

JOHN'S WELL AND CAMPGROUNDS

ARGYLE, TEXAS

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Subject Marker Application. Denton County. 1981

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TEXAS HISTORICAL MARKER APPLICATION

AUGUST 6, 1981

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The availability of water and a place to hold worship services were two determining factors that influenced the pattern of settlement and the way of life for early pioneers of the Argyle community. One such area that served both purposes was the old camp meeting grounds and Johns' Well located two miles west of Argyle, at what is now described as the Old Justin Road and I-35W intersection. The history of the Argyle community would not be complete without including Johns' Well and the Campgrounds. (1)

The Johns' Well site is located in the Patrick Rock survey, and the history of the land ownership can be traced back to February 12, 1856, as a patent to Patrick Rock by Governor E. M. Pease. On November 16, 1856, the widow of Patrick Rock, Margaret, and three children Mary Rock Chrisner, Jane Rock Dunlap and Elizabeth Rock, sold one-half of the original league and labor to William Little for \$1.00 for consideration and service rendered. (2) This action, plus the fact that this is a large tract of land that has been sub-divided to a variety of owners, made the tracing of ownership more difficult. While searching the deed records, a mystery as to how the well was named was solved when the name of Hardin W. Johns appeared. Most citizens had not known nor could they remember that the well had been named for the Johns family that once owned the land where the first well was located. They had assumed that the well had been named for John "somebody". (3)

On October 1, 1868, Edmond and Elizabeth Lee, deeded 375.62 acres of this property to B. S. Parr. Hardin W. and Charlotte Johns bought the tract for \$2500.00 on April 7, 1875. Other owners include N. M. Stone, E. B. Peter,

Charles B. Wood, R. T. and M. D. Yerby, D. R. Davis, J. O. and Mattie Cunningham, Emma Reynolds, Rose L. Collins, E. W. Hawkins, and former County Commissioner C. R. "Happy" Salmon and wife, Oneta. Long time residents related that the original Johns' Well was located on the north side of the Old Justin Road and the Campgrounds were on the south side of the road. (4)

At some unknown time and for unknown reasons, a second Johns' Well was hand-dug on the Campgrounds. Both wells served the early settlers by providing a never-ending supply of water for their families, livestock, thrashing crews, for travelers and for cattle drives from the feeder trails of the Chisholm Trail. The land on the south side of Old Justin Road, which is the site of the current Johns' Well and Campgrounds is presently owned by Mr. & Mrs. Eugene Wright. Tracing the past ownership of this ten acre tract of land was much like trying to complete a crossword puzzle.

As a part of the original league and labor patented to Patrick Rock on February 12, 1856, the first reference to be found in the Denton County Deed Records is on February 4, 1876, "intended to supply a chain of title that has been lost by the burning of the Records at the Town of Denton, Denton County that the premises having been conveyed to J. S. and M. A. Riley by James Sullivan, attorney in fact for F. G. Mason and wife, Jane Mason, heirs of Patrick Rock and conveyed by said J. S. and M. A. Riley to J. W. Carrington and by said J. W. Carrington to J. C. Huton and said Huton to said W. E. and E. S. Mayes". (5) Volume G, page 220 of the Denton County Deed Records shows that R. R. Mayes paid \$1800.00 to E. S. Mayes and W. E. Mayes and wife, Annie, for the tract on January 26, 1878. Volume T, page 579 of the Denton County Deed Records shows that R. R. Mayes sold the tract for \$900.00 to H. C. Fer-

guson on February 10, 1883. H. C. Ferguson received \$1000.00 for the tract Volume V, page 244) from J. A. Mayes on March 31, 1883.

This tract of land became known as the "campgrounds" on December 1, 1884, when J. A. Mayes of the state of Missouri, sold the tract for \$60.00 (\$40.00 in cash and a \$20.00 note due on February 1, 1885) to the Trustees of the Prairie Mound Campgrounds of the M. E. Church South. The trustees were: M. H. Alexander, J. O. McDowell, Joseph P. Hampton, R. B. Anderson and J. R. Stone. (6)

In the Denton County Deed Records, Volume V., page 213, a deed is found that originally conveys six acres of land to the trustees of the Prairie Mound Methodist Episcopal Church, South and their successors which is dated April 10, 1882. W. T. Clark, agent and attorney in fact for L. C. Carrington, signed the document. A sum of \$18.00 was paid in full in cash by W. H. Alexander and R. B. Anderson to Mr. Clark. Prairie Mound is located approximately two miles southwest of Johns' Well and the Campgrounds. As the name would indicate, it is located on the "bald" prairie with not a tree on the property. The trustees must have been looking for a wooded area with a source of water to serve as their campgrounds for summer and fall revivals; hence the purchase of the Johns' Well and Campgrounds site.

In writing the history of the Argyle Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1939, Laura Johnson Crawford described the Johns' Well and Campgrounds as one of the "noted places in North Texas". Every year a ten day camp meeting was held with people coming twenty-five miles to the meeting, and many were converted there. During the pastorate of Reverend J. R. Atchley (1898-1899), three hundred were added to the Circuit, at least one of whom became a preacher. During the years, the Argyle Methodist and Prairie Mound Methodist were a part of var-

Circuits including: Garza, Chinn Chapel, Roanoke, Cooper Creek, Lake Dallas, Lynchburg, Oak Grove, Brown School House, Little Elm, Green Valley and Ponder. (7)

These gatherings at Johns' Well and the Campgrounds fulfilled both the religious and social needs of the early settlers. The services were held in a brush arbor on the hickory ridge of the Campgrounds and the families literally "camped around" the arbor. Leona Jones McLean Hicks was born in 1890 just west of Johns' Well. Her parents were W. Henry and Pinckney Jones. At age twelve in 1902, Mrs. Hicks was the organist of the Argyle Methodist Church and Dr. M. D. Fullingham was the singer. Mrs. Hicks recalls attending the protracted religious meetings at the Campgrounds with her parents and ten brothers and sisters. The family traveled by wagon and slept in a two room tent at the Campgrounds. Her father would build a brush arbor to serve as the kitchen and dining room. The cookstove was placed at the outer edge of the arbor to help prevent fires. (8)

Usually held in the fall of the year, following harvest, the gatherings featured preaching, visiting, family reunions, recreation and even pranks. Such pranks included putting "high-life" (a chemical which had a strong burning sensation that was used to kill weevils in the feed granary bins for the next year's seed crop of wheat or corn) on the Mourner's Bench and switching babies in the family wagons. The latter proved most dismaying to families from Krum, Chinn Chapel, Shiloh or Roanoke when on their arrival back home, they discovered that they had the wrong baby with them. The "new" parents kept the babies with them until an exchange could be made on the next trip to the Campgrounds. (9)

When the established churches of the area--Argyle Methodist and Baptist, Prairie Mound Methodist, Smyrna Baptist, Shiloh Baptist and Beulah Baptist built church buildings, the need for the Campgrounds diminished. Some groups used the

facilities for summer revivals. It has been suggested that the Circuit rider preachers scheduled their brush arbor meetings according to the growing seasons. For instance, meetings were held in the Cross Timbers in June and July when the peaches, plums, berries, vegetables, cantaloupes and watermelons were being harvested. The second revival, held during the fall of the year, found sweet potatoes, blackeyed peas, pumpkins and sorghum syrup readily available. Meetings held in the prairie communities were during the winter months at "hog-killing" time. This type of scheduling is not so difficult to understand when one realizes that food for himself and his horse was all the remuneration that the Circuit rider preacher ever received. (10)

The Prairie Mound Methodist Church had a substantial membership and was active until the turn of the century. In 1901, the Justin Methodist Church was established and many of the families moved their church membership there. In the following twenty years, efforts were made to rejuvenate it, but to no avail. The church had been elaborately furnished for its day, with an organ, songbooks, handsomely carved pews, and hanging-swinging brass lamps. The church building featured two diamond shaped windows behind the pulpit. Outside was a hitching rail made of bois d' arc with rings for tying the horse reins. A cemetery had been established next to the Prairie Mound Church before John Wesley Faught bought farm land just west of the church and cemetery in 1883. (11)

On April 19, 1913, the trustees for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, sold the ten acre Campgrounds on the south side of the Old Justin Road to Frank and Naomi Cope. The trustees were H. A. Nowlin, Ish L. Crawford (County Commissioner, Pct. 3, 1918-1922) and W. H. Hardee. (12) The Cope heirs: Mrs. W. O. (Ann) Rayburn of Denton, W. E. (Bill) Cope of Leaburg, Oregon, Mrs. Bunk

(Marietta) Brown of Warren, Oregon, and Mrs. Lloyd (Tena) Wilson of Portland, Oregon, sold the ten acre Johns' Well and Campgrounds site in 1979 to the present owners, Mr. & Mrs. Eugene Wright. (13)

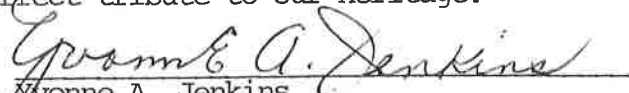
J. C. "Beans" Horton, whose family in 1921, moved to a house within three-hundred yards of Johns' Well, describes the second well as being fed by a natural spring. The water flowed in a circle to a depth of twenty-five to thirty feet to the bottom of the well which was native white stone. The side walls were lined with sandrock and Mr. Horton recalls that the well's shape reminded him of an ice cream cone. As a result of heavy rains, silt would wash in and settle to the bottom of the well, and each year, the neighboring families would toil eight or ten hours to "draw the well dry". They would then dip out the mud to insure a better and continuous supply of water. The Horton family lived in the area for fourteen years, and one of Mr. Horton's chores was to provide a water supply for the family. He would draw two barrels of water each day for family use and of course, much more on wash day. He, along with the neighboring children, drove his cattle twice each day to the watering barrel. The barrel was about four feet in diameter and held approximately forty gallons of water. At that time, neighbors included the Tom Hamptons, the Joe Finchers, the Alvin Ervins and the Emma Reynolds family. When other wells would "dry-up", settlers would come from miles around to haul water back home for their use. Ingenuity provided an easier method of drawing water from the well. A bucket was tied on each end of the well rope and each time it was pulled up, a bucket of water was drawn. Various types of rigging with ropes, wheels, pulleys, wagons and sleds were utilized by the settlers to use "horse power rather than man power" to draw water from the well. (14)



In 1960, the Prairie Mound Cemetery Association was formed, and the Argyle Methodist Church, in behalf of the Prairie Mound Church deeded the six acres (that was originally conveyed to the trustees of the Prairie Mound Methodist Episcopal Church, South on April 10, 1882) to the Association and their trustees: Miller Faught, Kirk Taylor and J. Wes Hall. The church building was sold to Doug W. Coin for \$350.00, and he moved it to his dairy farm approximatley two miles south (old Litsey community) where it is now utilized as a haybarn--still a very durable and well kept structure. (15)

Johns' Well is no longer in use, having been abandoned in 1963. Until that time, the well was still used as a source of water for household purposes for three families (W. W. Dyer's, C. R. Salmon's and E. W. Hawkins'). (16) The well is now covered by wooden boards, but still has water in it. The Campgrounds is now the site of the new home constructed by the Eugene Wright's in 1980. Both the Campgrounds and Johns' Well are inter-twined in the settlement of the Argyle community; the establishment of the churches of the area-particularly the Prairie Mound and Argyle M. E. Churches, South; and providing that necessary ingredient for survival, a good supply of water for the settlers and their livestock. That settlement just would not have taken place without a supply of water and a place to nourish the religious needs of the early settlers.

Interest in Johns' Well and the Campgrounds was rekindled in 1976 during the Bicentennial. As we approach the 100th birthday of the Argyle community, (1881-1981), the Argyle Centennial Committee is most anxious to restore the well and obtain a Texas Historical Marker for the site. The new owners, the Eugene Wright's, are most supportive of these plans....a perfect tribute to our heritage.

  
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F O O T N O T E S

- (1) Yvonne Allen Jenkins, ARGYLE COMMUNITY HISTORY, page 18.
- (2) Denton County Clerk, "Denton County Deed Records", 1856.
- (3) Yvonne Allen Jenkins, ARGYLE COMMUNITY HISTORY, page 18.
- (4) Denton County Clerk, "Denton County Deed Records", 1886-1976.
- (5) Ibid, Volume C; page 7.
- (6) Ibid, Volume Y, page 569.
- (7) Laura Johnson Crawford, "History of the Argyle Methodist Church", 1939.
- (8) Yvonne Allen Jenkins, ARGYLE COMMUNITY HISTORY, page 13.
- (9) Ibid, page 13.
- (10) Londa Pickett Ogletree, DUST OF THE EARTH, 1953.
- (11) Yvonne Allen Jenkins, ARGYLE COMMUNITY HISTORY, page 14.
- (12) Denton County Clerk, "Denton County Deed Records", 1913.
- (13) Ibid, Volume 531, page 487.
- (14) Yvonne Allen Jenkins, ARGYLE COMMUNITY HISTORY, page 19.
- (15) Ibid, pages 14-15.
- (16) Ibid, page 19.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

Crawford, Laura Johnson, "History of the Argyle Methodist Church", 1939. (Non-published, in custody of the Argyle United Methodist Church).

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