Letters From Brazos County Children
(And Some Adults)
1869-1922
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Few genealogists have extensive collections of family papers or letters to draw on in their research. Although much information can be gleaned from county and other official records, the lack of family papers presents many problems for the family historian. Often, little can be done to remedy this situation, but there is one source that has been largely overlooked. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries children's columns were published in many large newspapers and state agricultural magazines. These columns are generally forgotten.

The format of the columns was fairly uniform. They were edited by an "aunt" and "uncle" or a "grandmother" and "grandfather," and the children were usually referred to as "cousins." Children from across the state, and sometimes from out of state, would send letters to the columns. Topics discussed varied, but emphasis was usually placed on moral and academic education. Some columns included short fiction or poetry, which was frequently written by the children.

The contents of the letters vary. Some are brief and of little interest. A few letters contain genealogical information. The majority of the letters contain brief biographical information, personal opinions, and added information about hobbies, pets, and educational experiences. In other words, the letters tend to be useful in writing family histories, but probably won't solve many problems with pedigrees.

These letters do not represent a true cross section of the county's residents. First, almost of the authors were white. And, of course, their families had to be well off enough to afford a newspaper subscription. Nonetheless, the contents of the letters provide insight into the lives of children that is otherwise lacking.

While transcribing the children's letters, several letters from adults were discovered, including some endorsing patent medicines. Those have been included in this work, even though they technically fall outside its scope.