

Steele Store's death —

Rural town fading

By ANN RICHMOND

The community is dying. Old, abandoned houses are a common sight at the edges of plowed fields

where cotton plants have just recently broken the surface of the ground.

It is a farming community. It started when a man named Steele built a store there, between the Little Brazos and Brazos rivers in the late 1800s. People in the area would gather at Steele's store and thus the community became known as Steele Store.

Steele also built a cotton gin which still stands, though now it is a stone ruin, overgrown with shrubs and trees. It is opposite the site of the original store, where a beer hall now stands. Highway 50 runs between the old gin and the beer hall.

Steele Store was never a large community. It never had much business. At the peak of its activity, there were only two or three stores, says W.A. Stasny, county commissioner for Precinct 4 in Brazos County. The people had small farms — 50- to 100-acre tracts. They used mule teams to plow and cultivate the land.

Constable Sam Fachorn, a farmer in Steele Store, remembers those days. He came to Steele Store with his family in the 1930s. In 1935 they planted their first crop. He says he followed the mules with his father for 24 years.

"It was rough then, but everything was so cheap," he says. "We weren't living with conveniences."

They paid mule drivers 50 cents a day and that was enough for them to make ends meet.

Two mule teams were used to farm their 100 acres, Fachorn says. One hundred acres was all a farmer could take care of with only two teams. He says they hired day laborers, mostly blacks, to help with the work.

Tractors replaced the mules around 1947. That made farming a little easier but also made it more expensive. It had always been difficult for the small farmer, but for some it became impossible to continue. They were forced to sell their farms and leave. Most went to Bryan.

The farmers who remain in Steele Store today own large tracts of land. Fachorn has 1,000 acres in row crops and 1,000 acres in ranch land. But, he says, he still has "a rough time making it."

Fachorn and the other farmers in the community grow cotton, grain and alfalfa. Some of the farmers also raise cattle.

People are still moving out of the community.

"There used to be four gins here running," Fachorn says. "Now it's down to two. The people get so disgusted." Many of the day laborers have also gone to Bryan for better paying jobs. "We can't compete



The original cotton gin built by a man named Steele in the late 1800s still stands in Steele Store. The gin was shut down around 1913, according to Constable Sam Fachorn, a farmer in the community.

Battalion photo by Ann Richmond

with what they can get in town," he says. "We let them go. We just can't afford it (the salary)."

Most of the houses where the day laborers used to live are now abandoned shacks. They look desolate, standing wind-blown and forgotten, slowly being reclaimed by the land. But some of the decrepit buildings still house a few people.

A cluster of about eight houses can be seen from the highway north of Steele Store. A dirt road leads to the houses, which are surrounded by fields of cotton. There are a few signs of life.

About six dogs are running around in the house where the Cadillac is parked, Willie says. Another family lives in a house further down the road. The people who lived in the now empty houses used to work on the farms, he says, but they have all moved to Bryan. He, too, will be moving to Bryan in a week, he says. He got a job as a janitor at Texas A&M University. He says he is a city man. He doesn't like the hoot of the owls at night or the empty houses.

A man named Willie is staying in the house where the dogs run loose. He appears to be in his early fifties. He says he was born in this house, where his sister-in-law and another woman now live.

A couple of Spanish people live in the house where the Cadillac is parked, Willie says. Another family lives in a house further down the road. The people who lived in the now empty houses used to work on the farms, he says, but they have all moved to Bryan. He, too, will be moving to Bryan in a week, he says. He got a job as a janitor at Texas A&M University. He says he is a city man. He doesn't like the hoot of the owls at night or the empty houses.

But not all of the estimated 80 to 100 residents of Steele Store want to leave. Frank LaBarbera, who owns a liquor store, says there is still quite a lot left in Steele Store.

IRS labels hobby collections taxable

Nothing escapes the piercing sweep of the Internal Revenue Service, not even stamp and coin collectors.

For the more than 18 million coin collectors in the United States, and three times that many who collect stamps, the idea that they own taxable income never entered their minds.

"That's one of the problems we are trying to relate to the collectors," says Dr. Larry Crumbley, a Texas A&M University accounting professor. "People must keep records of their coin and stamp estates just as though they were dealing with stocks and bonds."

In the eyes of the IRS agents, many collections are high value investments on which taxes must be paid, he explains. The key for the collector is keeping a businesslike approach and thinking of it always in terms of investment, not just a hobby.

Crumbley is the author of a recently released book on the financial management of coin and stamp estates published by Arco of New York City.

Coin and stamp collections should be kept in safety deposit boxes, observes the researcher. An investor should take all necessary steps to show he truly has a profit motive, especially since the IRS may attempt to classify the investor as a collector in order to disallow expenses and losses.

"For some reason the IRS seems to feel that if you get any pleasure out of your collection, then you shouldn't receive a tax break," says Crumbley. "By keeping the collection in a bank not only do you protect it, but you give the IRS no reason to suspect that you receive some sort of personal satisfaction from the stamps or coins, other than as an investment, of course."

The future will find an ever increasing portion of people's coin and stamp investments being lost to taxes," reports Crumbley. "Most people would be amazed at the tremendous sums of money which the government collects each year from

taxpayers due to no other reason than poor tax planning.

"These are sums which could have legally been avoided. There is a difference between avoidance and tax evasion. Avoidance applies to legal tax savings. Evasion indicates failure to pay taxes."

"Don't let anyone kid you about the value of a collection. Collectors should never try to hide money. One individual found out the hard way in 1974 when he was convicted of \$350,000 income tax evasion, sentenced to a five-year term."

The courts have attempted to make the distinction between an investor or a dealer in terms of taxpayer's motives or expectations, says the researcher. An investor who buys in expectation of a profit due to a rise in the value of the property. The dealer who buys with the expectation of making a profit by selling at a price in excess of cost.

"Basically, the investor receives favorable capital gain treatment on the sale of his coins or stamps," explains Crumbley. "The dealer's gain is taxed as ordinary income."

If the activity is considered a profit, then any associated expenses or losses are deductible. However, if not for profit, then associated expenses are deductible only to the extent of any income made.

"The problem is most people don't report income they receive from the sale of their coin stamps," Crumbley says. "Under the tax laws today, you are guilty until you are proven innocent. That means you have to prove you are innocent."

"If you bought a stamp in 1965 and five years later sold it for \$10, that is a \$9.50 increase. If you are supposed to report that, that's one of the reasons we encourage people to keep constant accurate records, to protect themselves when the IRS calls."

Any sale without a record is very likely to be valued by the IRS at its selling value with no consideration for the purchase price.

Duke, 70 jets home 'looking for'

United Press International
BOSTON — Actor James Wayne, wearing a cowboy hat and looking fit, left Massachusetts General Hospital Thursday a little more than three weeks after undergoing open heart surgery.

"I feel great," Wayne said, feeling the best I have felt in a long time.

"I knew Boston was the cradle of liberty. I didn't know it was also the cradle of humanity," Wayne said as he boarded the steps of the jet standing by to take him back to his home in California.

The "Duke" was operated April 3 to replace a defective mitral valve in his heart. A team of cardiac physicians inserted a similar valve from a pig to replace Wayne's heart.

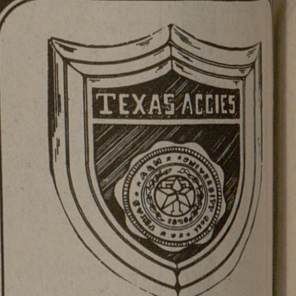
When asked if at anytime he was frightened, Wayne answered: "Ah hell, sure."

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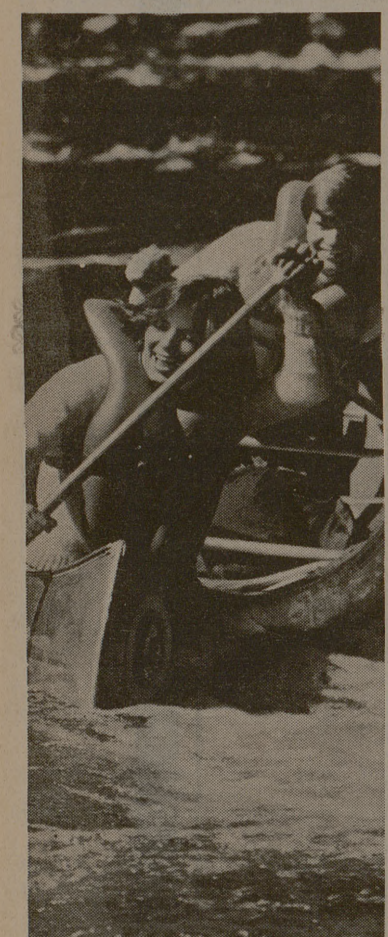
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