

Hope Well Methodist Episcopal Cemetery Brown's Creek Community

Written by Linda Mullen



The Old Hope Well Methodist Church at one time was located adjacent to the cemetery grounds. This photo was found in the FCGS cemetery files done by Betty Morrow in the 1980's.

Hope Well Methodist Episcopal Cemetery is an active African American cemetery that is located on the northern shores of Fairfield Lake, adjacent to the southern side of Big Brown Mining Plant. It is associated with the Titus Farm Community and the Hope Well Methodist Episcopal Church. It is under the care of the Hope Well Memorial Cemetery Association led by Elawrence Gabriel (903-389-2886).

The Titus Farm Community, a primarily African-American settlement, formed in the area of Brown's Creek after Emancipation. It was also known as Brown's Creek Community. The Hope

Well Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1874 in a log cabin on land given by Edward "Ned" (1812-1900) and Clorie (Dunbar) Titus (1820-1890). Ned and his wife were among the slaves brought from South Carolina to Arkansas, and to Freestone County, Texas in 1852 by their masters, the Simeon and Nancy Lake Family. Ned and Clorie had eleven children: Timothy "Tite", Frances, Jim, Harriet, Henry, Emma, Sudie, Walter, Willie, Levi, and Guydon. Many of the burials stem from this family and their descendants.

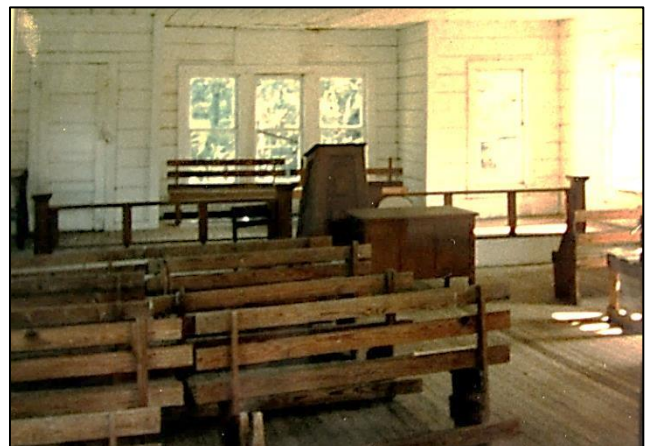
Another slave family, Joe and Nancy Keeton, also came to Freestone County around 1851. When the slaves were freed, Joe and Nancy moved to the Brown Creek area as well. They had five known children: Noah I, Hosea, Aaron, Fannie and Mariah. Noah I was married to Anne Carden. Most if not all of their children and grandchildren are buried in the Hope Well Cemetery. Their son Jim/James was born about the time the Civil War was coming to an end. He and his wife, Mary Jane Yarbrough, had 11 children: Maggie, Noah II, Harrison, Jim, Elmus, Ira, James Harvey, Crecia Ellen, Hannah Cora, and Hayward.

J.A. and F.E. Hill later donated an acre of land to the Northern Texas Methodist Episcopal Conference for Hope Well Methodist Church on January 29, 1881. Henry and Susan Titus gave the land for the cemetery when their son, Arthur, died on July 7, 1888. He was the first known burial. He is the grandson of Ned Titus.

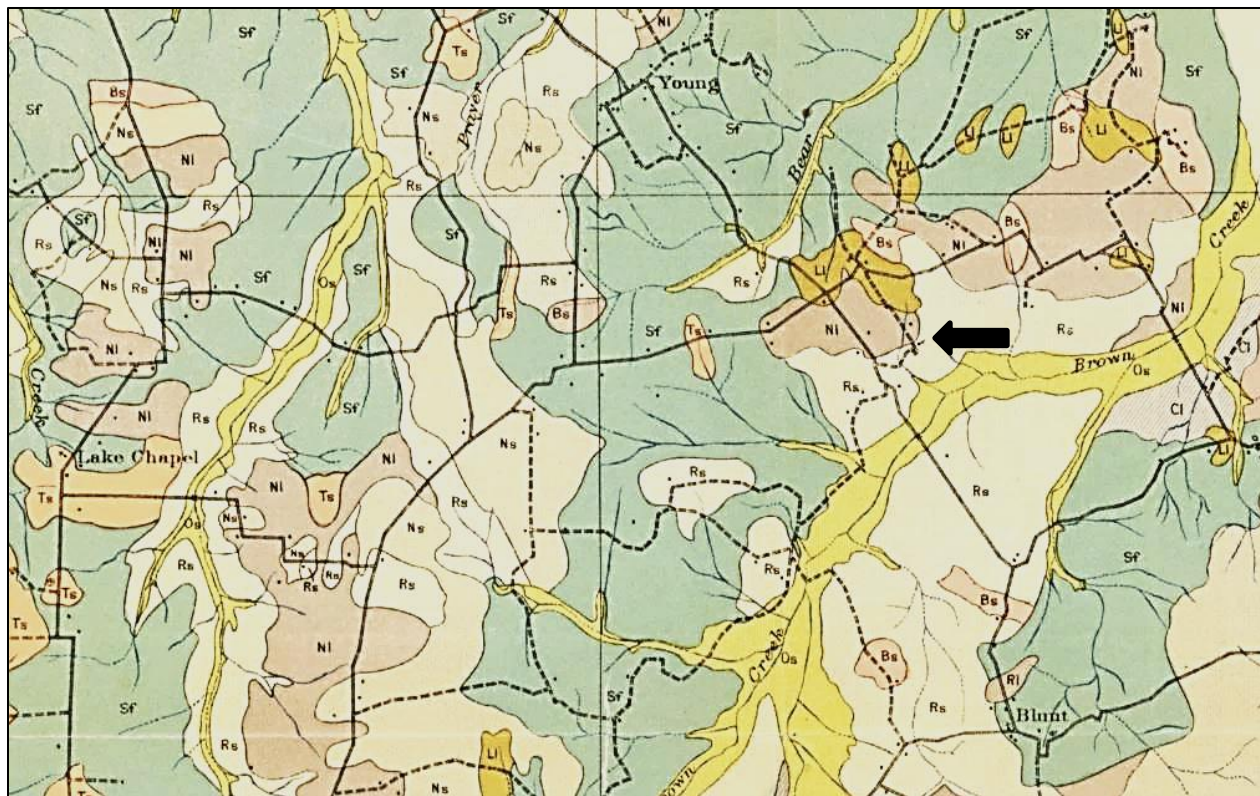
Ned Titus, Ben Lee, and Jim Keeton, amazingly, were able to acquire more than 350 acres of land each in the "flat woods" area where they were instrumental in forming a predominately black farming community. Other ex-slaves acquired lesser amounts of land. Titus Farm School, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Heroines of Jericho, and F.A. and A.M. Masons were also established in the Titus Farm Community. The Titus Farm School had an enrollment of 51 for the 1893-94 school term. Other slave families who came to this community in its early years were William Jefferson "Jeff" Betts, Sam Abney, Guy Mimms, Hite Carden, John Hamilton, Sonn Averhart, and Sylvia Dickens.

John Terry, a direct descendant of Hite Carden, Sr., remembers many stories told by his grandmother, Anner (Dickens) Carden. Hite Carden's family was sold on the slave market in Tennessee. His whole family ended up going to Texas without him. He walked all the way to Texas to find his loved ones in Freestone County. Also when Sylvia Dicken's was sold, her last memory of her family was her mother waving bye to her as she was sold and they were divided.

In the 1970's when Texas Utilities was building the power plant, the cemetery was nearly lost. Mrs. Loreta Yvonne (Titus) Phillips, daughter of Governor and A.M. "Sweet" Titus, challenged the Big Brown Mining Company. With only her husband, Louie Phillips for support, she went before the Water Commission in Austin and received assurance that Hope Well Cemetery would not be disturbed. With their efforts the cemetery was preserved.



Inside photo of the Hope Well Church also taken by Betty Morrow



This 1918 Soil Survey Map shows the location (marked by the arrow) of the Hope Well Church and Cemetery in relation to the old communities of Lake Chapel, Young and Blunt. Brown's Creek is now Fairfield Lake.

There is also another Hopewell Cemetery in Freestone County near Teague. It is traditionally an Anglo American cemetery associated with the Hopewell Primitive Baptist Church. However, through the years the burials of the Big Brown Creek Hope Well Methodist Cemetery and the Teague Hopewell Baptist Cemetery have often become confused by individuals who are not familiar with the different families. To add to the confusion, there is also a Hopewell Cemetery in Navarro County and a Hopewell Cemetery in Leon County. The internet has not helped matters either, with so many people wanting to post cemetery information that are not at all familiar with the various Hopewell cemeteries in the area or the families from the different communities. In an effort to help correct some of the errors posted on the internet, the FCGS has been engaged in redoing the Hope Well Methodist Cemetery survey that was done by Betty Morrow in the 1980's. She also had problems confusing the different cemeteries.

The Hope Well Methodist cemetery survey found on the following pages was done by Linda Mullen, Paula Snider, and Cindy Eisen along with help from Elawrence Gabriel, Virgil Keeton, Jr., Sherry Brackens, and Eric Wood. Every marker in the cemetery was photographed and the photos were processed and posted on Findagrave. The Texas Death Certificates, now available on the Familysearch and Ancestry web sites, were also consulted. Many unmarked graves have been discovered through this research that were not readily available in the 1980's when Mrs. Morrow did her research, as the internet was not yet accessible. Many names that were on Mrs. Morrow's list have been removed. Eric Bonner Wood has also posted the information on the Freestone County Archives web site.

The FCGS also plans to resurvey the Hopewell Primitive Baptist Cemetery near Teague. If you are interested in helping with this project please contact Paula Snider 903-389-4579 or Linda Mullen 903-389-3167.

Sources: Wilbur Thirkield (Bill) Bonner-Titus

Eric Wood: Freestone County Archives: <http://files.usgarchives.net/tx/freestone/cemetery/hopewell.txt>

"McDuffe Betts", The Freestone County History Book, Vol. I, p. 255

"Edward Ned Titus", The Freestone County History Book, Vol. II, p. 500

"Joe and Nancy Keeton", The Freestone County History Book, Vol. II, p. 302

"Reflections on Edward "Ned" Titus" by Wilbur T. Bonner-Titus/ Freestone County Archives

"Spotlight Upon Unsung Heroes: Loretta Yvonne Titus Phillips Champion of Hope Well Cemetery" by Wilbur T. Titus/ Freestone County Times, March 6, 2007