

HISTORY OF SWISHER CEMETERY

The land where Swisher Cemetery is located was owned by H.H. Swisher. Mr. Swisher was given the land known as the Swisher survey in Denton County for his part in the War with Mexico when Texas won its independence.¹

When H.H. Swisher died, Captain A.P. Swisher (born 1829, died 1920), his son, inherited the land. A.P. received his title of Captain during the Civil War. Swisher donated this land to be used as a burial place for the area occupied by the families in the French Settlement. This piece of land is located on the East Side of the current Swisher Cemetery.

When Captain Swisher's wife, Virginia, died in 1899, he buried her on the land and it is the area now known as the Swisher lot. He planted two cedar trees to the Northwest and the Southeast corners of the Swisher lot. Later, his son, J.M. Swisher put two more cedar trees marking the Northeast and the Southwest corners. The trees are still located on this lot. The Swisher lot has grown to the North. H.H. Swisher, another son of A.P., buried two children to the North of the trees.²

For many years, the community of Garza (now known as Lake Dallas) maintained the cemetery. Men in the area would volunteer to do the maintenance that was needed and took great pride in doing their part for our community cemetery. These same men also dug by hand the graves for all burials taking place. Many of these men are now buried in Swisher Cemetery, and we continue to remember them and their hard work which is such an important part of our heritage.³

In 1948, a ladies' organization known as the Lake Dallas Birthday Club, was asked if they would undertake the maintenance and care of the cemetery. These ladies took it upon themselves to find a caretaker to do mowing, clearing trees, and other things that would come about. With Lake Dallas being a small town at the time, they had a big job to do. According to many of the ladies, it was not an easy chore. Many people in the area remember the bake sales held once a month on Saturday in front of the grocery stores and ice cream parties with lots of home made ice cream. These ladies were very industrious. They made quilts and sold chances on them to raise their funds. They spent many hours on rehearsals on plays they would produce. The club would also have coffees. They spent a great deal of time and effort on making sure the cemetery was well cared for. There were times when a caretaker was not available and the group asked for help from the young men in the schools. That was a successful venture. In all, their projects successfully raised enough funds to keep the cemetery looking very beautiful. Until December 1998, this group cared for the cemetery. The community continues to support their efforts by having community clean up days and having very successful Decoration Days each May on Mother's Day. This organization is now known as the Swisher Cemetery Association. The organization now consists of 20 men and women working together as volunteers for the benefit of the cemetery.

Land purchases and burial plot sales are maintained by this group. Additional land has been purchased on the north, west and south side of the initial lot given by the Swisher Family. Property adjacent to the cemetery has been purchased as it has

become available. Interested local residents have also donated land to enable the cemetery to grow. As of 1997, there were 1,251 graves in the cemetery. Burial has grown from one in the 1860's to 241 in the 1990's. A section was purchased by citizens and donated for the interment of military personnel. There are 121 Veterans buried in the cemetery. The Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion group decorates these grave spaces with a flag on Veterans Day every year. In 1998, the cemetery had 1,115 future grave spaces, 956 undeveloped spaces and 159 developed spaces available. The oldest identifiable grave is Francis Long (born 3/30/1836 – died 9/9/1867). The oldest birthday date is Margaret Carpenter born in 1803 and died in 1868. The oldest person buried is Tina William Faulkner born in 1894 and died in 1997.

This cemetery has been designated for burial of citizens residing in the Lake Cities area. The initial land donated by Captain Swisher was given to the citizens as the occasions arose. With the purchases of land for expansion, it became necessary to charge for these plots, and funds from these sales are applied toward the payment of the caretaker and to develop additional land that has been purchased.

Every year on Mother's day, the Swisher Cemetery Association sponsors a Decoration Day at the cemetery. A gathering of old and new friends occurs with a ceremony remembering and honoring those who have gone on before us. Donations are accepted on Saturday and Sunday from those who have come to decorate the grave sites of their loved ones. These funds are used for projects to enhance the cemetery. The association is hard at work on the history of our community cemetery and on keeping our heritage alive.. Small granite markers have been placed on gravesites

where unreadable stones are located. Markers are also being placed on graves where
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there is no visible marker so as not to lose site of existing burials.

In February of 1995, the cemetery was vandalized. There were 80 markers broken
or turned over, 32 vases broken and a few benches broken. Floral decorations were
scattered everywhere. The community really showed their love for their cemetery.
The VFW and the American Legion organizations held special events to help raise
funds to have the cemetery restored. Also many people who did not have family
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members buried contributed time and money to have the damage repaired. In
May of 1998, the Friday night before Mothers Day, a storm blew through the town
and destroyed trees located in the cemetery. With the help of local citizens and
families, tree limbs and large trees were cleared before the ceremony on Sunday.
With the damage being so visible, citizens driving by stopped to make donations to
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help clean up the mess the storm created.