

An Application for an Official Texas Historical Marker
STEEP HOLLOW CEMETERY
Brazos County, Texas
Historic Texas Cemetery No. BZ-CO30 (2008)

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I. CONTEXT

Brazos County¹ is situated along the Brazos and Navasota Rivers that form two sides of a triangle-shaped county. Its original landscape was that of gently rolling prairies and woods that, along with the two rivers, provided hunting grounds for semi-nomadic Bidai and Tonkawa Indians.² Members of Stephen F. Austin's "300 families" were among the first settlers in this area.³ The Congress of the Republic of Texas created Navasota County in 1841, which was renamed Brazos County in 1842,⁴ with Boonville⁵ as the county seat.⁶

Steep Hollow,⁷ named for the valley of the Steep Hollow Branch, a tributary of Wickson Creek, was once a self-sufficient community with a general store, cotton gin

¹ Foster, L. L. with Introduction by Barbara J. Rozek. *Forgotten Texas Census. First Annual Report of the Agricultural Bureau of the Department of Agriculture, Insurance, Statistics, and History, 1887-88.* pp. 19-21 (Austin TX: Texas State Historical Association, 2001).

Gournay, Luke. *Texas Boundaries, Evolution of the State's Counties* (College Station TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1995).

² *A Guide to Historic Brazos County* (Bryan TX: Brazos Heritage Society, 2003).

Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. "Brazos County."

<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/BB/hcb13.html> (accessed September 26, 2008).

³ "The Old 300 Families: Stephen F. Austin's Colony in Texas (1821):" *Len Kubiak's Texas History Page* (consulted 2 Nov. 2008) <http://forttumbleweed.net/old300.html>.

⁴ Gammel, Hans Peter Nielsen, compiler, *Laws of Texas, 1822-1897* (10 vols., Austin: Gammel, 1898).

⁵ Boonville had an early Brazos County post office. J.B. Callicoate served as postmaster from May to November, 1846. *Jim Wheat's Postmasters & Post Offices of Texas, 1846-1930.*

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txpost/brazos.html> (accessed September 1, 2008).

1936 Centennial Marker, No. 8665: *Town of Boonville.* Texas Historical Commission Atlas at <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/>.

⁶ *A Guide to Historic Brazos County*, op.cit.

"Brazos County Genealogy": www.brazosgenealogy.org (accessed July 23, 2008).

Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. "Brazos County,"

<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/BB/hcb13.html> (accessed July 23, 2008).

⁷ Brundidge, Glenna Fourman, ed., with Langston James Goree, co-editor. *Brazos County History. Rich Past – Bright Future* (Bryan TX: Family History Foundation, 1986).

A Guide to Historic Brazos County, op.cit.

Smith, Broaddus A. *Pioneers of Brazos County, Texas, 1800-1850* (Bryan, Tex.: Scribe Shop, 1962).

and gristmill. As with other early rural Texas communities, early settlers were farmers and ranchers, raising cotton, corn and cane, and had some livestock and poultry. Homemade jellies and preserves supplemented items in the smokehouse, with 'town food' limited to barrels of flour and sugar. By the late 1860s, the families of the little community had organized to build a one-room schoolhouse, 24 x 36 feet in size.⁸ In the early 1900s an early teacher in the Steep Hollow Common School District No. 8,⁹ was Miss Bertie Risinger, later Smith, (1894-1978) who is buried in Steep Hollow Cemetery. Between 1947 and 1953, the Steep Hollow district, with others, was consolidated as District No. 10, Kurten Consolidated School District.

After the War Between the States, migrations into Brazos County continued with mostly Czech, a few Polish and German, and Italians, along with those from former Confederate states.¹⁰ Among early families in the Steep Hollow Community were those of B.M. Simmons, M.B. Laski, a native of Poland, and David Owens. A. B. Syptak, from Austria, and Walter English operated the cotton gin, and English also had the general store near the gin. John Conlee owned the gristmill. One of the last country doctors to serve the Steep Hollow Community was Dr. W.F. Odom of nearby Kurten, who practiced from 1900 until his death in 1928.

In the general Steep Hollow community, as evidenced by family names in the Steep Hollow Cemetery,¹¹ most had their beginnings in the southern states of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas and Louisiana. Early families buried in the Steep Hollow Cemetery include those of William Andrews, the Buchanans (A. G., Wilson Granbury, and Samuel Beatty), as well as Daniel Dansby.¹² The Samuel C. Bullock family arrived with its twelve children in a covered wagon sometime between 1864 and 1868. Widower Isaac Smith Cook, with his four children and sister-in-law, Nancy Sprawls, arrived on August 14, 1868. Abe Hensarling arrived in the Steep Hollow Community with his family in the fall of 1870.¹³

⁸ Haygood, Rev. Thomas. *Steep Hollow Baptist Church*, "Beginnings." (Bryan TX: Centennial Committee, 1973).

⁹ Brundidge, op.cit.

¹⁰ Brundidge, op.cit.

¹¹ Obituaries, tombstones, and genealogical research: Steep Hollow Cemetery Association records.

¹² Brundidge, op.cit. Brief histories submitted by family members.

¹³ Brundidge, op.cit. Brief histories submitted by family members.

Early family names include Risinger, Hartsfield, Tobias, Weedon, and others. Many of these early families intermarried within the Steep Hollow and other nearby communities, and their descendants remain in the area today.

II. OVERVIEW

Saint's Rest Baptist Church was organized in 1873, following a revival meeting held in 1872 by Rev. C.B. Hollis of Madison County, who became the first pastor.¹⁴ The church had thirty-three members, meeting first under the trees and later in the Steep Hollow schoolhouse, which had been erected in 1870 on property adjacent to what would become the church's property.¹⁵ Saint's Rest Baptist Church erected a separate building in 1873 on land given for that purpose by Harvey Mitchell,¹⁶ who served as postmaster at nearby Boonville from January 27, 1851 until July 13, 1854.¹⁷ Records seem to indicate that perhaps some additional acreage was sold to the Church in 1874.¹⁸

Although not officially changed, the congregation voted to use the name of Steep Hollow Baptist Church in February 1957,¹⁹ reflecting the name of the community.

The Steep Hollow Cemetery²⁰ is located on land that was originally part of the Richardson Perry League. Richardson Perry, a single man (1817-1836), received a land

¹⁴ Haygood, op.cit.

"Annual Home Coming at Steep Hollow Is Held Sunday; Many Children of Pioneers Attend," with photo entitled "Steep Hollow Cemetery." Photocopy of non-sourced newspaper article, estimated to have been published 1900-1925.

¹⁵ Brundidge, op.cit. Biography of Harvey Mitchell with photograph, pp. 245-247.

Haygood, op.cit.

Syptak, Virginia. "Saints' Rest Church Dates Back to 1872," *Bryan Eagle*, September 27, 1957, p. 3.

Steep Hollow Baptist Church, "History." <http://steephollowchurch.org/-/history.html> (Accessed September 24, 2008).

¹⁶ Haygood, op.cit.

¹⁷ Brundidge, op.cit.

Haygood, op.cit.

Wheat, op.cit.

1936 Centennial Marker No. 8665 Town of Boonville.

Texas Historical Marker No. 8666 Brazos County (1936 text).

¹⁸ Brazos County Deed Book O, pp. 356, 357, recorded on "6th day of April 1874." Dated "this the 8th --- 1873," H. Mitchell, B. Davis, Thos. J.Beall, & M.W. McCraw sold five acres of land in the J.W. Scott League to Saint's Rest Baptist Church; trustees were --- Willis & Charles Peters "in consideration of twenty five gold dollars to us paid by the Baptist Church, known as Saint's Rest, in Brazos County." Brazos County Clerk's Office, Bryan, Texas.

¹⁹ Haygood, op.cit.

²⁰ Beverly, Trevia Wooster. *Brazos County, Texas Cemetery Directory With Selected Historical, People, Places and Events* (Houston: Tejas Publications & Research, 2008).

Smith, W. Broaddus. *Brazos County, Texas, Cemetery Transcriptions* (Houston 1967).

grant in Brazos County on October 10, 1835. He took part in the siege of Bexar and died at the Alamo on March 6, 1836.²¹

The cemetery originated on private land with a family burial in 1870. It was given the name of "Saint's Rest" Cemetery, after the Baptist Church to which the original property was given in 1874, and which was located just across the road from the cemetery.

Steep Hollow Cemetery evolved from land on which J.A.S. Peters, the young son of Charles and Evaline Peters, was buried in 1870 a few days before his sixth birthday.²² Robert Martin, the son of Rev. Samuel Crawford Martin, died on June 23, 1871 and is buried just to the north of the Peters child. Rev. Martin and his wife, Sarah Ann Cheshire Martin, are also buried here.²³

Rev. Samuel Crawford (1825-1902), first pastor of Saint's Rest Baptist Church, who preached for over fifty years serving a number of Brazos County churches, was buried in Steep Hollow Cemetery with Masonic honors.²⁴ Rev. Edward Francis Thwing, a Methodist Minister Circuit Rider, died February 16, 1878 and was also buried in the Steep Hollow Cemetery.²⁵ His wife, Susan, is buried in Houston, Texas.²⁶ Rev. Thwing changed to the Baptist faith in 1867, being baptized in Galveston, Texas.²⁷ Other Baptist ministers buried in the cemetery include Rev. Joseph Terry (1814-1880), Rev. Joel Madison Bullock (1851-1924), and Rev. Oliver Columbus Cooper (1893-1978).

On June 30, 1874 Mr. and Mrs. Peters, "in consideration of \$25.00 cash in hand paid by the Baptist Church, known as Saint's Rest," conveyed six acres of land from the

Brazos County, Texas Cemeteries: A List of Persons Interred in Brazos County, Texas to 1988 (Bryan TX: Brazos County Genealogical Association, 1997).

²¹ Abstract No. 44, File No. SC 000019-28, Title Date October 10, 1835, Patent No. 109, Patent Vol. 10, Translation #3030 (Austin: Texas General Land Office).

Handbook of Texas Online, s.v., "Richardson, Perry."

<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/PP/fpe77.html> (accessed July 23, 2008).

²² Tombstone: Born September 29, 1864; died September 04, 1870.

²³ Barnett, Mary A., editor. *The Steep Hollow Cemetery* (Bryan TX: Steep Hollow Cemetery Association, 2003; corrected revision being prepared). Association records.

²⁴ Rev. Martin's obituary: *Dallas Morning News*, 24 December 1903, page 7.

²⁵ Tombstone: A Native of Charleston, South Carolina. Departed this life age about 60 years.

²⁶ Worm, Jeri & John. *Founders Memorial Cemetery*, 1217 West Dallas, Houston, Texas: Mrs. Susan Thwing. Died: 10 August 1856, age 27 years, 12 days. Wife of Rev. Ed F. Thwing of the Texas Annual Conference. <http://www.rootsweb.com/~usgenweb> Transcribed April-Jun 2002.

²⁷ *Flake's Bulletin* (Galveston), January 17, 1867, p. 5: "The Houston Baptist says, 'Mr. Edward F. Thwing, who has been for many years a Methodist preacher, was baptized last Lord's day by Elder W.W. Howard, D.D., in the city of Galveston.'"

Richardson Perry league, including the gravesite, to the Saint's Rest Baptist Church for \$25 "for the use and benefit of said Baptist Church."²⁸ Mr. and Mrs. Peters were founding members of the church and, when organized, Charles Peters was the first and only deacon.²⁹ An annual church homecoming and cemetery association meeting was held on the first Sunday in June for many years. Families have been meeting since its beginning in 1874 to care for their gravesites and oversee the general care of the cemetery, which is a nonsectarian community cemetery. In addition to markers denoting military service, organizations represented are the Masons, Oddfellows, and Woodmen of the World. Also, several of the deceased, including D.N. Dansby and E.F. Jones, were members of the Patrons of Husbandry, better known as the Grange. The Steep Hollow Grange was active from the 1870s through the 1890s.³⁰

Published obituaries offer some insight into burial practices. As is the custom in many areas, friends and family members often marked new graves with flowers. The obituary for Mrs. Amanda Sherrill Hall said, for example: "The new made grave was a mound of flowers, when the last words of the sacred service had been said, the prayer of benediction had assembled to the Heavenly Father above, and with sad and broken hearts, the bereaved family and friends took their departure from the cemetery." The report of the services for Miss Ida Holligan had this to say: "Pretty floral tributes were laid upon the grave by loving hands in testimony of the tender affection in which she was held."³¹

The first recorded minutes found for the Steep Hollow Cemetery Association are dated November 1, 1926. On August 9, 1966, after 92 years, the congregation of the Saint's Rest church voted to relinquish the cemetery to the Steep Hollow Cemetery Association³² and executed a quitclaim deed to convey all interests and rights to the Steep Hollow Cemetery Association on August 14, 1966.³³

²⁸ Brazos County Deeds Vol. P, p. 30, June 30, 1874. Brazos County Clerk's Office, Bryan, Texas.

²⁹ Haygood, "Beginnings."

³⁰ "Steep Hollow Grange," *Waco Daily Examiner*, 13 Oct. 1876; *Galveston Daily News*, 12 Jan. 1879.

³¹ *Bryan Daily Eagle*, 11 October 1927; (weekly) *Bryan Eagle*, 13 Feb. 1908, p.5, col.6.

³² Haygood, "Chronological Account."

³³ Brazos County Deed Records, August 14, 1966, Vol. 257, Page 812. Brazos County Clerk's Office, Bryan, Texas.

The Steep Hollow Cemetery Association later became the owner of the Steep Hollow Community Center and two acres directly across from the cemetery.³⁴ This Community Center building is used for cemetery association meetings. The Association places American flags on the graves of all military personnel each Memorial Day, and continues to hold an annual meeting in June of each year. The Association also maintains records of burials, cares for the cemetery grounds and oversees burials.³⁵

IV. HISTORICAL/CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Located about five miles from the city of Bryan, the cemetery is in a peaceful and picturesque V-like setting of two roads. Rectangular in shape, the cemetery has a hard-surface drive winding from the west entrance at the newer section through the “old” section to the east gate. Family plots in the older section can be distinguished, several with fencing. While there are no distinguishing monuments, there is a variety of sizes and materials. Inscriptions are simple in nature. Cedar trees and large oaks, along with crape myrtle, give a cool and peaceful view. With the placing of a Historic Texas Cemetery marker, flags poles will be added.

Early settlements of Brazos County reflect a cross section of the population, and pioneers desired a place of burial as near to the place where the death occurred as possible. The Steep Hollow Cemetery fit that need for the Steep Hollow community, with the deceased being mainly Protestant, of Baptist and/or Methodist faith.

Steep Hollow Cemetery is significant because it reflects the first families of the early community. The graves, oriented in an east-west fashion as is common in most Anglo cemeteries, are in family units or plots, and provide a record of pioneer area families. Included are fourteen known men who fought for the Confederate States of America, sixteen men and one army nurse who served in World War I and twenty-three in World War II. Five men represent the Korean War era with four who fought in Vietnam and one in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

³⁴ Originally part of the Steep Hollow Baptist Church, deeded to the Steep Hollow Community Center on April 1, 1987, as recorded in Brazos County Deed Records Vol. 961, Page 592. Acquired by the Steep Hollow Cemetery Association November 5, 2004, as recorded in Brazos County Deed Records Vol. 6389, Page 153. (Brazos County Clerk’s Office, Bryan, Texas).

³⁵ Steep Hollow Cemetery Association Minutes and Bylaws. Beverly, Trevia Wooster, ed. *Steep Hollow Cemetery Association Newsletter* (Houston. v. 1, 2007 -).

During World War I several of Steep Hollow's sons served in the military, and some of them died while in service. Robert Leslie Buchanan, U.S. Marine Corp, died November 12, 1918 at Quantico, Virginia, one day after the Armistice was signed. When Buchanan's body was laid to rest one week later, soldiers from the local training camp served as his pallbearers.³⁶ In October 1920, the body of Aaron N. Hall was returned from Germany where he was buried in March 1919 to be re-interred in the Steep Hollow Cemetery.³⁷ Hall had entered the army of the United States in 1917 and served with honor as a private in Co. G., 360th Infantry, 90th Division.³⁸

Five known ministers, as well as teachers, businessmen, farmers, and ranchers, who are also buried at Steep Hollow Cemetery, also represent the founding families of the Steep Hollow community. While there is no official 'babyland' area, many infants and young children are noted to have been among the early burials, mainly within a family area. Such is the Andrew J. and Martha A. Battle family, who lost three children from 1876 to 1881. Many names in today's community can be traced back to those founding families of the Steep Hollow church and community. Still used today, the cemetery continues to record the passing of time and serves as a partial record of the community's history. Pioneer and modern sections are clearly discernable by an assortment of markers and family plots.

Even with the removal of some second and third generations to cities beyond, nevertheless many return each year for an annual all day Cemetery Association meeting and covered-dish luncheon. Those buried at Steep Hollow Cemetery are honored as family and friendship ties are renewed.

Located just beyond the present-day Bryan city limits, the original setting of the area around the cemetery has changed from a very rural area to suburban with housing subdivisions, a large golf course and a few businesses. An Official Texas Historical Marker for the Steep Hollow Cemetery will provide an important historical interpretation of the pioneer era and the community's growth.

³⁶Tombstone inscription: USMC. Son of R.L and M.A. Buchanan, born Bryan, died Quantico, VA. "Soldier Boy Rests at Steep Hollow," *Bryan Daily Eagle*, Nov. 18, 1918, p.1.

³⁷ *Bryan Daily Eagle*, 26 Oct.1920.

³⁸ *Bryan Daily Eagle*, 26 Oct.1920.

IV. DOCUMENTATION

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