

Hamburger marker dedication held

By Mary Hunter
Review Feature Editor

Little did Fletcher (Uncle Fletch or Old Dave) Davis know when he put together that first hamburger in Athens in the late 1800s that his idea would sweep the country and become an American institution.

Nor could he have guessed that on a nippy, bright sunny Saturday at 10:30 a.m. on March 24, 1984 well over 100 people would get together to dedicate an historical marker honoring him for the invention.

After a thunderstorm-laden Friday, the sky cleared Saturday in East Texas fashion for the dedication/memorial at the (circa 1904) site of Davis' little cafe. The Ginger Murchison Building now stands on the approximate site.

The dedication and "First Ever Uncle Fletch Davis Memorial World Hamburger Cook-Off" were the offshoots of research that Texas author Frank X. Tolbert did on Davis and his hamburger.

This dedication was also a memorial to Tolbert for his efforts.

W.C. Perryman, Athens oilman, and Mary Hoy Owen Greenwood, Houston philanthropist and Athens native, joined forces as masters of ceremony for the dedication/memorial program.

In welcoming the crowd to Athens, Mayor Herbert Gatlin Jr. told the crowd, "We mean to make the "First Ever Uncle Fletch Davis Memorial World Hamburger Cook-Off" an annual event. So put it on your calendar to be back next year."

In introducing Mrs. Greenwood, Perryman joked that her greatest claim to fame was washing dishes at Davis' hamburger stand at the World's Fair.

Responding in good humor to Perryman's references to her age, the attractive Athens native said that although she was not that old, she was old enough to remember her good friend Mina Miller's older brother, Buddy Miller, was the most handsome man she ever knew.

M.K. (Buddy) Miller Jr., great-nephew of Davis, disputed the Review's reference to him attending the 1904 World's Fair since he was not yet born at that time. The youngster who did attend the Fair and passed the story on was Buddy's father, M.K. Miller.

"Uncle Fletch loved us kids," Miller said and told about Fletch getting the contract to tear down the old jail. He gave Miller and Mina each a key from the cells, number 13 and 14. Fletcher told the kids tales about outlaws who had stayed in the jail.

In telling a brief history of Athens, Perryman said, "Nothing is done in Athens on a small scale...whether it is good or bad, we make the best of it."

Dick Dwelle, Review publisher and chairman of the dedication/memorial, gave the facts surrounding Davis and the hamburger that came from Tolbert's book, "Tolbert's Texas and from the McDonald's Museum.

McDonald's research showed that when Davis first came to Athens to work in the pottery he rode the train

and then walked about 50 miles into Athens. It was more likely he got off at Ash Switch and walked about five miles into Athens.

Dwelle said that since nobody knows of the hamburger being made earlier, it is hoped that a Texas Historical Marker will be secured for Athens.

Perryman drew much laughter from the crowd when he introduced Robert Murchison. He explained that Robert was recently listed in the Inquirer as "the most eligible young bachelor in Texas."

Before unveiling the marker, Murchison acquired the "dubious honor."

Murchison professed he spent much of his life in Athens and although he is from Dallas, "Like it or not, I claim to be from Athens."

He spoke of the plans for a marker and said they "thought it might be presumptuous to have a huge hamburger made to replace the dome" as he motioned toward the courthouse.

"Uncle Fletch made his mark in life," Miller noted. "Somewhere around the early 1930s when they built Highway 31, he (Fletcher) took the contract to draw the yellow line all the way to Murchison."

Miller remembers Fletch wore knee pads (cotton pads) and gloves and carried a 4-inch brush and a can of paint. "He backed all the way to Murchison. I wonder how many knee pads, gloves and brushes he wore out and how many cans of paint he used."

Direct descendants of Fletcher Davis, Sharon Allison Van Slyke and Harvey Allison of Austin, were introduced to the crowd.

Perryman recognized Davis' children, Frank Jr. and Kathleen, in the crowd and told how Frank X. Tolbert was instrumental in the research for the marker. He noted that Tolbert had written about Athens more than 100 times.