

WELLBORN CEMETERY

Wellborn, Texas

2000

Researched by: Mary Dinsmore & Terri Olexey

Written by: Carol McCord, Karen Hinton & Mary Dinsmore

Hopes and dreams for a better life called for westward expansion. The idea of owning one's own land and holding the future in one's own hand brought railroads, which led to the establishment of small towns on the new frontier. Construction camps were created along the railways that linked established communities to the new frontier.

As the Houston & Texas Central Railway Company expanded their railroad north toward Bryan, Texas from Millican, Texas, land was bought for right-of-ways and for the actual railway track itself. Land was bought in huge lots. Acres upon acres were acquired for the railroad. Later the railroad fell upon hard times and huge lots of land had to be sold. As parcels were sold to settlers trying to forge their destinies, communities were established.

The Wellborn Cemetery in Brazos County, Texas is located in Block 10 of the Samuel Davidson League. From Harvey Mitchell Parkway, take Farm to Market Road 2154 seven miles to Wellborn. Turn left onto Greens Prairie Road, go two city blocks to the entrance of the Wellborn Cemetery on the right.¹ This entry is to decades of documentation of the lives of the people who shaped the character and livelihood of Wellborn. This documentation can be seen on headstones, told by markers and handed down by generations of the unmarked. The heritage within the gates of this cemetery needs to be preserved for our future generations. The parcel of land that was so poor that the graves had to be dynamited is now our richest piece of heritage.

Wellborn was established in 1867. The community was named for a local landowner, E.W. Wellborn, who owned land in the area prior to the Civil War.²

¹ Deed Records, Brazos County Courthouse, Bryan, TX.

² A History of Texas and Texans, Frank W. Johnson, Vol. V, The Texas State Library, Austin, Texas.

The sons of Adam Royder of the Rock Prairie Community were early founders of Wellborn.

As the community developed, opportunities became open in commercial fields. Enterprising individuals began to build sawmills, gristmills, mercantiles and saloons. One of the early pioneers in the Wellborn community was T.H. Royder. In 1885, John Horace Royder and his brother, Thomas Harvey, developed the partnership of J.H. Royder & Brother.³ The partnership established the first store on the line of the Houston & Texas Central Railroad. They also erected a cotton gin and established a lumberyard. Thomas also introduced the Red Polled cattle in his native country, as well as Jersey cattle into the community. He introduced the Poland-China swine into Brazos County. Thomas Harvey owned a thousand-acre estate where he erected twenty-five homes for his tenants and employed fifty families in connection with his various enterprises. Thomas Harvey was a Master Mason and was affiliated with the Woodsmen of the World. Thomas Harvey was very active in politics where he was a delegate to the state and congressional Democratic Conventions in Texas as well as to the Brazos County conventions. He was appointed a member of the state executive committee where he served in this capacity for four years and wielded a great deal of influence in party affairs during that period.⁴ He served as Postmaster at the Wellborn Post Office⁵ and also was very influential in the educational field, where he served as school trustee at the Wellborn school.⁶ Thomas Harvey died on June 17, 1919 and is buried in the Wellborn Cemetery.⁷

John Horace Royder, the other partner in J.H. Royder & Brother, also served as the local undertaker,⁸ building his own coffins in the back of the store.⁹ John

³ A History of Texas and Texans, Frank W. Johnson, Vol. V, pages 2358 & 2359, The Texas State Library, Austin, Texas.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ List of Wellborn Postmasters, United States Postal Historian, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

⁶ Postmasters list in the Wellborn Post Office and the postal history of Wellborn, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁷ Personal interview with Ms. Virginia Parsons in October 1999 by Mary Dinsmore. Mrs. Parsons is the granddaughter of T.H. and Ida Burkhalter Royder.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Wellborn School Records, Bryan I.S.D. bus barn, Bryan, Texas.

Horace not only attended the Wellborn School, but later became a school trustee.¹⁰ By 1891, John Horace built his home from lumber at the Royder mill and to this day, his descendants live in this home.¹¹ On July 24, 1886 John Horace was appointed Postmaster. John Horace married Lillian Dollins and had an only son, John Samuel.¹² John Horace died in 1929 and was buried in the Wellborn Cemetery where his grave is marked with a small pink granite stone. John Samuel served as Justice of the Peace from 1921 to 1962. He died on July 9, 1982 and is buried next to his wife, Prue Baker Royder in the Wellborn Cemetery.¹³

Once the farms and businesses were established, there was a need for churches and schools. The school started in 1877 as John N. Farquhar filed two positions, one for a school and the other for a teacher. He later became a school trustee.¹⁴ The school taught the local white children.¹⁵ A windmill standing next to the school supplied water.¹⁶ Miss Laura Eidson taught school in Wellborn in 1927 when the school was a unit of the A&M Consolidated school district. She taught for 14 years and later transferred to A&M Consolidated. While working for the school she would ride the bus to school with the children due to not having a vehicle.¹⁷ At the age of 82 she fell down a well at home and her sisters, Eula and Lula heard her cries for help. D.D. Burkhalter Jr. went down the well on a rope to help her stay afloat until help could arrive. She had a short stay in Bryan hospital and returned home. She died two years later in a local nursing home after thirty-seven years of service to teaching.¹⁸

¹⁰ Personal interview with John Samuel Royder, son of J.H. Royder, in Royder home by Billy Smith, Jr., for school paper, 1976.

¹¹ Royder Family Bible.

¹² Obituary for J.S. Royder, Calloway Jones Funeral Home, Bryan, Texas.

¹³ Wellborn School Records, Bryan I.S.D. bus barn, Bryan, Texas.

¹⁴ Brazos County Superintendent Report to the State Superintendent of Public Education, Austin, Texas.

¹⁵ Personal interview with Milford Royder at the Royder home in Wellborn in September 1999, by Mary Dinsmore. He attended the Wellborn school as a boy along with several other siblings.

¹⁶ Bryan Eagle Newspaper Article, February 21, 1965.

¹⁷ Bryan Eagle Newspaper Article, April 9, 1956.

¹⁸ Obituary in the Bryan Eagle, November 1, 1996.

According to the interview with Virginia Parsons in October 1999, “Ms. Eidson had old-timers disease and ran out of the house and jumped down the well in an attempt to end her life.” At one point in time the school district had at least two hundred children in attendance.¹⁹ From 1911 to 1912 Miss Mary Arrington taught at Wellborn. She was twenty years old. Alice McSwain also taught school in Wellborn. Mrs. Nannie Williams taught in Wellborn in 1914 and had one year of teaching experience in Texas. N. Coleman taught in 1919 and he had seven years of teaching experience.²⁰ As of yet we have no record of the dissolving of the Wellborn school district.

A large white two-story building located on the lot next to the cemetery was used as a school, Masonic lodge, and as a church. The church was used by three denominations on a rotating basis. The church was located on the bottom floor of the building. The Masonic lodge occupied the upper level. During the course of years, the second floor of the church and schoolhouse was dismantled and the roof was replaced making it a single story structure. The building stayed in the very same condition for many years thereafter. They used it as a place to vote in local elections. Until recently, the building used as the Wellborn Community Center was the only structure there was from the past life of the village. This structure was in use by the community until given away and moved from the original site in 1999. In its place a new metal building was constructed and dedicated in November of the same year.

The oldest known records indicate that J.B. and Annie M. Fletcher sold land to a local businessman (W.L. Orr) in January 1887 for cash. It is assumed the land was sold for the purpose of establishing a church.²¹

The Wellborn Baptist church burned to the ground in 1896 and was rebuilt. The materials for the building of the church were provided by the Barrow lumber business. Mrs. Barrow was also the organist for the church.²² A Baptist preacher by the name of W.E. Penn conducted revivals in Bryan, Navasota, and scores of

¹⁹ Bryan Eagle Newspaper Article, February 21, 1954.

²⁰ Deed Records Book____, Page____, Brazos County Courthouse, Bryan, Texas.

²¹ Deed Records Book____, Page____, Brazos County Courthouse, Bryan, Texas.

²² Deed Records Book____, Page____, Brazos County Courthouse, Bryan, Texas.

other towns in the area.²³ The Wellborn Baptist Church is now standing on the corner of McCullough Road and Farm to Market Road 2154, Brazos County.²⁴

J. Barrow was also the ticket agent for the H & T C RR. One afternoon he was sitting in the depot when a shot through the window killed him. His family just narrowly escaped a fire at the family home in the middle of the night. His mother ran back into the burning house thinking one of her grandchildren was still inside. Inhaling the smoke from the fire Mrs. Barrow died of pneumonia shortly after. The perpetrator of this crime remains a mystery to this day. The father sold the lumber business and moved the family to Bryan.²⁵ It has been said that the reason he was killed was due to his wife being of Hispanic origin.²⁶

Burying children seemed to become a common occurrence in the late 1800s. The oldest graves are children of J.N. and L.F. Farquhar.²⁷ J.N. was a landowner, a storeowner, a school trustee, and a schoolteacher.²⁸ He also served as Postmaster in 1883.²⁹ His son Newton died at the age of 2 on October 20, 1874. Albert and Eva died in 1886, only 10 days apart. Later Pauline and David died in 1887, 1 day apart.³⁰ Was it an epidemic of Yellow Fever or Typhoid that took the lives of the innocent young children? John N. and L.F. Farquhar had buried five children before they reached the age of ten. The only remaining child was Claude and he died on April 11, 1889. John and his wife never had more children. Numerous headstones within the cemetery are marked with angels, baby shoes, rocking chairs, hats, bonnets and toys. Many families found themselves relinquishing their children back into God's hands. Another family story, told from generation to generation, is that of a family of settlers traveling to a destination where they could forge their destinies. One of the children fell ill and died. This child was buried

²³ Deed Records Book____, Page____, Brazos County Courthouse, Bryan, Texas.

²⁴ Personal interview with Virginia Parsons

²⁵ Wellborn Cemetery Listing

²⁶ Wellborn Cemetery Listing

²⁷ Wellborn School Records, Bryan I.S.D. bus barn, Bryan, Texas

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Postmasters list in the Wellborn Post Office and the postal history of Wellborn, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³⁰ Tombstone, Wellborn Cemetery, Wellborn, TX.

within the Wellborn Cemetery. It is said that they marked the grave with a stone or placed the child under a tree so that they would know where their precious child was laid to rest. The family proceeded with their quest, but returned to Wellborn and constructed an iron fence around their child's final resting-place.³¹ There are only two iron fences within the confines of the Wellborn Cemetery. One surrounds the gravesite of the Kelly family and the other belongs to James W. Johnson who died on September 10, 1892 of typhoid pneumonia.³² The Kelly fence embraces two children, Katie who died on July 9, 1889 and Willie who died on March 23, 1893. The gravesite within this fence only has one marker.³³

There are seven unknowns lying within the Wellborn cemetery.³⁴ Some are unmarked, some are marked with only a rock to serve as a headstone.³⁵ Over the years new caretakers, not knowing the purpose the rocks served, have removed them. Two of the seven unknowns are resting on the south side of the Norwood family plot, between the Royders and the Norwoods.³⁶ It was reported that convicts working on the railway were shot trying to escape and were buried within these gates.³⁷ It was reported that guards, McMinn³⁸ and McCarley³⁹ were murdered by convicts. Both were laid to rest in the Wellborn Cemetery, McCarley is in an unmarked location within the cemetery.

The Wellborn Cemetery boasts of the fact that within its walls are veterans of nearly every war in which Americans have shed blood. Records show that one of the oldest veterans buried in the cemetery is that of Adam Royder, a Civil War veteran.⁴⁰ Adam enlisted on June 8, 1862 and served in Company C, 20th

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Wellborn Cemetery Listing

³⁵ Personal interview with Louise Wade, past caretaker of Wellborn Cemetery.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Confederate Records, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Regiment, Texas Infantry under General Magruder until the end of the war. He is joined by the following Civil War veterans: A.J. Battle (Pvt. Co. B – 8th TX Infantry), David P. Johnson (Pvt. Co. H 70th North Carolina Infantry), Evander Gandy (Pvt. Co. C 56th Alabama Cavalry), Berry Gandy, Levi Franklin Battle (Pvt. Co. G 2nd Regiment TX Cavalry State Troops), B.E. Gentry Capt. Co. H 21st Texas Infantry), M.B. Laski (Pvt. Jeff Davis Artillery), J.P. Atkins (Sgt. Co. H 3rd MS Cavalry), William Eidson (Pvt. Co. G – 7th South Carolina Infantry), and W.E. Farquhar.⁴¹

Many families suffered from casualties of the war. Adam Royder enlisted at Camp Groce in Hempstead, Texas. He served as a private in Company C of the 20th Texas Infantry. During this time, he was in and out of the hospital in Galveston, Texas with an eye infection (ophthalmia). This affected him for the rest of his life. Not only did Adam serve in the infantry he served with the Confederate Navy aboard the *Colonel Stelle*.⁴² (Ed. Note: It is unclear that Royder was an enrolled member of the Confederate Navy, although he did serve on this vessel. The Confederate Muster roll for Elmore’s Reg’t Texas Infantry (one of the informal names of the Twentieth Texas Infantry Co.) indicates that in January and February of 1863, Royder was “detached on bd steamer “*Col Stell*.” Royder is reported to have been on the *Stell* in late-May, 1865, when it surrendered to Union forces at Sabine Pass, TX.)

As life tried to get back to normal after the war, the valiant soldiers who served the Confederacy found themselves prisoners of war. On June 26, 1865, Adam Royder along with many others took the Amnesty Oath at Millican, pledging to never again take up arms against the United States.⁴³

Not only were the citizens of Wellborn loyal in the service of their country, they were very civic minded, too. This can be seen with the number of Masons,

⁴¹ Confederate State Roster, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁴² Ibid.

* Ed. Note: It is unclear that Royder was an enrolled member of the Confederate Navy. The Confederate Muster roll for Elmore’s Reg’t Texas Infantry (one of the informal names of the Twentieth Texas Infantry Co.) indicates that in January and February of 1863, Royder was “detached on bd steamer “*Col Stell*.” Royder is reported to have been on the *Stell* in late-May, 1865, when it surrendered to Union forces at Sabine Pass, TX.

⁴³ Confederate Records, National Archive, Washington, D.C.

Eastern Stars, Woodsmen of the World, and veterans from World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam buried in the Wellborn Cemetery.

During the early years of the village, the community would hold a community clean-up day. It would most likely be announced at the local church on Sunday. Everyone would go to the cemetery with the tools needed for the task and a basket lunch. The community took pride in its cemetery. Norton Burkhalter erected an iron ore rock archway over the lane that led into the cemetery.⁴⁴ This was quite a feat considering Mr. Burkhalter had only one arm. The archway was destroyed by a motorist who happened to miss the curve outside the cemetery on Greens Prairie Road. A brick wall was built to replace the archway in the early 1990s.⁴⁵ Ira Burkhalter also contributed to the beautification of the cemetery. He placed petrified rocks next to the road as you enter the cemetery. The purpose of this was to prevent people from driving over graves that were extremely close to the lane that winds around the original three acres. According to Mrs. Louise Wade, the chain link fence that surrounds the cemetery was erected in 1960 or 1961.

There have been several people from Wellborn and the surrounding communities taking care of the cemetery. They were Melvin Hinton, J.C. Wade, Joe Norwood, Donald Royder, and Louise Wade to name a few. Over the years, the caretakers were taken for granted. Names were forgotten as a list of caretakers was never kept. Mr. Royder took care of the cemetery while he was still in high school during WWII. The community took pride in this sacred piece of ground even though it sits upon rock and graves are still difficult to dig. The use of dynamite was used in the areas difficult to dig by hand. This may explain why there are wide, open areas within the cemetery.

Past caretakers have aged gracefully and their health is failing. It is time for our generation to pick up the torch and carry it into the next phase of Wellborn's history. With the City of College Station threatening annexation of this tiny village, our heritage is also threatened. With the contributions of a few, the cemetery will endure with history written in its stones.

Many of the persons buried in the Wellborn Cemetery were very influential in the establishment of Wellborn. Other pioneers of Brazos County are lying inside this cemetery. They traveled from foreign soil and other states for the dream

⁴⁴ Personal interview with Louise Wade, past caretaker of Wellborn Cemetery

⁴⁵ Ibid.

of a new life in Texas. They were not just everyday farmers, housewives, immigrants and craftsmen. They were the lifeblood of the community in which they lived. This is our heritage of which we are very proud.

It seems fitting that we honor these pioneers, our ancestors and the valiant citizens with a memorial from the Great State of Texas. History has shown that the people buried within the Wellborn Cemetery made tremendous contributions to their community, the Great State of Texas, and to the country in which we live.