

Ed Fisher

Ed Fisher was unique, a fine man in spite of being ignored by his parents as a child; he thought of himself as a dogie. He was lucky to have been more or less adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Ira Driver. Ed's grandparents were among the very earliest and influential Big Spring residents. Ed asked that following essay not be published until after his death. --Doyle Phillips

ROMAN

What Joseph Fisher found in the Union Army and California as well as on the frontier in west Texas was the fact a man was judged by his character, honesty, integrity, and his enterprise. Not his ethnic nor religious background.

It was different in Europe where a person was judged by his station in life that had been predicated by centuries of the caste system.

His pet expression to his son, was "in Rome, do as the Romans do. Because of this he sent his son to St. Mathew's Grammar School and his daughter to St. Mary's Grammar School. Both were in Dallas and Episcopalian sanctioned.

Many members of his family were affiliated with the Masonic order in both the states and in Austria, and he was one of the original brothers of the Staked Plains Lodge #598, AM&FM in Big Spring. It is not known where he was raised to a Master Mason. He followed the tenets of its beliefs of faith, hope, and charity. His son, Albert was in the first class of 32° (Cornerstone Class) at the Dallas Scottish Rite Consistory.

One of his prize possessions was his uniform and sword that were presented to him when he became a brother in the Knights of Pythias in Big Spring.

Joseph and his wife Anna were both students of the Bible, not only the old testament, but the new. His son was interested in Confucius, as well.

The whole family lived by the golden rule that Confucius laid down and later by Jesus "Do unto others, as ye would that they do unto you". This was the rule of the western frontier. The life you live may be your only one, but then again, you may have another chance. It is hard to believe that novels, and movies portray the 'old west' as being made up of outlaws, saloon girls, unscrupulous ranchers saddle tramps, and singers.

The old timers in the western sector of Texas said, "there was hardly a church that needed help that Joe or his brother Will did not help in some way."

This was so true when one thinks that the early churches were built by persons of all faiths. When the Baptists wanted to build a church in Big Spring, men did the construction, and the women provided the food. This was the same method that the Catholic, Methodists and others found they might have a separate place to hold services. Until each had their own structure, they shared facilities.

Old records reveal that Anna (Fisher) nursed various people back to health. One particular family, the Gomez's still remember Anna's faithful treatment to their grandfather. She had no formal instruction, just the knowledge she learned as a farm girl in Indiana.

It is easy to see why Joseph and Anna's descendants have become disciples of so many religions, ranging from Christian Science, Catholic, Dutch Reform, Orthodox and Reformed Congregations, Presbyterian, as only an individual knows where his heart leads him.

--Ed Fisher (Presbyterian Deacon)

One of Ed's many historical writing is called "An Overview--Settlement of the Llano Estacado, 1878 to 1890", published by the Permian Historical Society, 1997.

Another of his publications is "James J. Byrne--A Many Faceted Man", also published by the Permian Historical Society, 1999. When Ed was searching old deeds he came across the last letter that Byrne wrote to his wife before going into dangerous territory. Byrne's fear was well-founded and he was killed the Apache chief Victorio.

THE UNMARKED GRAVE

On Easter Sunday 1966, after attending St. Paul's Presbyterian Church and getting out of my suit (as a deacon I had taken the offering that day and had to wear a tie as well as a coat (we had no air conditioner and it was a sultry hot day), the phone rang. Evalena said it was Lindsey Marshbanks. He said the members of the Roberts family (Howard County's first Anglo settlers) were having lunch, when one of his great-aunts (Wade Choate's grandmother or Brookie Martin) asked why none of the Fishers ever decorated the grave over by the Spring House?

A cold chill ran up my spine. My inner thoughts took me back to Easter Sunday afternoon in 1930, when my Dad said he wanted me to go along to a ranch. We took long forgotten roads to a grave near Moss Springs. He and Uncle Lester laid a wreath on the mound of stone. Dad made me promise that I would not tell a soul about where we had been, for what reason, I can only surmise. There was a spring nearby the tall hackberry tree and remains of an former dugout habitat. (Later I found out it was called "the spring house").

I had not thought about that trip, as dad always had a reason to ask to keep secrets. After all, I was only 5 years old on that warm spring day, some 36 years before.

Lindsey (later a Federal Reserve Bank Examiner) said he and his wife would like for me to take them to the grave site that afternoon. The Roberts estate no longer owned that section of land. I had to search my mind to figure out what roads to take to get to the "old spring house" as they had never been there. The four of us (Lindsey, Troy, Evalena and myself) took paved roads to a spot about a mile west of Moss Creek Lake Dam (all the roads we took in 1930 had been either fenced off or torn up).

I told Lindsey to stop the car, I had some kind of "homing instinct". We walked about three-quarters of a mile, when I saw a small "wash" over a clump of cedars. We passed a few large boulders, then lo and behold, there was a mound of rocks, and the remains of a former hackberry tree.

As it turns out it was the grave of my uncle (son of my Grandfather's first wife) who died in the small pox epidemic of 1882 in Big Spring. His name is lost, as none of the old timers had ever heard it.

In addition to the Roberts family, Winnie Dell and Lillian Rhoton (daughters of the first rancher in adjacent Mitchell County) knew of the grave, as did Beulah Cartwright (Harry and Vivian Middleton's grandmother) and Andre Walker (daughter of early day District and County Clerk and Abstractor), but the first name of a boy baby escaped them.

The Marshbanks took us home, the phone again rang. It was from a fellow Knight Templar, who said he needed me to pay our respects to the widow of a fallen member, Ed Brindley. Sir Knight Brindley and my dad were the first candidates in the newly formed Scottish Rite Temple in Dallas (1906), there were only 21 Masonic candidates of which two were from Big Spring.

Several of us put on K.T. uniforms, and went to the Brindley Ranch house west of town. I told Mrs. Brindley and her sister, Olive Ruth Cowden about where I had been that afternoon, they remembered hearing about the grave, but neither one knew of the details. (They were the Bird sisters who grew up across from the Potton house on Gregg Street.)

Why I was asked to keep the secret, I have only thoughts on the subject.

How I ever found that resting place of my uncle, in a changing terrain, I'll never know, but there are some things that cannot be explained.

--Ed Fisher -1986)

EDWARD FISHER Ed passed away July 6, 2001, at the age of 76, in the Baylor Hospital in Dallas after a short but devastating illness. He was a descendant of a pioneering family of West Texas and had lived in San Angelo for a third of a century. Funeral service will be at 10 a.m. Monday, July 9, in Johnsons Funeral Home Chapel with Nelson Erwin, C-L-P officiating. Mr. Ross McSwain will deliver the eulogy. Interment with Masonic Rites will be at 2 p.m. Monday in Trinity Memorial Park in Big Spring. Ed graduated from Texas A&M University, Thunderbird Graduate School of International Management and Texas Tech University with an MBA. He served his country in World War II in the 1st and 9th Armies in Europe. His career was varied and very enjoyable. After retiring, one of his greatest pleasures was writing about the history and settlement of West Texas. He is survived by his wife, Evalena; and many cherished nephews, nieces and friends. Arrangements are by Johnsons Funeral Home.

Ira Driver's Steer-Roping Friend Swapped That White-Handled Pistol

By FRANKLIN REYNOLDS

"Just for the fun of it I think I'll let her tell my fortune," said Butch Cassidy, a Texan who had been christened George Leroy Parker.

"The place was Argentina, the year was 1906, and the fortune teller could speak English, and so—'What th' hell!'"

The Gypsy crystal gazer could only guess at his past. He knew that only too well, anyway. But she nailed his future to the facts. He had a white-handled Colts .45 Peacemaker stuck down in his waistband. She pointed to the ivory handles of the sixshooter. "That gun will kill you," she said.

Butch laughed. That was a joke. Wasn't it his gun? He'd never let any man, particularly one not trusted as a friend, ever get a hand on that gun. True, he hadn't owned the gun very long, just a few weeks. It had a seven and one-half inch barrel. He'd traded one just like it, but with a five and one-half inch barrel, for it to W. D. "Billy" Connell at a baile in Buenos Aires.

Billy Connell was a West Texas cowboy, from Midland and El Paso, who at the time was in the Argentine on a steer roping and rodeoing expedition accompanied by Ira J. Driver, now of Big Spring; Len Driver, Ira's brother; Asa Drape; Spence Jowell; Joe Gardner; Clay McGonigal; Wiley Hill, and the famous black-skinned cowboy, Bill Pickett, who was the first man who ever bulldogged a steer for exhibition. Incidentally, it should be mentioned that Pickett really "bulldogged" them. This rodeo feature he created has turned out to be literally "steer wrestling" but with Pickett it was real bulldogging. He'd fasten his teeth into the animal just like a real bulldog would do.

Mr. Driver doesn't remember the pistol trade between Cassidy and Connell, but he says he does remember that Connell had a good Winchester .30-30 that might have gotten the Americans into a lot of trouble one day when they were having a little misunderstanding with the South American natives, if Driver hadn't prevented its use.

Parker, alias Cassidy was in Argentina because of his health, and because he and his partner, Harry Longbaugh, alias The Sundance Kid, were men who were ambitious to quickly and easily acquire a substantial share of the world's gold reserves. In other words, if they had stayed in the United States some peace officer would have killed them, or some mob would have strung them from a convenient cottonwood limb, and in South America there were banks and trains to be robbed that had never been robbed before.

STOLEN HORSES

Cassidy was received at the Wyoming State Penitentiary as No. 187 on July 15, 1894 to serve two years for stealing horses. At this time he was 27 years old, a well-proportioned man a little less than six feet tall. He had light complexion, blue eyes and medium chestnut hair. On January 19, 1896, he was released on a pardon issued by Governor W. A. Richards.

Soon after his release he fled in with Longbaugh, and not long after that they were joined by Harvey Logan, alias Kid Curry, later a member of the Black Jack Ketchum gang. While this trio was punching cows for the old WS outfit in New Mexico they cooked up the idea of robbing the First National Bank at Winnemucca, Nevada; did it and escaped under fire with \$32,000. They struck out for Fort Worth and on the way picked up Ben Kilpatrick, a San Angelo badman, and Ben Carver of Bander County. Detectives got on their trail at Fort Worth and the gang split up. But somewhere Cassidy, Longbaugh and Logan got together again and reunited and on the morning of July 3, 1901, the three of them robbed a Great Northern train near Wagner, Montana. The loot this time was \$100,000—but sadly it was in unsigned currency consigned to a bank in Helena.

Again they were in flight. In Nashville, Tennessee, Cassidy and

Longbaugh attempted a holdup and then barely managed to escape the police by commandeering an ice wagon and engaging in a running gun battle with the officers, Longbaugh handling the reins and Cassidy handling the sixshooters.

SOLDIERS ON TRAIL

Next they turned up in Argentina, where many another Texan had preceded them in a search for a new start. After swapping pistols with Connell and seeing the fortune teller, the two went into the mountain fastness of Chile where they met determined opposition. The army was mobilized.

Following a bank robbery a battalion of cavalry struck their trail and stayed on it. The two American outlaws were in a strange country. They were riding tired horses. They were pushed hard. There was but one thing to do—to make the finish a grand and glorious one! To go out under a cloud of powder smoke a mile high!

The two took refuge behind a crumbling 'dobe wall and gave battle to the Chilean cavalrymen. Twenty-three of the soldiers yielded up their ghosts, and another score were wounded. Neither of the outlaws had been scratched as the soldiers observed later.

Then came the end of the trail. Their supply of cartridges had been exhausted. Each of them had one bullet left. They probably looked at each other and nodded a mutual understanding.

"So long," Cassidy probably said very simply.

"See you in hell," Longbaugh might have replied.

Cassidy looked down into the muzzle of his own gun, but he probably didn't see it. The chances are that his eyes were fixed on those ivory handles that had once known the touch of Ira Driver's compadre, Billy Connell, and likely Butch Cassidy laughed and fixed his last mortal thoughts on the prophetic words of that fortune teller as he died.

There the soldiers found them, side by side as they had loved and lived, ridden and robbed, and fought and killed.

EXPENSIVE TRIP

Ira Driver doesn't remember that pistol trade although he was probably around close when it happened, but he does remember that trip—and South America.

He remembers Argentina as a wonderful cattle country but he isn't anxious to see it again. He went there because a couple of Englishmen offered to put up half the money for the steer roping, Bill Pickett-bulldogging and bronc riding show the Americans could put on. The Midland County cowboys were to get half the profits.

"I got back to Midland with just about what I left Midland with," Driver recalls. There wasn't any chance to make money, he says, because everything down there cost so much. They had to buy horses and steers and pay high rent on the grounds where the shows were held. He also has never forgotten that the sponsoring English gentlemen were great entertainers and that they threw some rather expensive and expensive parties while promoting the shows, all of which had to be deducted before an accounting on profits could be undertaken. "They charged us pretty high for everything," Driver says.

The Big Spring man remembers, too, that unexpectedly there was a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in South America and this group contributed to the troubles of the Texans.

He says he believes those South American steers were the biggest cattle he ever saw. Most of them, he describes as being part Durham, but they came in all colors and shades. He has to spread his hands pretty far apart to show a listener just what wide backs they had. And they were man-fighters, ready to attack horse and rider with their long, wicked horns just the second a rope touched them.

"We quickly out-roped any native who wanted to contest against us," Driver says, "although we had one of them who was pretty good and he stayed with us all the time we were there." Driver also recalls that the Argentinians

had a different way of roping steers, using an entirely different type of saddle, with their rope made fast to a ring at the side of the horse.

HORSES NO GOOD

The South Americans argued that a horse could pull more with a rope fastened to this ring than when the rope was around a saddle horn. To settle the argument the other Driver brother, Len, and one of the Vaqueros decided upon a test. One end of the rope was in the vaquero's steer-roping ring and the other around Len's saddle horn.

"When Len hit the end of the rope," Ira Driver recalls, "he really turned that other horse upside-down and then dragged him off."

Driver says the South American horses of that day weren't any good for roping those heavy steers. As he pictures them they were heavy-boned Spanish horses but too slow for fast steer work.

The Texans didn't take their horses to South America because the Englishmen either didn't have, or wouldn't put up, that much money. They bought and trained the heavy-boned Spanish horses after their arrival—and they left the horses down there when they came home.

The Texans were gone about six months, "and we had a lot of fun," Driver says. "We nearly got whipped a couple of times and I don't care if I never see South America again, but it was good cattle country."

And as he tells about the trip you get the impression that if he could rename Argentina, he would probably call it "The Land of the Big Steers."

(Author's note. The other members of Butch Cassidy's Hole-In-The-Wall Gang also died with their boots on. Harvey Logan made it to British Honduras where officers killed him. Sutton County Sheriff Carver in Sonora, Texas, April 2, 1901, and Express Messenger Davis Trousdale killed Ben Kilpatrick in an attempted train robbery near Dryden, Texas, March 13, 1912, soon after Kilpatrick had been released from a penitentiary.)

Soil Conditioners Call For Caution

Farmers, gardeners and others interested in trying out the new chemical "soil conditioners" are advised by Dr. J. B. Page, soil physicist for the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, to use them only experimentally.

He points out that research work dealing with the conditioners is being conducted at many different locations over the country but since the materials are only now becoming available in quantity, additional information is needed before recommendations can be made. The work being done by the Texas Station is a part of a south-wide project.

Dr. Page says the "soil conditioners" are chemicals prepared for the purpose of binding and stabilizing small soil particles into larger particles which resist breakdown by water. He is quick to add that the natural organic materials have the same effect on soils and at the same time, leave other beneficial results in addition to the formation of the desired soil aggregates.

The scientist points out that research up to date has shown that expenditures of from \$300 to \$500 per acre must be made to get the required amounts of the conditioners in the soil.

He says work to date indicates that the conditioners are most effective on soils with high clay and silt content. They are not effective on soils high in sand content and soils already good structurally are helped little by the addition of the chemicals.

Dr. Page cautions purchasers against buying quantities of the materials until more is known about them. He adds, since the products offered for sale are new, many have not been adequately tested. Therefore, he suggests that buyers try only those products which have been tested and on which reports have been made.