





## CANYON CREED

BY RONALD BARON  
(This article was published in the March, 1953 issue of the McCamey Junior Historian.)

Skillman Grove, located on the western rim of the Davis Mountains, is as true a representation of the Old West as may be found anywhere. Within the shade of its giant oaks the Mescalero Apache held council to make their last bitter stand for their "homelands peaks and canyons," their hunting grounds, and their water holes. At this grove they contested the passage of gold seekers to California. They fought Henry Skillman and his agent, Big Foot Wallace, who contracted to carry the United States mail along the Butterfield Overland Trail from San Antonio to El Paso. This grove furnishes a majestic haven to those who seek its shelter today. It has become synonymous with the Bloys Camp Meeting which represents the very finest qualities of the Old West. The teachings received here played a vital part in setting up the strong Christian society in a land once known as the lawless west.

The leader of the new order was Benjamin Bloys. Born in McMoresville, Tennessee, in 1847, Bloys grew up on his father's farm. As a young man he entered Lane Theological Seminary with the purpose of becoming a missionary to India. Upon his graduation in 1872, having failed to meet the physical requirements for foreign service, he entered the home mission field. The Home Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. (North Presbyterian) assigned him to a charge in central Texas with headquarters in Coleman, Texas. He married Isabelle Yeck of Flora, Illinois, after which they set out immediately for the charge. They reached their new home on July 4, 1878, and the home mission work immediately prospered.

The Reverend Mr. Bloys organized churches in Coleman, Santa Anna, Atoka, Paint Rock, Buffalo Gap and Runnels. For ten years he kept appointments in these churches; he visited in the homes of his members and of those persons in outlying areas. He baptized babies, buried the dead, taught the catechism, and married couples. His devotion to his work endeared him to his associates.

After a short time in Coleman, Bloys became ill. His physician advised him to move further west and to live in the open. Mr. and Mrs. David Merrell had moved to the Davis Mountains in 1887 from Coleman. They wrote Bloys that the United States Army Post at Fort Davis was without a chaplain and that many isolated pioneer families were hungering for the gospel. Bloys was reluctant to expose his wife and four small children to the hardships which he knew must be faced in the West, but upon the insistence of his wife, he soon departed with his family and arrived in Toyahvale, in the Davis Mountains, on February 22, 1888.

The Bloyesses were not strangers in this beautiful land. Mr. and Mrs. W. T. Jones, whom the minister had married in his church in Coleman, had moved to the Davis Mountain area in 1883. Three other families, suffering from the effects of the drought in the 1880's, had packed their worldly possessions and had moved from the minister's former parish to the Davis Mountains. They were Mr. and Mrs. R. P. Bean and their four young children; Mr. and Mrs. George W. Evans with two children; and Mr. and Mrs. John Z. Means with two children. The mothers of these families drove covered wagons and looked after their children along the parched trail. Mrs. Bean drove a team of oxen; Mrs. Means drove a horse and mule hitched to her wagon; and Mrs. Evans drove a two-mule team. The three men rode herd on more than seven hundred cattle. This three-family caravan pitched its first camp in

the Davis Mountains on July 28, 1884.

David Merrell and his son, Jesse, on an early exploration trip to the Davis Mountains had found unclaimed public domain available for homesteading. On this land grew abundant black gramma grass for cattle. They found here also earlier settlers; the E. P. Websters, the Dietrick Dutchovers, the W. P. Pruitts, the Tankersleys, the Milam McKinneys, and the Charles Muithens. The Merrells had moved their possessions to a small farming area near Fort Davis. Their cattle, like those of other cattlemen in the area, grazed on the open range.

Thus, with a United States Army post in Fort Davis and with many families scattered in dug-outs, in shacks, and in tents throughout the mountains, Bloys found a field of work.

Within two years after his arrival, Bloys was holding regular services once each month at Alpine, Maria, and Fort Davis. He preached also at Sanderson, Shafter, Marathon, Fort Stockton, Van Horn, and Valentine. At night, on his rounds, if he stopped with a family, he held services in the ranch home. Neighbors and cowboys seeing him pass along knew there would be preaching wherever he chanced to stop. They frequently prepared to follow him and join in the service.

Isolated as many families were, mothers of children felt the need for religious training. At the suggestion of Mrs. Means, plans were made in 1889 for a camp meeting to be held at Skillman Grove as soon as the cattlemen had finished the fall working of cattle. Bloys agreed to announce the camp meeting in his charges as he filled his appointments on his circuit.

On the appointed date in October, 1889, the Reverend Mr. Bloys was the first to arrive at Skillman's Grove. He selected a giant oak with four great branches under whose shelter he placed an Arbuckle coffee box for a pulpit. On this pulpit he placed his Bible and an arrangement of wild plow which he gathered near by. The tree he called the Union Tree, for he said the four branches symbolized the four denominations represented at the meeting; the Baptist, the Disciples of Christ, the Methodist, and Presbyterian.

The kindly little minister greeted each new arrival. In every way he tried to provide for the comfort and convenience of those attending. After the greetings were over, Bloys stood back of this pulpit and called out the invitation, "Come to Church." This familiar call with the hymn, "How Firm a Foundation," has echoed through those Apache canyons for the past sixty-three years.

Attending the week-long camp services were John Z. Means, George Medley, George W. Evans, C. O. Finley, W. T. Jones, and Jesse W. Merrell and their families. Of the forty-six persons in attendance, only eight were church members, and of the eight, seven were women. Many of the children had never attended a religious service. A cowboy, Andrew Prude, led the singing.

With each successive year gains in attendance and services were recorded. Ranchmen took along with them and their families those who chanced to be their guests at the time. They paid their own expenses and that of their guests as well. As time went on, people from the lowland country and farther regions came to the camp meetings. The influence of the Bloys Camp Meeting and its atmosphere accounted in a large measure for the passing of the days of the outlaw and cattle rustler.

The Bloys Camp Meeting Association was formed and incorporated in 1900. The section of land on which the gatherings were held was purchased by the association for \$1,500 which has been contributed by ranchmen.

In 1904 persons came to the meeting from the low plains country and from the Panhandle. It was in this year that a secretary's

book was purchased in which to keep a record of the association's business, and a new and larger tent had to be purchased to accommodate the crowd. It was at this meeting that Dr. George W. Truett, a noted Baptist minister, first assisted Bloys along with Reverend J. M. Carroll.

In 1909 there were ten camps scattered over the ground, consisting of 66 tents, 115 hacks and buggies, 450 horses and mules, and nine automobiles. At this meeting 573 persons registered. The expense of the meeting was \$916, most of which was raised by voluntary contributions.

At the 1912 meeting it was agreed that a new tent was needed to replace the old shelter which had sprung leaks and failed to give sufficient shade in the heat of the day. A total of \$1,809 was raised by voluntary contributions for the purchase of a new tent.

In March, 1917, the Reverend Mr. Bloys died, and a month later a special meeting of the Bloys Camp Meeting Association was held to choose a new leader for the August camp meeting. Reverend L. R. Millican was named temporary leader. To assist him in preaching were Reverend George W. Truett, Reverend J. H. Burma, and Reverend S. J. Wright. Millican served the camp meeting as leader until 1920, when he was followed by his son, Reverend Richard Irving.

The 1935 meeting was of particular significance for the young people's group presented a memorial celebration in a program of three scenes. The first scene represented the home of John Means in 1890; the second scene was at the camp grounds in 1890; the third scene was a church service conducted by the Reverend Mr. Bloys in 1890. The characters in each scene were the children of the pioneers, and the past was re-enacted in costume and conversation. This celebration aroused generations to become more definitely identified with the camp meeting.

As a special token of love and affection for the founder of the camp meeting, the young people, under the direction of Mrs. Jessie Jones Mueller, grew flowers during 1937 for a flower service at the meeting. Mrs. Mueller and others often recalled the bouquets of wild flowers which Bloys placed on his pulpit. In memory of this the boys and girls decorated the tabernacle with flowers they had grown. On this occasion one hundred boys and girls were organized into a choir. They marched from the rear of the tabernacle and down the center of the aisle, singing as they came. In front of them children carried small nosegays. Older persons each carried a single bloom, a large white dahlia, which they dropped in a basket near the pulpit as they marched to their place in the choir.

In the years which have followed the golden anniversary, it has been observed that 95 per cent of the pioneer families down to the third and fourth generations are church members. The younger generations like their forefathers hold that, at the meeting, worship

is fundamental. Dignity, reverence and conservative behavior characterize the congregation. The general atmosphere of western hospitality and cordiality is always present.

Today younger generations are taking over. That they are enthusiastic in their undertaking is evidenced by the improvements at Skillman Grove and by numbers exceeding three thousand in attendance there. Leaders give their support not only to their own camp meeting, but they are known to furnish supplies and leadership in the camp meeting movement elsewhere. Joe, Dub and Lee Evans, the sons of the pioneers, Mr. and Mrs. George Evans, have supported Dr. Ralph Hall in establishing camp meetings in an area extending from Nagal Mesa, New Mexico, to the snowy range of Wyoming.

**WESTERN Christmas Cards**  
By THE FAMOUS WESTERN ARTIST  
H. D. Bugbee

TEX-CRAFT personalized cards created from original drawings by H. D. Bugbee with appropriate verses by S. Omar Barker. Printed in colors on beautiful french-fold paper. Choose from many designs.

SEE THEM NOW AT  
**THE RANKIN NEWS**  
Rankin, Texas

**DERRICK**  
DRIVE IN THEATRE  
Crane, Texas

**TONIGHT & FRIDAY**

ROMANCE - ADVENTURE  
THEIR LOVE WAS STRONG ENOUGH TO...  
**HIAWATHA**  
VINCENT EDWARDS - YVETTE DUGAY  
WITH LARSON STUART BARRELL

**LEO GORCEY in THE BOWERY BOYS**

THE BOWERY BOYS TRADE MINDS WITH A MONSTER!  
LAURENCE CHILLS AND THRILLS  
**Master Minds**  
HUNTZ HALL  
GABRIEL DELL - ALAN NAPHER  
ATLAS THE MONSTER... AND OTHER STORIES

**SATURDAY ONLY**

THE BEST OF MERRY MUSIC AND MERRY MAKING  
**ALL ASHORE**  
WICKY ROONEY - DICK HAYMES  
RAY McDONALD - PEGGY BYAN - BARBARA BATES

**SUNDAY - MONDAY**

MY FAVORITE SPY

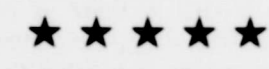
**TUESDAY - WED.**

HILARIOUS HOPE IS A SECRET AGENT!  
HE'S OUT TO DEBUT HIS FIRST...  
**BOB HOPE and LAMARR**

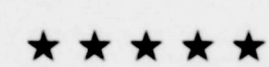
# SEE US FOR Everything For Your Office

## REMINGTON

- BOOKKEEPING MACHINES
- CALCULATORS
- ADDING MACHINES
- STANDARD & PORTABLE TYPEWRITERS
- OFFICE DESKS
- OFFICE CHAIRS
- OFFICE STANDS
- KARDEX SYSTEMS
- PHOTOSTAT EQUIPMENT



### STOWE-DAVIS FINE OFFICE FURNITURE



### NATIONAL - B&P - WILSON JONES

### BOOKKEEPING SUPPLIES



### COMMERCIAL PRINTING

### ADVERTISING

# The Rankin News Rankin, Texas

INVESTIGATE AND YOU'LL CHOOSE

## San Angelo College

Your parents, your high school principal and your friends who have attended SAC will all congratulate you on your choice.

Here you'll find: High Academic Standards, Inspiring Campus Life, Helpful Teachers, Credits Accepted by All Senior Colleges and Universities and a Stimulating Christian Environment.

Registration starts September 14. Write, phone or see the Registrar immediately for Dormitory Rooms or other information.

SAN ANGELO COLLEGE San Angelo, Texas

