

Dayton Historical Society Hears About Life in Rural SE Texas

The Dayton Historical Society met Monday evening July 31 at Parker Hall. After President Lester Ray Wisegerber conducted the business part of the meeting, Program Chairman Larry Wadzeck gave introduction to one of the members, Wes Williamson, who gave interesting insights to life in the area around the turn of the 20th century through the eyes of his great grandfather Rufus Elmer Williamson.

Wes showed several power point photos of Elmer and his family. Elmer was the youngest of 10 children, spending the first half of his life in east Liberty County and the last half in Dayton. He and his brothers roamed the countryside and fought with each other, but no one else better pick a fight with anyone of them because they took up for each other.

As a young man, Elmer witnessed the oil boom at Batson in 1903. The tiny town, initially called Rag Town, grew from just a few people to over 10,000 and with that came a tent city, 33 saloons, over 200 prostitutes, and enough dead bodies that the Texas Rangers were called in monthly to help "straighten things out".

Wes read diary accounts written by Elmer in 1969 about his family during his growing up years, his school life, life as a young man working at saw mills, on the rail road, oil fields, and other endeavors, marrying in 1913 to Roxie Simmons, and raising four children. Elmer passed away in 1975 at the age of 93. Elmer's writings were humorous and interesting as he gave detailed witness to what was going on around him. Wes' program was much enjoyed.

The next meeting of Dayton Historical Society will be Monday, August 28, 6 p.m. at Parker Hall, located behind The Old School Museum. The public is invited to attend.