

A HISTORY OF OAKWELL FARMS

BY

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Mr. Skaggs still lives in Oakwell Farms.

The first resident to move into Oakwell Farms was Frances and Alan Hidell in 1983.

Frances passed away in June 2012.

If you have been digging in your flower bed or planting a shrub in your yard, you may have found what most of us call a flint stone. This may have been a triangular shaped dart point or a small slab from a lithic (stone) tool. These pieces can date back to 7,000 B.C. to the early period of hunter-gatherers who roamed this area along its creeks and springs. Some Native American may have chased an animal across your yard before the pyramids were built. Descendents of these archaic hunters continued in traversing the Oakwell area into the historic period when branches of the Comanche and/or Apache were known to inhabit the land as temporary residents.

Other than these periodic hunting and camping expeditions of the American natives, we know very little about the area prior to circa 1850. Several archeological digs were conducted by the University of Texas and unearthed what is termed as lithic scatter. This material contains stone tools, scrapers, cores and flakes indicating temporary occupation over a long period of time. While quarries, work sites and campsites were found, there was no evidence of any major occupations. Many of these sites were found near Salado Creek, paralleling Ira Lee and Campden Circle. A major site near Salado Creek and Loop 410 known as the Gran- berg Site was explored in the 1960s. At this site at least eight burials were found along with the bones of bison, deer and turtle and quantities of oyster shells. Large mollusk shells were unearthed with holes drilled in them indicating the contents had been sucked out. This was the original way of dining on escargot. Archeological evidence shows that Salado Creek had once been a river. Many types of stone points were found having modern names such as Nolan, Travis, Castroville, Bulverde and many others. In more recent days flint stones and metal ax heads have been found along, the drainage areas.

Within modern history there is no record available showing any individual ownership of the present area prior to 1847. Old Bexar District maps refer to the area as "Heirs of Zambrano" and probably was part of an old Spanish land grant. The reference to Heirs of Zambrano may be to descendents of either Dario Zambrano, a part time priest, or to his brother Juan Manuel Zambrano who was also a church official. Both of these men have been accused of licentious behavior.

Dario Zambrano escaped the cloth and became a real father several times. Juan Manuel was retired from his clerical work to his ranch a few miles east of San Fernando but was back in the political scene shortly. When he died he left his land to Guadeloupe de la Garza and her two sons whom he identified as his own.

Historical markers at the confluence of Salado Creek and Austin Highway and located just outside the Bitterblue Gate tell about the Battle of Salado and what is known as the Dawson Massacre. Although the main thrust of these events occurred further down the creek, there is strong evidence that reconnaissance and skirmishes were conducted on the southern part of Oakwell Farms near the location of the markers. Controversy still exists over the exact location of these battles. Old maps don't pinpoint the sites but they do show a later road running through the property and naming it the Austin Road.

The first owner of record was Bonifacio Rodriguez who was a resident citizen of Texas but apparently an absentee land-lord. This original tract contained from 1,200 to 1,300 acres. The land changed hands several times in the next few years which was typical of the era since there were many land speculators around during the early days of Texas state hood. One speculator held the property only one day! The one-day owner conveyed the title to Mrs. Caroline Campbell who owned the property for the next twenty-five years. It was during this time that it became known as Campbell Ranch. Mrs. Campbell's husband, Robert B. Campbell, was consul in London in the 1850s. The Campbells were natives of South Carolina, so again we have absentee landlords. Lucius Campbell, brother of Robert, was apparently the first resident of the property and it probably was on a part time basis. Caroline Campbell, while residing in South Carolina, sold the ranch in 1876 to Jacob Waelder and Christopher Columbus Upson. Can you believe the selling price? \$1,740.00! You should remember, though, that there was probably very little change in the property since the Indians camped on the site. There may have been a few cow pens added along with barns and primitive shelters. There was no running water above Salado Creek, no electricity, no telephones, no streets, no fire department, no air conditioning and no TELEVISION.

Columbus Upson was a prominent attorney first in Castroville then San Antonio. He also was a hero Colonel of the Confederacy. He later became associate Justice of the Territory of Arizona and came back to Texas as representative in the 46th and 47th Congresses. Upson became full owner of the property upon settlement of assets held jointly by him and his law partner, Jacob Waelder. George Upson, son of Columbus, became owner and apparently managed the ranch until his death in 1916. The estate of George Upson held ownership until 1924 when a portion was sold to Sara Williams. She in turn sold the property to Ida Williams in 1931. Ida Williams had a leasing agreement with George Stevens who used it for ranching purposes and a dairy farm. The business was officially called the West Texas Dairy.

The northern part of Oakwell Farms was apparently ranched fairly early by Robert Neighbors who was also an Indian Agent and in 1850 residing on Salado Creek. He became owner after a few land-speculator transactions in the late 1840s. Neighbors were killed at Ft. Belknap in 1859 by a man who resented his humane treatment of the Indians. The property remained in the Neighbors family until 1884 when it was sold to Christian Pape. (The water "trough" behind the Community Center has the name and date "Pape 1928" scribed in cement). The property remained in the Pape family until it was purchased by Edgar Tobin in 1945. With this purchase portions of the original Bonifacio Rodriguez property came back together after many years of having separate owners.

Almost immediately after Edgar Tobin acquired the property he started a major land improvement program which included drilling deep wells and constructing a very elaborate system of irrigation including ponds/tanks and pumps. A complex cross-fencing plan was set up to create pastures and grain field's co-existent with the irrigation system. Traces of these old fences can be seen along the paths and in the undeveloped areas. Remnants of the irrigation system may still be observed along the Granberg (sic) Path and along Myrtlewood/Wolfton Way. One of the wells, a very strong one, located in the cul-de-sac on Myrtlewood has been transferred to the Homeowner's Association. A modern metal tank with the Oakwell logo replaced the old gravity tank. Oakwell became a modern ranch/farm with several dwellings and farm buildings mostly along Ira Lee road. Several wells were drilled into the Edwards Aquifer which supplied ample water to the residents and for irrigation. Massive stone work walls and bridges were built, some of which were constructed to help control flooding and erosion. Some of this stone work was done by German prisoners of war during World War II. The Tobin residence built by Robert Tobin and contained within the forty or so acres set aside is now a conference center and is available to non-profit organizations through application.

For a time the dairy business was continued but eventually dropped in favor of cattle and sheep ranching. Hay and grain grown in the irrigated fields was used mostly for consumption by the farm animals. Wool was marketed which indicates the sheep were used for more than keeping the grass mowed. Arabian horses were prized residents for a time and now have been replaced by a herd of Shetland ponies. Since Edgar Tobin was killed in a plane crash in 1954; the farm probably was not developed to its full potential. Contrary to rumors Oakwell Farms did not get its name from the centuries-old oaks that appear throughout the area. The name was taken from 16th century Oakwell Hall, in Yorkshire, England, the ancestral home of Margaret Batts Tobin, Robert Tobin's mother. The community we enjoy as Oakwell Farms didn't just happen. This unique residential area came about through the vision and perseverance of Robert Tobin who pulled out all stops to explore the archeological, historical and environmental features that would be affected by the impact of urban development. Analysis of Oakwell Farms Project included studies of water/drainage, vegetation, geology, noise impact, sewage, utilities and adjacent land use. All these elements were studied in forensic detail before the first soil was turned.-

Following is a quote from an historical narrative by Dixie Watkins in 1984: "....result of these efforts culminated in a plan which is sensitive, not only to the resources of the natural environment, but also to the needs and aesthetic concerns of future residents." You might say the "trees were counted".

Various species of animal and bird life are found along the wooded drainage areas. More than sixty different birds have been identified including "hoot owls", a chachalaca which is normally seen only along the Rio Grande and a wild turkey that nested one summer in the honeysuckle near the guard gate. Wild ducks' appear sporadically at the fish pond and along Tobin Creek when the water flows for a long period of time. The usual skunks, raccoons, opossums, rabbits and squirrels are frequently seen in our yards and along the paths. Less frequently seen are coyotes and ring-tail cats (cacomistle).

When Robert Tobin was nearing the development stage of the project, he looked for a Company which would be in agreement and sympathy with his ideas for a planned community. Denton Development was selected due to its history and experience in developing other planned communities. One of the unique features of Oakwell Farms which sets it apart from, other gated communities is different areas of living within the whole community. Each of these areas has slightly different governing covenants as to size, style, etc., but all have homogeneity in the overall plan. As each area is completed, jurisdiction is given to the Homeowner's Association. Until that time Oakwell Farms Corporation as owner of the property maintains the covenants and may also issue waivers to those covenants which it originally established.

This history is presented for the benefit of our residents who may want to know more about our great community. It is hoped that it will increase our appreciation of what we have and tell us about the efforts made to create the unique community of Oakwell Farms.

CREDITS

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Witte Museum Papers - Schuetz, Woolford
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Dixie Watkins, Urban Planner
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Robert L. B. Tobin of Oakwell Farms