

HISTORICAL SKETCH
OF
POETRY -CAMP GROUND COMMUNITY
(see addendum 1. page 7)

The Poetry - Camp ground Community is hoary with age. The community started when the President of the Republic of Texas, Anson Jones, gave Elisha Turner one league and a labor of land (4400 acres) on July 22, 1845. This was given to Elisha Turner for services rendered in the Texas-Mexican war. The deed to this land can be found in the records Kaufman County, volume D, page 356, #45. Elisha Turner was born in Georgia in 1788. He came to Texas before 1836, and lived in San Augustine (the first white settlement in Texas). In 1845, Elisha Turner, his wife and their four married children, Mr. & Mrs. Zack Turner, Mr. & Mrs. John Fox, Mr. & Mrs. Maston Ussery, Mr. & Mrs. Sane Turner, and Mr. & Mrs. James Stiles sr., the latter a married daughter of the Maston Ussery's , moved to their grant of land and the place was called Turner's Point, which was located on the old Shreveport and Dallas Road. Many herds of cattle were moved West over this road. Here the Turner's built log cabins for their first homes. Later they hauled in lumber from Jefferson, Texas to make their homes more comfortable. After they had lived at Turner's Point for a few years, Elisha sold small tracts of land to other families and Turner's Point became a rapidly growing settlement.

In 1845 the Masonic Lodge was established, which was a two story building located on the land belonging to Walker Stevenson. At the time this lodge was the second oldest in Kaufman County. *The charter was filed for in 1858.* It was not until June 14, 1860, that a charter was granted to the lodge by the Grand Lodge of Texas. *The lodge was known as the "Torbert Masonic Lodge" No. 241.* The first petitioners for the lodge in 1858 were:

J.H. McCarty	Dean Moore	P.F. Paschal
P.E. Stewart	O.K. Vance	W.E. Cain
W.H. Torbet	J.H. Tate	G.W. Noel

A.H Lowrie was the first Master under the Charter in 1860. Some of the other Masters were: John Wilson, L. B. Gentry, and J.C. Cambell. People would come for twenty miles to the Masonic Lodge. In the lower room of the lodge was the Community Hall, which was used for all types of community meetings. School was taught here until 1873. The different religious faiths of the community could hardly be distinguished, as all used this place for their services, because there were no churches near.

The first business houses were built about 1869 at Turner's Point. A general merchandise store was built and was operated by Joe Rushing, which was across the road from Mrs. Walter Chaney's farm. The first well that was ever dug at Turner's Point is on Mrs. Chaney's farm. It is walled with brick and is still in use.

In the early 1870's there was quite a lot of business carried on by the Rushing brothers, Joe, Jim and Ben. Also John Stevenson operated a store there. Joe Rushing and John Stevenson would load their wagons with their merchandise every morning and head for Terrell, Texas, where they occupied the four corner lots on Moore and Virginia streets. A man had to get up rather early to get the start of old Turner's Point. They carried small stocks of staple groceries, sugar, coffee, and rice, which was all the average public wanted. Every farmer raised corn, had hogs, fattened them and some of them sold bacon.

During the eighteen seventies. Mr. Bob Wray conducted the Post Office at Turner's Point. He also operated an old fashioned hotel or Inn. This hotel was very popular to those who drove their cattle to market. The mail carrier stayed at the hotel, and it usually took him three days for him to make his route. After a short time Bob Wray moved away and a Mr. Frank Rees and daughter Mag took over the post office. There was even a tannery at Turner's Point. It was operated by Mr. John Fox, who tanned hides and made them into shoes, which he sold to the community. In 1873, Mr. John Chambers operated a store here. A blacksmith shop was run by Mr. Ed Swann. The first cotton gin was built west of the stores, on land owned by Mrs. Massey. This gin was operated by Walt Stevenson for a short time, and later by Maston Ussery and Bill Paschel. It took two wagons to haul cotton to the gin, and the gin could only gin three to four bales a day..

The first school near Turner's Point was taught in 1858, in a log cabin at the meeting place, later known as the Camp Ground. Two of the early teachers were Miss Mary Cummins and Mr. McNutt. The first Doctor at Turner's Point was Dr. Ellis, who made his calls on horseback. In 1864 he left and the people of Turner's Point were able to get Dr. Daniels in 1873. Dr. Howell, Dr. Elnabnitte and Dr. Waching worked with Dr. Daniels. Dr. Daniels died in 1883. Dr. Frank P Yates and Dr. L.D. Coffman were two of the later Doctors. In 1876, Poetry was established (see addendum 2, page 7). The people had to choose another name for their post office other than Turner's Point because Texas already had a post office called Turner. The people held a meeting and the name Poetry was chosen. *Maston Ussery suggested the name Poetry. He stated that in the spring of 1854 when he came down a tree shaded lane and saw the wildflowers blooming everywhere, it reminded him of a poem. This meeting was held a few weeks before he was killed by his horse.* The first postmaster at Poetry was Bill Allen. Also in 1876 the new school building at Poetry was built, and Mr. Sted and Mr. Evans taught here.

About 1880 a gin was built at Poetry by Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Bob Stewart. The first church built at Poetry was the Baptist Church north of the Poetry store. This church was first called the Salem Baptist Church, and was built in 1881. G.T. Walker was the first deacon and later Mr. S.A. Marsh was deacon for sixty years. The Methodist sold their church at the Camp Ground to the Cumberland Presbyterian's and soon after the erection of the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church was built in 1855 just South of the store.

It was blown away, (*by a tornado*) along with the school building that stood across the pond, on May 3, 1890. In 1891, a new church was built that is still standing, The deed to the present building bears the date of 1886.

[Known as the Poetry United Methodist Church. (A Texas Historical Commission Plaque dated 1978, mounted in front of the Methodist Church reads as follows:

POETRY METHODIST CHURCH

ORIGINALLY CALLED TURNERS POINT, THIS COMMUNITY WAS FOUNDED IN 1845 BY ELISHA TURNER. IN 1855 THE METHODIST CONGREGATION PAID ZACHARIAH TURNER AND HIS WIFE MARTHA \$20.00 FOR THE ORIGINAL CHURCH SITE. THE REV. J.W. FIELDS, A METHODIST CIRCUIT RIDER LIVING IN KAUFMAN COUNTY, WITNESSED THE DEED AND MAY HAVE BEEN THE ORGANIZER AND FIRST MINISTER. AFTER THE NAME OF THE TOWN CHANGED TO POETRY, THIS SITE WAS DONATED BY J.H. TATE AND HIS WIFE NANCY. THE CIRCUIT RIDER PREACHED ONLY ONCE A MONTH, YET THE MEMBERSHIP GREW TO 119 IN THOSE EARLY DAYS.]]

Long before the Presbyterians built a church there were camp meetings. This is how Camp Ground got its name. The people built brush arbors and came from miles with their families, tents and wagons. These meetings lasted for about two weeks. Everyone worshipped together, prayed together and sang together. The women cooked on outdoor fires. Singers and preachers came from great distances. The people learned new songs and made new friends. After the schools, churches and business houses were built the Poetry-Camp Ground Community became a rapid growing, prosperous community. On Saturday people came from miles and miles in buggies, wagons and on horseback. On Sunday they had church one Sunday of each month at Camp Ground, one Sunday at the Baptist, and one Sunday at the Methodist. For years the people raised hogs, cattle, horses, corn, and cotton. After forty years of farming they awoke to the fact that their soil was poor and their top soil washed away. In 1940 the people of the people of the Poetry-Camp Ground began to rebuild the soil with balanced farming, livestock, and poultry and today we some soil that is as fertile as the virgin soil was in 1845, when Elisha Turner first came to this area. This community started a soil improvement program through vetch. Much vetch is produced each year, and more will be in the future. This community brought the "Vetch Capitol of the World" to Terrell, known all over the world. Also the Poetry-Camp Ground ranks high as a broiler community. Coming out the Poetry-Camp Ground road you see green vetch fields, many broiler houses, dairy barns, and good cattle.

On July 31st., 1924 there was a fire that destroyed all of the business houses in Poetry. The gins, general store, Post Office, etc. The two story building that housed the Masonic Lodge was destroyed.

No history of this community would be complete without mentioning the three boys who gave their lives during World War II, that we might have our freedom. ORVILLE LITTLETON, BRANDON LOWRIE AND HAYES SMITH.

The entire history of the Poetry-Camp Gound Community has been a story of community solidarity. The people worked together for the common good of all from the very start. This spirit has been carried out in the Improvement Project, that we are working on now. All have worked together to make the community the best place in the world to live., There has been no effort to win personal honors, but an effort to work for the best of all concerned. After all, what would it profit any community to have a few outstanding citizens and the rest of the community with a feeling of being on the sidelines with no part to play in the growth of their home community. In the Poetry-Camp Ground community all are recognized. Truly, a life abundant is waiting for any one who chooses Poetry-Camp Ground as their home.

Joanne Breeden

During the Poetry Homecoming on October 3rd. 1993, I had a chance to talk to several of the old timers. Mr. Emmett Wilson had very bad eyesight but a very keen sense of humor and did relate a few stories.

1. He had a bird dog who was trained to signal how many birds were in the underbrush by barking. One bark meant one bird, two barks - two birds, etc. One day the dog came up with a stick in his mouth and commenced to beat him on his leg. What the dog was conveying was there were more birds than you could shake a stick at.

2. Another story was about him finding a skeleton of a dog standing in the high grass with the end bones of his tail in a point position. Upon looking around he discovered a skeleton of a bird in a tree. The dog had treed a bird, which had died there, and the dog had died holding the point position.

3. And last but not least was his bird dog that broke its neck trying to fly like a bird.

About 1989, give or take a year or so, the following article did appear in the Dallas Morning News:

RURAL RHYTHM by Dan Shine:

Poetry Texas-- A woman sits on a plastic bucket in the shade of the general store's garage, just out of the harms way of the June sun. She mops her brow with a folded paper towel and quizzically stares at a stranger, dressed uncomfortably in a shirt and tie, as he walks up to her. "Watcha selling"? she quickly asks him. When he replies he isn't selling anything, she's skeptical. "No one in Poetry wears a tie unless they're selling somethin", she says. This is the style and pace of Poetry, a town about eight miles north of Terrell in Kaufman County. No one sweats the details, which may be a reason why no one is quit sure of the community's population. The best guess anyone has is "more than 600", because 600 homes are hooked up to the water system.

Life here is several steps slower than in the city, and people like it that way. They think that they will never see a town as lovely as Poetry. Residents traveling along FM 986, the main thoroughfare through Poetry, wave or simply nod at the other driver whether they know them or not. Passing motorists are sure to get a wave from the folks gathered at the Poetry General Store, the hub of the community, which has birds eye-view of the road but not much else.

There is no rhyme or reason to the activities at the store. "Some mornings we'll sit around and we won't do much of anything all day", said Mitch Akin, 49, who owns the store. His daughter, Cissy, said it is known as City Hall. "We have a city meeting each day around 7 in the morning," she said. "We'll solve the problems of the world and the problems of the people of Poetry." One problem Marty Holveck has is the lack of air-conditioning in the store. This must be a constant complaint by Mrs. Holveck, 53, because she says she can predict Mr. Akin's reply. To prove her point, she asks him again about the air-conditioning. "I had the air-conditioning on last winter, and everyone complained," Mr. Akin says. Delighted, Mrs. Holveck claps her hands and laughs, "I told you he'd say that."

The general store has the charm of Fred Drucker's Hooterville shop and the look of Fred Sanford's backyard. Fresh fruit and vegetables sit on a table outside the store. The radio dial is permanently tuned to a country music station. In the yard a few tractors sit idle, as do assorted log chains and farm equipment. Two gas pumps anchor one end of the yard. A roping dummy sits rusting next to the store. A sign above the store reads: Flats fixed - oil change and lube..

It is here that residents remember their grandparents tales of growing up in Poetry, or spin yarns of their own. They talk of stealing watermelons from a farmers patch or driving 200 head of cattle down the road and not worrying about snarling traffic

Mr. Akin, cuddling a beer, sits on a hospital gurney he recently bought. He doesn't have any immediate plans for the gurney, but he couldn't pass up a \$7.00 bargain. Besides, it's another place to sit - and a lot of sitting is done at the store. Mr. Akin is a third generation resident of Poetry, but he doesn't hesitate to say that he would leave "if I could sell this place, I'd pack up and go". Asked whether he ever lived in the city, he answers, "I lived in Terrell for a while but moved back here". Poetry isn't like it used to be, but that's still a lot better than most places. Mr. Akin said "It's changin' a lot now, "what with people from the city lookin' for a tax break", and moving in. "They've brought their city ways", he said. They don't mind (look after) their neighbors. They're not used to it. "Still this town is pretty foregoing. If it doesn't look like rain I'll leave those watermelons and vegetables out during the night and nothing will happen to them."

The fear of "city ways " may be one of the reasons the people of Poetry in 1984, turned down the opportunity to incorporate their community. At first the people voted 95 to 41 to create a municipality. But later they learned that the election was invalid because state law designates only four dates a year in which an incorporation vote could be held.

When another election was held in early 1985 the tally went the other way. Jimmy Bankston, 39, president of Bankston Enterprises, was one of the leading forces for incorporation. He has lived on a 680 acre ranch in Poetry for the past 10 years. I was looking for a place that didn't use roads for boundaries," he said., "It has trees and lakes out back. There are still deer and coyote out there. It's as close to wilderness as you can find in the Dallas area." "It was just all right". The clean country environment of Poetry makes raising his two sons easy, he said. "I baby sit with a pair of binoculars.

Besides the movement to become a city, also is gone the Greco-Roman Festival that used to be held in Poetry. There's no real explanation for why the festival was held here - just as there don't seem to be any poets in Poetry, there also don't seem to be an abundance of Greeks or Romans. Perhaps that is why 1985 was the last year for the festival's chariot races and brazen bacchanalia.

As for the community's name, (SEE ITALICS, PAGE 2) there are, as usual, several versions. One tells how the community was named after an early settler who was found of verse. When he died, his neighbors named the community after him as a tribute. Another, more reasonable story concerns a woman who lived here many years ago and was very found of the picturesque creek that wandered through the area. She used to walk along the path along side of the creek and would say that the area was as pretty as a piece of poetry.

The facts of the last story, which is embraced by most in Poetry, vary some. One of the more constant versions claim that a Southern-belle type woman lost her dog Tray. In her anguish the woman became somewhat mindless and would wander around the area and grieve. "Po' Tray, po' tray." Eventually it caught on.

Over the years, the unique moniker has caused a few neighbors to the north to claim allegiance to the community. "For years the people of Camp-Ground, which is North of here but nowhere even close, were telling people that they live in Poetry" Mr. Akin said. "They liked to be associated with it"

Mr. Bankston said he loves the quaint community and looks forward to many more years there, no matter whether it's a city or just a community. "It's Poetry," he says simply, "What else can you say?"

A sign above the grill in Akins' general store reads as follows:

"THIS AINT BURGER KING. YOU DON'T GET IT YOUR WAY, YOU
GET IT MY WAY OR YOU DON'T GET THE DAMN THING!"

ADDENDUM'S:

1. Researched and written by Joanne Breeden, about 1950.
2. On the wall, in the library in the Masonic Grand Lodge of Texas, there are several old official maps of the State of Texas. These maps depict several bits of information, including railroad lines, roads, rivers, what natural lakes there were at that time, communities, etc. On the map dated 1872 this area was listed as Turner's Point. On the map issued 10 years later the name is listed as Poetry.

(N.W.Chase, 1990)

3. *The Italics come from information supplied by Buela (Stiles) Brown. This information was obtained at the 1994 Homecoming. A copy is attached.*