

TEXAS CO-OP POWER



Tamale Time

The making—and eating—of tamales signals the start of the season



BLUEBONNET NEWS
SEE PAGE 18





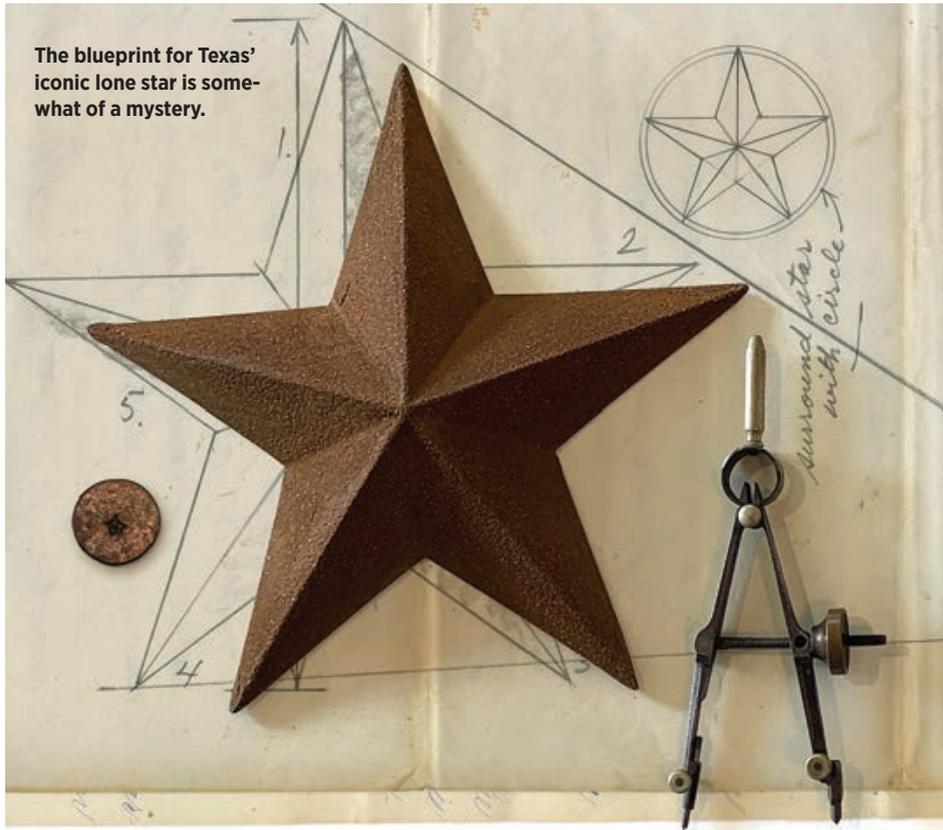
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The blueprint for Texas' iconic lone star is somewhat of a mystery.

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NEXT MONTH

Texas Feels a Draft Craft breweries bring entertainment and economic opportunity to communities.

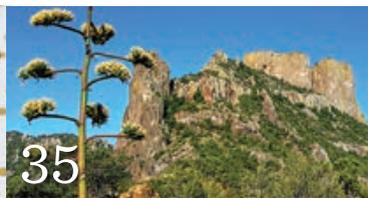


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STAR: JACK MOLLOY. BEER: MAXY M | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



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ON THE COVER Celia Galindo helps continue a tamalada tradition started by her grandmother in 1949 in Brownsville. Photo by John Faulk

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– Janet F.

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Your VFD Might Need You

In my lifetime, I've been a member of five volunteer fire departments [*Putting Others First*, October 2019]. More than once, I've been the only firefighter responding to a fire or wreck in our district, having to rely on manpower and equipment from a neighboring community to assist.

Chances are good your local volunteer fire department needs you. Check it out—you might be glad you did.

DOUG EARNEST | CHANDLER TRINITY VALLEY EC

Fateful Connection to REA

My father, Walter Smith, joined the Rural Electrification Administration in 1949 as a young electrical engineer [*Our Fearless Forefather*, August 2019]. By 1951, he was running electric service into the Missouri Ozarks for the REA. Family folklore says that Dad attended an REA conference in Salt Lake City in June 1951 and was scheduled to return home on a flight with his REA co-workers.

However, I was born in Missouri while Dad was at the conference, so when a seat opened up on an earlier flight, the REA group nominated Dad to return home early to greet his newborn son. As a result, Dad was



Remembering Cliburn

In 1959, I was a senior at the El Dorado, Arkansas, high school.

Van Cliburn had just won the International Tchaikovsky

Competition in Moscow

[*Charming the Soviets*, October 2019]. True to his previously scheduled performances, he played to a full house in El Dorado.

DEPHANIE CATES | LIBERTY HILL | PEDERNALES EC



not on United Airlines Flight 610 when it crashed, killing six REA employees, including George Haggard.

I suspect that Mr. Haggard, as a top REA administrator at the conference, probably had a hand in getting Dad on that earlier flight.

ROD SMITH | NEW BRAUNFELS PEDERNALES EC

Before He Went Uptown

The lanky, bespectacled, rather shy young man strumming a cheap guitar in my Grandmother "Honey" Elliott's rooming house in Pecos in the early 1950s was known to us only as Uncle Joe's helper. Uncle Joe was an entomologist sent by the Texas ag department to inspect the insect population. The easygoing musician was tasked

with catching and counting bugs.

Every evening after supper, we would gather in the kitchen for an impromptu concert. I was about 8, and this was just a normal grandparent visit for me.

A few years later, when he topped the charts, I realized I had spent the summer with Roy Orbison [*Wink's Spectacle*, September 2019]. Ain't Texas grand?

BRUCE BREEN | MCLEAN GREENBELT EC

Childhood in the Big Bend

As a young kid who grew up in Coleman, we had many wonderful trips to Alpine, Marfa and the Big Bend—great folks and amazing scenery for sure [*Big Bend's Golden Triangle*, September 2019]. My father was a dentist in Coleman for many years and, in the early 1980s, even opened up a small dental office in Alpine for a couple days a week.

TOMMY WHITE | ALLEN GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

Fit to a Tee

By the Numbers [Currents item about the odds of a hole-in-one, September 2019] had an extra special meaning to me. My 16-year-old grandson Clayton had just gotten a hole-in-one in his Farmington, Arkansas, high school golf tournament.

HELEN MCCAMEY | WILLS POINT TRINITY VALLEY EC

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   Texas Co-op Power

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HAPPENINGS

New Year's Eve Party in Itasca

Three artists with impressive musical bloodlines will provide the entertainment for a **NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY in ITASCA**. Whey Jennings, grandson of Waylon Jennings, was born and raised in Grand Prairie. Thomas Gabriel is the oldest grandchild of Johnny and June Carter Cash. And Cagney Frizzell, named after James Cagney, is Lefty Frizzell's nephew.

Guests are welcome to bring their own food and beverages to the HILCO Civic & Event Center party **DECEMBER 31**.

The event will include a 50-50 raffle and drawings for other items. Tickets start at \$20. For \$40, guests get a meet and greet with the musicians.

HILCO Electric Cooperative built the Central Texas venue last year and hosts about 10 community events per month.

INFO ▶ (214) 212-5798, bit.ly/NYEItasca



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PHILANTHROPY

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ALMANAC

CO-OPS ARE BORN

The **cooperative** movement turns 175 years old December 21. On that date in 1844, 28 workers opened a cooperative store in Rochdale, England. Initially, the store carried four key items: butter, sugar, flour and oatmeal.

◀ LOOKING BACK AT ARTS AND FASHION THIS MONTH



IN THE 75 YEARS since *Texas Co-op Power* debuted in July 1944, Texas and Texans have left an indelible mark in film, theater, literature and fashion—from Charlie Dunn to Sissy Spacek.

1940s

1945 Charlie Dunn, bootmaker to the stars, begins his career at Capitol Saddlery in Austin.

1948 *Red River*, a fictional account of the first cattle drive on the Chisholm Trail from Texas to Kansas starring John Wayne, is released.

1948 James A. Michener, who spent the final years of his life in Austin, wins a Pulitzer Prize for his book *Tales of the South Pacific*.

1950s

1952 Dancer and actress Cyd Charisse of Amarillo achieves star status opposite Gene Kelly in *Singin' in the Rain*.

1956 Grace Kelly marries Prince Rainier III of Monaco. Her bridesmaids' dresses are designed by Neiman Marcus of Dallas.



1960s

1960 John Wayne's *The Alamo* is released.

1966 Katherine Anne Porter, who was born in Indian Creek, wins the National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize for fiction for *The Collected Stories*.

1968 Poet and artist Consuelo "Chelo" González Amezcua has a solo exhibition at the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio. It's the first time she is recognized for her brand of Texas filigree art.

Elf in Kaufman Has His Own Toy Story

WHEN JERRY REICHERT sees a 2-by-12-by-12-inch board at a construction site, he knows it is likely to end up on the scrap pile. That is fine with him because the scrap fits into his plans for Christmas.

“When I see that piece of lumber,” Reichert says, “I see a toy.” Actually, he sees one of 22 varieties of toys. These comprise the 5,000 wooden playthings made each year by volunteers at Hobby Crafters and distributed to children in North Texas by more than 20 churches and charities.

Reichert and his wife, Wilda, live in Kaufman and have been members of Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative since the early 1970s. Two or three days a week, Reichert, 81, drives more than an hour to the Hobby Crafters workshop in Garland where he holds the unofficial title of head elf. “I took over from the guy who founded it,” Reichert says. “That was 38 years ago.”

Hobby Crafters was founded in 1944 by Dallas physician Arch McNeill, who organized friends and patients to produce toys for underprivileged children. Reichert took over in 1981 at McNeill’s request. “It’s always been strictly volunteer,” Reichert says. “You can look at my checkbook and see for yourself.” Reichert retired in 1997 from his 39-year career selling electronics for Toshiba.

The Hobby Crafters workshop houses 39 machines, including a variety of power saws and sanders, but not every one of the 40 volunteers needs to operate a power tool. “I tell people if they can lay a form on a board and draw a line around it, they’re hired,” Reichert says.

INFO ▶ hobbycrafters.org



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1970s

1974 Wichita Falls’ Tommy Tune, actor, dancer, singer, choreographer and director, wins the first of his 10 Tony Awards—best featured actor in a musical, for *Seesaw*.

1974 Cadillac Ranch is created outside Amarillo.



1980s

1980 Comer Cottrell Jr. relocates Pro-Line Corporation, maker of Jheri curl hair products, to Dallas. It becomes the largest black-owned firm in the Southwest.

1981 Sissy Spacek of Quitman wins the best actress Academy Award for her portrayal of Loretta Lynn in *Coal Miner’s Daughter*.

1986 Larry McMurtry of Archer City wins the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for *Lonesome Dove*.

1990s

1990 *Friday Night Lights* by H.G. Bissinger is published. It is adapted into a movie of the same name in 2004 and leads to a widely acclaimed TV series that ran 2006–2011.

1996 The first Texas Book Festival takes place, in Austin.

1997 Arlen isn’t on the Texas map, but when the animated TV series *King of the Hill* debuts, the characters make it feel like it could be the next town over.

2000s



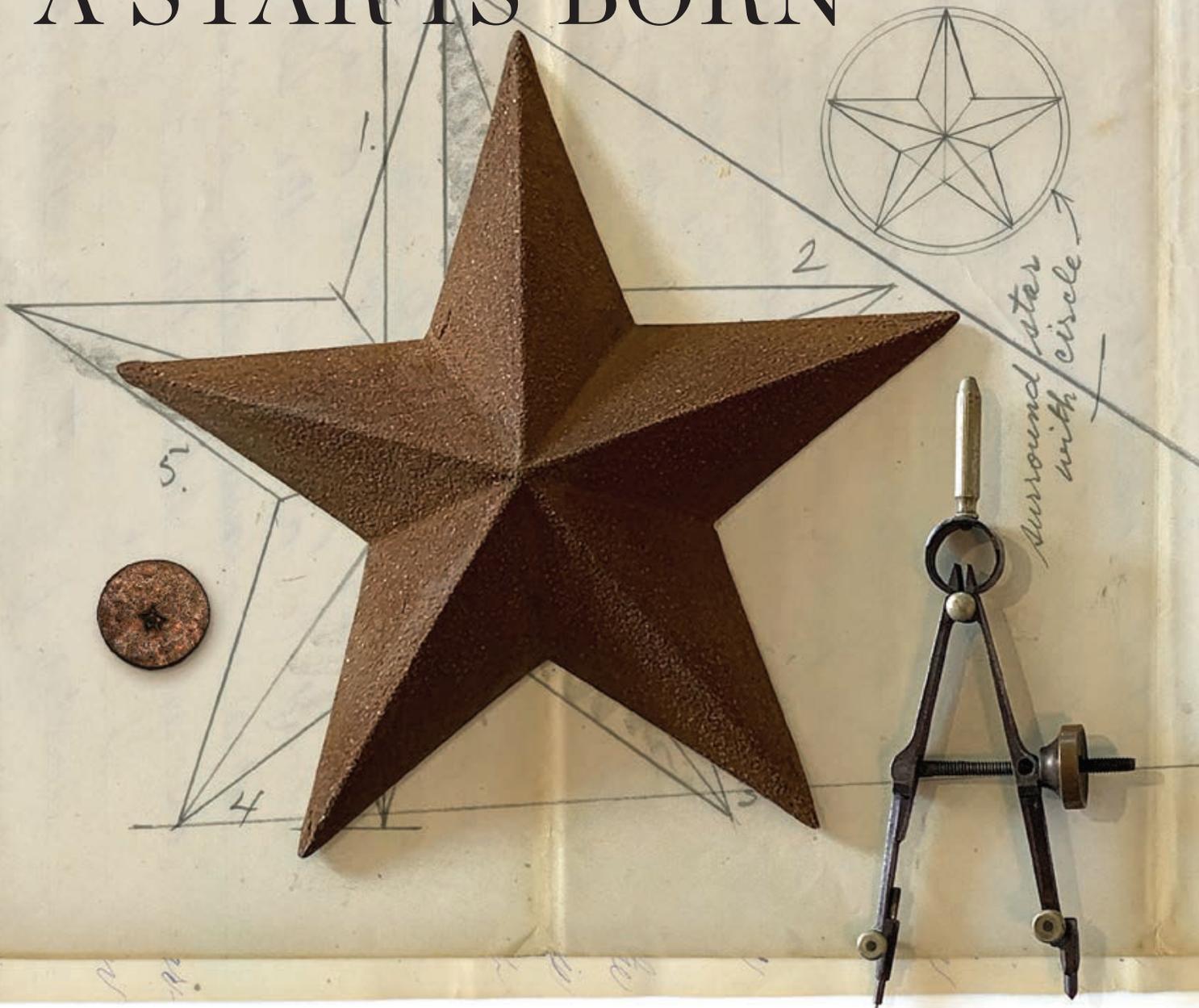
2002 Kendra Scott starts her eponymous jewelry company in a spare bedroom of her Austin home.

2003 Robert A. Caro wins a Pulitzer Prize in biography for *Master of the Senate*, one of four biographical volumes he’s written about Lyndon B. Johnson.

2013 The first episode of HGTV’s *Fixer Upper*, shot in Waco, airs.

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A STAR IS BORN



Texas' iconic lone star might trace origins to 1817 Mexican coins

BY CLAY COPPEDGE

A lone star adorns the Texas state flag and the state seal. It appears on the U.S. Mint's Texas commemorative quarter, and it is the state's official gemstone cut. Texas is the Lone Star State because we Texans are proud of our beginnings as an independent republic. According to history and mythology, nothing symbolizes Texas' spirit more eloquently than a lone five-pointed star.

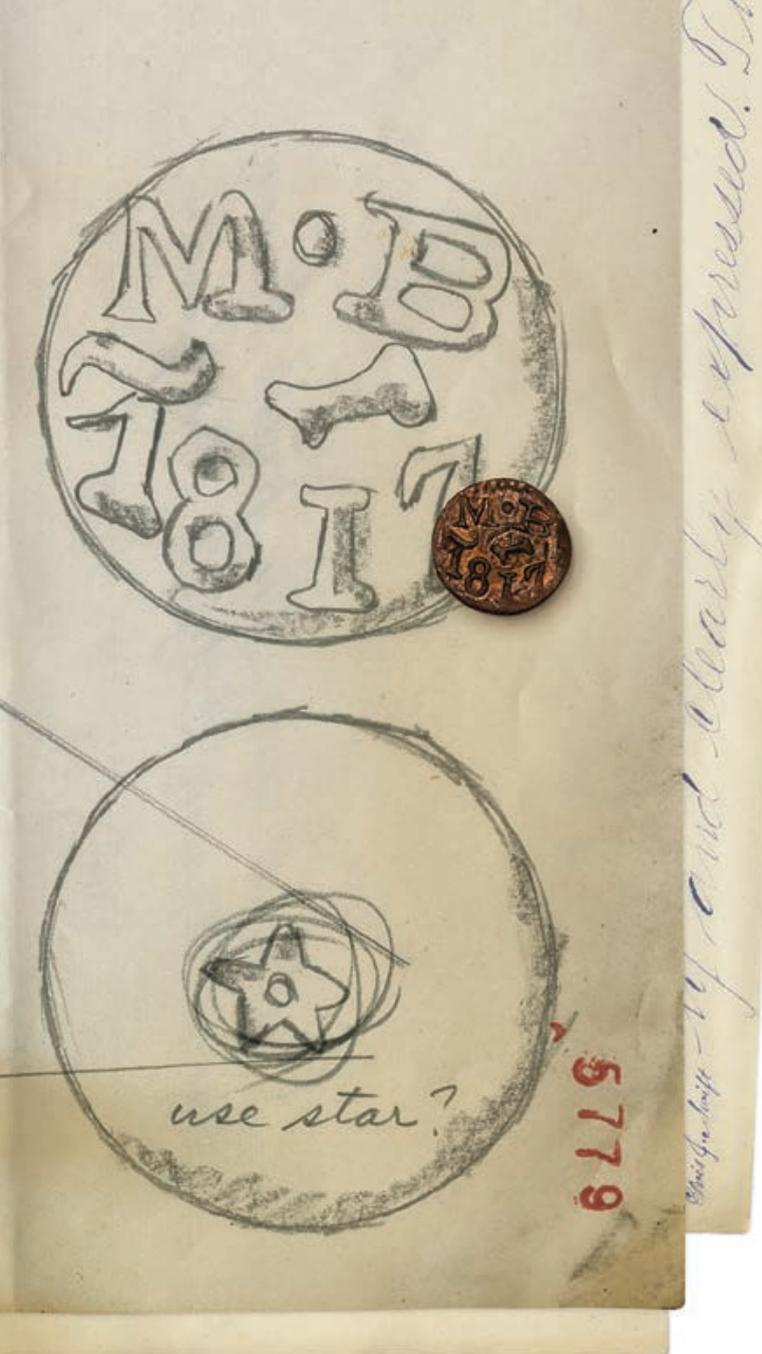
But who first came up with the idea of the lone star, and who was the first person to use the lone star as a symbol of Texas?

A lone star showed up as a symbol of Texas as early as 1819 on the flag of the ill-fated Long Expedition, an early attempt by Anglo Americans, led by James Long, to wrest control of Texas from Spain. That flag, believed to be the first Texas flag to feature a single star, incorporated 13 alternating red and white stripes with a single white star in the upper left corner. Eli Harris, a

frontier Texas printer and a leader of the Long Expedition, believed he invented the symbol and wrote to Texas President Mirabeau Lamar to that effect in 1841. "I established the flag which you now use," he wrote. "I was proud of being the man to establish the star and flag of Texas."

George Childress, author of the Texas Declaration of Independence, adopted a resolution at the general convention of the provisional government in 1836 resolving that "a single star of five points, either of gold or silver, be adopted as the peculiar emblem of this republic." The Texas Congress officially adopted the current lone star flag on January 25, 1839.

According to Houston numismatist James Bevill, the lone star—five-pointed with a dot in the middle—originated with an obscure San Antonio minter in 1817 when the central government in Mexico authorized a series of coins to be minted in San Antonio for local use.



In his 2009 book, *Paper Republic: The Struggle for Money, Credit and Independence in the Republic of Texas*, Bevill wrote that the star on the reverse side of the humble *jola* “brings us back to the very essence of Texas symbolism.” (Jola is Spanish slang for a coin of small denomination.)

Acting Spanish Gov. Manuel Pardo received authorization from Mexico City to strike small copper coins for San Antonio (then known as San Fernando de Bexar) and selected Manuel Barrera, a local merchant and administrator, to produce 8,000 jolas. These were worth 1/2 real, which would be about a nickel today. The copper jolas measured 15–20 millimeters in diameter with the minter’s initials and “1/2” on the obverse, or front of the coin. On the reverse was a five-pointed star with a raised dot in the center.

“It’s hard to say where the influence for a lone star came from,” Bevill says. “These were Spanish coins, after all. We don’t know if the design was done by Barrera or his helper or maybe the *alcalde*. But that was the first time the lone star representing what is today Texas first appeared.”

The Mexican government withdrew Barrera’s authority to mint the coins after about 20 months, possibly because minting coins in 1817 was difficult and the volume required presented a challenge. Barrera would have been using a steel die, or mold, to strike an imprint on the blank copper planchet (metal disc from which coins are made) with a hammer. The authority to mint the coins went to José Antonio de la Garza in 1818.

No records confirm how many jolas Barrera and Garza actually minted, but only nine of the crude coins survived. A collector found five of the nine 1817 jolas in 2004 in a coin shop.

The 1817 jolas preceded the Long Expedition by two years and the Texas revolution by almost two decades. So what did the lone star flag and emblem represent before it represented Texas as an independent republic?

According to Alamo historian and curator Bruce Winders, in vexillology—the study of flags—stars traditionally represented kingdoms or sovereigns until the end of the 18th century, when the star became a symbol of republican ideology and thus a good fit for the fledgling Texas government.

But, Winders noted, before Texas was the Lone Star State, it shared a flag—and a star—with the Mexican province of Coahuila. That flag was green, white and red with two gold stars in the middle of a white stripe.

“Prior to the Texas revolution, the Texas star flew alongside the star of Coahuila because Texas lacked a sufficient population for separate statehood as established by the Constitution of 1824,” Winders wrote in an email. “Officials designated it the Department of Texas and attached it to Coahuila for purposes of governance.”

Bevill says the lone star on the jolas might have carried the same symbolism as the flag. “There were Americans in San Antonio de Bexar who thought of Texas as having a separate identity from Mexico,” he explained.

The idea of a Lone Star State might have been a case of Eli Harris and George Childress thinking alike, but Bevill’s research makes it clear that the 1817 and 1818 coins with the five-pointed star and the distinctive raised dot in the middle created the first imprint of a lone star on Texas, the country and the world.

Clay Coppedge, a member of Bartlett EC, lives near Walburg.



BY EILEEN MATTEI
PHOTOS BY JOHN FAULK



MAKING
TAMALES
IS A HOLIDAY
TRADITION,
THOUGH
EATING
THEM NEVER
ENDS

Once upon a time, tamales appeared only at big family Christmas gatherings and special occasions in the Rio Grande Valley. Besides being tasty treats, aromatic tamales link multiple generations with memories of happy times together. Tamales were already on the menu in Mexico and Central America 7,000 years ago, prepared for ceremonies and armies on the move. Then and now, making tamales—spiced corn dough holding a filling of meats or vegetables or sweet fruits—is a complicated, labor-intensive process. That often prompts a *tamalada*—a lively gathering of friends and family toiling in the kitchen preparing dozens and dozens of tamales.

Starting in 1949, Celia Champion would gather 20–25 female friends and relatives for a tamalada at her Brownsville home as Christmas approached. The women—*tamaleras* for a day—would make as many as 240 dozen tamales. Wearing multicolored smock aprons and white chef hats, they spread out to workstations around the house to peel garlic, grind spices, stir the *masa* (corn dough) and grind up the slow-cooked pork shoulders. Others would spread the masa on softened corn husks, top it with meat or beans and three raisins, representing the three wise men, before snugging the corn husk around it all and freezing the raw tamales.



Family snapshots show the tamalada tradition that Celia Champion started in 1949. Opposite, from left: Champion's daughter, Chickie Samano; great-granddaughter Karolina Rodero; and granddaughter Celia Galindo with a portrait of the family's matriarch.

TITLE PLATE: LUMAMARINA | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; FAMILY PHOTOS: COURTESY CELIA GALINDO

MAKING TAMALES IS A COMPLICATED, LABOR-INTENSIVE PROCESS. THAT OFTEN PROMPTS A TAMLADA—A LIVELY GATHERING OF FRIENDS AND FAMILY TOILING IN THE KITCHEN PREPARING DOZENS AND DOZENS OF TAMALES.



Left: A Celia Champion tamalada. Above, from left: Tanya, Dora and Ana de Alba sample savory, fresh tamales prepared by De Alba Bakery using family recipes.

Seventy years later, her daughter, Chickie Samano, and her freckled, curly-haired granddaughter Celia Galindo continue the unbroken tamalada tradition. Two original tamaleras (one 104 years old) attended the six-hour work party in 2018, when the fourth generation included a 12-year-old and Champion's great-granddaughter. "Once you are in, it's till death do we part," Samano says.

"When my grandmother was alive, we would go to the Matamoros *mercado* to get the best leaves, meat and spices," Galindo recalls. "Now my cousin Cookie peels the garlic. My friend comes from Seguin with the meat grinder. I grind the spices in a blender." Nevertheless, she treasures her inherited 200-year-old stone *molcajete*, worn shiny from decades of grinding spices.

Champion's original tamalada required arduous labor to make

nearly 3,000 tamales. That prompted another tradition. "After making the first few dozen, we drink planter's punch, and the mariachis arrive. Then the *gritos* [celebratory shouts] get louder," Samano explains. "Mother was a party animal, always cooking. On her deathbed, she made me promise we would keep the tamalada."

But traditions adapt to the times, so the tamalada now gathers in Galindo's catering business kitchen. "The ladies want to do less and party more, so we make about 50–60 dozen tamales," she says. Still, that's 720 tamales. The women and their families eat the tamales at a Christmas Eve open house, on the religious feast of Candelaria on February 2 and later that month during Charro Days, a celebration of binational cultures and traditions.

The tamaleras also meet on January 6, Three Kings Day or the Epiphany, to eat the wreath-shaped sweet bread called *rosca*



Below: A De Alba Bakery tamale with shredded beef and green tomatillo salsa is wrapped in masa and a banana leaf. Bottom: A vegetable Oaxacan tamale at De Alba includes zucchini, corn, carrots, peas, onion and a bit of mozzarella cheese.



de reyes. The three who find baby Jesus dolls in their slices take charge of organizing the next tamalada.

Luis Reyes became part of a tamale-making team as a boy, joining cousins, parents, aunts and uncles, all under the direction of his grandmother. “Tamale making is an all-day activity. The whole family works together before Christmas,” says Reyes, communications manager for Magic Valley Electric Cooperative in Merced.

“Now the family is so big we make tamales twice a year,” he says. “My grandmother loves the American tradition of a family Thanksgiving. She blended that with the Mexican tradition of family tamale making, so we have tamales with the turkey at Thanksgiving.”

Rio Grande Valley parents once warned their unruly children: “Behave or the only thing you will unwrap at Christmas will be a tamale.” Sure, Christmas still finds Hispanic families at feasts anchored by mountains of beef, pork, chicken and bean tamales. But people readily acknowledge that making tamales at home is a time-consuming, fading art, while the convenience of buying ready-made ones is priceless. Hundreds of dozens of the foil-wrapped packets of tamales sell on a daily basis at various commercial tamale-making kitchens, like the one the de Alba family runs in Pharr.

Inside De Alba Bakery, smiles of a happy crowd get wider as the tamale aroma envelops them. They know from experience the subtly spiced masa of the tamales is as soft as butter and surrounds a savory filling inside the wrapper. De Alba makes 14 different types of tamales, from perennial favorites pork and chicken to Oaxacan vegetarian and bean or combos like cheese paired with jalapeno, beans, pork or chicken.

To satisfy a sweet tooth, De Alba Bakery makes a fudgy Mexican chocolate tamale that comes with Kahlúa sauce as well as a not-too-sweet vanilla-butter tamale common in central Mexico and a scrumptious raisin and cinnamon tamale. As a bakery, it also has shelves brimming with fresh Mexican pastries: *empanadas*, *conchas* and *hornitos*.

Ana de Alba’s grandmother made tortillas and tamales in a



DE ALBA BAKERY'S CHICKEN TAMALES

- 20–30 corn husks
- 4 cups water
- 5 pounds whole chicken (skinless and cut up)
- 1 onion, cut in half
- 6 cloves garlic
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1–1½ teaspoons powdered cumin, to taste
- 1–1½ teaspoons ground black pepper, to taste
- 5 pounds prepared De Alba tamale dough (available at dealbakery.com), divided use

1. Soak corn husks in a container of hot water 1–2 hours to make them pliable. Keep them submerged.
2. Boil 4 cups water in a pot. Add chicken, onion, garlic and salt. Reduce to medium-low heat and simmer 30 minutes or until cooked. Remove chicken from broth, cool, debone and shred or cut up. In a blender, mix the leftover broth with 2 tablespoons of tamale dough (also called masa). Pour broth mixture back into pot and add meat, cumin

and black pepper. Stir and simmer 15–20 minutes to thicken the filling mixture.

3. Drain corn husks and stand them in a container with narrow ends up. Husks have a rough and smooth side. Spread dough on the smooth side, starting in the middle, about 3–4 inches from the bottom—the wider end—and then spread to the bottom and sides. This should be a thin layer of dough, about ⅛ inch thick. Spoon 2–3 tablespoons of meat mixture. After spreading meat mixture onto dough, you can add optional ingredients before rolling it. Optional ingredients include corn, squash, roasted peppers and cheese. Roll husk over from one side to the other and overlap. Now fold top of husk down and squeeze bottom of tamale. Every tamale can be individually tied with string or left-over thin strips of husk. Also, tamales can be tied in bundles of a half-dozen.

4. Position tamales, folded part down, in a steamer basket that is deep enough. If not, just lay on basket carefully with folded points facing down. Position basket in pot with 2–3 inches of water and bring to a boil then cover well with tightfitting lid. Lower heat and steam on medium-low for 1 hour. If necessary, add more water during the cooking process but let the tamales steam an extra 15 minutes to make up for lost heat.

5. Turn off heat and let tamales set, covered, 10 minutes before handling to avoid breaking them.

► Makes 20–30 tamales.

COOK'S TIP For better, fresher flavor, uncooked tamales can be kept frozen and cooked as needed.

small San Benito shop in the 1960s. Her parents expanded that into De Alba Bakery in the 1980s and soon after made tamales available year-round. Today, she is CEO of the bakery, which has two Valley locations, an online store and a staff that has spanned four generations of the de Alba family.

“We’re so blessed to have the border next door to get all the quality, natural ingredients we want—corn leaves, dried chile pods and spices,” de Alba says. The kitchen crew makes the masa from scratch, cooking dried corn for one to two hours before grinding it. Spices and chiles are added to the cooked meats and other fillings, which with the masa are fed into equipment that forms the tamales. Hand wrapping the corn husk around the tamale is the final step.

“Our tamales are stuffed with more meat than the industry average,” de Alba says. “Pleasing our customer comes first, and the bottom line takes care of itself.” In the same vein, De Alba Bakery limits what it ships coast to coast from its website and through Amazon. “Some things won’t ship well without preservatives, and we won’t use them.”

The bakery sells about 50–100 dozen daily, but during the hol-

iday season, it switches to double shifts and brings in additional equipment to meet the demand for thousands of dozens of tamales. Orders for 10–20 dozen are common, although some customers request 100–200 dozen tamales for parties.

“Winter Texans were asking for beef tamales, so we decided to try it,” de Alba says. Dora de Alba, Ana’s mother, who is in charge of tamale quality control and recipe innovation, perfected the beef brisket tamale.

“Mom knew that Mexican women love cooking. She was the first one to provide made-from-scratch masa for sale. That made it simple for women to take prepared masa home and make tamales with their kids without slaving all day,” Ana de Alba says. Making it even easier, De Alba Bakery offers recipes for tamales and other treats in their online blog and stocks cumin, oregano, anise and chiles in the bakery.

“Everybody has become accustomed to eating fresh tamales for lunch and dinner all year long,” she adds. “Tamales are faster than hamburgers and taste better, too.”

Eileen Mattei, a Nueces EC member, is a Texas master naturalist in Harlingen.

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heirloom recipes

'The cake that won the war'

One of Lael Neill's earliest memories is watching her mother make an heirloom apple cake, wrapping it in wax paper and sealing it in a paraffin-lined box. Off it went to her father, who was a U.S. infantryman fighting in World War II's Battle of the Bulge.

When the cake arrived in Europe six weeks later, it was in perfect condition. Her father shared it with his tentmates, cutting tiny pieces so they could enjoy it each evening while reminiscing about home. "They stretched that cake out quite a while," Neill, who lives in Cedar Creek, said with a laugh. "He called it 'the cake that won the war.'"

The recipe, which Neill believes is German, has been in the family since around 1750.

"I can always remember it at Thanksgiving and Christmas," said Neill, a published author, retired computer technician and former English teacher.

She emailed a photo of a stained index card from her mother's recipe box, saying, "You can tell it's been very well used."



Neill family photo

A World War II photo shows Lael Neill's father, Cpl. Charles Heath, at right.

Raw Apple Cake



- | | |
|---|--|
| 3/4 cup butter | Icing (optional) |
| 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar | 4 cups powdered sugar |
| 3 eggs | 1 cup softened butter |
| 3/4 cup strong, cold coffee | 1 8-ounce package cream cheese at room temperature (Neill uses Philadelphia) |
| 1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda dissolved in coffee | 1 teaspoon vanilla flavoring or extract |
| 2 1/4 cups flour | |
| 1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon | |
| 1 teaspoon cloves | |
| 1 1/2 cups seedless raisins, soaked in warm water and pressed dry | |
| 1 cup chopped nuts (Neill prefers Texas pecans) | |
| 1 1/2 cups chopped apples | |

Cream butter and sugar together. Add eggs and coffee (with dissolved baking soda) and whip until smooth. Add dry ingredients and beat until thoroughly mixed. Add fruit and nuts. Mix by hand until they are distributed. Pour into a greased and floured 9x13-inch pan or two 9-inch layer pans. Bake at 350 degrees, 50 to 60 minutes. If desired, use a mixer to combine all of the icing ingredients in a bowl until thick and creamy, and frost the cake.

The most vivid memories of holiday celebrations include shared meals with loved ones: the aromas, the tastes, the fellowship. In honor of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's 80th anniversary — and the electricity that made cooking and baking such a snap — we asked our members to share their favorite family recipes.

Stories by Mary Ann Roser

Grandma Jesserene's Sugar Cookies



1 cup granulated sugar	Icing
1 cup butter, softened	1/2 to 1 cup powdered sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract	Several tablespoons of water (just enough to make the icing smooth and spreadable)
1/2 teaspoon lemon extract	Food coloring (adding a few drops at a time as needed)
1 tablespoon water	Christmas sprinkles
1 teaspoon baking powder	
2 eggs	
4 cups flour	
Variety of cookie cutters	

Blend the butter and sugar until creamy. Add the rest of the ingredients, except for 2 of the cups of flour. Roll out the dough on a pastry baking mat, adding the remaining flour as needed to keep dough from sticking to the rolling pin. (Ana used all 4 cups of flour.) Dough should be about 1/4-inch thick. Press the cookie cutters on the dough and carefully remove the shapes, placing the raw cookies on an ungreased cookie sheet. Bake at 375 degrees for about 12 minutes, or until the cookies are golden brown on the edges. Remove from the oven and place on a cooling rack. Once cooled, stir together first three icing ingredients and ice the cookies. Decorate with sprinkles before the icing dries. Makes about 3 dozen cookies.

Cookies baked with love

For half her life, 16-year-old Ana Matthews of Del Valle has been baking and decorating Christmas cookies, just like her grandmother taught her.

Grandmother Jesserene Matthews, a former home economics teacher who also lives in Del Valle, knows a thing or two about baking, as did one of her sons, the late Daryl Ray Matthews, who was known for his pies. Jesserene got the sugar cookie recipe from a friend in the 1950s and shared it with Ana, along with her old cookie cutters.

"I like anything having to do with something old," Ana said.

Ana bakes the cookies in gratitude. After a spark from the stove ignited when Jesserene was cooking in her spacious kitchen, firefighters from the Travis County fire station in Elroy had to be called. They came, armed with axes that, luckily, weren't needed.

Ever since, Ana has delivered dozens of carefully decorated sugar cookies and Toll House chocolate chip cookies to the fire station in Elroy for Christmas. "It's a way to give back," she said. "Taking them to everybody is my favorite part."



Photos by Ralph Barrera

Ana Matthews, 16, left, makes the Christmas cookies passed down from her grandmother, Jesserene Matthews, who offers guidance along the way in the kitchen of her Del Valle home.

Portuguese Tortillas



12 corn tortillas, cut into 1-inch strips	Olive oil for deep frying in a large pan or Dutch oven (about 3 inches deep) plus 3 tablespoons of olive oil to use later
1/2 cup Mexican shredded cheese (five-cheese blend)	
1 can tomatoes with chilis (King uses Rotel)	8 stalks of celery, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
1 jar salsa con queso (King uses Tostitos)	1 large red onion, chopped into small pieces
2 chicken breasts, cut into bite-sized chunks	A few shakes of Julio's (dry) Seasoning
	Salt and pepper, to taste

Deep fry a few dozen tortilla strips at a time in olive oil or bake them in the oven until crispy. Put in a bowl lined with paper towels to absorb the oil if the strips were fried. Use a few shakes of Julio's seasoning for flavor, and toss the strips gently with your hands. Set aside. In a large frying pan, heat 3 tablespoons of olive oil. Add the onions and half the celery. Add the chicken and cook together with a few shakes of salt and pepper to taste. When the chicken is done, add the tomatoes and jar of salsa con queso to the pan. Cook until it bubbles. Add the Mexican cheese and mix well. When that cheese is melted, turn off the heat. Add the rest of the celery. Serve immediately over the crispy tortilla strips. Eat with your fingers and a fork. Serves 6.

The cheese sauce for Portuguese Tortillas is served over homemade crispy tortilla strips.



A young mother's legacy

Nancy King of Martindale has happy memories of dining with her mother at the now-defunct Tavern in Crystal City in South Texas, where the family once lived. Her mother's favorite dish was Portuguese Tortillas, a cheesy chicken nachos dish that can be a shared appetizer or meal.

The two loved cooking together, and King's mother, Genevieve Blackard, figured out how to make the tortilla dish at home. It's among the many hand-written recipes from her mother that King cherishes.

"She died when I was 12," King said. Scarlet fever had ruined her heart, and she was just 33.

"I was her right-hand person," inside the kitchen and out, King said. They would lie in the backyard together on dark evenings, and Blackard would point out the constellations.

King made the recipe for her husband, who died in February 2018, and still serves it to her children and grandchildren. It makes her feel closer to her mother. "When I make it, I remember the times we lay out in the yard and looked at the stars," she said.



Above, at her home in Martindale, Nancy King deep fries corn tortilla strips as part of the dish. At left, a key ingredient is Julio's Seasoning. (Photos by Ralph Barrera)

Her 'go-to' dessert

Charlene Yezak of Brenham is the kind of person who devours a cookbook, reading it from cover to cover, like a novel. She loves making new dishes, but one recipe that's been in her repertoire for more than 30 years is still going strong.

Yezak found the chocolate cake recipe in *The Houston Chronicle* when the family lived in Spring, just north of Houston. She baked it to celebrate her daughter Rebekah's fourth birthday. Ever since, Rebekah's Favorite Chocolate Cake has been a family favorite.

"I try never to do the same thing twice, except for this cake," Yezak said.

When Rebekah, 37, lived in Boston for about a decade, Charlene baked the cake in a small bread pan and mailed it for her birthday. Charlene also uses the recipe for cupcakes and freezes them to satisfy her husband's sweet tooth.

Rebekah's son, Thomas, enjoyed his grandma's chocolate cupcakes when he turned 4 in September. Then, Charlene whipped up a cake for her dad's 91st birthday in October. "This is definitely a go-to recipe," she said. "I make it five to ten times a year."

Rebekah and the rest of the family are glad she does.



Rebekah Russell said she was feeling a little homesick on her first birthday away from home, and her favorite dessert was just what she needed.



Photos courtesy of Charlene Yezak

Charlene Yezak's dad, Charlie Heinrich, celebrates his 91st birthday with her go-to recipe for cake. It's been a family favorite for more than 30 years.

Rebekah's Favorite Chocolate Cake



- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1 box devil's food cake mix | Icing (optional) |
| 1 small box chocolate pudding | 1/3 cup milk |
| 4 eggs | 1/3 cup butter |
| 1/2 cup oil | 1 cup powdered sugar |
| 1/2 cup warm water | 1 teaspoon vanilla |
| 8 ounces sour cream | 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips |
| 1 1/2 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips | |
| (Optional. Makes cake more chocolaty.) | |

For cake: Mix all ingredients in bowl. Spray baking pan with cooking spray. Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees. Pour batter into cupcake pan or Bundt cake pan. Cupcakes will be done in 11-12 minutes. The cake will take at least 30 minutes. Check for doneness.

For icing: Gently cook the butter and milk in a small saucepan while stirring. After it's very warm, turn off the heat and add chocolate chips. Stir until melted and add vanilla. Pour over powdered sugar and stir or beat until smooth.



Cookbook giveaway!

Would you like a chance to have a copy of "The Best of Typically Texas Cookbook"? Just go to our Facebook page or visit bluebonnet.coop and share your favorite family holiday memory by Dec. 13, 2019.

Nurturing a Wendish tradition

If you have any doubt the Wendish culture still thrives in the Giddings area — 165 years after the Ben Nevis clipper ship docked in Galveston with 500 Wends from what is now eastern Germany — look no further than the noodle dishes served throughout the area.

“I remember my grandmother making noodles,” said Brenda Muniz of Serbin, which is about 7 miles south of Giddings. She was preparing a favorite casserole with her twin, Linda Wilkins of Elgin, earlier this year as their mother, Minnie Mae Schulze, looked on. “My grandmother had a big table, and she would roll out the dough and make little strips. She’d let the noodles dry out overnight,” Muniz said.



Minnie Mae Schulze, who died in September, gets credit for her daughters’ favorite recipe.

The twins’ grandmother would then kill a chicken and simmer the noodles in the broth. The aroma of baked chicken and noodles greeted family members as they arrived.

Today, the sisters make a hearty family favorite with noodles and beef, a recipe they credit to their mother, who lived in Serbin. She died unexpectedly in September 2019.

Wilkins picked up homemade noodles from the Texas Wendish Heritage Museum in Serbin, and the twins used their late grandmother’s 100-year-old wooden spatula to stir the pot.

“We would meet at my mother’s every Sunday after church and, occasionally, we’d make this recipe for lunch,” Wilkins said. It sometimes appears on their Christmas Eve menu. Always, it reminds the sisters of their grandmother. Now, it will always be a memory reminding them of their mother, too.

The family traces their ancestors to those who arrived in Texas. Five generations later, the noodles live on.

Hamburger Corn Bake



- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 1/2 pounds ground beef, 80 percent lean | 3 cups noodles |
| 1 cup onion, chopped | 1 tablespoon chicken-style soup base (Optional. The twins use Restaurant’s Pride.) |
| 1 12-ounce can corn, drained | 1 cup bread crumbs (Optional. The twins use Progresso Garlic & Herb) |
| 1 10 1/2-ounce can cream of chicken soup | 2 tablespoons butter, melted |
| 1 10 1/2-ounce can cream of mushroom soup | 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese (or cheddar-Jack blend) |
| 1 cup sour cream | |
| 1/4 cup pimentos, chopped | |
| 3/4 teaspoon salt | |
| 1/4 teaspoon pepper | |

Brown meat and onions in a large skillet until lightly brown and tender. Stir in corn, soups, sour cream, pimentos, salt and pepper. Cook noodles and add soup base for flavoring. Stir the cooked and drained noodles into the skillet to mix with other ingredients. Pour mixture into 2 1/2-quart casserole dish. Combine bread crumbs with melted butter and sprinkle on top of casserole. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes or until hot. Remove from oven and sprinkle the cheese on top. Makes 8-10 servings.



Photos by Sarah Beal

Brenda Muniz, left, and twin sister Linda Wilkins make their mother’s family recipe at Wilkins’ house. The sisters include homemade noodles, above right, from the Texas Wendish Heritage Museum in Serbin, though they fondly recall the noodles their grandmother used to make.

Pick a pie

Long ago, before there were supermarkets, most rural families had to hunt, grow or forage for their food.

Donna Wynn of Bastrop County thinks about that by-gone time when she steps outside, picks a bunch of mustang grapes and makes green grape pie.

“This pie is from an era that doesn’t exist anymore,” Wynn said, adding that her mother, grandmother and, quite likely, her great-grandmother, made the same pie. “To me that’s sad. It’s not my world anymore” because fewer people today grow what they eat.

But she happily recalls the values her foremothers passed down: independence and self-sufficiency.

The best time to pick mustang grapes is the second week of May, when the seeds are soft, Wynn said, although some cooks prefer to pick the small mustang grapes in summer. She cleans the grapes and freezes bunches so she can have her favorite pie whenever she wants.

The grapes are highly acidic, and can even taste sour, so Wynn uses a cup of granulated sugar for each cup of grapes to create a sweet pie.

“People are usually a little bit skeptical,” she said. “But after the first bite, they’re usually pretty pleasantly surprised. And it’s wonderful with vanilla ice cream on top.”



Photos by Sarah Beal

Donna Wynn of Bastrop County says the key to the star ingredient in her Green Grape Pie is picking the grapes before the seeds harden.

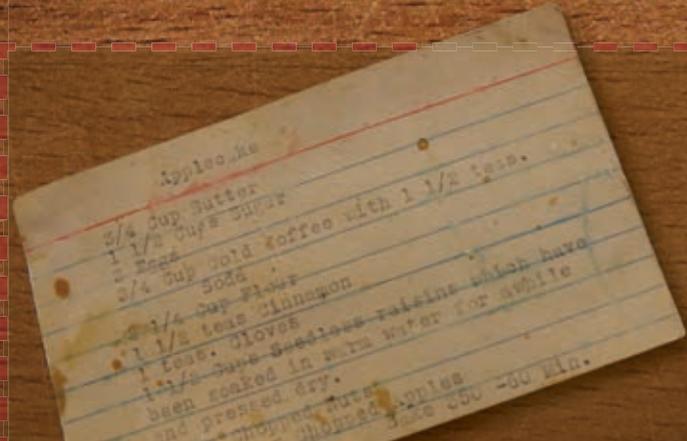
Green Grape Pie



- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2 cups wild green mustang grapes * | 1 egg |
| 2 cups granulated sugar | 2 pie crusts (Wynn uses Pillsbury) |
| 2 tablespoons flour | |
| 2 tablespoons butter or margarine | |

Boil grapes in just enough water to cover them until they begin to get soft and start to split open (about 25 minutes). Drain the water and mash the grapes with a fork. Add sugar, flour, butter and a beaten egg. Cook together in pan on medium heat, constantly stirring until thickened (about 2 minutes). Pour into an unbaked pie shell resting in a 9-inch pie pan. Top with another pie crust. Prick holes into the top crust and sprinkle with sugar. Bake at 375 degrees, until the crust is golden brown.

* No mustang grapes? Substitute 3 cups of regular green grapes and reduce sugar to 1 cup.



More recipes online

An old recipe card for mom’s Raw Apple Cake on page 18 is a family heirloom for Lael Neill of Cedar Creek, but those beloved cards can get hard to read. You’ll find some of our members’ favorite family recipes at bluebonnet.coop.



This is one in a series of stories about some of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's earliest residential members



DECADES OF STORIES

Wiley Jones shares memories of life in an African-American farming community in Caldwell County

By Clayton Stromberger

Once a month, when it's time to pay his electric bill, Wiley Jones – who turned 94 in June – slides slowly behind the wheel of his silver Chevy pickup and makes the 20-minute drive north from his apartment in Luling to the Bluebonnet member service center on West San Antonio Street in Lockhart. Then, sporting a gimme cap and a grin, he moves gingerly through the front door, assisted by his trusty walker, which has a small Bluebonnet flashlight duct-taped to the side like a mini-headlamp. Inside, the Bluebonnet member service representatives behind the counter greet him like a cherished friend.

"Hi, Mr. Jones! How are you doing today?"

"For an old man," he replies, "I think I'm OK."

And then Jones effortlessly segues into a story, full of specific details and comic twists — perhaps one about his recent middle-of-the-night trip to the emergency room after a home fall, or about the time a tornado almost got him and a buddy years ago on a nearby oil field. It's the kind of vivid, unhurried storytelling you might have heard on a bench outside a county courthouse back in the day, when folks were in less of a rush.

"He makes us laugh because he has such a funny personality," says longtime Bluebonnet Community and Development Representative Joyce Buckner, who has seen Jones just about every month since she began working at the center 32 years ago. "One time he fussed about how he didn't know how he was going to be able to eat because he had to pay his electric bill, but we knew he was just giving us a hard time."

Jones is among the most senior of the Bluebonnet members who come in to pay their bill in person each month and he's one of the few who can tell stories of the days before electricity came to the rural area of Caldwell County east of Lockhart and south of McMahan, where he grew up with five sisters and his parents, Bill and Cordelia Jones.

The old Jones farmhouse still stands, off FM 86 near Fox Lane, a bit battered by the years. The home once sat amid a thriving group of African-American farming families between the small communities of McMahan and Tilmon, recalls Brenda Cooper, Wiley Jones' niece.



(Photos courtesy Brenda Cooper)

Wiley Jones' parents, above, Bill and Cordelia Jones. Bill Jones was born in 1899 in Caldwell County. The couple married in September of 1921 and lived in a small farmhouse south of McMahan.

Cooper, 69, a longtime Dallas-area resident, was raised by Jones' mother and father — her grandparents — in that farmhouse from infancy until she graduated from Lockhart High School in 1968.

"It was a black community with at least 20 families up and down

At far left, Wiley Jones, 94, holds an old photograph of relatives gathered on the front porch of the family home. (Photo by Ralph Barrera) Left, a young Wiley Jones in a photo taken sometime in the 1930s. Jones grew up in his family's farmhouse south of McMahan and has lived his entire life in this part of Caldwell County, most of it in Luling. (Photo courtesy of Brenda Cooper)



Photo by Ralph Barrera

Wiley Jones, 94, of Luling, is a longtime member of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative. The first electric appliance he remembers was a refrigerator.

those roads,” Cooper says, “with even more going down the road to Tilmon” (5 miles southwest of McMahan). According to historical documents and notations in a family bible going back to 1814, both lines of Wiley Jones’ family tree lead back to southern states such as Tennessee, North Carolina and South Carolina before the Civil War. “My grandfather’s grandmother, who lived to be over 100, would tell him stories of coming to Texas in a covered wagon,” Cooper recalls.

Jones’ parents were beloved leaders in the community, known for their generosity — everyone around was welcome to come get fresh spring water from their well. Like many folks of that time and place, the family farmed cotton and corn and lived mostly off the land, growing their own vegetables and killing a hog or calf when necessary. Jones’ parents also ran a small general store out by the road. Those were the days of segregation, so the children walked to a school for African-American children near McMahan, carrying a lunch pail with a fried egg and a homemade biscuit.

“They were forward-thinking people, especially for their focus on education, and they left a legacy to us,” Cooper says. Bill Jones died from a sudden heart attack in 1963 at age 64. Cordelia Jones, born in 1900, lived on at the farmhouse until her death in 1989.

Wiley Jones doesn’t recall the exact moment when the lights first came on in the family farmhouse. But he can still recapture scenes from that simpler time, especially the ones that make a good story years later.

“It used to get cold then,” Jones says. “I mean, cold. I’ve seen a chicken freeze on the roof. I said, ‘Mama?’ She said, ‘What?’ I said, ‘That chicken out there is frozen on the roof.’ She said, ‘How do you know?’ I said, ‘It’s been raining, and that chicken just froze up there.’ Daddy said, ‘Put some hot water on. We’re gonna cook that chicken.’”

The first electrical appliance Jones remembers his family getting was a refrigerator. Jones was mostly fascinated with how the thing worked. “The motor was on the top,” he says, as if still seeing it whirl into action.

Jones lived on the farm until he married at age 25, he says. He and his first wife, Christine Jones, had five children before the marriage ended in divorce. Two of the children are still living: daughter Jarylen Jones of Killeen and son Ronnie Jones of San Marcos. Wiley Jones has one surviving sister, Ruth, who lives in San Antonio.

For three decades Jones worked as an industrial electrician in the Darst Creek oil fields near Luling, where he had a knack for diagnosing and fixing shorted-out well pumps. “I love electricity, I just love it,” Jones says. “I can start up anything. I can wire anything. I’ve just got a feeling for it.”

When Jones was born, Calvin Coolidge was president and Model T Fords pattered up and down the road past the family farm. He’s seen an astonishing number of changes in his time, and has moved through life’s ups and downs with a twinkle in his eye and a ready laugh. “A lot of people know history from a book, but they didn’t see it like I saw it,” he says.

From left, Bluebonnet summer interns Hannah Teague, Adryanna Coy and Tyler Medack prepare a welcome bulletin board near the entrance of Prairie Lea Elementary School. At far right, a volunteer displays books at Krause Elementary's book fair. (Photo at right by Bluebonnet; far right by Joe Stafford)



Through the Bluebonnet School Partnership Program, the cooperative has given teachers cookies bearing the program's logo and bags of supplies. (Photo by Bluebonnet) At right, Stacey Staes, the life skills teacher at Blake Manor Elementary in Manor, expressed gratitude for the support. (Photo by Joe Stafford)



Above, Red Rock Elementary teachers enjoy treats from Bluebonnet. (Bluebonnet photo) Above right, Bluebonnet apprentice line worker Taylor Rutledge attaches a harness to Parker Lewis, 5, in an inflatable bounce house slingshot. Garrett Gutierrez, superintendent of Bluebonnet operations in Red Rock, keeps an eye on the action at Red Rock Elementary's Fall Festival. Parker's mother, Casey Lewis, is a teacher at the school. (Photo by Sarah Beal)



Bluebonnet employees lending helping hands to students, teachers through new partnership program

In support of schools

By Melissa Segrest

Brightly colored bulletin boards in entranceways greeted students and teachers at five elementary schools on the first day of school this year, courtesy of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative volunteers. Each teacher at the schools had already received a bag of school supplies to start the semester.

That marked the launch of the cooperative's new school-support initiative, the Bluebonnet School Partnership Program.

"We have always been advocates for the communities we serve. Educating our members' children is so important because these kids are the future of our communities," said Elizabeth Kana, Bluebonnet's chief financial officer, who helped launch the program. "This is one of the best ways we could help. The new program will support several schools every year, to assist students and teachers with needed supplies and volunteer hours."

The five elementary schools receiving support during the program's first school year are scattered across the cooperative's service area. They are Red Rock Elementary in the Bastrop school district, Blake Manor Elementary in the Manor ISD, Krause Elementary in the Brenham ISD, the Prairie Lee School and the Dime Box School.

These five are among 43 elementary schools in the co-op's service area that have a large percentage of students from families with low incomes. Over time, the program goal is to provide some support to all 43 schools.

One of the teachers who received a Bluebonnet bag of supplies is Sandra Staes, a life skills teacher for children with special needs at Blake Manor Elementary.

For the last six years she and aides have helped children with physical, intellectual and emotional disabilities learn how to interact with the outside world.

"I found out there is such a need for this type of teaching," she said. "There's a high staff turnover rate because it can be very stressful." For her and so many other teachers, what they



Photo by Joe Stafford

Volunteers at Bluebonnet's headquarters in Bastrop stuff bags with canned goods, granola bars and other food items that were handed out to students at Dime Box and Prairie Lea Elementary schools.

do isn't just a job, it's a calling.

At Krause Elementary, cooperative employees helped reward good conduct or perfect attendance with pizza parties, and they assisted at the book fair. At awards day, Bluebonnet line workers and other employees served ice cream at Prairie Lea. Volunteers plan to attend other awards days at all schools throughout the year. At Red Rock, line workers were among the volunteers setting up booths and overseeing some activities at the school's annual Fall Festival.

Bluebonnet volunteers have stuffed bags to provide weekend food for children at three of the schools because many students cannot always count on consistent meals. Almost one in four Texas children — more than 1.6

million — struggles with hunger, according to Feeding America, a national hunger relief organization.

"In December we'll deliver small holiday gifts for the kids at all five schools," Kana said. "During teacher training days, Bluebonnet volunteers will provide food for teachers. On testing days and at special events, we'll support both teachers and students."

More is planned for the 2020 spring semester at the five schools. In January, Bluebonnet employees will hold a cooperative-wide drive to provide mid-year supplies for teachers at all the schools. They will help out on field days in May. During weeklong State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, or STAAR, testing in April, volunteers will provide snacks and water.

And, of course, there will be a day when students can meet a Bluebonnet lineman in his gear and learn about electricity and safety.

The most important contribution, the schools' leaders say, is for volunteers to spend time each week mentoring a child who may need tutoring or support from a role model.

Dime Box School, in Lee County, about 18 miles northeast of Giddings, has 170 students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. This year was momentous: students, teachers and many of the town's residents turned out to watch the school's first home football game ever. Bluebonnet volunteers helped run the concession stand and shot video of the six-man team's game for coaches and players to review.

Nicholas West is the assistant football coach and the school's superintendent. After the game, which Dime Box won, he thanked Bluebonnet for the help. "It seems simple to work a concession stand, but with other people doing that ... I didn't have to ask anyone connected with the school to help out," he said. "They were actually able to enjoy the game today."

Even though more is planned for the remainder of the school year, fall of 2020 isn't that far away. "We're already looking at possible schools for next year's program," Kana said.

Apprentice line worker takes 4th at international competition

Congratulations to Bluebonnet apprentice line worker Michael Guajardo, who placed fourth among all apprentices in the cooperative division at the International Lineman's Rodeo in Kansas in October. Guajardo's accomplishment marks the first time a Bluebonnet line worker has placed in the International competition.



Photo by Sarah Beal

Two great opportunities for Bluebonnet-area teens

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative has two excellent programs to further area high school students' educations.

The Government-in-Action Youth Tour offers two high school students (in 11th or 12th grade) the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C., to tour our nation's capital.

Students selected to represent Bluebonnet will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to visit the U.S. Capitol, meet members of Congress and see historical sites. They will also take a tour of the Texas Capitol and the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin. The tours will be June 17-26, 2020. Both students also receive a \$1,000 scholarship in their senior year.

Applicants must live in the home of a parent or legal guardian who is a current Bluebonnet member with an active account and who resides within the outer boundaries of Bluebonnet's service area (including city limits that are within those outer boundaries). Students in accredited home extended study programs are eligible to apply. Applications are due by Jan. 17, 2020.

Bluebonnet will also offer 60 \$2,500 Scholarships of Excellence for students plan-

ning to pursue a trade and technical certificate, an associate degree in a vocational field or a bachelor's degree.

Applications are open to graduating high school seniors who live in the home of a parent or legal guardian who is a current Bluebonnet member with an active account and whose primary residence is within the outer boundaries of Bluebonnet's service area (including city limits that are within those outer boundaries). Graduating seniors in accredited home extended study programs are eligible to apply. The deadline for applications is March 6, 2020.

Details about Government-in-Action Youth Tour and Scholarships of Excellence are available through area high school counselors and vocational instructors, at any of Bluebonnet's five member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor, and online at bluebonnet.coop. Hover over the Community tab, and click on Scholarships to also download the applications.

If you have questions, please contact Bluebonnet's youth programs coordinator, Karen Urban, at karen.urban@bluebonnet.coop or 512-332-7961.

Applications available for Board seats open in 2020

Bluebonnet members interested in serving on the co-op's Board of Directors can run for one of four seats up for election during the Annual Meeting on May 12, 2020.

Candidates, who would run in one of seven districts, can be nominated either by presenting an application for nomination with at least 50 signatures from co-op members in their respective districts or by paying a \$250 filing fee in certified funds.

Bluebonnet's Board is made up of nine directors who serve staggered three-year terms. The four seats up for election in 2020 are from District 3, Bastrop County; District 4, Lee, Milam and Williamson counties; District 6, Austin, Colorado and Fayette counties; and District 7, Washington County.

To run for the Board, candidates must be at least 21 years old, a co-op member in good standing, agree to a background check and meet other qualifications outlined in Bluebonnet's bylaws, which are available at bluebonnet.coop. Hover your cursor over the About tab on the home page, click on Leadership in the drop down bar and then click on the Becoming a Director link.

Application for nomination forms are available at the co-op's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor and online at bluebonnet.coop, under the About tab, then click on Reports & Forms.

All candidates' petitions, filing fees and application for nomination forms must be submitted at any Bluebonnet member service center by 4 p.m. Feb. 12, 2020.

For more information, call a member service representative at 800-842-7708.

OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Dec. 24-25 in observance of Christmas and Jan. 1 for New Year's Day. Crews will be on call. If you have a power outage, report it by texting OUT to 85700 (to register, text BBOUTAGE to that number) or via 800-949-4414, bluebonnet.coop or our mobile app.

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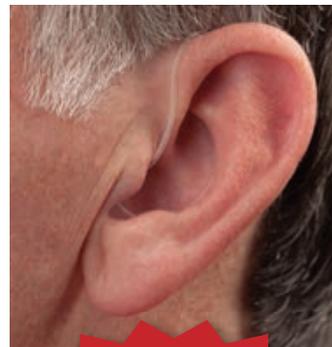
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Nixon's Attack on Co-ops

President tried to block co-op loan program

BY ELLEN STADER

CO-OP LIFE HAS NEVER BEEN EASY. DURING the early decades of rural electrification, cooperatives in America had to defend themselves from special interests, with private electric companies and politicians often leading the charge.

Possibly the highest-profile attack on co-ops began just after Christmas in 1972. The Nixon administration directed the U.S. Department of Agriculture to announce that, effective January 1, 1973, it would deny funds already authorized by Congress for the Rural Electrification Administration's upcoming fiscal year and then terminate the agency's direct loan program. For 36 years, this program had enabled the REA to offer loans to co-ops at 2% interest.

President Richard M. Nixon's plan was to replace the federally funded REA loans with commercially backed loans that would be offered at 5% interest. This move, designed to cut more than \$200 million in federal spending, would gut the rural co-op system by impounding the federal funds already allocated to hundreds of electric and telephone co-ops. In addition to taking away the loans that had been approved, this action would more than double the interest rates others would have to pay on new loans.

Robert D. Partridge, then-general manager of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, said the action would "wipe out many of the more than 1,000 rural electric systems and... threaten the welfare of millions of consumers who depend on them." Many co-ops would no longer be able to offer service to people in outlying areas. That same winter, co-op systems across the



President Nixon approves a new REA direct loan program as, from left, William Erwin, assistant secretary of agriculture; David Hamil, REA administrator; and Earl Butz, secretary of agriculture, look on.

country were suffering severe damage from ice storms, but they were left without access to the emergency funding customarily offered by the REA.

Co-ops didn't take the new policy lying down. On January 23, three weeks after the USDA's announcement, 1,400 electric co-op representatives from the 46 states across the country with electric cooperatives (including 135 Texans) converged on Washington, D.C. Participants traveled to the Rural Electric Rally to persuade their representatives in Congress to restore the REA direct loan program.

Lawmakers rode to co-ops' rescue with legislation that would allow the REA to extend loans in the full amount authorized each year. They also estab-

lished the Rural Electrification and Telephone Revolving Fund that allowed for a standard interest rate of 5%, plus a special interest rate of 2% for those eligible. The Senate and House bills both passed quickly, and the fate of co-ops hung on Nixon's pen.

Finally, on the REA's 38th birthday—May 11, 1973, exactly 19 weeks after first issuing the order that would have crippled the agency out of his "concern for the nation's economy"—Nixon signed the new legislation implementing a modified direct loan program for the REA. Ironically, this new arrangement resulted in greater co-op financing than ever.

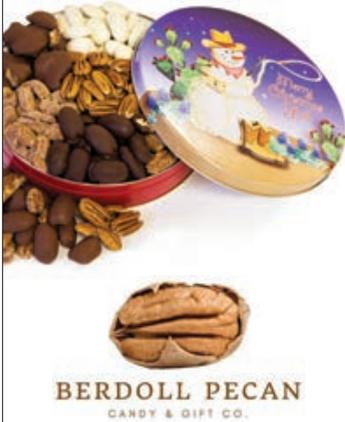
More than \$1.2 billion was made available to rural electric and telephone co-ops in 1973, the highest amount of loans granted in the program's history. The REA administrator's report from that year notes, "Fiscal 1973 was a remarkable year in the history of the Rural Electrification Administration."

Ellen Stader is a writer in Austin.

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Cookies & Candies

THIS RECIPE FOR CARAMEL POPCORN graced the pages of our magazine in December 1997, but its nostalgic, Cracker Jack appeal is timeless—especially this time of year. The original recipe calls for margarine, but use butter for the best flavor. To balance the sweetness and create an eye-catching, gift-worthy mix, I up the salty crunch with pecans (or use your favorite nut) and pepitas. For a kick of spice, add a pinch of cayenne to the sugar syrup, or use Picosos Hot Chile Peanuts (made in Helotes). You can pop your own kernels in a neutral vegetable oil or use store-bought popcorn.

PAULA DISBROWE, FOOD EDITOR

Caramel Popcorn

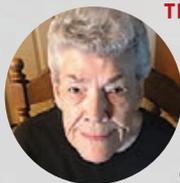
- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter
- 2 cups firmly packed light brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup light corn syrup
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 6 quarts popcorn (about 1 cup unpopped kernels)
- 12 ounces roasted salted peanuts
- 1 cup roasted salted pecans or cashews
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup roasted salted pepitas

1. Preheat oven to 250 degrees.
2. Melt the butter in a large, deep pan. Stir in the sugar, syrup and salt and bring to a boil. Boil 5 minutes without stirring. Remove from heat and stir in baking soda and vanilla (mixture will foam).
3. Pour the mixture over the popcorn and nuts in a large roasting pan and use a rubber spatula to combine until the ingredients are thoroughly coated.
4. Bake 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes. Transfer the hot mixture

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

Retro Recipes

Cookies & Candy



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

SUE WEST | WISE COUNTY EC

These cookies will make your house smell like Christmas while baking and will please young and old when served. Spices, citrus zest and a crackled top with sugar coating—these treats meld all the holiday flavors into one delicious whole.

Cinnamon Crackles

- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened (no substitutions)
 - ½ cup shortening
 - 1 cup sugar
 - ½ cup packed brown sugar
 - 1 egg
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 - ½ teaspoon almond extract
 - 2½ cups flour
 - 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
 - 2 teaspoons baking soda
 - 2 teaspoons cream of tartar
 - 2 teaspoons ground nutmeg
 - ½ teaspoon salt
 - 2 teaspoons grated orange zest
 - 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
- Additional sugar for rolling cookies

1. Cream butter, shortening and sugars thoroughly in a large bowl. Add egg and extracts; mix well.
2. In a separate bowl, combine flour, cinnamon, baking soda, cream of tartar, nutmeg, salt and zests. Add by heaping spoonfuls into butter and sugar mixture and stir until combined (or use the low setting on an electric mixer).
3. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Put about ½ cup sugar into a bowl. Shape dough into 1-inch balls and roll in sugar. Place balls 2 inches apart on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake 12–15 minutes or until cracked and very lightly browned. ▶ Makes 6 dozen cookies.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

to waxed paper to completely cool. Store in an airtight container. ▶ Makes about 6 quarts.

Browned Butter Cherry Almond Chocolate Chip Cookies

MARIAN EVONIUK | PEDERNALES EC

This “everything” cookie will keep you coming back for more. The cookie has a crunchy texture from the almonds and oats, but then you get a bite with chocolate or a tart cherry and know you’re going to eat another one (or two).

- ½ cup sliced almonds
- 2 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
- ½ cup coconut oil
- ¾ cup sugar
- ¾ cup packed light brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 cups rolled oats
- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- ½ cup tart dried cherries
- ½ cup shredded sweetened coconut

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place almonds into an 8-by-8-inch baking dish and toast until light golden brown, about 8 minutes. Remove and set aside.
2. While almonds are toasting, stir together flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt in a medium glass mixing bowl and set aside.
3. Place butter into a 10- or 12-inch light-colored heavy skillet and cover with a see-through lid. Heat on medium until butter is a soft brown color and emits a nutty aroma, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in the coconut oil and pour into a large glass mixing bowl. Include the browned bits on the bottom of the pan. Let stand 10 minutes.
4. Add the sugars to the butter and oil mixture using an electric mixer on medium speed until just blended. Add the eggs and beat until well blended, about 1 minute. Stir in the vanilla. Gradually stir in the combined dry ingredients followed by the rolled oats, chocolate chips, cherries, coconut and toasted almonds.



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\$100 Recipe Contest

May's recipe contest topic is **Spring Celebrations**. Send your favorite dish for showers and graduations. The deadline is **December 10**.

ENTER ONLINE at TexasCoopPower.com/contests; MAIL to 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701; FAX to (512) 763-3401. Include your name, address and phone number, plus your co-op and the name of the contest you are entering.

5. Using a metal scoop (cookie-size for small cookies, ice cream-size for giant cookies), drop cookie dough 2½ inches apart on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake 10–12 minutes, until edges are a light golden brown. Remove and allow cookies to cool on baking sheet 5 minutes before enjoying. ▶ Makes 18–24 cookies.

COOK'S TIP Dried cranberries or raisins can be substituted for the cherries.

Chocolate Lemon Balls

CHRISTINE HENDERSON | GUADALUPE VALLEY EC

“A few years back, I visited Italy and fell in love with their chocolate and lemon candies,” Henderson says. “This is my reimagined version of the flavors I found there.”

- 1 cup white chocolate chips
- ½ cup finely chopped slivered almonds
- ½ cup finely crumbled lemon cookies
- ½ teaspoon lemon extract
- 1 cup semisweet or dark chocolate chips
- Sugar sprinkles (any color)

1. Put the white chocolate chips into a heatproof bowl and microwave on 50% power 30 seconds, then take it out and stir. Continue microwaving in 30-second intervals at 50% power, stirring as needed. Once the pieces are mostly melted, remove from the microwave and let the remaining bits melt as you stir. This should take about 1–2 minutes. (Don't try to cook at higher power, which creates a less spreadable consistency.)

2. Once the white chocolate is melted, add the chopped almonds, cookies and lemon extract to the white chocolate and stir until smooth. Let sit 1–3 minutes, until a doughlike texture develops.

3. Wearing plastic disposable gloves or wetting your hands so the dough doesn't stick to them, form dough into 1-inch balls, rolling them in your hands until they are nicely rounded. Place balls on waxed paper in a sealed plastic container (single layer) and freeze 1 hour or longer.

4. Melt semisweet or dark chips using

the same method as the white chocolate chips. Place a wire cookie rack over a cookie sheet. Remove lemon balls from the freezer. Drop a lemon ball into the liquid chocolate mixture and quickly turn to coat. Use a fork to remove the dipped balls and place on wire rack. Repeat with each ball until done. Then cover with sugar sprinkles.

5. Refrigerate chocolate lemon balls on the rack for about 15 minutes. Cover and refrigerate until ready to eat, at least 15 minutes more. Remaining balls should be kept in a cool place in an airtight container. ▶ Makes 20 balls.

COOK'S TIP Cookies and almonds can be pulsed together in a food processor. Don't use lemon sandwich cookies.

WEB EXTRAS

▶ Read these recipes on our website to see the original Caramel Popcorn recipe from December 1997 and find a recipe for I Almost Ate Fruitcake Cookies.



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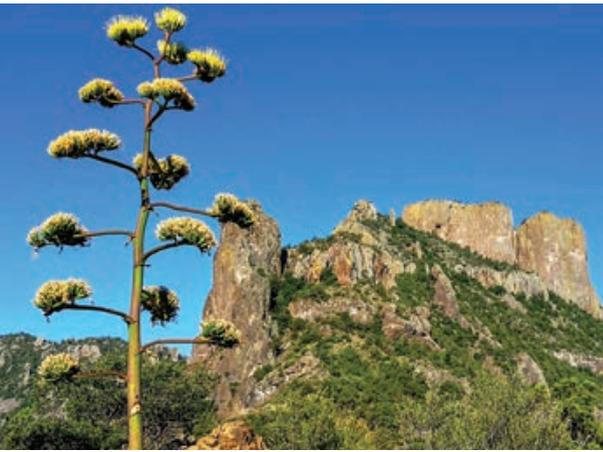
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Deserts

TEXAS SETTLERS HAVE FOR MILLENNIA braved the harsh terrain of the Chihuahuan Desert. It's the kind of place where you shake out your boots before wearing them and look twice before stepping (or sitting). Enjoy the terrain where yucca, creosote, mesquite, agave and ocotillo dot the landscape and mountains loom in the distance. **GRACE FULTZ**

WEB EXTRAS ▶ See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.



▲ **KAY BELL**, Nueces EC: "The century plant, havard agave, grows in the higher elevations of the Chihuahuan Desert in the Big Bend."



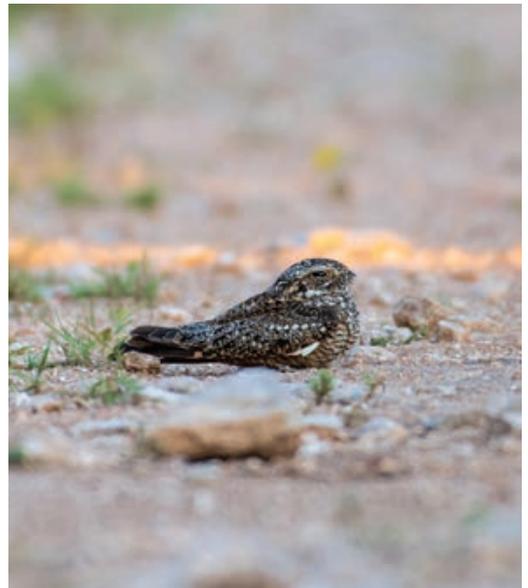
▲ **J. REAGAN FERGUSON**, Central Texas EC: "Enjoying a peaceful sunset in Guadalupe Mountains National Park."

▼ **MARK HOLLY**, Bandera EC: "It was a beautiful spring day in one of my favorite national parks, Big Bend."



▲ **MIKE PRESTIGIACOMO**, Bartlett EC: "Once upon a time—a tree."

▼ **MATTHEW CROTWELL**, Guadalupe Valley EC: "Nighthawk awaiting dusk for feeding time."



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APRIL SUNSETS	DUE DECEMBER 10
MAY FAIRS AND CARNIVALS	DUE JANUARY 10
JUNE STATE PARKS	DUE FEBRUARY 10

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Pick of the Month Celtic Angels Christmas

Marshall December 19
(903) 934-7992, memorialcityhall.com

A quintet of singers from Ireland highlights a show that includes instrumentalists and Irish dancing. The set list includes traditional Christmas carols and Irish favorites. The event is part of the premiere season for the Memorial City Hall Performance Center, built in 1907 and former home to municipal offices and courts.



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Frisco Hope for the Holidays Masquerade, (972) 977-6064, melodyofhope.org/gala

Hubbard Magnolia & Mistletoe: A Victorian Christmas, (254) 625-0258, hubbardcity.com

Johnson City Lamplight Tours of LBJ's Boyhood Home and a Frontier Christmas, (830) 868-7128

Rusk Cherokee Craft & Trade Fair, (903) 268-1598

Santo Community Christmas Craft Show, (940) 659-3990

Taylor Mistletoe Market, (512) 666-9003, artoffcenter.com

Dripping Springs [7-8] Redbud Artisan Market, (512) 660-3328

Keller [7-8] Keller High School Indianettes Craft Show, (925) 708-7383, indianettes.com/craft-show



December 7
Taylor
Mistletoe Market

8

Fort Worth Woman's Club Holiday Open House, (817) 335-3525, thewomansclubfw.com

Moody Mother Neff Christmas, (254) 853-2389



ELLEN FULLER with **WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA**, a nationwide organization that places holiday wreaths on veterans' graves.
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Camp Street Blues

Historic venue fuels memories of Crockett’s musical legacy

WITH CREDITS TO BURN DURING MY senior year at the University of Texas, I enrolled in a class on the history of rock ‘n’ roll, expecting to listen to Led Zeppelin and ride an easy A into the burnt orange sunset. When the professor played a song from a scratchy blues record from 1926 by an artist I had never heard of, I realized I was in for more than I bargained for. The class turned out to be tough, but it set fire to my blues-loving soul.

That track was *Match Box Blues* by Blind Lemon Jefferson. It was a raw, visceral song with a clanging guitar and haunting vocals. I had never heard anything like it, and when I learned Jefferson was from Texas, I was hooked. My love for the blues drove me to East Texas and historic Camp Street in Crockett.

When I found Camp Street, a few blocks from the Houston County Courthouse square, I wasn’t sure if I was in the right spot until I noticed a mural of Jefferson painted on a brick wall. Next to Jefferson were more musicians, including T-Bone Walker, Big Mama Thornton and Sam “Lightnin’” Hopkins, who all played in Crockett when it was a stop for blues artists traveling the Chitlin’ Circuit between Houston and Dallas.

In the 1930s, Camp Street hummed as one of the most vibrant business districts in East Texas. Both sides of the street were lined with businesses: a beauty parlor, an all-night laundry, a shoe repair shop and a juke joint named the Jolly Joy. And there in the middle of the action, you’d find the Starlight—now called Camp



Chet Garner and Pipp Gillette on the front porch of Camp Street Café in Crockett.

The quaint building with its red sheet metal exterior and large front porch was built in 1931 by a local rancher named V.H. “Hoyt” Porter. On the porch were three doors: Through the middle door was a barber-shop and through the left door, a pool hall. Through the right door was a café and taxi stand that featured a dice table and bar. On any given night in the 1940s, you might find bluesman Lightnin’ Hopkins playing for tips. In the ‘50s or ‘60s, you might find B.B. King or Fats Domino enjoying a beer after a show at the nearby Paradise Inn.

The café was closed for many years, but in 2008 it got a second chance. Porter’s grandsons, Guy and Pipp Gillette, bought the property and turned it into a listening room to honor Crockett’s musical legacy. Since then, this small stage has hosted artists including Michael Martin Murphy, Kinky Friedman and Ruthie Foster.

Street Café, the town’s only remaining blues-era stalwart.

The quaint

On the night of my visit, Pipp, a singer and songwriter himself, was scheduled to perform.

I found a room packed with people at small square tables enjoying wine (it’s BYOB) and munching on snacks from a counter in the back. When Pipp took the stage, a hush fell over the crowd. For the next hour or so, Pipp played one song after another, woven together with his stories and meandering thoughts. The experience epitomized why I love a good listening room, as the only sounds coming from the crowd were applause and laughs at Pipp’s jokes.

As I enjoyed the show, I imagined the room in decades past, as the greatest blues legends played guitar and told stories of the road. I left feeling anything but blue.

Chet Garner shares his Texplorations as the host of *The Daytripper* on PBS.

 **WEB EXTRAS** ▶ Read this story on our website to see Chet’s video of his visit to Camp Street Café. Also, for more about the blues, read *Texas: A Blues State* in our March 2019 issue.

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