

Grange Hall Cemetery

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Grange Hall Cemetery is located on a tree-covered hillside about twelve miles northwest of Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas, on Farm Road 1930. Native grasses grow in the red soil and help prevent erosion. At the foot of the hill, to the east, a small stream winds its way through the country side. Early settlers called it Cryer Creek, because of a waterfall which made the sound of a woman's crying. Nearby, a small village sprang up and it was named Cryer Creek also. However, the waterfall vanished long ago and the death knell sounded for Cryer Creek in 1963, when Mama Minnie Garlington died and her General Store closed after seventy-two years of continuous operation. Meanwhile, the little stream flows onward in a northeasterly direction and, at its confluence with Chambers Creek, it too loses its identity.

To the west a lodge hall, a school, and a church were at the top of the hill while the churchyard extended down the hillside toward the creek. At intervals, in the stillness of this rural setting, one might hear the singing of birds, the lowering of cattle, the swishing sound of the wind as it passes through the trees, the droning of a tractor, or the hum of a passing automobile. Otherwise, there is little else to disturb the quietness surrounding this burying ground chosen by the pioneers for their dead.

No doubt this cemetery derived its name from the Grange, a lodge with a membership composed of the agrarian class, for Cryer Creek was indeed a farming community. This organization, once so active, no longer exists in this locality. The Grange evolved into the People's or Populist Party but that was of short duration. However, the Grange is still popular in some parts of the country.

On 10 April 1851, Thomas Capps received a land grant of 640 acres located in the Grange Hall area. This property was transferred to David R. Mitchell soon thereafter. On 10 November 1854, Samuel Wilson bought the 640 acres. Samuel and Siddy Wilson and six of their eleven children had come to Navarro County in 1847 from Bourbon County, Kentucky. There Wilson was a distiller but was engaged in farming and stock-raising after moving to Texas. The 640 acres remained in the possession of the Wilson heirs for about sixty years when it was sold to Frank N. Drane in 1911.

On 30 January 1875, Samuel Wilson gave two acres of the Capps Survey to M. N. Jones and his successors for the use and benefit of a public school. Jones was director of District 5 where Cryer Creek School was to be located. This deed was witnessed by J. B. Armstrong and W. W. Burris and acknowledged by D. Maggard, Justice of the Peace and Notary Public.

Then 9 June 1877, Samuel Wilson gave land adjoining the school land for a Methodist Church. In part the deed reads:

..... for and in consideration of the love I bear for the cause of Christ and from an earnest desire to promote His (sic) heritage on earth, do give and grant unto W. J. Grant, B. H. Badgett, R. Grantham, W. B. Thompson, and R. S. Stokes, trustees of the Dresden Circuit North West (sic) Conference (sic) of the Methodist Episcopal Church South a certain tract or parcel of land containing two acres.

The deed was witnessed by P. A. Wilson and John Callicutt. The acknowledgment was signed by S. H. Kerr, Clerk of the County Court.

Although the land for the church, which included a churchyard, was not given until 1877, a number of persons were buried on the property prior to 1877. According to the inscriptions on the stones, Nancy J., wife of J. F. Watson, Lott Wilson, son of Samuel and Siddy Wilson, and two Phillips infants were buried in 1872. Others were buried in 1873, 1874, 1875, and 1876. Most of these were infants. Samuel Wilson had made no legal provision for a cemetery on his property, the Capps Survey.

On 30 May 1916, Cryer Creek School District #24 was re-established nearer the village of Cryer Creek where a new building

was erected. In February of 1917, the Commissioners Court of Navarro County ordered John B. Davis, County Superintendent of Public Instruction of Navarro County and D. T. Collins and C. O. Williams, trustees of Grange Hall Common School District #24, to sell the two acres of school land to the Grange Hall Cemetery Association for the sum of \$100.00. This was the same land in the Capps Survey conveyed by Samuel Wilson to M. N. Jones and his successors in office for the use and benefit of a public school. This deed was acknowledged by W. W. Ballew, Notary Public.

The trustees of Grange Hall Cemetery Association, W. B. Rutherford, L. J. McGraw, and Alex Bryant, sold one acre of the old school land to the Grange Hall Methodist Church trustees, Everett Bryant, Will Boyd, J. T. Pullin, Henry Nicholson, and E. D. Ingram, for the sum of \$10.00. This acre of land was located in the southwest corner of the school land and across the public road from the cemetery. This deed was acknowledged by J. R. Griffin, Notary Public.

The Methodist Church at Grange Hall disbanded in 1934. Soon thereafter, 10 May 1937, the Conference at the First Methodist Church of Blooming Grove, Texas, authorized the trustees of Grange Hall Methodist Church to sell the one acre of land purchased in 1934 back to Grange Hall Cemetery for the sum of \$10.00. J. R. Griffin, Notary Public, signed the acknowledgment.

W. H. Livingston and Marshall Massengale, acting as Grantors for the Grange Hall Cemetery, sold to the Texas State Highway Commission part of the original Grange Hall School lot so that the new Farm-to-Market Road 2930 could be straightened to avoid the sharp angles. This transaction involved 1,576 acres. This deed was acknowledged 22 March 1965, and signed by a Notary Public, name not legible.

The Association which functioned so effectively for so many years was discontinued. A well-kept cemetery with a caretaker became overgrown with shrubs, trees, weeds, brambles, poison ivy, and matted grasses where bumble bees built their nests. Except for a few family plots kept by members of the family or paid workers, it was a sad picture of neglect. Old records were lost or destroyed but, in spite of this sorry state, the cemetery remained in use. Then one day a near miracle occurred.

About fifty descendants or friends of those buried in the cemetery met 20 April 1980, and another association was organized. Mrs. A. M. Shows became president, Lee Williams, vice-president, Charles Leslie Johnson, secretary and reporter, and Roy Massengale, treasurer. Board members chosen were Elizabeth Shows, Claude Maggard, Charlie Joe Armstrong, Billy Butler, Roy Massengale, Charlie Boyd, Lee Williams, Ernest McGraw, Octa Cook, and Charles Leslie Johnson. Volunteers met for all-day work sessions and soon had the old cemetery bearing some resemblance of its past appearance. Of the approximately 350 graves, some were marked with rocks or stakes but most had stones. Many had to be raised, repaired and cleaned. The enthusiasm has continued and a paid caretaker has taken charge while they are working toward perpetual care. The last Saturday in April was set as the date for the annual meeting and at a location commensurate with the Texas Weather.

There was a large influx of settlers to this area from the South following the War Between the States. The Mississippi Colony came in 1869-1870 from Meridan, Mississippi. Among them was Captain David Maggard, a Virginian, with his family, including son, John, who also fought with his father in the conflict. John, soldier at age sixteen, lost a leg. Unfortunately, he is not buried at Grange Hall. The Brown, Williams, Stokes, Ransom families, and others came. Other soldiers, beside Captain David Maggard, are buried here and who fought in this Civil War are: B. F. Dyer, W. W. McGraw, Sgt. John S. Russell, John Watson Tinkle, John E. West, G. W. Williams, Lieut. Andrew P. Wilson, and William T. Wilson, son of Samuel Wilson. Since Grange Hall has been put in good repair again, all those who have ties here feel that it is a fitting refuge for their dead.

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Grange Hall Cemetery Association
W. W. Ballew
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