

Coker Cemetery History #1

by Bob Battaglia

The Coker Cemetery is a unique moment in time. Our ancestors who are buried there could provide us with many interesting stories of their early years in a land that could be hostile at times. Indian bands still roved this land in the 1850's when our ancestors arrived on the John Coker bounty land a few miles north of the Alamo. Joseph Coker and his sons and daughters and sons-in-law and daughters-in-law arrived here about 1853. Joseph Coker had buried his wife, Malinda Brown, in the Old Jacksonville Cemetery in Cherokee Co. May 24, 1853. They had lived in Cherokee Co. since about 1846 as shown by the Amos Dickens Jones diary that recorded the journey from Talladega in 1846 to East Texas.

Joseph Coker married Malinda Brown in Laurens Co. SC before 1822. This is proven in a court case where Malinda and her brothers and sisters are taking their mother Nancy Brown to court in order to claim their inheritance. They claim that when their father, Benjamin Brown, died in 1813, their mother hastened to dispose of the property and did not provide the children with their rightful shares. Their mother, Nancy, had married again shortly afterwards. In these 1821 proceedings Joseph Coker is named as husband of Malinda. Joseph and Malinda Coker left Laurens SC about 1826 based on their first two daughters showing their birth state as South Carolina in 1823 and 1825. James Coker and his family also traveled with his brother Joseph on the round-about journey to Texas. In 1830, they are in Franklin Co. TN and in 1840, Talladega AL and 1846 in Cherokee Co. TX.

When Joseph Coker and his family left Cherokee Co. in 1853, James Coker and his family stayed behind and their descendants are still in East Texas today. When John Coker was getting up in age he drew up a deed giving his bounty land on the Salado equally to his brothers Joseph and James. James Coker then sold his share to Amos Jones, James Harrison Coker and other family descendants. Then began the evolution of the well-known Coker community. Today we still have the Coker Cemetery, Coker Methodist Church (now completely separate from the Cemetery), Coker Elementary School, Jones-Maltsberger Road and other reminders of a community that started over 140 years ago. The Joseph Coker descendants alone number in many hundreds today and are spread all over the country.

There are a lot of stories that should be told. Some descendants have written histories, but there are many others who still need to get things down in writing for the future. We are all familiar with John Coker's exploits at the Battle of San Jacinto and the Smith brothers held captive by Indians. These grave-sites are honored with Texas State Historical Markers.

Did you know? Amos Jones's daughter, Malinda Catherine, married James Van Riper. This family had three chiefs-of-police in San Antonio in the early 1900's.

James and two of his Sons became San Antonio Police Chiefs. More on this family later.

In the Coker Cemetery there is a tombstone inscribed "Catherine Jones 1803-1873". It has now been established that this is Amos Dickens Jones's mother. She was Catherine Long who married Seaborn L. Jones in TN July 13, 1820. This is recorded in the bible of Joseph Long, father of Catherine Long. This bible was in the possession of an elderly lady in New Mexico as of 2001. It was copied in 2000 by another Long descendant who lives in Dallas.

More stories to tell? Neill B. Coker, sworn on part of the defendant said, "I am son of the defendant and was about eleven years old at the time of the killing. My father and I went to the well to water horses and oxen and had been there about ten or fifteen minutes when John Jones Jr. and his crowd came down to water their stock. Our stock was not quite done drinking and father told Jones to keep his horses back till ours got through. Jones said he had as much right to water as anybody. Father told him he had a right to water using stock but not stock cattle. Jones said it was nothing to my father what he watered." This was Aug 10, 1860. Sound like the beginning of trouble? More later on this.

More stories? "Sarah Jane Coker Autry, wife of Zachry Taylor Autry, was a remarkable woman. In 1895 she was left a widow with a large family to feed, clothe and guide in their everyday problems. She was always busy, but somehow she managed to acquire the love and respect of those who knew her well. Her livelihood came from a dairy. Her day started at 4AM. The cows were fed and milked, the cream separated, and the butter churned. Early in the day she was seen driving her surrey, pulled by a team of mules, "Baldy and Jack," into San Antonio to deliver the milk and butter to her customers. It was twelve miles to San Antonio.

Another of Joseph Coker's daughters, Eliza Caroline, married Hiram Carrol Rogers in 1849 in Cherokee Co. A Rogers descendant stated: "Grandmother was a Coker and I am not sure of her first name but seems it should be Elizabeth. To me she was a pretty grandmother, low and plump and straight with light brown eyes full of expression. Into this home, twelve children were born, one a twin died when young. The first, a girl named Mary Francis, was born in Erath City on Nov 30 1852." The Rogers settled in the Seguin area along with the Bennetts and Seays. Many descendants are buried at the San Geronimo Cemetery in Seguin.