

THE CITY OF PILOT POINT

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Pilot Point is located in the northeast part of Denton County, three miles from the Cooke County line, six miles from the Collin County line.<sup>1</sup> Before Denton County was organized it was a part of Fannin County. The Republic of Texas attracted many settlers from the United States by advertising cheap land. Immigrants from Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee and Arkansas came to the area around Pilot Point where they found rich rolling blackland prairies to the east and wooded sandy land to the west as Pilot Point is situated on the edge of the crosstember region. A high point of timber jutting out into the prairie was visible for miles in every direction and served as a guide across the trackless countryside first for the Indians and later for Rangers, Scouts and finally for settlers. The site was first called Pilot's Point but later shortened to simply Pilot Point.<sup>2</sup> "Dripping Springs", a popular watering place, was located just to the north and was a favorite campground for both Indians and settlers. The area just west of the "Central National Road of the Republic of Texas" popularly called Preston Road over which thousands of immigrants poured into Texas.<sup>3</sup> Later Pilot Point was a stop on the Butterfield Stage route.

Settlers began arriving in the area of Pilot Point as early as 1840.<sup>4</sup> By 1850 a village had begun to spring up near this high point because of the fertile land, abundance of water and ample supply of wild game. Land was unfenced and cattle raising became the chief occupation of these earliest settlers. This settlement later proved to be on land from the Charles Smith grant.

Charles Smith immigrated to Texas about 1834 under the colonization law of Mexico, it was in 1837 after his death, that his wife, Sophia, as administratrix, presented the claim for his heirs. She filed under the colonization law previous to the 2nd day of May, 1835, for a first class headright certificate which granted one league and one labor of land (4,605 acres) to a married man and settler.<sup>5</sup>

The heirs of Charles Smith received Certificate No. 36 dated March 1st, 1838 for one league and one labor of land.<sup>6</sup> Certificate No. 36 was filed for Patent March 13, 1841 at Warren, Fannin County.<sup>7</sup> The Republic of Texas, Anson Jones, President, granted to the heirs of Charles Smith, Patent No. 494, Vol. 4 dated December 1st, 1845.<sup>8</sup> The town of Pilot Point is located on part of this land. Charles Smith also received land in Lee, Liberty, and Grayson Counties.<sup>9</sup> The survey for the land which would later become Grayson and Denton Counties was made for the Charles Smith Estate on September 20, 1841.<sup>10</sup>

On the 11th day of February, 1854 a plat of the town of Pilot Point was laid off by James Pierson for the heirs of Charles Smith. G. W. Newcome, surveyor, certified that the Plat and field notes were a true and correct description of the town of Pilot Point.<sup>11</sup> This was recorded June 28, 1854 in the Denton County Court House, Denton County, Texas.<sup>12</sup>

On January 27, 1858 the Legislature passed an act providing for the incorporation of town and cities. Pilot Point, Denton County was included in this act. However, it was not until October 8, 1866 that the Legislature passed an act incorporating the town of Pilot Point and providing for a mayor, five aldermen and a constable who acted as assessor and collector of taxes. On November 12, 1866, thirty-five days later, the same legislature extended the provisions of the earlier act. The Thirteenth Legislature on June 2, 1873, passed an act amending the Pilot Point Charter of October 8, 1866 and re-enacted the same with amendments. The city was organized under this law.<sup>13</sup>

In the year 1852 Dr. R. W. Eddleman (1825 - 1904) and wife, Alvina, moved from California, Missouri to Pilot Point. Dr. Eddleman had studied medicine at Transvallia College in Lexington, Kentucky. He was one of the first to purchase land in the newly plated town. He built a house, a drug store and practiced medicine. In 1856 Dr. and Mrs. Eddleman's first child, L. Z. was born and to him goes the distinction of being the first white child born in Pilot Point. Before 1853 Dr. Eddleman's brothers, Thomas J. Eddleman and Peter Eddleman were in Pilot Point. In the fall of 1854 Cynthia Eddleman, mother of these men, a widow, with a number of slaves came to Pilot Point from Missouri.

F. Jefferson T. Elmore (1830 - 1901) and wife Mary C. Eddleman Elmore moved to Texas from Missouri in 1853 settling in Grayson County. In 1856 Mr. Elmore and family moved to Pilot Point.

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Another early settler was Nick Wilson and family who moved to Pilot Point from Missouri in 1854. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Elmore built a grist mill one block south of the square in the same year.<sup>14</sup>

Among other early settlers to come to the area was the Light family, Dave Light, George Light and Dave Light, Jr. They immigrated from Kentucky in 1853 and began to run cattle on the unfenced range land. Other cattlemen who used the free range were Elijah and John Emberson.<sup>15</sup>

Major James D. Walcott who was born in Cumberland, Rhode Island in 1807 moved to Pilot Point from Missouri in 1854. Later in the year he built a hewed log house on the northeast corner of the square and in the fall of that year he opened the first general merchandise store.<sup>16</sup>

About 1856 Alphius Knight built a frame school house in the western part of town and conducted the first school in town. Mr. Knight was a New Yorker and was a graduate of a normal school.<sup>17</sup>

Probably the first mill in the vicinity was owned and operated by a Mr. Rankin south of town. This was later bought by J. C. Thomas and John Graham, moved to town and located south of the square. It was an ox-tread mill and besides grinding flour and corn meal, it was used as a sawmill and cotton gin. These two men organized the Pilot Point Roller Mill Company with a capacity of 135 barrels of flour per day.

William H. Bean, Orlando W. Bean, H. H. Harrison and Samuel Beatley built a steam grist mill in 1866.<sup>18</sup>

The first post office was established on June 12, 1855 with James D. Walcott as first postmaster. Other postmasters were Jacob Martin, John R. Masters, Matthias A. Dale, George W. Anderson, J. Lockett McLain, David A. Wellborn, Samuel F. Gainer, John B. Pondrom, Ada L. Davis, Henry M. Carson, W. B. Carson, James L. Noel, Earl Cassidy, William E. Whitley, Faye Emberson and W. O. Skinner.<sup>19</sup> The post office has been located on seven different sites. They are as follows: (1) 108 East Liberty Street, where the stage coach stopped and names would be called off, (2) 205 South Jefferson Street (combination store and post office), (3) 112 West Main Street, (4) 109 North Jefferson Street, (5) 104 South Washington Street, west side of square, (6) 114 West Main Street, north side of square and (7) 110 North Washington, present location.<sup>20</sup>

In 1856 the First Baptist Church was organized. The presbytry consisted of Elder Asa Davis, Dr. T. J. Harris and S. D. H. Steed.<sup>21</sup> The Methodist Church was organized by Rev. William E. Bates, a circuit rider for the Gainesville Mission under an appointment from the East Texas Conference.

The Southern Presbyterian Church was organized August 8, 1875 with Rev. W. E. Sherrill as first pastor. The Christian Church was organized in 1862 by Dr. B. H. Hall of Kentucky. The present church building was constructed with lumber hauled in ox wagons from Shreveport.<sup>22</sup> Early pastors besides Dr. Hall were S. A. Ramey, John Wellborn, Joe Gist, G. Blake and A. W. Cooke who also operated an early drug store.

The Holiness Church purchased property of Franklin College in 1901 and established an orphanage and church. In 1903 Rest Cottage, a home for unwed mothers, was established with Rev. J. P. Roberts in charge. This establishment continued to operate until 1971. At a National Convention held in Pilot Point on October 13, 1908, the Holiness Church and several other pentecostal groups united to form the Nazarene Church.<sup>23</sup>

The St. Thomas Catholic Church was founded in 1891 with the first mass being celebrated on November 4, 1891, the Rev. John Corvey of Dallas reading. In March, 1892 the church building was completed and Father Bardenhever was appointed as pastor. At the time of organization there were sixty-three members of the parish.<sup>24</sup>

In 1872 Dr. and Mrs. M. B. Franklin and Mr. Greene formed a school called the Pilot Point Seminary. The school obtained a charter in 1884 and became widely known as an excellent institution of learning. The name was changed to Franklin College and a new charter was obtained in 1892. The building was a large three-story frame one built with lumber hauled from East Texas by ox team. Three hundred and twenty pupils were enrolled for the first session. Tuition was fifty dollars a year and board was one hundred dollars. Fifteen teachers were employed to teach from the primary grades through college.<sup>25</sup> Franklin College benefited the community both culturally and economically. When public schools began in Pilot Point in 1894 enrollment decreased and the college closed its doors in 1900. In 1923 the bell belonging to the college was found on the site and sold to the William Boerner family

for two dollars. In 1928 the city of Pilot Point bought the bell and placed it on city property just east of the water tower. This is the only part of Franklin College that still remains in Pilot Point.<sup>26</sup>

In 1887 the first telegraph line was extended from Sherman through Pilot Point to the western forts. In 1874 the Texas and Pacific Railway had begun surveying and laying tracks to connect its line from Sherman to Ft. Worth. The contractors in charge of construction were A. P. Crosgrove (d 1919) and J. E. Hayden (1839 - 1881), father of Fred Hayden a later mayor of Pilot Point. In 1880 the first train reached the town. The M.K. & T. Railway leased the line and thus Pilot Point had two railroads but only one track.<sup>27</sup>

The first newspaper was the Pilot Point Post with D. J. Moffitt and Mr. Jones as owners. The first issue came off the press August 31, 1878. Later the Post absorbed a rival paper The Mirror and became the Pilot Point Mirror. It later consolidated with another local paper The Signal and became the Pilot Point Post Signal. The paper continues to publish under this name.<sup>28</sup>

Mr. Henry Selz built a cotton gin in the east part of town in the early 1870's. After it burned he and Mr. J. P. Cooper (1844 - 1911) built a new gin in 1882. At the time it was the largest gin in the United States. It is presently owned by the Lee Massey Estate and is the only gin in Denton County still in operation.<sup>29</sup>

The first brick building in Denton County was erected by John Merchant in 1872 on the northeast corner of the square where Dr. Eddleman's first home

stood. Mr. John H. Hundley, (1862 - 1898) burned the brick and built the store. Soon other brick buildings were built around the square with brick made by the same method.<sup>30</sup>

The first bank in Pilot Point was a private one called the Pilot Point Bank which opened for business on January 1, 1884 with A. H. Gee (1849 - 1929) as cashier and manager. In 1887 the capital was increased to \$25,000. Mr. J. M. Weeks was made president and Mr. J. A. L. McFarland (1851 - 1932) assistant cashier. In 1892 the capital was increased to \$60,000 and the bank was chartered as the Pilot Point National with Mr. A. H. Gee as president.<sup>31</sup>

During Pilot Points' interim history many citizens made noteworthy contributions toward continued growth. In addition to those already mentioned we list only a few others.

Levi Bellew (1856 - 1923) was a buyer of grain and other farm products. He served as mayor from 1914 to 1916.

John R. Peel (1861) came from DeQueen, Arkansas and operated a drug store on the north side of the square.

Dr. D. B. Burks who died in 1876 was an early surgeon and physician. His sons J. B. Burks (1871 - 1942) was with the Farmers and Merchants Bank and William D. Burks, Sr. (1868 - 1949) was an attorney who served as mayor from 1912 to 1914.<sup>32</sup>

Dr. Thomas Harris (1879 - 1941) was a physician who served the community for many years. He worked for the sanitary and sewer system for Pilot Point.



H. M. Russell (1865 - 1937) was co-founder of Wilson-Russell Dry Goods. This establishment later became Russell, Gray and Jones and was a leading dry goods store in the area. In later years it was moved to Denton as H. M. Russell and Sons.<sup>33</sup>

J. Winston Peel (1898 - 1968) served for 22 years as mayor of Pilot Point working for the beautification of the town.<sup>34</sup>

By 1922 the town boasted fifty business houses, three banks, nine churches, a free public school system, a roller mill, cotton oil mill, an electric light and ice plant, a paved square, a hotel, beautiful homes, two federated women's clubs and a number of fraternal organizations among them the Masonic Lodge, A.F. and A.M.<sup>35</sup> This lodge is one of the oldest in Texas. The dispensation was applied for June 18, 1861 and the lodge was chartered June 11, 1862.<sup>36</sup>

In 1977 Pilot Point is still primarily known as an agricultural center but it also has industry. The Martino-Robinson Lingerie Manufacturing Plant provides many job opportunities. Nelson Brothers Ready Mix Concrete has a large plant which serves a thirty mile radius. Strittmatter Irrigation and Supply, Massey Gin Company, Pilot Point Livestock Exchange and several cabinet shops are located in the city.

More recent civic leaders and memorable persons who deserve mention are too numerous to be recorded here. Hundreds of people in every walk of life have made significant contributions to the growth and development of the town.

Does Not Apply

Due to the historical significance, the cultural history, and the continued economic stability of Pilot Point, we feel that this community deserves an official Texas Historical Marker.

### Footnotes

1. Bates, History and Reminiscences of Denton County, p. 273.
2. Wright, On Their Roaring Way, and Pilot Point Historical Society Paper, 1909.
3. Newton, History of Texas, p. 279.
4. "Blue Bonnet", Pilot Point Historical Society, May 1909, Early Incidents in History of Pilot Point.
5. Patent Book A, p. 21, Bonham, Fannin County Court House, Texas.
6. Ibid., p. 159.
7. Ibid., p. 160.
8. Deed Book, Book A, p. 65, Denton County Court House, Denton, Texas.
9. Telephone interview with Cathy Williams, Texas Historical Commission Staff, Austin, Texas.
10. Survey Records Book A, pp. 94 - 95, Bonham, Fannin County Court House, Texas.
11. Deed Records Vol. A, pp. 66, 67, Denton County, Texas.
12. Ibid., p. 67.
13. Bates, pp. 274 - 275.
14. Interview with R. W. Eddleman, grandson of Dr. R. W. Eddleman.
15. Wright, On Their Roaring Way, p. 38.
16. Telephone interview with Mrs. Alfred Beilharz, granddaughter of Major Walcott, Dallas, Texas.
17. Pilot Point Historical Society, 1936.
18. Interview with R. W. Eddleman.
19. Official Post Office Records, Pilot Point, Texas.
20. Clifton Irick, Pilot Point, Texas.
21. Minutes of Sister Grove United Missionary Baptist Association, found at Southwestern Baptist Seminary, Ft. Worth, Texas.
22. Wright, On Their Roaring Way, p. 125.

23. Taped interview with Mrs. Emma Irick, charter member present at the organization.
24. Rev. Paul Charcut, Golden Jubilee History of St. Thomas Parish, 1891 - 1941 Printed by Post Signal, Pilot Point, Texas, 1941.
25. Franklin College Bulletin.
26. Pilot Point Historical Society, 1936.
27. Pilot Point Historical Society.
28. Ibid.
29. Interview with Misses Tott and Grace Burks, descendants of Mr. Cooper.
30. Pilot Point Historical Society.
31. Pilot Point Post Signal, July 1922 and interview with Mr. L. L. Whitley.
32. Interview with Misses Tott and Grace Burks.
33. Interview with L. L. Whitley.
34. Interview with Mrs. J. Winston Peel.
35. Pilot Point Post Signal, July 1922 and Towns and Communities of Denton County, Emily Fowler Library, Denton, Texas.
36. Grand Lodge of Texas, Waco.

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1. Bates, Ed F., History and Reminiscences of Denton County, McNitzky Printing Company, 1918, Denton, Texas.
2. Newton, L. W., History of Texas, Turner Company, 1935, Dallas, Texas.
3. Wright, Mary B., On Their Roaring Way, John F. McInnis Printing and Publishing, Orange, California, 1957.
4. "Early Incidents in History of Pilot Point". Blue Bonnet, Pilot Point Historical Society, May 1909.
5. Patent Book A, Bonham, Fannin County Court House, Texas.
6. Patent Records, Vol. C, Denton County Court House, Denton, Texas.
7. Survey Records Book A, Bonham, Fannin County Court House, Texas.
8. Deed Records, Vol. 207, Denton County Court House, Denton, Texas.
9. Deed Book, Vol. A, Denton County Court House, Denton County, Texas.
10. Official Post Office Records, Pilot Point Post Office, Pilot Point, Texas.
11. Pilot Point Historical Society Paper, 1936.
12. Franklin College Bulletin.
13. Charcut, Rev. Paul, Golden Jubilee History of St. Thomas Parish, 1891 - 1941, Printed by Post Signal, Pilot Point, Texas, 1941.
14. Pilot Point Post Signal, July 1922.
15. Towns and Communities of Denton County, Emily Fowler Library, Denton, Texas.
16. Grand Lodge of Texas Records, Waco, Texas.
17. Interview with R. W. Eddleman.
18. Interview with L. L. Whitley.
19. Telephone interview with Cathy Williams, Texas Historical Commission Staff, Austin, Texas
20. Telephone interview with Mrs. Alfred Beilharz, Dallas, Texas.
21. Interview with Misses Tott and Grace Burks, Pilot Point, Texas.

22. Taped interview with Mrs. Emma Irick, Charter member of Nazarene Church.

23. Interview with Mrs. J. Winston Peel, Pilot Point, Texas

Respectfully submitted

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