



Freedmen's Towns in Dallas

The Freedmens town movement involved the establishment of communities by formerly enslaved African Americans in the United States, mostly organized after the Civil War and emancipation in 1865. These settlements, often called “Freedmen’s Towns” or “Freedom Colonies,” were created as areas where African Americans could live independently, build self sufficient communities, and exercise newfound independence away from outside control. The movement is most closely associated with the communities in the post war South, but similar communities emerged across the U.S. There were several Freedmen’s towns and neighborhoods in Dallas and Dallas County. The list of towns usually includes those noted below:

- North Dallas (Uptown/State-Thomas). This was one of the earliest African American communities, located just outside what was then the Dallas city limits. A rough description of the boundaries might be from east of the Houston & Texas Central railroad along Hall Street between Thomas Avenue and Flora Street and on the west side of the tracks between Cochran and Flora streets westward to Pearl Street.
- Tenth Street (Oak Cliff). This location is Dallas’ 12th historic district, as adopted in 1993. It is noted as being one of the few Freedman’s Towns in the country that remains virtually intact. Homes date from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The **National Register of Historic Places** describes its boundaries as follows: The area is roughly bounded by R.L. Thornton Freeway (Interstate 35E) on the west, East 8th Street on the north, and the former Interurban Railway right-of-way and Clarendon Drive on the southeast.
- Little Egypt (North of White Rock). This area is no longer in existence after residents sold their property to developers in the early 1960s. It was a virtually self contained community with residences, at least one church, shops and other services. Egypt, or Little Egypt, was an area of around 35 acres, located just north of the currently existing roads of Northwest Highway, between Ferndale and Audelia, north of White Rock Lake, around the intersection of Thurgood Lane and Shoreview Road.
- Deep Ellum (North of Downtown). Located just outside the old downtown area, adjacent to the North Dallas Freedman’s town. It mainly served the African American community as a place of entertainment and culture. Its boundaries may roughly be described as north of Canton Street, east of Good Street, south of Elm Street and west of Hall Street. May not have had any significant amount of residences, so it might be more apt for it to be considered a business district and essentially part of North Dallas.
- Joppa/Joppee (South Dallas). An early African American settlement currently not designated as a historic district of the City of Dallas. It is another mostly still intact community that had its origin as a Freedmen’s town around 1870.

Using existing roads and landmarks, its boundaries are roughly described as follows: north of the Trinity River, east of the Trinity River wetlands, south of the Union Pacific rail line and west of the Southern Pacific rail lines.

- Bear Creek (Irving). Founded after the Civil War. It had churches, a cemetery and at least one school which later became part of Irving Independent School District.

There are other neighborhoods that were settled largely by formerly enslaved people and their descendants, including the following:

- Stringtown – Name given to the area between Deep Ellum and North Dallas
- Elm Thicket – North of Love Field. Its rough boundaries were Lemmon Avenue, West Lovers Lane, Inwood Road and West Mockingbird Lane.
- Bon Ton – South Dallas neighborhood in the vicinity of Hatcher Street, Malcolm X and South Central Expressway.
- Fair Park – Neighborhood around Fair Park.
- Alpha – Small neighborhood in far north Dallas County.
- Queen City Heights – Roughly bounded by Pennsylvania, Pine, what is now S. M. Wright Freeway and Myrtle Street.
- Wheatley Place – A small neighborhood that began a few blocks northeast of Queen City Heights.

As the city has grown, many of these neighborhoods have been divided up to accommodate freeways, streets and rail lines. Others have given way to commercial development or multifamily residential growth.

Illustration by Theo R. Davis



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