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Shortgrass Country

by Monte Noelke

Indians called the part of the Shortgrass Country west of San Angelo "The Hairline Hunting Grounds." Such crafty hunters as Sinking Stomach and Badger's Reflection led hunting parties in here, challenging nature to deny them fat game. But as the great medicine man Hollow Steeple warned them, this was the land of thin rinds and empty tree limbs.

Over and over, ol' Steeple's words have been proven true. In the 1870s a band of starving Lipan Apaches came by one of my ancestors' place begging for food. All he and my great-great grandma had to offer the tribes was free reign over a barrel of honey.

The honey turned out to be those poor Lipans' downfall. The time was December, the weather was cold and freezing. On the morning after eating at great grandpa's, the Indians were attacked by white men coming from east of San Angelo. Had the tribesmen not had cold honey lodged under their fingernails, maybe they could have shot fast enough to hold back their enemy.

On the anniversary of that battle the historical society over at Angelo invited descendants of the Lipans to come up from Mexico and visit the battleground. The

historians and the guests made speeches in English; the Indians spoke among themselves in their own language.

I was assured that there was no animosity. I wasn't surprised. Granted, it was a dirty trick by the Lipans to move off to Mexico and leave us stranded with this dry old country. But the Shortgrassers have to be graceful loser to live in this land. We have to stare fate down; we can't blame our forefathers for being so easily fooled by the token resistance the Indians made to hold this ground.

In a lock box at the bank in Mertzon is where by great grandfather's watch is kept.

I've examined the gold case closely, and I can swear that a hostile's arrow point never marred the surface. Maybe the honey didn't really slow them down. Perhaps the chiefs just couldn't arouse their warriors to fight over such a scrubby piece of territory.