

# A Legend in West Texas . . .



Col. C. T. Herring in front of his home on Van Buren Street

By Jim Matthews

told his father that he was leaving home to begin a life of his own in this land. A momentous decision for the adventurous teenager, but another of the decisions that made Herring such an outstanding example of his intense desire to be his own man.

Until he died June 29, 1931, C.T. Herring proudly stated, "I never worked a day in my life for someone else." Interestingly, even though he had little formal education, he kept a dictionary in his pocket, and always learned one new word a day. One must wonder if his feat of initiative, fortitude and success will ever be equaled.

Coney Burgess remembered hearing this story. "He was 16, at the end of the Civil War in 1865 and joined an expedition heading for California. The route took them along the Gila Trail, from El Paso, Texas, into Old Mexico, then along the Gila river to Yuma, Arizona and finally to San Diego. The expedition ran into obstacles from storms, illness and hostile Indians. Finally, after two months, the party disbanded in Mexico, and C.T. remained in Matamoros, where he learned Spanish before returning to Texas."

Herring's youth was spent doing a man's work. During the Civil War the Confederate troops found themselves with many shortages of supplies, beef being one. He and his brother, Emerson, rounded up cattle in Navarro and adjoining counties and trailed them to Shreveport, La.,

A fiction writer would find it difficult to create a believable character possessing limitless energy, courage, foresight and a strong determination to succeed. Such a person did exist...and not in fiction. His name was Cornealius Taylor Herring and the Texas Panhandle grew to know him as owner of thousands of acres of land, friend of Comanche Indian Chief Quanah Parker, cattle baron, hotel owner, oil and gas well developer, banker and possibly the area's first entrepreneur.

"Born November 13, 1847, he was just 13 when his mother, Sarah Ann, died," said Mrs. Coney (Janie) Burgess, great granddaughter of Colonel C.T. Herring. "Shortly after his mother died, his father remarried

Martha Jane Webb. He felt alone in the world, and grew more independent. In later life, he was known far and wide for that independence, and liked to say that he'd never worked for anyone."

In the year 1859, Texas was rough and tumble -- an environment that challenged the hale and hardy. The Comanche resisted the white man invading their land and the cattlemen's Longhorns and Herefords struggled to exist on land previously grazed by sheep and goats. In the midst of this hostile environment young Cornealius Taylor Herring took his first steps toward becoming a legend in West Texas. Barely a teenager, and mourning the loss of his mother, he developed a deep resentment of his stepmother and

## Col. C. T. Herring

Texan, Cattle Baron, Banker, City Builder