

## DEWEES REMSCHEL HOUSE

Wilson County and the Wilson County Historical Society have had the good fortune of being bequeathed a historic home situated on a site of 130 acres in southern Wilson County. In addition to this property, the home is furnished with antique furniture and rugs plus an annual endowment of \$12,000 for maintenance and operation of this facility as a museum and park. The house is situated in the eastern center of the original Dewees Ranch. It is located approximately five miles southwest of Poth, off of FM 541 on Dewees Road.

In her will, Claribel Dewees Remschel, who was a direct descendent of the Dewees family, offered this property to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, D. C. to develop into a museum and park. After a review of this property by the National Trust, it was refused by them because they felt it was too difficult to manage from Washington, D. C. As directed by her will, in the event this gift was refused by the National Trust, the Trustees in charge of the estate were to find another way to establish the museum in Wilson County. The Trustees then approached the Wilson County Historical Society for assistance to develop this property into a museum and park. This opportunity was accepted by the Wilson County Historical Society. It was deemed to be a definite asset to Wilson County in preserving its history and helping develop another point of interest for the viable tourist industry.

The house was originally built by Dr. R. T. Knox in Gonzales, two blocks from the center of town. The two lots on which the Knox house was built are now owned by HEB and serve as part of the parking area for their present day grocery store. The property abstract shows the lots being purchased in April 1866 by R. T. Knox and it is thought the house was built soon after and occupied by his family until the early 1900's.

Dr. Robert Taggart Knox was an interesting man as were his descendents who later owned the Dewees Remschel House in Wilson County. Claribel Dewees Remschel was the granddaughter of Thomas Dewees and Kate Ham Dewees. She was also the granddaughter of Dr. Knox's daughter, Mattie Mae Knox and Henry Remschel.

Dr. Knox was born in Danville, Kentucky, in 1832, the second in a family of three children. He was raised in Kentucky and educated in a private school. He began the study of Medicine in January of 1851 under the tutorship of Dr. J. M. Meyer of Danville and graduated from the University of Louisville in 1854. He started a medical practice in central Kentucky but in 1856, he came to Gonzales where he developed a profitable practice as a physician and surgeon.

Dr. Knox became a mason at Gonzales in 1857 and became a Knight Templar and a member of the Gonzales Command # 11. At the beginning of the American Civil War, he was offered the position of surgeon of various regiments but joined Terry's Rangers in

1862 instead. He was in a camp in Bowling Green, Kentucky for some time before leaving because of poor health.

He returned to Gonzales and was appointed physician in charge of the hospital being constructed there at the confederate military fort. He was a very active member of the Texas Medical Association and was its first vice-president. He was a contributor to medical journals and also invented a medical device called a uterine dilator.

Dr. Knox was married in 1860 to Catherine T. Blake of Chester, South Carolina. In 1866, Dr. Knox purchased lots 2 and 3 in block 27, of the inner town of Gonzales for \$1000. Three years later in 1869, he built his home.

Five children were born to this couple. A daughter, Mattie Mae, married Henry Remschel. They were the grandparents of Claribel Dewees Remschel.

Dr. Knox died in Gonzales Friday, January 22, 1898 at @ AM in his residence at the age of 63 years.

Dr. Knox was survived by his wife, two sons and three daughters. Sometime after his death, his wife moved to Kerr County, Texas and sold the home in Gonzales.

After the death of Dr. Robert Taggart Knox in 1898, his wife sold the house in Gonzales, which later became known as the Dewees Remschel House. Through the years, several families have owned the property and in its later days in Gonzales, the porches were enclosed and the home was divided in several separate rental units.

Since then and through the years, several families have owned the property. In its later days in Gonzales, the porches were enclosed and the home was divided in several separate rental units. In 1983, the property was purchased by the HEB Grocery Chain.

Claribel Dewees Remschel, a descendent of the Knox family, expressed an interest in the building structure. HEB offered the house to her if it would be moved off the lots at no cost to HEB. The Gonzales Historical Commission also expressed an interest in the house to preserve it in Gonzales but HEB agreed to give it to them only if Claribel did not accept it.

In the fall of 1983, Clairbel Dewees Remschel contracted with Wood House Moving Company of San Antonio to move the house to her ranch in Wilson County at a cost of \$22,000. The size of the structure was such that it could not be moved as one piece. The upper story of the house had to be demolished with the material being salvaged and stored on top of the two first floor sections. The demolition work was performed by Joe Matejcek Construction Company of Gonzales for a sum of \$10,500. The remaining first floor was divided into two sections for moving to the ranch site. At the ranch site the

first floor was reassembled and set on concrete piers. Reconstruction of the second story was performed by a local contractor.

Reconstruction work had not been completed at the time of Claribel Dewees Remschel's death in 1996, even though the house was livable and it served as her residence on the ranch. Using funds from the estate, the Trustees retained architects Kell-Munoz-Wigodsky of San Antonio asked them to prepare the drawings and construction documents to complete the restoration of the house. Randy Hohlaus was approved as the principal architect in charge of the project.

The contract for the construction work was awarded to Guido Construction Company of San Antonio at the cost of \$250,000.

The work was completed in September of 1997 and the transfer of title to Wilson County and Wilson County Historical Society was accomplished in January of 1998.

The house that you see today looks very different from its original appearance. Visualize a three-sided, two story porch with octagonal spindle columns, railings with flat board scroll-work and brackets surrounding a steeply roofed tower. The bay windows and their decorative flourishes were essentially as you see them now. This was a house built in simple Victorian Vernacular with Italianate flourishes.

There is evidence to believe that a fire may have been the cause of a first major renovation. Sometime this century, the original tower was removed and the three-sided porch replaced with the large round porch and the Corinthian columns you see today. In the course of the years, the house accumulated, as an old house will, additions, in filled porches, scabbed-on stairways and subdivided rooms serving as separate apartments.

The rebuilding was not completed prior to Claribel's death and the house was left with the massive front columns left strapped to the building and their intricate terra cotta capitals were laying on the ground. Making sense of all this was the challenge of the restoration.

The architect, Randy Hohlaus set a goal of peeling back the intervening layers of past construction to allow the form of the old house to reveal itself.

Randy began by preparing design documents looking at the various options of restoration and decided to restore the house as much as practical back to the period of the first major renovation. The result of his outstanding work is evident in the completed project.

The house was filled with furniture and household goods belonging to Claribel and after the renovation was complete, members of the Wilson County Historical Society began the process of returning only those pieces needed to restore the home to its earlier elegance

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Today, the beautiful Dewees Renschel House is available for meetings, receptions and other related civic activities in addition to serving as a museum documenting the Dewees Ranch history and its contribution to ranching in Texas during the trail driving days after the American Civil War.

Compiled by Gene Maeckel from information in the files of the Wilson County Historical Commission Archives, P.O. Box 101, Floresville, Texas 78114, 7/2010. Web site: [www.wilsoncountyhistory.org](http://www.wilsoncountyhistory.org)

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