

# Rosston



Looking down on Rosston from the west in early 1890.

## ROSSTON HISTORY

The Rosston area is made up of nature's beauty, which delights the senses and exalts the mind, possessing the qualities which caught the eye of early settlers, the hills making good lookouts for Indians, the fertile valleys which would yield a bountiful supply of grass, crops and food, the creeks with many flowing springs, which would give a supply of water. Being a wooded area there was plenty of wood for fuel and the building of log cabins for homes.

Manufactured goods were very scarce for the pioneers. Home grown and home made articles were a necessity. Native corn, wheat, salt pork, plenty of beef and other locally grown products made life possible, but the hardships encountered were great. Substitutes were used for coffee, clothes were not only handmade but usually handwoven too. Neighbors were really neighbors and relied on each other in those early days, as there was little communication with the rest of the world. The mail was brought by Pony Express. Transportation was by horseback and horse and buggy or wagon, or by foot.

Houses were built of logs and rawhide lumber from post oak timber, coming from the nearest sawmill. There are two houses in the Rosston area that still have the log cabins in them. Seth Bewley who came to Texas in 1882 built one cabin where Clyde Bewley, a grandson, now lives. The other is a place that M.W. Estes purchased from J.E. Totty in 1868. This became the home of John Gilliland in later years. John believes that M.W. Estes built the log cabin and barn. The oak lumber, used in the barn, coming direct from the sawmill, is made of four by four inch timber, hewn out for fitting and put together with wooden pegs. In later years pine siding has enclosed the log cabins, making the walls some twelve inches thick.

The first settlers, who pioneered the Rosston area were men of courage, seeking to explore a new horizon, knowing they would not have the basic necessities and comforts of life. One such settler was John N. Loring, who owned several thousand acres of land. When they came to the Rosston area, they brought their slaves with them. It has been said that Mr. Loring liked to gamble. Loring and his wife were great horse lovers, and also great racing fans. They spent a lot of time in St. Louis, Missouri, while their negro "boss", with many cowhands, took care of the horses. The negro woman was the housekeeper and took care of the children.

It was on the Loring's return from one of their many trips to St. Louis, that John Loring, being intoxicated, antagonized the negro man who was cutting wood. The negro could not please him, although he tried very hard to obey. After taking several "cuffings" from Loring, the negro killed him with an axe. He was never punished for this crime. Loring was buried at the spot where he was murdered, in a very dense wooded area. There were flowing springs and a branch near by which, since this incident have been called Loring Springs and Loring Branch. There was also a Loring Branch School District number 58, the exact location of which is not known.

The family erected a tombstone some five feet in height. The epitaph, on the tombstone, reads thus; John N. Loring, Husband of Martha A. Loring, Died February 12, 1857.

The tombstone also has the Masonic Emblem engraved on it. This land is now owned by Lola Christian Webb. Two of John Loring's sons, Tom and Bruce Loring, married Alida and Matilda McCracken.

W.T. Berry came in 1860. A number of his descendants still live in Rosston. The Menasco and Shegog families, so torn with grief after their losses in the last Indian raid of 1868, were anxious to leave the scene of this tragedy, and sold their holdings to Mr. Berry for twenty-three head of horses.

Some of the early settlers of this area have been mentioned elsewhere in this chronicle. Others who contributed greatly include: O.A. Cogburn, C.N. Jones, Mr. Dural, Mr. Daugherty, Mr. Roper, James A. Mathis, J.A. Baird, John M. Airheart, M.E. Cooper, Joseph McCracken, W. Palmer, Sewell Dover, William G. Robeson, W.M. Vess, T.B. Settle, Bill Meyer, Joe B. Scott, James K. Polk Christian, A.P. Penton, J.H. Kelley, Samuel Philips, James W. Jenkins, Bailey English, Jim Glance, Z.T. Edge, W.J. Robinson, John Raney, John Nesbett.

The first cotton in Cooke County was raised around Rosston in the early 1860's.

There are three well known and historic trails which came very close to Rosston; The Chisum Cattle Trail 1866-1880; The Butterfield Stage Line 1858-1861; and the Mormon Trail, with its varied route from Callisburg, going north of Gainesville and west of Muenster and coming into the Butterfield Stage Line at Rosston, The Butterfield is probably the most colorful and the most written about trail of its time.

Three Ross brothers, O.A., T.A., and W.J. came

to the Rosston area on a prospecting trip from Grayson County, in the early 1870's, decided to locate here, and bought land from S.E. Doss and J.M. Peery on which they established the town of Rosston. In the next few years they built a general mercantile store, cotton gin and mill. The town was first known as Rosstown, and later shortened to Rosston.

In 1873 there were forty-eight inhabitants in the village and the population surrounding the village was at least five hundred.

Mr. Jack Howeth, of the W.W. Howeth Company Land Title office of Gainesville, Texas, in his years of work with the people of Cooke County, has secured a map of the town plot of Rosston in its heyday, which gives block numbers, street names, and denotes a public square. Mr. Howeth said "Don't ask me where it came from or who drew it! I do not know." The map is very old and is now being held together with tape. A copy of the map has been made and is reproduced in conjunction with this history.

A woman's hardships were many during the early days. Women washed clothes by hand and hung them on nearby bushes to dry. Ashes from the home fire were a good cleanser. They soon learned to make soap from the grease of animals, using a "potion" of lye, grease and water. Corn meal constituted the principle ingredient in bread making, as flour was scarce. Because of this scarcity, biscuits were served only on rare occasions. Beef sold for 5¢ a pound, white sugar for 33¢ per pound; rice was 25¢ a pound; corn was \$ 1.37 per bushel; barley sold for \$ 2.00 a bushel; flour was \$ 8.00 for one hundred pounds; Irish potatoes were shipped in and sold at 12½¢ per pound.

A general merchandise store of the day included a wide variety of stock to meet all of the settler's needs. The stores in Rosston carried such items as shoes and clothing, yard goods and thread, and staple food items as well as tools to meet the farmer's needs, including bridles, saddles, horse collars and hardware supplies. The store built by the Raney brothers, included an extra room that ran the length of the store, in which caskets were stored. They were brought out from Gainesville on bundle wagons, the ordinary wagon not being wide enough to carry them.

W.M. Vess, grandfather of Clyde, Lonnie and Lois Bewley, split rails where the town of Rosston is now. He worked for 50¢ a day and bought land for \$ 3.50 an acre. Almanacs, the only authoritative source of information available, could be had for 25¢ each, by going to Gainesville for them.

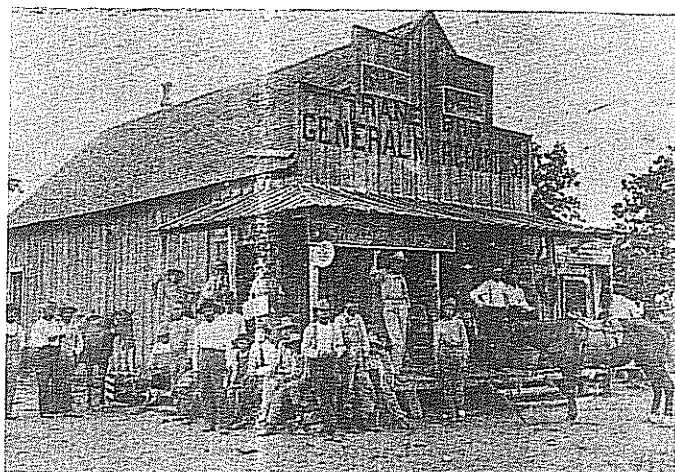
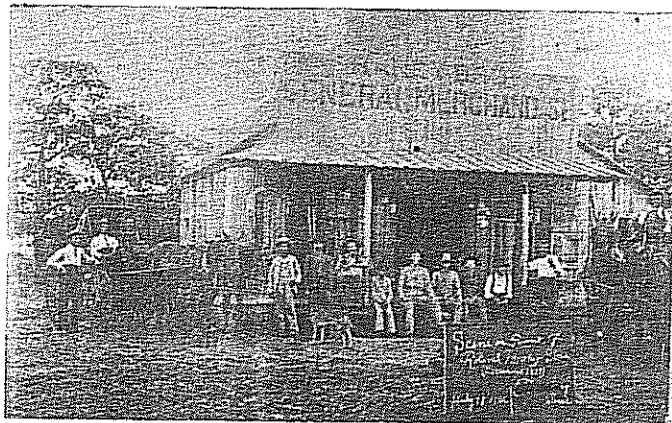
Banks were not needed in early days when cows were legal tender. Most dealings were made through exchanges of property. Little money changed hands.

Doctors of early days were: Dr. J.R. Harper, Dr. T.S. Booth, Dr. D.M. Higgins, Dr. Walter Johnson, Dr. Parish and Dr. Picken.

The growing town of Rosston in the early 1870's, felt the need of a drug store. The first known druggist was a Mr. Charlesworth. He and Dr. J.R. Harper, both being widowers and very close friends, lived together in the Glance house, across the road from the Dills hotel. They ate their meals at the hotel. Mammy Dills, who cooked the meals, would cut her pie in very small wedges in order to make it go further. One day, Dr. Harper, perhaps hoping for a more generous cut of pie, told Mammy Dills that had his mother served him that size piece of pie, when he was a boy, he would have cried! Dr. Harper later owned the drugstore and Henry, his son, was pharmacist.

The most thriving businesses in the early con-

munities were Blacksmith shops. In early Rosston, there were as many as two at one time. Charlie Mathis and Joe Stone were competitors. They shod horses, made and sharpened plow points and made and repaired wagons. Burt Moseley tells of standing on an Arm and Hammer wooden soda box and as Bob Martin heated the steel in the old forge, while it was red hot, Burt would hit it with a large hammer for shaping. This was called "striking" for a blacksmith.



Two pictures of Raney Brothers Store built in 1879 by Clay, Ike and Sarah Raney. Now owned by George Berry.

Rosston patronized as many as four general stores in the "boom" days. In 1868, Mrs. Angeline Raney came to Rosston with five children. In 1879, three of her children, Clay, Sam and Sarah, built the store that now stands in Rosston.

The lot where the two story hotel building stood, is now a residence, but the hotel was operated for many years by J.H. P. (Pappy) Dills as a hostelry.

Rosston reached its maximum growth about 1912, when there were as many as eight business establishments in the town. As well as the four general stores and the drugstore and a blacksmith shop operated then by Charlie Mathis and John and Ed White-side, there was a saloon run by Bill "Doc" Krunk and a barber shop. There was also a cotton Gin, run by J.R. Roach, and a flour mill.

Burt Mosely recalls that his father, Roland Mosely, worked at the flour mill for the Ross brothers. The mill, run by oxen, had an inclined wheel. As the oxen stepped on the wheel, the wheel turned, setting the mill in motion for grinding of grain to make flour and meal.

Rosston is in Justice of the Peace precinct number 4, but the precinct has not elected a justice or constables for a number of years. In the early days however, Rosston certainly needed law and order, as there were many fights, bootleg "booze" and much "cuttin and shootin". Constables have included S.P. Durham, Ben Fletcher, C.C. Henderson, E.R. Moseley and Tom Ford, who served in that capacity for seventeen years until he was elected sheriff of the county over 50 years ago. A court of Justice was often held in Rosston. For lack of trained legal counsel, A.P. "Price" Penton Sr. often acted as spokesman for litigants. Some of the Justices serving during these times were: Thos Willis, H.J. Dills, F.M. Ford, O.A. Cogburn, W.T. McClure W. M. Vess.

"Ole" Clear Creek has flooded, rumbled and roared its own stories through the years. There were times when her banks could not carry the water and flooded the bottom lands, washing out her bridges, making the roads impassable with sand dunes and taking crops and fences down the creek. Children in school, who had to cross the creek to get home, would have to spend the night with friends when Clear Creek was on a rampage.

After a big rain, people would gather at the creek, to watch her capers as she carried her huge trees, or any other debris that was in her way, down the creek. Along with her sorrows, she also brought joys. Children played in her beautiful white sand banks and waded in the clear water. There would be large holes of water left, after one of her performances, making a wonderful place for swimming and fishing.

There has not been any flooding in several years, thanks to the conservation practices instituted by the Clear Creek Watershed Authority, formed in 1960 on a charter issued by the State of Texas. George Berry of Rosston is on the board of directors of the Authority. Thanks to the many retarding structures that have been built, Clear Creek has been tamed.

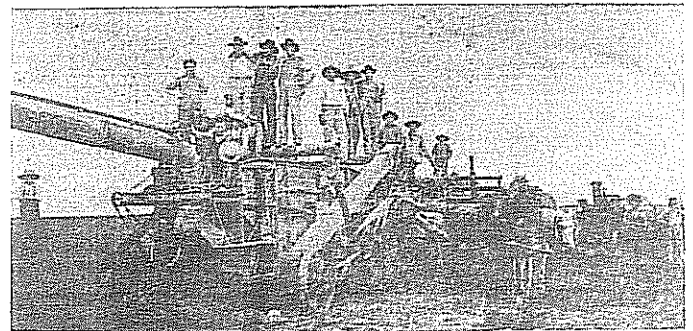
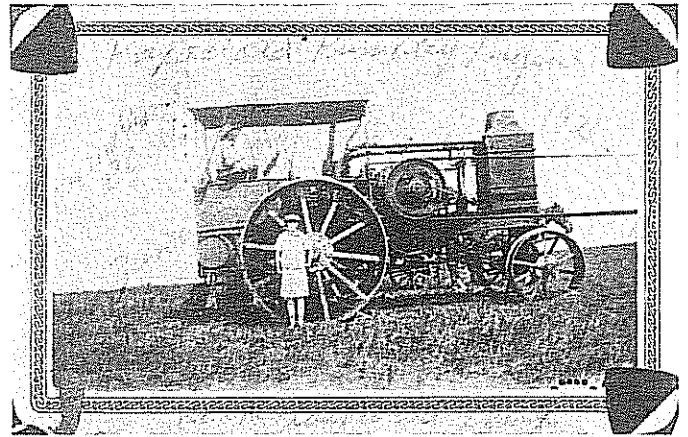
In 1943, George Berry bought Rosston's one remaining store from Joe Stone, and is now Rosston's grocer. The store building is ninety-three years old, and catches the eye of all who pass by. Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Christian and daughter Judy of Santa Rosa, California, returned home for Thanksgiving in 1971, after an absence of nearly 18 years. One of their first remarks was "We want to go and see George Berry's store and get a Rosston soda pop."

Some of the other store owners in the intervening years have been; Ross brothers, John Dill, Pappy Dennison, Al Smith, Fate and Rowland Moseley, Drew Marrs, Alvin and Delia Totty, J.B. Pinkston, Charlie Dickenson, W.T. McClure, J.R. Roach, S.P. Durham and George Akin.

There are two churches in Rosston. The Baptist was the first church, organized in 1880, the Methodist organized in 1890. A small group of Church of Christ members met for three years at the Ross Point school building.

The Rosston community has seen a great number of changes in the past one hundred years--and yet a great many things have not changed. The village is still nestled in this high valley on the banks of its sometime friend, Clear Creek. The live oaks and pecan trees still flourish. Some of the fruit trees planted by those who have gone on, still bear fruit. The only Indians around now are the local boys on their motorcycles. The advent of paved roads and a modern telephone system have brought Rosston into

close contact with the outside world. Television aerials are liberally sprinkled around. Machinery replaced horses for working. There is no hitching rail in front of George Berry's store--it has been replaced by two gas tanks. But the people are the same--the same names, with a sprinkling of a few new ones, There is an occasional "tempest in our teapot", but in times of need, neighbors still rally around in the same way.



An early day Threshing Outfit.

#### THE INDIAN RAID OF 1868

Perhaps the greatest hardships confronting the early settlers of the Rosston Community were the attacks made by the Indians. The Kiowa and Comanche Indians, who had been placed on a reservation in the Indian Territory by the United States Government, were the tribes who crossed the Red River and entered Montague and North west Cooke Counties. In addition to their love for horses, they were undoubtedly prompted in these raids by resentment against the invasion of the white settlers into the land they loved, and had once called their own.

It was on January 5, 1868 that Chief Big Tree, leading 100 or more Kiowas, made the infamous raid on Willa Walla, Blocker and Clear Creek Valley. Homes were burned, women and children were captured, horses taken and perhaps more damage would have been done had not George Masoner, a brave man, acted as the "Paul Revere" of the valley.

In this raid it was the W.G. Menasco family that felt the greatest loss. W.G. Menasco, his wife and two small daughters, and his aged father, lived east of Rosston where Odessa and Jack Berry now live. The two small daughters, Mae and Lizzie were visiting an aunt, Mrs. Edward Shegog who lived across Clear Creek one fourth mile from the present town of Rosston.

W.G. Menasco was out among his cattle on this warm afternoon, when the elder Menasco heard that the raging Indians were approaching. He left his daughter-in-law alone in the home and hurried across Clear Creek to bring the two little grand-daughters; his daughter, Mrs. Shegog, and her small baby with him. After sounding the alarm, all hurried toward the W.G. Menasco's home, attempting to run the approaching Indians. Just as this group reached the crossing on Clear Creek, the large band of Indians rushed in upon them, scalping and killing Grandfather Menasco and taking the three children and Mrs. Shegog as captives. When the infant started crying, Chief Big Tree gave signs for Mrs. Shegog, the infant's mother to hush its crying. When efforts to stop the crying failed, the chief snatched the little one from its mother's arms and rode quickly away, soon returning and pointing an index finger to the sky, mumbling as if to say "papoose gone to happy hunting ground".

Lois and Lonnie Bewley remember their mother telling them of Louis Shegog picking up the body of the baby which was frozen to the ground by the extreme cold that followed that night. Louis Shegog, who was a relative of the baby made his home with Mr. and Mrs. Will Vess for eight years.

Later that night, after darkness fell and the terrific blizzard hampered their traveling, the Indians began to slow down. The brave and courageous pioneers seemed to accelerate their pursuit in search of the Indian trail. They were able to overtake the raiders near the small village of Hood.

Lafayette Jones, a Civil War Veteran who came with his parents from North Carolina in 1859, and settled in the Rosston neighborhood, was one of the men pursuing the Indians after they left the scene of the Menasco tragedy. No man ever possessed more courage and tenacity than did "Fate" as he was often called. Fate said, "I was riding some distance in advance of our men, acting as a guard. The Indians had a herd of horses they had gathered on this raid. Though the moon was full the clouds kept us from seeing very far ahead of us. We followed the trail only by the noise of horses hooves ahead. At a point ahead I became convinced that a trap was set for our riders. I turned about and reported but some wanted to go ahead I said, No, I have been in that trap once and I am not going back in there."

A short skirmish ensued, the herd of horses even stampeded subsequently returning to their ranges. After the skirmish referred to above, the Indians took a course Southeast and came to Elm Creek, a short distance from the present town of Gainesville. It was thought that after the Indians lost their herd of horses they decided not to do more raiding but would return to Indian Territory as soon as possible. The cold and the darkness of the night must have confused them as to their location. The Indians came to a quick halt for a consultation, then the crowing of roosters at a farm house near by must have caused them to panic, fearing the presence of the pale face. Mrs. Shegog who had been allowed to dismount made her escape. Dazed from shock and numb from the exposure to extreme weather, she was scarcely able to make her way. The crowing of the rooster at a near by farm house guided her steps until she came in view of a light in a window. Mrs. Shegog soon found herself in the yard of a Mr. Sam Doss. The family of negroes living in Mr. Doss's yard were first to see Mrs. Shegog and, fearing that she might be an Indian, rushed in to the Doss home announcing that an Indian stood in his yard. Mr. Doss took the near frozen

woman into his home, giving her good care, and soon returned her to her home.

W.G. Menasco, deep in grief went to all of the Indian agencies along the frontier, thinking he might find his daughters being held to collect ransom.

Spring came but it brought with it no joy to the stricken neighborhood and broken families. The uncertain fate of the two little girls was worse than the most agonizing sorrow for the dead. Finally, after months of anxiety, the skeletons of the two small girls were found by Charlie Grant and other cow hands, on the prairies between Elm Creek and Clear Creek along the route taken by the Indian invaders the remains of the small girls were brought back for burial in Rosston Cemetery. Eliza Cleo McCracken Berry, wife of W.T. Berry, cut the hair from the little girl's heads, washed, curled and perfumed it and sent it to their mother.

This grizzly Indian raid left an indelible mark on the Rosston community. The Shegog and Menasco families, so torn by grief, sold their land and left the area shortly there after. Standing on one of Rosston's peaceful hills today, and looking down into the quiet valley, it is hard to imagine the agony that was suffered here and yet, at dusk, looking from the valley up to the hills, a vivid imagination is not stretched too hard to see the silent outlines of the Indians on their ponies, ready to attack.

#### BUTTERFIELD STAGE LINE

"Remember Boys, nothing on earth must stop the United States Mail!" John Butterfield shouted to his men.

On Thursday, September 16, 1858, John Butterfield and Waterman Ormsby, a correspondent for the New York Herald, started out with the first mail bags over the route from St. Louis, Missouri to San Francisco, California. Butterfield went only to Fort Smith, Arkansas and waited there for the East bound coach. Ormsby traveled the complete route to San Francisco.

The first mail delivery from St. Louis arrived in San Francisco in twenty-three days, twenty-three and a half hours well within the twenty-five day limit. It was just after sunrise, Sunday, October 10, that the first overland mail arrived in San Francisco from St. Louis. John Butterfield in Ft. Smith met the east bound stage coach, which had left San Francisco on the same day he had begun his trip west. He arrived in St. Louis on time with the mail declaring both directions a success.

Pres. Buchanan telegraphed a congratulation to Butterfield upon the success of the venture. He felt that the establishment of the stage coach line would bring about a chain of settlements from East to West and communication would open up profitable businesses all along the route. The word "Overland" was used by merchants in manufacturing boots, hats, coats and even toys, bringing a rousing business from East to West.

John Butterfield kept trying to keep the venture successful. The federal government gave a \$ 600,000 a year subsidy for the operation of the line. There were over 1,000 employees, men to drive the stages, men riding shot gun, men at relay stations and many others. There was a relay station some five or six miles east of Rosston known as Davidson Station. These stations had horses, station masters, food and water. It was necessary to have enough supplies to sustain life for station masters, feed passengers, and protect everyone, and repair coaches, as well as providing fresh horses. On the southwest swing the

route crossed the Red River and into Sherman, Texas, and continued on, passing through Rosston on the way West. The Butterfield Trail came down the hill east of Rosston very near to where the present farm to market black top runs.

During the Civil War, Appaches and Confederate soldiers attacked the stages and relay stations, disrupting the service. On March 2, 1861, the post Master General was ordered to discontinue service on the Butterfield route on or before July 1, 1861. The route eventually fell under the control of W.G. Fargo and Henry Wells. Both men had been John Butterfield's partners years before.



Rosston Cotton Gin  
COTTON GINS

During the Civil War a little cotton was raised around Rosston, but the acreage was so small that the seed was separated from the lint by hand.

In 1866 the crop amounted to several hundred pounds, and two of the enterprising young men who had seen hard service in the Civil War decided they would take the entire crop to a gin. They heard of a gin somewhere east of Gainesville in the Cross timbers, but, due to the lateness of the season, it was closed. Hearing of another gin, they drove there, only to find it closed. They then drove to a Grayson County gin. The owner agreed to gin their cotton provided they would help. The fourth day after leaving, they were on their way back home. Both are buried in Rosston Cemetery. They were Lafayette Jones and Julius McCracken, still remembered in Rosston as "Uncle Fate and Uncle Jule".

In early 1870, Ross Bros. had the first cotton gin in Rosston. Sometime after, no one knows the exact date, there was a gin run by oxen, about one quarter mile from the present store. In the early 1900's another was built in Rosston where Luther Links now lives. The old dug water well is still being used by Mr. Links.

Burt Moseley, the oldest citizen of the Rosston area, recalls that Z.T. Maxwell owned the gin at one time as did Joe Stone and J.D. Brown. Harve Glance fired the boiler with Cord wood; Alfonso Snell ran the stands; Burt Moseley operated the packer and J.D. (Jake) Brown was weigher and bookkeeper. Jake would hide his whiskey from the other boys. Snell and Burt found where the whiskey was hidden. They learned they could exchange a drink of whiskey for labor. At one time they gave Will Williams a drink to clean soot out of the flue. Burt also tells of bumble-

bees being somewhat of a problem. The boys being rather mischievous, put a dog in the flue with the bees. Jake went after them with his hat. He put his hat back on his head, and the yelling started, as a live bee was still in the hat. For a short time the customers could not catch the seed on their wagons to take home,, as they would have to have ridden with bumble bees.

There were several more gins in the area; one on the old Harry place; another at Prairie Point. It seems the oldest in the area would have been the one at Fort Blocker. Opal Christian Berry now owns the land where this gin stood. John Nesbitt was one of the last owners of the Rosston Gin. Nesbitt was a bachelor. It was here he met and married Bertie Meyer. J.R. Roach came to Rosston in 1910 and purchased the gin from Nesbitt. His sons Wesley (Skinny), Dee and C.P. (Cobe) Roach came also. The three sons worked in the gin along with Morton Jones and Tom Hill. Cobe met and Married Rubye Sutton and they still live in the area. The Roach family was the last to own the gin.



Taking a load of cotton to Gainesville to be sold.  
John Dill driving the team.

#### SIX CENT COTTON

To you my fellow farmer  
I sing a brand new song  
Although my tune is doubtful  
And often slightly wrong.

The works however awkward  
With simple truth are crowned  
Tis about our raising cotton  
At just six cents a pound.

Set out the old sour butter milk  
We'll drink to all the land  
Make some good brand coffee.  
Quite strong nuf to stand.

Oh, make a yellow corn dodger  
And bake it devilish brown  
I'm a man who raises cotton  
At just six-cents a pound.

March on to picking cotton  
Strap on a duckin sack  
With cotton burrs hitting at your face  
And another one at your back.

Pick cotton on til dooms day  
Til Gabriel's Trumpet sounds  
The poor man's curse is cotton  
At just six-cents a pound.