

# THE TEXAS POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY JOURNAL

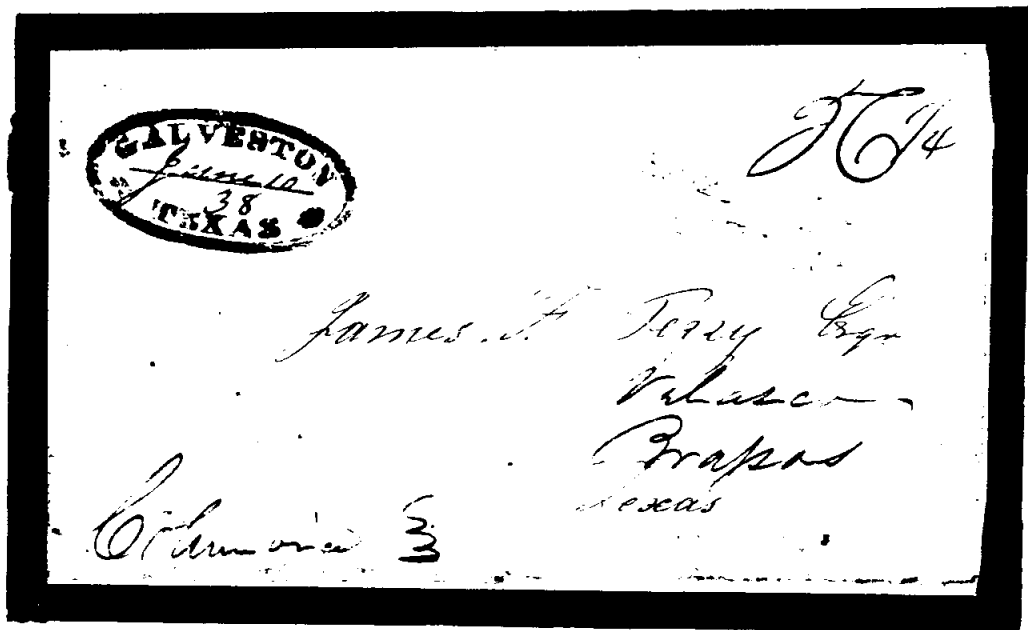


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Illustrated on the front cover is the first postmark used in the Galveston post office. This particular device was in use from March 1838 to February 1840. The postmark is black, a double-oval (18.5mm x 36.0mm) and is characterized by the stars on either side of the word TEXAS.

# THE TEXAS POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Dues \$10 per year payable to Secretary-Treasurer

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We had a great meeting at TEXPEX '92 in Arlington. Twenty-nine (29) members and guests were in attendance to hear Gordon Bleulers excellent presentation on his hand made Texas Sesquicentennial cacheted envelopes and Texas postal history covers. His classic and modern covers were superbly mounted and his philatelic knowledge of both areas was awesome. Those of you who couldn't attend really missed an entertaining and informative meeting.

The swap and sell session was also fun and productive. Lots of lively exchanges. Your President was able to secure a few nice pieces and also disposed of a few Texas covers.

A number of members in attendance said we ought to have two meetings like this a year. Where? What time of year? Drop me a note if you agree and we'll work on it.

And don't forget to keep working on signing up some new members. We need to spread the word about the T.P.H.S. to all of the postal history collectors in Texas.

Meanwhile,

Good Collecting

Ed Christman

P.S. Back issues of our Journal are available. See page 21.

# SAN ANGELO, TEXAS AND ITS FORERUNNERS

1873 - 1944

By Nonie Green

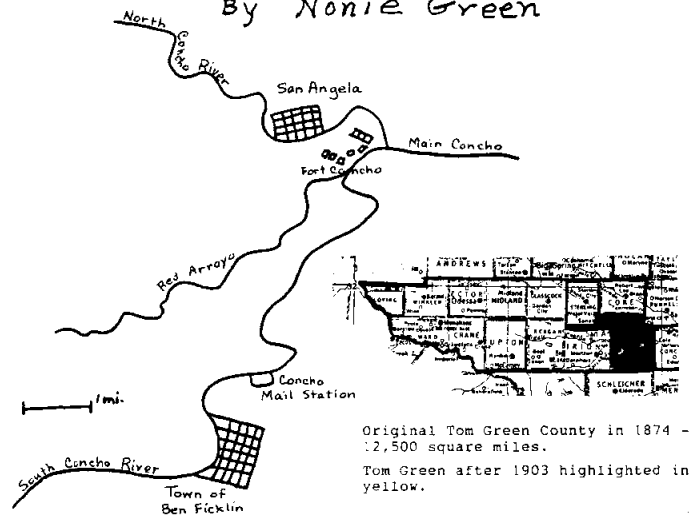


Fig. 1

Settlement of West Texas did not begin until the Civil War was over. Although that is not that long ago as some postal history of our country represents, the earlier covers of this area are not easily acquired and particularly certain types of them.

In 1867 Fort Chadbourne, located in the northeast portion of Bexar County, was without enough water to sustain it and Major George P. Hunt was sent to find a better location. The site chosen in November was first called Camp Hatch. In January 1868 it changed to Camp Kelly. A third name, Fort Concho, was given to it in March 1868 for the rivers joining at a point nearby. This strategic location today provides an ample water supply on the watersheds of the Concho Rivers controlled by Nasworthy and Twin Buttes dams from the Middle Concho(not illustrated on map Fig.1) west of Red Arroyo, the South Concho, and the O.C. Fisher dam from the North Concho.

A post office was established at Fort Concho on April 30, 1868, then in Bexar County.

The only cover in the writer's possession used while the fort was in that county is one dated Apr. 14 and the enclosure documents the year as 1873. The cancellation is 24 mm. in diameter and star in circle killer. This went via San Antonio-El Paso stageline. Traveling northeast from Fort Concho stops on the route included Camp Colorado, Fort Griffin, Jacksboro, Sherman and Fort Smith where it continued its journey by other means. Fig. 2.

Much history is gleaned from enclosures and this one has inter-

esting contents. The writer is Sgt. J.W. Foley who is at Fort Concho for a short stay. He requests discharges previously discussed sent to him at Fort Clark. He mentions Indians being quiet in this part of the state at the time. He asks Levi Kirk what he thinks of Grant's administration and says Grant's son was at Fort Clark but went home for his father's inaguration and was now on Sheridan's staff in Chicago.

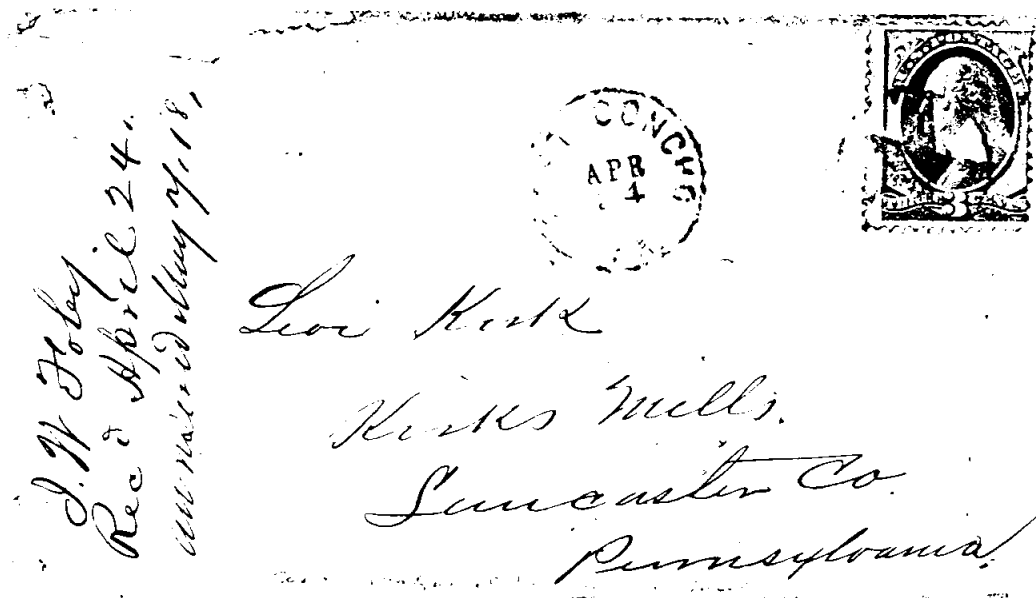


Fig. 2

In 1874 Tom Green County was formed out of Bexar County and Fort Concho included within its boundaries. The newly created county originally consisted of 12,500 square miles but by 1903 twelve other counties had been formed out of it leaving 1,503 square miles. Fig. 1.

A 25½ mm. cancellation with month and day inverted. This cover took the same route as previous one. 1870s use from Lt. Markley to his wife. Fig. 3. See Bill Emery's article a few years ago that includes information on Markley.

A Fort Concho cover mailed by Rev. N.(Norman) Badger, post chaplain appears in Fig. 4. He arrived at the fort in April 1871. Badger was an ordained minister of the Episcopal Church and during the Civil War served as a hospital chaplain. Since there was no chapel on the post, he conducted religious services whenever he could and at whatever place on the post seemed expedient at the given occasion. He ventured into the small community of picket and adobe dwellings and saloons across the river called "San Angela." It is said that the inhabitants first heard the name of the Diety from him on these excursions. Badger made monthly reports which now provide a record of his ministry and a history of the post. In March 1876 he became ill and died June 5, 1876.

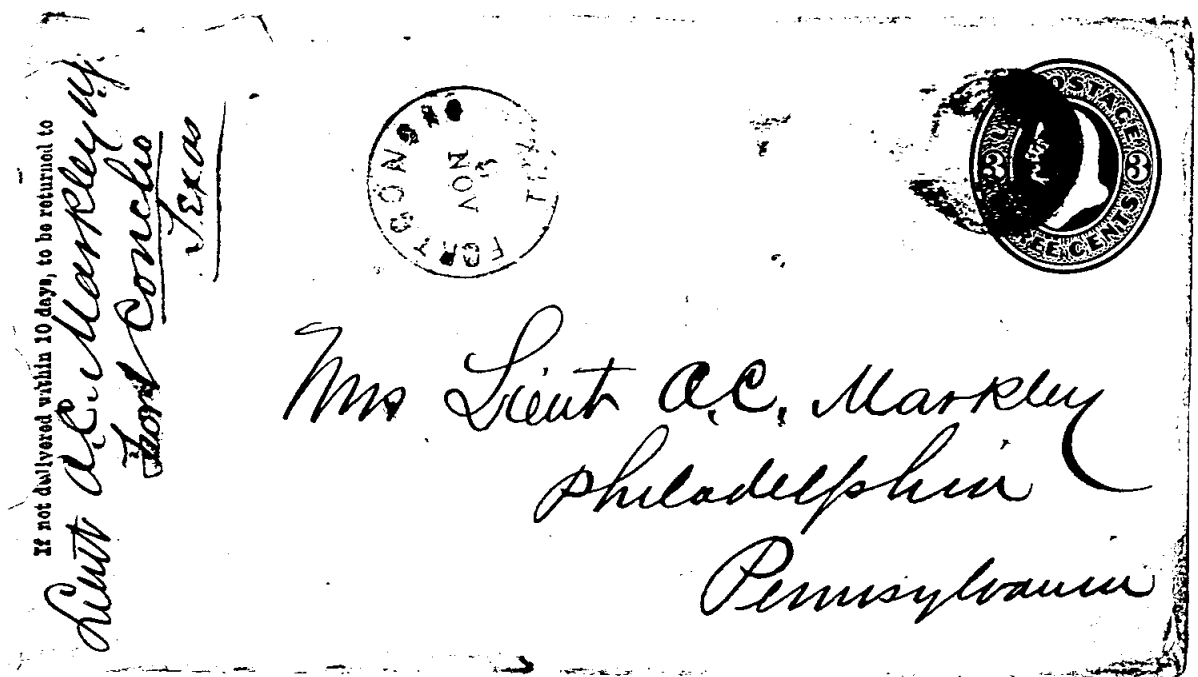


Fig. 3

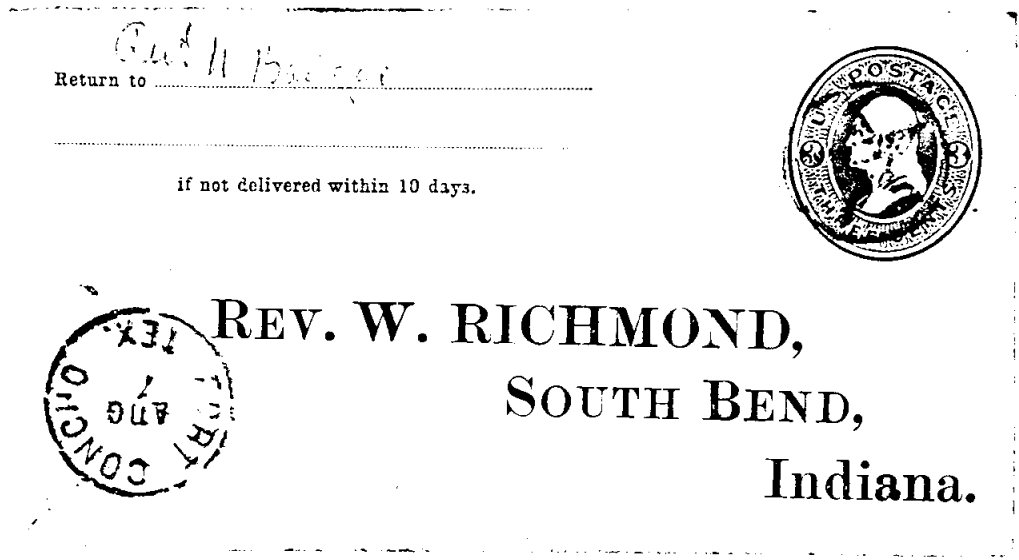


Fig. 4

A new style cancellation with thinner lettering and the year date now incorporated with "Texas" in full made its appearance sometime after 1875. This is 24 mm. in diameter. The one illustrated here is in a magenta color accompanied by a black "X" killer and dated Dec 10 1878. Fig. 5. This is from the correspondence of Dr. Samuel L.S. Smith, post physician, whose letters

to members of his family contain much history of the area, and army life and troops connected to Fort Concho. The writer has several of his letters, one of which was used by Bill Emery in an article on Camp Charlotte in TPHJ several years ago. Dr. Smith was not a military officer but served under contract with the government. Upon his retirement from duties at Fort Concho he set up a medical practice in San Angelo and was the proprietor of Pioneer Drug Store on a prominent downtown corner. Besides his professional duties and operating a business he served on the first school board, as postmaster, and first president of Tom Green County Medical Society.

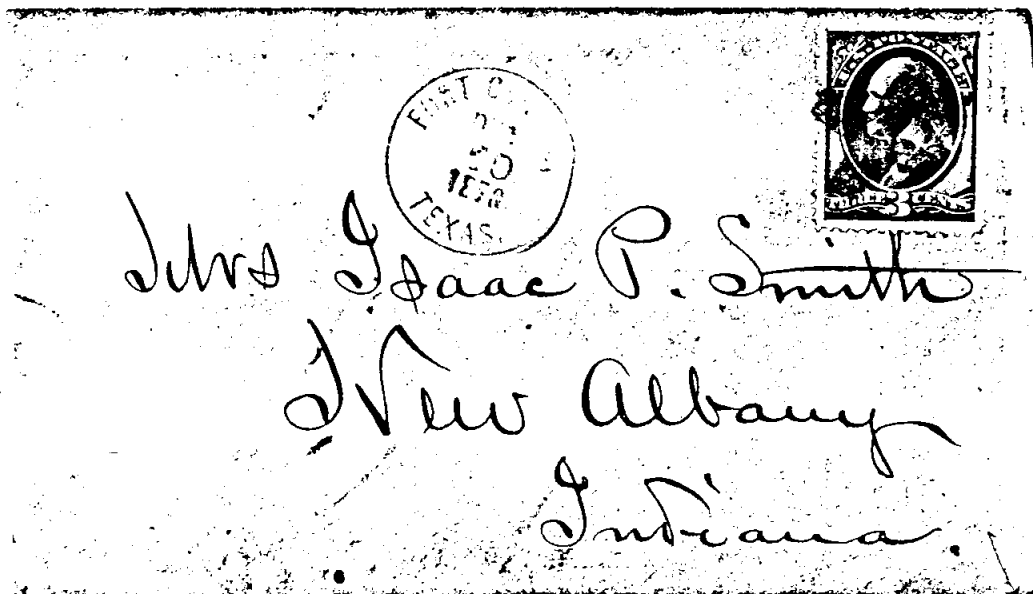


Fig. 5

Besides magenta the cancellation in Fig. 5 appears in black purple, and blue (covers in writer's collection) with other killers such as wedges and cork blobs. Approximately three years ago a Fort Concho cover appeared listed in a Daniel F. Kelleher auction. The description called the cancellation "red." The price realized was about \$300.00.

Incoming covers to some locations are scarcer than those outgoing which is the case for the cover to General Grierson at Fort Concho and forwarded to him at Fort Stockton shown in Fig. 6.

A postal card of wholesale grocer's appointment for its salesman traveled by C. Bain & Company's El Paso Mail & Express going to Ben Ficklin, Fort McKavett, Coglan's, Menardville, Mason, Loyal Valley, Fredericksburg, Confort, Boerne and San Antonio. There it would be transferred to another line going to New Braunfels. Fig. 7

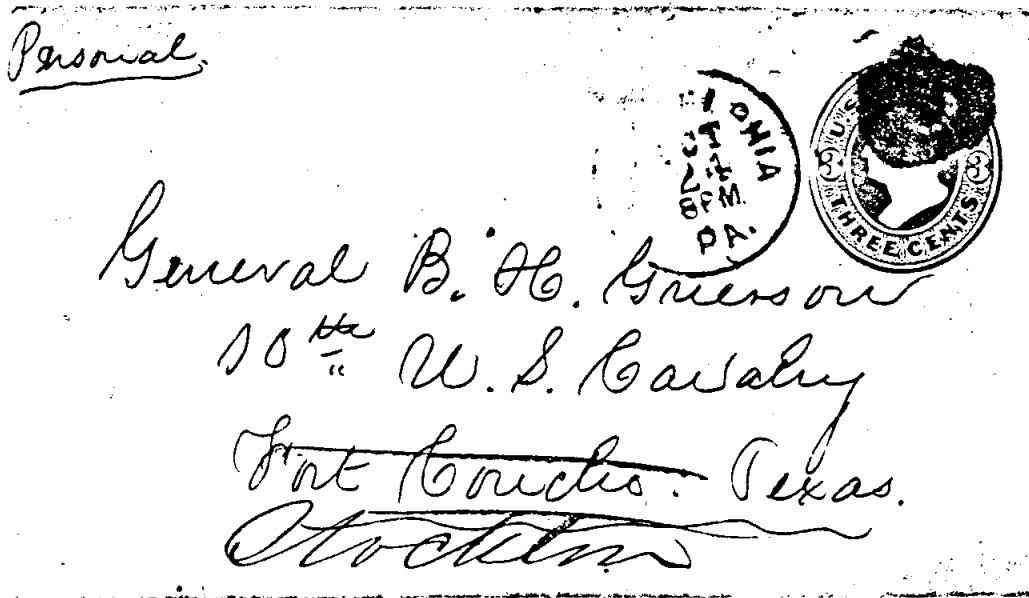


Fig. 6

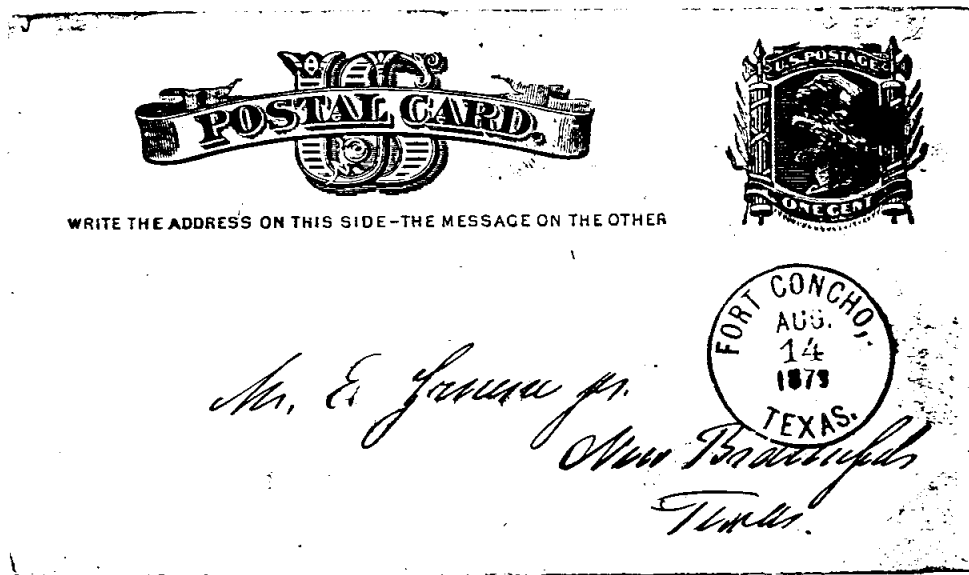


Fig. 7

In 1882 or 1883 a double outer band 32½ mm. cancellation with much larger name lettering made its appearance. An inner circle shows the date information. Fig. 8. This went by stage to Abilene, Texas (backstamp) and thence by train to Philadelphia (Sept. 24 backstamp). Four days in transit is good time in 1884.

In 1884 the Fort Concho post office closed and service transferred to San Angelo about a mile away across the river.



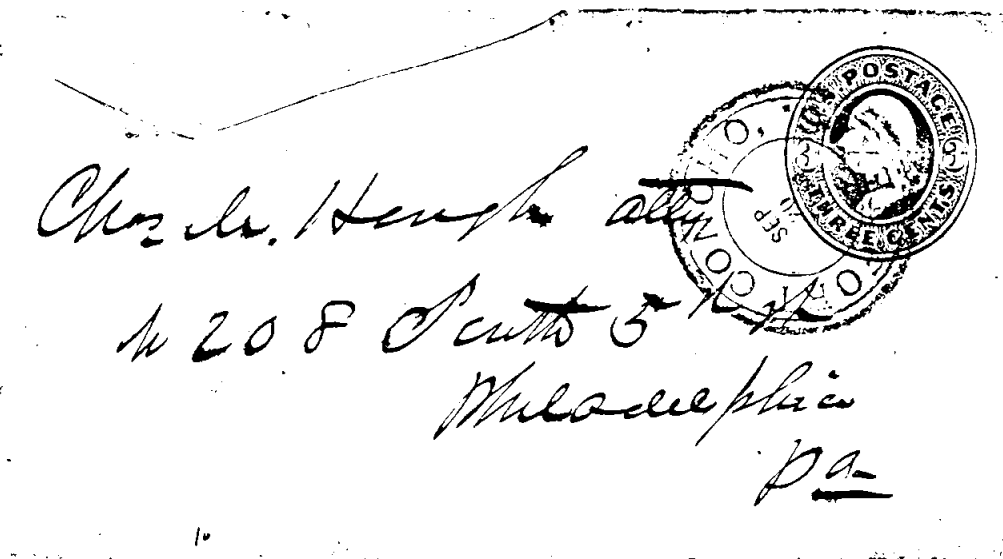


Fig. 8

Review of Fort Concho postmarks: Most dates are approximate from studying the holdings mentioned in the article.

1868-1873 - not known and not in the scope of this article.

1873-1875 - 24mm. TEX. and no year date, star in circle killer.

1875-1877 - 25½mm. TEX., no year date, cork killer.

1878-1882 - 24mm. TEXAS in full and year date. Latest date in this collection Apr. 18, 1882. Various colors and killers known.

1883-1884 - 32½mm. double outer band, much larger lettering, complete inner circle includes month, day and year. Used until the fort post office closed on Dec. 1, 1884. Aug 14, 1883 and Sep 20, 1884(Fig. 8) in this collection.

Additional information to me or Texas Postal History Journal will be appreciated.

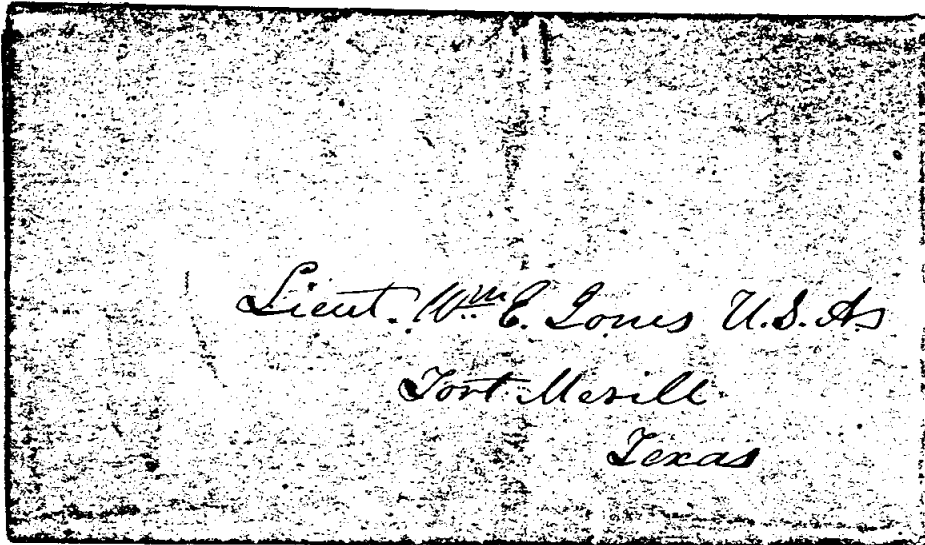
Second installment of this article will include Ben Ficklin and San Angela.

"Lieut. Wm. E. Jones U.S.A.  
Fort Merrill  
Texas"

by Tom Kean

William E. Jones was a Brigadier General when he died at age 40 while leading his confederate troops during the Battle of Piedmont. Along the way he fought with such famous soldiers as J.E.B. Stuart and A.P. Hill and was known to both "Stonewall" Jackson and Robert E. Lee. He was called by one Civil War superior the "best outpost officer" in the cavalry. But then, all of that is the end of his story.

The beginning of his story emerged when I spontaneously bid on a cover during an auction a few years ago. To this day I don't know why I bid on it. The cover didn't fit into any of my collecting interests, and I had never heard of Jones or Fort Merrill. However, long journeys begin with a first step and so it was with me, and Lt. Jones and Texas forts. Along the way I met some fascinating people, uncovered a few mysteries, found out about all kinds of historical resources, came to know my home state better, and joined the TPHS. Best of all, the hunt is still on!!



The cover was a stampless, folded letter as seen in the illustration. You will quickly note that it bears no postal markings, but was wax sealed and opened. The letter is dated June 1, 1852 at Washington, Virginia. At first, because of the lack of postal markings and the content, I wondered if the letter had even been sent. Later I obtained another letter from the same period that covered some of the same subject matter and which was clearly handled by the postal system and delivered (that's another story to

be told later). I'm guessing this letter was in fact carried to Jones.

When I first proposed this article to TPHS Journal Editor Bill Emery, he replied that it "looks like you may have been bit by the same bug as myself". That bug is, of course, the curiosity bug that surrounds the people and history of Texas during its early years. Covers like this are "windows" on history that make it real and alive for me. So let's open the window on Lt. Jones and an event that caught my imagination and started me on a long and continuing journey through Texas forts.

(June) 1st 1852, Washington (VA)

William E. Jones

Dear Sir

I write to you this morning in acknowledgement of a letter we received sometime since and I wish you to excuse my delay in so doing. I have lost a father a mother, brother and sister but never a child before and even at this time I can scarcely command myself to say anything on the subject. I have stood by the couch of the dying and I saw the distress of their friends and I thought their grief unreasonable. I have never been able to appreciate their sufferings before, but my daughter is gone and (may) God help me to submit to my fates. You are young in a (new) (and) exciting country and must not let your misfortune overcome you, time will soften our misfortune. You saw and knew the worst at first. We heard of the accident on the 10th of (April) and you can scarcely imagine our suffering and anxiety for more than a month our information came through the papers. A letter from M. (Strothers) at New Orleans left us with but little hope and finally when we had concluded that you and (Thos.) were also lost your (second) letter arrived the first not arriving until yesterday and although your second confirmed all the previous reports the news of her having been reclaimed from her watery grave was a gratification not expected. The day previous to hearing the fatal news I had commenced making preparations to visit you in your new home and if I could have been permitted to have seen my child once more it would have been gratifying indeed. But the time is past and I can see her no more, but Wm you remain and what I have lost in a daughter may I gain in son. But this is to much I distress you we must try to forget. I have nothing new or interesting to write you from this country. Our first election under the new constitution is over the returns from the district not all heard from. G.W. Hopkins thought to be elected ( ). Your friends and relatives as far as is known are all well.

I am and all the children send their love to you. If Tho. ( ) is with you let us know or where he may be give him our sincere thanks. Write to us often let us hear something of Texas and come to see us as soon as you can. I do not know when or ever I shall see Texas. Byars, Stuart, Dickinson are in Texas examining the country you may see some of them.

Yours ( ) S. Dunn

Lieut. Wm E. Jones, U.S.A.  
Fort Merill Texas

(V.B.) I took a letter out of the office from (Orr) of Illinois that you be loaned money to (be) had got home and said he could pay you the money shortly.  
S.D.

What a letter! I have two daughters of my own and quickly found myself relating to the tremendous grief this man must have felt. But who was Jones? What was he doing in Texas? What "accident" had happened to Dunn's daughter? Whatever became of Jones? A tragic letter and a bunch a questions. Yeah, I was bit!

I started with Jones. At first it was frustrating because I didn't know where to look. So I began with the standard civil war texts. The auction I bid in had identified the addressee of the letter as a "famous confederate general". Well, it turns out that he wasn't all that famous. In fact, most of the references I came across were confined to one or two sentences as part of the larger discussions of such battles as Brandy Station, Gettysburg, Cloyd's Station and the Piedmont. Mostly he seemed to be a postscript.

But two interesting facts emerged with some consistency. The first was that he had a nickname, "Grumble" and the second that he had a real feud going with everyone; his peers, his troops, and his superiors, including Stuart and Hill. Ok, so now I know he was an irascible fellow. Why?

The clue is found in the letter above. Dunn implores Jones that "you ... must not let your misfortune overcome you, time will soften our misfortune". But, as Douglas Southall Freeman notes:

"Jones never recovered in spirit. Whatever there had been of gentleness in his heart seemed to have been destroyed. Embittered, complaining and suspicious, he resigned from the army in 1857..."

(1)

The "accident" was a shipwreck in the Gulf of Mexico while Jones and his wife, Eliza Dunn, were being transported to their new home in Texas. Apparently, Jones lost hold of his wife from the force of the waves and she drowned. It was one of those awful tragedies that befalls some people in this world. Jones had graduated from West Point and served his first three years in the army with the Oregon Mounted Rifles. He returned on furlough to Virginia in early 1852 to marry Eliza. She died on March 26 of that year. Young newlyweds. You can imagine them still full of love and future hopes and dreams. Then this horrible tragedy. No wonder Jones became "Grumble".

According to records from Fort Merrill, Jones "joined from absent without leave and relieved Lt. Ransom in command of Company G" on April 11, 1852. If the dates are correct, this was only two weeks after his wife's death. I have some issues with various dates I've seen in books and in the post reports that I'll raise in a later installment on Jones.

At any rate, Jones came to be at Fort Merrill. The Texas State Archives was wonderful in helping me locate resources, especially since I was living in the Washington D.C area at the time. One of the most useful quick references is THE HANDBOOK OF TEXAS, which gave me my first glimpse of Fort Merrill. Established in 1850, it first accommodated two companies (H and K) of the 1st Infantry out of Fort Brown, Texas. According to the handbook, "Companies I and E of the Rifle Regiment were the regular garrison" until April 1853. Fort records indicate that Company G was only at Fort Merrill from February 11 to June 12, 1852. In April 1853, everyone but two NCOs and 13 men left Fort Merrill for Fort Ewell. From then on the Fort was in decline and was permanently abandoned in December of 1855. Fort Merrill was located in Live Oak County along the Nueces River "where the road from San Antonio to Corpus Christi crossed the river" (2).

Another valuable source of information was Mr. Jim Warren, Live Oak's County Archeologist. Mr. Warren notes that there are no standing structures on the old Fort Merrill site, although the stone foundations of several buildings remain. One includes around 60% of the original foundation. For those that are interested, Mr. Warren says the Ft. Merrill site is located southeast of the current town of George West. Leaving George West, you go south on I 37 for 10-12 miles to FM 534. You go west on FM 534 until it crosses the Nueces River. Just beyond that is a county road. Turning north on it, the site is located about 4 or 5 miles up the river.

As an interesting postscript, note that the letter is dated June 1, 1852. On June 12, 1852, Lt. Jones and company left Ft. Merrill, having been transferred to Ft. Ewell. I wonder if the cover was forwarded?

So now I'd met Jones and found out a little about Fort Merrill. But I still had (have) lots of questions. In a conversation with

my mother, she was telling me about her efforts to trace the genealogy of her family (from Karnes County). She wondered if the National Archives could help her locate some information on one of her relatives. The National Archives? That's the big building in D.C. with the Declaration of Independence. There's nothing there but exhibits. Right? Wrong!!!!

In my next installment, I'll share a second letter to Jones which also talked about his wife's death and discuss the National Archives' Military Reference Branch and the fascinating world of "post reports."

In the meantime, there may be some holes in my story. I've remained faithful to the facts I've uncovered, but I'm sure there are knowledgeable folks out there who can help set me straight if I've made mistakes or who can add to the story. If anyone can, I'd love to hear from you. If any of you have Jones' covers and/or letters, I'd really like to share information. I can be reached at: 6256 E. Long Circle N., Englewood, CO 80112.

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BROWNSVILLE SNAKE FARM

by R. H. Stever

Postal historians are wont to say that every cover has a story if one can just ferret it out. When the cover shown in Figure 1 was entered in the TPHP advertising cover contest, the author had no knowledge of the cover other than it advertised a most unusual business. With this cover there are three basic elements involved: (1) a Houston & Brownsville RPO cancel applied in 1912; (2) an address directing the envelope to the Zoological Arena in Kansas City; and (3) a bizarre photograph of a pit full of rattlesnakes advertising the Brownsville Snake Farm. Obviously the latter is the most fascinating and is the central theme for the following account.

The story begins in the late 1800's when Abraham Harry Lieberman and wife, Jennie, emigrated from Warsaw, Poland. The family eked out a living in New York for several years before moving to California. One of the children, William Abraham, dropped out of school after the fourth grade and joined a carnival. For a youngster it was a glamorous and irresistible life. It wasn't long before he was operating a "geek" show -- carnival slang for a snake exhibit.

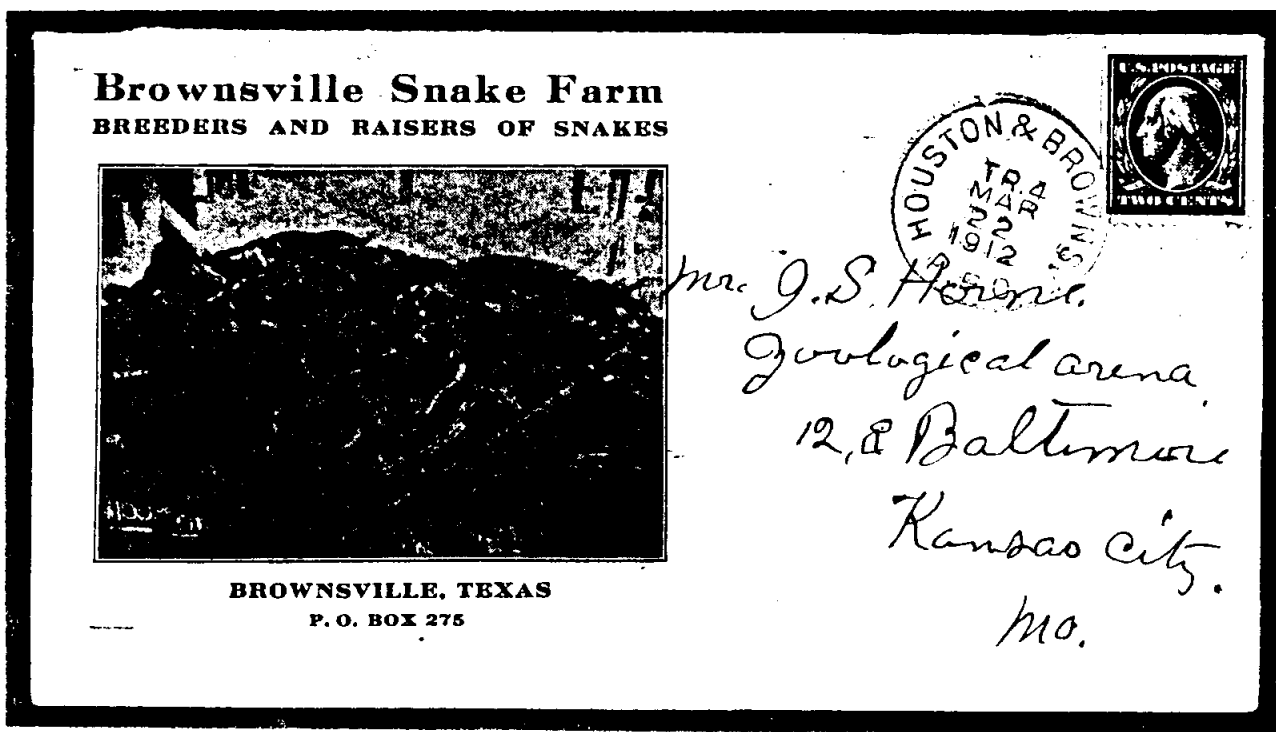


Figure 1. Brownsville advertising cover, 1912

One thing William noticed was that the reptiles died prematurely from the constant handling at night when they normally rested. And it was difficult for a carnival to replace them. There was no source of supply. He thought that a snake farm that could provide reptiles for all the carnivals would be a good idea and spent some time visiting the various carnivals that were travelling around the country. Everywhere he went the idea received enthusiastic endorsement.

William figured Texas was the logical place where the snake supply would be ample. He settled on Brownsville for his fledgling business enterprise which he promptly named "Snakeville". To get this new venture off the ground, he thought the family name should be changed. William Abraham Lieberman had himself legally registered as William Abraham Snake King (Figure 2). Eventually he was known throughout the entire world as Snake King.



Figure 2. Snake King

At first there was no railroad into Brownsville. Snake King tried to ship boxes of snakes by stage coach but few, if any, stage drivers would take them. Fifty venomous diamondbacks escaping from a broken box was a chilling thought and the stagers couldn't be criticized considering the rough South Texas roads. However, in 1903 construction commenced on the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico Railway (Figure 3). Finally in 1907 Brownsville got rail service. By 1912, if not earlier, the Railway Postal Service was using the Houston & Brownsville RPO cancel shown on Figure 1. In 1956 the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico became part of the Missouri Pacific system.



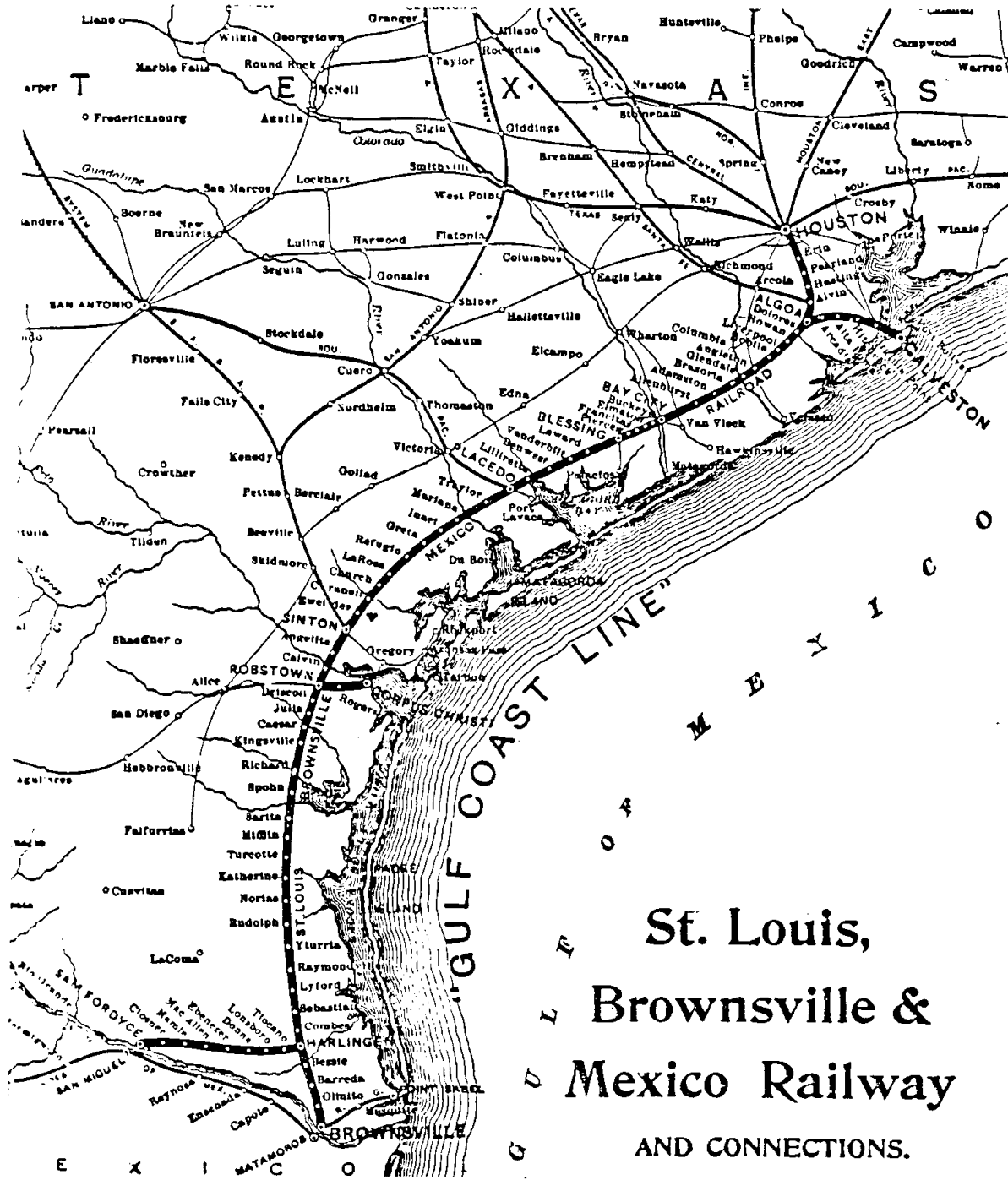


Figure 3. St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico RR  
(From J. L. Allhands)

Snakeville prospered. The business was one of a kind. Correspondence was never terminated with anything so mundane as "Sincerely yours" or "Respectfully yours". It always ended "Rattling yours, Snake King". He was an entrepreneur that never missed a lick. For example, clients unhappy with Snake King would threaten to do business with the Brownsville Snake Farm, a

competitor they thought, instead of with Snake King at Snakeville. Snake King would just laugh because he also owned the Snake Farm. It used separate stationery and had a separate bank account, separate post office box, etc. Figure 4 shows the type of check Snake King used. But it was the same operation. The illustrated cover is from the Snake Farm.

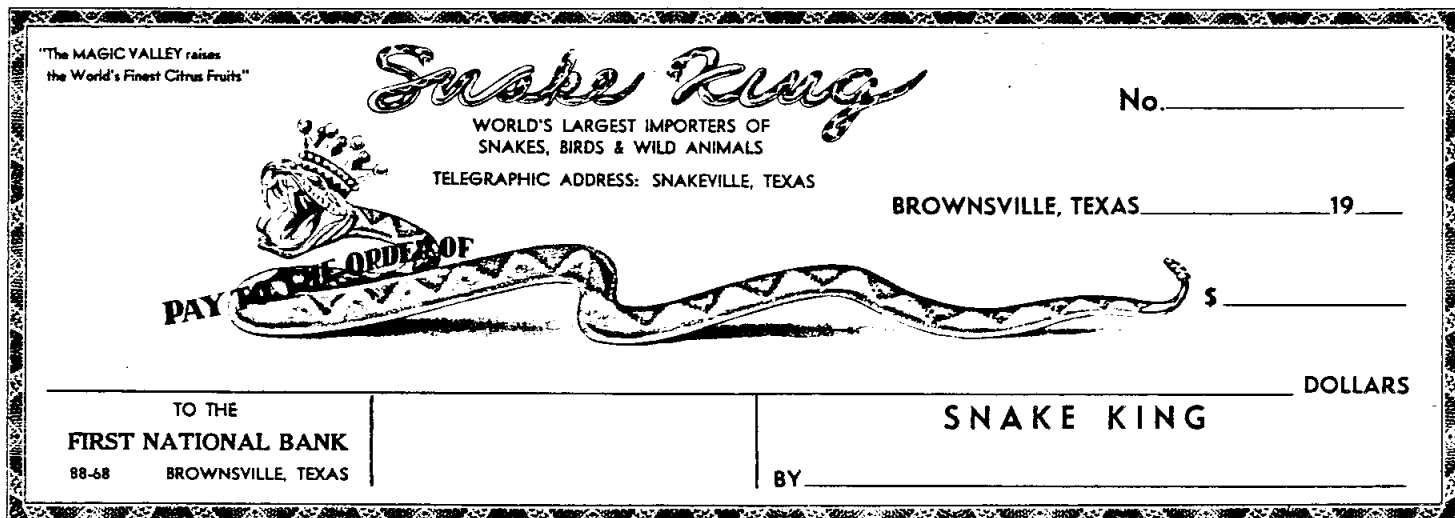


Figure 4. Type of check used by Snake King

The reader probably thinks this was only a snake business. Nothing could be further from the truth. Snake King dealt in all kinds of wild animals -- horned toads, lions, tigers, leopards, boa constrictors, pythons, you name it. He did a roaring business in bobwhites, parakeets, parrots, macaws, and even Indian Rhesus monkeys.

The main business, though, was snakes and the ranchers of northern Mexico and southern Texas kept Snake King well supplied. Figure 5 is a typical Snake King advertisement. While the original concept had been to furnish snakes for carnivals, Snake King was soon filling orders worldwide for laboratories, zoos and zoological exhibits. Figure 6 attests to his far flung reputation.

As one might suspect, a place as unusual as the Snake Farm attracted very unusual people. Snake King's employees were Grade-A characters, each and every one of them. And each had his own private reason for choosing to work at such a place. Also as one might suspect, there were numerous "incidents", some outlandish, some dangerous and some humorous. A couple of the latter bear repeating.

Snake King got a letter one day from a man who said he was down on his luck and asked Snake King to send him a \$50 box of snakes, which he needed to start a carnival exhibit. He said he had everything else, trailer etc., but the exhibit itself. He promised to pay Snake King "when I get back on my feet". Snake King, being an ex-carnival man himself, decided to help the fellow get started and shipped the box of snakes. When six months elapsed and no check arrived, Snake King wrote and asked for payment. Back came the reply, "But, Mr. King, I told you I'd pay you as soon as I got back on my feet". He enclosed a photograph showing him to be a double amputee! Snake King carried that photo for years and liked to tell how he'd been outfoxed by a legless man.

One of the oddballs that worked at the Snake Farm was Joe Guerrero. He was a Mexican National who had come north looking for work. He was, for all practical purposes, relatively illiterate. Even though Joe worked at the snake farm for several years, he could speak only broken English. But he was a good hand and did all kinds of odd jobs necessary at a place like the Snake Farm. One day, though, Joe decided to return to Mexico. He went to a remote area near Vera Cruz but kept in touch with Snake King by mail -- letters laboriously scrawled with an old fashioned indelible pencil. Joe built up a business supplying the Snake Farm with snakes and other animals. As the years went by, Joe's letters became more and more difficult to interpret. On one occasion he asked Snake King to "sand me a box a peper". That had everyone stumped. Why would anyone in Mexico want someone in the U.S. to send them a supply of pepper? Snake King pondered Joe's request and finally after several days wrote Joe a letter inquiring if he wanted red pepper or black pepper. Joe's classic reply, "I dunt kere wot color peper you sand me, jus so its toylet peper".

One of Snake King's clients, as evidenced by the address on Figure 1, was Mr. E. P. Horne's Zoological Arena Company in Kansas City. Mr. Horne was perhaps cut off the same bolt of cloth as Snake King. He started in the animal business at age 17 in Denver about 1885 but shifted his trade to the Kansas City area, apparently sometime in the 1890's. Horne had gone on the Vaudeville circuit with various animal acts but eventually settled in Kansas City and formed his company, the Zoological Arena. He was more inclined to deal in larger animals than Snake King, i.e., elephants, lions, tigers, giraffes, kangaroos etc. Like Snake King, Horne supplied carnivals and some of America's largest circuses (Ringling Brothers, for example) with the animals they needed. There's little doubt that one of Horne's sources of supply was Snake King. Figure 1 records the Zoological Arena in 1912 at 12th and Baltimore, a location now occupied by office buildings in downtown Kansas City. Later it moved to 602 Walnut Street and by 1930 was located at 900 Spring Branch Road in

Still Going Strong After More Than 25 Years...

*The Giant Mexican*

# HORNED RATTLESNAKE



The most out-standing Side Show Attraction in the Show World today is the Giant Mexican Horned Rattlesnake, discovered by SNAKE KING more than a quarter of a century ago.

This money-making attraction is a leader in its field because it is inexpensive, requires very little space and it may be exhibited as a "free" attraction, or separately as an added attraction.

So any way you look at it, you're in business when you latch on to one of these Giants. Two sizes: large, \$22.50; or extra large, \$27.50. Allow a week to ten days to fill your order.

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TERMS — Not less than half-cash with ALL orders,  
balance C.O.D. Positively no exceptions.

Figure 5. One of Snake King's ads. Snake Farm advertising had world-wide exposure.



Figure 6. Several foreign covers addressed to Snake King. Notice the cover with drawing of a snake and "Texas, USA" as the only address. Such was the fame of Snake King's operation.

Independence, Missouri. The Kansas City Star of May 2, 1935 reported sale of the Zoological Arena Company's properties at a trustee's foreclosure sale, ending the Horne family's business.

Meanwhile, back at the Snake Farm, Snake King had for years been milking snakes and storing the venom long before a use was found. He figured some day it would be valuable, and when that day came, his business took on another new dimension. He probably had the world's largest supply. This example is typical of his business acumen and the wide variety of commodities handled by this unique man in his unique business.

Snake King died in November, 1952. The children continued to operate the Snake Farm for a couple of years, but without the main driving force things were not as before and the business was closed. Thus ends the story, only a small portion of which is related here, of one of Texas' most spectacular business enterprises and the cover that led to this investigation.

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