

**Cooper Creek Baptist Church Subject Marker Application,  
4582 Fishtrap Road  
Denton, Denton County, Texas 76208**

*Historical Narrative researched and written by Kate Singleton for Texas Historical Commission  
Subject Marker Application  
Denton County 2012*

## **I. Context**

The Cooper Creek Baptist Church, located at 4582 Fishtrap Road, Denton, was founded in 1872 by early settlers to the Cooper Creek and Denton County area. This is the same year that the Cooper Creek community was founded, although families had been living in the area before the Civil War<sup>1</sup>. The church is one of the last remaining remnants of this small rural community that flourished in the northeast portion of Denton County. The church originally met in a building in close proximity to the current location. This location was purchased in 1916 and building (extant but altered) was constructed the next year.<sup>2</sup> Cooper Creek is now located within the city limits of Denton but was described as being three and a half to four miles northeast of Denton. It is important to note that the Denton County Courthouse burned in December 1875; therefore there are few records from before that time. The land is located in the Morean Forrest Survey in Denton County.

## **II. Overview**

### *Early History*

Cooper Creek is situated in what was part of the Peters Colony land grant. William S. Peters received a land grant from the state of Texas in 1841<sup>3</sup>. The company was called the Texian Land and Immigration Company but known as Peters Colony. Most of the settlers were from the Upper South. Peters sent his agents to Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas and Missouri.<sup>4</sup> Alexander Cooper moved to the area in 1848 as part of the

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

<sup>2</sup> "Donated Labor for Erection of Church", *Dallas Morning News*, January 7, 1917, Section 3, p.9.

<sup>3</sup> Handbook of Texas Online, s.v."http://tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/DD/hcd6.html (accessed November 27, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Mary Jo Cowling, *Geography of Denton* (Dallas: Banks Upshaw and Company, 1936), p.1.

Peters Colony. Families that settled in the area before the Civil War included Thomas Skaggs (March 15, 1826-April 14, 1897) and his family, the Price family, the W.G. Evans family and the W.G. Etter family.<sup>5</sup> Both the Evans and Etter families were charter members of the Cooper Creek Baptist Church.<sup>6</sup>

### *Geography and Agriculture of Denton County*

Denton County has three general soil belts running north to south: the eastern belt lies in the Blackland Prairie; one fourth of the county is in the western belt that lies along the Grand Prairie and half of the county in the mid-section is in the Eastern Cross Timbers<sup>7</sup>. The area was settled due to the abundance of water, timber and sandy soil, and the crops planted were cotton, corn and other similar crops<sup>8</sup>.

Denton County became known for its wheat cultivation, beginning in the early 1880's and well into the turn of the century<sup>9</sup>. Large scale cultivation of crops like wheat became economically feasible with the advent of the railroad and the ability to move these crops to market. Between 1880 and 1900, the acreage cultivated with wheat increased more than 80,000 acres. Denton County ranked either first or second in statewide wheat production behind Collin County<sup>10</sup>. The wheat crop increased steadily in the early 1900's. In 1903, the wheat crop increased 10% from the previous year<sup>11</sup>.

Cotton was also grown in the area around Cooper Creek<sup>12</sup>. In 1880, there were 29,785 acres of cotton being cultivated in the county. Cotton cultivation peaked at 115,078 acres

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<sup>5</sup> Emily Fowler and Alma Lain Chambers, *Towns and Communities of Denton County*, (Denton, Texas, 1960), pp.1-3)

<sup>6</sup> Joy Smith, *Cooper Creek Baptist Church Standing Firm: The First 140 Years*, (Denton, Texas: Smith, 2010), p.2.

<sup>7</sup> University of Texas Bureau of Business Research, *An Economic Survey of Denton County Prepared for Texas and Pacific Railroad* (Austin: University of Texas, June 1949), Section 2.0201-02.

<sup>8</sup> "Cotton Stripped of Foliage and Corn Ruined in Some Places", *Dallas Morning News*, July 1, 1904, p.10.

<sup>9</sup> Captain B.B. Paddock, *History of Texas: Fort Worth and Texas Northwest Edition*. (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1922), Vol. 2, p.738.

<sup>10</sup> Handbook of Texas Online, s.v.",<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/DD/hcd6.html> (accessed March 5, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> "North Texas". *Dallas Morning News*, April 21, 1903, p.10.

<sup>12</sup> "Cotton Report", *Dallas Morning News*, July 10, 1907, p. 10.

in 1920<sup>13</sup>. In 1930, cotton cultivation made up 26% of the crops grown in the county, wheat was 16%, oats 15%, corn 13%, peanuts, sorghum and barley 3%<sup>14</sup>. During the Depression years, cotton was still being grown in the area<sup>15</sup>. By 1945, cotton was the leading crop in Denton County, followed by cattle. The surge in cotton production may have been in response to the demands of World War II.

Dairy farming was also important to the local economy with Denton ranking 9<sup>th</sup> in the state<sup>16</sup>. Altogether, in 1920 there were 4,200 farms in Denton County and in 1925, there 4,255 farms or ranches averaging 120 acres. By the beginning of the Depression in 1930, there were 3,963. This number steadily declined through the Depression years from 3,796 in 1935 to 3,340 in 1940<sup>17</sup>. Like many rural areas, as the number of farms grew, the community established a school for the local children. The community consisted of the cemetery, school and two churches, Cooper Creek Baptist Church and 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.

#### **IV. Significance of Cooper Creek Baptist Church**

The Cooper Creek Baptist Church was founded in 1872 by several of the early settlers of the Cooper Creek community. This year is recognized as the date that the Cooper Creek community was founded although families had begun to settle in the area before the Civil War. Like many agricultural communities at this time, life centered on the churches, the school and cemetery. Often, the school building served a dual purpose; housing the area churches before the congregations constructed buildings. Or, a structure was built by a congregation that then served as a school and for other churches. In Cooper Creek, a building was constructed in the early 1870s to serve as the school and for the Baptist

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<sup>13</sup> Handbook of Texas. Denton County.

<sup>14</sup> Cowling, p.45.

<sup>15</sup> "Eight Cent Raise in Ginning Prices Called Necessary". *Dallas Morning News*, July 28, 1932, Section II, p.8.

<sup>16</sup> University of Texas Bureau of Business Research, 4.0107.

<sup>17</sup> University of Texas Bureau of Business Research, 4.0101-03.

church congregation.<sup>18</sup> The Cooper Creek Baptist Church and its congregants played a vital role in the development of this agricultural area and the community.

Several of the early residents of Cooper Creek were charter members of the Baptist Church. They also contributed to the establishment of the local school. Charter members of the church were W.G. Evans (September 1836-nodate), W. G. Etter (no date), John Perry (1846-no date), H. Crosby (no dates) and the Crosby's daughters, J.B. Brandon and Billie Durham.<sup>19</sup> The Cooper Creek School applied in 1876 to Denton County for recognition as a community school and W.G. Evans and W. G. Etter were the trustees of the new school.<sup>20</sup> During the 1880s, members of the church served as trustees to the school including David Argo (1882-1954), a church deacon, and W.G. Etter.

In 1886, the Baptist churches in Denton County organized the Denton Baptist Association, an affiliate of the Association of Southern Baptist Churches. Cooper Creek Baptist Church was a charter member of this organization.<sup>21</sup> The early pastors of the church included: the Reverends John Curley (no date), A.T. Thompson (no dates), W.E. Bibb (no dates) and A.J. Harris (no dates)

The church and the community continued to grow and in 1900, a Sunday school was organized. The Sunday school apparently disbanded until 1913 when it was reinstated.<sup>22</sup> During this time, the church was active in supporting such institutions as Buckner's Children's Home in Dallas. The church continued support of the orphanage over the years.<sup>23</sup>

In 1916, L.F. (Tom) Collins (December 17, 1859-November 17, 1924) whose family had owned land in the area since 1861 donated land to the church to build a new sanctuary.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Smith, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, p.2.

<sup>20</sup> Director's School Record for Denton County, O.N. Hollingsworth, Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1876, p.102.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, p.2.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, p.3

<sup>23</sup> Smith, pp.5-6.

The congregation agreed to build a new structure and a building committee consisting of Tom Collins, J.P. Sitz (no dates), M.L. Barr (1880-1974), R.D. Hutcherson (no date) and W.L. Geesling (1861-1943) was formed. In January of 1917, the congregation and the community donated their labor to construct the church building.<sup>25</sup> By November of 1917, the members of the church had paid of all the debt associated with the construction of the building.<sup>26</sup>

During the 1920s, the congregation continued to grow; the membership was 59, with an enrollment in the Sunday school of 93.<sup>27</sup> The church was active in missionary work through the Southern Baptist Association and locally. In the summer, revivals or “protracted meetings” were held. By 1936, the membership had climbed to 123.<sup>28</sup>

The Cooper Creek Baptist Church continued to grow throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Many of the early families continued their memberships in the church and their involvement with the community. The Argo family has been active in the church and community for five generations. Mary Batte Argo (July 24, 1883-May 10, 1910) attended the church in the late 1880s and several family members served as Deacons. Clarence Argo (May 19, 1907-April 14, 1978) was a Deacon and the groundskeeper for the Cooper Creek School and cemetery.<sup>29</sup> The extended family included the following names: Rainey, Sauls, Batte, and Amos. Members of these families are still active in the church and community. There are several examples of the pastor or members of the churches who were trustees, principals and/or teachers at the school. The members of the church, volunteered at the school as well since a rural school the size of Cooper Creek was not able to pay for a large staff. As an example, in the late 1940s, Denver Amos (October 2, 1909-January 1, 1993) served as pastor of the Cooper Creek Baptist Church and as principal and teacher at the school<sup>30</sup>. Tressie Argo (March 7, 1913-no death date)

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<sup>24</sup> Denton County Deed Records, Volume 135, p.487, December 26, 1916.

<sup>25</sup> “Donated Labor for Erection of Church”, *Dallas Morning News*, January 7, 1917, Section 3, p.9.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, p.5.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, p.63

<sup>29</sup> Smith, p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, p. 18.

served as the school cook in the 1950s and as a Sunday school teacher at the Baptist Church. Wilma Keene Owens (no date), a member of the church, taught at Cooper Creek School. Many other members were teachers or volunteered at the school. The community homecoming in May has centered on the church, the school and the cemetery. At these gatherings, past members, classmates and families would gather at the cemetery as well as attending services at the church.

In 1961, the church remodeled the 1917 sanctuary with a new steeple and entrance. Other additions and smaller buildings were erected on the site as the congregation grew. In 1979, a new brick sanctuary was constructed. This building was used as the main sanctuary until the current building was constructed in 2000 and opened for services in September of 2001. The altered 1917 building was moved across Fishtrap Road to the east of the Cooper Creek School building. This building is still used by the church.

There were several locally known farming families that attended Cooper Creek Baptist Church including the Geesling family. They had a farm in Cooper Creek and successfully raised cotton. Sim Geesling (August 10, 1866-March 9, 1936) had the best first bale of cotton in 1922<sup>31</sup>. In 1954, the Geesling family again won recognition for Denton County's first bale of cotton for that year<sup>32</sup>. The Owens family also attended church there and Lieutenant Howard Owens (December 4, 1921-September 8, 1943) who served during World War II received the Air Medal and Oak Cluster before he was reported missing in North Africa<sup>33</sup>. Other families that have lived in the area and attended the church include Rainey, Collins, Amos, Belew and Eggleston.

The Cooper Creek Baptist Church has been an integral part of the community since 1872. The church has provided stability in the community and its members have served the community and the school. The several of the founding families of the Cooper Creek Baptist Church are still active in the church. The church served as a focal point for the

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<sup>31</sup> "Denton, Texas", Dallas Morning News, December 26, 1922, p.2.

<sup>32</sup> "Bank President Buys Denton's First Bale", Dallas Morning News, September 9, 1954, Part 1, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> "Denton Lieutenant Missing in Action", Dallas Morning News, October 8, 1943, p.4.

community's growth and development. Today, the church continues its tradition as the center of the community, helping to host the annual Mother's Day celebration and Homecoming. This celebration brings together current members of the community, those who have moved away and those who attended Cooper Creek School or have family members interred at the cemetery. The church is also active locally helping those in need as well as statewide and international missionary efforts.

## **V. Documentation**

- Ed Bates, *History and Reminiscences of Denton County* (Denton, Texas: McNitzky Printing, 1918).
- C.A. Bridge, *History of Denton County from Its Beginning to 1960* (Waco, Texas: Texian Press, 1978).
- Mary Jo Cowling, *Geography of Denton* (Dallas: Banks Upshaw and Company, 1936).
- Emily Fowler and Alma Lain Chambers, *Towns and Communities of Denton County*, (Denton, Texas, 1960)
- E. Dale Odom, *An Illustrated History of Denton County, Texas* (Denton, Texas: Self Published, 1996).
- Captain B.B. Paddock, *History of Texas: Fort Worth and Texas Northwest Edition* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1922).
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### **Handbook of Texas Online,**

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## **County Records**

- Director’s School Record for Denton County, O.N. Hollingsworth, Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1876, p.102.
- Denton County Deed Records, Volume 135, p.487, December 26, 1916.

## **Newspaper Articles**

- “North Texas”. *Dallas Morning News*, April 21, 1903, p.10
- “Cotton Stripped of Foliage and Corn Ruined in Some Places”, *Dallas Morning News*, July 1, 1904, p.10
- “Cotton Report”, *Dallas Morning News*, July 10, 1907, p. 10
- “Loafer Tells of Things He Saw at the County Fair”, *Denton Record Chronicle*, January 1, 1917, p.2.
- “Donated Labor for Erection of Church”, *Dallas Morning News*, January 7, 1917, Section 3, p.9.
- “Denton, Texas”, *Dallas Morning News*, December 26, 1922, p.2.
- “Reunion Sunday at Cooper Creek”, *Denton Record Chronicle*, March 24, 1923 p.5
- “Eight Cent Raise in Ginning Prices Called Necessary”. *Dallas Morning News*, July 28, 1932, Section II, p.8.
- “Denton Lieutenant Missing in Action”, *Dallas Morning News*, October 8, 1943, p.4.
- “Bank President Buys Denton’s First Bale”, *Dallas Morning News*, September 9, 1954, Part 1, p. 13.