

## **APPLICATION FOR A TEXAS STATE HISTORIC SITE MARKER FOR THE ROCK PRAIRIE SCHOOL AND CHURCH COLLEGE STATION, TEXAS**

The education of school age children in much of rural America in the 19th and early 20th Century was conducted in small, often one-room school houses with all grades attending. While many of these school houses have disappeared from the landscape, a few remain in public use today. One such building is the Rock Prairie Baptist Church located on Rock Prairie Road in College Station, Texas.

### **Donation of the Land by Adam Royder**

A deed recorded in Brazos County<sup>1</sup> indicates that on August 28, 1891, Adam Royder conveyed to E. Gandy, J.H. McGregor and William Symms, trustees of the Wellborn School District, Brazos County, Texas one acre of land for the purposes of building a school house or church to be used by the "American People". Adam Royder was a prominent citizen of the community who had emigrated from Bavaria, Germany with his widowed mother, Barbara Royder (also spelled Reuther, Reuter) as a member of the Prince de Solms Colony. They originally settled in the present town of Millican. He was married to Mary Ambrella Price by Harvey Mitchell in 1852 and they moved to the Rock Prairie Community. Mr. Royder lived there until his death on March 4, 1894.<sup>2</sup>

It should also be noted that Adam and Mary Ambrella Price Royder had seven children, and a second marriage by Adam Royder to Barbara Ellen Harrell produced eleven children. Of the 18 children, 15 lived to be adults. Adam Royder was an active Mason and the Adam Royder Masonic Lodge No. 778 in Wellborn was named for him.<sup>3</sup>

### **Use as a School House**

In the 1890's, a one room school house was constructed on the Rock Prairie site donated by Mr. Royder and is one of the few such buildings still in general use today in Brazos County. The building was also in use as a church during this time period and was an integral part of the Rock Prairie community which consisted of a general merchandise store and a grist mill.<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Atkins Barron has the following reflection about the community.

I moved to the Rock Prairie Community when I was in the second grade (about 1914). The enrollment at the Rock Prairie School was about 12 to 15 pupils. Mrs. Ida Todd Carroll was my teacher. We had some desks in the one room school and we also sat on benches. When I was in the fourth grade, Mrs. Gladys Barron (later Mrs. Hugh Dowling) became the teacher. Some of the pupils who attended the Rock Prairie School were children from the Barron, Todd, Shaw, Carroll, Grandy, Atkins, Williams, Sebesta, Zak, Higgins and Royder families. I also attended church in this building.

In 1919, the Brazos County School District combined the Shiloh School District and the Rock Prairie School and formed the Rock Prairie-Shiloh Consolidated Common School District #13 (Shirock School) in order that a high school might be formed. This was done so that the 8th through 11th grades could be taught. The appointed trustees were J.A. Grandy, Tom Sebesta, and Victor Boriski. Rev. Eclar Smith was one of the teachers that is remembered by many of his students. He also preached at the Rock Prairie Baptist Church.

The Rock Prairie School building is still standing in its original location. Nearby was the store owned by Mr. Burt Carroll and the grist mill where the families of the surrounding area brought their corn to have it ground into meal. The store and grist mill are no longer there.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Building**

Much of the original building is still in place as are some of the handsawed pine church pews with V-cut feet and slats that form a contoured seat. The original pulpit, of similar primitive design is still in use. The 29 foot by 40 foot six-inch building rests on wooden piers and the original building had a pine clap board siding. The ceiling and interior walls are covered with "beaded" pine tongue and groove planks. The building was designed with double entry doors and large windows on each side and in the rear wall to allow ventilation. During the 1970's, a new ceiling, aluminum windows and vinyl siding were installed to improve the energy efficiency of the building. Until the 1950's, when a gas heater was installed, the building was heated by a wood heater. Also, at about this time period, window air conditioners were installed to replace the ceiling fans, open windows and funeral parlor advertisement fans. A steeple was added to the original building in 1982. It was erected by the Arnold family in memory of their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Freeman Arnold, long time members of the church.<sup>6</sup>

In 1984, the Rock Prairie Baptist Church expanded on the original site, building a new building and Sunday School facility to accommodate its growing congregation. The original church-school house was left in place and is still used.

### **Formation of the Rock Prairie Baptist Church**

The Rock Prairie Missionary Baptist Church was organized with a membership of 44 persons on June 10, 1900 by a community group assembled at the school house for that purpose. Elder G.A. Foster and Elder S.C. Martin spoke on the need to form and the views of the Missionary Baptist Church.<sup>7</sup> Thirteen of the first members came to membership by letter from the Missionary Baptist Churches in Brazos and Grimes County, Texas. Adam Royder's widow, Barbara Ellen Harrell Royder, was elected charter member. Mr. P.L. Barron was elected church pro-tem at the June meeting and it was decided that the group was to "reassemble on Saturday, prior the second Sunday of July, at eleven o'clock a.m., being July 7, 1900 A.D."<sup>8</sup>

On July 7, 1900, Mr. A.J. Tabor, Jr. was elected church clerk, and a committee was appointed to select two deacons.<sup>9</sup> At the October 1900 Assembly, Mr. A.J. Tabor, Jr. and Mr. S.I. Lee were elected deacons, with P.L. Barron serving as church clerk and Elder G.C. Foster serving as the first itinerant pastor, with a salary of \$50.00 per year.<sup>10</sup> Rev. J.M. Bullock was elected pastor in 1902 and the church met once a month for many years. It appears that, in the beginning, both a Saturday evening and Sunday morning were devoted to services and business. A Sunday School was organized in January of 1907.<sup>11</sup>

From the records, it seems that the church went through periods of time when it was not active on a regular basis; during the 1920's and again between 1938 and 1947. Since 1947, the church has held weekly services. From 1947 until the late 1960's, the congregation was pastored by student pastors from Texas A&M College (University), Baylor University and the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Among those serving were Reverends Newton V. Cole, Tom Young, William R. Cardin and Floyd Haddox. Only in the last few years has a full time pastor served the congregation.<sup>12</sup>

Many descendants of Adam and Mary Ambrella Price Royder and Adam and Barbara Ellen Harrell Royder still reside in Brazos County and some are still members of the church, extending its history back some 90 years.<sup>13</sup>

### NOTES

1. Record of Deeds, Vol. W., page 427.
2. Genealogy Records of the Royder Family, in the possession of Mrs. Virginia Jones Parson, Great-Granddaughter of Adam and Mary Ambrella Price Royder.
3. Ibid
4. Oral interview with L.N. Marquart, Bryan, Texas, 10/3/82. Conducted by Mary Arnold McCulloch.
5. Interview with Elizabeth Atkins Barron, Bryan, Texas, 5/15/84 by Mary Arnold McCulloch.
6. Mary Arnold McCulloch, History of Rock Prairie Schoolhouse/Church, Brazos County, Texas, Unpublished document, July, 1984.
7. Minutes of Rock Prairie Baptist Church, June 10, 1990, Book I.
8. Ibid
9. Minutes Rock Prairie Baptist Church, July 7, 1900, Book I.
10. Minutes Rock Prairie Baptist Church, October, 1900, Book I.
11. Minutes Rock Prairie Baptist Church, January, 1907, Book I.
12. Minutes Rock Prairie Baptist Church.
13. Current Membership Roster, Rock Prairie Baptist Church.