

HOMEFRONT



Lt. Col. William N. 'Bill' Todd is in his element at the Wells Branch homestead, above, where for 15 years he has conducted tours of

visitors through the complex. In the photo below, Todd displays mementoes of his early years in the cavalry and as a West Point cadet.



TERRY HAGERTY/Leader Staff

ROUND ROCK LOCAL LEGENDS

The City of Round Rock has honored three more of its own with the title, "Local Legend." William N. Todd, Xenia Voigt and Betty Porter are the new selectees and will be featured in turn in this and the next two Homefront sections.

Lt. Col. William N. Todd

By WILEY GILMORE

Leader Staff

It is perhaps indicative of Round Rock's growth in the past quarter-century and of his intense involvement in the community that Lt. Col. William N. Todd seems to have been here always. Actually, the retired Army officer and his wife, Jean, came to town to stay in the mid-1970s.

During that time, however, Todd has been heavily involved in the community, schools, his church and regional historical projects.

The narrative accompanying Todd's nomination as one of three new Local Legends of Round Rock cites his service on several committees with the Round Rock Chamber of

Commerce; with the Noon Kiwanis Club (Kiwanian of the Year in 1981); as one of the founders and Sunday School teachers at St. Richard's Episcopal Church; and as a storyteller and folklorist at the pioneer cabin in Wells Branch and the Texas Folklife Festival in San Antonio.

"My parents moved to Round Rock in 1952," Todd said recently. "Then we came in 1976-77. Mom and Dad were not too well and I'd decided I'd had enough of the boys' school. Ten years was enough."

Having grown up on military posts, Todd followed his father's vocation as a career Army officer. He enlisted in the

Todd: Legend 'didn't really intend to stay' in Round Rock

Continued from Page 1C

Army (horse cavalry) in 1939 and was subsequently appointed to the United States Military Academy at West Point, from which he was graduated and commissioned a second lieutenant on June 6, 1944. He served in Europe during World War II and was a company commander in Korea during the Korean War. He retired from the Army in 1967 and was employed for 10 years as executive director of a boys' school in Chicago.

"We got down here to look after my folks and really didn't intend to stay," Todd said. "But within a year all our kids were living nearby, too. And they're still here. We don't have to travel on holidays. Thanksgiving and Christmas around here you wouldn't believe."

The Todds' comfortable home sits amid woods at the end of Old Settlement Road overlooking Brushy Creek. They recently celebrated 50 years of marriage and have five children and 10 grandchildren.

Bill Todd's den is filled with memorabilia that includes pioneer artifacts, books and souvenirs of his military career, about which he speaks affectionately.

"Daddy was a cavalryman," he said. "He wore the crossed sabers insignia on his uniform until he retired."

Todd was also trained as a cavalryman and still has his heavy government-issue saber as evidence. He said he received his appointment to West Point after passing the entrance exam with some difficulty.

"I'd never get into West Point today," he said. "These kids now are way ahead of us."

Todd participated in the notorious Louisiana maneuvers in 1939, before the United States' entry into World War II.

"It was the toughest war I ever fought," he said. "We had no rifles. We used wooden sticks. The army was just making the transition to trucks. They'd get stuck and we'd have to come with the horses and pull them out."

A certain amount of barracks language was exchanged between the horse people and the truck drivers, Todd said.

Among the items in Todd's den is a set of toy soldiers he received for Christmas when he was around 10 years old.

"They represent all the armed forces that fought in World War I," he explained.

Among the items was a miniature artillery piece with its supporting livery and a pair of horses.

"I couldn't have asked for a better environment to grow up in," Todd said of the life of an Army brat. "We didn't have any money but we played polo and we had the gymnasium and the swimming pool. And we got to see places like the Philippines and China. It was a grand education."

Todd's West Point class was accelerated and completed the four-year curriculum in three years. He was then trained as a paratrooper.

"We graduated from West Point on D-Day and were in Europe by January 1945," Todd said. "We were held in theater reserve until May. We were finally briefed and in the air and they turned us around because our landing zone had by that time been captured by our own men."

If Todd didn't see combat in World War II, Korea made up for it. He recalled manning an outpost very near one of the enemy's fortifications.

"We'd put up a flag at night and they'd shoot it down in the daytime," Todd said. "It's probably against the law, but we took our last flag and cut it up in small pieces so each member of the unit could have a piece."

Todd chuckled when recalling the time the enemy blew up his private comfort facility.

"My boys had built me a private one-holer outhouse," he said. "I had just left it one morning when the Chinese put an 82mm mortar shell right down the hole. It was the only time I was ever really mad at the enemy."

Todd considers his association with the Wells Branch pioneer homestead to be

among his most rewarding activities since moving to Round Rock. He tells stories, explains the history behind the buildings and entertains with discourses on natural medicines and foods.

"We've touched an awful lot of children with Texas history in the past 15 years," he said. "We've had them from all over, as far away as Houston and Dallas as well as our school kids here."

Todd said the homestead was almost torn down early on.

"Jim Mills (Round Rock developer) sent me out to tear it down," Todd said. "I went

back and told him I didn't want to do it, and he said we'd keep it as a centerpiece of the development."

It became the centerpiece and has been an attraction for approximately 15 years.

"It's pure fun," he said. "If it ever gets to be work, I'll quit."

Todd also participates with his friend O.T. Baker in the annual Texas Folklife Festival in San Antonio.

"We tell lies, skin rattlesnakes," he said. "We put up an old ramshackle building every year and cook wild game. We tell people they're eating possum and sometimes they are."