



# On The Vine

## GRAPEVINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

V28 #9 • DEDICATED TO PRESERVING GRAPEVINE AND TEXAS HISTORY • SEPTEMBER 2025

### CALVIN PRICE DORMAN WROTE ABOUT...

## *Looking Back at Life in Grapevine 100 Years Ago*

The “Grape Gatsby” theme of the 39th Annual GrapeFest® causes us to think about life in Grapevine in the 1920s. Calvin Price Dorman, who was born in 1920, addressed this decade and more in his book, “*Life on the Grapevine Prairie*,” published in 2003 and sold at the Grapevine Historical Museum.

In his book, Dorman writes of that time, “No large game such as buffalo or bear existed here then; big game had become extinct here by the end of the 1870s, I was told later. I did not see or hear any wolves, coyotes or panthers in the area but did see two wolves in Denton County west of Roanoke near the present Texas Motor Speedway. Cottontail and jackrabbits were common as well as opossum, skunk, fox squirrels and terrapins. The creeks were filled with sun perch, catfish, carp and snapping turtles. Copperhead, black snakes and king snakes were common. I never saw a rattlesnake, but some probably existed.

“Grapevine was an early-established pioneer community of about 800 people in the mid-1920s. It was located on the east edge of the Eastern Crosstimbers landform which is a sand land strip about 15 miles wide, stretching westward to the town of Keller. All of the business part of Grapevine was north of the railroad; it ran from Willhoite’s Garage to the water works, with most of the stores on the west side of Main Street. Main Street may have been paved at this time, but some wooden sidewalks still existed. The most imposing structures were the feed mill and the water tower. The water tower, pump station and the firehouse occupied a whole block north of Texas Street (at Main Street) and its perimeter was lined with young sycamore trees. A hose outlet, located on Main Street, was a

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### MUSINGS FROM THE MAYOR

## *A Pioneer’s Year, in verse*

*Something different for this month - a bit of poetry that I composed a decade ago for dedication of the Cotton Ginner’s house in the Museum District, which I hope captures the feeling of the life led by the early generations of Grapevine’s settlers...*



When the crick is running water and the cotton’s in th’ ground,  
And the papa quail are whistling with such a peaceful sound.  
And the early corn is tasseling in the pasture by the dale,  
And the toughness of my team of mules, never seems to fail.  
Oh, it makes a feller want to shout Halleluiah to th’ Lord!  
When the crick is running water and the cotton’s in th’ ground.

When the crick is running water and the cotton’s in th’ stalk,  
And the hoes are sharpen and the weeds have all been chopped,  
And ma has been shopping and the cabbage is in the croc,  
And the crops are full of promise and the town is full of talk,  
Oh, it makes a feller want to shout Halleluiah to th’ Lord!  
When the crick is running water and the cotton’s in th’ stalk.

When the crick is running water and the cotton’s in th’ bloom,  
And the days are hot and muggy and the baby’s coming soon.  
And the channel cat are running down below the dam,  
And my old hound dog’s a resting, curled upon the ground.  
Oh, it makes a feller want to shout Halleluiah to th’ Lord!  
When the crick is running water and the cotton’s in th’ bloom

When the crick is running water and we’ve started pulling boles,  
And the dusty days of summer have given way to yellow gold.  
And the nights are getting longer and the hog is in the vat,  
And with Christmas time a coming the geese are getting fat.  
Oh, it makes a feller want to shout Halleluiah to th’ Lord!  
When the crick is running water and the cotton’s in th’ boles.

When the crick is running water and the cotton is in th’ bale,  
And the cycle is nearly over, and the hay is up for sale.  
And th’ bank notes are paid in full and the gospel songs are sung,  
And at last there is peace and rest for me and all the little ones.  
Oh, it makes a feller want to shout Halleluiah to th’ Lord!  
When the crick is running water and the cotton’s in th’ bale.

-- William D. Tate  
July 2015

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## Smaller, quieter times defined Grapevine 100 years ago

source for people hauling water. A nice croquet court was on the extreme south edge next to Texas Street which was free for aspiring wicketeers.

“Grapevine had a Post Office with postal boxes for each household since there was no city mail delivery. We had rural free delivery (RFD) six days a week on Route 3, but box numbers were not required. Not long after we arrived, the local ice company started a rural delivery once a week. They furnished a cardboard sign to place on a front window with the amount of ice desired displayed at the 12 o'clock

position. The ice man carried the ice with tongs on a leather protector fastened to his back.

“Steam locomotives pulled passenger and freight cars on the “Cotton Belt.” About 1930, passenger service was dropped and the steam engines were replaced with a small diesel that was jokingly called “the dinkie.” A jitney service came into being and later on, a major bus line had a stop in Grapevine. Highways 114 and 121 had not been built yet, and there was no direct way to Fort Worth or Dallas.



Employees and visitor pose for the camera during a quiet moment inside the Grapevine Post Office on Main Street in the mid 1920s.

small Ferris wheel. It amuses me to look back and see these rural kids, raised with horses, eagerly climb onto a gaudily painted wooden horse, with a rhythmic up and down motion and traveling in a fixed circular motion around the carousel axis. Attractions for prizes included hoop tossing over pegs, throwing baseballs at “kewpie” dolls, a shooting gallery and the shell game (sleight of hand). A fortune teller was usually present in a tent isolated from the crowd and eager to tell a person his or her fortune for a price. They told fortunes through tea leaves, gazing into a crystal ball, or palm

reading. One fortune teller was billed as “Ramo the Mystic” and did so well that he stayed in town after the ‘carnies’ moved to another location. Apparently, his mystic powers did not extend to dogs because his pet dog strayed and he ran an ad in the Lost-Found section of the local paper trying to find his dog. (Our family did not avail of his mystic services,” Calvin Dorman wrote.

A century ago Grapevine was a small hometown with heart and vision, whose people did their best for the community. Grapevine today continues to attract that same kind of people who make our community a unique, wonderful place to call home.

—Calvin Dorman and Sallie Andrews



Cured all ills?

“In the mid-1920s to the early 1930s, medicine shows would come to town, usually in the early fall. These groups consisting of three to four people, always had a self-described ‘Doctor’ who possessed a secret medicinal blend having a wide range of cures for most any illness, from toe ache to rheumatism. One doctor claimed his secret formula was given to him by a Kickapoo Indian medicine man on his deathbed. The doctor’s support cast was two to three stand-up comedians. They told crude jokes, sung ditties and were roving salesmen to the crowd, peddling elixir. When they sold the last bottle, they headed back to the stage, loudly hollering ‘Sold out, Doctor.’ Quite a bit

of this medicine was sold, but not to the Dorman family, and the cure, if any, was never known to us.

“Carnivals came to town usually in late summer or early fall for a week’s stay. Rides would include a merry-go-round, a ‘whirly ride’ and sometimes a

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## DID THE 1920S ACTUALLY ROAR IN GRAPEVINE?

*How We Had Fun in the 1920s*

The 2025 edition of Grapefest is now behind us. This year's "Grape Gatsby" theme promised hundreds of thousands of visitors a taste of the fabled "Roaring '20s" - an atmosphere of uninhibited revelry and anything-goes celebration.

In reality, entertainment options in Grapevine during the 1920s were considerably more sedate. Back then, Grapevine was a small Texas farming community. We had no speakeasies - Grapevine was "dry" long before Prohibition took hold. That didn't mean you couldn't obtain liquor. Druggists became a legal if limited source of liquor for "medicinal purposes," and home-made stills were not unheard of, if rarely mentioned openly.

Local churches were home to the biggest regular social gatherings, but there were also a few public spaces. For several summers we supported a local baseball team, and in 1927 a roller skating rink stayed open from 1 PM until 11 at night on weekends.

In 1924 the first Palace Theatre began, showing silent movies in a single-story building, changing out feature attractions several times each week. Meanwhile, the Woodman of the World Hall was the site of regular concerts and plays staged by the public school and the Bay View Club, as well as occasional visiting performers.

Other entertainers came through town and set up tents -- the Joy Boys Minstrels, a traveling circus, and other acts. In April 1923, the Wessleman Stock Company pitched their tent, took out ads in the *Grapevine Sun*, and performed their big western comedy-drama *The Serpent and the*

*Dove*" supplemented by vaudeville acts.

Musically-speaking, the town got an early introduction to the 1920's controversial music form - jazz - in January 1920, when the TCU Jazz Quintette trekked here to perform at the high school. That didn't inspire any local jazz bands that we know of, but the Grapevine Municipal Band (at once point boasting 40 members!) played monthly concerts for years at the W.O.W. Hall. More in tune with local music tastes were the country fiddle bands - the Rabbit Twisters and the Coon Hunters.

During this decade, all three of these groups made regular appearances on the exciting new medium of "radio," driving to Dallas or Fort Worth to play to an invisible audience on stations WFAA and WBAP. Radio listening became a major pastime in the 1920s. Dedicated "radio-bugs" would stay up late at night to try to pull in distant stations, hoping to hear a hot band like the Coon-Sanders Original Night-hawk Orchestra on WDAF in Kansas City.

Meanwhile, radio performers came through town for live shows, drawing crowds to the Palace Theatre or the W.O.W. Hall. It was Grapevine's closest link to vaudeville, which was really a big-city attraction. Fort Worth and Dallas had huge auditoriums where thousands were entertained by big names like Houdini and Mae West, and rising comics like Jack Benny and Bob Hope. Dallas or Fort Worth both had real gangsters and speakeasies. Fort Worth advertised their Casino Park with

**COMING**  
**WORLD'S GREATEST**  
**Radio Artists**

**Saturday, October 1st, W. O. W. Hall**  
**7:30 P.M.**

---

**Bud Reynolds**  
World Champion Non-Stop Piano Player

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The Famous Snow Ball and Sta Fresh Comedians  
No Others Like Them

---

**THE PRETTY GIRLS ORCHESTRA**  
This Alone Is Worth the Admission

---

Steve Austin and His Barnyard Animals  
And Numerous Other Characters Combined In  
the Best Vaudeville Ever Presented in Grapevine.

Every Radio Fan has heard these artists, and this  
is your chance to see and hear them in person.

---

Reserved Seats 35c on Sale at Spiaks Drugstore  
Other Seats 15c and 25c

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**Grapevine Fire Department**

*In 1927, the Fire Department held a fundraiser that promised fun and excitement for just about anybody.*

bathing girls and jazz bands, while Dallas hosted the annual State Fair of Texas each autumn.

How could Grapevine compete with that? We tried our best. In 1922 and for half a decade thereafter, the biggest, most exciting event in Grapevine was the **Community Fair** each fall. No opportunities for Gatsby-like madness here, but everything that the city could pack into a few days, they did: a parade, a carnival, political speeches, concerts, greased-pig-races, educational exhibits, "negro boxing", pie eating and more.

The Grapevine Community Fair is the direct ancestor of modern Grapefest. Such were the entertainment options available to a small town one hundred years ago.

--Larry Groebe

IT'S A DIRTY JOB, BUT SOMEBODY HAD TO DO IT...

## Grapevine's "Town Scavenger"

Grapevine once had an official **town scavenger**. To modern ears that's a curious job title -- hiring someone to do -- what, exactly? In fact this scavenger's hunt was a messy one. In the days before modern sewage and garbage collection, a town Scavenger's job was to be a collector of waste and an overseer of outhouses.

Such a delightful term for such a messy human business! Scavengers had been paid positions since at least the 19th century. As villages grew, public health and safety made such positions ever more necessary. In May 1914, the Grapevine town council posted official ordinance #24, creating the position of Town Scavenger.

As described in the ordinance, the job description was to "clean and lime all dry closets or privvies ...at least once each month and collect legal fees for such service, from the owners or tenants in charge of said dry closets or privvies." Powered lime was dropped

down the holes to reduce odors and reduce insect population.

The Town Scavenger was authorized to collect 25 cents for each private privy and 50 cents for those "used in connection with a business house or hotel" on his monthly rounds. The ordinance also officially made it illegal to dump human waste "in any street or alley or on the premises of another person." All collected refuse had to be deposited well outside city limits. Violations to the ordinance could incur a fine or five dollars or less.

The ordinance passed at the May 15, 1914 Town Council meeting, and a man named Tom Jasper was elected the first Scavenger. To announce and enforce the new law, five hundred copies of the ordinance were printed and placed on all the outhouses around town.

Being a rural community, Grapevine didn't begin installing a modern sanitary infrastructure for



*This 1940 poster pointed out how poop was everybody's problem.*

another dozen years. In the spring of 1926 a bond package passed that allocated money for the city's first proper sewer system, and although outhouses persisted for years here and there, the position of Town Scavenger began its slide to the dustbin of history.

--Larry Groebe

September 22, 7 PM at the Vine Arts & Events Center, 225 W. Worth St.

## John F. Kennedy and the Sixth Floor Museum



**Stephen Fagin, Head of Curatorial at The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza, discusses Dallas in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination, and the fascinating story of how the former Texas School Book Depository building became a world-renowned museum.**

**Then Share Your Story! Anyone with memories of the assassination or the 1960s in general is invited to record a brief interview with Mr. Fagin for the Museum's ongoing Oral History Project (as time permits). Your story will be preserved and become a part of history. Come early!**



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