

# Cooper Creek Cemetery, Denton, Denton County, Texas

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for Texas Historical Commission Historic Texas Cemetery Marker, Denton County  
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The Cooper Creek Cemetery is one of the last remaining remnants of this small rural community that flourished in the northeast portion of Denton County. Cooper Creek is located within the city limits of Denton (note – Cooper Creek Cemetery is located in Denton County, correction by Marker Chairman Beth Stribling, May 2013) but was described as being three and a half miles northeast from Denton. The land for the cemetery, school and church had been set aside in deeds that date back to the 1870s. The Cooper Creek community was established around 1872 although families had been living in the area before the Civil War<sup>1</sup>. The land is located in the Thomas H. Living Survey in northeast Denton County. In a deed dated October 14, 1878, the cemetery or graveyard is noted as having been established<sup>2</sup>. The first burial was Richard Kale who died February 9, 1872. The cemetery is still active and contains approximately 800 grave sites.

The area was settled due to the abundance of water, timber and sandy soil. The crops in the area were cotton, corn and other similar crops<sup>3</sup>. Like many rural areas, as the number of farms grew, the community established a school and church along with a cemetery. The area consisted of the cemetery, school and two churches, First Baptist Church (known commonly as Cooper Creek Baptist Church) and First Methodist Church (known commonly as Cooper Creek Methodist Church). Cooper Creek is similar to the other agriculturally based communities in Denton County including Green Valley, Bolivar, Drop and Chinn's Chapel. Cooper Creek was an active community with participation centered at the school, churches and cemetery. The cemetery was part of the social structure and focal point of this farming community.

The cemetery includes several families who were early settlers in the area. It is interesting to note that this cemetery is mainly Anglo, although there are several Hispanic graves. There is also a Jewish grave. The leaders and founders of the community were buried in this cemetery including the Farris family and Thomas Skaggs and family. James Farris was the pastor at the First Methodist Church. The family moved to the Cooper Creek area before the Civil War<sup>4</sup>. The Skaggs family had also been in the Cooper Creek area from the time before the Civil War. Several community leaders who had been school board trustees were also buried in the cemetery including David Argo, James Farris (see above) and J.A. Templeton. Templeton was one of the early settlers in

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<sup>1</sup> Denton Record Chronicle March 24, 1923 p.5 "Reunion Sunday at Cooper Creek".

<sup>2</sup> Denton County Records, Vol. K, p.189, October 14, 1878.

<sup>3</sup> "Cotton Stripped of Foliage and Corn Ruined in Some Places", Dallas Morning News, July 1, 1904, p.10.

<sup>4</sup> Mrs. W.A. Beeman, "Cooper Creek", *Towns and Communities of Denton County*, pp. 1-3. ed. Emily Fowler and Alma Lain Chambers, no date.

the area having purchased property there in 1887.<sup>5</sup> Templeton already owned property in the Denton city limits and continued to purchase property in the city and county.<sup>6</sup>

Many local residents and farmers that were known in the county are buried in the cemetery. Charles Price's obituary notes that he was "a well known farmer and stockman in the county"<sup>7</sup>. P.G. Lanham, described as a "good citizen of Denton County" was also a farmer and businessman in Cooper Creek<sup>8</sup>. The cemetery includes veterans such as Lieutenant L.H. Owen who served during World War II. Owen had received the Air Medal and Oak Cluster before he was reported missing in North Africa<sup>9</sup>. David Payne who farmed in the area served in Company E, 29<sup>th</sup> Texas Cavalry, DeMorse's Regiment in the Civil War<sup>10</sup>. His relative, Hiram Payne, was considered the oldest Confederate soldier in Texas at 103. However, when he died in 1902, his gravestone indicated that he was born in 1808, making him 94 years old<sup>11</sup>. The cemetery reveals sad stories such as a young boy, Freeman Amos, 14, who was struck by a train and is buried with other family members including B.L. Amos<sup>12</sup>.

Several members of the Geesling family are buried in the cemetery. They had a farm in Cooper Creek and successfully raised cotton. Sim Geesling had the best first bale of cotton in 1922<sup>13</sup>. In 1954, the Geesling family again won recognition for Denton County's first bale of cotton for that year<sup>14</sup>.

The Hispanic graves in the cemetery include Tiburcio Menchaca, known as "Tom" who lived in Denton County for several years before his death. He knew Antonio Villanueva, a man whose family members were buried in Cooper Creek Cemetery<sup>15</sup>. Mr. Villanueva's first wife, Refugio was buried there in 1911. It appears that other family members were also buried in the cemetery<sup>16</sup>. Other Hispanic graves include Murio Contrares who died in 1916, Jesus Mirles who died in 1930 and Ida Garcia who died in 1949<sup>17</sup>. Mr. Villanueva did own property in Denton County. It may also be that his daughter, Delores, married into the Skaggs family, many whom are buried in the Cooper Creek Cemetery<sup>18</sup>. Many of these graves are in Spanish. The grave of Dario Ortiz has the letters "IHS". These letters represent the Latin phrase which when translated states, "Jesus, Savior, Man" but are more commonly associated with the Roman Catholic

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<sup>5</sup> Denton County Records, Volume 30, p.362, January 24, 1887.

<sup>6</sup> Denton County Record, Volume X, p. 385, January 23, 1884; Volume N, p. 400, February 22, 1881.

<sup>7</sup> "Denton County Man, Charles Price, Dies", Dallas Morning News, September 23, 1952, p.23.

<sup>8</sup> "Death of a Good Citizen of Denton County", Dallas Morning News, June 6, 1886, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> "Denton Lieutenant Missing in Action", Dallas Morning News, October 8, 1943, p.4.

<sup>10</sup> "Denton Pension Applicants", Dallas Morning News, July 20, 1899, p.8.

<sup>11</sup> "Oldest Confederate Veteran", Dallas Morning News, May 2, 1900, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> "Train Hits Truck Near Denton, Boy Killed", Dallas Morning News, May 26, 1925, p.22

<sup>13</sup> "Denton, Texas", Dallas Morning News, December 26, 1922, p.2.

<sup>14</sup> "Bank President Buys Denton's First Bale", Dallas Morning News, September 9, 1954, Part 1, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> Denton County Records, Affidavit of Heirship, Volume 194, p.254, November 24, 1924.

<sup>16</sup> Denton County Records, Volume 518, pp. 36-38, January 13, 1965.

<sup>17</sup> Carin Horn, Heather Taylor-Stonequist, Marilyn Moragne and Cathy Terry. *1999 Cemetery Survey-Cooper Creek Cemetery, Denton County, Texas*. Available at the Denton County Historical Museum Archives.

<sup>18</sup> Denton County Records, Volume 518, pp.36-38, January 13, 1965.

Church and their use of the phrase "In His Service" which began with the Jesuit missionaries. It can be assumed that many of the Hispanics buried in this cemetery were Catholic. This is interesting considering that most cemeteries are segregated by race and religion.

The cemetery has fenced plots as well as concrete curbing around family plots. There are approximately 30 areas that have concrete curbing to delineate family plots. The cemetery also has plantings that are associated with burials such as irises, roses and Cedar trees. Tiburico Menchaca's grave is fenced with yucca plants surrounding the grave. There are also several raised graves made of concrete including the slab which is cast as one piece with the headstone. The grave of Minnie Jones and three others are of this style. There are two raised graves that have brick or stone walls. One of these is the grave of Richard Kale who died in 1872 and is one of the first people buried in the cemetery.

It is important to note that the cemetery, along with the school and church, served as a gathering point for the community. The school was used for many community functions and the cemetery was the gathering place for many of the family and old timers' reunions. The community held decoration days<sup>19</sup>. The Cooper Creek PTA held fund raisers for the cemetery including "pie suppers"<sup>20</sup>. The school was used for the Cooper Creek Home Demonstration Club and for lectures by local luminaries<sup>21</sup>. The school, cemetery and church are the only remnants that signify the community of Cooper Creek, now a part of the city of Denton.

The cemetery continues to be used. The most recent burial was in 2011. Every Mother's Day, the Cooper Creek Cemetery Association hosts a homecoming and cemetery maintenance day. They also continue to maintain the cemetery throughout the year including mowing, trimming trees, mending fences and gravestones.

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<sup>19</sup> "Cooper Creek Decoration at Cemetery", Denton Record Chronicle, May 15, 1928, p.2.

<sup>20</sup> "Pie Supper at Cooper Creek Friday", Denton Record Chronicle, May 1, 1940, p.10.

<sup>21</sup> "Area Happenings", Denton Record Chronicle, April 4, 1970, p.5.

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- Carin Horn, Heather Taylor-Stonequist, Marilyn Moragne and Cathy Terry. 1999 *Cemetery Survey-Cooper Creek Cemetery, Denton County, Texas*. Available at the Denton County Historical Museum Archives.  
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