

# Couple's roundup of history awaits visitors



Alberto Martínez photos AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Len and Lynda Kubiak have assembled several historical buildings on their Liberty Hill land, which they call Fort Tumbleweed, and plan to soon open

for history buffs. The buildings include a Pony Express station from Abilene and a Round Rock bank that outlaw Sam Bass once planned to rob.

## Antique buildings will soon be open to public

By Ricardo Gándara

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

**LIBERTY HILL** — In its heyday, the Bryson stagecoach stop was a place to rest along the route known as the Military Trail between Austin and Fort Croghan, near present-day Burnet.

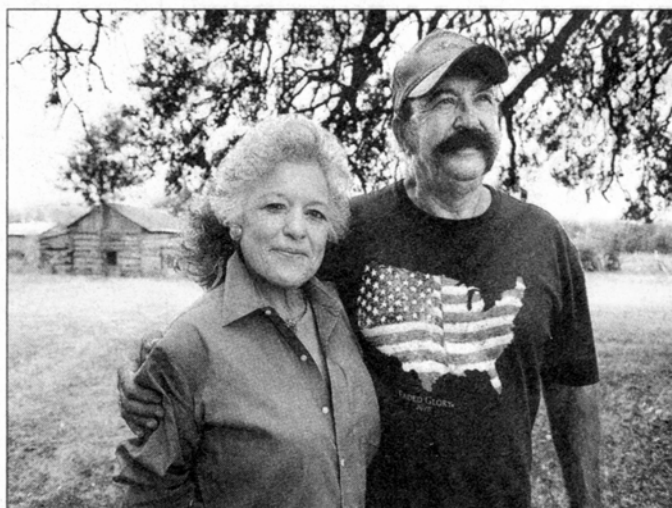
Surrounded by cactus and a rock wall and adorned with a Texas Historical Commission marker, the building now stores antiques. But that will change in about a month, when owners Len and Lynda Kubiak plan to open Fort Tumbleweed to history buffs who want a closer look at the Bryson house and several other antique buildings they have assembled on the premises — including a Round Rock bank that outlaw

Sam Bass once planned to rob.

The Kubiaks, who split their time between Fort Tumbleweed and a 32-acre farm in Rockdale, eventually envision a history museum and guided tours on the 16-acre property. In November, they plan to launch Saturday Trade Days for crafts and antique vendors. Len Kubiak, 70, a semi-retired technical writer with an electrical engineering degree from the University of Texas, knows everything about the house, which was built by John and Amelia Bryson after they settled in the area in the 1850s.

"The Bryson home is all cedar, its log foundation notched and fitted. The open, dogtrot architecture opened up the center of the house to allow air to flow through. That's how they cooled houses in those days," he said.

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Len and Lynda Kubiak would like to someday have a history museum and guided tours at Fort Tumbleweed. Len said he used to seek out old buildings, but now the owners often find him.

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Len Kubiak bought the place in 1977, attracted by the Bryson home. Then he set his sights on the Round Rock Bank, built in 1876.

"The City of Round Rock was condemning the building, but it ended up in the hands of the Voight family, who moved it to their ranch by oxen and wagon," he said.

Kubiak bought the bank in 1980 from the descendants of early-day Round Rock builder J.A. Engstrand and moved it from Round Rock to Fort Tumbleweed. He loves the tale about Bass and his gang, who planned to rob the bank in 1878 but were stopped in their tracks in a shootout with the Texas Rangers. Bass was wounded and died in Round Rock two days later, according to The Handbook of Texas Online.

"I've liked collecting old things all my life. I'm trying to understand history and preserve it," said Kubiak, who was born in a farmhouse on Bee Creek south of Waco.

Gradually, he found more old buildings to buy, including a general store from Andice that was



See more photos and watch a video from Fort Tumbleweed with this story online.

built about 1870. Kubiak bought it in 1980 from a rancher who was about to tear it down.

"How do I find these buildings? It's gotten to the point where people interested in preserving history find me. They hear I'm building an old Western town," he said.

He won't say what he pays for buildings.

"It's not cheap. When I bought a Pony Express station in Abilene, I had it on a trailer and someone offered me \$20,000," he said. Of course, he didn't sell.

The property also has an outhouse, log cabins, cisterns and several capped water wells that once served the Bryson family.

"We're working to get everything out that looks modern," said Lynda Kubiak, and that includes a 1962 Mercedes in front of the Bryson

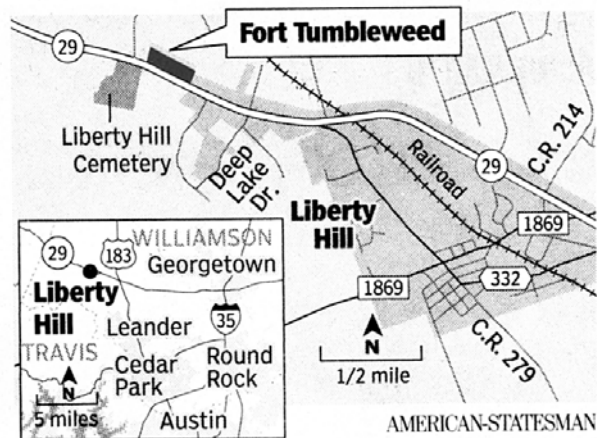
home that was one of her husband's uncompleted restoration projects.

The couple is cleaning the property and organizing. Len Kubiak, a jack-of-all-trades, is in the middle of several remodeling projects to shore up buildings. Lynda, a retired schoolteacher of 36 years, is designing a Texas history timeline using signs and pictures on the walls of Fort Tumbleweed's trading post.

When Fort Tumbleweed does open for business, it will be the "grand reopening" said Len Kubiak.

In the 1980s and '90s, the place was a trading post for antiques vendors on weekends. From 1981-86, the Bryson house was The Stagecoach Stop Restaurant, but Kubiak closed it when his restaurant manager left town because of a family illness. Through the years, Fort Tumbleweed has also served as a venue for small concerts and parties, but it has been closed for five years.

The Kubiaks, who were married on the property five years ago, share a vision for the place.



"Yes, we have big dreams. It'd be a great place to shoot movies," Lynda Kubiak said. "Maybe a bed and breakfast someday. But just look around — it's so Texas."

"There is no place I'd rather be than here," her husband said. "We work here; we vacation here by camping with our children and grandchildren. It's our world."

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