

SMITH CEMETERY

LEWISVILLE, TX

Historical Narrative researched and written by Frances James for Texas Historical Commission (THC)
Subject Marker Application, Denton County. 2001

Smith Cemetery

Lewisville, Texas

Compiled by Frances James

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In

Lewisville, Texas

The Smith Cemetery is in Denton County in Lewisville, on Smith Street about two miles from the city hall.ⁱ In 1970, Daniel Paul Stafford did a survey for Community Service as a requirement for his Eagle Badge Project. At that time there were two hundred and sixty legible grave markers and seven illegible markers. No doubt there are many unmarked graves. The Denton County Historical Commission updated the list in 1988.ⁱⁱ Each year there have been a few additional burials the latest one was David Joseph Deras who died in October 1999.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1881, Thomas M. Smith and his wife Elizabeth A. Smith sold two and one half acres for a cemetery plot to the Lewisville Lodge No. 201 for \$25.00. J.F. Ford was the Worshipful Master of the Lodge in 1881. This deed described the land as being on the waters of Prairie Creek - a tributary of the Elm Fork of the Trinity River.^{iv}

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In 1950 a group of friends of the Smith Cemetery met in the Community Hall in Lewisville and organized a permanent organization to maintain the entire four and one-third acre cemetery.^v After managing the cemetery for ninety years, in 1972 the Lewisville Lodge No. 201, A.F.&A.M. resolved that the Lodge would sell and convey by Quit Claim to the Smith Cemetery Association the two and one-half acre property that was being used as cemetery land. It was noted at this time that it was " south of T.M. Smith's residence and east of the entry gate to farm of same."^{vi}

Denton County was formed in 1846 by the Texas legislature. It was cut out of the territory of Fannin County. Before 1837, Red River County had covered a large section of the land along the Red River. When it was decided that thirty miles square or that not more than 1000 square miles was the ideal size for a county, many of the counties in northeast Texas were formed with this in mind. Denton County was named for John B. Denton, early frontiersman, Indian fighter and aide to General Edward H. Tarrant for whom Tarrant County is named. This land was included in the first contract with the Peters Colony of Texas in 1841.^{vii}

Two brothers from Missouri, John and James Halford (Holford) arrived in old Fannin County in 1844 and received a certificate from Peters Colony for 640

acres. The 1850 census for Denton County shows thirty-four year old John and his family as number 69 born in Kentucky and with four children and two slaves. This vicinity became known as Holford's Prairie. They lived in Nacogdoches County on White Rock Creek.^{viii}

In 1844 Indiana native John N. King and his son Augustus (1828 – 18--) King became the first settlers on Holford's Prairie. John died before 1850 and his widow Delilah patented 640 acres in the Cross Timbers in old Fannin County.^{ix} Much of the Old Town of Lewisville is on the King's Survey.

Basdeal W. Lewis, who named the town after himself, established the small community that became the town of Lewisville in 1853. Rawlins, Kealy, and Herod built the first gristmill in 1862.^x There are seven members of the Kealy family buried in the Smith Cemetery. John and Tom Kealey had left Michigan to go to San Antonio. When they camped out in the Lewisville area on the way, they met Mr. Harrington who not only persuaded them to stay but he loaned them \$2000.00 in gold to develop a mill, a cording machine and cotton gin which ran on steam power.^{xi}

The earliest birthday for any of the burials in the Smith cemetery was that of William Herod (1794-1872). William Wilson Sherrill (1877-1958) was one of the

town's first blacksmiths, started the first water works, and helped wire the town for electricity. Many of his descendants, family and friends are buried in the Smith Cemetery.

Lewisville was the site of Denton County's first cotton gin in 1867, built by T.M. Clayton (1833-1915) and George Craft. When the gin burned later in the year, it was the first fire in Lewisville! Clayton is also buried in the Smith Cemetery.^{xii}

On an old map of Denton County it is noted that Holford's Prairie was the lowest point in the county. On the General Land Office map for Denton County the names of many of the families buried at this site are noted. When Lewisville was a small town just serving the farming community surrounding it, there was one area that was called Buttermilk Flat, another was called Sweet Milk Hill. These names reflected the economic conditions of the two sections of the community. After an alleged murder of a white man by a black man, many of the African Americans moved to a small area called "scrounged out,"^{xiii}

The town incorporated in 1925, when the population was 825. Lewisville's first boom occurred when the Elm Fork of the Trinity was dammed near the small village of Garza in 1928 to assure the area's water supply. The waters then covered this village. This lake was known as Lake Dallas and served for thirty-

one year as the principal source of water for the city of Dallas.^{xiv} On March 2, 1945 Congress passed the River and Harbor Act which called for the construction of four flood control lakes within the Trinity River basin. The new Denton County dam was started in 1948 and completed in 1955 to impound the waters of Clear Fork, Little Elm, Stewart, Pecan, and Hickory Creeks in addition to the Trinity River's Elm Fork. There is an archeology site on the West side of the Elm Fork at the mouth of Hickory Creek that has revealed various pre-historic findings. These materials are now located at the Smithsonian Institution.

The lake started filling up in 1954 and was known at that time as the Garza-Little Elm reservoir and Dam. The cost for this \$21,756,500 project was contributed to by the cities of Dallas, Highland Park and University Park as well as Denton. In 1957 the older and smaller Lake Dallas was incorporated when the old Garza Dam was breached. This huge lake, thirteen miles long with 183 miles of shoreline and a capacity of 436,000 acre-feet covered almost one-fifth of Denton County and is owned by the United States Government. The current official title is Lewisville Lake.

Between 1873 and for the next several years various railroads were constructing tracks across Denton County. In 1878 the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad completed a track from Dallas to Lewisville, first stop was at the

community of Letot, Texas - now part of Dallas.^{xv} In 1881 the Dallas and Wichita Railway arrived in Lewisville. Five years later the Gulf Colorado and Santa Fe Railroad completed a track across the county from north to south. The completion of these railroads marks the second phase of Denton County's history.

The inhabitants of the county were mostly transplants from the upper south. In the 1850 census the population was 5000 with 256 slaves. Farming was the main occupation and due to the fact that transportation was expensive the main cash crop was one that could transport itself – cattle. After the railroads came wheat was planted as a cash crop at one time Krum a short distance west from Lewisville claimed the prestige of being the largest inland wheat-loading station in the United States.

There are thirteen members of the Smith buried in this cemetery that was started near the home place on family land. The oldest known marker is for James J. Smith (1842-1862).^{xvi} He was the twenty year old son of Tom and Elizabeth Smith. The oldest birth date in this family is for Captain Henry Hardin Smith (1811-1887). His wife, Elizabeth (1817-1887) died the same year as he did. Thomas Morgan (1814-1887) and Elizabeth A. (1815-1883) Smith purchased three hundred and eighteen acres of land from L.T. and Sarah B.

Higgins for fifteen hundred dollars in 1859. The Higgins had procured the property in 1854 from Sarah Sutton. She was the fifty-eight year old widow of Peters Colonist Edmund Sutton who had died before 1850. Sarah Sutton was issued a certificate for 640 acres in 1850 by Peters Colony that was patented in Denton County.^{xvii} There is another parcel of land nearby that was also patented to the Sutton's, but is not contingent to this site. Mrs. Sutton was living in Benton County, Arkansas in 1854 when the transaction with the Higgins took place.

The Smith families had migrated to Texas at different times from North Carolina and Mississippi. One of Henry Hardin Smith's daughters married Aron Lott and remained in Mississippi. Senate Majority leader Trent Lott is a descendant of this family.^{xviii}

Cora Skillern (1862-1882) is buried in the Smith cemetery. She was a member of the Skillern family that was so well known in Texas because of their chain of drugstores. James A. Skillern (18 -1914) who came to Texas in 1875 received his diploma in pharmacy from Vanderbilt University ten years later. This is when he started his first drug store in Lewisville in 1885. When fire damaged that first store in 1893, James sold out and moved to Sherman and started another one. Two years later Skillern started his first store in downtown Dallas near the

courthouse. The second Dallas drugstore was located at 1812 Commerce near the old Interurban Building. Frank Skillern, a son, managed this store until his father's death. Then he became president of the company until his death. After the death of his brother Frank in 1922, Rae Skillern became president and it was during the next forty-three years that many new trends and designs were instigated, and a chain of drugstores was operating all around North Texas, Rae and his wife Anne Thomas Wilson Skillern were killed in a tragic automobile accident in August 1964 on their way home from a visit to their Triple R Ranch a mile and one-half east of Lewisville.^{xx}

There is a sign on Highway 35 for the Fox Exit. This street was named for the prominent family in Lewisville. There are fourteen members of the Fox family buried in the Smith Cemetery. John Moore Fox (1834-1922) and his wife Ann Eliza Fox (1849-1923) lost six children, one in 1863, 1874, 1875, 1878, 1880, 1882.^{xx}

Henry Meredith Fox born in 1867 lived until 1942. He and Mary Elizabeth (1871-1912) had four daughters. There is a book in the Lewisville Library entitled the Fox Sisters that was compiled from an oral interview conducted by LuJauna Hale with Henrimae Fox Degan about her family. When the mother died, the father became actively involved in the daughter's day to day up-bringing. They

lived in the house that had been built and lived in by the Skillern family before the Skillerns moved to Sherman in 1893.^{xxi}

Julius Kane Fox had come to the Lewisville area in 1850 from Missouri. The 1860 census, the last taken before the blacks in Texas learned they were free, indicated that Fox and his brother C.W. Fox owned eight slaves whose value was \$6000.00. Although there is a Fox family cemetery in Lewisville, there are handmade headstones in the Smith cemetery with the name Fox on them. It has always been told that these are "slave" graves. Family reunions are held annually by the black Fox family.^{xxii}

The Jenkins family came to Texas from the Lookout Mountain area of Tennessee. There is a wonderful picture of Mr. and Mrs. Tom F. Jenkins in 1877 beside one of the cannons that defended Lookout Mountain during the Civil War. There was heavy fighting in this area in 1863. This mountain was never captured, as "there were too many cannons." Another picture shows Sam Jenkins building a wagon in 1883 that brought his family to Texas from Moccasin Bend an area at the foot of Lookout Mountain near Chattanooga, the Confederate's last bastion in eastern Tennessee. Sam and Lisa Jenkins did not come to Texas until 1893. Their first born, Etta Mae was three years old. The wagon, team and belongings were placed on a barge on the Tennessee River

near Chattanooga and they traveled by boat. They debarked and traveled by land to the Mississippi River. They then traveled by boat past the Arkansas River. From here they then traveled by land until they arrived in the general area of Texarkana where the team, wagon and belongings were placed on a railroad car and they eventually arrived near Denton. Family members who had come ahead met them. Sam, Lisa had five other children born in Texas. Some members of this family are buried at the Smith cemetery.^{xxiii}

On Main Street in the Old Town section of Lewisville are four iron plaques that say - Cobb Brothers. These are in the concrete at the entrance to Cobb Brothers Dry Goods Store. The plaques say Gainesville Iron Works – 1902. John Cobb was a member (1863 –1911) of a large Lewisville family. In a clipping concerning Mattie Cobb (1850-1910), she was described as the surviving head of the Cobb family and she died “from a complication of troubles” at the age of sixty. Two children, O.E. Cobb and Gertrude Cobb survived her. Mattie and her husband John Cobb were among those who founded the First Methodist Church in 1879. She was the sister of Hon. E.C. Smith, who was in engaged in a trial in the county court in Denton when word was received about his sister’s death.^{xxiv}

The Cobb family was all musically inclined and there is a picture of Alice Melinda Cobb (1870-1900) with her violin. She was also a talented artist and her paintings have been registered in the "Dictionary of Texas Artists" one hundred years after her death.^{xxv} Allie never married and one Sunday morning after church she went to her room, removed her gloves and placed them in the drawer, took the hat pins out of her hat and placed them on the dresser, took a gun from a drawer and shot herself. No one ever knew why she did; she was only thirty years old.^{xxvi}

The Cobb family, consisting of four brothers was involved in the several businesses. Sam Sylvester Cobb was in Webber's Grove I.T. (Indian Territory) in 1883 in the cattle business as well as being a partner with his brother Henry Clay Cobb in a Lewisville store. This establishment had general merchandise and farm machinery. The brothers also operated a lumberyard. Samuel Sylvester received a veteran's pension having served in the Civil War in Company K, 5th Regiment Tennessee Volunteers. He was discharged on June 30, 1865, and moved to Oklahoma in 1867.^{xxvii} These Cobb brothers were the sons of John Cobb of Montgomery, Blount County, Tennessee. They all had a distinguished nephew, Ty Cobb (1886-1905), whose record is enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.^{xxviii}

Calvin L. Cobb (1833-1900) and his wife Julia Howard (1835-1883) are buried in the Smith Cemetery. There is a stone marking Calvin's grave, but the stone for Julia's cannot be found. Calvin died one month after his daughter, Alice committed suicide. Mary Cobb (18 - 1891) was the wife of Henry Clay Cobb and is beside Henry in the cemetery.

The Jenkins family intermarried with the Cobbs and in the cemetery there is a stone for Artie Cobb Jenkins (1861-1911) – Tom Jenkins who lived to be over 100 – Archie (1890-1893) who was the son of T.H. and N.E. Jenkins.^{xxix}

As happened so often these many years ago, Freda Alice Hamilton Temple (1892-1970) and Donald Ross Temple (1892-1953) buried a baby in 1911, in 1913, and yet another one in 1916. All are in the Smith Cemetery. Freda was so depressed from losing all her babies, that they adopted a son, who is also buried in the Smith Cemetery in the family plot. He did live to maturity and had children of his own. Alice served as assistant postmaster for a while in Lewisville.^{xxx}

More than fifteen members of the Bourland/Hamilton family are buried in this cemetery. Guy Bourland (1889-1964) married Verga Alma Hamilton (1891-1964) and two of their children are buried along with his parents. Verga's sister

Velda married Dr. J.A. Fenlaw and four of their children are buried at the Smith Cemetery. The father of these two sisters, Overton Littleton Hamilton, owned the Lewisville Enterprise.^{xxxI} The Bourland/Hamilton families are also related to the Smith family and the Gatewood, Lott, and Sparks families.^{xxxII}

There are two children of Alabama native F.N. and Mary Elizabeth Cogburn Oliver buried at the Smith Cemetery, Carrie Mable(1880-1881) and Cudie L.(1879). F.N. Oliver founded the Lewisville Headlight in 1881. While living in Lewisville, he published the paper for several years as well as serving as Justice of Peace.^{xxxIII}

He sold the paper and moved to Pilot Point where he started another newspaper. After only a short time, he moved to Oak Cliff, now a section of Dallas, Texas and built an office and founded a newspaper there in a wheat field. F.N. Oliver was involved in many aspects of the newspaper business and became the mayor of the town of Oak Cliff when it was incorporated in 1890.^{xxxIV}

Through the years the Smith Cemetery Association has sent an annual newsletter requesting donations. This pays for the maintenance of the cemetery. In the spring of 2000 some angels appeared who have adopted the cemetery. Linda Smith and her husband Richard and other family members

found the site and fell in love with the tranquility of the lovely trees. They volunteered to clean up and cut back years of growth that had encroached on the site. (There is no relationship with the original Smith family) Linda's father, Fred Thacker died in California and she wanted him to be buried nearby. They were able to find a vacant spot in the cemetery and will use that for her family. Linda works at the post office in Lewisville. When they finished cleaning up early in the spring, the iris was blooming and the cemetery looked beautiful!

Jere Freeman has been the president of the Smith Cemetery Association for several years and Bob Gifford has been the secretary-treasurer In 2000 these positions are going to be filled by younger members of the association.^{xxxv}

An exciting event occurred June 16 and June 24, 2000! Texas Utilities-TXU adopted the cemetery as a community service project this year for a very special clean up. They brought necessary power equipment, tools, sand to level the stones. and even breakfast for everyone. An officer of the 1st International Bank heard of the project and volunteered to arrange for lunch! The Mill Street Café catered the meal.

This was a wonderful day for the Smith Cemetery that started over one hundred and thirty-eight years ago. Lewisville, that was a small town for so many years,

is now only nine miles northeast of the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport and near a large lake. The town of Lewisville is changing dramatically. A Texas Historical Marker at this site will insure that these first citizens of the area of Texas will not be forgotten.

Endnotes

- ⁱ Mapsco Map No. 651 for Denton County
- ⁱⁱ Denton County Historical Commission
- ⁱⁱⁱ Current Cemetery Files
- ^{iv} Denton County Deed Records – Volume S page 278
- ^v Copy of the Minutes dated August 27, 1950.
- ^{vi} Copy of the resolution from the Lewisville Lodge No. 201 dated August 15, 1972 signed by Virgil R. McLarry when the Lodge quit claimed the cemetery to the Smith Cemetery Association.
- ^{vii} Handbook of Texas, gleaned from the Internet. Various Histories of Denton County, Texas Almanac
- ^{viii} The Peters Colony of Texas page 266
- ^{ix} Ibid page 304
- ^x Various histories of Denton County
- ^{xi} Dr. D.F. Kirkpatrick(1869-1839) wrote a paper entitled Reminiscences of Early Lewisville Dr. Kirkpatrick was Chairman of the Denton County Historical Society when he wrote this paper in 1937-38. This account is in the Lewisville Library.
- ^{xii} Oral interview with several descendants of these settlers during a "walk-thru" at the cemetery June 12, 2000.
- ^{xiii} Ibid.
- ^{xiv} Handbook of Texas-Lewisville Lake subject – from the Internet

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- ^{xv} Handbook of Texas – Letot, Texas
- ^{xvi} Inventory made in 1970 by Daniel Paul Stafford while completing his community service project for Eagle Scout.
- ^{xvii} Denton County Deed Records Volume C page 524 dated October 3, 1859
- ^{xviii} Farrington Family from the South and Allied Lines page 273.
- ^{xix} Clipping file and microfilm in the Dallas Public Library, 7th Floor.
- ^{xx} Inventory of cemetery.
- ^{xxi} Interview between LaJuana Hale and Henrimae Fox Degan was conducted in 1997.
This book is in the Lewisville Library.
- ^{xxii} Clipping from the "Northeast Tarrant" Fort Worth Star Telegram dated June 18, 2000.
- ^{xxiii} Personal papers of Willetta Sherrill Stellmacher, Dallas, Texas.
- ^{xxiv} Clipping dated January 27, 1910 from the Denton Record Chronicle
- ^{xxv} Dictionary of Texas Artists – 1800-1945 page 115
- ^{xxvi} Cemetery records and personal papers of Willetta Sherrill Stellmacher.
- ^{xxvii} Civil War records in personal files of Willetta Sherrill Stellmacher
- ^{xxviii} The Story of America page 485.
- ^{xxix} Pictures, family papers, in the personal file of Willetta Sherrill Stellmacher.
- ^{xxx} Oral Interview with Ken Bourland – descendant June 15, 2000.
- ^{xxxi} Article in the Lewisville News dated June 16, 2000.
- ^{xxxii} Telephone conversation with Jerry Petty, whose grandmother was a Smith June 28, 2000
- ^{xxxiii} Memorial and Biographical History of Dallas County pages 324-327 and 733-734.
- ^{xxxiv} Ibid.
- ^{xxxv} Pictures and files of the Smith Cemetery Association

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Skillern family – clipping file and microfilm at the Dallas Public Library taken
from the Dallas Times Herald and Dallas Morning News

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Maps

General Land Office Map of Denton County

Current Mapsco No. 651