



Mills Cemetery

By Frances James (1922 – 2019)

The Mills Cemetery at 1925 Commerce in Garland is near the intersection of Bankhead Highway and Centerville Road. To the east is the Rowlett Creek Preserve and Mill Creek, just south of the cemetery, empties into this greenbelt area. The over two acre Mills Cemetery and the expansion across the road are near the northeast corner of Ohio native Edward Mills' Peters Colony land grant Abstract No. 952.

Transportation difficulties were of primary concern for the emigrants. Their objective was to acquire land they had heard was available through Mercer Colony or Peters Colony in the 1840s. There were very few routes the emigrants could take. This wagon road that crossed Muddy Creek was the route between Garland, Rowlett, Pleasant Valley, Liberty Grove and other settlements north of Rowlett. It became the right of way for the Bankhead Highway, (now Highway 66), when it was paved in the 1920s.

Many of the families important to the development of the Northeast portion of Dallas County have family members buried in the Mills Cemetery. When the Edward Mills (1805-1871) family came to Texas before 1848 they acquired this particular one hundred and forty acres with trees near water - both of these were a necessity. Three of Edward Mill's oldest sons, Hope, John, and James, all born in Ohio, were over seventeen years old and each of them also qualified for land from Peters Colony.

Sometime after James was born in 1832 the Mills family had gone from Ohio to Kentucky where two daughters Ruth Ann in 1835 and Lydia in 1837, were born. Sarah Hunter Mills (1806-1842) the first wife of Edward Mills was the mother of seven children before she died.

Edward was married for the second time to Kentucky native Elizabeth Collins (1820-1854) and they had two children, Virginia in 1845, Robert Thomas in 1846, born in Kentucky before coming to Texas. Another son, William was born in 1850 in Texas. As family number twenty-five on the 1850 census Edward is listed as a wagonmaker and at that time the three oldest boys were still living at home with Edward and his second wife Elizabeth and the five younger children. Four years later in 1854 Elizabeth died and was the first person to be buried in the Mills Cemetery.

Edward Mills was married for a third time in 1854 to Mrs. Martha Ann Sturdivan (1828-1881), a widow with two daughters, Sarah (1848) and Julia (1852). Martha Ann and Edward then had five children, Henry C. 1856, William 1859, Suripta 1861,

Nancy Matilda 1863, and Margaret 1866. Edward died in June 22, 1871 and is buried in the Mills Cemetery. There is a headstone for him and the names of both of his wives who died in Texas are on it. Edward's widow, Martha Ann, and their daughter, Margaret, lived with their son, William, and his family until Martha's death in 1881. She is buried next to Elizabeth.

John Clark Jacobs' mother, Sarah, was from England and his father was a doctor in Newark, Ohio. The family had moved to Independence, Arkansas in 1848 where Sarah died and left Dr. Jacobs with four young children. Dr. Jacobs took his children to relatives in Vermont and New York. John Clark stayed in New York and Vermont for three years and then went to Grand Rapids, Michigan to work at a store owned by an uncle and while there he learned the trade of general mechanic. In 1853, J. C. came to Texas and was living in Rockwall where he met and married Ruth Ann Mills in 1857. They moved to Dallas County and purchased land near Duck Creek where they raised their seven children. John Clark enlisted with the Confederate forces in 1862 in Co. A, 31st Texas Calvary, Hawpe's Regiment. John Clark's brother, Edwin A. Jacobs, served in the Union Army. When the war ended John Clark returned to Ruth Ann and their farm and started over. He built a house and a shop where they lived. Ruth Ann died in 1898 and is buried in the Mills Cemetery. Jacobs married for the second time in 1901 to widow Ruthie Ballenger Groves (1844). In 1923 when John Clark died he was buried next to Ruth Ann at the Mills Cemetery.

Edward Mills' fourth son, Robert T. Mills (1846-1927) is buried between his two wives, both headstones say "wife of" Robert T. Mills. Malissa (1844-1867) and Martha (1848-1908). Their baby, Robert T. was born in February 1867 when his mother Malissa died but the baby lived until September 1867 and is buried next to his mother.

Robert T. Mills gave the cemetery to the City of Garland before 1925. The Mills Foundation was established to maintain it. A sign on the gate for many years said "Garland Cemetery, C.S. Nelson and C.A. Weaver promoters, 1925." Mr. Nelson and members of his family are buried in the cemetery and Mr. Weaver was the owner of the land adjacent and south of the cemetery.

This cemetery was used by friends as well as family members. There are headstones for burials as early as the 1860s and 1870s. There are many of Edward Mills' descendants buried here. Centerville Road passes the original cemetery and the section on the east side of old Centerville Road was provided for expansion,

Veterans are buried in this cemetery from the civil war to glider pilots in WWII and Viet Nam. In the inventory made in 1982, there were over 100 veteran's graves. Their families wanted them near to the areas where they had lived. For Instance, George Belcher (1891-1918) died while held a prisoner of war in a German camp during World War I. There is a head stone for him.

Henderson Coyle Sr. came to Texas from Arkansas in 1854 and settled on the 320 acres of land he had received through Peters Colony. He married and this family eventually owned large sections of land in the area. They were important in the development of the town Rowlett. His son, Henderson Coyle Jr., married a Mills granddaughter, Nancy Matilda Mills. They are both buried in this cemetery. Their daughter, Lou Mia (Luvillia) Coyle Halsall drowned in 1915 in an attempt to save her fourteen year old daughter, Tommie, who had fallen in Rowlett Creek. They are buried side by side. Other members of the Coyle family are found in this cemetery.

Several other tragedies occurred and are noted on the headstones. Roy Groves and his friend Clifford Hall drowned when their boat sunk while they were fishing in 1929.

The Smiley family was killed by a tornado on May 9, 1927. Belle Hall Smiley and her husband Charles Oscar Smiley, and their children, Lileth Merle, age 13, Greeta Mae, age 12, and Charlene, an infant, are all buried in the family plot.

Many members of the interesting Charles Axe family are buried here. In the memoirs of Garland written by Martha Catherine Jones James (1851-1931) usually called Kate, and transcribed by her great granddaughters, Dorothy Olinger Range and Mimi Olinger Davis, Kate says that Reverend Abner Keen was building a new house, the finest looking house in the country, but he "took sick" and died in his log cabin before the house was finished. Mrs. Will Axe now owns the land she said.

Charles Christian "Karl" Axe (1831-1898) came to America at the age of 19, leaving his parents in Germany and landing in New Orleans. Karl was a blacksmith and a wheelwright in New Orleans and this is where he met his wife, Charlotte (1835-1899). Her family had immigrated to America when she six years old from Hanover, Germany. The Axe family of thirteen children consisting of seven girls and six boys came to the Dallas area in July and acquired the property later owned by his grandson, Raymond Axe. They lived in Dallas for a few months while waiting to take possession of the property in Garland. During this time Karl was involved in the organization and building of the Zion Lutheran Church in downtown Dallas. While in Dallas their daughter Josephine (1858-1874) died. Her headstone, with a cross on it and a German inscription, was inventoried in 1921 in Dallas' Downtown Pioneer Cemetery next to the Convention Center. In 1921 no one knew who the parents of this little girl were.

An article in Garland paper dated March 4, 1938 titled, "Axe Home Being Razed," described the construction of the Karl's original house. At the time of the article the owner's grandson, Raymond Axe, intended to incorporate some of the original material in the new house he was building.

The article describes the house as two rooms with a hall running between them to which four more had been added. The corner posts were hewn out of one solid oak post approximately twelve inches thick. The studs and rafters were of cedar. The floors were laid on solid oak posts and joints were put together with bois d' arc pegs.

In the Axe family there were seven girls; Josephine 1858, Jennie 1859, Annie 1862, Mary 1864, Maggie 1871, Louise 18??, Lizzie 1882, and six boys; Charles Christian 1860, John 1866, Fred 1868, Henry 1874, Will L. 1876. At the time of the 1938 article there were four of the girls alive but only one son and he died later that year. Many members of this large family are buried in the Mills Cemetery.

Among the pioneers buried in this cemetery are members of the Bortolo Chiesa (1824-1896) family who came to Texas from Zurich, Switzerland. There is a road that intersect I-30 and Hwy. 66 named for this family. The land they farmed was near the intersection of Centerville and Miller Road. They purchased Hope Mills land after he died in 1863. A community developed in the vicinity named Morris. Their home place was where the Morris post office was before it was moved to Rowlett and, became the first post office in Rowlett. Ida Chiesa (1851-1918) came to America when she was nineteen and married John Chiesa the son of Bortolo. When she died her obituary said she had lived in the area for sixty seven years and that she died from "stomach trouble." Ida Cheisa was survived by two daughters and four sons. Several members of this family are buried in the Mills Cemetery.

The Herfurth family was very involved in the Rowlett area of Dallas County. In the 1890s John Samuel (1879-1958) discovered the fertile land and abundant water in this part of Texas. He went back to Medina County west of San Antonio and persuaded his parents, Anna B. (1846-1925) and John C. (1835-1914) to come to Rowlett.

John Samuel was just twenty years old but rented and later purchased a farm that is now the Elgin B. Robertson Park on Lake Ray Hubbard. John Samuel was recognized a happy, hard working young man who played the fiddle for local dances. He met and married Bertie Mae Roan in 1906. Their first baby was born and died in 1907, son John William was born in 1908, and Carl Leroy was born in 1910. The young mother, Bertie Mae, died in 1921 as did the twin boys Roy Derwin and Clay Erwin.

John Samuel traded the first farm for another larger one in the Hope Mills and T Collins surveys south of Miller Road. His parents continued to live in the Herfurth home that still stands at 2122 Miller Road. John Samuel worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Dallas County Extension Agent, A.B. Jolly and later Murray Cox taking their suggestions and rotating crops to preserve the fertile land. He traveled over the nation as a county delegate learning and sharing the new concepts of farming. His out buildings and farm equipment were always in good shape and stored neatly. He served on the School Board and as a Committeeman for the city of Rowlett. He and Bertie Mae are buried in the Mills Cemetery.

The two sons, Carl Leroy, who was a Major in the U.S. Field artillery in WWII and his wife Helen Hall Herfurth, and John William and his wife Selena Herfurth are also buried in the Mills Cemetery John William had attended AM and became a civil engineer. He was elected mayor of Rowlett twice and is credited with keeping the post office in Rowlett and most other good events that happened in the seventy five years he lived in the area. His wife was a charter member of the Rowlett Historical Society, served in the Home Demonstration Club, and chair of the council's Education Expansion Committee and other civic organizations.

It would take a book focused on this one cemetery to contain the stories of all these pioneers who are buried in this cemetery. They came from other countries, other counties and other sections of America and became neighbors and friends. Their families are now scattered but this beautiful spot under the large cedar trees is a constant reminder of the pioneers who settled in this section of Dallas County.

Burials are still allowed in this cemetery that is maintained by the Foundation that is controlled by the Williams Funeral Home of Garland.



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