

# THE OLD SKINNER CEMETERY

Pilot Point, Denton County, Tx

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The Skinner Cemetery was an integral part of the community during the early years of Pilot Point, Texas. The 2.44 acre plot for the cemetery was given to the community by Richard and Lucinda Skinner, taken from a 342-1/2 acre parcel of land they purchased from Cynthia Stewart on December 29, 1856, and which was a part of the Charles Smith Survey.<sup>1</sup> The cemetery was a recognized landmark as is evidenced by its inclusion in the metes and bounds measurement of the February 18, 1867, deed in which Lucinda Skinner, Esau Skinner, Susan Skinner Miller and Chafin Skinner transfer 38-1/2 acres to J.D. and George A. Skinner Coyle for the consideration of \$400,<sup>2</sup> the description of which reads as follows:

“Beginning at the Northwest corner of the 342-1/2 acre tract conveyed to Richard Skinner dec by Cynthia Stewart... Thence West 360 vs a stone in the east line of the graveyard tract of 2 acres... Thence West 95 vs a stone the north west corner sd graveyard and west line of sd 343-1/2 acre survey - thence north 440 vrs to the place of beginning.”

The Skinner Cemetery was sold by John Skinner in November 1905 to the Skinner Cemetery Association.<sup>3</sup> The trustees of the Association were J.R. Peel, J.T. Smith and R.J. Hardwick. There is no information regarding the disposition of the records of the Association.

Although the Skinner Cemetery has been listed as abandoned and has suffered from the onslaughts of nature and the indifference of man, the efforts of private citizens to record the names of people buried there and preserve pictures of the tombstones have retained much of its history.<sup>4</sup> The names recorded on the remaining tombstones are those of many of the early settlers of Pilot Point who were influential in developing the commercial and cultural growth of the city. Lucinda Glasscock's 1890 obituary<sup>5</sup> succinctly describes its history:

“The burial took place Sunday morn at 9 o'clock in the old cemetery (which is a piece of ground that originally belonged to her homestead, but she many years ago set it apart for cemetery purposes. There sleep nearly all that died in former years in this scope of country). The services, by her oft repeated request, was conducted by her aged pastor and acquaintance of many years standing. The scene was very impressive in the midst of ancient sunken graves, crumbling stones, spreading trees and grass-grown paths.”

The records on the tombstones also reflect the growth of the community through immigration of settlers from Kentucky, Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee and Virginia. These early settlers brought their regional customs, religions and

agricultural techniques to Denton County and were instrumental in establishing the character of Pilot Point.

When studying the messages on the tombstones and following the lives of persons buried in the cemetery through census records and early histories of Pilot Point, it becomes clear that those who rest in the Skinner Cemetery are a microcosm of the Pilot Point community itself. Preponderantly Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, with backgrounds in the hills of Virginia and Kentucky and the mountains of Tennessee, these settlers brought with them the cultures they had known. Most of them were farmers who welcomed the opportunity of expanding their farms to accommodate growing families and the use of free unfenced grazing land for cattle.

A growing population created opportunities for commercial development such as the grist mill established by James Graham and J.C. Thomas a block south of the square,<sup>6</sup> which later became the Pilot Point Roller Mill Company. Interestingly, there are two James Grahams buried in the cemetery with a common birthday of April 5 two years apart and who died on the same date, September 9, 1867. Julian Gist, whose daughter Minnie is buried in the Skinner Cemetery, was mentioned as one of the “prominent stockmen” in Denton County in Ed. F. Bates “History and Reminiscences of Denton County.”<sup>7</sup>

Religion was also an important element in the lives of these early settlers: Lucinda Skinner was a fervent Baptist who was active in the Pilot Point First Baptist Church to the end of her life – her obituary states that “she was the last of

the original membership of the Baptist congregation of Pilot Point;" the John Wellborn family was among the early members of the First Christian Church;<sup>8</sup> Mathew Holford was a minister, probably Baptist, at Elizabethtown.<sup>9</sup>

There were strong family connections between the persons buried in the Skinner Cemetery. The Skinner, Bates, Short, Turner, and Russell families have ties that extend back to Nelson County, Virginia, in 1810<sup>10</sup> and earlier. Other families, such as the Merchants and McFarlanes, were related to the Skinners through marriage. The Vanderslice, Baldwin and Saling families were also probably connected to one another through marriage.

The earliest recorded burials in the Skinner Cemetery were Josiah Taylor in July 1858 and his five-year-old son, Josiah, in March 1858. They came to Pilot Point by way of Missouri and Arkansas, and the long journey and difficulties encountered in establishing a homestead in a more hostile climate may have contributed to their deaths. Catherine Taylor, wife and mother, died in August 1900 and is buried alongside her husband and son. Their tombstones are deeply embedded in the earth with only the front surface showing. The graves are in their original location and set apart in a wire fence enclosure.

Much of the integrity of placement of tombstones was lost in 1987 when a local church group, with the intent of clearing the property of undergrowth and overgrown trees, used a bulldozer and razed a wide swath through the center of the cemetery. Broken tombstones were set aside and no record of the original placement was kept. A large pile of rubble left in the wake of the bulldozer may

contain other broken stones, but it would require a major restoration effort to clear the rubble and retrieve any additional markers. Fortunately the cemetery is so covered with vines, large trees and heavy underbrush, the original burial sites located along the east fenced border and along the western edge that faces Debbie Lane were spared. There are 68 names that can reliably be recorded as either still having markers or were listed in the 1974 Denton County Historical Commission Cemetery Survey conducted by Hazel Shelton.<sup>11</sup> Longtime residents of Pilot Point remember that the cemetery was full before the area was cleared, and there were probably about 200 graves in the cemetery by 1900. The last recorded burial in the cemetery was an infant, Joe Mylo Phipps, in April 1928.

Richard Skinner (1790-December 12, 1863) was born in Virginia, the son of Burdit and Nancy Austin Skinner. He lived in Nelson County, Virginia, until about 1817 when he moved to Washington County, Kentucky. He married Lucinda Glasscock (January 29, 1805-June 28, 1890) June 10, 1824,<sup>12</sup> and their marriage produced fourteen children. They traveled by wagon train from Marion County, Kentucky, to Pilot Point prior to December 1856, and all of their thirteen surviving children also moved to Texas. According to Lucinda's obituary, their purpose in moving to Texas was to obtain land to be distributed to their children, and deeds recorded in March 1859<sup>13</sup> verify that this purpose was fulfilled. Five of their sons (Richard, Samuel, Esau, John and Francis) served in the Confederate Army and one of them, Francis, was killed in the war. Indicative of the hardships encountered by these early settlers, another son, William Thomas, was robbed and killed by a fellow traveler near Honey Grove while returning from a cattle drive.

Only one of the Skinner children, Elizabeth Skinner Short and her husband Joel Short, have tombstones remaining in the cemetery. There are two Short daughters who were probably buried there, but the stones are missing.

Many of the tombstones in the cemetery are simple, made of limestone or marble and recording only the name and birth and death dates of the person buried there. Others, however, have elaborate Biblical or floral motifs and poignant messages of loss carved into the stones. Two of the most beautiful stones are for the Wilson sisters, Prissie and Sarah, who died within two months of each other. Identical in size and shape, the stones have a curved top that follows the contours of a carved rose and its leaves, and just below the rose is an ascending dove carrying a broken bough in its beak. The sisters were probably victims of a yellow fever epidemic that shadowed the communities from Columbus to Sherman and Denison, Texas, during the years 1872 and 1873.<sup>14</sup> Other names in the cemetery that can also most likely be attributed to the epidemic are Pocahontas Turner, Isaac Inmon, Martha West and Juda Wilson.

The monument for J.D. Merchant, Sr., (August 24, 1800 - December 8, 1876) is well preserved. A striking obelisk of limestone, it is located near the southern edge of the cemetery and close to the Taylor graves. J.D. Merchant, Sr., was a leader in Pilot Point commercial affairs and in 1872 built the first brick building in Denton County on the northwest corner of the square.<sup>15</sup> That building is still in use today.

The tombstones also reflect the fragile hold on life given to the very young—twelve of the names recorded are of infants three years old and younger. Small children on the frontier were vulnerable to fevers, measles, whooping cough and other infectious diseases and the medical resources available in the latter part of the century were not sufficient to overcome the virulence of epidemics. Young mothers, too, were frequently lost through complications of childbirth and six of the recorded names in the cemetery can probably be attributed to this cause.

The earlier settlers, however, were surprisingly long lived. Despite the rigors of traveling by wagon train to a lonely western outpost and the hardships encountered in establishing a home and rearing a family, many of those who first came to Pilot Point lived beyond the Biblical three score and ten: Richard Skinner died at age 73, Lucinda Skinner age 85, J.D. Merchant, Sr. age 76, Daniel Hill age 75, Nathaniel Wilson age 72, John Russell age 82, Daniel Wills age 88, Mary Graham age 81, Catherine Taylor age 80. Three of these early settlers were born shortly after the Revolutionary War: Daniel Wills, born October 16, 1786, Richard Skinner, born 1790, John Russell, born January 26, 1797, and many others were born early in the 1800's.

A historical marker would be most appropriate for the Skinner Cemetery. Those who are buried there struggled to establish the town of Pilot Point, encouraged its growth through their contributions to the cultural, agricultural and commercial ventures of the community, and remain there now as a permanent legacy to its history.

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret Sexton Mathies Margaret Sexton Mathies Date April 4, 1997

W.O. Buddy Skinner W. O. Skinner Date April 1, 1997



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> "Deed of Sale of 342-1/2 acres from Cynthia Stewart to Richard Skinner December 29, 1856," Denton County Grantor/Grantee Records, Book D, p. 170. Denton County Courthouse, Denton, Tx.
- <sup>2</sup> "Deed of Sale of 38-1/2 acres from Lucinda Skinner, Esaw Skinner, A. Miller and Susan (Skinner) Miller and Chafin Skinner to J.D. and George A. (Skinner) Coyle February 18, 1867." Denton County Grantor/Grantee Records, Book D, p. 167. Denton County Courthouse, Denton, Tx.
- <sup>3</sup> "Deed of Sale of Skinner Cemetery by John Skinner," Denton County Grantor/Grantee Records, vol. 96, p. 219. Denton County Courthouse, Denton, Tx.
- <sup>4</sup> Margaret Sexton Mathies and William Oliver Skinner, The Old Skinner Cemetery, Pilot Point, Denton County, Texas (Houston, Tx: N. pub., 1996)
- <sup>5</sup> A photocopy of Lucinda Skinner's June 1890 obituary is in the possession of Margaret Sexton Mathies, 6809 Hazen St., Houston, Tx 77074. No newspaper citation was given.
- <sup>6</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, Early Happenings in Pilot Point, Texas N.d. (Genealogy Section, Denton Public Library, Denton, Tx)
- <sup>7</sup> Ed. F. Bates, History and Reminiscences of Denton County (1918, Rpt. Denton, Tx: Terrill Wheeler Printing, Inc., 1989)
- <sup>8</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, Early Happenings in Pilot Point, Texas N.d. (Genealogy Section, Denton Public Library, Denton, Tx)
- <sup>9</sup> Ed. F. Bates, History and Reminiscences of Denton County (1918, Rpt. Denton, Tx: Terrill Wheeler Printing, Inc., 1989), p. 379, 390.
- <sup>10</sup> Nelson Co., VA, Personal Property Tax Lists 1809-1845. Microfilm of Original Records at the Virginia State Library and Archives in Richmond, Virginia. Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1992.
- <sup>11</sup> Hazel Shelton, "Denton County Historical Commission Cemetery Survey," June 1974. Photocopy in possession of Margaret S. Mathies, 6809 Hazen St., Houston, Tx 77074.
- <sup>12</sup> Marriage Record for Lucy Glasscock and Richard Skinner, June 10, 1824. Minister Joel Gordon. Washington County, Kentucky, Marriage Record Book 1-238, Book 3-12. Photocopy in possession of Margaret S. Mathies, 6809 Hazen St., Houston, Tx 77074.
- <sup>13</sup> "Deed of Sale of 48 acres from Richard and Lucinda Skinner to William H. Brown and Martha (Skinner) Brown March 10, 1859." Denton County Grantor/Grantee Records, Book X, p. 198. Denton County Courthouse, Denton, Tx (The descriptive text makes reference to John Skinner's 48 acre survey.)  
"Deed of Sale of 48 acres from Richard and Lucinda Skinner to William T. Skinner March 10, 1859," Denton County Grantor/Grantee Records, Book 0, p. 13. Denton County Courthouse, Denton, Tx. (The descriptive text makes reference to Elizabeth D. Short's 48 acre survey.)  
"Deed of Sale of 48 acres from Richard and Lucinda Skinner to John D. Merchant and Sarah Ann (Skinner) Merchant March 10, 1859," Denton County Grantor/Grantee Records, Book C, p. 459. Denton County Courthouse, Denton, Tx.
- <sup>14</sup> Transactions of the Texas Medical Association 1872-75 (Austin: Texas Medical Association ) Proceeding Fifth Annual Session, April 1873, pp. 130-139; Sixth Annual Session, April 1874, pp. 172-178.
- <sup>15</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, Early Happenings in Pilot Point, Texas N.d. (Genealogy Section, Denton Public Library, Denton, Tx)

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1. 1830 U.S. Census, Washington Co. KY, National Archives Microfilm M-19, Roll 42.
2. 1850 U.S. Census, Marion Co., KY, National Archives Microfilm M-432, Roll 212.
3. 1860 U.S. Census, Denton Co., Tx (Pilot Point), National Archives Microfilm M-653 Roll 1292.
4. 1860 U.S. Census, Cooke Co., Tx, National Archives Microfilm M-653, Roll 1291.
5. 1860 U.S. Census, Grayson Co., Tx, National Archives Microfilm M-653, Roll 1295.
6. 1870 U.S. Census, Denton Co., Tx (Pilot Point), National Archives Microfilm M-593, Roll 1582.
7. 1880 U.S. Census, Rockwall Co., Tx, National Archives Microfilm M-653, Roll 1324.
8. 1880 U.S. Census, Denton Co., Tx (Pilot Point), National Archives Microfilm M-653, Roll 1300.
9. Transactions of the Texas Medical Association 1872-75 (Austin: Texas Medical Association )  
Proceedings Fifth Annual Session, April 1873, pp. 130-139; Sixth Annual Session , April 1874, pp.  
172-178.
10. Hazel Shelton, "Denton County Historical Commission Cemetery Survey," June 1974. Photocopy in  
possession of Margaret S. Mathies, 6809 Hazen St., Houston, Tx 77074.
11. "Early Bates Settlement in Pilot Point," N.d. Recollections of R. W. Eddleman. Copy provided to  
Margaret S. Mathies, 6809 Hazen St., Houston, Tx 77074, by W.O. Skinner, Pilot Point, Tx .
12. Ed. F. Bates, History and Reminiscences of Denton County (1918, Rpt. Denton, Tx: Terrill Wheeler  
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13. \_\_\_\_\_, Early Happenings in Pilot Point, Texas N.d. (Genealogy Section, Denton Public Library, Denton,  
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14. Gussie D. Carlton, Kinfolk Tales My Mama Told Me (N.d., N. pub.) Photocopy provided to Margaret  
S. Mathies, 6809 Hazen St., Houston, Tx 77074, by W.O. Skinner, Pilot Point, Tx.
15. Margaret Sexton Mathies and William Oliver Skinner, The Old Skinner Cemetery, Pilot Point, Denton  
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