

THE ROANOKE, TEXAS,
INTERNATIONAL ORDER OF ODD FELLOWS CEMETERY OF
Denton County, Texas

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I. O. O. F. CEMETERY ASSOCIATION
ROANOKE, TX.

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PREFACE

At the outset of this investigative report, the writer found that this Cemetery, unlike many others, does not relate directly to a church or to any existing entity other than family ties. It continues to serve people of the Roanoke community without any requirement for church or lodge affiliation, and the lodge which sponsored the Cemetery at its founding ceased to exist long ago.

Thus, it is in truth a family cemetery. But it also has had liberal people controlling it as is reflected by the fact that it has unique features not common to other cemeteries in the area.

First, this Cemetery reflects the influence of the cattle farmers who hanged and buried a horse thief right in the Cemetery.

Second, it reflects the railroad influence as demonstrated by the burial of Mexican-American people who lived in the section houses and whose adult males were section crew workers for the Texas and Pacific Railroad.

Third, it stands as a tribute to the humane nature of the Cemetery fathers who permitted burial of two derelict railroad hoboes who could not be identified.

The town of Roanoke is itself mirrored in the Cemetery as it provides a resting place for former merchants, postmasters, rural mail carriers, cobblers, bankers, farmers, ranchers, a physician, a blacksmith, and a plumber plus their families.

Its 86+ years of history are not as long as the other major Roanoke-area cemeteries, but its historical value has been well established as it stands as a monument itself to the character and quality of the people interred therein. Its continued use is assured by a strong support Association.

ROANOKE, TEXAS, I. O. O. F. CEMETERY
TEXAS HISTORICAL MARKER APPLICATION

LOCATION OF THE CEMETERY

The Roanoke, Texas, I. O. O. F. (International Order of Odd Fellows) Cemetery is located one mile East of Roanoke, Denton County, Texas, on the old Roanoke to Grapevine Road which is an extension of the Lonesome Dove Road to the West and the C. W. Fanning Road to the East.

It consists of 5.57 acres, more or less, of land and cost \$97.00 when purchased by the Roanoke I. O. O. F. Lodge #421 on March 29, 1897. The parcel of land is of the Richard Eads Survey and was bought from George W. and Hannah Medlin. The Deed is recorded as of January 7, 1910, by then Denton County Clerk W. T. Bailey and appears on page 538 of Book 82, Denton County, Texas, General Index of Deeds-Reverse. The actual sale was made on March 29, 1897, at Roanoke, Texas, witnessed and sealed by J. L. Selby, J. P. (Justice of the Peace) Ex Officio, N. P. (Notary Public) in and for Denton County, Texas. The reason for a nearly thirteen year delay in filing the Deed for record is unknown. (1)

The Cemetery is located on the Eastern bank of Marshall Creek, and is separated by fence on the West, North, and East from the internationally known Circle R Ranch now owned and operated by Mr. Nelson Bunker Hunt, millionaire heir to the Hunt fortune, who owns a valuable collection of race horses and Charolais cattle. It is then possible often to see these high quality animals as they graze peacefully alongside the Cemetery fences.

A well known landmark, the Bald-headed Hill, overlooks the Cemetery to the East, and the Cemetery setting is picturesque in a special Texas way.

All of this is a credit to the vision of the Cemetery founders who selected the site for their family plots. Many a youth who grew up in the Roanoke area can recall the productive fishing hole at the Lonesome Dove Road bridge over Marshall Creek to the West where almost any day sun perch and catfish could be landed. And an abundance of dewberries, persimmons, and pecans could be obtained in season. It was feasible to swim right in plain sight of the Cemetery. Black and live oak trees are scattered about the Cemetery, growing in thick forest-like configurations on the Northeast section.

I. O. O. F. LODGE #421, Roanoke, Texas

Official records on the Roanoke Lodge have not been located but, according to some reports, were kept by Mr. J. H. (Jim) Seagraves in his home along with the Cemetery map and related documents for many years after the Lodge was disbanded. Records of the lodges in Krum, Ponder, Justin, and Argyle were reportedly transferred to the Denton Lodge when those lodges ceased to operate. When Mr. Jim Seagraves, by then a widower, died on September 4, 1958, the Lodge records were likely lost. Mr. Seagraves, interred in the Cemetery, was a shoe cobbler and general handyman. He designed and built his own tombstone and then displayed it prominently in his front yard on Oak Street in Roanoke for many years. It marks his grave now.

Early membership in the Roanoke Lodge included, but was not limited to, these pioneer Roanokians:

Clint Cowan	Calvin Abner Sams
Charles G. Fanning	Hise Seagraves
Christopher Hayden	James H. Seagraves (believed to have been Secretary)
Henry Howe	Arch Wilson Smith
Martin Francis Jarrell	Will Taylor
Peter Lassen	Frank Stump
John Austin McMahon	
Henry Reynolds	

The Roanoke Lodge met in the Masonic Lodge building in Roanoke which was replaced in 1905 by a new building. Some of the members belonged also to the Masonic and Woodmen of the World Lodges.

THE MEDLIN FAMILY CONNECTION

No history of a Roanoke entity would be complete without mention of the pioneer Medlin Family. The Medlin Cemetery is located about three miles to the Northeast of the Roanoke I. O. O. Cemetery, and is situated on land donated by Charles and Matilda Medlin. This Charles Medlin was the son of Charles and Mary Medlin, early settlers, and an uncle to George W. Medlin who pre-owned the land on which the Roanoke I. O. O. F. Cemetery is located.

Medlin family history is often the subject of debate, but the fact is that Charles and Lewis Medlin and their Eads relatives were owners of huge tracts of land in the now Roanoke area. Lewis Medlin's first son and child was the George W. Medlin referred to above.

The Medlin Cemetery contains about 1500 graves and dates back to 1850. It relates to the the Roanoke I. O. O. F. Cemetery by prior ownership. Researchers may be curious why the Medlin Cemetery was not used by families who founded the Roanoke I. O. O. F. Cemetery. The best explanation is that the Medlin Cemetery was considered to be over-crowded and remote. Texans like open space. This tends to be confirmed by the fact that the Medlin Cemetery was increased in size as a result of a later donation of land by James Medlin. (2)

If, then, the Medlin Cemetery is the oldest cemetery in the Roanoke area, then the Roanoke I. O. O. F. is the newest. And it is a reasonable belief that the Roanoke I. O. O. F. Cemetery was founded in part to accommodate an overflow from the Medlin Cemetery.

BRIEF HISTORY OF ROANOKE, TEXAS

Roanoke, Texas, was founded in 1881 when the Texas and Pacific Railroad was routed from Fort Worth to Denton through Keller, Roanoke, and Argyle. A railroad surveyor by tradition named the town "Roanoke" which is the Indian word for beaded and belted money made from small white cockle shells. The town was certified as plotted by Texas and Pacific Railroad Land Commissioner W. H. Abrams on June 23, 1881, at the Marshall, Texas, Land Development Office of the Company. Actually Roanoke evolved out of the small settlements known as Elizabethtown to the West and Garden Valley, an often flooded community to the North in the Denton Creek Valley.

By 1897, sixteen years later, when the Roanoke I. O. O. F. Cemetery was founded, the town of Roanoke had fifteen or sixteen businesses operating on Oak Street, the main street, and a population of over five hundred.

Roanoke was an outloading point for cattle, was surrounded by fertile land, and was from its beginning a Western town where dusty cowboys came on Saturday for a shave and bath followed by a night of drinking at Snead's Saloon. There were two hotels. The early pioneers of Roanoke were fond of Sam Bass, legendary train robber who worked on the Carruth Ranch to the North of Roanoke, and Henry Underwood, Bass' accomplice and friend.

The history of Roanoke has been well documented, and plans have been made to publish an already written book on the subject. This book was a by-product of a BiCentennial Celebration held on June 19, 1976, and attended by over 570 Roanoke-related people. (3)

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CEMETERY

To appreciate the historical meaning of the Roanoke I. O. O. F. Cemetery, one must review some of the events and legends that relate to the people who lie peacefully in its confines.

Calvin Abner Sams (1827-1914) was a key factor in founding the Roanoke I. O. O. F. Cemetery. When his wife Lucinda Johnson Sams died in 1882, she left two daughters aged ten and eight plus a son seventeen years of age. One of the daughters was the grandmother of the writer of this paper. The family lived three miles to the East on Lonesome Dove Road from where the Roanoke Cemetery is now located. But "Pappy" Calvin Abner Sams could not bear to bury his wife so far away from the family home, so she was interred in the family yard and a low white picket fence was built around the plot.

When "Pappy" Sams died in 1914, remains of Lucinda Johnson Sams were removed to the Sams plot in the Cemetery, so she is the person who died first even though her interment was delayed by 32 years.

"Pappy" Sams' son-in-law, James DeWitt Pressley, husband of Fanny Sams died also in 1897 and is interred in the Southwest section of the Cemetery. He was a young man but 38 years of age at death.

The oldest person interred in the Cemetery and believed by most to be the first buried there is J. C. Smith who was buried soon after his death on January 13, 1898. Born on June 26, 1826, he was but 71 years of age at death by no means an advanced age in the present era.

The person with the longest life in the Cemetery is Lela Wharton Taylor (1880-1977) who was 97+ years of age at death, and she was followed closely by Ida Lee Cowan (1874-1971) and Arch Wilson Smith (1872-1968) both of whom were 96 years of age at death. Frank (Poo) Stump (1852-1945) lived over 93 years.

Something that sets this Cemetery apart from others in the area is the famous "Hanging Tree" which is a very old and gnarled live oak tree in the Northeast wooded section of the Cemetery. Near its wide trunk is a simple tombstone which reads as follows:

Elijah Homer
Lay
May 18 1874
Dec 17 1906

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

The somewhat sardonic epitaph offers mute testimony to the end of the life of an alleged horse thief. Among those who were present at the hanging was Reese Eidson, husband of Mollie Sams and another son-in-law of "Pappy" Sams. The story of the hanging as told by Arch Wilson Smith and Claude Raibourn (whose mother was Mary Abigail Fanning Raibourn) was that the posse had been drinking after the hanging and discussing what to do with the remains of the 32 year old man. They decided out of decency to dig a grave and bury the corpse, and this proved to be a very difficult and uncomfortable job.

Claude Raibourn asked for his comments on the hanging to be off the record. At the time of the discussion a tape recorder was being used. What he said was likely no more than an allegation or a rumor, so to protect innocent family descendants no entry will be made in this paper in that regard.

While this type of a historical event is not a matter of pride or anything pleasant to record, it is an example of how strongly early Texas ranchers and cattle farmers felt about the stealing of horses or cattle.

This grave with its marker reminded all citizens of the probable penalty that awaited a thief.

There was a belief and a rumor that two more horse thieves met their end in the Cemetery, but no proof has been located. It is probable that the two other alleged victims were in fact two railroad hoboes or bums who in the early 1900s were either killed in a train wreck or otherwise died in a boxcar. Neither had any identification whatsoever, and to this day, therefore, nobody has claimed their graves. No tombstones were placed at these graves, so they forever will be known as "The Unknown Railroad Bums" who were provided a final resting place due to the charity and humane nature of the Cemetery fathers.

Cemetery records show them as being buried in Graves 11 and 12, Lot 21, Block F, and Mrs. Nell Fanning noted that the Roanoke I. O. O. F. Lodge was donor of the lots and that the cost of burial was paid from a collection taken for the purpose.

About 1920 and forward the Texas and Pacific Railroad placed Mexican-Americans in Roanoke on the section crew which was headed by Foreman Simon Garcia. He was well regarded by the people of Roanoke for his honesty, hard work, and sense of responsibility. He wanted his children to become proficient in the English language, and he sent them regularly to Sunday School and Church at the Roanoke Presbyterian Church.

When children of either the Garcias or other Section Crew members died, they were interred in Section 13 of the Cemetery with wooden crosses and bright flowers marking their gravesites. Time has eliminated any trace of these graves.

On November 22, 1919, at about 9:30 P. M. a major explosion rocked Roanoke. A boiler at the Farmers' Gin exploded, killing two men immediately and injuring several others severely. One

of these men was Charles Cooper Cardwell (1875-1950) who was left as a pitiful cripple for the rest of his life. He was buried in the Cemetery alongside his wife, LuBelle Fanning Cardwell. One of the other victims of the explosion was Sam Seagraves, brother of Hise and Jim Seagraves, who was interred in the Medlin Cemetery. All of the Seagraves family members except Sam Seagraves are buried in the Roanoke I. O. O. F. Cemetery. The reason given the writer for the burial of Sam Seagraves, then 30 years of age, in the Medlin Cemetery was that the Gin was owned and operated by Jack Medlin who felt a responsibility for his deceased employees.

The dependency of the early settlers on animals and dangers related thereto is demonstrated by the tombstone and grave of Thomas Aubrey Fanning (1912-1917), son of Oscar Leland and Lula Foster Fanning, who as a four year old went to the barn to greet his Father who had come in from a day of plowing. The child entered a stall and was kicked by a feeding horse. This tragedy would be remembered and used as a warning to other children.

SOME BRIEF FAMILY HISTORIES

Since this is in truth a multi-family cemetery, brief sketches of family history are in order. In most instances, much more in-depth documentation exists, and these paragraphs are in no way intended to be complete presentations.

The immigrant ancestor of the Sams Family is Bonham Sams who came to what is now Hilton Head, South Carolina, in 1681. Calvin Abner Sams was son of W. Braxton and Susan Caszy Sams, and he was born in Tennessee. He came to the Roanoke area from Drake's Creek, near Hindsville, Carroll County, Arkansas. His wife, Lucinda Johnson, was daughter of Thomas Murrell, and Sallie McMurray Johnson. The Sams (or Sammes as the name is spelled in old English) family traces to Somerset County, England, and is well documented. (4)

"Pappy" Sams' descendants intermarried with members of the Fanning, Fawks, Pressley, Owens, Underwood, and McAnally families.

J. C. and Martha Brand Smith came to the Roanoke area from Bardstown, Nelson County, Kentucky, a common connection point for people during the Westward Expansion. Descendants intermarried with the Fanning family.

T. R. Brand and Mary A. Brand, believed to have been his wife, came also from Bardstown, Kentucky, with the J. C. Smith family. E. C. Brand was an early banker in Roanoke.

William Cowan, progenitor of the Cowan clan in the Cemetery and interred there himself, was Roanoke's second postmaster from 1898 to 1910, and he inaugurated the first rural mail delivery out of the Roanoke Post Office in 1902. He was appointed by President William McKinley. His daughter Ida Lee Cowan, never married, replaced him as postmaster in 1910 and served for 45 years. She was appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt. The inscription on

her tombstone immortalizes her daily contact with Roanoke citizens which started with the question, "Any mail today, Miss Ida?"

The Cowans trace back to Alabama and Georgia. People who have inventoried the Cemetery have been confused by the fact that the tombstone inscription on the front of the William and Sarah Cowan stone provides birth and death dates of William while the back gives the same information on Sarah Cowan. This indeed is unique and not observed on any other stone.

While there is one intermarriage between Cowans and Sams, which ended in divorce, the true close relationship came about when the two Sams daughters, Ida Annie and Lucinda, were orphaned by their Mother when they were ten and eight years of age. Sarah Cowan became the acting mother for the two girls and was instrumental in their lives ever after.

The Fanning line of Roanoke traces back to 1668 when John Fanning entered Charles County, Maryland. The first Fanning in the Cemetery by age was Charles Grant Fanning who came to Texas in 1878. His Uncle John A. Fanning entered the Elizabethtown area in 1852 from Fayette County, Illinois, and the early Fannings used what is called the Sweet's Chapel Cemetery, seven miles West of Roanoke, and, in fact, John A. Fanning donated the land for this Cemetery which sometimes has been referred to as Fanning Cemetery or Fanning Burying Grounds.

Fannings were intermarried with Sams, Cardwells, Smiths, Underwoods, Owens, and Fosters. There are eighteen Fanning relatives in the Cemetery, more than any other family. (5)

The Owens family traces back through James H. and Lula Ann Owens to Alabama and Georgia, and relate to the Sams and Fanning families through intermarriage of Bert D. Owens to Ruby Ida Fanning.

Dr. Biram H. Seagraves brought his wife, three sons, and one daughter from Tennessee to Texas in 1885 by train. Amanda Seagraves married R. H. Smith, Hise Seagraves married a widow Reynolds first and then Lillie Murl Kelly, and James H. Seagraves married Margaret Lee. The Seagraves were prominent in Roanoke affairs, and noted for long life. There are nine Seagraves in the Cemetery.

Claude William (Tony) Underwood, husband of Ruth Fanning Underwood, traces back to the Underwoods and Whipples of Indiana. Early Underwoods were close friends of John A. Fanning, obtaining land from him West of Roanoke. He is the single Underwood in the Cemetery.

The Buell family has been traced to William Buell who entered Massachusetts from England in 1630. The descendants who entered the Roanoke area in 1881 from Paxton, Illinois, were Erwin Clyde and Thomas Warner Buell. Descendants have distinguished themselves as scholars. One Dr. E. C. Buell, Jr., recently deceased, was Head of the Department of Government, North Texas State University, at the time of his death. There are six Buell graves in the Cemetery.

The Lassen family has a most interesting background, since Peter Lassen and Anna Brandt Lassen both were immigrants. Peter traces to Gelting, Germany, and lived in Denmark in an area that was dominated by the German Government. He served in the German Army, was a blacksmith, mechanic, and inventor, and came to Roanoke by way of Justin to do mechanical work. Anna Brandt Lassen was born in Schoenwerder, Germany, entered Galveston by ship, and met Peter while she was living on a ranch in Blanco County, Texas, with friends.

There are five Lassens in the Cemetery.

The Boutwells trace to Tennessee where Jerry Boutwell was born and to Illinois where Sarah Mattie Boutwell was born. She was by legend an orphan girl who was raised by Mary Abigail Fanning Raibourn

in Roanoke where she helped in operation of a small hotel on Oak Street. Her maiden name was Howard, and the Howard family in Illinois related to the Fanning family. There are four Boutwells in the Cemetery.

William C. Taylor came to Roanoke from McMinnville, Tennessee, and married Lela May Wharton, who traces to Cleveland County, Arkansas. There are two Taylors in the Cemetery.

John Austin McMahon, born in Georgia, came to Roanoke in 1903 as Section Foreman for the Texas and Pacific Railroad Co. His second wife, Ethel Lee Riggs McMahon, lived with him in the Section House, and is interred in the Cemetery. John McMahon was quite active in the Roanoke I. O. O. F. Lodge, and shifted to farming in about 1919. There are six McMahons in the Cemetery.

Martin Francis Jarrell, Foreman of the Texas and Pacific Railroad's Extra Gang, and his wife Medora Phillips lived periodically in Roanoke either on a work train on the Roanoke siding or in a house one block East of the railroad section houses. He had been born in Minnesota to parents who were natives of West Virginia. Martin Jarrell was an active member also of the Roanoke I. O. O. F. Lodge. One of his sons, Rufus Martin Jarrell, married Mattie Delila McMahon. The type of work assignments given to him made the establishment of a permanent home impossible. It is noteworthy that he, his wife, and one son chose to be interred in the Roanoke I. O. O. F. Cemetery. (6)

THE ROANOKE I. O. O. F. CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

This Cemetery with 229 marked graves, eight unmarked, and fifty more estimated as unmarked was operated as a family cemetery in which family plots were cared for, or often not cared for, by family members.

In the 1950s an informal Association was formed. Mr. C. W. Fanning, Mrs. Ruth Fanning Underwood, and Miss Hedwig Lassen volunteered to solicit funds so that a regular maintenance program could be established. Mr. and Mrs. Fanning kept the Cemetery map and records and assigned grave sites when needed.

When Mr. Fanning became disabled in 1959, Mrs. Fanning continued to work with others on keeping the Cemetery in shape. She obtained help from Mr. John Foust, associated with the Foust Funeral Home in Grapevine, and they located and marked with slabs about fifteen graves which otherwise might have been lost from recognition. Mr. Foust is a cemetery restoration specialist whose interest in history and preservation of cemeteries is noteworthy.

Much credit is due Mrs. Nell Fanning and Mr. John Foust who cared enough to undertake a joint effort that resulted in the commemoration of a number of lives that otherwise would have gone into pitiful obscurity. This Cemetery continues to operate.

In July of 1983 after the death of Mrs. Nell Fanning, Mrs. Ruth Fanning Underwood arranged a conference in the Roanoke Community Center where she called for the election of a slate of officers for the Cemetery Association. These are as follows:

President	Mr. Charles Richard Fanning
Vice President	Mr. Richard Mitchell
Secretary	Miss Hedwig Lassen
Treasurer	Mrs. Ruby Lee Lassen

Plans for an application for a historical marker and for perpetual care for the Cemetery were discussed and made final.

AFTERWORD

Intellectually honest writers know that they never have all of facts together when they decide to submit a manuscript. Then it makes sense to provide for a place where new and additional items can be added. This is the purpose of this section.

Mrs. Norma Taylor Redwine, daughter of William C. and Lela Wharton Taylor, on January 14, 1984, recalled that her Father helped to dig graves in Medlin Cemetery several times. He lamented the fact that the water table in that Cemetery was such that seepage caused problems to the workers. He commented that he never wanted to be buried in water. This then provides another explanation for the founding of the Roanoke I. O. O. F. Cemetery.

Mr. Charles Richard Fanning in a letter dated December 31, 1983, recalled a report on the Elijah Homer Lay hanging that identified Roy Fischer as another witness to the event. One detail that he added was that the body was allowed to hang for a period of three days prior to burial. He alleged also that "The Justice Squad" as he called them were "well fortified with whiskey" during both the hanging and the burying actions.