

Local History & Genealogical Society

COOPERATING WITH THE DALLAS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Volume 1

AUGUST 3, 1955

Number 5

OUR CREED: "What you have inherited from your fathers, you must earn for yourself, before you can call it yours."—Goethe.

EARLY DAYS IN DALLAS COUNTY

In 1940, ninety-four-year-old Mrs. Alice West Floyd told the story of her early life in Dallas County to her daughter Miss Willie Floyd of Abilene. A copy of this narrative was given to Mrs. George F. Carlisle, well-known Dallas historian and writer, through whose kindness the story appears below:

"My father, Robert Gentry West, and my mother Mary Ryland West, came to Texas in the Spring of 1845 from Jonesboro, Tennessee. They brought with them three children, Helens, John R. and Ann, their slaves and household possessions. Their wagons were schooner wagons, beds tied together with chains in the center, four horses to each. The family rode in a carriage.

"Arriving at Farmers Branch, the family took up the land allotted to them by Peters' Colony as colonists. I was born there March 25, 1846. My earliest recollection was learning my letters put on the wall for that purpose. My mother and father organized a society for debates and spelling bees in the neighborhood. They had brought a fine library with them and supplied books for study and our books were scattered over the neighborhood and our magazines and newspapers were passed on till they wore out, so while we took all the magazines, we never preserved any copies. The magazines were: *Grahams*, edited by Edgar Allen Poe; *Arthers*; *Godeys Ladies Magazine*; *Petersons*; *New York Ledger*; *London Times*; and later the *Dallas Herald*.

"We had no graded schools. The teacher was an absolute dictator. We had to furnish our own books. We did not have arithmetics for every child, so the teacher wrote the 'tables' on charts and the children used these. If the day was rainy and few children were able to go, the ones who went could go forward in their lessons as fast as they wanted to. The teaching was to individuals.

"The school house was built of logs with puncheon floor and puncheon seats without backs. We used slates which we held on our laps. There was a long writing desk against the wall with a bench where we had our writing lessons. The teacher's desk had two drawers—one for his personal use, the other for school things. We hung our wraps and our slates on nails in the wall. We had

a fireplace and a drinking bucket and common dipper, but each family had their own cups with their lunch. The best teacher we ever had was a Mr. Hudson, an Englishman, who had taught at Denton, Farmers Branch, Grapevine and Fort Worth; later he taught at Tehuacana. Each child brought his New Testament and each day began with Bible reading—an un-falling practice through all my school days, even through college. The school houses were our churches. The Baptist Church, west of our home was the first church to be built. The first child born in the community, a Keenan boy, was buried in Keenan Cemetery. Later Cochran's Chapel, a Methodist Church, was built.

"All the settlers at Farmers Branch were farmers. People ran their accounts for a year and when harvest came the bills were paid. Crops were wheat, corn, barley, oats, millet and sorghum cane. Crops were more abundant than now because the ground was new and more fertile. Mr. Fyke made furniture. He was a veteran of the Mexican War.

"In early days we had no country roads or pasture fences, open country covered with high grass. One went in the direction one wanted to go. There were few trees except along some of the streams. We had a public road near our house, a dirt road over which many settlers traveled. Many camped near our house and Father invited them into the house to stay. Sometimes inclement weather kept them there for a week or two. All fences were rail fences, snake, stake or rider fences. The poles were made of split rails of hackberry, post oak or other available timber.

"I will soon be ninety-four—the times of long ago comes before me strong and clear. Of course my first few years I only know by hearsay. But by the time I was four I remember and forget no more. I remember my mother combing her hair. It was long enough to reach the floor as she sat in a chair. She parted it in the center, then off from each side and braided the back hair, then wound the braid around the cover the back of the head; then she smoothed down the front, where it came to the ear she put a comb to hold it in place, then carried the ends round the braid. She had a tortoise shell comb which stood high at the back of her head above the braid. It looked like a crown on her

regal head. Fair with blue eyes, she was a beautiful woman. Her voice was gentle and kind but her firmness was evident to all. Mother was a teacher. She taught in Tennessee and was the first teacher in our neighborhood when she came to Texas.

"A dress I remember was of silk fitted close to the neck a basque that fastened down the back. The front was gathered full and pointed over the skirt where the fullness was shirred. Bretelles of lace extended from the shoulders to the point. The dress was lined with heavy linen and boned with stays. The skirt was full and plain. The sleeves were tight with fullness at the elbow, the color was wine, the lace was silk and black in color with white lace next to the face.

"Bonnets were 'poke' with lace under the brim and flowers nestled in the lace. Sometimes plumes trimmed the bonnets and most women wore wrappers, tight fitting in the back and full in front.

"The Negroes spun and wove the cloth to make their clothes. Our clothes were made from material brought by wagon train to Hedgecott's post office and Foss Dunnaway's store. Peters Colony business was conducted in this same store. A seamstress came to the house and made clothes for us each season. Aunt Jane, our Negro mammy, and Mandy made clothes for the slaves. We wore woolen dresses in the winter, with aprons of mash materials over them. Dresses were much like those of children of today. Hoops were stylish when I was about ten years old. My sisters had them but I never used any but 'tilters'. 'Tilters' had no bustle but hid pieces of tape sewed to a belt to make a skeleton skirt with only a few wires at the bottom, maybe as high as the knees.

"We had guineas, partridges, prairie chickens, tame chickens, hogs, buffalo meat and deer meat to eat. We could stand on our porch and see deer run across the prairie. Plenty of fresh fish were taken from the streams. Brother John found a nest of wild turkey eggs, took them home and set them. When they hatched, we got a tame gobbler and from then on we had plenty of turkeys.

"Wild bees gave us a start of bee hives. The negro man my father owned, Levi, put out syrup to bait the bees, then followed them to their hives. Enough bees were taken to make a good start besides giving us plenty of honey.

"Dewberries and blackberries grew wild in the 'bottoms' and we planted fruit trees, peaches and plums; plenty of wild grapes grew in the woods, the vines hanging on the trees. School children used these vines to swing across the creek and back. The playground of my first school was fenced with grapevines. In the spring the prairies were beautiful with bluebonnets and other flowers.

"We had a good vegetable garden: beets, turnips, carrots and pumpkins were put up for winter use. Parsnips, potatoes and cabbages were put in hills, pumpkins were kept in a room in the barn. Our own corn and wheat were sent to the mill to be ground. The negro cook often gathered wheat when it was in the milk, removed the husk and boiled the soft wheat. It was called 'fermity' and was served with milk and sugar, and we thought it was delicious. Corn was grated before it was dry and used to make fresh bread. The herb garden had sage, sweet fennel, mint, caraway and red pepper. Medicinal herbs were planted in a special bed in the cellar where they were kept moist."

(To be continued in next issue)

CENSUS RECORD FOR TEXAS

Microfilm copies of the 1880 Census for Texas are now available for use as part of the Texas Collection of the library. These documents were procured through the personal donations of numerous individuals and a number of historical organizations, who realized the great value of this census. Since its arrival, the census has been in almost constant use by patrons, who have found data listed which cannot be located elsewhere. Listings include the age, sex, color, degree of literacy, occupation, relationship to head of household, state of health, state or country of birth, birthplace of parents, and other important data on the person being interviewed.

In addition to the 1880 Census, Mrs. Margaret Pratt, the department head, reports that the 1850, 1860, and 1870 Censuses for Texas are also available on microfilm. All of these records are arranged by county and by residence—the census taker went from house to house down the road. It is important, therefore, that the place of residence by county, at least, be known so as to facilitate research on an individual.

Earlier records on Texas population are available in various publications. One of the most important sources of information previous to 1850 is Dr. Sey-

mour V. Connor's series of articles on the Peters' Colony in North and West Central Texas. An Englishman W. S. Peters and his family were responsible for the promotion of this colony, which drew settlers from all over the South, starting in 1841. Details will be found running serially in Volume 51—1953 and Volume 52—1954 of the REGISTER OF KENTUCKY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, in the article entitled "Kentucky Colonization in Texas."

Another article sometimes overlooked is "The Irish in Texas," by Rice, starting on page 60 of Volume XXX—1932 of the JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN IRISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY. Therein will be found data on the early Irish families of South Texas, including the McMullens, O'Connors, and McGloins.

BOOKS OF INTEREST

According to the librarian, Mrs. Margaret Pratt, the following new books are available for use in the Texas, Local History & Genealogy Department of the Dallas Public Library:

Compiled by Old Settlers and Veterans Association of Falls County, Texas—History of Falls County, Texas. Donated by Misses Kathleen and Helen Ellis Caldwell.

Biggers, Don H.—From Cattle Range to Cotton Patch. Reprint of 1904 publication on West Texas history.

Strong, Capt. H. M.—My Frontier Days and Indian Fights on the Plains of Texas.

Smith, T. C. Jr.—From the Memories of Men. Stories of early Texas as told by the settlers.

Swisher, Col. John M.—The Swisher Memories. Published 1932, dealing with Texas pioneer life.

Reid, J. C.—Reid's Tramp. Originally published in 1858 on travel through Texas and the Southwest at that time. Reprint edition of 1935.

Campbell, Thos. H.—History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Texas. 1936 Centennial Volume, the history from Summer Bacon, pioneer minister of Texas, through organization of the various churches to 1936. No index, but very well written and easy to follow.

Foreman, C. T.—The Cross Timbers. A history of the northern Texas timber area, published 1947.

National Council of Jewish Women, Dallas Section—A Picture Life in Dallas From 1872 To 1955. Written by Dallasites of several well-known Jewish families, their early life and accomplishments. This was a special project of

the Dallas Section of National Council of Jewish Women, and has been compiled in an interesting style. Copy donated to the Council to the Texas Collection.

Wilson, J. A.—James Andrew Wilson, Life, Travels and Adventures, the Greatest Fighter Living in Texas, Written by Himself, 1927. Narrative autobiography, most of which concerns life before arriving in Texas.

Poetry Society of Texas—A Book of the Year 1955. Another of the well-done poetry books by the society, a copy donated to the Texas Collection.

Austin, J. O.—Genealogical Dictionary of Rhode Island. Published 1887. As stated in the book, it compiles data "comprising three generations of settlers who came before 1690, many families carried to fourth generation."

Owen, Thos. M.—History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography, in four volumes. This is an excellent source of data for biography up to the early 1900's.

Knorr, C. L.—Marriages of Brunswick County, Virginia, 1750-1810. Donated by Mrs. W. O. Alvis.

Knorr, C. L.—Marriages of Greensville County, Virginia, 1781-1825. Donated by Mrs. W. G. Langley.

Knorr, C. L.—Marriages of Fredericksburg, Virginia, 1782-1850. Donated by Miss Kate White.

Knorr, C. L.—Marriages of Culpepper County, Virginia, 1781-1815. Donated by Mrs. J. W. Anthony.

Venable Family in America. Manuscript of the Abram Venable family of Manakin Town, Virginia, and Joseph Venable of Snow Hill, Maryland. Worked in brief form and easy to use. Donated by Mrs. Thomas M. Eldridge of Orlanta and Mrs. A. E. Kucera of Dallas. (Ask for it at desk).

CORRECTION, PLEASE!

Mrs. Charles Looney's address and phone should be: 4328 Lorraine — LA-4328.

Published monthly by the

Local History & Genealogical Society
Dallas, Texas

President:..... John Plath Green
Secretary:..... Mrs. Dee Brown Walker
Treasurer:..... C. C. Hayley
Editors:..... Charles Noland and
Hazel A. Peterson

Editorial Assistants:..... E. M. Comstock,
Chas. L. Syron, Mrs. Margaret Scruggs
Carruth, Tom L. Tipton, Jr.