



EL RANCHO GRANDE/TRINITY FARM CEMETERY

By Frances James (1922 – 2019)

The small cemetery known as El Rancho Grande or Trinity Farms is behind some houses on Lee Hall Street behind St. Paul Hospital near I-35. The cemetery is very near the street known as Record Crossing, which is exactly what it was, a hard surface low water crossing for anyone heading west, perhaps for the Gold Rush in California, before the bridges on the Trinity River were built. The Trinity Farm that started in 1917 covered one of these tracts, part of the Hiram Bennett Abstract No. 83. Georgia native Bennett (1798 – 1888) who had moved from Georgia to Alabama in 1833 to Arkansas in 1840 and to Texas in 1845 was just in time to get 620 acres – just not all in one piece.

Deed records reveal the owners of the farm had started to assemble the land by 1917. This was not the only farm like this that the owners of the Trinity farm Company operated. There was one in Tarrant County and Kaufman County also. A consortium of three men, E. P. Harwell of Tulsa, Oklahoma, C. H. Clark of Wichita Falls, Texas and T. H. Harbin of Waxahachie, Texas were the owners of the Company. Mr. Harbin directed most of the operations.

Mr. Harwell, a native of Ovilla, Texas had started in the oil business before 1900. The McMan Oil and Gas Company had flourished until 1916 when they sold out to Magnolia Petroleum Company for \$39,000,000. Mr. Harwell received about \$6,000,000 for his share and he and his wife moved to Tulsa. His wife, Mary, was from Midlothian.

On this large expanse of the flood plain of the Trinity River over one hundred acres of Bennett's survey provided much of the fertile soil used as farmland. Agricultural levees were built and for much of the year, crops were planted as well as orchards. Peach and pecan trees were grown. This farm was labor intensive and much of the labor force were Mexican workers who had come across the Rio Grande looking for a way to make a living. During World War I, these eager workers were given a green card to permit them to work in the United States. There were also Black farm workers who had come to the Dallas area from rural areas of the South that found jobs on this plantation.

The Trinity Farm Company ran this farm like a plantation, providing houses for the workers and a segregated school, one room for Blacks and one room for Mexicans. Priests and sisters from the Catholic Church came out to the site from time to time. During World War I these young men were drafted to serve in the army. The owners of the farm also provided a segregated site for a cemetery, one side for Blacks and one for the Mexicans. There are approximately fifty graves in this site.

When the bonds were finally passed to build the levees along the Trinity River to protect Dallas in the 1930s, Trinity Industrial Company, John Stemmons and his brother, Leslie purchased all this land and the farm was shut down.

The descendants of the families, who were born on the Trinity Farm, maintain the small cemetery where their ancestors are buried. One descendant, who retired from the City of Dallas, stated that he was glad the teacher at the one room school house required all the students to speak English. He said he never had a problem getting a job. Another was able to go to work for one of the large glass companies in Dallas, and participated with Octavio Medallin, the Mexican Artist, in making some of the beautiful stained glass and other mosaics in the Mercantile Bank Building, at Calvary Hill Cemetery and other sites. Another has his own Mexican restaurant and caters for various occasions.

The El Rancho Grande Cemetery is just another part of Dallas County History to be preserved for all times.

James, Frances, "Dallas County History – From the Ground Up, Vol. I," 2007.

Cemetery Entrance



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