

On The Vine

GRAPEVINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

V29#2 • DEDICATED TO PRESERVING GRAPEVINE AND TEXAS HISTORY • FEBRUARY 2026

THEIR CREATIVITY WAS “PATENTLY OBVIOUS”

Those Inventive Grapevine Citizens

Early on in our nation’s history, America established a reputation for inventiveness. “Yankee ingenuity” was recognized early in the 19th century, and soon we came to see ourselves as “a nation of inventors.”

In the 1800s, even plain folk could see how technology and progress were transforming the world as never before. There was no better example than Thomas Edison, whose phonograph and light bulb lit up the public imagination. The next Edison might be just around the corner, bringing something new into the world and improving

our daily lives. Anyone, anywhere might have that next great idea and get it patented. Even someone from Grapevine.

The US Patent Office archives reveal a burst of inventiveness coming from ordinary folk in the decades after the Civil War through World War I. Grapevine residents alone patented nearly a score of inventions during those years. None of their devices challenged Edison’s breakthroughs. However, they addressed the very practical concerns of rural life on the Grape Vine Prairie.

Surprisingly, most local inventors weren’t the town’s leading citizens, whose names reappear through decades of our history. Generally they were ordinary farmers, albeit men (and they were all men) who hit upon a clever twist or a new way to improve something they faced doing regularly.

Devices that could make farming easier or more efficient form the most greatest number of patents from Grapevine. In the 1880s, James Woodard patented a *Cotton Stalk Chopper*, while William Tillman received two patents (and a partial assignment on a third) for *improvements in fences*. In the 1890s, Benjmon

MUSINGS FROM THE MAYOR

The Morehead Family

James Tracy Morehead was the son of John Morehead, a descendant of Charles Morehead of Scotland. Charles Morehead was the first of the family to immigrate to America in 1630. James was born on March 27, 1809 in Rockbridge County, Virginia. He married Christina Jackson in 1833 from Bristol, Virginia. They had two daughters, Mary Hudgins and Martha Quayle, and a son, Jacob Lyon Morehead, who was born May 22, 1843 the same year the Treaty at Bird’s Fort was signed. The Morehead family moved to Saltville, Virginia where Sally Shannon, a school teacher, became James’ third wife. In 1852, the family started by wagon train to Texas with other families and settled on the Halford Prairie in 1852.

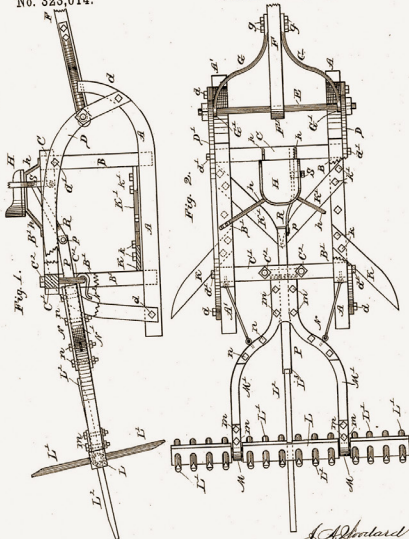
James built a dogtrot log cabin east of town. He later added two rooms and a loft, and they were covered with siding in 1857. The property was sold to R. M. Gano, a doctor, minister, and Confederate General, and it became the Gano family home until after the Civil War. J. T. Morehead was Grape Vine’s first attorney, and in 1854 he was elected the second judge of Tarrant County. That same year he met A. F. Leonard, Henry Suggs and others for the purpose of laying out a town and arranging for



UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

JAMES A. WOODARD, OF GRAPE VINE, TEXAS, ASSIGNOR OF ONE-HALF TO ANDREW J. HALFORD, OF SAME PLACE.
COTTON-STALK CHOPPER.

(No Model.)
J. A. WOODARD.
COTTON STALK CHOPPER.
No. 323,014. Patented July 28, 1885.



Witnesses
John C. Miller
Ray E. Brown

J. Woodard
Inventor
By Lafayette Kingham
Attorney.

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Local Inventors with Fresh Ideas

Wilkinson patented a combination *hog pen and feeding trough*, John Glenn a *wire tightener* that took up the slack on wire fences, while James Foster and John Miller received a patent on a *hoe sharpener*. A few decades later, local blacksmith and former cowboy William “Tuck” Richardson created a multi-purpose *adjustable plow*.

Other patents were focused on improving home life. An 1882 *Ventilating Attachment to Hearths* patented by Joshua Howard was intended to warm two-story houses by spreading upstairs heat to the floor below. A new and improved *Sash Balance* invented by Charles Estill helped windows stay open. Charles Millican, longtime Grapevine blacksmith, patented a *floor jack* in 1904 that kept floorboards in place while homes were being built, and Charles Johnson created a *revolving gate* in 1902. 46-year-old Willie Cribbs was the listed inventor of a fancy *quilting frame* in 1913.

Three other patents from townspeople all revolved around that most important and visible piece of 19th century technology - the railroad. John Gassaway, Junius Yates, and Joel Millican all were granted patents on devices related to coupling and uncoupling railroad cars. Gassaway’s patent was approved in 1878, a full ten years before the railroad even arrived in Grapevine — and when the inventor was apparently just 18 years old.

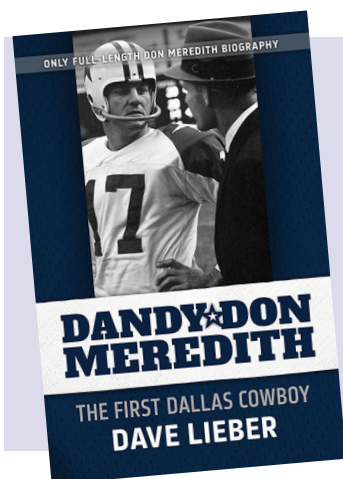
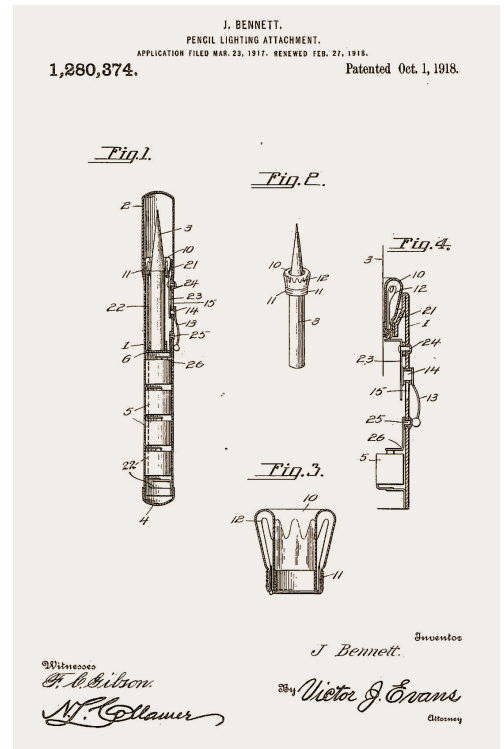
One patented invention that certainly was ingenious was a pencil with a lightbulb attached, so that you could write in the dark. It sounds like the kind of clever gadget a 20th-century boy raised on “Tom Swift” stories might dream up. In this case, the boy was 17-year-old Jerrell Bennett of Grapevine. His device used a small battery and ring-shaped light bulb that

slipped over the pen or pencil, and his patent was granted on October 1, 1918. Jerrell Bennett went on to become an obstetrician and pediatrician who served Tarrant County for decades before his death in 1975.

It’s tempting to speculate on the motivations of these homespun inventors. Were they hoping for riches and fame? Was it to protect their great brainstorms from being stolen? Or was it a case of someone pointing out that they’d had a good idea that just ought to be acknowledged?

As technology rapidly became more complex and the world more mechanized in first decades of the twentieth century, the romantic image of the lone inventor - the next Thomas Edison burning the midnight oil — was being replaced by the very industrial-scale research facilities that Edison’s own successes had enabled him to create. Edison’s creation of an “invention factory” was actually one of his most important inventions, but it brought an end to an era when ordinary Grapevine citizens might submit their own ingenuity to the Patent Office for the world to judge.

-- Larry Groebe



February 23 Historical Society Meeting: Dandy Don Meredith: The First Dallas Cowboy with Dave Lieber

Author Dave Lieber always tells an entertaining story. Past visits have focused on Amon Carter and Ross Perot. This month he returns with his latest book, the first-ever biography of Cowboys quarterback Don Meredith, a colorful figure who found even more fame in the announcer’s booth on “Monday Night Football.”

THE VINE ARTS CENTER • 225 W. WORTH
6:30 PM REFRESHMENTS • FREE EVENT

190 YEARS AGO, HE DRAFTED HISTORY

George Childress, Author of the Texas Declaration of Independence

George C. Childress was an important and complicated young man who by the age of 37 had left his mark on Texas in a grand way. It is almost universally acknowledged that he was the primary author of the Texas Declaration of Independence.

Born in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1804, Childress attended the Davidson Academy (later called the University of Nashville). He was admitted to the Tennessee bar in 1828 and also married Margaret Vance that same year. Childress practiced law and was the editor of the *Nashville Banner* and *Nashville Advertiser* newspapers in 1834, the same year he made his first trip to Texas. His uncle, Sterling C. Robertson, was organizing the Robertson’s Colony in Central Texas and ultimately brought in 600 families. George Childress was eager to get involved. In March 1835, Childress

became the father of a son, but his wife died just a few months later. George and his baby son came to Texas in December 1835 and made it to the Robertson Colony by January 1836.

In February 1836, Childress and his uncle were elected to represent Milam Municipality at the Convention of 1836 at Washington-on-the-Brazos. Childress called the convention to order and subsequently introduced a resolution authorizing a committee of five members to draft a Declaration of Independence. Upon adoption of the resolution, Childress was named chairman of the committee which also included Edward Conrad, James Gaines, Bailey Hardeman, and Collin



McKinney. The next day, on March 2, 1836, the Declaration of Independence was presented and adopted by 59 delegates at the Convention. It is believed that Childress likely brought a pre-written draft with him to the convention.

The Texas Declaration of Independence structure and tone strongly resemble the United States Declaration of Independence. It focused on the rights of citizens to life and liberty and had an emphasis on the property of the citizens.

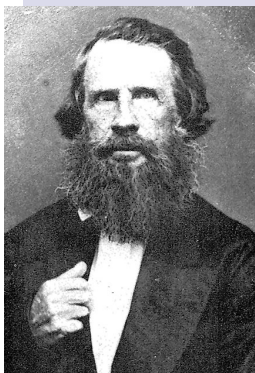
In December 1836, George married Rebecca Jennings, and they soon had two daughters. Three times he tried to establish law

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The pioneer family who gave the town its name

a post office. After the town had been laid out and a plat made, a discussion arose as to the name to be given the town. The community had been called Leonardville after A. F. Leonard, and later Dunnville in honor of the Dunn family.



Judge Thomas Morehead

was credited with organizing Parker County in 1856. In 1914 the town’s name was shortened to one word, **Grapevine**.

Several names were suggested. James suggested the name **Grape Vine**, the town being located on the edge of the Grape Vine Prairie which had taken its name from the famous Grape Vine Springs. Grape Vine Springs was an early, well-known watering and meeting place where a large Mustang grapevine grew over a huge oak tree near the springs. The name was unanimously adopted. I. P. S. Dunn served as the first Postmaster, a horseback route from Birdville to McKinney. Judge Morehead

Judge Morehead’s son, Jacob Lyon Morehead, enlisted in 1861 at the age of eighteen in Company A, Ninth Texas Cavalry, commanded by William Quayle. They went into winter quarters at Horse Head Bottom, Arkansas, then down White River by seamer, and up to Memphis, then to Corinth, Mississippi, where Richard Gano requested Jacob transfer to Company A, Gano’s Squadron. This Squadron reported to John H. Morgan’s Company at Knoxville, Tennessee. About 1,000 men were recruited, known as Third Kentucky Cavalry. They nicknamed Jacob “Texas,” and he served as a scout for one year. They saw action at Lexington and Bowling Green Kentucky. Jacob’s horse was shot out from under him at Horse Shoe Bend on the Ohio River. He was held prisoner for eighteen months near Chicago and released in 1865. By foot, steamer, and train, he made his way to Paris, Texas, where a cousin gave him a horse and saddle. He reached Grape Vine in August 1866. Once resettled, he operated a gin and grist mill here for thirty-seven years. Jacob died in Fort Worth, Texas on March 20, 1933.

-- Mayor William D. Tate

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The too-short life of George Childress

practices in Houston and Galveston without success. He could not make enough money to support his family. So, on October 6, 1841, at age 37 and while living in Galveston, he slashed his abdomen with a Bowie knife and died soon thereafter. Today, that way of death is known as *Seppuku*, also called *hara-kiri*. It is a form of Japanese ritualistic suicide. It was originally reserved for samurai in their code of honor, but was also practiced by other Japanese people to restore honor for themselves or for their families.

Historical records offer no evidence that George Campbell Childress ever studied Japanese. His education and career were entirely focused within the United States. During that time period Japan was in a period of self-imposed isolation, and there were no significant diplomatic or academic ties between the Texas revolutionary movement and Japan.

George Childress lived during important and stress-filled times:

- In October 1835 the revolution against the Mexican government began;
- By December 1835, Texians (Anglo-American settlers) and Tejanos (Texans of mixed Mexican and Indian descent) captured the town of San Antonio;

- On February 23, 1836, Mexican troops under General Antonio López de Santa Anna arrived in San Antonio to retake the city. Although Sam Houston ordered Texans to abandon San Antonio, a group of rebels decided to defend the town and make their stand at an abandoned Spanish mission, the Alamo. For twelve days, Mexican forces laid siege to the Alamo;
- On March 6, four days after Texas declared independence, Mexican troops scaled the mission's walls and 183 defenders were killed, including several Mexicans who had fought for Texas independence. Their oil-soaked bodies were set on fire outside the Alamo;
- On April 21, 1836, the Republic of Texas won its independence with a final battle along the San Jacinto River.

There were many obstacles and hardships our country's heroes had to overcome. Their struggles, attempts, failures, perseverance, accomplishments and ultimate successes they achieved give them their place in history. George C. Childress accomplished much, but he could not conquer everything. His excellent work drafting the Texas Declaration of Independence was honored by the State of Texas when on August 21, 1876, Childress County was formed and named in his honor. In 1887, the City of Childress was officially named, and incorporated in 1890.

--Sallie Andrews



FEBRUARY 28TH 11 AM TO 8 PM
 PEACE PLAZA 815 S. MAIN STREET
 Benefiting First Responders' benevolence, GV Shield and historic preservation groups. Honoring Mayor William D. Tate's fifty years of service.

CHILI COOKOFF WITH PRIZES • PEACH COBBLER BAKING CONTEST
GREAT ENTERTAINMENT ALL DAY • HISTORICAL REENACTMENTS
CHILI & COBBLER SAMPLES • FOOD & BEER VENDORS
MUSEUM AND SETTLEMENT TO CITY TOURS
GAMES AND FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

Taste of Texas Independence is a joint effort between the Grapevine Historical Society, Grapevine Shield, and United by the Vine, in partnership with the City of Grapevine. Proceeds from Taste of Texas Independence will directly benefit our community by supporting first responders, providing scholarships for local students, preserving our rich history, and meeting critical local community needs.

The Grapevine Historical Society • P. O. Box 995 / Grapevine, Texas 76099-0995 • grapevinehistory.org

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A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization supported by tax-deductible memberships and contributions. Become a member!

Join The GHS' Facebook Group - search for "Grapevine Historical Society" and read all about it!