Both Sides of the Border
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Ralph Ramos, radio and television personality, professional football and hockey player, wrestler, U. S. Marine in WWII, and a student of East Texas history and folklore
I came across this old May 10, 1973, Beaumont Enterprise clipping when I was cleaning out my files. I had kept it because I knew Red Kelly casually, and the story by photographer-journalist Ralph Ramos included other folks that I knew about. And I knew and admired and read Ralph Ramos and kept a lot of his clippings. Ralph got in the newspaper business when he was a kid selling papers in Ohio in the 19-teens and stayed in it and radio and television all of his life. During the Thirties and Forties he also played professional football and hockey (Texas Ice Rangers), was a pro wrestler, was the Buckskin Rodeo manager, and was a U. S. Marine during World War II. Ralph had lived long and intensely when I met him in the late 1950s, and we came together in our interest in East Texas history and folklore. I admired Ralph as a man and as a mover among and writer about the people of East Texas. Yankee though he was, he loved the people and the stories of East Texas. So I do this in remembrance of him.—Abernethy

On the other side of Red Kelly’s family were the Martins.
His grandmother, Mary Martin, was left a widow with five daughters and a son on their plantation-like place in northern Tyler County’s Billum’s Creek area. She was quick to get a reputation, as
one oldtimer put it, “having more sense than any other woman in Tyler County.”

When her husband died he left her 25 or 30 head of cattle. A fellow named George Kirkwood came by to buy. Mrs. Martin told Kirkwood to get her the agreed amount of money and he’d get the cattle. A few days later Kirkwood returned proffering a check. Mrs. Martin’s response, “No checks, bring me money.” Kirkwood retreated and returned with money.

Her reputation for sharpness continued to grow into legend. She sold a season’s shearing of wool to a neighborhood minister who conveniently forgot to pay.

One day, sitting in his church, Mrs. Martin listened to his fiery preaching on salvation. He waved his arms and shouted over his congregation, “What must I do to be saved?”

Mrs. Martin calmly rose from her pew and shouted back, “Pay me for my wool!”

And, there was the time when a man stopped at her kitchen door pleading for a bite to eat. “Certainly,” said Mrs. Martin, “just chop me some firewood first.”

“I’m too weak to cut wood.”

So, Mrs. Martin fed him and said, “Now cut the wood.”

“Now,” said the moocher, “I’m too tired and sleepy. I need to rest a minute then I’ll get up and go.”

Mrs. Martin reached over behind the kitchen door and came up with a rifle which she aimed at the moocher, saying in a tone there was no mistaking, “Now you cut that fire wood or I’ll shoot you right between the galluses.”

[Grandma Martin got her wood cut.]
BURRYING PA GARDNER


Pa stepped into the creek behind the house when he was going after the cows. He got wet up to his knees but kept going to bring the cows up to the house. The next evening he got a cold and it went into pneumonia and he died.

To the left of the breezeway in front is the bedroom in which Pa Gardner died. It was cold and Granny had piles of quilts in the room for Pa. Granny came out of the room one morning and said, “He’s gone.” Then she went to the kitchen where she had cooked him a pan of oatmeal. She took it to the back yard and scraped it onto the ground for the chickens.

“I was real tight with Pa,” said John. “I was about three and he would give me a penny when he had one. I was holding his hand when he died.”

The day after Pa died wagons and buggies were parked in front of the house to go to take Pa to the cemetery. Greenwood didn’t get to go to the funeral. So from the porch he watched them drive off in a line to go to bury Pa.

John went to the funeral. They put Pa in a wagon, in a wooden box, that maybe Daddy [Leroy Gardner, Pa’s son] had made. John rode in a buggy and the mud was so bad that the man driving the buggy had to get off to pull the horse along and to lighten the load. John got to stay on the buggy because he was little. Trip Fuller came behind the wagons and played the banjo part of the way, off and on, to the cemetery.