

WHY THE LLANO ESTACADO IS THE “PALISADE,” NOT “STAKED,” PLAINS

The Gordon Stockade, Custer State Park, South Dakota



The Caprock Escarpment, Garza County, Texas

THE SOUTH PLAINS OF TEXAS



NORTHWEST Parmer County (Farwell)
NORTHEAST Brisco County (Silverton)
SOUTHWEST Gaines County (Seminole)
SOUTHEAST Scurry County (Snyder)

THE DIOCESE OF LUBBOCK “CORONADO CAMPSITE” SILVER JUBILEE MASS



“AN ENCOUNTER WITH FIVE SOUTH PLAINS CATHOLIC PIONEERS”

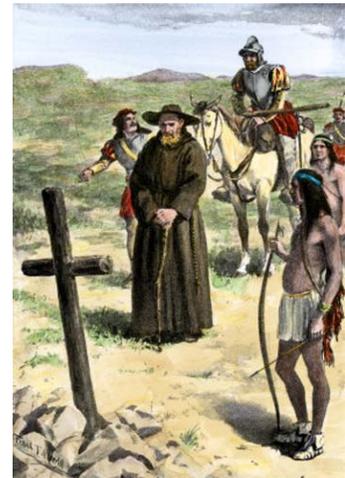


A conquistador whose army camped in Blanco Canyon -- while on a star-crossed quest for riches...

A priest who celebrated Mass less than 50 miles east of Lubbock... then went on to become America's first martyr...



A nun who brought the Gospel to the Jumano Indians in Ransom Canyon -- without ever leaving Spain...



A German immigrant who built this area's first permanent home... and welcomed Billy the Kid as a guest...



An Irish immigrant school teacher in whose family's home a priest celebrated this area's first known Mass of the modern era – 114 years ago on August 10, 1902.

Deacon Leroy V. Behnke Background... PMB

Here tonight to talk about some local history

But not as a professional historian of any kind

No, here as a *hobby historian*... not history **of** hobbies, history **as a** hobby

A hobby historian simply loves history and zealously researches it for fun

For me, it's US history, but especially the history of our Great High Plains

The hobby began when growing up in New Jersey

"Crossroads of the American Revolution"

At least 250 battles and skirmishes, including three of only four victories

But the hobby really became an obsession after moving here in 1971

Pat and I thought we'd only be here for a year

But we fell in love with the South Plains... the place, the culture, the people

That being the case, I'm delighted to visit y'all's little *soirée* tonight...

To share "An Encounter with Five South Plains Catholic Pioneers"

What that means is we'll take a quick look at:

- A conquistador whose army camped in Blanco Canyon -- while on a star-crossed quest for riches...
 - A priest who celebrated Mass less than 50 miles east of Lubbock... then went on to become America's first Christian martyr...
 - A nun who brought the Gospel to the Jumano Indians in Ransom Canyon -- without ever leaving Spain...
 - A German immigrant who built this area's first permanent home... and welcomed Billy the Kid as a guest...
- and,
- An Irish immigrant school teacher in whose family's home a priest celebrated this area's first known Mass of the modern era – 114 years ago on August 10, 1902.

The conquistador whose army camped in Blanco Canyon while on a star-crossed quest for riches...

was a Catholic pioneer named Don Francisco Vasquez de Coronado

This is a glimpse into his story:

there was a time when America was Catholic.

That is to say, there was no Christian presence in most of the vast territory which is now the United States...

except the Catholic presence of French and Spanish explorers and pioneers... including a lot of Jesuit and Franciscan priests.

Even as late as 1788, when our Constitution was ratified, three-quarters of what would become this country's territory remained Catholic.

The event with which most Americans probably reckon the beginning of our history was the landing in 1620 of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock.

That's nice, of course, but it's really kinda, well, flat out, *wrong*.

As the pundit Josh Billings once said, "It ain't so much the things we *don't know* that get us into trouble, it's the things we do *know* that just ain't so."

The Calvinist Pilgrims were certainly devout and intrepid pioneers, but they weren't even *close* to being the first Westerners to reach these shores.

In fact, in 1528, nearly a *century* before the Pilgrims got here, a Spanish Franciscan priest had already been designated as the Bishop of Florida...

and – in 1541 -- almost *80 years* before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock...

another Spanish missionary celebrated Mass right here in what is now our own Diocese of Lubbock.

We'll hear more about that in a few minutes.

Right now, let's take a look at how we can say that the roots of the Catholic Church in West Texas run very deep.

In the 1500s, Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza was serving as the Spanish king's ruler of New Spain...

a colony in the Western Hemisphere that stretched from today's Panama Canal north to a line connecting today's South Carolina and California.

Well, in 1540, the viceroy commissioned the 30-year-old Governor of Nueva Galicia – a province on the central west coast of México...

to assemble and lead an enormous expedition into that vast territory to explore the colony's little known regions north of the Rio Grande.

His name was Francisco Vasquez de Coronado y Lujan and he was born in Salamanca, Spain in 1510.

His fateful travels are known to history as the Coronado Expedition

Muster Roll

Before every Spanish expedition, its leaders took a *muster roll* that described each traveler, each weapon, and all supplies in detail

Coronado's official roll lists 225 mounted *hidalgos* (members of the Spanish nobility), 62 foot soldiers, and 49 scouts; meaning the captain general commanded a force of 336 soldiers...

as well as an army of more than 1,000 Mexican Indian warriors, many of whom were accompanied by their wives and children.

The expedition troops were also followed by a few hundred Indian allies, who went along as servants and herdsman for the more than 1,500 sheep, horses, and cattle that were brought along for food and transport.

But of greatest importance to us is this:

On foot in the front rank of the march were four Franciscan priests:

Fray Marcos de Niza... Fray Juan de Padilla... Fray Antonio de Victoria... and Fray Luis de Escalona

The reason the padres were in the vanguard was that Viceroy Mendoza wanted it that way.

A devout Catholic, Mendoza wrote specific orders stating that Coronado's mission would "be Christian and apostolic and not a butchery."

The viceroy also ordered that any Indians encountered along the way were to be "...treated as if they were Spaniards"...

and that the expedition's *Indian allies* were not be used as human beasts of burden for the caravan.

Finally, after a swearing-in ceremony, each soldier presented himself to the chaplain, placed his right hand on a cross and a prayer book, and...

“in a loud voice” took an oath “to uphold the service of God and (the king)...as a gentleman should do to the best of his ability and intelligence.”

Now the long march -- the longest by any conquistadores in the sixteenth century -- commenced.

Legend says that Coronado was intent on finding the mythical Seven Golden Cities of Cibola and the Indian province of Gran Quivira, so he could claim their rumored treasures of gold and silver.

That probably had at least something to do with motivating the young Spaniard to undertake such a grueling and dangerous adventure.

It is more likely, however, that – like most of the explorers of that era – his primarily economic interest was one of finding a new trade route to Asia.

Oriental spices, gems, pearls, and silk were highly valued in Europe.

If he could find the fabled Strait of Anián, the reputed New World waterway that connected the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, he and his supporters would become very rich and powerful, indeed.

Either way, Captain General Francisco Vázquez de Coronado was, no doubt, intent on realizing significant financial gain for himself and his investors – including his very wealthy wife of five years, the 17-year-old Doña *Beatriz* de Estrada.

But the Coronado Expedition had another – much more important but rarely mentioned -- objective.

The viceroy had commanded the captain general to lead a missionary journey, not simply one of military conquest or treasure-hunting.

That’s why Coronado had the four Spanish Franciscan missionaries lead the way and serve as chaplains for his private army.

The armed forces were essentially along to protect the company from wildlife and any human resistance to the expedition’s efforts at evangelization, exploration, immigration, and colonization.

The monks’ mission was paramount:

To proclaim the Gospel... to celebrate the sacraments... to establish mission churches... and to teach the ways of European civilization.

The earliest evidence of a Catholic presence in today’s Diocese of Lubbock points to this expedition’s 1541 trek across the Llano Estacado and into the Caprock canyon lands of West Texas...

From west of today's Bailey County... down Blackwater Draw... over to Runningwater Draw... and into Blanco Canyon and Yellowhouse Draw

On their travels across these plains, Coronado and his company would have attended Mass daily as the expedition of Catholic pioneers passed through these "South Plains."

Coronado never did find the riches he had expected to discover. They weren't here... and he went home in disgrace.

But his expedition had been a trip made bearable by grace... and it was the beginning of the lasting presence of our Catholic faith in this part of these United States of America...

PADILLA

10 MINUTES

The priest who celebrated Mass less than 50 miles east of Lubbock and then went on to become America's first Christian martyr...

was a Catholic pioneer named Servant of God Juan De Padilla

This is a glimpse into his story:

Martyrdom

In 1939, the U.S. Catholic bishops launched a Canonization Cause of the Martyrs and named Fray Juan de Padilla as the first of the 116 martyrs on their list.

A member of the Coronado Expedition, Fray Padilla is therefore honored with the title "Servant of God" because it designates someone who is being investigated by the church for possible canonization.

Born sometime around 1492, Juan de Padilla came as a missionary to the New World from his native Andalucía in Spain, where he had been a soldier before joining the Franciscan order.

The young priest was apparently quite talented since we know he held several important ecclesiastical positions in old Mexico.

But he knew he was called instead to bring the Gospel to the Indians who were living in the far off and unknown northern lands of New Spain.

So, he signed on as one of the four Franciscans who accompanied Coronado on what would end up as a futile and deadly expedition.

After leaving Compostela – near present-day Puerto Vallarta -- the expedition travelled north through Mexico and present-day Arizona (discovering the Grand Canyon along the way)...

before settling in at the pueblo near today's Pecos, New Mexico.

It was at Pecos that Coronado met El Turco, an Indian who regaled him with stories of the gold and other riches to be found in Gran Quivira, a bountiful land located to the east.

So, on May 3, 1541, Coronado, Fray Padilla, and the rest of the expedition started out with El Turco on a journey to this fabulous kingdom.

Coronado met with little opposition as he journeyed eastward... up and over the Caprock... out onto the Llano Estacado... down the draws... and, eventually, into Blanco Canyon.

But, after surviving a devastating hail storm, Coronado changed his plan.

Sending the main body of his expedition army back to Pecos by way of Yellowhouse Draw...

the captain general took Fray Padilla and about 30 horsemen northward with El Turco to continue the quest for Gran Quivira.

They reached the place – which turned out to be an Indian village located on the south central plains of Kansas – in late June.

But it wasn't *grand* at all.

No gold... no giant fish-filled river... and no great kings were to be found among the local Wichita people.

El Turco admitted that he had lied to Coronado and led him out into the seemingly endless prairies so that he and all his men would die.

The captain general was furious... and El Turco was strangled to death.

Sorely disillusioned, Coronado declared his intention to return to Mexico in the spring of 1542.

Fray Padilla accompanied Coronado back to New Mexico...

but then returned to Quivira to continue his missionary efforts among the plains tribes.

He and his companions were warmly received by the natives there, but, after working in the area for about two years, Fray Padilla and two mission Indians sought to expand their ministry to neighboring tribes.

As far as we can tell, it was on November 30, 1544 -- at a little more than a day's journey from their home base -- that they were suddenly set upon by a war party of enemy tribesmen.

Urging his companions to flee, Fray Padilla knelt and deliberately sacrificed himself to what a witness called "the arrows of those barbarous Indians, who threw him into a pit, covering his body with innumerable stones."

After laboring to bring the Gospel to the indigenous Wichita, Pawnee, and Kansa tribes, Fray Juan de Padilla met his death...

and thus became the first Christian martyr in what is now the United States of America.

Although Fray Padilla would have celebrated Mass at dozens of camps as the expedition bisected the Llano Estacado prairies, there's only one site at which artifacts prove their presence.

It's southeast of Floydada on a ranch in Blanco Canyon, and it's the site of the first verifiable Mass in the Diocese of Lubbock.

It took place on Ascension Thursday, May 26, 1541, and it was celebrated just about 50 miles northeast of where we are right now.

Father Padilla – who would, two years later, become the first Christian martyr in what is now the USA – left us a precious gift that day.

He planted the Catholic faith on the South Plains, and here it remained through the centuries.

Guided by Dr. Donald Blakeslee -- the Wichita State University professor who supervised the archaeological dig at Coronado's Blanco Canyon campsite -- Bishop Rodriguez celebrated a May 12, 2008 Diocese of Lubbock Silver Jubilee Mass on the same spot as the liturgy that had been celebrated there by Fray Padilla in 1541.

MARIA DE AGREDA

11 MINUTES

The nun who brought the Gospel to the Jumano Indians in Ransom Canyon without ever leaving Spain...

was a Catholic pioneer named Venerable María de Ágreda

This is a glimpse into her story

Young Nun

Maria Fernandez Coronel lived her entire life in Ágreda, a city located in northeastern Spain.

She was born in 1602 and, from a very young age, showed extraordinary passion in her devotion to the Catholic faith...

even to the point of becoming well known for ecstatic trances, during which she was completely rigid.

María became a cloistered Franciscan nun in 1620 and, in 1627, became abbess of the convent that she and her family had established in their home.

As a Franciscan Conceptionist, she wore the order's distinctive habit, which is white with a blue cloak... a fact that will soon prove to be of great interest.

Now known as Sor María de Ágreda, she managed to write 14 books in her 45 years of religious life.

Her best-known work was entitled *The Mystical City of God: The Divine History and Life of the Virgin Mother of God...*

and it was a 2,700 page book in which she recorded the words that she said were *dictated* to her by the Virgin Mary during private revelations.

It's basically a mystical autobiography of the Blessed Mother, and it was very popular.

In fact, it was one of the best-selling books of the 17th Century.

But, perhaps even more compelling is the fact that between 1620 and 1631, María de Ágreda is said to have visited the New World some 502 times...

bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Jumano Indians of West Texas and Eastern New Mexico -- without ever leaving her convent in Spain.

That's right. Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda was gifted with the charism of bilocation... she could be in two places at once.

Although she never left the convent in Spain, she appeared regularly to these native peoples and taught them the Gospel before they'd had any other foreign contact!

Because of her instructions, the Jumanos went searching for missionaries who could prepare them and baptize them into the Catholic faith.

So, in 1629, about 50 members of the tribe, also known as "Flatheads," arrived at the Spanish mission of Isleta, near present-day Albuquerque, N.M.

According to meticulous documents preserved in Spanish archives, the Jumanos asked the priests to return with them to their home in West Texas.

The natives wanted a Christian mission established in their homelands so everyone in the tribe could become believers.

The missionaries were dumbfounded -- mystified as to how these Indians could have learned anything about Christianity in the first place.

The Jumanos said they'd been sent by a woman who appeared to them as if by magic.

Wearing a blue cloak, she would come from distant hills and instruct the Indians in her faith, then tell them to find priests to complete their initiation.

The native peoples could only describe her by the clothing she wore, her Conceptionist habit.

They called her “La Dama Azul...The Lady in Blue.”

Those visits with the “Mystical Lady in Blue” took place in and around the Jumano campgrounds...

at least six of which would have been located within 30 miles are where we are right now...

- *Tahoka Lake* (south of Wilson);
- *Double Lakes* (northwest of Tahoka);
- *La Punta de Agua* (the Lubbock Lake site in Lubbock);
- *Buffalo Springs*, southeast of Lubbock;
- *Seven Springs*, just off the Caprock, east of Slaton; and,
- *Pig Squeal Spring* (Brookhollow) in Ransom Canyon, northwest of Slaton

The priest who went to Spain in 1630 to investigate the Jumano claims, said Sor María described the area's geography and climate in detail...

and that she “was able to speak to these people in their own languages about the True Catholic Faith and that they understood her.”

In addition to her *own* ministry of evangelization, *The Lady in Blue* also played a major role in the Franciscan evangelization of the Americas.

It was her story that encouraged many of the friars to come here as missionaries...

including Saint Junipero Serra, the "father of the California Missions."

That's right: Mother Maria's *Mystical City of God* was the only book, in addition to his breviary, that Saint Serra brought with him from Spain.

Indeed, Saint Junipero actually credited *The Lady in Blue* with leading him to the American West.

Sor María de Ágreda died in 1665.

The cause for her canonization was introduced in 1672 and she was declared *Venerable* in 1676, marking the first step in the canonization process.

We don't know if she'll make it to beatification or canonization, but we do know that when her body was exhumed in 1909, it was found to be incorrupt.

That's right, even though it was never mummified, her body was free of decay or decomposition even though it had been in the grave for almost 250 years.

She's one of the Incorruptibles -- along with Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Bernadette, and about 250 other Catholic Saints -- and her incorrupt body remains on display in a glass-lidded coffin at the convent in Ágreda she served as abbess.

HANK SMITH

8 MINUTES

The German immigrant who built this area's first permanent home and welcomed Billy the Kid as a guest...

Was a Catholic pioneer named Heinrich Schmitt ... but who's better known to history as Hank Smith

This is a glimpse into his story

From Germany to Fort Griffin

In 1878, Hank Smith and his wife – fondly known as “Aunt Hank” -- became what most historians recognize as this region's first permanent settlers...

when they built a two-story hand-hewn limestone home in Blanco Canyon, northwest of Crosbyton.

Heinrich Schmitt – who was baptized into the Catholic Church in 1836 at his family's home parish in Bavaria -- emigrated to Ohio in 1851 when he was 15-years-old.

Before too long, he “americanized” his name to Henry Clay Smith and headed west.

After working as a prospector... a cowboy... an interpreter... an Indian fighter... a Confederate soldier... a government contractor... and freighter...

he married Elizabeth Boyle -- a woman of Scottish birth -- at Fort Griffin, Texas in 1874.

Located near Albany, Texas, about 30 miles east of the Diocese of Lubbock, Fort Griffin was one of the wildest places in the Wild West.

Billy the Kid and his killer, Pat Garrett... Lottie Deno (on whom “Gunsmoke's” Miss Kitty was based)... the notorious psychopathic gunfighter John Wesley Hardin and his killer, John Selman... were all residents of the settlement at one time or another

It was also the place at which Wyatt Earp first met Doc Holliday and his girlfriend, Big Nose Kate.

It was a wild and crazy town...

and the Smiths were there when that “Who's Who of Outlaws” passed through.

From Fort Griffin to Blanco Canyon

Hank and Elizabeth managed a hotel there until 1878, when they eagerly accepted an invitation to start a cattle ranch in the shadow of Mount Blanco, 10 miles north of present-day Crosbyton.

There they and their six children were the first settlers on the South Plains to break the land with plows... drill a water well... plant an orchard... grow a crop... and open a post office.

And, since their home was the only house in an area the size of some small states, the Smiths often hosted travelers... some of whom had Catholic connections.

One such guest was New Mexico's notorious "Billy the Kid."

Born in New York City in 1859, Henry McCarty -- his real name -- was baptized there at Saint Peter Catholic Church.

He moved with his mother to New Mexico as a child, but ran away from home after she died when he was 15.

Before getting involved in the Lincoln County War that solidified his place in the outlaw lore of the Wild West...

he had apparently trekked down to the South Plains from Tascosa in 1878, looking for cattle to rustle.

Sometime in the 1880s, May Mitchell -- a Catholic girl from Toledo, Ohio -- came to visit her Uncle Hank and "Aunt Hank" Smith at their landmark "Rock House" in Blanco Canyon.

She later married Frederick Horsbrugh (*HORSE-berg*), manager of the massive Spur Ranch that was headquartered in Dickens County, some 30 miles southeast of the Rock House.

May Horsbrugh was a good Catholic girl, but, symptomatic of the times, her family lived more than 200 miles from the nearest Catholic church.

The four Horsbrugh daughters weren't baptized, therefore, until 1904, when the family brought them to the Ursuline Convent in Dallas.

They could have gone just 100 miles to Clarendon, but might not have known that a Catholic Church had been built there in 1894.

At any rate, the Smith's two-story hand-hewn limestone structure, now only one wall crumbling and charred from a fire more than 60 years ago, is a sad ruin in Blanco Canyon, near Crosbyton, Texas.

The family built a replica of the original home, to house the Crosby County Museum, on the downtown square of Crosbyton.

The Irish immigrant school teacher in whose family's home a priest celebrated this area's first known Mass of the modern era – 114 years ago on August 10, 1902.

was a Catholic pioneer named Mary O'Mahoney Lupton

This is a glimpse into her story:

From Antlers to Shallowater (about 10 years before it existed)

The first known written description of our Llano Estacado was penned by Coronado in his October 20, 1541 letter to the king of Spain:

He wrote:

I reached some plains so vast, that I did not find their limit anywhere... with no more land marks than if we had been swallowed up by the sea... there was not a stone, nor bit of rising ground, nor a tree, nor a shrub, nor anything to go by."

U.S. Army Captain Randolph B. Marcy, who explored the area more than 300 years later, echoed Coronado's impressions:

"...not a tree, shrub, or any other object... relieved the dreary monotony...it was a vast... expanse of desert prairie... it spreads into a treeless, desolate waste of uninhabited solitude, which always has been, and must continue, uninhabited forever."

The rainfall was insufficient for farming. There were no settlements. There was no recognized commerce.

Nevertheless, once a railroad was built in 1887 to serve the cattle barons' transportation needs, things changed.

On those trains traveled many Catholic immigrants from Europe in search of a better life.

Captain Marcy was wrong. Towns sprang up along the railroad.

The First Mass

But, even by 1900, the whole of Lubbock County included only 293 people.

Fortunately, that included the newly-arrived and devoutly Catholic family of Henry and Brigid O'Mahoney.

There were, no doubt, other Catholics in the area, but it was the O'Mahoney home three miles southwest of today's Shallowater that hosted the first Mass in the documented history of the South Plains.

The date was Sunday, August 10, 1902. The celebrant was Benedictine Father Gratian Ardens, a Basque priest from the community at Sacred Heart Abbey in Oklahoma.

While in residence there, Father Ardens routinely celebrated Mass at Saint Agnes School of the Choctaw Indians in Antlers, Oklahoma... a ministry funded by Saint Katherine Drexel.

Father Ardens was, therefore, known to the eldest O'Mahoney daughter, 22-year-old Mary Brigid, because -- just before moving with her family to Lubbock County -- she had spent two years as a teacher at Saint Agnes School .

Sometime after Father Ardens had been assigned to ministry in Thurber, Texas, Mary had by chance encountered him when she was in Stanton, Texas for her Easter Duty...

and asked Father Ardens if he might be able to visit Lubbock County some day to say Mass at the O'Mahoney home.

He said yes.

In her diary, Mary wrote:

The house was all torn up. They were house-cleaning and had every carpet up and everything was in confusion. All this and Father visiting us. Well we did not try to do anymore house cleaning.

We left carpets up and everything as it was and decided to profit by enjoying Father's visit as he would only be with us a week. Father was as good and considerate as ever; he told us not to worry about anything.

Saturday evening we took my bureau into the dismantled parlor and arranged the altar on it. About it we hung the most beautiful picture of the Mater Dolorosa.

Sunday morning we would be ready for Mass. Saturday evening Father made us take him all around the place.

He said everything delighted him with its freshness after sooty black Thurber.

We sat on the (stock) tank dam -- all of us -- from after supper till dark and sang and laughed and joked...

We even said our Rosary there and then went to bed.

Next morning for the first time in our house, and perhaps for the first time since the creation, Mass (was) celebrated (on these plains).

I know we were all thankful to God for so great a privilege and blessing to us. I went to Holy Communion by myself this morning as I had been to Confession a few days previously.

After Mass I made my Thanksgiving. I shall never while I live forget it.

Because of the initiative taken by young Mary, the O'Mahoney home was now the site of the area's first documented Mass... and, within three years, would be the site of the county's first Catholic wedding and first Catholic baptism.

BY THE WAY:

In 1906, Mary O'Mahoney and Walter P. Lupton rode in a buggy for two days to Nazareth, Texas – site of the nearest Catholic parish – to be married there right *after* Walter -- who had received his catechism instructions from Mary -- was received into the Catholic Church.

Their first of seven children -- Brigid Elizabeth -- was born in what was to become Lubbock, Texas, on February 28, 1907.

Elizabeth, as she was known, attended boarding school at Our Lady of Mercy Academy in Stanton, Texas, and graduated from San Diego High School in California.

After completing her studies at Texas Technological College, she followed in the footsteps of her mother, Mary, and started her own teaching career...

first in New Mexico, then in Pep, Texas, where she taught for 20 years.

Elizabeth took a break from 1949 until 1957 to stay at home with her husband, Lewis Owen, and their family of what became ten children.

But then, in 1957, she returned to teaching and -- for 20 years taught second grade – right here at your own Christ the King Cathedral School.

Fondly called "Big Red" because of her Irish heritage hair, she was a charter member of both Saint Elizabeth Parish and Christ the King Parish.

Elizabeth Owen was 104-years-old when she died on July 8, 2011.