

Mortimer Mertz
Joseph Mertz
Family History
Heritage Park 2019

The Mertz family honorees are Mort and Joe Mertz. The family explained that they operated together for many years and are still very close today. It was said that if you talked about one, you were talking about both of them. They were both born in San Angelo, and on their maternal Mayer side they would be fourth generation ranchers in the San Angelo area, and on their paternal Mertz side they are the third generation of people who have ranched here.

Mortimer (M.L.) Mertz, their grandfather, had his fingers in every phase of agriculture: sheep, cattle, wool, cotton, banking, and railroads. Many things that came together in the agricultural setting and promoted San Angelo were because of him. His wife was quoted as saying, "San Angelo is where we made our living, and it's been good to us." They were both very pro San Angelo and pro agriculture. It was open range when both the Mayer and Mertz families started and you could acquire substantial holdings.

After 1904, Mr. Mertz, sold some land on Arden Road to the Cargile brothers. Later the Cargiles started an auction ring, and some of Mort and Joe's best friends were John Cargile and Carolyn Cargile. Mr. Mertz started with a flock of sheep. Then he moved to raising cattle and got rid of the sheep. He sold these cattle to a bigger market in Kansas City because he was involved with the railroads.

In 1910, M.L became director of the Kansas City-Mexico-Orient railroad and worked alongside the head of the railroad, Arthur Stillwell, towards securing a railroad from Kansas City to the Pacific Coast. He knew going through Texas would be a shorter distance than over the Rocky Mountains. Mr. Stillwell had been robbing Peter to pay Paul, so to speak, and the railroad went into receivership from 1912 to 1914 with Mr. Mertz and S.P. Hovey of Ft. Worth as the receivers. Mr. Mertz and Mr. Hovey provided private funds and for the first time in history a track was built while a railroad was under receivership. The railway came through Irion county and the county seat at that time was Sherwood but to go through Sherwood, two expensive bridges would have to be built. To avoid building the bridges the railroad was routed through a small town nearby that had no name at that time. The railroad named it Mertz first. There was a town in Kansas named Mertz and this caused postal confusion, so the name was changed to Mertz on Spring Creek with the Spring Creek eventually being dropped leaving Mertz as the town's name.

Abe Mayer, Mort and Joe's maternal grandfather, was a true cowboy who was born in 1877. He was the head of the Val Verde Land and Cattle Company in Crockett County. His family lived at Howard's Well. There are photographs of the oldest house in Crockett County, and Abe Mayer lived in that house. He was a thin, wiry guy, who brought a lot of joy to Mort and Joe and helped mentor them in the ranching business. The influence of Abe Mayer and Len Mertz, their father, in the lives of Joe and Mort Mertz is what made them into who they are today. Their descendants are the beneficiaries of the qualities installed by these great, strong men.

Growing up, Joe and Mort spent much time with Abe and Emma Mayer. They had a large home at the corner of Beauregard and Abe, 401 West Beauregard, where the Shell station and Econo Lodge are currently located. It was called the “big house”, and the Mayers had a big family. There multitudes of family gatherings were held. The family had the ranch at Arden that Abe Mayer purchased in 1915 from the other grandfather, M.L. Mertz, so it is all very intertwined. That piece of land has been consecutively owned for over 130 years by someone in the Mertz/Mayer family.

Will Rogers came to Ozona once and while there, he saw Abe Mayer rope. Later that same year Joe and Mort were with their grandfather Mayer in San Diego at a polo match when Will Rogers recognized Abe, whom he had met months before. Rogers pointed at Abe but since he couldn't think of Abe's name, he said, “Hey Ozona!” Rogers called him “Ozona” for the duration of the polo match.

Joe and Mort Mertz enjoyed playing polo with their father Len Mertz. They had a polo arena at Mertz Field where Stadium Park shopping center now stands on Knickerbocker. Their father played polo when the boys were young. Joe and Mort kept their saddle- horses behind their home on Washington Drive and usually rode their horses to Mertz field. Their Dad taught them to rope goats so they could be cowboys and do ranch work. The brothers noticed the polo mallets and the balls in the barn. So, one day their father allowed them to start playing polo. After the fun of polo and the thrill of riding fast and hitting the ball, they never went back to roping goats. This started many wonderful years of playing polo with their father.

In 1928 Len Mertz won the Southwestern Circuit Tournament in San Antonio. In 1949 Joe and Mort won the same tournament. They sought to emulate their father who was an experienced horseman and polo player. They were cowboys but they loved playing polo. The family especially enjoyed the family aspect of polo and even their mother was part of San Angelo Women's Polo Team. They played polo all over the United States. A great story developed when they were playing in a high dollar match in Chicago. The match was on Sunday so they first went to Church and then to the barns to shoe their horses. A man confronted Mort Mertz saying, “You can't shoe these horses because you don't have a union card.” Mort responded “I don't need a union card. These horses belong to me.” The man replied, “No, you can't do it.” Mort thought the man looked like someone who might have underworld connections but he went right on shoeing his horse. Nothing more came of it and the Mertz brothers went on to win the match that afternoon.

They played in other big polo tournaments besides Chicago, including Arlington Farms, Colorado Springs, El Paso, and San Antonio. Other players had fancy trailers, high-top polo boots, and other fancy accoutrements but the Mertz brothers beat them all just the same.

The Mertz family was also involved in the government Remount Program. In this program, the Army would send down thoroughbred stallions and loan them out to the ranchers. The Mertz family trained the horses for the Remount Program. The government only wanted the males, so, the females stayed with the Mertz family. Consequently, they had some tremendous thoroughbred horses that contributed to their polo success all over the United States.

Mort and Joe purchased 60 sections in Pie Town, New Mexico in 1949. They were actively playing polo, but they received a large number of cattle and needed more ranch land. Land in the San Angelo area was too expensive at that time, so when they were playing polo, they looked at ranches. Their father, Len Mertz, found a place in Valencia and Catron counties of New Mexico which they purchased. They employed the Navajo Indians from the Acuma reservation to help them build a house. By the time Joe and Marilyn Mertz married in 1955, the wonderful rock house was complete and looking out on Brazos Mesa. Mountain lions could be heard at night. There were also wild mustangs on the ranch which Mort and Joe broke to add to their remuda. Once when the horses returned after being let out of the corral a horse named Bolson came back visibly attacked by a mountain lion. The Joe Mertz family moved back to San Angelo from Pie Town and brought Bolson with them.

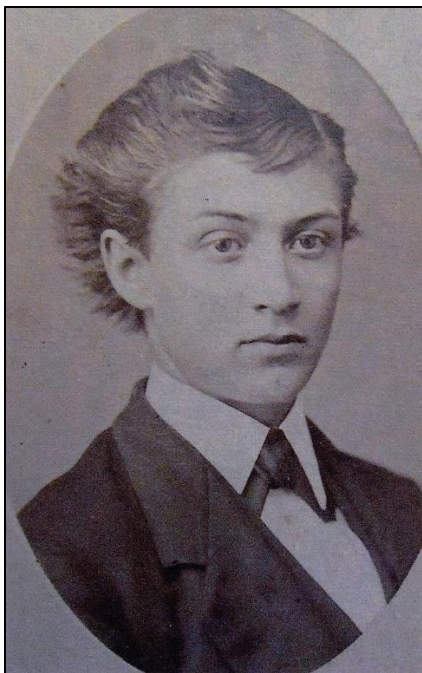
There is a thread in the Mertz family about loss and the loss of a parent, which has caused the family to pull together. The first example is in the life of M.L. Mertz who lost his mother at age seven and his father when he was only 14. Then at 24, he had some money being held for him in Wisconsin, but he came to San Angelo instead saying "I can make a success of myself here." The family has also had young children losing parents. The Mertz children have pulled together and become the most unbelievable success stories. So, this spirit and thread of survival has permeated down through the generations.

There are also hardships down through the years in the actual workings of a ranch. On the Thursday that Elvis Presley died in 1977, a fire started that consumed a large part of Mort's headquarter ranch in Schleicher County. Twenty-six miles of fence burned and there was great loss of livestock. This was a catastrophic blow to the ranch and very hard for the family to have to put down some of the livestock that had been permanently injured by the fire.

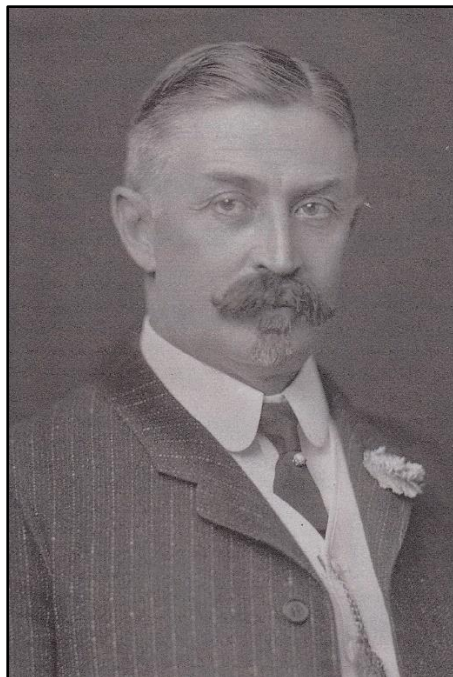
In the future, the Mertz family is anticipating phasing out of the sheep business because of predators and most significantly the lack of labor. The family traditionally did all of their own labor with supplemental help only at round up time.

The Mertz descendants were taught that you always need to do something besides depend on the ranch. It is a great heritage to have a great inheritance, but every time a generation passes the resources are divided up making it hard to turn a profit. The Mertz family also believes that it is not fair to demand that children must return back to the ranch after college. They, like many other ranching families, see that diversification will be necessary in the future. Len Mertz, Mort's son, cites some companies employing new technology such as Finless Fish and Memphis Meat. Those new concepts and some others have legs and substantial money behind them.

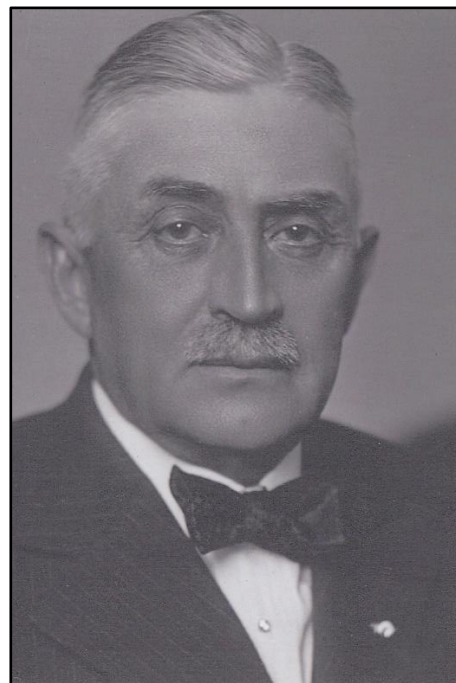
Artist Joan Mertz, Joe's daughter, sees ranching as a place where everybody gathers and quotes her mother who said "If anything bad happens in the world, get yourself to the ranch as quickly as you can." That's the place where everybody was to meet in time of crisis. Joan claims to be a porch rancher and feels the future of ranching is your dog and a pickup.



M.L. Mertz 14 years old
Beaver Dam. WI



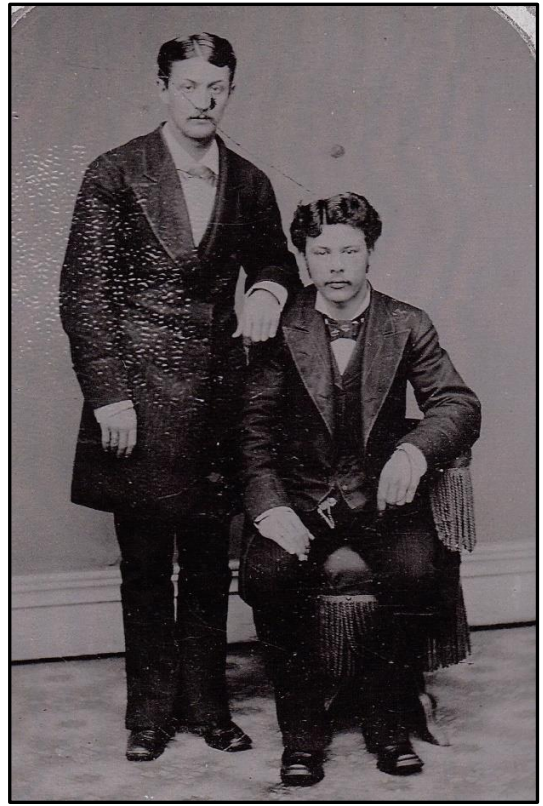
M.L. Mertz



Mortimer Lovejoy Mertz
December 25, 1854 – March 12, 1931
Director of KCM&O Railroad



Minnie Hewins Mertz with sons
Edwin Hewins Mertz 1892 Len M. Mertz 1896



M. L. Mertz (left) Age 24
Cousin, Otto Mertz
Watertown, WI

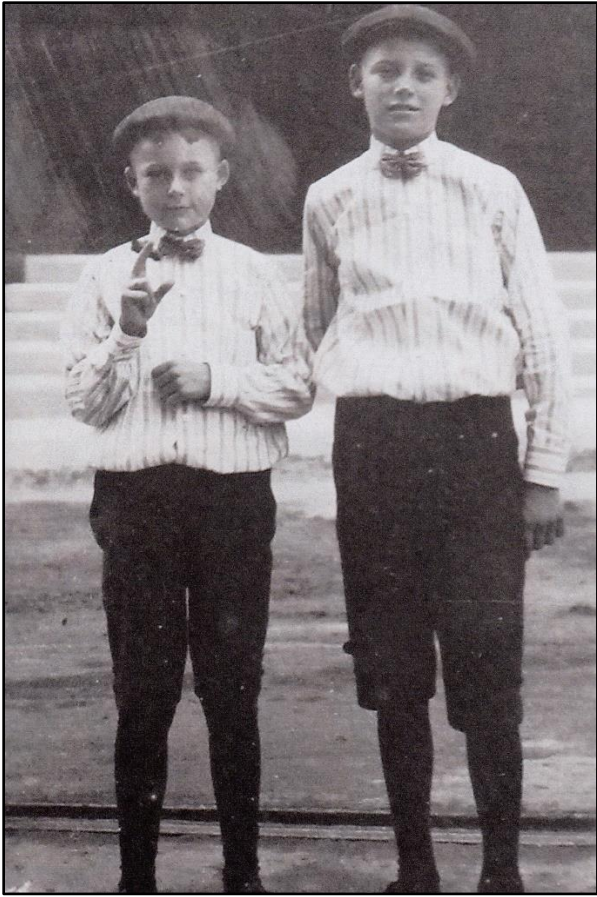


Mr. Mertz in buggy on Arden Ranch c.1900



c. 1902 -Schleicher County: the Bird and Mertz ranch. George Albert Neill with branding iron is flanked by (L-R) Mel Petit, J.L. Neill, Martin, J.B. Montgomery, Gill Adams, C.A. Brice, Luther Petit, Bill McGee, Jack Neill and Dan Murrrah.

c. 1902 Bird & Mertz Ranch cowboys, Schleicher County



Len & Ed Mertz
8 & 12 Years Old (1904)



Len M. Mertz
Lead of the Black Horse Patrol at Culver



Len Mertz (2nd from left)
Culver Military Academy



Len M. Mertz
U.S. Army



Len & Ernestine Mayer Mertz
Married November 1922



Friend Clarence Webb and Len Mertz along
Texas and Mexico border.
1917



Abe Mayer – grandfather with Len Mertz
1930

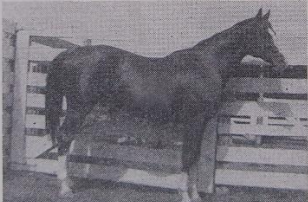


Grandfather Abe Mayer with "catfish"
On Arden Ranch

LEN M. MERTZ
 Ranch Near Mertzson
 Phone 7804

Breeders of:

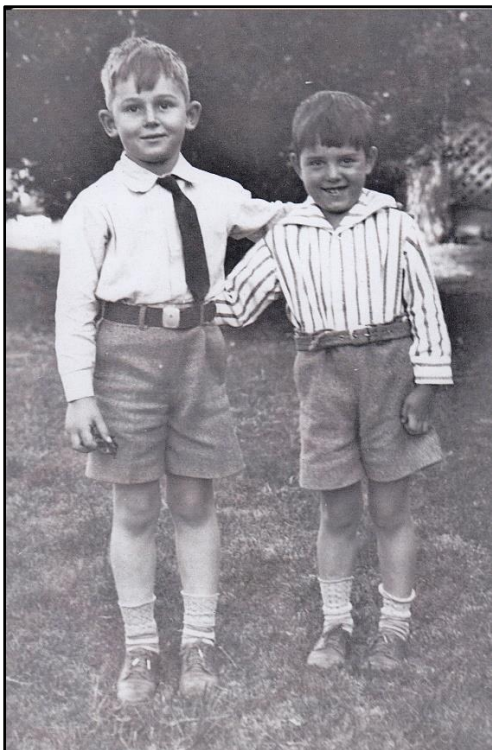
Thoroughbreds
Halfbreds
Hereford Cattle
Rambouillet Sheep



Livestock Weekly Ad
Len Mertz Ranch



Morgan Chaney & Ed Mertz saddle a steer



Mort L. Mertz Birth year: 1923
Joe Mertz Birth year 1925



Minnie Mertz
playing the mandolin (still owned by family)



Mertz Family: Mort, Len, Ernestine & Joe
1940



Joe & Marilyn Mertz Mort & Madolyn Mertz
Last party at 401 W. Beauregard

Mertz Brothers Ranch
Pie Town, New Mexico
1949 - 1967



Thanksgiving Day
Deer Hunt
Mort & Joe Mertz



The Brothers
Mort & Joe





Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers

Far left: Sol Mayer

Center: Len Mertz



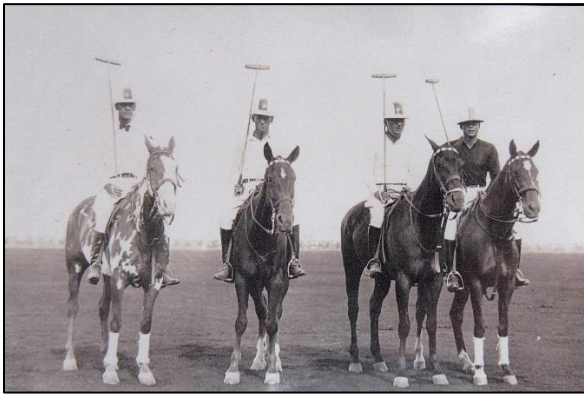
Len Mertz, President
West Texas Polo Association



Len M. Mertz
Nationally Ranked
10 goal player



Joe Mertz, Captain of A&M Polo Team 1942

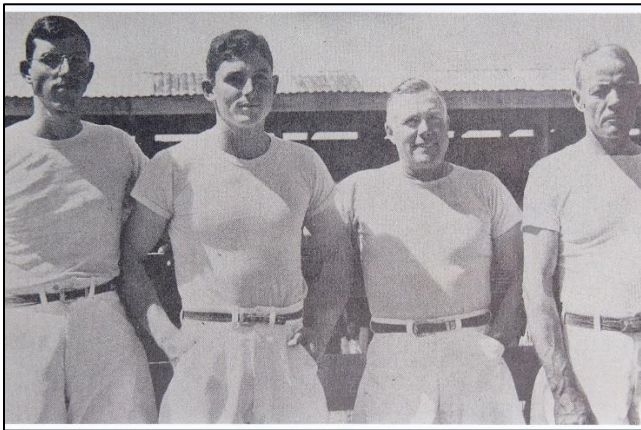


Len Mertz – Far right San Angelo Polo Team

P
O
L
O



Competitive Polo – Len far left, Joe 3rd, Mort far right



Joe, Mort, & Len Mertz
Steve Scott



Morgan Flowers
Walter Henshaw
Gillie Gilmore
Len Mertz



Ernestine Mertz - 2nd from left

San Angelo Women's Polo
Fort Concho 1923

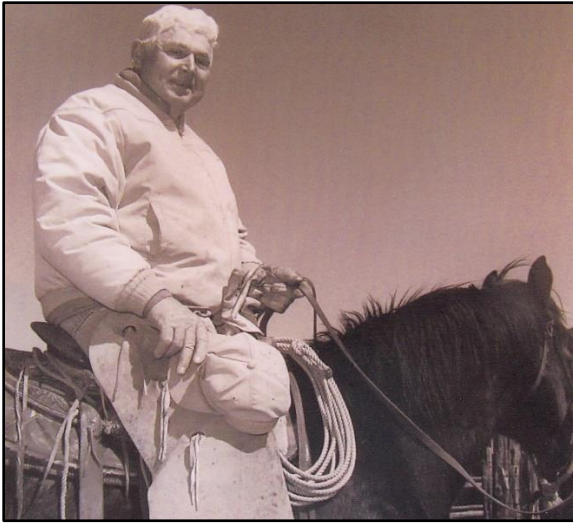


Photo on left:
Mortimer Leonard Mertz - age 90



Photo on right:
Joe Mayer Mertz – age 90



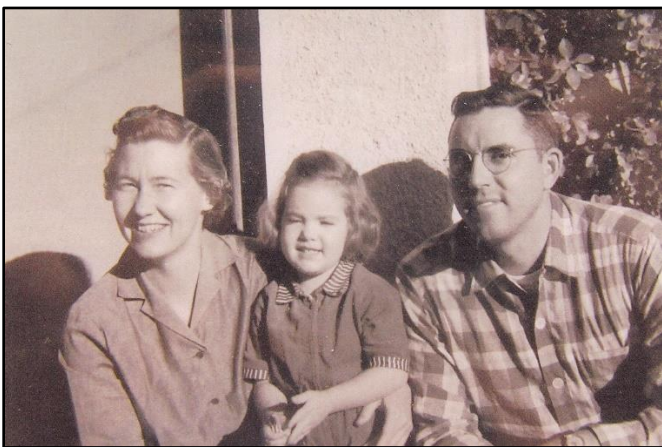
Joe Mertz with Katie, Margaret & Joan 1960



Joe Mertz with his
"cowgirls"

Joan, Joe,
Margaret, & Katie

New Mexico



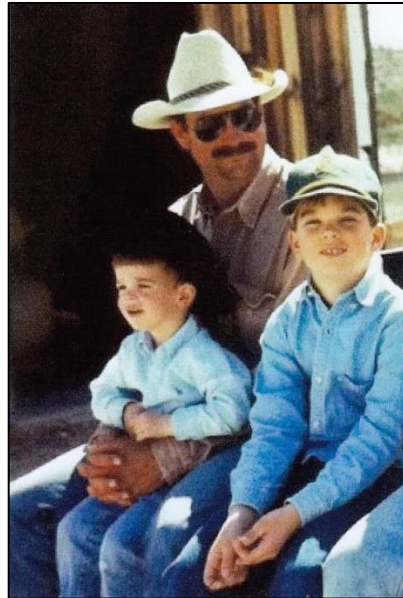
Marilyn, Katie and Joe Mertz
on New Mexico Ranch
1957



Mertz Girls: Joan, Katie, Margaret and Susan
Front center: Len Mertz



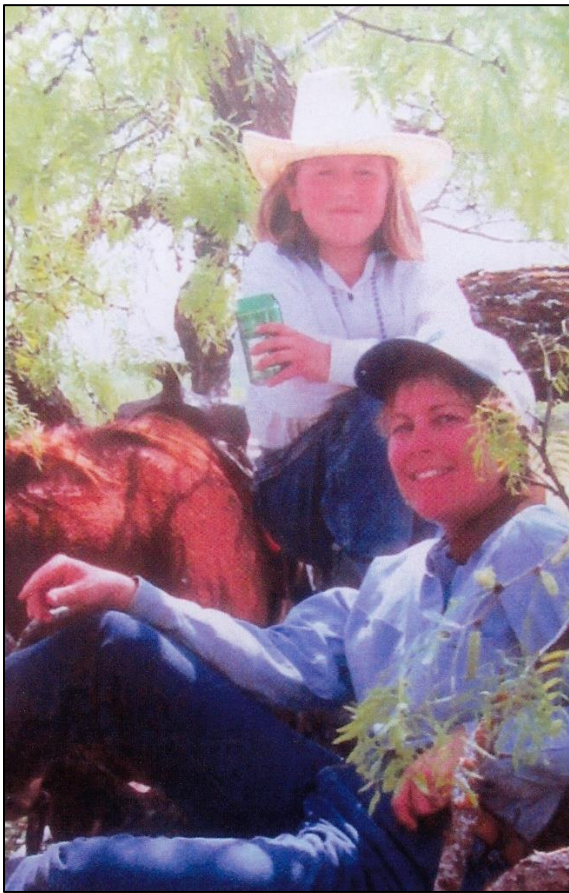
Trish Nunley Mertz
On Mr. Guns smoke Dunit



Dub Slaughter William David Slaughter
Will & Len at Sheffield Ranch



Len P. Mertz rides "Twinkle"



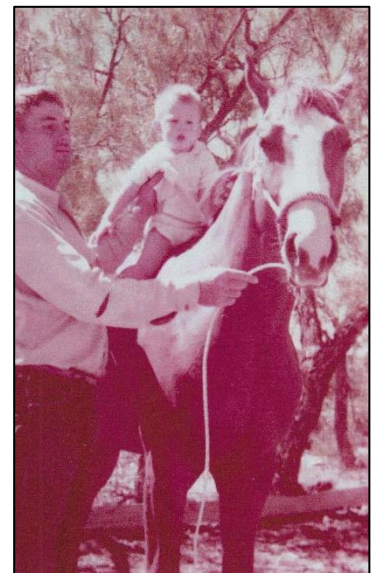
Madolin & her mother Frances Mertz
June 2000



Len, Susan and Will Slaughter



Old Timer Reunion
Arden Ranch
Mort, Mort Sr. and Joe 1976



Mort puts Len P. Mertz
on horseback 1956



Mertz Boys left to right:

Michael, Mort, Joe,
Mort Sr., Len and

Front center:

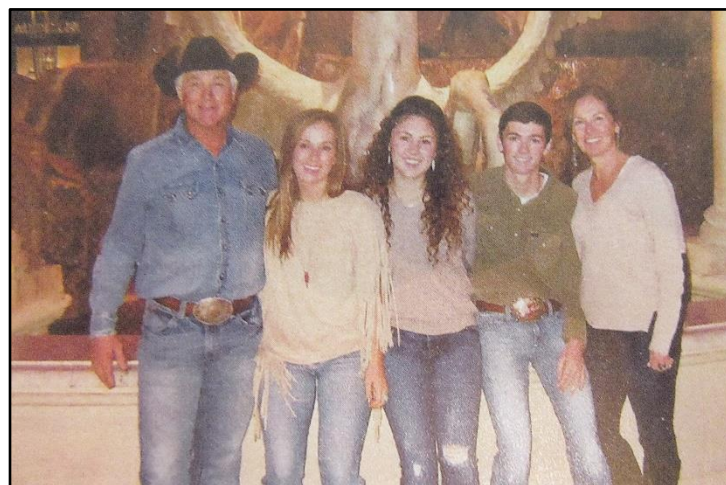
Len - grandfather

Mertz Family 1968

515 S. Washington - backyard.



Michael, Chase, Arden,
Wyatt and Trina Mertz





Mort Mertz Cowboys: Louis, James, Len, Phillip, Lauso, Mort Sr. Mort and Michael



Cowboys at Sterling City. Len Mertz 4th from left



Mayer cousins at Arden Ranch
Jean Mayer, Ronny, Len Mayer - Joe & Mort Mertz



1927:

Eight Story building

San Angelo National Bank

Chabourne & Beauregard



1902:

San Angelo National Bank Corner of Chadbourne & Twohig