Coppell, History of a Texas Town
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Prepared by
The Coppell Historical Society
2016

For
The Fourth Grade History Students of
Coppell Independent School District

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A History of Coppell

Area Began With a Land Grant to James Parrish

Coppell’s first settlers arrived in 1848 as part of the Peters Colony Land Grant. The program offered families 640 acres of land and supplied them with supplies such as gun powder, shot, and seed for planting.

James Parrish was the first person to receive a land grant in the area that would become Coppell. The grant stretched from E. Belt Line to Sandy Lake, Moore Road to what is today MacArthur Blvd. He built two homes along Moore Road.

Parrish set aside acreage to establish Bethel Cemetery, originally known as Sands Cemetery, and a family cemetery, Parrish Cemetery, both of which are still in existence.

The area became known as Bethel Community and had a school and church.

Land was added to the Coppell area west of Denton Tap Road, where other schools served west side children.
Coppell Participates in The Civil War

The Civil War began in 1861 with the state of Texas fighting as part of the Confederate States. While little is recorded about Coppell during that time, that same year, local resident Josiah Record made statements disparaging the Confederacy’s ability to win the war. He was lynched as a result. Josiah’s son John later fought for the Confederacy, serving as a private in Captain Good’s Company, Texas Artillery.

After returning from the war, John killed a man named Mr. Copeland, who is assumed to have participated in his father’s hanging. John and five others were lynched in 1869, thought to be in retaliation.

Both Josiah and John Record are buried in the Historic Parrish Cemetery in Coppell.

Several other notable Coppell residents fought in the Civil War. Burrell B. Howell, a native of Kentucky, served in Captain Witt’s Company. Howell later became a founding member of Coppell’s Methodist Church and lived in until 1929. He was the grandfather of Coppell Mayor William T. Cozby. Howell and Cozby are buried in Coppell’s Historic Bullock Cemetery.

William Ewing Thomas, a charter member of Coppell’s Methodist Church, fought for the Confederacy in Company D of the 29th Ten-
Tennessee Infantry. Thomas fought in the Battle of Chickamagua in 1863 and was later captured and imprisoned by Federal forces. Thomas is buried in Grapevine Cemetery.

Another notable Coppell resident to serve in the Civil War was William George Hensley, who served in Taylor's Regiment as part of the cavalry. When Hensley died in 1906, he was living in a portion of Coppell known as the Gentry Community. Like William Thomas, Hensley was buried in the Grapevine Cemetery.

Residents today can visit these cemetery graves.
Bethel School Children Had Interesting Names

Dozens of children walked long distances from homes on the east and south side of town to Bethel School, which began as a one-room school, later adding another room.

"There was no class distinction in our school—we were all ‘have-nots,’ but we were not aware of it. We didn’t realize how overcrowded we were or how overworked the teacher was," wrote Bernice Ledbetter Graham.

Some of the families had eight or nine children. In the Hodges family, the 13 children had these names: the boys were Albert, Alvin, Calvin, Melvin, Marvin, Melford, and the girls were Erline, Pauline, Maurine, Ethylene, Charlene, Geraldine, and Claudine.

Across town, there were two other schools, Gibbs School, later called Coppell School, and Gentry School.
Stores Begin to Serve Farming Community

Coppell began as a farming community. The main crops were cotton, corn, wheat, oats and Sudan grass. Farmers owned their land and often had tenant farmers to help.

Although the first settlers had come to the area in 1848, it wasn't until 1874, that the first general store was opened to sell products such as flour, sugar, and salt. W. O. Harrison built the first store where old downtown Coppell is today. By 1887, he had a post office inside his store.

Other stores were built nearby, including a drug store. Some sold groceries and others sold fabric, shoes, and medicines. There were blacksmiths, barbershops, and cotton gins. Schools and churches were being built for the first time in North Texas. By the end of the 1800s, the downtown also had a school, a Methodist Church, and a Baptist Church.
Two Coppell youth stand among the chief Coppell crop, cotton

One of Coppell's two cotton gins
Trains Change the Town

The town was named Gibbs until the railroad came along. In 1890, a fancy depot was built to honor George Coppell. He was a wealthy New York businessman who made his money by investing in railroads and who had worked to make it possible for the St. Louis, Arkansas & Texas Railroad to pass through the town. Later the railroad was called The Cotton Belt Railroad. Because trains were so important in those days, people who lived here started calling the entire town by the name Coppell, so in 1892, the name was made official.

George Coppell’s family was so wealthy, he lived on the most expensive streets in New York, and he and his grown children owned homes in nearby New Jersey that they used only in the summertime. Their homes were so fancy, they had servants living next door who tended the gardens, drove their cars, cooked the meals, and did all the jobs that were necessary in huge houses.

A train runs south of Grapevine Springs Park
Trains Improve Everyone’s Life

Trains could bring in lumber and other supplies, and so building houses and stores got easier. Trains also carried goods away from town, like cotton crops, so local farmers could make more money off their lands. And people who needed to travel in and out of Coppell could now board a train and visit almost any other place in America. A person called a railroad agent was in charge of receiving any goods that were delivered by the trains, which could include tools, clothes, and baby chickens. Even the mail came in on the train and was taken to Coppell’s post office.

One young Coppell woman remembers going to the Texas State Fair by catching the train in Coppell and getting off in downtown Dallas. After spending the day at the fair, she rode the train back to her home. In those days, a train stopped at the Coppell station at least once a day to deliver packages or to let passengers get on or off.

Coppell Depot
Sam Houston Visits 'Coppell' to Meet Indian Tribes

Sam Houston, as President of the Republic of Texas, played a big part in putting the Coppell area on the early Texas historical map. The purpose of his visit was to seek peace with Indian tribes. James Haley, who wrote a biography of Sam Houston, said many U.S. places mark the site of a battle, but very few places mark the site of peace. Grapevine Springs in Coppell is a site of peace.

Sam Houston invited ten tribes, the Delaware, Chickasaw, Waco, Tiwocano, Keachie, Caddo, Anadahkah, Ionie, Biloxi, and Cherokee, to enter into a peace treaty at Bird’s Fort on the Trinity River in 1843.

In late July 1843, Sam Houston left the Texas capital, Washington on the Brazos, and traveled north with an expeditionary party to "Grape Vine Springs."

The group stopped to camp for a few days at what is now Grapevine Springs in Coppell as they prepared to negotiate the treaty. The site is now a County park, leased to the City of Coppell, on W. Bethel Road in Coppell.

Edward Parkinson, a member of Houston’s party, described the camp in his journal, which is preserved at the Dallas Public Library. The following is how he described the visit: “From Bird’s Fort on the west to Grape Vine Springs on the Elm fork, about six miles above us, we turned off to the right and soon reached the camp, where we spent some five or six days rather monotonous, only relieved by finding a bee tree or killing beeve (beef), and speculation on the delay of the Indians in coming to the Treaty, which excessively annoyed Sam
Houston, who swore vengeance against his commissioners, imagining the delay caused by them, and he finally determined to return to Washington by way of the falls of the Brasos.”

**Visit Helped Open the West to Trade**

Houston finally returned to Washington on the Brazos, leaving Generals Terrell and Tarrant to sign the peace treaty at Bird’s Fort on September 29, 1843. The treaty was formally signed by Houston in 1844.

The treaty of 1843 provided the future city of Fort Worth the slogan, "Where the West Begins." The treaty resides in the archives of the State Library of Texas.

Today, historical preservationists point to Grapevine Springs Park as one of the primary historical sites in Dallas County, due to the visit of Sam Houston.
The WPA Comes to Coppell

Walls and structures were built by the WPA in Grapevine Springs Park.

It’s 1933. You are President of the United States. The country is in financial depression. Thousands of banks have closed, and people cannot get their money. More than 13 million Americans are unemployed. In Coppell, farm and cotton prices have fallen. Times are hard. What can the President do?

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1933 to help put people to work. The WPA offered work to the unemployed with different programs, including highways and building construction, slum clearance, reforestation, and rural development.

After helping construct several roads in the area, the WPA began work in Coppell in November 1935 at Grapevine Springs Park. This was the historic site of Sam Houston’s attempt to negotiate a peace
treaty with Native Americans in 1843 when Houston was President of the Republic of Texas.

WPA records say that work on the park cost $25,000 and required five months to complete. Ninety men worked to build a 1,800 foot retaining wall of native rock, 2,500 feet of gravel walks, three foot-bridges, a dam, twenty picnic tables, thirteen benches, and landscaping with trees, plants and shrubs. A paved road seven-tenths of a mile in length was built from Belt Line Road to the park.

Johnny Dobecka, who was 18 years old at the time, remembered the WPA keeping their horses, mules and wagons at his family home on Ledbetter Road off of E. Belt Line. There was a hill next to his family’s house and the WPA took down the entire hill using picks and shovels! They had five or six wagons that they used to haul dirt, sand, and rock from that hill down to a low spot where the road crossed the Trinity River. They dumped their loads there to raise the road, but when it flooded again the road washed away.

You and I may still travel on portions of Belt Line Road between WPA stone columns, a gathering spot
Coppell and Carrollton that was built by the WPA workmen. The WPA program gave money to projects and helped build things within the Coppell community that the state could not have afforded at the time. The historic park and a significant portion of the roads we use today were first built and funded by the WPA.

Coppell's experience with this jobs program of the '30s still benefits the community today.

This drawing shows downtown Coppell in the 1930s.
World War II Impacts Coppell

When the United States declared war on Japan after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, all U.S. citizens needed to make sacrifices to help the war effort.

Many young men in Coppell enlisted to fight in Europe or the Pacific. Their families at home were proud of their service while missing their sons, brothers, grandsons and nephews.

Coppell families, like other U.S. families, would hang a small flag with a red border and a blue star in the center of a white field to show that they had a person serving in the war. When a young man was killed in combat, the family back in Coppell would hang a similar flag with a gold star to show the soldier had died.

People on the homefront made sacrifices in their everyday lives to help the war effort. They had to buy groceries with ration coupon booklets. A person had to present a certain number of coupons to buy simple items like flour, sugar, and butter. It would be a very special treat to have a cake for a birthday, since it would take many ration coupons to buy all of the ingredients.

Many times people in Coppell and all across the U.S. would have to turn off all of their house lights and draw thick shades in front of their windows when they practiced aid raids. People were concerned that the Japanese and Germans would attack the U.S., and they did not want the enemy planes to see lights and know it was a town with people.
Many times people were asked to collect tires, metal, and paper to help with the war effort. The factories that built cars and other household items were converted to factories to build tanks, airplanes, and guns. With many men off to war, women worked in the factories to help build these war items. Family life changed with mothers working. Kids had to do more to help at home.

Every person, young and old, was asked to do many things to help the U.S. and its Allies such as England and France win the war against the Germans and Japanese. In small towns like Coppell, people grew victory gardens with vegetables such as lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, and peas.

With the people back home helping with all of their everyday sacrifices, the Allied soldiers won World War II, and the Germans and Japanese surrendered. In churches in Coppell and throughout the U.S.A., people celebrated on VE (Victory in Europe) and VJ (Victory in Japan) Days. Victory was achieved by all because they worked together for a common goal.

Coppell veterans returned home.
Town Forms City Government

Coppell became an incorporated city when it received its Charter in 1955. The city of Coppell has a municipal government headed by an elected mayor. Mr. R. M. Johnson was elected its first mayor in 1956.

There are seven Council members or Places elected by the city's residents. They primarily vote on zoning issues, the budget and appoint paid city officials. Neither they nor the mayor receive a salary.

The City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesday of each month, except June, November and December. Meetings are open to all citizens, and allow a forum of a few minutes for citizens to address the Council.

The meetings are held at Town Center and are also shown live on the city's government cable channel. Places 1, 3, 5 and 7 are elected one year; Places 2, 4, 6, and the mayor are elected another year, and in the third year there are no elections.

The mayor is the official head of Coppell, yet does not vote during Council meetings unless there is a tie. The city manager administers the budget that the Council adopts. He or she receives a salary, and acts as go-between for citizens, the Council and city organizations.

In addition to City Council, Coppell has many opportunities for citizens to serve as volunteers on Boards. These Boards cover everything from animal services to the library and parks system.

Engaging in local government not only allows citizens to tell their local government what they want, but helps shape the community for the better, thus improving the quality of life for Coppell's residents.
Coppell Has a Unique Terrain

Coppell is different in terrain, because it is surrounded by waterways—creeks and the Trinity River—and highways, separating it from other nearby towns. The Elm Fork of the Trinity River forms the town's east boundary, and the creeks are Grapevine Creek on the south, and Denton Creek, Timber Creek, Cottonwood Branch, and Baker's Branch on the north, all flowing into the Trinity.

Early settlers, including Native Americans, always looked for sources of water for drinking, cooking, washing, watering crops, and fishing. Indian artifacts have been found along Coppell creek and river beds. Coppell began as a farming community, depending on crops for food and especially cotton for a source of income.

Waterways also provided spiritual and recreational activity. Early baptisms were held in the Trinity River. Swimming, picnics beside the water, even skating on the frozen creeks were among entertainment activities described by old timers.

Early baptisms were held in the Trinity River.
The town experienced a 100-year flood in the early 1900s that left residents in ankle-deep water.

Coppell experienced a 100-year flood in early 1900 in the area near Coppell High School and Town Center. Even today, parts of the City flood near the Trinity River floodplain.

The Coppell area also has a number of hills over by North Lake and Valley Ranch that early residents called Caddo Mounds. Even though Indians camped in the area, the hills are not thought to be true burial or ceremonial mounds, according to state archeologists.

When North Lake was drained around 2012, Coppell youth during a search found 60-million-year-old ammonites, an extinct group of marine mollusk animals or fossils. Each year, the Coppell Historical Society conducts a local archeological search, and all ages are invited.

But one natural hill did not last. A hill called Turkey Knob, on Denton Tap Road across from Town Center, was torn down by developers to make way for more houses.
Homes Had Outhouses, No Electricity, But Kids Had Fun

In the later 1800s and early 1900s, Coppell residents had none of the conveniences we have today. One early resident named Jackie (Jack) Kirkland recalled what it was like back then. She lived in old downtown, and her home, built in 1904, still sits in what is called Heritage Park, under the windmill.

She had three sisters and four brothers. The children played in the meadows behind her house and picked up pecans for the family. She helped her dad, a farmer, pick cotton in her father's fields across from her house. But she joked, "Our dad didn't expect anything out of us."

The family had an outdoor restroom called an outhouse, as did all the houses back then. "You just got used to it," she said about cold winter mornings. There was no electricity, and lighting was by lantern or candles. An iceman brought blocks of ice to cool the ice-boxes, because there were no refrigerators.

She and her brothers and sisters first attended a two-room school by her house and then moved into the new two-story school when she was in the third grade.

She said the favorite things to do back then were simple, such as

Jack Kirkland, at 90, remembered Coppell's early and funny days.
Jack's mother, Jennie Kirkland, stood in front of the family home in old downtown Coppell.

going to the train depot to watch for the train or going to watch the local blacksmith shoe a horse. "We'd say, 'Let's go see 'em shoe ol' so and so,'" she recalled.

When she was 10 years old, she and her sister first took the family's fringe top surrey, pulled by a horse, to Grapevine by themselves. She was not afraid. "Nothing happened then, other than a horse running away with you," she laughed. There were no cars until she became a teenager.

Jackie Kirkland was on the first basketball team, even though she said she had "never seen a basketball in my life." During her first game, the Coppell team got beat 51 to 1. The next year, they were prepared. "They didn't beat us much," she joked.

At 90 years old when she shared her memories, Jack Kirkland showed that Coppell youth were strong, daring and funny.
Families were important.

The Burrell Howell home near the railroad track

The County's first brick house, at Bethel School Road and Denton Tap
Native Americans in the Coppell Area

Native Americans did not build permanent structures in the Coppell area. They were part of the Plains Indians that lived on the prairies and forests in the Southwest part of America. This part of Texas had many old trails that were used for many years by Indians moving from one part of the country to another. A popular stop would be Grapevine Springs. The place where daily living took place, the campsite, is the most common of all prehistoric sites in Texas. Native Americans were always on the move. Many of the same sites were used over many hundreds of years.

Small groups traveled through our area on hunting trips. They hunted for deer, rabbits, squirrels and game birds. The meat was roasted on sticks made from small trees. Native Americans used bows and arrows to kill animals for food. They made the arrows from cobbles they found in Denton Creek. Sometimes they carried flint from other areas of the country so they would have useful material to make arrowheads. It took a lot of skill to make the arrowheads. The wood from the Bodark trees in our area made good, flexible, strong bows.

They also collected mussels found in Denton Creek. The mussels were placed on top of a hot fire. When the shells opened, the mussels were ready to eat. It took a lot of mussels to make a good dinner! The shells could be used to make necklaces and bracelets. Fish would be plentiful in Denton Creek.

Hunting trips would also include gathering nuts from the trees in our area. The nuts could be eaten whole or ground into a kind of flour.
One of the food sources would be a mixture of dried meat, ground nuts and berries. Cooking "pots" were created from animal stomachs or treated animal hide. These "pots" were suspended over the fire, filled with water and left to boil. Native plants would be cooked along with meat.

The Native Americans were very efficient. They used all parts of an animal.

Meat provided food. Sinew, which connects muscles to bone, provided strong ties. Hides were cleaned and used for clothing, water containers and tents. Hooves provided a type of glue. Bones could be used as shovels, scoops and fishhooks. Antlers were used to chip the stone to make arrowheads and handles for tools.

When archeologists look for Indian camping sites, they look for a location that has plenty of water. They also look for old bones and arrowheads that may be lying on the ground. Denton Creek has many Indian camping sites on both sides of the creek. There is always running water in the creek so it was a good place to camp. There are many trees to provide wood for fires. The water also attracted animals which made hunting easier. Cottonwood Creek also has some Indian camping sites.

The Coppell area was a good place for Native Americans to camp. There were plenty of animals to hunt, lots of water and shade from the hot sun.

Jan and Paul Lorrain, from Coppell, found many Indian artifacts in the Coppell area during their searches of nearby creeks. They served as archeological stewards for the Texas State Historical Commission.

Artifacts found in Coppell
Three Developments Lead to Coppell's Growth

Three developments after 1950 helped Coppell grow from a small, rural town of around 1200 to the city it has become in the early 21st century.

First, in 1955, North Lake Generating Station located a power plant and accompanying lake on 1700 acres of land at S. Belt Line and E. Belt Line. The plant brought electricity to the North Texas area. The lake and park were used for recreation. The huge plant was torn down, but the lake remains.

In 1964, plans were announced for Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport on 17,000 acres just south of Coppell. Many people wanted to live and work near a major airport, often needing to travel for work. Many pilots and business executives, even Dallas Cowboys players, chose Coppell for their hometown.

In 1967, plans were announced to extend LBJ Freeway west to the new airport. The freeway made it easier for Coppell residents to travel to Dallas for work or over to the airport.

These three projects caused developers to flock to Coppell, building subdivisions and attracting light industrial and corporate offices. Development helped increase taxes to support the city and develop roads, parks and other services. The City designed a plan to make the town's land one-third residential, one-third light industrial and one-third park land.
Development occurred rapidly in 2000, with Old Town Coppell coming full circle as a redeveloped gathering spot.

Coppell created an independent school district that also attracts residents.

The population increased from 1200 in 1960 to over 40,000 in 2016.

Coppell city leaders have worked hard to make Coppell not just another suburb but an independent, self-sufficient and caring community. Its mottos have been "A City With a Beautiful Future" and "A Community for a Lifetime."