

# Photo of the Month

## House of Webster



Roy (left) and sons Harold and Dale by Roy Webster's bakery truck, 1939. Courtesy of Roy Webster. (Neg. #N000953)

The Webster family has been in Rogers since the early 1880s when W.H. "Bill" Webster moved from Stafford, Kansas, and established a farm and apple orchard. Son James Daniel Webster continued in the farming business, while grandson Roy drilled wells for his uncle, one of the few steady jobs during the dust-bowl days of the 1930s.

When the opportunity to supplement his salary with a paper route arose, Roy took on a 125-mile paper-delivery route for the Southwest American, covering most of Benton County and parts of southern Missouri.

While he was carrying papers, Roy figured he could add more income by making a deal with the Harris Baking Company of Rogers to deliver bread along the route, seven days a week. Gradually he started to add his wife Evelyn's small five-cent pies to his route, which were an almost immediate hit. Soon the couple acquired a cow and added butter to their sales. Orders started to pile up, prompting the Websters to install their own bakery shop on South Fourth Street in Rogers. Among their best sellers were small fruitcakes which were mailed all over the world, especially to G.I.s during World War II.

By 1940 House of Webster was formed. The next step was the development of gift-packaged bakery goods, the idea being to sell packaged foods to corporations to give as gifts to their employees and customers; their first customer was Tyson Foods. In 1943 Webster began making replica containers for some of the food gifts; these included small butter churns, pot-bellied stoves, and cream cans. (Today those replicas are crafted at House of Webster Ceramics in Eastland, Texas.)

The bakery was closed in the 1950s to focus on making homemade jams and jellies, some of which came from Evelyn's own recipes. In 1957 the company added a line of Country Charm electrical appliances. The stoves were manufactured from an 1875 pattern located by Webster in an old casting foundry in Alabama.

Son Dale joined the company and is now president and CEO, while grandson Chris marks the third generation of the family involved in the business. Roy Webster wrote about his life in an 1984 book, *Under a Buttermilk Moon: A Country Memoir*; he died in 1994 at age 80.

Today House of Webster is in a 100,000-square-foot facility with more than 60 employees; the business

also includes a log-cabin gift shop on the premises. The company offers a wide variety of items sold individually or in gift packs, including biscuit mixes, honey, hams, bacon, jams, and jellies. About one-third of the business is now devoted to making private-label food products.