

LITTLE ELM COMMUNITY

4320

by
Clyde T. McWilliams

Underlying reason for settlement: In 1841, five years after Texas gained her independence from Mexico, major problems faced this new republic: lack of money; shortage of people; Indian depredation and Mexican threats; and low land value. This economic concern, together with the practical desire to check both the threats of Mexican invasion and Indian depredation, was to lead the Fifth Congress of the Republic, elected in the fall of 1840, to the establishment of the empresario colony usually known as the Peters Colony. This was the Republic's first such colony. Because of its dual effect on land policy and on immigration, a fairly substantial argument could be developed that as far as later history of Texas is concerned, the law of February 4, 1841, which established the colony, was the most important single act of the Republic. (1) Peters Colony, of which the Little Elm Community is a part, was chartered in 1841 from the Republic of Texas by W. S. Peters and a company of nineteen other men for the purpose of bringing six hundred families into N.E. Texas within three years from the date of contract (Contract No. 1, Colony Contracts, General Land Office, Austin). Every married man who was brought to the colony was to receive 640 acres, and every unmarried man, 320 acres of land. Peters Colony, as the grant was known, included the whole or parts of twenty-six counties.

The area comprising the Peters Colony was inhabited mostly by Indian tribes at the time the colony was chartered. The Mexican government, in ~~granting~~ lands to the colonists, had not favored settlements near the borders of North or East Texas in the line of transportation into the area from the bordering United States. Although some colonists settled in the upper Red River Counties in the Peters Colony, abstract records of Denton County, of which Little Elm is a part, show that only one claim had been filed in the land office at Austin for land that is now in Denton County prior to 1841. (2) Denton County, along with other land in the territory, was thus virgin land. There were no roads, no neighbors, no mail service, no bridges, no schools, no churches, no stores. In fact, there was nothing except what nature provided. However, the Little Elm area offered to the new settlers an untold number of creeks, rolling prairies of grass, and vast amounts of timber.

(1) Page 6, Seymour V. Connors, The Peters Colony of Texas, Austin, the Texas Historical Association, 1959.

(2) Page 2, Mrs. J. M. Harris, 112 Years in Little Elm Community; also Land Records of Denton County, Texas Assessor's Office.

As far as it is known, the King family was the first family to settle in this area of the colony. (3) John and Delilah King migrated from King's Mountain, North Carolina (Draper's King's Mountain and Its Heroes confirms family tradition that this mountain had been named for his forefathers well before the Revolutionary battle was fought on it). According to other historians, John King and family migrated to Little Elm before July 1844. (4) When the Kings chose a home in this new land, they selected a spot near water and timber, at the forks of Little Elm and Cottonwood creeks, which is approximately one mile southwest of the Little Elm City Park. A certificate for 640 acres was granted John King in 1844. Before he died in the summer of 1846, John King asked to be buried at the foot of a big oak tree near his house. Thus began the King Cemetery; however, the King Cemetery was removed in its entirety to other surrounding cemeteries due to the impoundment of Garza Little Elm Reservoir. There are seven cemeteries prior to 1900 in the Little Elm area. The Dickson school was near both the King and Dickson cemeteries, later consolidated into Little Elm Rural High School.

Big Elm Creek, with Little Elm Creek and other creeks joining together, formed the Elm Fork of the Trinity River. The Little Elm Community is located at these forks. After the Civil War, Henry Hill laid out a townsite which was called Hilltown, later to become known as Little Elm; however, it was not incorporated as the City of Little Elm until 1966.

Established facts by historians and some old timers through the Postal Department lead us to be positive that an early mail service was established as early as 1845. Mrs. W. P. Parker writes: "The Post Office was established in 1845 and is older than Denton County. It was an overland route running from Preston Bend on Red River south to Bird's Station, later called Birdsville, in the eastern edge of Tarrant County. It must have gone by Kit King's (born 1823-died 1880 and son of John King), who was the first to have charge here." An article in the Denton Record Chronicle (1946) states: "In its 101 years of existence, the Little Elm Post Office has seen the transition from unstamped letters and sealing wax to postal and air mail stamps. The first Post Office is a year older than the county and was originally established at the Kit King residence located on Little Elm Creek." From Washington, Victor Gondos, Jr., of the National Archives and Records Service, gives the following: "An early mail route, including Little Elm, was Mail Route Contract No. 6262, from Bonham (via Warren, Sherman, Indian Grove, Roseland, Denton Creek, Little Elm, Alton, and Farmers Branch) to Dallas let for the period of 1850 to 1854, 134 miles and back." Another item from Gondos reads: "According to the records of the Post Office Department now in our custody, a post office was established at Little Elm, Denton County, on August 2, 1852. It was discontinued on January 23, 1867, and re-established on September 14, 1873."

(3) Page 18, Mrs. J. M. Harris, 112 Years in Little Elm Community, Dallas Banks Upshaw and Co., 1957

(4) Page 304, Seymour V. Conner, The Peters Colony in Texas, as cited.

The first schools were private classes taught in a home near Kit King Crossing. The first effort at a public school building was at John House Springs. Parents built a crude log building and by subscription paid the teachers. In the earlier schools, some were attended in summer. Others were writing schools, while some were music schools. The county superintendent's office has a few early records, including a photostatic copy made of an acknowledged petition that was filed by W. A. Gotcher in September, 1877. The school then was so constituted and recognized as Little Elm Community, #18. It was ordered that the sum of \$223.30 be credited on the books of the County Treasury for the community, to be applied to the maintenance of their Public Free School. In 1913 the people built a new three-room building at another location on Gotcher land, and later added another room. It was during this time that the first P.T.A. was organized. In 1930 three districts consolidated--Hackberry, Dickson, and Little Elm--into one district, which became known as Little Elm Rural High School. Today, Little Elm has a fully accredited twelve-grade high school and has recently completed a beautiful high school building and campus. Early businesses were cotton gins, grocery stores, and drug stores. As to the exact date of these business startings, records do not indicate a specific time. As to social and cultural institutions, Ruth Harris says: "Delilah King died in 1884, after spending forty of her seventy-eight years helping to change Little Elm from a neighborless expanse to a delightful neighborhood with churches, schools, and friendly people."

Early settlers of the community brought their religious faiths with them. Rev. W. E. Bates organized Methodism in Denton County in 1853. Oak Grove Methodist Church was built in 1881, and has been in continuous use since. A historical marker was placed on this church in 1973. The Christian Church, with John Wilmeth as organizer, started worship in a log house at John House Springs. (5) The Missionary Baptist Church organized in 1867. (6)

In its early days of settlement, this area consisted of several small communities, namely, Lloyd, Hackberry, Dickson, Hilltown, etc. Later, due to consolidation, building of roads, concentration, this area grew into a flourishing small town--Little Elm. Construction of Lake Dallas in 1925-26, with its highway extending across the lake from McKinney to Denton, through Little Elm, caused further growth.

In the middle 1950s, with the construction of Garza-Little Elm Reservoir, land was impounded and bought for the building of the reservoir. Homes, cemeteries, railroads, roads, churches, and schools were moved. Because Little Elm is a peninsula between the two Elm forks, the community of Little Elm appeared doomed. Instead, when the Garza-Little Elm Reservoir filled in 1957, land prices boomed, home developments began around the lake shores, and Little Elm community was again on the rise. Also, with its close proximity to the Dallas-Ft. Worth airport, as well as the mass migration from the cities, this once small community, which almost became extinct, is now on its way to becoming a great economic development. Much interest and concern is now being shown in the preservation of this community's early history and historical artifacts.

(5) Page 71, Mrs. J. M. Harris, '112 Years in Little Elm Community'

(6) Page 71, Mrs. J. M. Harris, '112 Years in Little Elm Community'

We certainly believe that it is justifiable to commemorate this community with an historical marker for the following reasons:

1. The first family to settle and receive certificates for land under the "Peters Colony Contract" of February 4, 1841, was in this area (John and Delilah King). *
2. The first Postal Service was originally established at the Kit (C.C.) King residence located on Little Elm Creek, near Kit King Crossing, in 1845, prior to the forming of Denton, Collin, Dallas, and other counties in the area. **
3. Many of the earliest churches of the county were organized in this community -- Little Elm.
4. Many men of this community, from its beginning until the present, have held county, state, and federal offices. Some of the earliest are:
 - a. William H. Dickson, first elected county judge, 1848-1852.
 - b. William Holt, first mail carrier, Denton County, 1845.
 - c. C. C. (Kit) King, first postmaster of Little Elm, when Post Office was established in 1852.
C. C. (Kit) King, Commissioner #1, 1858-1860.
 - d. J. M. McNeil, Assessor-collector, 1858-1866
 - e. S. J. Hawkins, Commissioner #1, 1860-1862
 - f. J. M. McNeil, County Clerk, 1864-1868
 - g. J. D. Hawkins, Commissioner #1, 1864-1868

Although Little Elm Community never became a thriving city, it has played an important part in the history of our county and has been a credit to our great state and to our nation.

NOTES BY TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION Staff:

*This is not to say that the Kings were the first Peters Colony settlers, they were the first to settle and receive land certificates for land in this particular corner.

**This is not to say that Kit King established mail service before mail service was established in the rest of the county of Denton or in Collin or Dallas counties -- merely that he did establish local mail service in Little Elm Community prior to the organization of the three counties.

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