

11-3-87

Dear Dr. Cleaver

This does P.V. proud
and I know Dr Norris
would enjoy seeing this
article. As part of the
black history of Texas, we
must not forget our elders
because of their innate
genius.

Respectfully

Paul H. Little, Jr.

P.S. We attach the
approval of our
historical marker.
You all are invited
when we get a date
set.

Peach pits become an art in hands of oldtime carver

By DAVIE ANN BROWDER
H-P Staff Writer

We may be living in an age of technology, but W.L. Singletary says there are some things machines just can't do.

"See that machine on my work table?" he says to a visitor. "I bought it to help me with my hobby, but it's not good for much."

The hobby he speaks of — for he has many and varied ones — is carving peach seeds, mostly into baskets and monkeys.

Yes, that's right, peach seeds — not something to turn your head until you see what Singletary can do to one with a knife.

Singletary can carve on any material, including wood and cow horns, but he's been carving on peach seeds since 1934, the year he moved to Anderson County and started his teaching career.

"I may be just walking along and see a peach seed and pick it up — if I can see who or what I'm looking for, I've gotten my start," Singletary says of his hobby.

He says his hands are somewhat arthritic — he's a spry 78 — but looking at fine lines, carefully carved tails and arms, and facial expressions of some of his tiniest creations, it's difficult to believe one man has the patience, or the skill, to do the work.

"I don't do this every night," he

Neighbors

From boom towns to booming towns, folks from five counties fondly recall the past and look to the future. Neighbors, a weekly feature of the Herald-Press, brings you a glimpse into the lives of residents across the region.

said, "but on a cold, winter night, after I've seen to my cattle, I'll come in and get my knife and maybe carve an hour or so while I listen to the news. But you have to have a solid steel blade, not stainless steel like many knife blades have."

He also prefers Freestone peach seeds; he says they just seem to carve better. As for polishing them, he doesn't. He says the lanolin in one's hands is the best polishing agent around.

Singletary is better known as just "W.L." to most people in Anderson County. He started his teaching career earning \$75 a month at Lost Prairie, then moved after two years to the Tucker area as a vocational agriculture teacher. There he started making \$100 a month and married a girl he'd been in love with for

several years.

Singletary and his wife-to-be met in the college library at Prairie View A&M University. With the Depression still affecting most people, they waited until they both got good jobs to get married.

On Sept. 18, 1936, Singletary and Laurelia Maria Holden were married. Both continued working — he in vocational agriculture and she in home economics.

"Actually I just started carving again a few months ago," Singletary said. "After my wife died in 1985, I just kind of put my things away."

However, he's back to carving, and a number of other things as well. It's hard to tell from talking with him whether he goes to the woods to hunt animals, or limbs to carve on.

"I go to the woods with my shotgun, but sometimes I see something in a part of a limb and pick the limb off the tree — of course the noise scares off all the game, but I've found some hours of enjoyable work for myself."

Although he retired from Westwood schools in 1975, after 41 years of teaching, he's anything but sedentary.

Singletary owns a farm with cattle. He raises and harvests corn to feed the cows through the winter, a habit he said sometimes upsets his

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Staff Photo by Wendie Finley

V.L. Singletary begins a carving at his workbench.

(OVER)

Peach

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daughter, June McCoy, of Palestine.

"I guess it's a blessing that he stays busy all the time," she said, "but sometimes he's on the go almost all the time it seems."

Mrs. McCoy, who teaches in Neches, says her father is "a real firm man, but also very understanding." She said both her mother and dad were very family oriented.

"I guess any of us have always been able to talk with him," Mrs. McCoy said. "He'd give you the alternatives and leave the decision up to you."

Mrs. McCoy's younger sister, June, got a nursing degree. She and

her family live in Davidsonville, Md. A brother, W.L. Singletary Jr., died before his seventh birthday in 1952, from what doctors thought to be polio.

Aside from taking care of a working farm, making his own ropemaking device, tanning and curing hides, training horses and cow dogs, and of course carving, Singletary also makes wine as Christmas gifts.

A morning spent talking to W.L. Singletary will convince you that he not only is a man of many talents, but most of all, he's a man who's content.

"A lot of fellows had to leave home to have fun," he said.