

The Antioch Community

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Originally published in "[The Navarro County Scroll](#)", 1966

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On December 24, 1858, Joseph P. Sneed, a native of Tennessee, purchased 2,800 acres of land located in the extreme western portion of Navarro County and approximately five miles northwest of the town of Dawson. According to the report of descendants of early settlers in the area, the sale price was fifty cents per acre.

Sneed had come to Texas when it appeared that there would be war between the North and the South over the slavery question. He owned a number of slaves and hoped to retain them by settling in this remote and undeveloped territory in Texas. (See [Notes Concerning Paragaraph II](#))

After the South lost the war and his slaves were freed, Sneed sold small tracts of fifty and seventy-five acres of land to his former servants. The new owners took up the task of building homes and clearing the land so it could be cultivated. There were no pine trees in the area, but a small saw mill provided slab lumber from the more desirable trees in the timbered sections.

When homes and barns were completed, attention was given to the erection of a church building for the congregation of Methodists in the section. This marked the beginning of the organized community of Antioch.

David McCandless, a surveyor and an earlier white settler in this part of the county, had acquired large land holdings through a patent from the state, and R. D. Bills, J. L. Slater and other white citizens were also owners of large tracts of land in Navarro and adjoining Hill County. Land was purchased from them by the former slaves, and the community of Antioch expanded and embraced territory in the two counties.

Antioch was never a trade center. The only business operated there was a small confectionery which was housed in a private home. There was a gin in the community for several years, but a faulty boiler exploded and destroyed the building and machinery. One employee and a customer were killed.

Until other towns were established in that region, the baled cotton was marketed in Corsicana. Food and other supplies were purchased at Dresden and Spring Hill in Navarro County and McLainsboro in Hill County until the Cotton Belt Railroad traversed this section and towns were established at Dawson and Hubbard. Today the two latter towns and Malone (also in Hill County) provide markets for the Negroes who still reside in the Antioch community.

The other commercial establishments at Antioch were a syrup mill and a grist mill. The former was operated by Anderson Drake, who was previously one of Joseph Sneed's

slaves. The bottom land adjacent to Treadwell Branch, which provided drainage in the area, produced the ribbon and sugar cane from which the syrup was processed. Mrs. Jocie Henderson, Drake's daughter, who now resides in Hubbard, says, "working around a syrup mill was the hardest and hottest work I ever did in my life." Stripping the cane in hot, bottom-land, and standing around the fire that boiled the juice in was pots was not a desirable vocation 'in the good ole summertime'.

Since many pioneer settlers resided considerable distances from trade centers and flour was difficult to obtain, they used meal for bread. Grist mills that ground the corn were important industries in these settlements. The one at Antioch employed horses and mules to turn the grinding stones.

As the population at Antioch increased and the community expanded in area, a small settlement was located at Four Corners -- on the Hill-Navarro County line. Another community was established at "Forks of the Creek" (Ash Creek) three miles north of Antioch. The former is still considered a part of Antioch. When suitable implements were provided to till the heavier black land, the "Forks of the Creek" settlement was abandoned and the community at Pelham was established. Thus it can be said that Antioch played an important part in developing the territory north and west of it.

Joseph Sneed, who brought the Negro slaves to live in this area, donated land for a cemetery where they could bury their dead. Later, Elmer Porter, a Pelham citizen who owns considerable acreage in the Antioch community, donated an additional acre of land to extend the size of the cemetery. At the outset, the plot had areas for the burial of both white and negro citizens, however today it is used exclusively as a burial ground for negroes.

A church to house the Methodist congregation in Antioch was erected shortly after the village was founded. When it was destroyed by fire, it was replaced by a structure that was lost during a windstorm. Two additional buildings were ravaged by fire and windstorm. But the courageous church members constructed a fifth building that is still standing. However, most of the Antioch residents have moved from the area, and the structure is not being used.

There was a Holiness congregation which had a house of worship at the "Four Corners" location in the Antioch community. It had a small membership and played a less important role in the religious life of this settlements.

Undoubtedly, educational advantages for both white and negro children were very limited for many years prior to the organization of public school districts in this section of Navarro County. The records in the office of the Navarro County superintendent reveal that McCandless was established as a common school district in 1895 and a similar district was established in the Pelham area in 1899.

The Antioch settlement was included in the McCandless district which operated a school for the Negro scholastics. Austin Lockhart was the first teacher at Antioch. Later the McCandless district was annexed to the Dawson district (1949).

Some of the pupils in the Antioch area attended the Ash Creek school at Pelham. Others enrolled in a Negro school in the Herbert District in adjoining Hill County. The Ash Creek District still operates an elementary school for Negro scholastics. The Herbert District consolidated with Hubbard in 1949.

Prior to the establishment of these public school districts, what education the children received was provided by their parents or schools that were operated on a subscription basis, if the families could afford it.

Antioch never had a post office. The nearest offices were located at Dresden and Spring Hill in Navarro County and McLainsboro in Hill County. After Hubbard was founded in 1881, it was more convenient to get service from that office, which inaugurated a rural route through the Antioch community in the first decade of the present century.

A few small business establishments were located at Four Corners, but the construction of better roads and the stronger competition from more substantial markets in the larger white settlements made these business ventures unprofitable.

Like Babylon, the Antioch community has only a cemetery and an unused church building to mark the site of its organized community activities. During three-quarters of a century it played an important part in the settlement and development of this section of Navarro County, but like other rural communities, it was a victim of changing economic conditions.

Antioch lives only in memory today, but history will record that the courageous and hard-working citizens who lived in this community performed well the mission assigned to them. What more can be expected from any group of human beings?

Antioch Family Names:

Brackens, Burns, Carruthers, Cavitt, Cood, Drake, Henderson, Lockhart, Moore, Owens, Porter, Sample, Washington, Wilhite, Wilson

[Notes Concerning Paragraph II]

In "The Navarro County Scroll" of 1966, L.L. Wilkes, second paragraph, Joseph P Sneed was "concerned about the coming War between the State and went to Texas" The facts are some different.

Joseph Perkins Sneed was born January 10, 1804, the son of James William Sneed and Achsah Bond Harris, in Williamson County, TN. The farm where they lived was some 15 miles South of Nashville, and offered no schools. Joseph was "home schooled" until his mother died when he was eight. At age 14 he was sent to one of his father's farms in

Alabama, and at age 24, he accepted the Lord in 1829. He was admitted as a Junior Preacher for the Methodists for rural Alabama. In 1831, he was accepted as a full-time preacher and was assigned to the swamps of Mississippi and Louisiana, where others had been unwilling to go. In 1838, he was assigned to Texas, and spent the next four years traveling on horseback to any promising site where he could hold church. In 1842, tiring of this exhausting routine, he went back to Tennessee where his family introduced him to an 18 year old Nashville girl, Achsah Bond Harris, whose family was well-to-do.

Joseph talked her into marrying him October 12, 1842. They immediately set forth for Texas with several wagons and slaves. Achsah was appalled at how rustic Texas was. He bought land near Gay Hill, TX for a home, and then began buying land in Milam County, where they first occupied a one room home built by his slaves. That cabin is now on display at Cameron, TX.

He had three children by 1848, and had moved into a much nicer home on his "plantation." Joseph began accumulating tracts of land in various parts of Texas, and when the slaves were freed by the North winning the war between the states, Joe Sneed hired those same people in many cases. Where they wished to start their own homes, he provided very low cost land on which they built their own homes.

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Feb 20, 2001