

*The little town with the big plans...*

# The history of Myra

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, much of Cooke County was unsettled. Cattle were driven north through the open ranges, and occasional Indian raids added to the difficulties of pioneers scattered through the area.

But in 1887, as Western Railway Company extended its line west from Gainesville to Henrietta, civilization began spreading. Along the railroad 12 miles west of Gainesville was a good position for trade and commerce. Stock pens were built here, and it wasn't long before buildings began to pop up. These clusters of buildings grew around their lifeline - the railroad - and this young establishment was called Myra after the railway superintendent's daughter.

Neighbors to the south of this new railroad line were the Reed family. The Reed Cemetery served the area, with the oldest grave dating back to 1875. Also, the Reed Baptist Church had been in existence since 1876.

A.J. Harris erected the first grocery store soon after the railroad was built, and he also acted as postmaster.

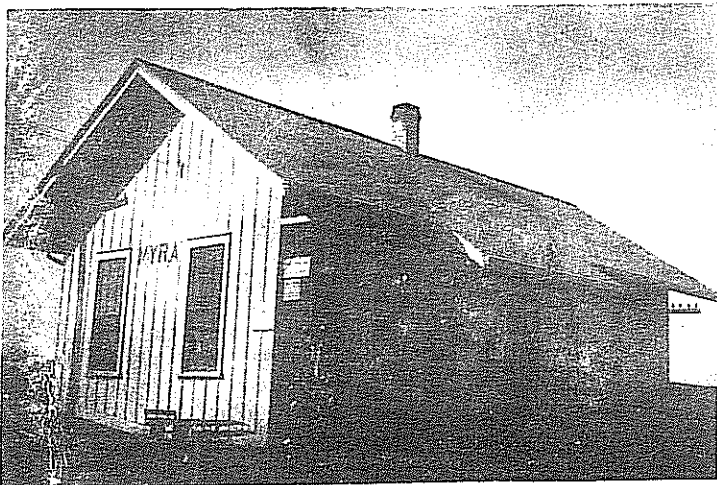
Two years later, Jot Gunter made a bold move to initiate land sale for Muenster when he relocated Myra's depot in Muenster. However, that same year, pike roads leading in each direction were constructed in Myra.

Cooke County's first test oil well was drilled in 1898 near Myra on land owned by George Ball. The news over this oil discovery caused great excitement, and the rush to Myra was on.

1900 was the boom year. Many homes were brought in from other areas, and real estate agent G.W. Aldridge began selling lots south of the Katy Railroad tracks. In fact, the name of the town is recorded in Cooke County deed records as Aldridge, but the post office refused to change the name from Myra. However, Gainesville Senior Charles Newton wrote in 1915 that "the Jolly Germans of the neighboring cities of Lindsay and Muenster refer to the place as 'High Windy' because of its location."

Newton also wrote of Myra's early history that "it was not unusual to see 20 or 30 homes going up at once. No one doubted that Myra would someday rival Gainesville in size."

Two lumber yards were established in 1900, and the first water well powered by a small engine was drilled that year.



The Myra Park

Myra's first school, a two-room wooden structure, was built in 1900 in the west end of town. A new brick school was erected in 1912 in the east part of Myra and served the students of the town until its closing in 1965. The school building is now the Community Center.

The year 1900 was also marked by the arrival of Dr. Corwin L. Maxwell from Forestburg. Dr. Maxwell bought the house now owned by the Paul Sickings and established a hospital in it. Mercy Hospital was the only hospital in Cooke County until Gainesville Sanitarium opened around 1902.

Jack Felty started Myra's first telephone system in 1902, with the Myra Telephone Company organizing in 1906. In 1903 came the first flour mill, Dr. Maxwell's drugstore across the street from his hospital, and the founding of Masonic Lodge No. 878, with 23 charter members.

The first bank was established in 1904, the same year that a fire burned five Myra businesses. The Methodist Church, organized since the beginning of Myra, got its own building about this time. Also, after a big cotton crop in 1907, the town's first cotton gin was erected.

Community fairs were held in Myra in 1912 and 1915, but by 1915, the population of the town had already declined to 474 citizens. An electric light plant was installed in 1919. Two years later a branch of Cooke County Library opened with Dr. Maxwell in charge. The library branch closed after a number of years.

Myra businesses in operation during the 1920's included a livery stable, cafe, hotel, barber shop, hardware store, blacksmith shop and several general stores.

But things continued to slow down in the town during the Great Depression, and the construction of Highway 5 (later Hwy. 82) north of Myra further led to the town's decline by somewhat isolating it from the major thoroughfare. Most of the businesses gradually dwindled and went out of operation.

The only known coal mine in Cooke County was located three miles west of Myra, with its mouth at the Elm Creek bank. No longer used, the coal from this mine was good in quality but small in quantity.

Tragedy struck Myra the night of April 12, 1945, when a tornado hit the town. Mrs. Bettie Gatewood, 85, was killed in the devastating storm, and three other Myra residents were seriously injured. The Methodist and Baptist churches were both destroyed, among with many other damaged areas.

Years later, pride and hard work of Myra residents paid off when the town won the statewide, prestigious Community Development Award in 1979. One big boost that year was the founding of the Myra Volunteer Fire Department. Also started in 1980 was the annual Myra Volunteer Fire Department Barbecue, a community event which draws crowds and raises funds for the department.

Myra may not flourish and bustle with activity like it once did, but it has endured 100 years well. Lifetime resident Jake Biffle proudly states, "I went all around the world and never found anything like Myra. It's not the fastest place, but you'll live a long time."

## Pioneer days of Myra

There have been two train wrecks at Myra. In the first wreck, one man jumped and one was killed. The second wreck was a cattle train loaded with southern cattle. The train was completely destroyed and the cattle were turned into what was then known as the "Doc Gunter Pasture."

In the pioneer days, small one-room ranch houses were scattered over the country for the cattlemen. The main occupation was caring for cattle. There were many hardships to be over-

come; but there were also many pleasures to be shared. The ranchmen and their families went for many miles in wagon and on horseback to attend the old-fashioned play parties and dances. Large crowds gathered at the schoolhouse, and after the midnight crowing of the cocks broke up their spelling matches.

When one saw the smoke curling from the kitchen chimney of the ranchhouse, they knew that madam ranchman was preparing a portion of the feast for the picnic to be the next day in the woods. Church was generally held under brush arbors. Cowboys were numerous then. Their uniforms were very much the same as that of the cowboys of today. They wore leather britches, with four gallon hats, and brass-toed boots. A cowboy without pistols was almost as helpless as a dog without a tail.

The early settlers depended greatly upon wild animals and vegetables for their food. Clubs of eight ranchmen often killed a beef and divided it among themselves. In that way they were able to use it before it spoiled. They dried most of their fruit because they did not know how to can them.

For the first years of the Myra settlement, most of the people wintered their cattle in the Indian Territory.

## Myra Investment Company

The board of directors for the Myra Investment Company consisted of Henry R. Jones, J.L. Bradford, W.F. Sanders, J.W. Robinson, T.H. Sears, G.W. Aldridge.

On Jan. 30, 1970, G.W. Aldridge was made attorney for Myra Investment Company. Not all these men came to Myra, each just simply invested money in land speculation.

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One of the last cattle drives. Shorty Wilson is pictured on the left.

## Indian raids

In the winter of 1863, a band of Indians raided the Myra Community.

They went to the Shannon farm later known as the Kibbler homeplace. Bob Shannon was shot with two arrows and died in Gainesville. Mrs. Shannon, two sons and one daughter made their escape to Gainesville.

The second raid was in the fall of 1866.

Mr. Newt Gilbert, the father of Mrs. Judge Holman, who lived about eight miles west of Myra, was moving his family to Gainesville. They were accompanied by Mrs. Stephens, the mother of Mrs. Bell Rogers.

After crossing Big Elm, a mile and a half from where Mr. Mattingly lived, he saw the Indians following them. As they entered the gate, the Indians were about 50 yards behind them. The Indians drove off many horses and killed several people.

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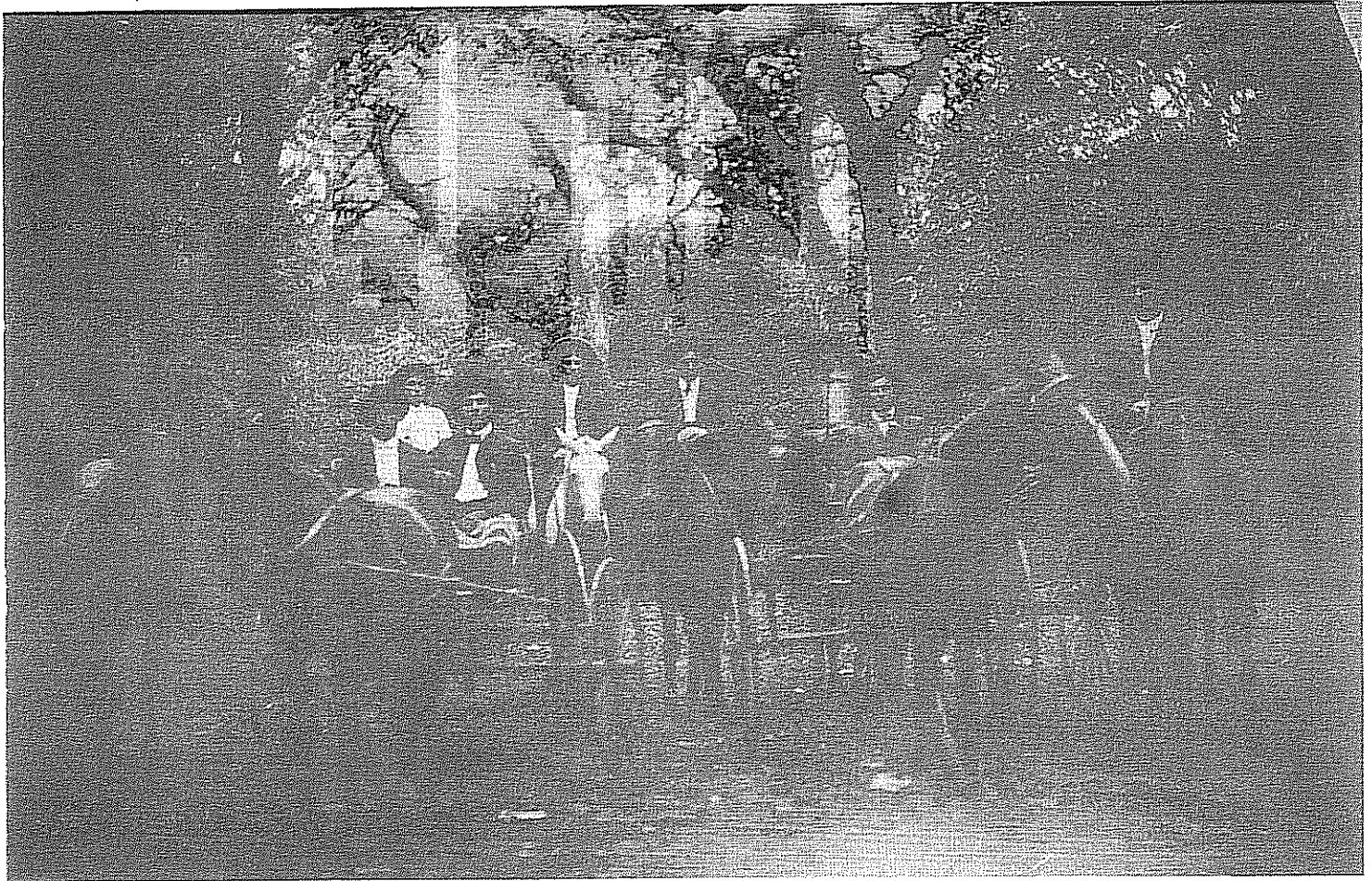
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Young men at the creek.

### A typical fish fry

Often on bright sunny afternoons years ago crowds of people would gather at the bridge that crosses Squirrel Creek about three miles north of Myra. Each one carried the necessary things which are needed for a fish fry.

The women and children would stand on the bridge and watch the men below as they got ready to seine for fish. They would start above the bridge and drag the seine out on the bank of the creek below. These creeks would often go dry, therefore, the law did not prohibit seining. Small boys often carried sacks along to hold the fish. The first haul of fish would often fill a sack. This would always please the men because they knew they would have a good fish fry.

The women and children would follow the men as far as they could and then stop and begin to prepare the fish for supper. The men continued to seine until they knew they had plenty for the large crowds that gathered.

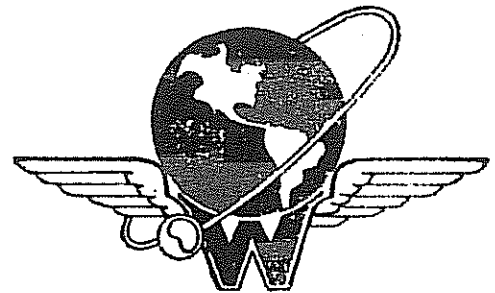
When it began to grow dark, lanterns were hung in the trees and the fish fry would begin. Because so many helped, the fish were soon fried, coffee made and bread sliced. Everyone enjoyed these feasts so much that they always declared that the last was the best. When they parted, they looked forward to another fish fry.

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Reed Crossing was the scene of many baptisms in the old days. A cattle holding pen was situated on the Thomas Felderhoff place across from the Reed Cemetery.

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The Myra Cotton Gin

## Coal mine

On Mr. Edd Green's farm, which was three miles west of town, there was discovered a small vein of coal. This mine was dug in a sand rock bank and it consists of three different rooms.

It is about 50 or 60 feet long and has an outlet at the south end. The mouth of the mine faces the north and also the Elm Creek which is about 10 feet from the mine.

The coal was of very good quality but not a very large quantity. There are names and initials carved on the sand bank, which indicates that many people have visited the mine.

In 1981, the flood destroyed the entrance to this mine and did great damage to the inside.

## Lumberyards

In 1900, two lumber yards were built. Waples-Painter Company built one, at a location south of the railroad and on the east side of Fannin Street. The other was north of the railroad and was owned by Mr. G.E. Dolby. After three years, Waples-Painter bought out the Dolby yard.

Some of the managers were Mr. Jiles, Mr. Earl Rubush, Mr. A.O. Clack, Mr. Humphries and Mr. A.B. Crawford.

## The gin

The gin was built in 1908 as the Farmer Brown Gin Company, organized by local people. In 1910, Ed Nelson bought and ran it for two years before selling to J.M. Jones.

Jones in turn sold to John Jander and, after his death, the gin was sold to Ruth and Brewer. Brewer sold his part to Ruth and then it was sold to the partnership of Fulton and Townsley, which was composed of W.S. Fulton, Ron Townsley and E.L. Townsley, the last owners of the gin.

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