

# Medlan House Historical Sight

By NITA MCPHERSON

GRAHAM, Tex. (Special) —

Students of history could spend days roaming the area surrounding Medlan Chapel 10 miles south west of Graham, where the gently rolling hills, giant post oak trees and crude stone and brick structures are reminders of another way of life.

And the late A. B. Medlan no doubt would be pleased to see the ranch house he built nearly 90 years ago still in good repair. The house was built in 1875.

Now owned by the J. W. Akers family, the house serves as a residence for a daughter of Mrs. Akers, Mrs. Walter Byerly and family.

A. B. Medlan left his native state of Alabama with his single possession, a horse, for Texas in 1850. He sensed the possibilities of the Fort Belknap area near the present site of Newcastle, for raising feed for army horses so staked a claim to 160 acres and built a log cabin near the fort.

With a wood-toothed harrow, a "bull-tongue" plow and an ox team Medlan planted his first crop. He made \$500 that year, and, spurred by his initial success, soon became well known for his ability as a farmer.

## First Philanthropist

"Uncle Archie" Medlan lived a life of "firsts." He raised the first watermelons, experimented in planting various other vegetables which he sold for a fancy pice at the fort and as a result of his success as a farmer, became

the county's first philanthropist.

Medlan also served as the first county treasurer of the newly-organized Young County, and was one of the charter stockholders in the first county bank.

He was particularly interested in young men since he never had any children of his own. He gave many pioneer youths a start, and as a result of his friendship toward youth, his two-story house nearly always was full of boys who were in the process of "pre-empting" land and planting their first crops.

Medlan's holdings were expanded in time to more than 1,000 acres. On the land are remains of Old Fort Growl which the prominent settler had built during the Civil War. He converted his first home into a fort of considerable strength. The fortified home became the center of a settlement, and church services began to be held in the house.

Eventually the house became known as Medlan Chapel, which still is in use by the Primitive Baptist Church.

Few changes ever were made in A. B. Medlan's second house. Above the entrance is carved in sandstone "A. B. Medlan, 1875 A.D." Two original porches have been enclosed to make rooms, the kitchen has been modernized and a large bath and dressing room added.

One of those Medlan helped, Fred Fitzgerald, said he remembers "Uncle Archie" well. He also remembers Charlie Newhouse, who built the second Medlan home. "Uncle Archie gave me my first calf when I was nine years old, and I've raised cows ever since," Fitzgerald explained.

Fitzgerald said the bricks for the house were made by hand from Brazos River clay found below the house, and were fired on the site.

About the only item not hand made is the spiral staircase built and shipped from Chicago. Walls of the house are 15 inches thick with plaster on the interior. Four fireplaces once heated the large rooms and also served for cooking. All the fireplaces except the one in the kitchen still are used.

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Near the house is the family cemetery where such names as Timmons, Brogdon and Medlan are carved on both old and new stones. Two such stones bear the legend "A. B. Medlan, born Jan. 8, 1825; died April 13, 1909," and "Elizabeth Medlan, born Nov. 14, 1836; died Nov. 14, 1932."

"Aunt Betty" Medlan died on her 96th birthday during a birthday celebration. While sitting on a divan in the parlor, she leaned her head on her daughter's shoulder, Mrs. E. Ragland, closed her eyes and "went to sleep."

The Fort Belknap museum today holds many interesting relics of the Medlan family, even a quilt made by "Aunt Betty" when she was only nine years of age.