

HISTORY OF I.O.O.F. CEMETERY
DENTON, TEXAS

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY
ELAINE ADAMS LEDLOW
with additions by
Norma Lynn Gamble

Preface

I.O.O.F. Cemetery, Denton, Texas is a history book of early Denton County settlers. Old Settlers Association members and the year they came to Denton County are:

1845 C. R. Green; 1847 Jesse P. Loving; 1850 Lawson Lafayette Roark; 1852 James A. Freeman, Charles Alex Williams; 1853 R. H. Bates; 1854 W. B. Brown, Jesse F. Chinn; 1855 Louisa Blount Geers, Nat Rector, Samuel B. Tabor; 1856 Press W. Collier, Achilles Jasper; 1857 Charles C. Lacy; 1858 William T. Fouts, Tolbert F. Jasper, Alex W. Robertson; 1859 James Russell Christal, F. M. Crowlley, William F. Egan, W. S. Fry, Missouri Frances Egan Carruth Medlin, Homer Smoot, Charles S. Wilkins, D. L. (Dock) Wilkins; 1860 James C. Hawk, R.R. Litsey, Sallie Blount Owsley, Emory B. Peter; 1861 Jefferson Davis Bates, UJ. H. Degan, Jennie F. McNeil, Anne Elizabeth Brown McMurray.

The settlers named above represent early landowners, merchants, farmers, lawyers, newspaper editors, hotel owner, teachers, ministers, law officers, potters, etc. Each in their own right have a history of importance to Denton County.

North Texas Normal College founders, the "syndicate" who bought the land in 1890 on which the college was built, are:

Col. T. W. Abney, Joseph A. Carroll, John a. Hann, H. F. Schweer, M. S. Stout;

Founders who became administration and faculty are:

William Douglas Butler (Dean); James Willis Smith (Treasurer-taught math); E. D. Criddle (history);

Founders, faculty and local board members are:

Jesse Albert Sanders (faculty), Sallie Frances Thornley (faculty), M. Louisa Hann (faculty), Dr. Frank E. Piner (board), Emory c. Smith (board), Alvin Clark Owsley (board), James Thomas Bottorff (board), James Russell Christal (board);

Founder and Masons wh laid the cornerstone (Lodge 217) are:

Judge Stephen Monroe Badley, J. W. Cook, M. S. Stout, James M. Roark, Sr., Oliver Perry Poe, Wilburn L. Reynolds, James S. Chapman, J. W. Underwood.*

Today, IOOF Cemetery is well kept by the City of Denton Parks and Recreation Department.

The significance of this cemetery to the history of Denton County lies in the lives of those whose names one reads in the history books or as you walk among the graves. It is fitting that a historical marke be placed to recognize this importance.

*Bates, History of Denton County.

THE I O O F CEMETERY OF DENTON, TEXAS
ESTABLISHED 1860

The I O O F Cemetery is located five blocks south of the Courthouse-on-the-Square in Denton, Texas. In 1860 when the cemetery was established, it was described as being "out in the country." A "Birds Eye View of Denton," drawn in 1883 by Augustus Koch, city engineer, seems to verify its out of town location.¹ The cemetery is today surrounded by apartment complexes and bounded by South Carroll Boulevard, Eagle Drive, and I O O F Street. Highland Street extends through the cemetery from east to west. The extensive campus areas of the University of North Texas (formerly, North Texas State University) begin a few blocks west of the cemetery.²

In 1859 or 1860 James M. Smoot, a Denton merchant, born in Virginia and a charter member of Denton Lodge, No. 82, Independent Order of Odd Fellows, donated to the Lodge a tract to be used as a cemetery. It is on the north side of Highland Street and is known as the "Old Part." In its center is the burial site of James M. Smoot, who died in 1862 at age 40.³ Eleven 1860 burials were located on the cemetery markers or records.⁴

Denton Lodge No. 82, I O O F was instituted on June 6, 1859. According to records of the Lodge the original charter was obtained through the efforts of five prominent pioneers of Denton County: Otis G. Welch, J. B. Ford, Hugh McKenzie, W. A. Walker, and John S. Chisum, whose name lives on in the Chisum trail. Welch was elected Noble Grand; Ford was named Vice-Grand. Ten days later four candidates were accepted: Joseph A. Carroll, attorney-at-law, age 27; James M. Bryson, a school teacher, 32; Hercules Sanches, millwright, who left the county; and James M. Smoot, a merchant, 37. Other 1859 candidates accepted were: C. A. (Alex) Williams, clerk in a store, 27; Stephen Augustus Venters, clerk of County Court and farmer, 35; Jesse M. Blount, merchant, 38; and James T. Sutphin, druggist. The later members accepted are recorded in the Lodge's interesting record, I O O F Examination Book.⁵ Several members had been Peters' colonists before 1844. During the Civil War years the Lodge was in recess, and resumed the organization in 1867.

The cemetery had more rapid growth from the early 1870s. The tract from James M. Smoot has four divisions designated as A, B, C, and D, each of which included thirty-five blocks of ten spaces each. Division D had some burials then, but also had the water well, the windmill, and workshed for the cemetery.⁶ Through the years the Lodge's Minutes Books recorded the diligent cemetery work required. Examples of this are evident in an 1887 record of cemetery funds, an 1893 contract with the Sexton, and others.⁷

A Rebekah Degree Lodge was granted on May 25, 1870. The Rebeccas actively supported the cemetery. They prepared "suppers" to raise funds, planned for decoration day programs, with special attention to the "unknown" graves. In April 1877 it was ordered that the Lodge celebrate the 26th day of April by having a basket picnic at the cemetery, with instructions to bring hoes and shovels. Their 1885 report on decoration day described a "march down the main avenue of the cemetery, with members wearing regalia."⁸

On July 17, 1874, the Texas Department of State issued a charter addressed to Denton Lodge, No. 82 member, Esq. Thomas E. Hogg, who was an older brother of James Stephen Hogg, the first Texas born Governor of Texas. In 1864 Thomas E. Hogg had been the editor of the Denton Review, the first newspaper to be published in Denton. He later became County Judge.

By 1880 cemetery space had become scarce, and in 1883 the Lodge made its first land acquisition when it purchased from John McMurray and Ann E. McMurray, his wife, seven and one-half acres which adjoined the south line of the original cemetery tract. This transaction of October 17, 1883 (Deed Book V, page 563) states that the Murray tract was "within the corporate limits of the City of Denton."⁹

On June 1, 1916 the Lodge bought from Mrs. Ann E. McMurray a tract of six and one-half acres (Deed Book 146, page 477). The Lodge had planned to enclose it within the fence and arch gate which had been erected in 1912. However, the nearby residents protested that move because "it would be in the view of their property more than if it was back in the timber as it is now."¹⁰ The area was wooded, and the Lodge records show accounts of the need to cut wood and burn the brush in the cemetery.

By the 1920s burial space was again very limited and maintenance was a great problem. Lot owners neglected care of their lots; some had moved away. No more land was available and the city had prohibited any additional cemetery space within Denton. The officials wanted I O O F or others to establish a second cemetery away from the city. The Lodge's response is recorded on three pages (undated; late 1920s?) and is addressed to the members. On page two is: "Therefore be it resolved by Denton Lodge No. 82, I O O F, does not conform to the idea of maintaining two separate cemeteries, and under no circumstance will they attempt to do so."¹¹

There was some relief in 1924 when the Lodge bought a four-acre addition which ajoined the existing cemetery on the east and provided for 128 blocks of ten burial spaces each, which added a total of 1,280 burial spaces. The writer for Denton Record-Chronicle's "Round About Town" column wrote that: "The new addition to the Odd Fellows Cemetery . . . is expected to take care of the burial needs of Denton for some time to come."¹² It was an aid, but was not sufficient for the cemetery's continuing needs.

There did soon develop a privately owned, out of town, cemetery. Dr. C. A. Bridges, in his History of Denton, Texas, wrote: "In 1926 a new burial ground was opened about two and one-half miles southwest of Denton. The new cemetery comprised some eighty acres, including the Old Dalton Cemetery, and was known as Roselawn Memorial Park."¹³ This is a favored cemetery, is well kept, and maintains good records.

By early 1933 the Denton Lodge, No. 82, offered to deed all of the I O O F Cemetery to the City of Denton: April 4th was set for the vote by the citizens. In "Round About Town," April 3, 1933, the editor wrote: "The Odd Fellows, after having developed and cared for one of the best kept cemeteries in Texas, is now asking that it be relieved of further charge . . . and for the City itself to take over the work that an organization has carried on for 60 (i.e. 73) years for the good of the town. The people of Denton owe a debt of gratitude to the Odd Fellows . . . There seems no question but that the voters will repay, in a measure, the debt owned to the local Odd Fellows organization by voting to accept the gift of the property."¹⁴ The citizens voted, and the headline of April 5, 1933 appeared as: "Cemetery Plan Gets Sweeping Majority." The vote was 545 for and 96 against accepting the cemetery.¹⁵

Mr. Roy Stewart, secretary of the Lodge, stated that this fraternal order has continued to meet regularly in its building on the north side of the Courthouse Square. Its only recess was during the Civil War years; it reorganized in 1867. Its vaults holds its history and those of Denton County lodges which no longer meet.

Since May 1933 the City of Denton has served well in its care of this twenty-two acre cemetery. In 1984 the Denton County Historical Commission sponsored a fund drive for fencing part of the perimeter. With later funds the Commission finished the project in November 1988,

with Mr. Bob Tickner, of the Denton Parks Department, as advisor.

The rather unique history of the I O O F Cemetery and the admiration held for it by local citizens and others now distant, indicate that the cemetery and its history will be preserved for future generations.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bates, Ed. F. History and Reminiscences of Denton County.
Denton: McNitzky Printing Co., 1918.
- Bridges, C. A. The History of Denton, Texas from its
Beginning to 1960. Waco: Texian Press, c1978.
- Connor, Seymour V. The Peters Colony of Texas. Austin:
Texas State Historical Association, 1959.
- Cowling, Mary Jo. Geography of Denton County. Dallas:
Banks Upshaw, c1936.
- Denton, Texas. Ordinances. Code of Ordinances; Cemeteries.
Tallahassee: Municipal Code Corporation, 1966.
- Denton County, Texas. County Clerk. Deed Books. Denton.
- Denton Record-Chronicle, October 22, 1924, April 3, 1933,
April 5, 1933.
- Independent Order of Odd Fellows. Denton Lodge, No. 82.
Minute Books. 1867, 1868, 1874, 1879, 1881-1885,
1888-1889, 1896-1901, 1903-1905, 1927-1928.
- Jordon, Terry G. Texas Cemeteries; A Cultural Legacy.
Austin: University of Texas Press, c1982.
- Koch, Augustus. Birds Eye View of Denton. (Drawing)
Denton: 1883.
- McCormick, Edna Haynes. William Lee McCormick; A Study in
Tolerance. Dallas: The Book Craft, 1956.
- Parsons, Kim. A Reference to Texas Cemetery Records.
Humble, Texas: Kim Parsons, c1988.
- Stillson, Henry Leonard. The Official History of Odd
Fellowship, the Three-Link Fraternity. Boston:
Fraternity Pub. Co., 1900.
- Walker, W. H. Odd Fellowship in America and in Texas.
Dallas: W. H. Walker, 1911, c1912.

REFERENCES

¹Dr. C. A. Bridges, in his History of Denton, Texas, p. 177, wrote that "One of the most valuable sources of information about Denton in 1883 is a bird's-eye-view drawing of the town in that year by the city engineer, Augustus Koch." It is used as end sheets for the Bridges book. The sketch is filed following these References.

²The locations of the three Denton cemeteries (I O O F, Oakwood, and Roselawn) are noted on a 1988 map of Denton. The map is filed following these References.

³A plat of the I O O F Cemetery is filed following these References.

⁴Following are the names of the persons buried in I O O F Cemetery during the 1860s. They were located by their markers found in the cemetery; one was located in records. Anne Isabella Carroll, d/o Joseph A. Carroll, 20 May 1860-2 Nov 1860; Almira Peter McKittrick, 18 Jan 1834-11 Nov 1860, w/o Felix McKittrick, who served as sheriff in 1854 and was captain of Co. G, 18th Texas Cavalry, C. S. 1862; Richard S. Christal, 24 Dec 1834-3 Feb 1862 (a memorial marker; he was lost, presumed killed, while on a buffalo hunt); James M. Smoot, 1822-Nov 1862; Minnie T. Egan, 1 July 1859-30 Jan 1864, d/o W. F. Egan, elected sheriff in 1869 and served nine years; Joel Williams, 22 Nov 1858-1 June 1866; Mary E. Pritchett Williams, 21 Aug 1835-4 Sep 1868; Francis E. McKinney, 1866-19 Aug 1869; Celia Jane Burris Carroll, w/o Joseph A. Carroll, 2 Feb 1842-23 Aug 1869; Elizabeth Clark, 1797-1869; Oliver Clark, 1794-1869.

⁵The original I O O F Examination Book includes questions and answers given and signed by the first eight applications for membership in the Denton Lodge No. 82 in 1859. This record book in manuscript was the style used for several years before printed forms were adopted. Several pages of the book are filed at the end of References.

⁶This historic "Old Part," which has lost some important markers, now has fencing on its fourth side bounding Highland Street which extends through the cemetery by that point. It remains open for visitors. See the plat of the cemetery which is filed with 3 above.

⁷Independent Order of Odd Fellows. Denton Lodge, No. 82, Minute Books. Three examples of the Lodge's governance are filed following these References: (1) 1874, Form of Cemetery Deed; (2) 1887, Denton Lodge Cemetery Fund; D. R. Long, superintendent; (3) 1893, Contract with C. Bell for sexton employment.

⁸Henry L. Stillson, The Official History of Odd Fellowship, the Three-Link Fraternity, p. 714. "Odd Fellowship sought to widen their scope . . . to include, at least, the wives of members in good standing." Later it was extended to the widows, daughters, and sister of brothers having this (Rebekah) degree.

⁹Denton County, Texas. County Clerk. Deed Book V, p. 563.

¹⁰Denton County, Texas. County Clerk. Deed Book 146, p. 477.

¹¹In addition to the strong resolve of the Address to the Members, its opening paragraph should also be noted: "Whereas Denton Lodge No. 82 . . . has provided and maintained a cemetery in the City of Denton, Texas, for more than sixty years for the use and benefit of the citizens of Denton and vicinity, and has provided funds to add to and enlarge it from time to time to meet the requirements . . . for cemetery purposes at considerable loss and expense to its members;- And whereas said cemetery is one of the most beautiful cemeteries of North Texas, and is endeared and made sacred to the hearts of most every citizen of Denton on account of being the place of sepulcher of some of their beloved relatives and friends;- " The remainder of the paper deals with the ongoing operations of the Lodge.

¹²Denton Record-Chronicle, October 24, 1924, p. 349.

¹³Dr. C. A. Bridges, History of Denton, Texas, from its Beginnings to 1960, p. 349.

¹⁴Denton Record-Chronicle, April 3, 1933, p. 1, col. 1.

¹⁵Denton Record-Chronicle, April 5, 1933, p. 1.

