

CEMENTERIO LOMA DE LA CRUZ

Cementerio Loma De La Cruz (Hill of the Cross) is ^{ONE OF} the oldest Cemeter^{ies} in Val Verde County. This cemetery is located on four acres of land within survey No. 183 patented in the name of the "heirs of James Mitchell, deceased; James Mitchell having been killed in the battle of San Jacinto."¹* He was fighting for Texas independence, and was awarded land according to the agreement made by the State of Texas with those who enlisted to fight for freedom. This patent is No. 255, Vol. II, dated 29 Sept. 1854.²

Cementerio Loma De La Cruz is located at the edge of the Community of San Felipe. It adjoins the South border of the City limit of the City of Del Rio, Texas, County seat of Val Verde County. It is bordered by hills and on the west it meets San Felipe Creek, from which the surrounding community derives its name.

In 1869 a group of ten individuals acquired title of Survey No. 183. The ownership was an undivided 1/10 interest or moiety in and to that certain tract of land, namely 1476 acres along the San Felipe Creek, Kinney County. (Val Verde County was not created until 1885.) This group formed a Company with each having this 1/10 undivided interest. The organization was known then and now as the San Felipe Agricultural, Manufacturing, and Irrigation Company.³

* not according to Dixon & Kemp. According to marker file for Taylor-Rivers House (1982), Mitchell died en route from Ft. Houston to Nacogdoches after participation in the B of S.I. #13-13

The earliest know record with respect to the San Felipe Agricultural, Manufacturing, and Irrigation Company is found in Vol. I of the minutes owned by the Company. The date of these minutes reads 27 April 1871.⁴ Members present at that first shareholders meeting were; A.O. Strickland, Randolph Pafford, Joseph Ney, W.D. Adams, and James H. Taylor.⁵

James H. Taylor's wife Paula Losoya Taylor* inherited his shares of the San Felipe Agricultural, Manufacturing, and Irrigation Company at the time of Mr. Taylors' death 4 April 1876.⁶ Paula Losoya Taylor was approved and elected to take Taylor's place on the Board of Directors.

Later in the year 1876 Dona Paula Married Dr. Charles M. Rivers. Dr. Rivers died in 1879.⁷ Paula T. Rivers served in the Capacity of Shareholder and Director of the San Felipe Agricultural, Manufacturing and Irrigation Company for many years.

* native of Mexico - born c. 1830 and died 1902

DONA PAULA LOSOYA TAYLOR RIVERS

A small Community of Mexicans was in existence in San Felipe Del Rio, as the City of Del Rio was formerly known during the early part of the nineteenth century. They lived in an area called Las Sapas or El Salto, located in what became later a part of the San Felipe Agricultural, Manufacturing, & Irrigation Company. Sapas is the original Spanish word for underground shelter.

The gradual disintegration of Las Sapas or El Salto came about as a result of the arrival of Dona Paula Losoya de Rivera and her sister Dona Refugio Losoya de Rivera, who moved to the area in the vicinity of Las Sapas in the year 1862 from Rio Grande, City, Starr County, Texas. They had the pioneering spirit of those days and soon developed the land along the San Felipe Creek for farming and cultivating the soil. Dona Paula realized irrigation was needed to produce better crops, so she made canals and used the creek for irrigation. She began to plant sugar cane, and shortly thereafter built a sugar mill, a flour mill and a gin.

The Losoya sisters soon developed their land into a thriving hacienda that kept growing in numbers of people. Many of these early residents started to cross the San Felipe Creek to form their homes, joining others who were moving from other parts of the state and Mexico.

Dona Paula's original home is located at the corner of East Nicholson Street and Hudson Drive Street.⁸

Dona Paula, throughout her entire life took an active part in many community affairs. She always showed an interest in and made an effort to help those who were less fortunate than she. She was always alert to the needs of the settlement. It was Dona Paula who first realized that the Mexican people of the settlement did not have a cemetery for burying their dead. They were burying them in their backyards. It came to Dona Paula's attention that several graves were on the land she owned. So it was that Dona Paula gave four acres of land for a graveyard for the Mexican colony in 1884,⁹ and another $\frac{1}{2}$ acres of land for the Italians in May 1892¹⁰ adjoining the graveyard for the Mexicans at the Northeast corner.

The cemetery is at the foot of a hill known as Round Mountain or Loma De La Cruz. Legend says that once, while fighting with the Indians who sometimes came to attack the settlements, three Indians and two Mexicans were killed, and they were buried on the hillside on the property of Dona Paula. To mark the place, she had a cross erected on top of this hill, and so it is that to this day the hill is known as the hill of the Cross.¹¹

It is also said that the hill is thus named because Dona Paula, following an old Mexican custom, place a cross on top of the hill to remind all of the crucifixion of our Lord.¹²

Buried in this old cemetery is Rev. Roman V. Palomares, who was the first pastor of the Mexican American Methodist Church, officially established in the year 1878. Palomares was not only the first minister of San Felipe, but the only Methodist minister between Del Rio, Texas and El Paso, Texas. He remained at the head of the church until 1881, then returned again for a brief period in 1886. By this time his health was failing him and he passed away on April 14, 1887 in San Felipe Del Rio.¹³

Three Indian Scouts are buried in this old cemetery. Victor Frausto and his three sons, Tomas, and Quirino enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1878 and served as Indian Scouts with the Fifth Cavalry Division based at Fort Clark. These Scouts worked along with the Negro Seminole Scouts and the United States Military Troops at Fort Clark protecting the settlements along the Rio Grande from hostile Indians.

These Scouts were courageous, displaying gallantry in action at the risk of their own lives. They were excellent horsemen, fine trail trailers, and good marksmen, familiar with the language and the ways of the Indians. They were brave and daring, superior to the Indians in fighting qualities. The Scouts always led the way when the Troops make their search for Indians whose raids had branded the Texas frontier with tribulation. These Scouts were invaluable during these constant hit and run skirmishes.

The Scouts buried in this old cemetery are:

Quirino Frausto dated February 14, 1897

Tomas Frausto dated October 26, 1902

Victor Frausto dated March 4, 1905

Victor and Tomas were among those recognized by the United States Government for their valuable services. Headstones supplied by the United States Government were placed on their graves to mark their recognition and appreciation.

Several descendents of the Frausto's still live here.

The last person buried in this old cemetery was Lorenzo Gomez on June 30, 1933. This was the last year this cemetery was used. By the year 1933 a new cemetery was established. It is known as the San Felipe Cemetery, and is situated near Cementerio Loma De La Cruz, facing the old highway to Eagle Pass, Texas.

The Italians buried their dead on $\frac{1}{2}$ acre of land adjoining the cemetery on the Northeast side.

Maria Cassinelli, the wife of G.B. Cassinelli was buried in this section in the year 1891.

G.B. Cassinelli, Maria's husband, was noted stonemason, who along with his partner John Taini was recruited in Italy by an American constructor to come to New York to construct buildings. This project failed and the stonemasons went to work for the railroads, and completed this work in 1883. Then they were hired by the United States Government to construct several buildings at Fort Clark at Bracketville, Kinney County, Texas.

When the work was finished the two came to Del Rio to work on the Val Verde County Court house.

Cassinelli built a dam on San Felipe Creek and built a gin house and home there also. This two story structure "The Cassinelli Gin House" has an official Recorded Texas Historic Landmark Marker (1981).¹⁴

The idea of restoration of the oldest Cementerio Loma De La Cruz originated in the early part of the year 1978, when the congregation of El Principe de Paz United Methodist Church in San Felipe were making plans to celebrate the centennial of the first Spanish speaking gospel preaching church in the San Felipe sector of the City of Del Rio. They knew that the first minister of this church, Rev. Palomares Villegas was buried in this cementerio Loma De La Cruz.

In order to rescue his resting place and tombstone from vandalism and neglect, Mr. Gilberto Cerda, descendant of first members of the congregation, suggested to Mrs. Araminta G. Cardenas, the chairperson of the committee for the celebration, that she inquire into the possibility of transferring the remains and tombstone to the Whitehead Museum. Mr. Cerda made an appointment with Mrs. Rosie Jones so that Mrs. Cardenas and Mrs. Mimmie Salazar could discuss the matter. Mrs. Jones and Louita Wilson, then President of the Val Verde Historical Commission, said it could not be possible because of the separation of Church and State.

The Historical Commission, in their purpose of preservation of historical places and buildings had already investigated

the possibility and validity of preserving and restoring the oldest cemetery in Del Rio, Texas.

We are grateful to the Val Verde County Historical commission for their support in this Association. They suggested that the Spanish speaking community organize a group with the idea of restoration and preservation of the cemetery.

During the celebration of the San Felipe Exes first reunion in Del Rio in July 1978 at Brown Plaza, a booth was set up and leaflets of list of names of graves were distributed and donations were accepted. This list had already been prepared by Mrs. Rosie Jones.

Then in July 24, 1978 a meeting was held under the leadership of Mrs. Araminta Cardenas at the Neighborhood Facility Center. The group was organized and elections were held resulting in the election of the following officers.

Mr. Adolfo Maldonado President, very dedicated during his tenure of office, several improvements were made.

Araminta G. Cardenas Vice-President

Minnie Salazar Secretary

Carmen V. Hernandez (deceased) Treasurer 1978-1979

Louita Wilson Reporters, and very helpful to the success of the project undertaken.

The first project was installation of a chain link fence about 400 ft. around the cemetery, and with the fence a gate was built. The crosses on either side were made by Mr. Enrique Delgado who designed them and built them with available material in memory of his parents. The road to the cemetery was fixed so it be easier to travel on.

The Val Verde County, through our district commissioner Mr. Ricardo Padilla helped with cleaning brush and weeds. Also the county Sheriff's office has helped in discouraging vandalism.¹⁵

This non-profit organization was established for the sole purpose of restoring this old cemetery and maintaining it in good condition. Financial donations from people interested in restoring the cemetery were made when the association was first established. Since then the association has held many projects to raise money.

Rededication of El Cementerio Loma De La Cruz, after it was abandoned in 1933 was held Saturday, 16 of June 1979. The public was invited. State Rep. Susan McBee was the main speaker and other officials and guests gathered for the ceremony.

Don's Funeral provided chairs and canopy for shade for honor guests, guest speaker and clergy.

A large gray granite stone monument 32½ inches x 65½ inches on a concrete base was dedicated at a ceremony of rededication on 11 of April, 1981 in memory of all the people buried here, those whose gravestones are known, and those who are "known only to God," This monument is engraved as follows:



A ceremony honoring the Scouts was held on May 1984, presented by the San Felipe Del Rio Honor Guard in cooperation with Laughlin Air Force Base and veterans organizations of the city.¹⁶

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Judge Brian Montague's papers on the San Felipe Agricultural, Manufacturing, and Irrigation Company, p.3
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Kinney County Deed Records; Book A-4, p 295
- 4 Minutes of S.F.A.M. & I. Co. Minutes are now in the custody of the Del Rio Bank & Trust Company, 1200 Avenue F. Del Rio Tex.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Information received from Whitehead Memorial Museum, 1308 S. Main Street, Del Rio, Texas
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 "A History of San Felipe " by Antonio E. Gutierrez, Published by Whitehead Memorial Museum 1978
- 9 Val Verde County Deed Records, Kinney Transcript Vol.3 p. 486-487
- 0 Val Verde County Deed Records, Vol. 5, p. 180-181
- 1 "La Hacienda" published by the Whitehead Memorial Museum, p. 5, on Dona Paula Losoya, by Flavio L. Valdez.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 A history of San Felipe by Antonio E. Gutierrez, Published by Whitehead Memorial Museum, 1978
- 4 Texas Historical Commission-Recorded Texas Historic Landmark 1981
- 5 Personal interview with Araminta G. Cardenas
- 6 Records of "Los Amigos del Cementerio Loma De La Cruz" and my personal knowledge as a member of this organization and Treasurer for 7 years.

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