

RICHARD WALKER AND IKE BARNES

Wilson County lost one of its favorite cowboys in November 1974 when Richard "Bubba" Walker passed away and was laid to rest in Floresville's City Cemetery #2.

With his twinkling eyes and infectious laugh, Bubba was probably the last of his generation to work the area ranches. It is said that he followed in his father and grandfather's footsteps making him a 3d generation ranch hand.

While he pursued ranching in his spare time and on weekends, he worked more than 30 years at Kelly Field in San Antonio, where he commuted the 30 miles every day, to provide for his family – Helen, his wife, and two sons Richard Jr. and John Wilbert.

About 2 months before the 1900 disastrous hurricane struck Galveston killing thousands, Richard Walker was born to Jim Walker and Eliza (Edwards) Walker in Wilson County. The youngest boy of 5 sons and 3 daughters, he was called "Bubba." The family lived in "The Colony" where most of the African American families congregated after the Civil War. This was in the vicinity of Sixth and Seventh Streets east of Standish; however, at that time the street names weren't known. Most of these families later moved away or out of Floresville.

Bubba and his brothers Walter, Obie, and Rosser "Buster" were lifelong Texas residents. His brother Alonzo, called "Lonnie" or "Tonker," lived in Chicago. His sister Johnetta, who seemed to take on the role of surrogate mother, was called "Johnnie" and lived in Karnes City. Mamye, the youngest girl who was called "Jim," was sent to college by her generous brother Bubba.

Some men become men by their actions. Quietly and secretly, Richard Walker gave money to a local family when the husband became sick and unemployed...Richard Walker always transported the local school children to attend the county meets...Richard Walker moved a young family to a city where their children could continue their education...and according to whom you ask, there are hundreds of other examples of this caring person.

After leaving the old Walker home place where the HEB store is now located, Richard built a lovely home on Standish Street near the corner of 7th Street for his wife Helen and their sons. This home was the site of many happy events for family and friends.

Bubba worked on many of the area ranches including the 90,000 acre Dewees Ranch. His maternal grandparents, Andrew Edwards and Nancy McDaniel Edwards, worked and lived on the George A. Monkhouse Ranch. Records show that he and most of his brothers also worked for Monkhouse in later years. His son John reports working with his Dad Bubba on the Frank Thompson Ranch in Charlotte. The Peeler Ranch in

McMullen County also employed Bubba Walker. In fact, photographs of a staged roundup at the Peeler Ranch are in a collection at the University of Texas at Austin. This 1957 event shows Bubba and a number of other Wilson County African American "cowboys" on horseback with a Longhorn herd.

Sometime during the ranching years, Isaac "Ike" Barnes met Bubba Walker and they became lifelong buddies. This was a mutual admiration. At most family events, one would find Ike. Few, if any, knew much about Isaac Barnes' background. He was a big gentle quiet-spoken guy with a dark brown complexion. No record can be found that indicates he ever married. It seems cattle, horses and hard ranch work in south Texas was his life.

Sometimes, a man receives accolades during his lifetime. Ike received recognition from South Texas ranchers by being given the Working Cowboy Award in 1979 at a festive annual rodeo event in Pleasanton. At that time, Ike was only the second African American to receive the Award, which included a silver belt buckle and a vest. Ike Barnes died about 1989.

Although, the era of the great cattle drives had ended by the time these two men were born, the same skills were still needed on the ranches. Bubba and Ike learned over time to perfect their skills at branding and herding cattle, breaking horses, and other range duties.

Life continually presents characters in our lives that impact us in a special way such as these two men. Their skills at ranching caused them to receive praises from their peers, tributes from publications, and admiration from many throughout Southwest Texas.

Written by Jamie L. Walker Harris for Wilson County Historical Society, 3/12/2007