

Kleb Woods Nature Preserve

On a sunny March morning several members of the LF garden club climbed on a Precinct 3 bus heading for the **Kleb Woods Nature Preserve** in Tomball. This 133-acre property is a green oasis in midst of a growing suburban area. The property was once a thriving family farm. Conrad Kleb, a German immigrant, settled in this part of Harris County in 1840.



His grandson, Edward prospered on the land between 1904 and 1933 and increased the farm to over 130 acres. His son, **Elmer Kleb** was born on the farm and lived there his entire life but had no interest in farming. When Elmer inherited the farm, he let the land go back to nature. A recluse, he enjoyed the company of birds and small animals rather than people.

He planted more trees on what used to be prairie land. The trees now growing on the land include Water oaks, Shumard and Live oaks, Loblolly pines, eastern red cedar, pecan, bald cypress, and sugarberry trees. Understory trees like the yaupon and beauty berries thrive in this environment.

Elmer Kleb never concerned himself with mundane things like taxes. After amassing more than \$150,000 in debt, serious court actions commenced. Elmer Kleb had hoped to donate all of his property to the Audubon Society, but some of his lands had to be sold to pay off the tax debt.



With a grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Harris County purchased the remaining property and established the Nature Preserve it is today. Elmer was allowed to remain on the property. He lived out his 92 years in his family home, a house without electricity, indoor plumbing or any modern conveniences. He is buried at nearby Roberts Cemetery.



A short walk on a comfortable path led us into the woods and to the last remains of the farm that it once was. The homestead, a one-story house and the barn, are still standing and are maintained by the park management.



Old farm implements and blacksmith tools are still inside in the barn. The old tractor came from the Kleb estate, but most of the other farm equipment, dating from around 1900, were donated.



The grounds around the house are still preserved as vegetable gardens, growing squash, corn, okra, beans and herbs.





A tour was scheduled for us and we met our guide, Elise, at the Nature Center which was built as an educational venue when the park opened to the public in 1994.



Elise led us through the area that remained of the farm and into the old house.





Much of the furniture, such as the pie cupboard and many dishes belonged to the home built by the Kleb family.





After a group picture was taken, we continued our tour into the thick, dark woods of the Nature Preserve.





Although the grounds looked very natural, continuous maintenance is required to prevent invasive species to take over. Elise told us about their collaboration with the local Boy Scouts. The troops assist in 'weeding' the grounds periodically. Another scout project, plastic lined waterholes, are built to collect water for critters to have it available during hot, dry summer months.



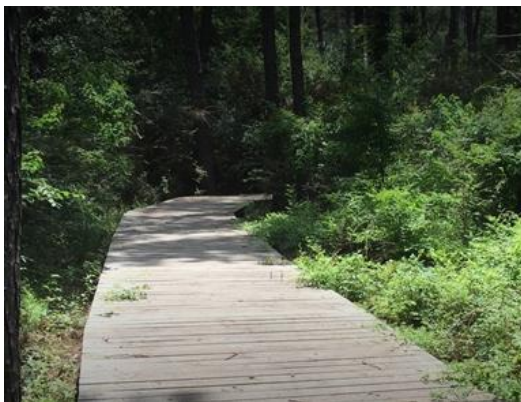
As we strolled along the gravel paths, Elise listed the wild life that can be observed at Kleb Woods: armadillos, swamp rabbits, gray squirrels, eastern fox squirrels, eastern flying squirrels, cotton rats, white-tailed deer, Mexican free-tailed bats, bobcats, coyotes, and raccoons.



To increase diversity of plant life and offer food and shelter to wildlife, employees have started a small orchard in a clearing.



School children, coming through Kleb Woods on field trips will comment on a pine tree and an oak tree 'embracing and kissing' when in fact they are in a life or death struggle for survival.



Well maintained, elevated boardwalks allow the visitor to cross through natural wetlands and observe many migrating birds.



A large Chinese Fringe tree was in full bloom.





Our tour ended at the Nature Center, where we learned more about the history of the Kleb family farm, their German roots and its last member, Elmer who in part shaped this natural landscape.



This Cedar Table: A Tale of Tradition

The Germans who immigrated to Texas in the 1840s valued landownership. In Germany, property was nearly impossible to acquire. Families that did own land would hold onto it for generations. The 134 acres that is now Kleb Woods Nature Preserve remained in the Kleb family for over 120 years. If Elmer Kleb had fathered children, these woods might still be in the family.

Traditionally, Germans would plant trees for future generations. It was one's duty to use the lumber and plant more trees. Andreas Kleb planted a grove of Eastern Red Cedars here sometime after 1871. The grove, which is prominent in a 1930 aerial photograph, was harvested by Andreas' son Ed before 1956. Those cedars regenerated and are still thriving today.



There was so much to see, explore and read! Much more than we had time for, but keeping it in mind for another time.



Back on the bus and a short drive later we arrived at the 'Texas Mesquite Grill' for lunch.

A private room was reserved for us and we welcomed a refreshing beverage.



A lively conversation about our impressions of yet another enjoyable and interesting outing was only interrupted when the hot food arrived.

And there was enough food that most of us took a doggie bag home.

We thank Donna for arranging this wonderful trip.



For more information:

<https://www.wideopencountry.com/incredible-story-behind-texas-kleb-woods-nature-preserve-2/>
<https://wanderwisdom.com/travel-destinations/Kleb-Woods-Nature-Preserve-Amazing-Site-in-Tomball-TX>