



A Relic Gone But Not Forgotten: The Medlin Barn

By Trisha Faye

Start with a base of families from Missouri. Season with a splash of Pennsylvania influence. Simmer many seasons in the Lone Star State.

It's the ideal recipe for a historical Trophy Club icon.

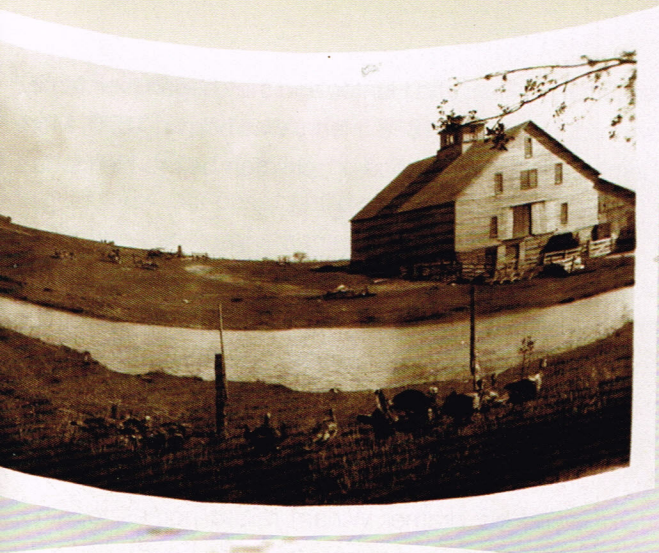
The Medlin Barn was a notable structure that was baked to perfection using this method.

The third wagon train of Medlins from Missouri rolled into Texas in 1847. Little one-year-old James Wilson Medlin didn't know then that he'd leave a Trophy Club legacy behind. The barn he would build in the 1870's would outlive him and his immediate family. In 1847, he was happy if his belly was full and his diaper was dry. Over 160 years later, people still talk of his creation – the Medlin Barn – even though it no longer exists.

Life in this early Texas frontier was not for the faint hearted. Perils on the prairie cut many lives short. By the 1870's, when the barn was built, only six of the fourteen Medlin children were still alive. Tragically by then, five Medlin sisters, two infant siblings, and James' parents, Charles and Matilda, had joined each other on the hilly crest that formed the growing Medlin Cemetery.

But life in these times left little room to grieve. Men and their wives worked from sunup to sundown, providing for the family, tending to the farm, raising livestock, and attending the only church in the area. Most families attended Lonesome Dove Church the third weekend of each month.





Browder, H. F. [Medlin Family Barn], Photograph, ca. 1920; (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph3846/> : accessed February 02, 2015), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Courthouse-on-the-Square, Denton, Texas.



The Medlin Barn as it might have looked upon construction

THE MEDLIN BARN

The Medlin Barn was located on Trophy Club Drive just north of Quorum Townhomes.

Prior to the barn's dismantling, it served as the Trophy Club Equestrian Center.

Several rocks from the base of the barn were placed in medians throughout the town in memory of the iconic structure.



In 1864, James married Henrietta Hunter, and they began their family. After losing their first child, Frankie, in 1868, Henry was born in 1870. More children followed. James and Henrietta had 11 children before Henrietta's death in 1891.

In 1865, James' older brother, William Owen Medlin returned home from the Civil War. William had enlisted as a private with Co. G, 18 Texas Calvary. He was captured twice before returning home and unlike many others, he returned in possession of both life and limbs. William married Amanda White, and they began their own family that would boast of four girls by 1889.

It's reported that James and his brother William raised horses together. They needed a barn for their business venture. Not satisfied with using the construction methods common to the area, James traveled to Pennsylvania sometime in the 1870's to gather ideas. He returned with a design in mind that utilized Pennsylvania Dutch architecture. This uncommon style surely garnered the community's attention.

The barn was built on a slope. It stood three stories high on the front side. At the rear of the structure the second floor was at ground level. The first floor of the 15,000 square foot structure housed twenty-four horse stalls. The second floor had rooms built for grain storage. The third floor provided space for hay roll storage and also led to the upper loft and cupola. In 1999, descendant, Mary Carpenter shared with the Fort Worth Star Telegram that the cupola was more than a decorative feature. She reported that it contained a type of windmill that would turn and grind the grains below.

A popular story tells that when the barn was completed, James Medlin was showing off its unfamiliar construction to neighbors. He allegedly drove a team of mules into the barn on the ground level entrance at the rear. The mules, apparently unbroken, bolted when they saw daylight and ran for the open windows. Unfortunately, this was the second story on the front side of the barn. As the team jumped, one mule was killed and two others had to be cut free of the harnesses.

Time passed. It's the one thing no one has any power over. Children grew up and moved on. Family heads aged and died. William Owen Medlin died in 1900 and James Wilson Medlin died in 1915. Both are buried at Medlin Cemetery, with many of their children and other relatives.

Yet the barn remained standing.

Rumors abound about Sam Bass and his gang using the barn. The gang probably didn't hide out in the barn as some stories say. They more than likely used the Medlin horses as fresh stock, which they possibly helped themselves to, in keeping with their typical style.

Other rumors have the notorious pair, Bonnie and Clyde, hiding out in the barn. The duo were active in this part of the state, and killed three Texas lawmen on State Highway 114 not far from the barn's location on Easter Day in 1934. It's possible that they were familiar with the back roads and abandoned spots where they could easily hide.

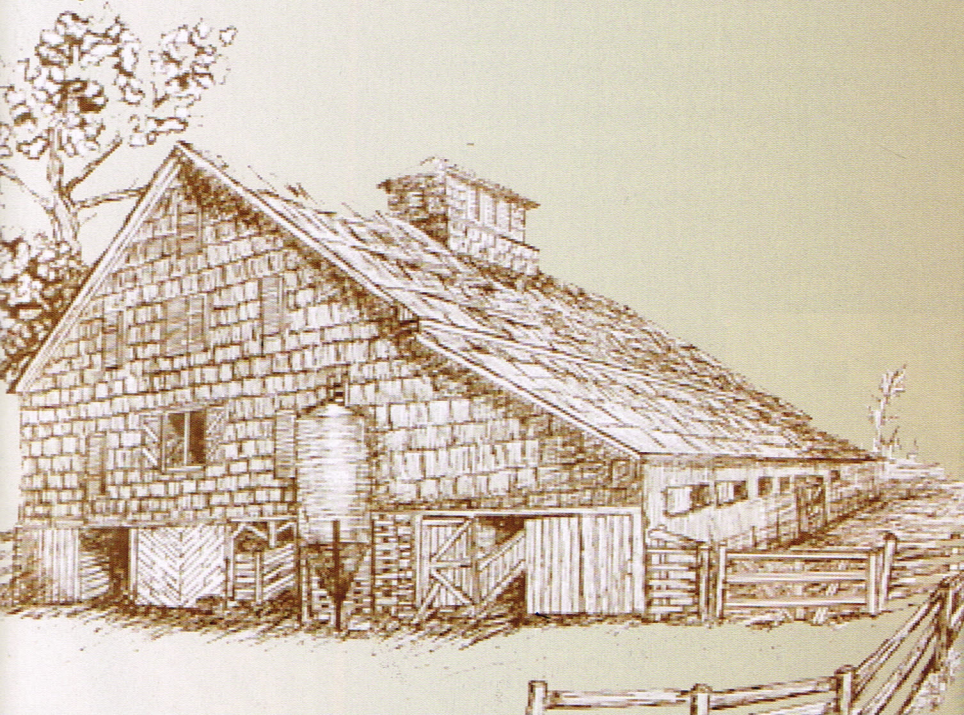
The barn was rented out and used as an equestrian center for many years through the 1980s and 1990s.

Then, it remained vacant and gradually began falling apart. The intense Texas sun, freezing winters and inclement weather does this to long standing structures. For many years local teenagers discovered that this relic from long ago made a secluded spot to rendezvous. Ultimately, the barn was evaluated and judged structurally unsafe by engineers.

The Medlin Barn, one of the last tangible pieces of the Medlin family, had to be destroyed. The television series, Walker, Texas Ranger, considered blowing up the barn as a scene in one of their segments. They decided against it. Beck Properties, in charge of the site at that time, decided to implode the building.

In March 1997, the supports were removed. It's reported that the barn caved in and fell into a pile of disintegrated rubble in front of the crowd watching. One hundred and twenty years of time and weather had done its job. Immortality does not exist, for people or for barns.

But in a fashion, it does. Trophy Club still celebrates the Medlin Barn as a part of the local history. Several photos survive that showcase the celebrated stone and wood structure. This memory, of a Texas heritage born of a blending of Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Texas roots, still survives, outliving the men who built it. ★



INTERESTING FACTS

James Medlin was enthusiastic about breeding racehorses and regularly visited the local track, presently where the Roanoke Hawaiian Falls is located.

Outlaw Sam Bass and his gang would rob stagecoaches, trains and banks not only in Texas but as far away as Nebraska and the Dakota Territory. When they returned, they would slip into the Medlin barn and switch their tired horses for fresh ones.

The Medlin barn doors are located in the Roanoke Visitor Center and Museum, and are the only remaining pieces of one of the largest hand-built structures of its time in our community.

Source:
Roanoke Visitor Center and Museum