

Heritage on the Prairie

Nestled in the back roads of Washington County sits Quebe Farm, an ecosystem of prairie land and natural animal habitats which were settled by Charlotte von Rosenberg's great-grandfather over 100 years ago

By JONI J. DANIEL

We've all been there and done it: lost, sold or given away something that was unknowingly of great value. Of course, the opposite can hold true, too, as it has for Charlotte von Rosenberg, owner of Quebe Farm.

Nestled in the back roads of Brenham, Quebe Farm was originally settled in 1887 by von Rosenberg's great-grandfather, Heinrich Quebe. One hundred years later, she inherited the land, but it wasn't until 2003 that she discovered the treasure trove in her possession. Fortunately, she didn't let go of the land before discovering that the overgrown prairie and forest could, indeed, be transformed into a haven where many of central Texas' dispossessed animals, plants and insects could once again thrive. Von Rosenberg's vision has inspired her to lend Mother Nature a gracious hand in undoing all that time and civilization had wrought on the land. The land was, in her words, "worth saving, nurturing and reclaiming."

When Charlotte's great-grandfather immigrated from Germany, he purchased 450 acres initially called the Thomas Plantation, which was part of the original Stephen F. Austin tract. By the time Heinrich Quebe bought the land, everything was completely changed by the Civil War.

Sharecropping of cotton and corn eventually became the primary use for the land, but later the idea of sharecropping grew stale for a number of economical and political reasons. In the 1930s raising cattle replaced sharecropping, which in turn put more stress on the land. "Cattle should be moved from place to place so they don't eat everything but the dirt and cause the land to be terribly abused and battered," said von Rosenberg.

Von Rosenberg's mother was born and lived on Quebe Farm until she graduated from high school



Above:
Springtime prairie at
Quebe Farm.

Below:
Charlotte & Bill von
Rosenberg with their free-
wondering pal " Squirrel."



and moved to Austin to begin her education in nursing. By 2002, both mother and daughter resided in Austin. Although von Rosenberg and her mother visited Quebe Farm quite often — von Rosenberg's uncle remained in the family home — the land was primarily used for cattle grazing as they were all still unaware of the continued damage being done to the property.

Before von Rosenberg's mother passed away in 2006, she ensured that Quebe Farm was registered as a "Texas Family Land Heritage Farm". Obtaining certification in this program is no easy accomplishment. First, the owner must reside in Texas and trace the line of ownership from the first family member to the present, either through direct relatives or by marriage. The land must also meet the old U.S. Census definition of a farm: 10 acres or more with agricultural sales of \$50 or more a year; or, if less than 10 acres, sales of at least \$250 a year. Next, the

owner must work on the land or, if they live off the land, they must be actively managing the everyday operation of the farm or ranch.

Von Rosenberg's life changed forever in 2003 when she met Larry Pierce, Agri-Life Agent of Washington County. Until that time, the value of the vast plant and animal species as well as the food chain of Quebe Farm were a mystery to her. Pierce pointed out that she had two rare and endangered habitats on her property: 12 acres of native prairie remnant and at least 15 acres of old hardwood forest along the creek bed. Von Rosenberg also learned that fire was a beneficial tool for restoration of native habitat. "Good land management improves water quality in Texas. When everything was set into place by our creator, everything worked together for the food chain, but humans have had such an impact on this chain that it has been terribly disrupted - worldwide, but it can be healed. Habitat loss is the number one reason for the disappearance of wildlife," said von Rosenberg.

The realization finally came to von Rosenberg that what appeared to be just average acreage was indeed a prize worth saving. Pierce suggested the Texas Master Naturalist program to von Rosenberg and, taking on her mother's courage, she set out to conquer the arduous program: a minimum of 40 hours of combined field and classroom instruction, eight additional hours of approved advanced training, and 40 hours of volunteer service.

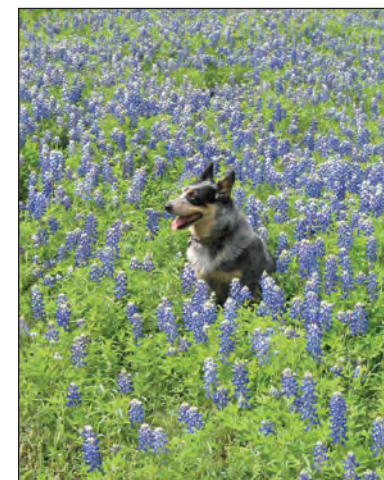
After the initial one-year training needed to attain the Texas Master Naturalist title, each subsequent year volunteers must complete eight additional hours of advanced training and provide an additional 40 hours of volunteer service coordinated through their local chapter of the Naturalist program. (For more information on the Texas Master Naturalist program go to masternaturalist.tamu.edu.)

Seven years after completing the course, von Rosenberg was honored with the Texas Land Steward Award, which recognizes private landowners for excellence in habitat management and wildlife conservation of their lands, among other things.

In addition to her numerous accomplishments, von Rosenberg operates a bed & breakfast at Quebe Farm, using the original homestead for her guests. Now in their fifth year of wildlife management, the mission continues: "to restore habitat for native species of mammals, birds, butterflies and plants using sustainable agricultural practices."

Von Rosenberg is an active volunteer for the Texas Master Naturalist program, dedicated to identifying native remnants and fostering an appreciation for all natural resources. She is also a member of the Texas Native Prairies Association and the Native Plant Society. Charlotte, with her husband's guidance and encouragement, has recognized the worth of her family land — and that's something that money cannot buy. ☺

Life on Quebe Farm



Left: Squirrel in a prairie bed of Bluebonnets.

Bottom left: Hercules Club (*Zanthoxylum clavaherculis*) — larval plant of the giant swallowtail butterfly.

Top middle: Squirrel takes a swim in a spring fed pool in a tributary of New Years Creek.

Bottom middle: Bluebonnets (*Lupinus texensis*), Butterfly Guara (*Gaura lindheimeri*) - and other spring wildflowers which abounded this year.

Top right: Rare Downy Paintbrush; Bottom right: Ladies' Tresses on Quebe Prairie.

