

# TEXAS HERITAGE

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## TELLING THE STORIES OF TEXAS

Palo Duro Canyon Provides Musical Backdrop For More Than a Half-Century

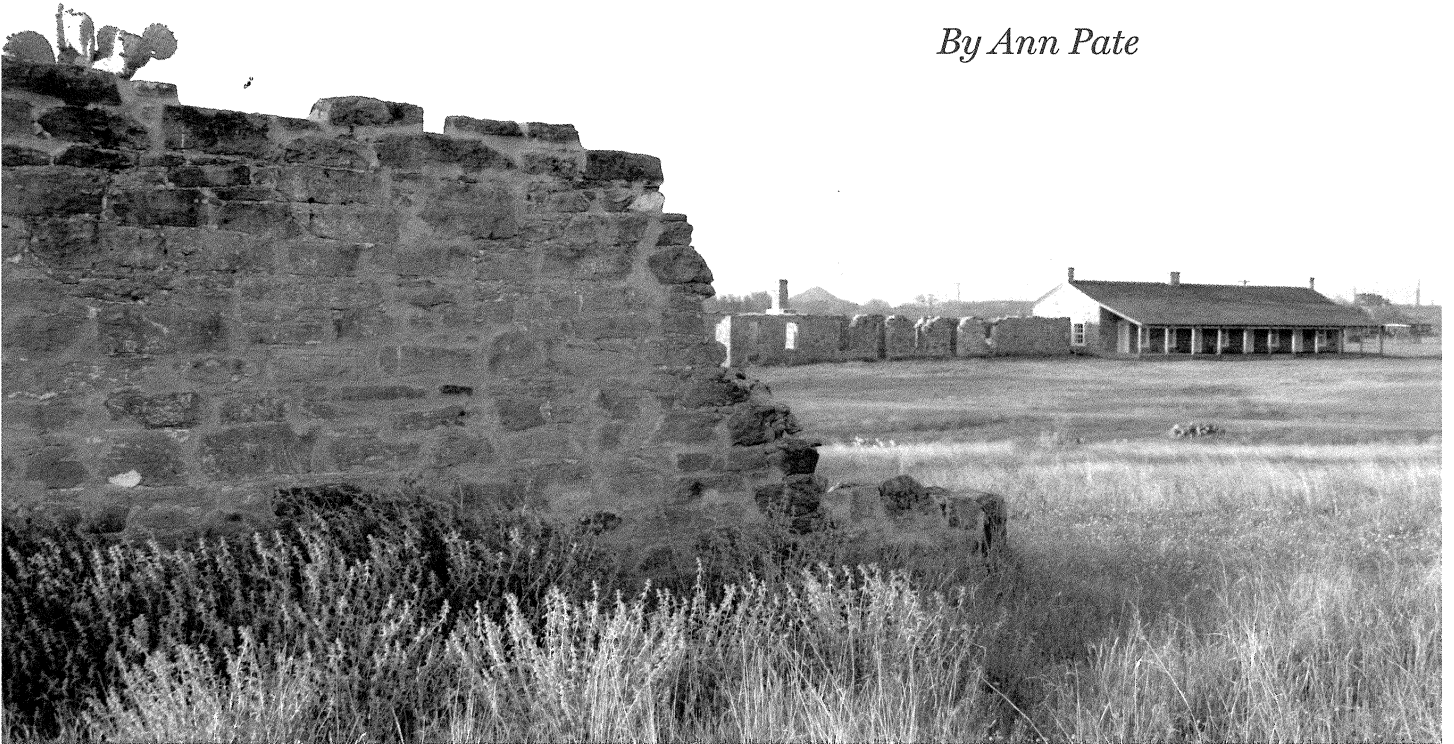
Walls That Speak:  
The Murals of Tom Lea

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# A FAMILY HERITAGE PRESERVED

*By Ann Pate*



In 1853, Thomas and Lucinda Odom, along with 13 children, arrived in Texas from Birmingham, Alabama. The sawmill business they set up in the Hill Country town of Bandera produced shingles for Fort Chadbourne, located 200 miles north in Coke County. The frontier military post had been established the previous year. Within two years of its founding, Samuel Maverick, noted lawyer and signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence, purchased the acreage housing the defense installation from the State of Texas. At that time, he leased the property to the federal government. Abandoned in 1867, Fort Chadbourne's fate soon merged with Odom family history.

In 1877, Thomas Odom and his oldest son Garland drove 4,000 head of cattle onto the fort's parade grounds, establishing the OD Ranch, later renamed the Chadbourne Ranch. Permanent ownership of the defunct military site came in October of that year when Maverick's widow Mary sold Lucinda Odom 320 acres

for \$500 in gold. The frontier post's abandoned buildings were repurposed: the officers' quarters became the family home, the barracks served as barns, and other outbuildings were used for bunkhouses and storage. By 1883, the 43,000-acre property spanned several counties and eventually grew to 100,000 acres, making it one of the largest ranches in Texas.

When barbed wire was introduced to the cattle industry in 1884, landowners saw great benefits for its use as fencing, but squatters who took advantage of the open range did not. When wealthy ranchers, including Odom, decided to fence their properties, trespassers formed localized gangs in response. Each night, a group

Above: Some of the original buildings at Fort Chadbourne, including the hospital in the foreground, which has been stabilized but not restored, and the barracks in the background, are shown. Photograph by Lana Richards, courtesy of Fort Chadbourne Foundation. Original in color.

known as the Fish Creek Fence Cutters slashed through miles of Chadbourne Ranch barbed wire.

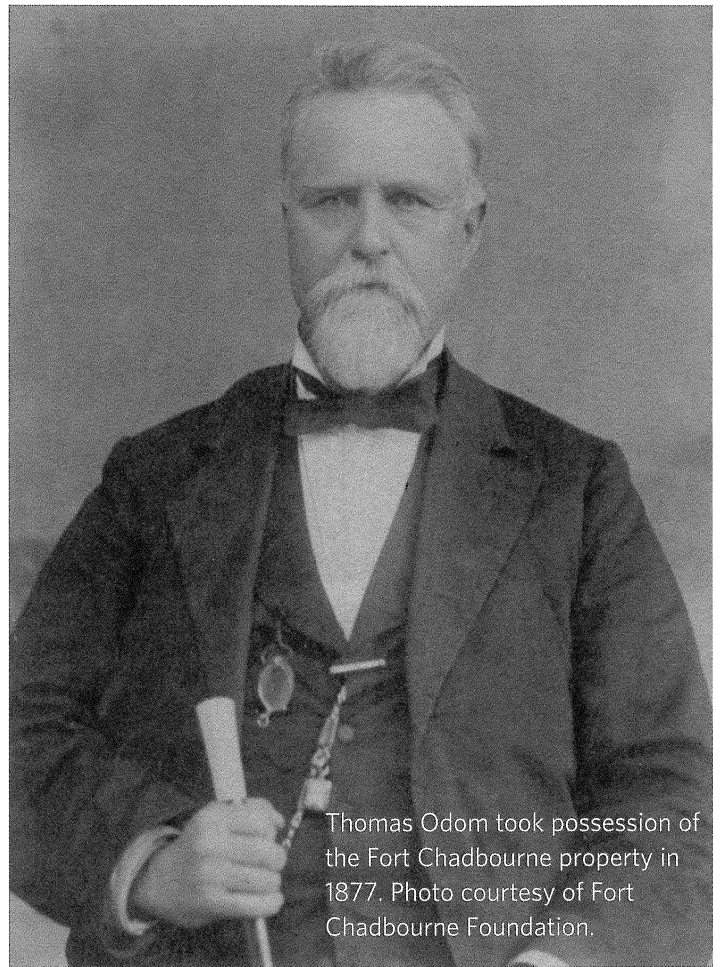
At the time, Civil War veteran Colonel Odom, as he was respectfully nicknamed, served in the 72nd Texas Legislature. He used his influence with then-Governor John Ireland to bring attention to the problem. Odom spoke to the legislative assembly, “I am ready to fight to keep Texas one and inseparable, but if justice is not done to all classes, both cattlemen and fence cutters, I will be glad to see the state divided and vote for it.”

At Colonel Odom’s suggestion, Benjamin Warren, a private in Captain J. T. Gillespie’s Frontier Battalion of the Texas Rangers, was assigned to covertly infiltrate the Fish Creek gang. In just a few weeks, the lawman had the evidence needed to arrest and indict 15 individuals. On February 10, 1885, the eve of the fence cutters’ trial, Odom and Warren were sitting together at the Central Hotel in Sweetwater, both set to testify the next morning. Outside, a gunshot rang out. The bullet passed through a hotel window, narrowly missing the rancher’s head, and struck Ranger Warren, killing him instantly. Despite this heinous act—and because of Odom’s tenacity—the Legislature passed a law making it a felony to cut a property owner’s fence, an act punishable by one to five years in prison.

After his wife Lucinda passed away in 1882, the Colonel remarried and stepped away from ranching allowing his son Garland to assume control (the family patriarch died in 1897).

Garland Odom’s daughter Sallie married Conda Wylie, and the couple inherited Chadbourne Ranch upon her father’s death in 1935. Ownership transitioned to successive generations, who maintained the property’s heritage, but neglected the old buildings.

That changed in 1999 when Lana and Garland Richards, Thomas Odom’s great-great-great grandson, decided to restore Fort Chadbourne to its original state. The pair was advised that the only way to rehabilitate the site was to hand over ownership to a federal or state agency with the means and expertise necessary to take



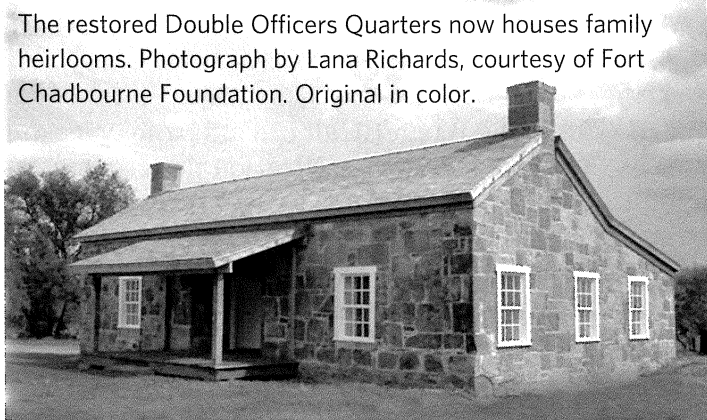
Thomas Odom took possession of the Fort Chadbourne property in 1877. Photo courtesy of Fort Chadbourne Foundation.

on such a large-scale effort. However, much in the same way that Thomas Odom had faced off with the fence-cutting gang, the Richards accepted the challenge of bringing the military post back to life on their own.

During the years that followed, the couple oversaw the restoration of six of the fort’s original buildings, with funding raised by the Fort Chadbourne Foundation, the nonprofit organization they established. In 2012, the public was welcomed when the Fort Chadbourne Visitor Center and Museum opened. Thousands of American Indian and military artifacts are on display there, including a collection featuring 400 antique firearms. A Medal of Honor exhibit pays tribute to 3,498 United States recipients. The Double Officers Quarters, which later became the Odom family homestead, showcases ancestral heirlooms that tell the story of the founding of the OD/Chadbourne Ranch.

With determination, perseverance, and hard work, Lana and Garland Richards have created a public place that shares the history of a Texas fort and their own family legacy—stories that are forever entwined.

*Ann Pate is a Fort Chadbourne Foundation board member, historian, and author.*



The restored Double Officers Quarters now houses family heirlooms. Photograph by Lana Richards, courtesy of Fort Chadbourne Foundation. Original in color.