FRISCO’S 4TH DECADE
1930-1939

In revisiting the 1930’s this month, we find that the obvious question is, “how did the Depression affect Frisco?” To answer that, we are going to use an article that was written by Benton Staley for the 1976 Frisco History book. Benton writes from the perspective of time that is only about 40 years after the end of The Great Depression in Frisco—although it did not end officially for all of America until 1941. The name “Benton A. Staley” may only be familiar to some of you as that of a Frisco middle school. We’ll put the spotlight on him in this newsletter and find out some of the reasons why that school was named for him. The poem about Frisco featured here, was written by Mrs. Josephine Staley, Benton’s mother, in 1930.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

By, Benton Staley

The “depression” hit Frisco on Friday after Thanksgiving, 1928. The First State Bank did not open for business that morning. The “Black Thursday” was not until October 19, 1929. This was the day the stock market crashed, so we had an 11-month start on the rest of the United States.

To get a mental picture of conditions one must wipe out all Federal Programs. No one depended on any government agency for anything. Each business, family, or individual was on its own—sink or swim—live or die.

Frisco was an agricultural community, and, even though it was rough, I am sure we had it better than many. Most everyone had a cow, a few chickens, a garden, and most important, a will to work. Cotton went to 4¢, oats to 10¢, gasoline was 9¢ per gallon and oil was 10¢ per quart.
Each individual who lived thru these five years has his own memories of just how he made it. No one bought anything he did not just have to have to exist. This was very little.

Many had gas and electricity turned off. Wheat was ground into flour rather than sold. The first government program to be directed was a school to teach the average housewife how to can in tin cans the fruit and vegetables which had been grown. Pressure cookers and home sealers came into being and home canning became a big part of life. Everything that was grown was canned in one form or another. Beef was canned, pork was salt cured, sugar cured, or smoked. Salt, sugar and coffee were the three things bought in stores.

The public schools could not collect taxes, so they could not pay teachers. A plan was worked out to issue “scrip,” a promise to pay, to the teachers. People would board them in their homes and the teachers would pay in “scrip.” The “scrip” could be used to pay school taxes. Also, merchants would take the “scrip” for money.

In 1932, Franklin Roosevelt was elected. The first day of his administration he froze all banks for three days. In these three days, he announced many new socialistic reforms, and a new way of life came into the American scene. Crops were plowed up, cattle and hogs were killed. The W.P.A. (Works Progress Administration) came into being. Many projects were financed with Federal money. Those Federal projects which affected Frisco most were provisions to rock the streets, to build a sewer system, to have a general clean-up and fix-up campaign, and, the most important of all, to erect a new high school building. Most of the cost of all these was paid for by a Federal grant. This W.P.A. project not only was used to build the new school but also to wreck the old three-story red brick building, which had been used since 1912.

With W.P.A. men could get jobs. They worked at hard manual labor, such as digging rock from the big hill on South 5th Street. They cut this hill down 12 to 15 feet and used the rock to build streets in Frisco. The rock was hauled by wagon, spread by hand, rolled down by Emil Sonntag’s steam engine. The sewer ditches were dug by hand in the white rock which is the under surface of the land on which Frisco is built. Gradually, things returned to normal and by 1935 living conditions were stabilized again.

We will leave it to the history of 100 years from now as to whether it was a good or bad change that was made under President Roosevelt. But one thing we know for sure, things changed.
Banking During the Depression

For most of the 1930’s until 1947, there was no bank in Frisco. Banking had to be conducted in McKinney or one of the other nearby towns. Although, given the state of the economy Benton Staley talks about in his article, it didn’t sound like too much banking needed to be done.

In researching this edition of the Heritage Past Times, we found this March 6, 1929 article in the Fort Worth Star Telegram celebrating the reopening of the Planters State Bank, which was previously the Frisco State Bank, as the new First State Bank. At that time, Frisco was without a bank for three months when its only other bank, The First National, closed in December of 1928. The First State Bank worked hard to gain the trust of its customers, but ultimately closed its doors in the early 1930’s. Frisco was without a bank until 1947 when a new First State Bank opened in August of that year.

This article from the June 16, 1947 McKinney Courier Gazette celebrates the approval of a new bank in Frisco, which opened in August 1947.

This COVID-19 Quarantine is a Historic Event. Here are a few activities to do now, so your children and grandchildren can understand that what they are experiencing now, will be history that their children and grandchildren will ask about!

Tell your children or grandchildren about the Great Depression. Ask them what three things the most popular items at the store during the Coronavirus emergency were—and write down their answers.

Keep a daily journal. Even if it is only a sentence or two, it will be a reminder of this most unusual time we are currently experiencing. Clip newspaper articles, print some of the funny memes, note what you are doing differently. Did you have a birthday during the quarantine? Are you washing your hands? Are you singing songs to make sure you scrub for 20 seconds? What songs are you singing? What is it like to work or go to school at home? How does this make you feel? Did you Facetime your family or friends who you can’t visit with in person? Write down or draw whatever comes to mind. Maybe 50 years from now, your children and grandchildren will show this journal to their grandchildren and tell them about The Great COVID-19 Coronavirus Quarantine of 2020.
SPOTLIGHT: Benton Acker Staley 1911-1988
Mayor, Civic Leader, Businessman, Historian, Family Man

The Staley family arrived in Texas in the late 1860’s, settling in Collin County in 1870. William “Wallie” Staley married Josephine Acker and Benton Acker Staley was born to them in 1911—their only son. In 1919 Wallie and Josephine built a house on the southeast corner of 4th and Pecan and moved their little family into the town of Frisco.

Benton attended school, graduating from Frisco High School in 1928. As a boy, he worked for an undertaker named W. T. Byrum, learning the trade and becoming an undertaker and funeral director himself. He and his wife, Maurine, purchased the funeral home from Byrum in 1949 and ran the Staley Funeral Home at Maple and North County Road until they retired and sold the business in 1971.

As a citizen of Frisco, Benton worked tirelessly to improve the town for everyone. When the town’s only doctor, Dr. Saye, died in 1952, Benton worked alongside Jack Scott and Curley Eaton to get a new medical clinic built that would attract a physician to town. The plan worked and Dr. Erwin G. Pink came and made Frisco his home.

Benton served three terms as Mayor from 1954-1960. Frisco’s City Hall was located in the little building by the water tower. Benton needed office help and hired Joanne McSpedden to work two hours a day. At the time, receipts were kept in cigar boxes. Frisco has come a long way since then!

Additionally, Benton Staley was the Chairman of the first Board of Directors of the Frisco Community Center, organized in 1956. He was the first President of the Frisco Lions Club. In 1960 he organized a United Fund drive benefitting all Frisco charities.

In 1976 Benton served as the President of the Frisco Bicentennial Society, which published Frisco’s first history book. The article about the depression in this newsletter is taken from that book.

Dr. Pink credited Benton Staley with having more vision than anybody for building Frisco into a vibrant and thriving community. In 1985 Benton received the first Silver Citizen award from the Frisco Chamber of Commerce. This award is given to a person 50 years or older who lives in the community and has made a notable contribution and outstanding dedication to public service over a period of 25 years or more.

A lasting tribute to Benton A. Staley and his family was made when his name was given to Staley Middle School in 1996.

Benton Staley passed away in 1988. We can only wonder what he would think of Frisco today.
When the Frisco Community Center opened in July, 1960, Benton Staley, an undertaker by trade, oversaw the burial of a time capsule. Twenty-five years later, he oversaw the opening of that same time capsule. Here is an article from the Frisco Enterprise in 1960 describing the time capsule and a photo from the Frisco Enterprise 25 years later. It is interesting to note that, once again, Senator Sam Rayburn attended.

**A Brief Word About COVID-19**

With the ever-evolving COVID-19 situation, we are monitoring the situation and following City of Frisco protocol as well as that of the county, state and federal government. Because most of our Heritage Association volunteer base falls into the age-related (60+) category where the virus can be more serious, we want to err on the side of caution and protect our membership and our guests. Therefore, we have cancelled all meetings and events for April. As soon as we can resume our regular programming, we will let you know!

**Thank you, Mike Cates!**

The Heritage Association of Frisco extends their thanks and appreciation to Mike Cates for his vision and efforts in creating this newsletter to share Frisco’s rich history. Mike is unable to continue in this role, so please bear with us as we hobble together a smaller newsletter to keep you informed until we can find a volunteer or volunteers to take over. If you would be interested in helping with the newsletter, please email us at secretary@friscoheritage.org.

**Rayna Alam!**

Rayna is our new Frisco Heritage Park Administrator. She comes to us from the Museum of the American Railroad, but we no sooner said “howdy” when we were sent home to wait out COVID-19. Rayna is working from home on a new exhibit, but you can get a sneak peak at www.facebook.com/friscoheritagemuseum

Be sure to stop by and introduce yourself when the museum reopens!