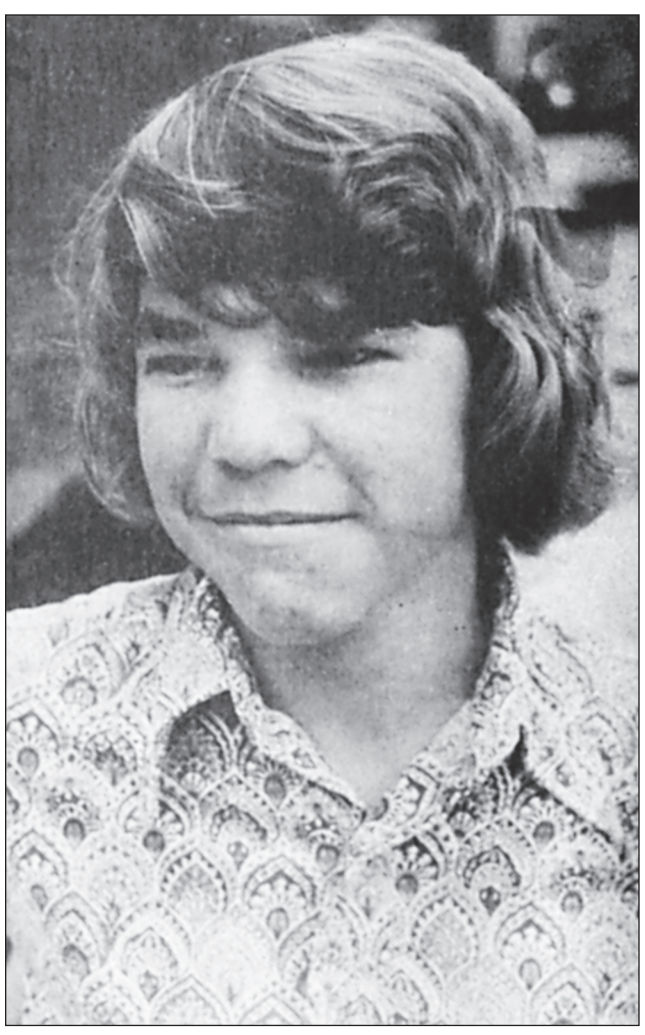
History & Folklore

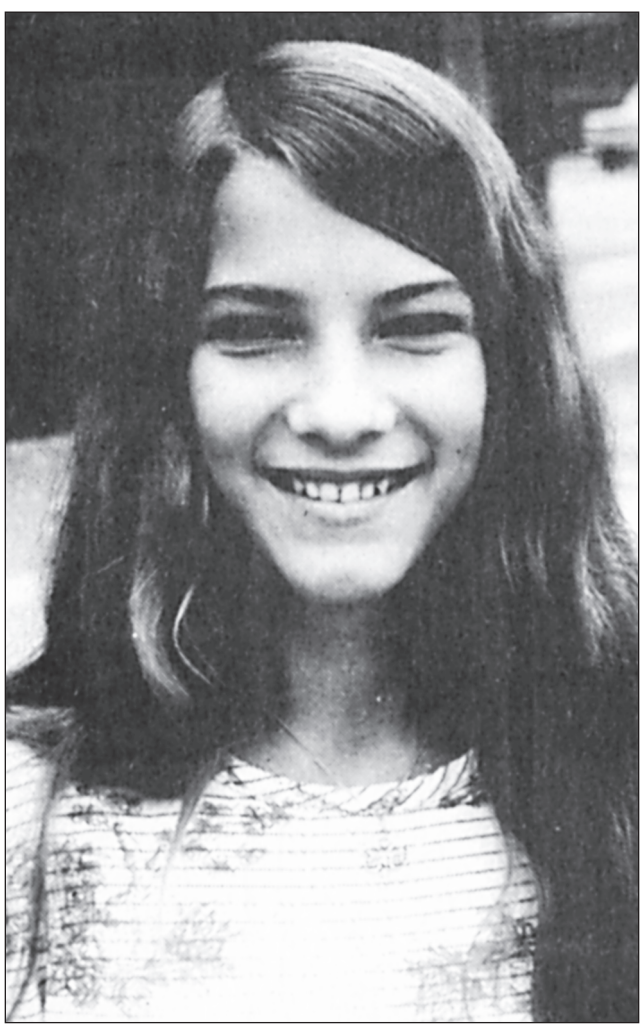


From Liberty Gazette, Thursday, September 13, 1973 –
ARTIE'S ARTISTIC WHEELS

Artie Ripkowski is not a little proud of his new Millionth Vega Sport. It's orange and white, so you know where he plans to go next year after he graduates from Liberty High School. With him is his sister Jo Beth Ripkowski and his cousin Judi Root.



ARTIE RIPKOWSKI, LHS senior



JO BETH RIPKOWSKI, LHS freshman



JUDI ROOT, Sam Houston sixth grader

Chief Bob Martin 1896–1964

More history of the Martin House, 516 Milam, Liberty

Any history of Liberty during the middle portion of this century must by necessity include a remarkable character by the name of H.R. "Bob" Martin. He was larger than life and wore a variety of hats as a lawman, firefighter, fingerprint expert, cowboy and a Texan by choice. He was an avid collector of almost everything worth collecting. He could be big and burly, but he also could be gentle enough to grow camellias.

Bob was born in Illinois in 1896, a son of Harold and Nellie Martin, who later moved their three sons and only daughter to Colorado. The family line boasted some Native American connections, which was clearly evidenced in Bob's bearing and complexion. He entered the military during World War I, rose to the rank of sergeant, and came to be stationed near Houston. He was, from that point on, completely enraptured with Texas and anything Texan. He came to Liberty around 1920 and went to work for the Pearson & Glass garage and shortly fell in love with Miss Hazel DeVore, daughter of Christopher Columbus and Hattie (Smith) DeVore. They were married at Houston on September 6, 1922, honeymooned awhile in the mountains of Colorado, and may have even lived there briefly. Hazel and Bob came back to Liberty soon thereafter and never left again.

Downtown Liberty was devastated by fire in 1925, wiping out several stores and office buildings and convincing the locals that the time had come for a modern Liberty Volunteer Fire Department. Martin was an obvious choice for the job and lost little time in organizing and equipping the new department. A fire station was constructed on the old city park property that now houses city hall, the city administrative building, and today's more modern fire station complex. Bob Martin served as chief of the fire department from September 1925 until his retirement in December 1957.

He served as a deputy for Sheriff Lockhart V. "Lock" Hightower and also went to work for Sun Oil Company as chief special officer. Bob even worked for awhile as a Texas Ranger, most notably during the 1936 Texas Centennial, working out of Dallas during that summer. His wife's niece, Rosemary (Mull) Laird, once described him this way: "Bob loved Texas with a passion, and particularly Liberty. He was more ardent than the natives when it came to proclaiming his allegiance to his adopted state."

His passion for collecting all sorts of things was due in part from his Native American ancestry, which led him to collect artifacts from that culture. He and Hazel began collecting American Indian artifacts from hither and yon, primarily from their vacation journeys to Colorado and Arizona. This led in time to collections of stamps, coins, rocks and guns, among other things. All of these items were crowded into nooks and crannies in the house they built at 516 Milam, which became their most notable creation of all.

The Martins prevailed upon Watson Neyland, a local artist, to design the house along a decidedly Southwestern style and afterward began construction of the dwelling from those plans. The house featured a detached garage and an enclosed courtyard, around which the living quarters were constructed and onto which they opened.

Many of the building materials came from other structures. Structural steel came from the old 1914 "High Bridge" over the Trinity, which was replaced that year by a modern suspension bridge. The current courthouse was under construction at the same time, and the remains of its 1896 predecessor offered a wealth of materials. Bob cajoled his way into good graces of the contractor for the new courthouse, who allowed him to gather leftover bricks, floor tiles and other building materials. The Martins also retrieved handsome walnut, ash and gum flooring from Hazel's old family plantation home at Ironwood in north Liberty County. The kitchen cabinets were built out of cypress. Other wood, solid walnut and gum, were purchased from the Robertson-McDonald mill at Devers. Several loads of brick from Fort Anahuac found their way into the house. Built from recycled materials with their own histories, the new house was steeped in the past. It remains one of the most charming structures in town. Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wiggins purchased the house in 1991 and have faithfully restored it to its original appearance.

Seven years after retiring as fire chief, Bob Martin passed away in 1964. His widow, Hazel, survived him for several years until her death in 1972. They are both buried in the historic Liberty City Cemetery.

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