

The Bandera PROPHECY

August 11, 2021

Frontier Times Museum director gives history of tourism presentation in Lakehills

As part of their monthly seminar program, the Lakehills Community Center is welcoming Rebecca Norton, executive director of the Frontier Times Museum, to speak on Tuesday, Aug. 17.

Norton will give a slide show presentation, *The Switzerland of Texas*, which will explore early tourism in Bandera County and Medina Lake. The presentation will begin at 6:30 p.m., and is free and open to the public.

Norton is proposing the founder of the museum, J. Marvin Hunter, may have been among the first to see the potential of Bandera County as a tourist mecca. He wrote in his biography that when he arrived in Bandera in 1921 to purchase the local newspaper, the *Bandera New Era*, Bandera was an “old settled town...but had not grown much...The town was a ‘ratty’ looking place...But when I noted its picturesque location, and the many natural charms and advantages of this little town...I knew that with the proper publicity Bandera would someday be a great resort for tourists and vacationists and could be made the ideal playground for all of Texas.”

He would go on to use the *Bandera New Era* and his magazine, the *Frontier Times*, to proclaim how beautiful and beneficial a visit to Bandera would be for one’s health and spiritual well-being.

Those who lived on the shores of Medina Lake saw the potential for the lake to be an attraction even before the lake had filled with water.

Completed in 1912 with the construction of the Medina Dam, it would take until 1914 for enough rain to fall to fill the lake. But tourists began arriving immediately to see the completed dam, a wonder in itself, being the largest dam in Texas and fourth largest dam in the United States at the time. Residents of the area began opening marinas, restaurants, and

resorts to tout the beauty of the lake, boat rides, and the great fishing and hunting to be found in the area.

When economic hardships fell on local ranchers, many looked to open their ranches as guest ranches, also known as dude ranches. They offered an authentic ranch experience to city folk, even touting feeding the livestock and milking cows as part of the attraction of staying on their ranch. The ranch owners marketed Bandera as the Cowboy Capital of the World and visitors began to flock to Bandera to stay on a ranch, wear cowboy and cowgirl clothing, ride horses and enjoy Bandera's western flair.

Norton did extensive research on the history of Medina Lake for the book she co-authored with Lakehills resident Karen Ripley for Arcadia Publishing for their Images of America series. Her research also extended to the history of Bandera's dude ranches for Arcadia's book on Bandera County, which she also authored. In her slide presentation, Norton will show images of early marketing brochures and pamphlets as well as early photographs from Medina Lake and from the golden age of the dude ranch in the 1940s and 1950s.

The museum's traveling exhibit on Medina Lake will also be on display at the Community Center during the presentation. The Lakehills Community Center offers a variety of programs and services for the community of Lakehills and surrounding areas. It is located off Park Road 37 at 11225 PR 37.