

The perfect spot to show off

By LISA GLENN

Two years ago, an old high school chum from the Washington, D.C. area, flew out for my daughter's graduation from Elkins. Where could I take him by bike during our brief respite from family gathering pre-grad hecivity?

He was a photographer and lover of nature. We meandered through Quail Valley over to Lake Olympia along the water when it dawned on me what spot I'd be proud to show this friend who had the Nation's capital, rich in history, practically in his own backyard...the Freedom Tree. It also seems the appropriate park, or rather future park, to introduce during this season of the "spirit."

In his book, "The Freedom Tree," Edward C. Hutcheson writes: "Stand upon a piece of land and think back upon all you can know or learn about its history, as far back as the writings go, and you will have covered a period of time comparable to the blinking of an eye."

At the year's end, it is not uncommon for us to reflect...and to truly appreciate the Freedom Tree in all its glory, we must look back in time...as far back as the January of 1860 when Edward Palmer purchased 640 acres for \$6000 in what was known as the David Bright League. During October of that same year, Palmer was elected Judge of the Seventh Judicial District of Texas. The election was certified by Governor Sam Houston.

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Judge Palmer and his wife Martha, known as "Pat," had three children: William Henry, Harriet Elizabeth (Bettie), and Rosalie Heath. In the January of 1862 Judge Palmer left this world, and less than three years later his wife also passed away, leaving ownership of the Oyster Creek lands to then 14 year old Bettie Palmer.

On June 19, 1865, from Galveston, the Northern General Granger issued a proclamation declaring the slaves free. At long

last the words and the arm of the great Emancipation Proclamation reached into Texas.

On a late-spring, early-summer day, Ed Gibbs, who has been the personal driver for Judge Palmer as well as leader of the slaves on the Palmer Plantation, gathered all of the workers together under the branches of the great oak tree standing on the edge of the prairie. Along with these slaves from the bottomlands came the white overseer, who knew them all by name, astride his horse. He explained that representatives from the Palmer Estates had sent word for him to gather them and tell them that they were free. He further announced that planting and cultivation would continue; that they were welcome to stay on the Palmer land to live and work if they chose yet the only wages that would be paid them would only be shares of their crop. It was in this light that slavery ended on the Palmer land beneath the spreading boughs of the Freedom Tree.

The land formerly known as the Palmer Plantation is now Lake Olympia Development. Residential developers in Missouri City are required to dedicate parkland to the public based on the number of houses proposed in development; or they may choose to donate money in lieu of parkland to the City for development of a park or acquisition of other parkland within the same "park zone: as

the proposed development.

Lake Olympia Development has dedicated 6.8 acres of parkland around the Freedom Tree for a public park. Access to this location is just now being completed. The Missouri City Parks Department is currently endeavoring to obtain a Historical Marker for the Freedom Tree, and plans on holding a formal dedication ceremony for the park in the near future. The parks department has also hired a certified arborist to fertilize, prune, and cable the tree for support of its abounding branches.

Over thousand years ago a babe, born quietly in a stable, came into our world to free us to live in the spirit of love. Hutcheson writes in his book, "As the sun slowly brushed back the darkness, on this day of note on the Palmer Land, the quail's call did not differ from the ten thousand other times it had been sounded by the prairie-feeding birds...Freedom did not come to this land with blaring trumpets nor even with a joyful crowd's acclaim, and perhaps that is why the memory of this day was marked more with feelings of uncertainty and awe." When the Freedom Tree Park is opened, take the time to stand in awe of the happenings which occurred beneath its spreading arms.

Sketch from Edward

Hutcheson's book,

"The Freedom Tree."

