Quakertown, Denton County, Texas

This narrative was written as an application for a Texas State Historical Marker for the Quakertown area. It provides an overview of the Quakertown story, barely touching on the people who lived in the community. Please visit Emily Fowler Central Library or the Denton County African American Museum for more information on Quakertown and the people who lived there. - Laura Douglas October 2010

In the city of Denton, Texas, founded in 1857, five African American communities emerged and were established by 1920. These were: the original settlement of Freedman Town, the area known as Peach Orchard Hill, one neighborhood at Congress and Egan Streets, another along Bois d'Arc Street, and Quakertown.[1]

Quakertown was once a thriving African American community nestled in the heart of Denton, Texas. It had become a community within the town by the early 1880s, encompassing the area bounded by Withers Street on the north, Oakland Avenue on the west, Bell Avenue on the east and by Cottonwood and Pecan Creeks on the south. Quakertown flourished through 1920, and its growth was due in part to its proximity to the city square, plus the opportunity for African Americans to purchase land, own businesses, and for their children to attend the Quakertown school.

The first recorded public building in Quakertown was the Fred Douglass School. The application was made for the first free colored school in Denton on October 19, 1876, and the school was established on the corner of Terry and Holt streets by 1878.[2] It can be reasoned that the school was one of the main incentives that drew people to the area and, in turn, the school continued to grow with the community. In 1895, there were 162 students enrolled on the first day of school, the most to start the school year up to that date.[3] Fred Moore, (b. 1 Jan 1875, d. 1 Oct 1953),

principal of the Fred Douglass School beginning in 1915, confirmed the important role of the school by making it part of his educational philosophy: "The community school seeks as its primary purpose to improve the quality of human living, both individual and group."[4] Mr. Moore continued to be a leader in the educational opportunities for the African American population of Denton until his death.

The school building was also used for Quakertown town meetings and gatherings. In 1897, the *Dallas Morning News* reported on the Colored Teacher's County Institute meeting at the school in Quakertown.[5] In September 1913 the school house burned on the night before the first day of class. The cause of the fire was listed as unknown.[6] Classes were held in the basement of St. James African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church[7] until the new school building was finished in June of 1916.[8] As a foreshadowing of things to come, the school was not rebuilt at the original Quakertown location but nearly a mile away in the southeast part of Denton between the tracks of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas and the Texas &Pacific railroads. It is in close proximity of the current Fred Moore School.

Three Quakertown churches were founded not long after the school was established, all of which are still in operation in Denton. While the date of founding for the Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist Church is unknown, Mrs. Irene Price writes about its inception:

> "Our church history is much like Biblical History in that its origins have been orally handed down from one generation to the other. It came to us from a charter member, the late Deacon Marion Mays. In 1884, the Mays family and others of the Baptist faith who wanted to worship God according to their belief, met under a brush arbor near Pecan Creek and organized a church and name it Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist."[9]

St. Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church was also founded in Quakertown. Then known as the Second Baptist Church, it first held services in a temporary outdoor facility until a frame church was built on Sanders Street.[10] Saint James A.M.E. Church moved from Freedman town to Quakertown in the early 1890s.[11] An article from the *Denton County News* published in August 1892 gives a report of a picnic at the Saint James Church near the confluence, where Cottonwood and Pecan Creeks come together, celebrating the laying of the church cornerstone. It is interesting that the article ends with the statement, "There is nothing small about Denton when it comes to holding a picnic, it makes no difference what the color the participants may be."[12]

Picnics, revivals, and other gatherings were an important part of the Quakertown community. Residents were active in their organizations and lodges. The Masonic Joppa Lodge #62 was established in June of 1889 and held meetings on the second floor of Ford Crawford's Grocery Store. The Tabor Lodge #218 was on Terry Street; the Knights of Pythias, Sir Knights and Daughters Lodge, on Oakland; and the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows and the Household of Ruth lodge hall on the corner of Oakland and Holt Streets.[13]

Residents had a sense of pride in the community they affectionately referred to as Quaker.[14] Despite the flooding from the aforementioned creeks, the residents worked to keep the community a clean, healthy place to live. In an article from the October 14, 1915, *Denton Record-Chronicle* about the health and sanitation in the "negro quarters" states that they "have been singularly free from disease the past two or three years."[15] Another article from 1915 reports on the Civic Improvement Committee meeting in Quakertown. Mrs. Jones, Miss Moore, and Mrs. Curtis met with about 30 women interested in the "general cleaning up and beautification of Quakertown."[16] In oral interviews gathered by Denton County Historical

Commission Member Letitia deBurgos in 1990, former Quakertown residents voiced their memories of their community.

> "Most of the residents owned their own homes. Everyone had a garden. Chickens, cows, goats and pigs lived here too. Hunger was not known. Water came from wells and plumbing was an outhouse and a No. 2 washtub; while light was furnished by a kerosene lamp. The streets were dirt and playground for the children. The churches were a strong influence on the citizens and there was very little crime."[17]

By 1920, Quakertown had come into its own as a self supporting neighborhood. According to the 1920 Denton City Directory, there were 32 households along Oakland Avenue. Businesses along Oakland included a grocery store, a drug store, the Allen Restaurant and the Smith Café, St. James African Methodist Church, Henry Maddox's boarding house and the Knights of Pythias Hall. Bell Avenue listed 15 households, including the home of Dr. E. D. Moten, the community's physician, and Skinner Shoe Shop. Along the bisecting streets of Holt, Terry and Sanders, there were 17 households, two churches, a tailor shop, and the Citizens Undertaking parlor.[18]

Many of the Quakertown residents worked as servants in the white households of Denton or as farmers or laborers. They worked in the businesses that surrounded the Denton Square and at the two local universities: the North Texas State Normal College, now the University of North Texas, and the College of Industrial Arts (CIA), now Texas Woman's University. The CIA stood on a hill one block north of Withers Street, the community's northern boundary. The College not only overshadowed Quakertown but its entire future.

The CIA was established on April 6, 1901, when Governor Joseph Sayers signed into law the bill that created the "Texas Industrial Institute and College for the Education of the White Girls of the State of Texas in Arts and Sciences."[19] A 21 member committee was formed to bring the new school to Denton. Made up of some of the most influential men in women in the community and local government, the committee roster included Dr. J. P. Blount, C. C. Bell, J. B. Schmitz, John A Hann, W. A. Ponder, A. C. Owsley, Mrs. A. C. Owsley, J. N. Rayzor W. R. McClurken, J. C. Coit and C. A. Williams.[20] Denton was selected for the location of the new college by 1903, and building of the "Girl's Industrial College of Texas" was underway.[21] In 1905 the name of the college changed again to the College of Industrial Arts.

Michele Glaze, the author of *The Quakertown Story*, writes about the growing college: "The young school was faced with an ever-increasing need for expanded facilities and under the guidance of President F. M. Bralley, began to court state officials in Austin in a bid to win legislative appropriations and recognition as a full-fledged liberal arts college."[22] It appears that the proximity of Quakertown to the all-white women's college was a barrier to obtaining that designation. On November 18, 1920, Dr. Bralley spoke to the local Rotarians about the ways that the two universities and the City of Denton could help each other. He specifically mentioned Quakertown in his speech, stating, "It [Denton] could rid the college of the menace of the negro quarters in close proximity to the college and thereby remove the danger that is always present so long as the situation remains as it is and that could be done in a business way and without friction."[23]

"In a business way and without friction" seemed to lend itself well to a valid civic need in Denton, the establishment of a park system. Articles had regularly appeared in the *Denton Record-Chronicle* calling for the creation of a city park. In 1913 one editor states, "There are

several locations reasonably central which could be obtained at no great expense and which, at little cost, could be transformed into beauty spots which the entire citizenship would appreciate."[24] Coupled with the need for a park there was a call for a fair ground. In an article published March 1, 1917, Felix M. Reeves, secretary of the chamber of commerce was quoted, "… the thing to do is to get busy and buy a tract of land for park purposes on which this County Exhibit can be held."[25] Social clubs also recognized the need for a park system. At a meeting of the Shakespeare Club in February of 1917, Mrs. A. C. Owsley "told of a natural scenic area in the city which should be made a city park."[26] C. J. Foster, Jr., expert of the Department of Agriculture, spent a week in Denton making a survey of the trees along principal streets in March 1919. It was his recommendation that Denton should have a Tree and Park Commission.[27] By December 1920 with the support of the Chamber of Commerce,[28] the Federation of Women's Clubs,[29] the Rotary Club,[30] the Denton County Livestock Association,[31] and the City of Denton, the campaign had grown into a full-fledged movement.

The first mention of Quakertown as the chosen park site was published in the *Denton Record-Chronicle* on December 29, 1920. The article announced the intent of the Chamber of Commerce to petition the City Commission to add a $75,000 bond election, to the April 5, 1921, ballot for purchase and improvement of a city park and a coliseum for a fair and livestock show.[32] It is interesting to note that in the same issue of the paper there is a small article that reads: "As an aftermath of what was reported to the officers to have been a free-for-all after the meeting of a negro lodge in Quaker Monday night, five charges of aggravated assault were filed in the County Court Tuesday afternoon against as many negro men. Reports stated a number of negro women were connected with the fight but no charges have been filed against them."[33]

While it is only speculation, it is possible that the topic that sparked the altercation is related to the decision of the park site. If so, this small article may give us insight to the true feelings of the Quakertown residents to the purchase of their land. Nevertheless, a petition was announced on January 18, 1921.[34] Due in part to an intensive house to house campaign by the members of the City Federation of Women's Clubs,[35] the park issue was set to appear on the April ballot.

On the day before the vote an article appeared on the front page of the *Denton Record-Chronicle* encouraging citizens to vote for the bonds that would be used to purchase the Quakertown lands and create the park system. Entitled, "Vote for the Good of the Order"[36] and written by a regular columnist H. F. Browder who used the pen name "The Loafer",[37] the article gave insight into the park campaign. The focus of the piece was about the benefit the park would provide for the community as well as why the Quakertown community was a justified selection.

In the last section of the article, Browder revealed the real reason that Quakertown was doomed:

> "We promised the state of Texas when the CIA was located here that this part of town should be improved and made a beauty spot. That promise is twenty years old and has not been fulfilled. Texas has carried out her part of the contract and placed one of the greatest assets this town ever had on the ground selected on that blustery March day but Denton has failed to perform her part of the contract and at this late day is just awakened to the fact that a committee of good men representing us told the committee that located the school here that a park would be placed along the shores of Pecan creek and made a beauty spot."

On April 5, 1921, the vote was put to the citizens of Denton. When the results were counted, it ran 367 to 240 in favor of establishment of a park system.[38]

The day after the election an editorial appeared in the *Denton Record-Chronicle* calling on the white citizens of Denton to "give the negroes the benefit of unselfish assistance in protecting them from profiteering."[39] Two days later, April 8 1921, a committee was formed to arrange a "mass meeting to be held by the Negroes at an early date … for the purpose of discussing what location will be acceptable to them." Even with the acknowledgment that the Quakertown residents should have some say in where they relocate, the article goes on to report that the City Commissioners agreed that they "were favorable to a segregation district for the negroes in order that they may be protected for the future."[40] The Quakertown residents appointed on April 14 to the committee to locate new sites were, J. W. Burr, chairman, M. Mays, Ross Hembry and E. D. Jones, secretary.[41] The Quakertown committee appeared before the City Commissioners with recommendations for sites for relocation on April 29, 1921.[42] While the sites the Quakertown committee selected are not known, the events of the following year reveal that their recommendations may have been a moot point.

By September 1921 the City was ready to move ahead with the purchase of the Quakertown land. A committee composed of W. B. McClurkan, W. C. Orr and Fred Minor was established and provided with the 1920 property tax assessments to use as a guide for the transactions. The committee was charged with visiting with the property owners and purchasing the property if they could agree on a reasonable price.[43] A Park Board was also appointed that same month.[44] But little else could be done until the City sold the bonds in April 1922 for a total of $72,000.[45] The first plots of land were purchased from the homeowners in May of 1922.[46]

Quakertown residents had the choice of selling their property outright or to have the city move their house to the new settlement location.[47] As the first lots of property were being purchased by the city, there had not been a new site selected. Henry Maddox was one of the first Quakertown

residents to sell his property to the city. He sold four lots and the hotel building for $4,000.00 with the option to move three small houses to his new land.[48] In June he purchased 20 acres of land east of the CIA[49]

In the meantime, two petitions had started circulating. The first petition asked that the new settlement be located south of McKinney Street, quoting Dr. F. M. Bralley as saying "that if they were allowed to settle east of the CIA we would have about the same condition we are trying to remedy by buying their property for a park site."[50] The second petition asked that the new settlement be located near the Fred Douglass School.[51] Two anonymous notes were found in Quakertown warning the residents not to move east of the CIA The notes read "Negroes Take Notice…. No building, no moving east of CIA, north of the R.R. or south of Jase Walker's. Those already there will be given time to sell there (sic) property and move. Understand?"[52]

It was on the same day that B. M. Hammett and George Elbert went to visit Henry Maddox at his new property. They informed Mr. Maddox that it was unacceptable for him to move to that area and were concerned because he planned to sale plots of land to other Negro families. They told him not to move his houses to that location and that they would facilitate the sale of the land, stating that Mr. Maddox would get the amount he paid for it.[53] By August 2, deed records show that Mr. Maddox had purchased land in the Moore's addition near the Fred Douglass School.[54] Within two short years 72-year-old Mr. Maddox went from holding the position of a prosperous business man to living in a section of town known as "Shack Town."[55]

It was still unclear where the displaced residents would settle until July 15, 1922 when rancher Albert L. Miles platted 21 acres in the southeast part of Denton. The new addition, named Solomon Hill, was to be sold exclusively to the former Quakertown residents as an acceptable

site to relocate.[56] Mrs. Norvell Reed was a child when her family moved from Quakertown. While she was not old enough at the time to remember the move, the stories of the move were handed down in her family. In an interview conducted in 1988 she recalls:

> "I was actually born up there where the city park is now. Blacks were living there. Of course, that was near the college, and as the college began to grow and everything, well, they moved blacks out. Then that's when they divided, and some bought in that section over between the tracks, and then others bought out in this section. The guy who sold this land was Mr. Miles; he was a white landowner. When he first sold this land, the first house that was built out here, well, a group burned it because they didn't want this sold to blacks. But he got up a group, and he told some of the black guys that were buying some of the land that if they would come with him, then he would see that they were protected after they built their homes. Some of the people moved their little homes from over there where the city park is."[57]

Through the summer and fall the residents relocated to the new community. The churches were rebuilt; homes and buildings were moved across town on sled-like runners atop of large rollers.[58] As the area was established the residents continued to face challenges. Some of the white residents were unhappy that Miles had offered his property for the new settlement. Hooded riders visited the area.[59] Members of a revival meeting were pelted with eggs.[60]

More than 60 families lost their homes. Many of the residents did relocate to southeast Denton, but many left the area entirely. The Crawford family moved to Kansas. Angelina Burr, her daughter Cora Logan and husband John Logan moved to Los Angeles. Dr. Moten and his family moved to Indiana.[61] One group of residents even established a "Back to Liberia" movement with

plans to use the funds gained by the sale of their property to establish a colony in West Africa.[62] Those that remained behind began turning a cow pasture into a home. An editorial published April 1921 in the *Denton Record-Chronicle* praised the Negro community saying; "The Negro citizens have been fortunate in the class of leaders they have had among their own race."[63] Ironically, many of those leaders were the businessmen who moved out of state. Not only did the African American community lose the core of its leadership, it lost many of its neighborhood businesses, and families lost members who had married into the families that left Denton.

By February 1923 the park land was being cleared and Quakertown had disappeared.[64]

As the years passed, Quakertown faded from the official history of Denton but never faded from the collective memory of the residents of Southeast Denton. Their distrust of the white city leadership was evident in the 1960s as the Denton Christian Women's Interracial Fellowship worked to bring paved roads to the Southeast Denton community. The women conducted a door-to-door campaign to convince the residents to enter into a contract with the City to pay a partial cost of the paving. According to the interview with Mrs. Reed, many of the residents would not sign because they felt like it was some kind of trick.[65]

Their distrust was justified. In 1902, promises were made by members of the committee securing the location of the CIA in Denton that were not theirs to make. Denton benefited from the establishment of the college, but at what cost? How would Denton be different if this strong African American community had been allowed to continue to grow?

Quakertown became a part of the regional history when it was "rediscovered" by local historians in the late 1980s.[66] As knowledge of the Quakertown story grew, Denton began to belatedly recognize the events in its past. A Denton County Historic Landmark Marker was placed in the

Civic Center Park at the approximate location of the Fred Douglass School in 1991.[67] In 2006 the name of the park was changed to Quakertown Park, to honor the Quakertown community.[68] Two of the churches from Quakertown have had Texas State Historical markers erected at their present day locations. Saint James African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1107 East Oak Street, marker number 4442 was placed in 1985 and St. Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church, 509 Lakey Street, marker number 13563 was placed in 2006.

In 2008 the Denton County Historical Commission moved one of the remaining houses that once stood in Quakertown to the Historical Park of Denton County and restored the house. It is now the Denton County African American Museum.[69] A Denton County Historical Commission Landmark marker was dedicated for the Quakertown House in February 2009.

A Texas State Historical Subject Marker placed in the park where the community of Quakertown once thrived will serve to keep the history of the African American experience in Denton alive.

I. Documentation

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