

# THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE

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## Day Trips

BY GERALD E. MCLEOD



Little town on the prairie  
Photo by Gerald E. McLeod

**McMahan, Texas**, is for sale; lock, stock, and barbecue joint. The five buildings that make up the historic business district 10 miles east of Lockhart on FM 713 are ready to make more history if the right visionary comes along.

"The old place has lot of history and stories," says Ronda Reagan, the real estate agent handling the listing. She envisions someone turning the old general store, post office, garage, barbershop, and storage building on two acres of land into a Texas-style dance hall or artists' colony.

"The town is coming alive again," Reagan says. "Young people are moving back to the area." She estimates that around 6,000 residents are scattered among the hills around the ghost town.

Reagan has a lifelong connection to the settlement 16 miles north of I-10. Her great-grandparents and grandparents owned a ranch down the road from the once-feisty little town. During World War II, her mother pedaled a bicycle to the post office every day to see if a letter had arrived from her father. "My grandmother worked at the telephone exchange, and my mother worked in the general store," she said. At the time the community was at its peak with six businesses and 250 residents.

Roy Jeffrey grew up in McMahan, too. He runs R&G Barbecue with his wife, Grace, the last business in town other than the convenience store at the highway intersection. The barbecue joint has taken over the old general store with its pressed tin ceiling, wood burning stove, and nearly empty shelves lining the walls.

"At one time McMahan had two stores," Jeffrey says. Between the general store and the store with the post office you could buy almost anything you needed, from farm supplies to clothing. "I remember when we got off the school bus everybody would crowd into Mr. Chamberlain's store for candy and sodas before walking home," Jeffrey says.

Reagan remembers going to the store with her grandfather and getting a nickel's worth of candy in a small paper bag. "The store was open into the Sixties," she says. "By the Seventies the older folks began moving away, and nobody moved in to replace them."

A local rancher began buying the properties one at a time in the late-Seventies mainly to save the buildings from destruction or relocation. At one time he ran the general store, and his wife operated a beauty shop across the street. The couple is now in their 80s and has retired to a life of fishing and beachcombing on the Texas coast. Even at the bargain price of \$215,000, the sleepy town has been waiting for just the right buyer for nearly two years.

It wasn't always so. Sometime in the early 1840s, someone, their name lost to history, opened a general store and saloon on Ambrose Tinney's land, among the goat ranches and cotton fields. According to the *Handbook of Texas*, the town was called Wildcat until the name was changed to Whizzerville.

"There used to be a domino parlor there called the Bloody Bucket Saloon," Reagan says. One day while several of the patrons were sitting on the front porch of the saloon, a horseman rode through town at a fast clip. "Somebody commented on how the rider whizzed through town," she says. "And the name stuck." At least for a while.

When the community applied for a post office in 1898, federal officials saw no humor in the town name and declared it had too many letters for such a small place. The residents promptly changed the name to McMahan, the name of a local storekeeper. By the early 1960s, the post office closed and the population fell to 125.

McMahan, Texas, sits on a scenic country road between nowhere and somewhere else. The empty buildings are a silent reminder of days gone by, when families raised their children in a nearly self-sufficient community. R&G Barbecue opens Tuesday through Saturday from 11am to 3pm. "Roy makes a mean hamburger," Reagan says. The menu also includes brisket, sausage, beans, potato salad, and sometimes chili. To place an order ahead of your arrival, call 512-398-7276.

779<sup>th</sup> in a series. **Day Trips, Vol. 2**, a book of Day Trips 101-200, is available for \$8.95, plus \$3.05 for shipping, handling, and tax. Mail to: Day Trips, PO Box 33284, South Austin, TX 78704.

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