

**EAKINS CEMETERY DENTON COUNTY TEXAS**

**Its Value as a Historical Landmark**

Information and help provided by Eakins Cemetery Association  
to compiler and writer Carla Nell Wright Cullum

In Loving Memory of Carson Whit Cullum  
Born May 26, 1994 - Died May 27, 1994  
Laid to Rest in Eakins Cemetery May 29, 1994

## **The History of Eakins Cemetery**

Eakins Cemetery is located three miles northwest of Justin in Denton County. Nestled between Justin and Ponder on highway 156 and Eakins Cemetery Road. The 5.5 acre tract is enclosed by a white fence. Within that white fence lie the early settlers, slaves, forefathers, W.W.I and W.W.II soldiers of the Justin and Ponder areas. The cemetery is well preserved and the land well kept. The cemetery is maintained by donations only. The lots are free to anyone who wishes to place their loved ones there. (3)

Noah and Susan Eakins married and lived most of their younger years in Henderson County Kentucky. County records show that they were married August 15, 1833. (7) Susan Ann Edwards was a young woman of 17 and Noah Eakins was 23. A year later their first child Sarah Elizabeth Eakins was born on July 1, 1834. Noah and Susan Eakins had several children, Sarah, Elmer, George W., Frances, Margaret, James, Lorenza, Noah J., and Charles who all grew, married and started families of their own. (9)

Sarah Eakins became a bride at the young age of only 11 years old. She married Charles Sandifer on December 24, 1845. Some years later she became a widow and soon remarried to William Sandifer on January 6, 1852. Two years later William and Sarah had a son whom they named Noah Sandifer. Sarah became a widow for a second time and she and her small son made the journey to Texas with her parents. (7)

Noah and Susan Eakins moved to Denton in the later part of 1855. They moved to Texas with 5 horses, 3 covered wagons, and 10 children ranging in age from 1 to 21 years of age. They claimed 500 acres by Denton Creek. Tax records for Denton County indicate that Noah Eakins paid \$3.48 in county taxes and \$3.73 in state taxes. His total worth at that time was \$2587.00. (4) In those days he was considered very well off. Because of the large size of his family, Noah

Eakins had no need for slaves. After settling in Ponder, Sarah met W.H. Thomason and married for the third time. Together Sarah and W.H. Thomason had several children. (9)

The origin of the cemetery dates back to approximately between 1855 -185<sup>9</sup> when the first person laid to rest there was Mrs. Angelina Rayburn. This was determined by the mortality census taken in 1860 which included ~~the~~ deaths between 1859 -1860. Mrs. Rayburn's death was not recorded in this census or the current population census. (8, 9, 10) It was during the time of savage Indians and wild cowboys, when cows roamed free on the prairies. The women of the time wore heavy cumbersome long dresses and cook stoves were as yet not widely known and used. For women of this wild prairie this meant cooking outside over an open fire.

On the fateful day of her death Angelina started the day like any other. Her husband had already left to tend to his farming chores and their three small children were just rising as Angelina prepared breakfast. The open flames of the cook fire caught the hem of her skirt and soon her entire body was engulfed in flames. In her anguish she ran away from her log cabin home screaming in pain for help.

Some men nearby heard her screams but as they approached they were startled by her appearance and screams. Her clothes were entirely burned off and her skin was blackened giving her the appearance of a wild Indian rushing towards them causing them to run away in fear. She could hear the men but being blinded by the flames could not see them. She called for help but no one answered.

Angelina Rayburn died within hours after the ordeal leaving behind a husband and three small children, two boys and one girl. These children were raised by Noah and Susan Eakins. Angelina Rayburn was buried on a sandy knoll at the edge of a post oak grove not far from her home. This site is now known as Eakins Cemetery. (1)

The Thomason family has a white fence enclosing their family plot. Many generations of this family are laid to rest here including W.H. Thomason, born February 25, 1824 and died January 20, 1882, Sarah Thomason, who died April 10, 1916, and four of their children. Several of the Thomason descendants still live in the Justin/Ponder area today. (6)

The headstones in the Eakins Cemetery are as different as the people buried there. The dead range from infants to aged who died from plagues and illnesses of the past century, accidents, and the passing of time itself. Down through the past two centuries this peaceful cemetery has become hallowed ground as dearly beloved family members have been brought to this place for their last long rest in peace.

Noah, Susan and G.W. Eakins are laid to rest in the oldest section of the cemetery. Noah, who was a mason as indicated on his headstone, was born October 5, 1810 and died June 8, 1868. Susan Eakins was born January 26, 1816 and died July 16, 1878. Their son G.W. Eakins was born November 12, 1839 and died February 27, 1864 at the young age of 25. (6)

West of Ponder across Denton Creek was the old "Uncle Jerry" Burnett estate. He and Captain Burk Burnett were known as the cattle kings of Texas. Some of the Burnett estate is now owned by the Deussen heirs. Many of the Burnett and Deussen family rest at the Eakins Cemetery. (11)

A few of the other forefathers of this area also buried at the Eakins Cemetery include Mr. Bob Cope, 1883-1948; Mr. George Harshaw, born October 6, 1876 - died June 1, 1922; M.L. Swafford, born January 26, 1892 - died August 19, 1974; Tom Gale, born March 20, 1839 - died April 15, 1914; L.F. Cole, born March 2, 1858 - died January 24, 1907; and L.D. Stallings, born February 24, 1871 - died October 2, 1938. Mr. Bob Cope was the first businessman in Ponder to have running water. Mr. George Harshaw put in one of the first mercantile businesses in Ponder in 1908. Mr. M.L. Swafford maintained the grain silos and a cotton gin in Ponder. Mr. Tom Gale operated the first lumber yard in Ponder. Mr. Stallings and Mr. Cole were two of the founding members of the Baptist Church in Ponder. (11)

Among the 600 known graves in the Eakins Cemetery are many unknown graves. The earliest interned date known is for a Lula Q. Porter who was born December 3, 1860 and died October 9, 1861.

The cemetery includes a section which was in days past reserved for blacks (now known as African-Americans) both slaves and freed men and women. Mr. Lee McCarty was a freed slave who lived in this area most of his life and owned a farm just a few miles away from the cemetery. Mr. McCarty helped dig many of the graves in the cemetery and was often heard to remark at the completion of a new grave, "Well I helped dig the first one and helped dig the last one." He and his family have been laid to rest in Eakins Cemetery in the black section in the southwest corner of the cemetery. (1)

## Bibliography

1. Bishop, Katie, Eakins Cemetery. Ponder Texas, May 1956.
2. Denton County, Texas. County Clerk Deed Records Denton, Texas. Volume 45, page 138.
3. Denton County Plat Department, Denton County Surveys, Denton County, Texas.
4. Denton County, Texas. County Tax Records, Denton, Texas, 1857,1858,1859.
5. Inventory of Eakins Cemetery, on file at Denton County Historical Commission.
6. Inventory of Eakins Cemetery by Glenda Brooks and Carolyn Harrison, 1994.
7. Henderson, Kentucky. Marriages in Henderson County, Kentucky. Records Department, Henderson, Kentucky, 1806-1858.
8. U.S. Census Bureau, Federal Population Census, 1850; Henderson County, Kentucky, U.S. National Archives, Microfilm; Washington D.C.
9. U.S. Census Bureau, Federal Population Census, 1860,1870; Denton County, Texas, U.S. National Archives, Microfilm; Washington D.C.
10. U.S. Census Bureau, Federal Mortality Census, 1860,1870; Denton County, Texas, U.S. National Archives, Microfilm; Washington D.C.
11. Yarbrough, Fannie M., History of Ponder. Author, Ponder, Texas, 1980.

Addendum I, Deed To Eakins Cemetery

Addendum II, The map of Ponder/Justin area where Eakins Cemetery is located.