



STARR BRYDEN, PIONEER PHOTOGRAPHER BY JOE HERRING



I collect early photographs of the Texas Hill Country, and many of the best were taken by one man, Starr Bryden.

His story, from an email from one who remembered him:

“Starr [Bryden] was a very interesting man. He and his father had come to Texas from Tennessee. Starr had tuberculosis and was very ill. Like many others, he had heard that the climate in the hill country of Texas would be beneficial in helping him recover from his illness. I believe he was about 16 years old when he came to Kerr County. My great-grandfather (Harry Williams) discovered Starr and his dad camped in a primitive shelter on a neighbor’s ranch near Turtle Creek. He went home that evening and told my great-grandmother about having found a very sick boy and his dad camped out in the woods. My great-grandmother (Ella Denton Williams) insisted that they bring the boy to their home. They enclosed a corner of their front porch and made a room for Starr. My great grandmother fed him, nursed him back to health, and even taught him to walk again. Starr remained in the Kerrville area the rest of his life. He rode a bicycle most of his early years, and rode a motor scooter as he got older.”

Raymond Starr Bryden came to Texas in 1912, suffering from what doctors then called “Galloping Consumption.” He spent a year and a half in San Antonio, then moved to Kerrville in 1913, “just a jump and a skip ahead of Father Time with the scythe. He made quite a few passes at me,” Bryden wrote in 1956, “but I jumped and the scythe went under my feet.”

After he’d been here awhile and had been nursed back to health by the Williams family, he decided to go visit his family in Chattanooga, Tennessee. On his bicycle.

“All the money I had was \$10.00 and my bike, and the distance to go was about 1500



miles. The late Dr. Jackson said ‘Starr, it will kill you.’ Maybe so, I replied, but I want to go home. I made the ride in twenty-one days and when I got home I had exactly 25 cents, and paid for everything I ate on the way.”

When he arrived in Chattanooga, he sent a telegram to the Kerrville Mountain Sun, which the paper published. (I think the town was worried about him.)

“Arrived in Chattanooga September 29th. Traveled over 1500 miles and was in six different states. It was a great trip.”

Later, Starr wrote: “When I got back to Kerrville, I saw Dr. Jackson and said ‘Well, Doctor, it didn’t kill me.’

The doctor, according to Bryden, replied “H--- no, but it should have.”

Starr became a beloved member of the Kerr County community. “Yes, folks,” Bryden wrote, late in life, “my hat is off to the Hill Country, and especially my friends, and the great outdoors, and the beautiful hills. Truly the good Lord has been good to this community.”

Many of his photographs are featured on my blog, at joeherring.com