mother, the circumstances. In the meantime, early in the morning, Grandpa had saddled a horse and gone to the sheep camp to help Domingo. Grandpa missed Doming in the blinding snow.

Domingo was almost frozen when he came in. When Mama heard the news, she immediately said, "I will wrap up and go help you bring them in." Grandma gave the man food, coffee and extra clothes and boots. Grandma tried to persuade Mama not to go, but she insisted saying, "Those sheep are our living. If they drift away, they will all freeze or be

---

<sup>2</sup> Webber, Thelma A. *Life on the Prairies: Settling the Llano Estacado*. Hobbs: n. p., 1996 Print. Excerpts edited for readability.

lost.” They put newspaper over the upper part of her body. She put on pants and two coats, and they wrapped their feet with gunny sacks and set out to find the herd. They found them southwest of the house where they had stopped against a neighbor’s fence. The two began trying to turn them toward the house, which made them facing almost straight into the storm.

Walking – running – yelling – coaxing, they tried to drive them slowly but surely back to the shelter, feed, and safety. They pulled off their outer coats and used them to whip the animals. About three in the afternoon they reached the house. They arrived just as Grandpa came in, almost frozen. He had been wandering, looking for the herd. Soon they had them in the corrals with plenty of feed.

Rube Knowles had a general store at Monument and was running low on stock. The day before the storm hit, he set out in the freight wagon for Midland. The next day, they came to Daddy’s camp, where they stopped when they met the storm. He told Daddy he had heard the cattle and sheep were all drifting clear out of the country and it was feared all the stock and herders would be frozen.

Daddy was so worried about the family and sheep, he told the man with him to stay in camp until the storm broke. He poured feed out of sacks into the wagon bed, wrapped his and his horses’ feet and stared facing the storm. Trying to reach home, he rode through the heavy drifts all the way without stopping. His faithful horse, J. P. carried him through very bad circumstances. When he rode into the house, Domingo went to meet him saying, “Willie, all sheepies is safe. Mama, she helpie me getum Mama babies. She Bueno.” There was thanksgiving and rejoicing in the house that night.

As soon as possible, the ranchers began to try to get together any remaining livestock. All this area was unfenced, except for now and then a small field or small horse pasture. Thousands of sheep, cattle, and horses drifted to faraway places. Beginning about where Maljamar is today and where the Caprock gets higher, the snow whipped over the rim building drifts further and deeper. When the herds came to the rim, they piled over, burying themselves in the deep drifts. Many herds were lost completely. In other herds, only a few animals survived.

## ORAL HISTORY LESSON PLAN - *Tell Me a Story*

---

Thelma Linam Webber believed that it was important for her to preserve her family's stories. She wrote her book, *Life on the Prairies: Settling the Llano Estacado*, in order to make sure that future generations would have a record of the tales of how her pioneer family survived hardships and enjoyed the fruits of their hard work in the early days of Lea County.

Some of the stories are her first-hand recollections of people, places, and events. Others are stories told by older members of her family and recounted by Thelma. Thus, Thelma practiced a kind of oral history tradition in writing her book.

Our Lesson Plan, *Tell Me a Story*, is designed to encourage students' interest in their own family history. Everyone has a story to tell and everyone's story is important. As students learn about the past by listening to an older relative talk about their memories, they make a valuable connection with their heritage.

### ***Tell Me a Story***

Oral history is a way of learning about the past by interviewing someone who experienced it. Family stories are a wonderful resource to use as a window on the past. The focus of this lesson is to provide an opportunity to connect one generation with another through story telling.

**Age Group** – 3-5 and Middle School. Can be adapted for High School Students

Students will choose a family member and ask them to talk about a significant event or memory from the past. It might be helpful to choose a family artifact or picture to start the interview.

**Objective** – students will

- Understand that oral history is a way of gathering information that helps to explain the past.
- Understand that all of us have important stories that need to be shared and remembered.
- Learn more about their family from a first-hand account from the past.

### **Materials**

- Object/photo – significant to the subject of the interview
- Pencil and paper – to take notes
- Recording device – cell phone, video camera, audio recorder

### **Outcome**

- Students will record the story and produce a written summary of the interview.

**Interviewing a Family Member** – use a significant photograph or object for the interview.

**SAMPLE QUESTIONS**

Name of the person being interviewed. \_\_\_\_\_

How is this person related to you? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the object you chose? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did you choose the object? \_\_\_\_\_

Can you describe it? \_\_\_\_\_

Who did/does it belong to? \_\_\_\_\_

How was the object acquired? When? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the significance of the object? \_\_\_\_\_

Is there something you would like to know about the object? \_\_\_\_\_

Is there someone else in the family who might know more about the object? \_\_\_\_\_

Is there a story that relates to this object? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you ever face a difficult challenge? \_\_\_\_\_

How would you describe that challenge? \_\_\_\_\_