

## Elizabeth Cemetery

Historical Narrative researched and written by Yvonne A. Jenkins, Mrs. I. Neal Samuels and Mrs. A. B. Harmonson for Texas Historical Commission Subject Marker application. Denton County. 1978

## ELIZABETH CEMETERY

"Da's right. Soons' you get bettuh, less hitch up de mares to de wagon, an go like Honey Peggy said, to wheah she could forget all de ole life an' start anew", says Dempy to her master, Bob Adams, as he surveys what remains of his plantation following the end of the Civil War. <sup>1</sup> His family starving, spring planting to be done and still crippled from war injuries, Bob Adams came to the realization that a decision had to be made. His mind recalled a Texas Colonel who sang the praises of Texas and to him it held out hope for the future. In the summer of 1865, Bob Adams and his family left the Blue Ridge Mountains for Elizabethtown, Texas.

This same story is repeated by many families who came to Denton County, Texas, fleeing the aftermath of the Civil War that had left burned and destroyed homes and confiscated lands. Denton County was created and organized from Fannin County, Texas by the first State Legislature and named for John B. Denton. Census records indicate 641 settlers were established in the county by 1850 and among those settling in the Elizabethtown areas via the Peters Colony included: Benjamin Matthews and Lewis Medlin from Missouri; Chris Hayden, Edward Fayette Springer, W. Peter Harmonson, Benjamin Waters Harmonson and Z. J. Harmonson from Kentucky. According to deed records, others arriving in the 1850's were: Jesse Daniel, George W. Shamblin, Franklin Huston, Allen Henderson, Hamilton Perry and Peter K. Matthews. Joining the early pioneers and arriving in the 1860 decade were: John A. Fanning on the Rufus King Survey, Thomas S. Reyburn, A. M. Feltus, James Smith, Rufus Daniel and Archibald Robinson. During the last three decades of the 19th century, other settlers included: A. W. Robertson on the Abraham M. Gawltney Survey in 1872; Burrell Lee on the T. J. Bates Survey in 1882; James Eads in 1882, William Bush in 1883; E. B. Peters in 1887 and A. G. Peterson in 1898. Entering during the 20th century and settling the remaining land were L. E. Olson in 1911, N. F. Peterson in 1912 and J. A. Arnold in 1938. <sup>2</sup>

Elizabethtown was located between Henrietta and Elizabeth Creeks near the Tarrant

County line in southwest Denton County. In 1977, that same location is described as 2.7 miles west of Roanoke and 1/2 mile south of the intersection of Highway 114 and Interstate 35W. The Elizabeth Cemetery is in the southeast corner (Tract 7) of the George W. Shamblin Survey, #1191, settled by Shamblin on June 17, 1859 on a patent issued originally to A. Smith. Elizabethtown was named for the wife of Captain John B. Denton, also the creek bearing the same name; Harriett Creek for his daughter and Oliver Creek for his son. <sup>3</sup> "Captain Denton was killed May 22, 1841 in a fight with Indians in the battle of Keechi on Village Creek, just east of where Fort Worth now stands. His remains were placed crosswise in the saddle and carried northward to Oliver Creek in Denton County. The remains were buried and the grave marked for future identification under an elm tree on the north side of the creek. After the Civil War, his personal friend, John S. Chisum, located the grave after days of searching, exhumed the remains and removed to his ranch near Bolivar where they were buried. In 1901, the remains were again exhumed and removed and buried upon the Courthouse square in the City of Denton, County of Denton--named in his honor". <sup>4</sup>

As the settlers rolled into Elizabethtown by wagons, they could "view the village with its two-story long church, weather-beaten houses and a row of stores on either side of a hard black road". <sup>5</sup> Some of the business establishments included a saloon owned by Clay Withers, with the "startling letters a foot high across the broad front: 'The Road to Hell'. Beneath it was painted tongues of flame in crimson red". <sup>6</sup> Other businesses included a grocery and general merchandise store, a hotel operated by Mrs. Peace, a pool hall, a cobbler and blacksmith shop. The community had the services of a medical doctor, Dr. Palemon C. Bush and a post office was established later with W. W. Cowan (1844-1911) serving as a rural mail carrier. Cattle raising and horse breeding were the main occupations of the settlers., such as the extensive ranch holdings of Richard Randolph Litsey, grandfather of Pearl Chadwick. Mr. Litsey gave land for the Litsey School and Church.

The Grand Lodge of Texas granted dispensation to the William C. Young Lodge, #349 on June 16, 1871. The charter was received on June 13, 1872 with charter members being:

Dr. P. C. Bush, William Bush, E. C. Collett, D. M. Davis, H. C. Foster, W. W. Fain, J. J. Honeycutt, J. G. Johnston, F. W. Perry, J. M. Washburn and D. Wise. The petition for dispensation stated that the petitioners "resided 16 miles from the nearest Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons and separated from said Lodge by a stream which is often crossed with difficulty---living also in and near a thriving village in which we have a room suitable for a Lodge room that could be used for the purpose of forming a Lodge at Elizabethtown, Denton County, Texas, to meet on the third Saturday of every month". 7

Returns of 1871 through 1873 to the Grand Lodge of Texas show not only who the new members were, but gave an indication of the land ownership and from whence they migrated. For example, early land patentees, W. P. and Benjamin Waters Harmonson, were shown as Lodge members during this time. Coming to Elizabethtown and joining the Lodge were: John Lampkins of #36 Mayoville Lodge, Arkansas; H. G. Carlton of New Bloomfield #60 Lodge, Missouri; J. M. Crawford of #148 Fort Worth Lodge; William Lopp, Ocean #130 Lodge; W. H. Jennings of Lodge #286 of Decatur; Ben Parham of Hiram Lodge #118, Missouri and Orville Coffee of Charleston Lodge #155, Arkansas. 8

A two-story community building served a variety of purposes, including Lodge meetings in the upper floor and the lower floor used for school and religious activities for the village of Elizabethtown. "The Elizabeth Baptist Church was organized here in 1877 with charter members including: Mr. & Mrs. Mike Kinser, Mr. & Mrs. George Rucker, Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Webb and Mr. & Mrs. W. H. Welborn. Members joining later were: Professor Lindsay and daughters, Nora and Lizzie and Mr. & Mrs. Billie Sloan". 9

Until the public free school was established in Elizabethtown, there was a subscription school headed by Professor Lindsay. School was generally held for three months in the summer, teaching only reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic. The students paid \$1.25 to \$1.50 per month tuition, and would go early in the morning and stay all day.

The Elizabethtown School District #58 was created in 1884. The school site was officially deeded for \$1.00 to the District on October 12, 1887 and was located on Tract 6 (north of Elizabeth Creek) on the George W. Shamblin Survey and consisted of .41 of an acre. The deed is signed by Dr. Palemon C. Bush (1829-1908) and his wife, Ruth E. Bush (1834-1909) to the trustees of the Elizabethtown School District #58 as a public free school on Elizabeth Creek, sixteen miles southwest from Denton. 10

The Elizabethtown Cemetery is located on a grassy knoll southeast of Elizabeth Creek, with the ground swelling gradually until it reached the once prosperous village. The location is significant due to the flooding conditions from the creeks during heavy rains. According to a 1977 census of Denton County cemeteries (copy attached) conducted by Denton County Historical Commission members, Grady and Thelma Stevens, there are 297 legible, 61 illegible and 22 unmarked graves in the Elizabeth Cemetery. Mrs. O. A. Peterson, current secretary of the Elizabeth Cemetery Association, states that sand-stone rocks that marked graves in the center of the cemetery were removed in 1967 (when the Association was formed) to facilitate maintenance. This could have resulted in 100 or more graves being lost.

The earliest identified graves in the cemetery are those of three members of the Samuel and Margaret Wolff family: Their son, Robert L. (September 9, 1837-May 30, 1862); Samuel Wolff (February 12, 1807-December 24, 1863); their daughter, Susan (October 6, 1861-May 4, 1867). The mother, Margaret (born July 17, 1818) died on August 9, 1905. These graves, located in the northwest corner of the cemetery, are marked with a large, gray granite stone with all the birth and death information about the Wolff family on it. No other facts about the family are available.

The fourth oldest grave is that of Anna McGee Harmonson, wife of Peter Harmonson, born in Kentucky on October 25, 1796 and died at Elizabethtown on September 15, 1867. It was at this time that the youngest son of Peter and Anna Harmonson, William Perry, donated

the 1 1/2 acres for the purpose of a community cemetery with the eastern portion of the cemetery reserved for the Harmonson family. Peter Harmonson had moved to Denton County from Johnson County, Arkansas with three sons and three of his five daughters. The 1850 Census shows him as a farmer, born December 12, 1797 in Bourbon County, Kentucky. He received 640 acres of land and was considered as friendly toward the Texas Emigration and Land Company. <sup>11</sup> He was appointed the first sheriff of Denton County at the first District Court held at Pickneyville in 1847, with Judge John T. Mills of Clarksville presiding over the early court. The sheriff elect, William Garvin, for some reason failed to appear and Harmonson was appointed until an election could be held. He served as a witness, as one of the five free holders of Denton County, to the hangings of George Brown Jr. and Andrew Brown convicted of the murder of Doc McClain. The trial and hangings were held in Denton County on a change of venue from Montague County. <sup>12</sup> Helping to organize Denton County, he served as Chief Justice of the county. In October of 1864, he was wounded in the famous "Elm Creek Raid". He died January 9, 1865 at Johnson Station and is buried there. <sup>13</sup> A marker for Peter Harmonson is in the Elizabeth Cemetery.

Six generations of the Harmonson family are interred at the Elizabeth Cemetery. There are twenty-two marked and identified Harmonson graves in the cemetery, including: ZERRILL JACKSON HARMONSON, eldest son of Peter and Anna Harmonson, born in Indianapolis, Indiana on March 3, 1822 and moved with his parents to Platt County, Missouri, then on to Arkansas and Texas. The family settled first near Lewisville in 1845. The Rev. Z. J. Harmonson assisted with organizing the Methodist Church in 1845 and Denton County in 1846. He moved from Holford Prairie and settled on 320 acres near Roanoke on Denton Creek. He served on the jury that convicted and sentenced to hanging George Brown, Jr. The trial was held on March 9, 1878 in the District Court of Denton County. After many appeals, the hanging took place on November 21, 1879. An evangelist and Indian fighter, he died December 2, 1891. <sup>14</sup>

WILLIAM PERRY HARMONSON, born in Platt County, Missouri on May 26, 1836 and moved with his parents to Texas, via Arkansas, in 1845 and in that year joined the Methodist Church. He married Mary Ann Harper on November 19, 1855, settled on Denton Creek and entered the livestock business. He was also an Indian fighter and died at age 62 on August 10, 1907.<sup>15</sup>

Among other predominate family names are those of Sutton (6 graves); Olson (7 graves); Pickett (10 graves); Smith (16 graves); Peterson (26 graves); and Lee (36 graves). Fred Peterson arrived in Elizabethtown from Sweden in 1867. His parents, three brothers (Peter, Andrew and August) and two sisters (Lena and Hannah) landed in New York on December 25, 1869. Arriving later in Elizabethtown, each man homesteaded 160 acres. The Petersons were and their descendants are still excellent farmers and ranchers in the Elizabethtown area.

The building of the Texas and Pacific Railroad through Denton County established the town of Roanoke, east of Elizabethtown, in 1881. Interest and membership in the Baptist Church was so depleted that it ceased to function. The railroad took its toll on the William C. Young Masonic Lodge. Masonic work at Elizabethtown continued through February 9, 1883, and then moved to Roanoke on July 10, 1883. By 1885, the Lodge requested to move to Keller since a more acceptable Lodge Hall could be found. Since the Lodge had not met in twelve months, the Grand Lodge committee declared the Lodge demised and had the DDGM pick up the charter and jewels. <sup>16</sup>

In 1903, the Elizabethtown School District merged with a county line school district, Henrietta. Calvin Peterson, grandson of Andrew Peterson, recalls riding his horse three miles daily to school from the family farm, south of the school. A barn was located behind the school to stable the horses, while the children were in classes. It was not until the 1930's that the school bus routes were established. By 1946, the Elizabethtown School District was consolidated with Roanoke and both were absorbed by the creation of the Northwest Independent School District in 1949. <sup>17</sup> With the abolishment of the Elizabethtown School District, the school trustees wanted to donate the

.41 acre school site to the Elizabeth Cemetery. They negotiated an exchange of the school site on the north side of Elizabeth Creek for a like amount of land on the south side of the creek, adjacent to the cemetery, with land owner, W. W. Cowan. The William Wallace Cowan family had come from Tennessee, settling first west of Fort Worth and arriving in Elizabethtown in the 1880's. This transaction resulted in the present 2 acre cemetery which is now governed by an Association. Officers in 1977 are: President, Leroy Mason; Secretary, Mrs. O. A. Peterson; and Treasurer, Mrs. B. R. Smith. Decoration Day is held the third Sunday of each May and the cemetery is currently in use.

Author, Londa Pickett Ogletree, a direct descendant of the Bob Adams family (depicted in her historical novel of Texas, DUST OF THE EARTH); dedicated her book to her parents--Ben (1861-1936) and Mattie (1862-1934) Pickett, who loved the prairie and its people. She very aptly portrays the valor, perils and achievements of the pioneers of Elizabethtown. Because of the many contributions of the citizens of this area and the continuation of the traditions, the Denton County Historical Commission recommends that a Texas Historical Marker be awarded to the Elizabeth Cemetery.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 Londa Pickett Ogletree, DUST OF THE EARTH, (New York, 1953), p. 17
- 2 Denton County Clerk, "Denton County Deed and Land Patent Records", 1850 to 1938
- 3 J. N. Rayzor, HISTORY OF DENTON COUNTY BAPTIST ASSOCIATION AND THE SIXTY CHURCHES WITHIN ITS JURISDICTION, (Denton, 1936), p. 29
- 4 Ibid, Rayzor, p. 30
- 5 Ibid, Ogletree, p. 40
- 6 Ibid, Ogletree, p. 40
- 7 Grand Lodge of Texas, Petition for Dispensation for William C. Young Lodge, June 16, 1871
- 8 Ibid, Lodge Returns, 1871, 1872 and 1873
- 9 Ibid, Rayzor, p. 29
- 10 Ibid, Denton County Deed Records, Volume 30, p. 560
- 11 Seymour V. Connor, THE PETERS COLONY OF TEXAS, (Austin, 1959)
- 12 Ed F. Bates, HISTORY AND REMINISCENCES OF DENTON COUNTY, (Denton County, 1918), p. 148
- 13 Grace Lee Parr, THE JUSTIN STORY, (Quanah, 1976), p. 191
- 14 Ibid, Bates, p. 378, p. 148
- 15 Ibid, Bates, p. 378
- 16 Ibid, Lodge Returns, 1885
- 17 Commissioners Court Minutes, Denton, Texas, 1884-1949

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- Bates, Ed F., HISTORY AND REMINISCENCES OF DENTON COUNTY, Denton, Texas, McNitzky Printing Company, 1918.
- Connor, Seymour V., THE PETERS COLONY, Austin, Texas , 1959.
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- Denton County Deed and Land Paten Records, Courthouse, Denton, Texas, 1850 to 1938.
- Grand Lodge of Texas, A. F. & A. M., Petition and Returns, 1871 to 1885.
- Ogletree, Londa Pickett, DUST OF THE EARTH, A HISTORICAL NOVEL OF TEXAS, New York, Exposition Press, 1953
- Parr, Grace Lee, THE JUSTIN STORY, Quanah, Texas, Nortex Press, 1976.
- Rayzor, J. N., HISTORY OF DENTON COUNTY BAPTIST ASSOCIATION AND THE SIXTY CHRUCHES WITHIN ITS JURISDICTION, Denton, 1936.

## ORAL INTERVIEWS AND FAMILY RECORDS

- Harmonson Family Records, Mrs. A. B. Harmonson, Box 40, Keller, Texas 76248 (1977)
- Interviews conducted by Pearl Chadwick, Litsey Ranch, Rt. 2, Roanoke, Texas 76262 in 1976 and 1977: (Miss Chadwick is a member of the Denton Co. Historical Comm.)
1. Mrs. O. A. Peterson, Route 2, Roanoke, Texas 76262
  2. Julia Peterson Whittington, Roanoke, Texas 76262
- Interview with Calvin Peterson, Route 2, Roanoke, Texas 76262, (July 1977)