



A GLIMPSE OF THE GOOD OLD DAYS AT

# THE GROVE

BY LAURA BRAY ∞ PHOTOGRAPHS BY EARL NOTTINGHAM





Fiddler Willa Porter, Art Horan on banjo, and Clayton Elliott on guitar perform at the Cacklebur Saloon, which features live music most weekend nights. More than 800 sets of deer antlers hang from the ceiling.

[FACING PAGE] The post office, established in the Dube General Store in 1917, closed in 1996. No one knows the age or origin of the lockboxes, but Eula Mae Kindler, The Grove's last postmistress, says they were brought in from Killeen when the post office opened.

the largest settlements in Coryell County, with several doctors, two general stores, a mill, and several other businesses dedicated to serving area farmers. The nearby St. Paul's Lutheran Church, whose original congregation began meeting in members' homes in the 1870s, was built in 1917.

**T**HAT same year, W.J. Dube (pronounced DOO-bee) built a new general store, where he sold everything from dry-goods to harnesses and brooms. The Planters State Bank occupied one corner of the store. On a long, wooden bench out front, men would gather during the day to chat and exchange news, watch the passing cattle and the cotton wagons

headed for the gin down the street, and witness the occasional shootout.

From 1930 to 1939, rodeo enthusiasts flocked here for the Doolittle Championship Rodeo, produced by local cowboy Austin Doolittle. Cowboys came from all around Texas to participate in the event, which included bronco- and Brahma bull-riding. Even though the rodeo was well attended, Doolittle "gave away too many free tickets to those who helped," according to Moody, and the event kicked up the dust for the last time in the summer of 1939.

In the 1930s, the Texas Highway Department asked permission to pave Texas 36 through the middle of town. But there was a catch—a well in the middle of the street would have to go. The town's leaders refused, so the road bypassed the town just to the north. The town also lost thousands of acres of surrounding farmland to Camp Hood (now Fort Hood) and to man-made Lake Belton. As Texas grew, the prosperous community began to decline.

Today, the remaining residents run farms or ranches or work in nearby Temple. The old well still sits in the middle of the street, its soft limestone edges scored by past residents' efforts to draw water.

The old Dube General Store now houses Moody Anderson's Country Life Museum, the town's centerpiece. Here, you'll see



Moody Anderson (shown here) says the old bar in the Cacklebur came from a saloon in Winchester, near Smithville.





[TOP AND ABOVE] With antique medical devices on display, the doctor's office looks much as it did in The Grove's turn-of-the-20th-Century heyday. In the general store, Kailynne Goldman inspects a breadbox that once graced the O.S. Alexander store in Dale.

thousands of artifacts—everything from medicines and hardware to canned goods and coffins (the latter once manufactured in a local shop and sold at the store). The shelves hold food containers (like Del Monte Coffee and Pioneer Flour), household and farm products (Black Silk Stove Polish, Martin's Udder Lotion), and medicines (Dr. Thacher's Worm Syrup, with the slogan, "Children like it"). Moody's extensive sign collection includes all sorts of trade signs, made to identify businesses

for customers who couldn't read. For example, a large pair of tin snips identified a tin merchant, and a three-foot "pocket watch" identified a watchmaker. A portable bathtub on wheels, complete with water tank and kerosene heater, numbers among the museum's more unusual items.

The restored bank (in the corner of the museum) includes the original vault, huge old ledger books with the Depression-era National Recovery Administration eagle logo, and safe-deposit boxes, each with the owner's name painted on the side.

"I had a visitor whose eyes went wide at one box," says Moody. "He told me it was his grandfather's safe deposit box, but I wouldn't sell it. Since it had belonged to his grandfather, I gave it to him."

**THE** restorations in The Grove include a post office, a doctor's office, a saloon, and a blacksmith shop, all furnished with artifacts of the era. The blacksmith shop is the oldest building in town—and not even W.J. Dube's widow knew how old it was.

"I found a picture of the town from around the turn of the [20th] century, and the blacksmith shop looked old even then," recalls Moody. "Several years ago, I asked Mrs. Dube if she knew the name of the first blacksmith. She told me, 'That building was old when I got here as a little girl [in the late 1800s].'"

Using aged lumber from the store in Paige, Moody built a stage across from the museum whose backdrop resembles an old general store. Every third Saturday year round, the stage welcomes musicians from around the state at The Grove's Jamboree. Music fans toting lawn chairs and coolers gather to enjoy a night of music under the

stars. Most other weekend nights, a local musician will stop by the saloon and provide a bit of music, while a few of those 40 local residents play dominoes on tables scattered about.

The old wooden bar in the saloon, the general store's pressed-tin ceiling with its intricate pattern, and the tangy smell of the iron tools in the blacksmith shop bring back a sense of a time long gone. By sharing this beautiful restoration and his magnificent collection, Moody Anderson has opened a door to the good old days. ★

LAURA BRAY of San Antonio enjoyed finding the same kinds of things in The Grove's museum that she remembered from her grandmother's country home in Burke.

Longtime contributor EARL NOTTINGHAM, who also photographed our last story on The Grove, in August 1989, says his appreciation of this wonderful collection has grown.

## ESSENTIALS The Grove

**ALTHOUGH** not well marked, The Grove, in Coryell County, is easy to get to—it sits just off Texas 36 between Temple and Gatesville (see map, page 50). To get there from I-35 in Temple, take Texas 36 northwest about 15 miles to its intersection with Texas 236 and FM 1114. Turn south on FM 1114; the town center is a quarter-mile on the left. Hours for all buildings: Sat-Sun 9-5. Admission: \$2. Some of the restored buildings are wheelchair accessible (2nd-floor doctor's office is not). Restrooms behind the store; soft drinks available in the Cacklebur Saloon.

Kids (and adults, too) will enjoy a game of "What is it?" in the **Country Life Museum**. Mysterious-looking artifacts include a spindle for measuring ribbon, a buggy heater, and an embalming table.

Every 3rd Sat. at 6 p.m. year round, The Grove holds a **Jamboree**, where musicians from across the state provide a free concert (any musician is welcome to join in the event, or perform at the saloon on most other weekend nights). Bring your lawn chairs and a box supper, and enjoy some Texas music.

For more information, or to arrange special tours during the week, call Moody Anderson at 512/282-1215. Together with other attractions in the area, this can make a well-rounded trip (see "Unbuckling Belton," page 42).