



## Welcome to Little Egypt

Posted December 18, 2009, 4:32 p.m. by Dawn Quiett

Located on what is now the corner of Ferndale and Shoreview roads, Little Egypt was a Freedman's town founded after the Civil War.

Jeff Hill became patriarch of the community because it was established on land deeded to him in 1865 by his former owner. The community became known as Little Egypt because the residents were delivered from bondage, as in the biblical story.

Other residents included Ephram and Amanda Floyd, the Field family off Skillman Street between Church Road and Merriman Park, and the Giddings family near McCree Road and Mediterranean Drive. The area was made up of an unusual number of African-American landowners for that era.

By 1870 residents had built the Little Egypt Baptist Church. The town was made up of 20 small homes with only three to five rooms each, most of them built where the old Tom Thumb used to be. The Little Egypt Baptist Church faced Ferndale Road, which was the center of the residents' lives.

Their children were educated in their own schoolhouse, located where the Shell station is now. There was also a local dance hall located at site of White Rock Coffee.

In the early 1900s, the school was a small one-room building. It had blackboards and rows of homemade benches for the students, and a old coal stove.

Classes were for students in the first through seventh grades, and more than 30 students attended. The last day school was the most celebrated day of the year. Younger children and their parents came from miles around in wagons, brought food, and participated in a program with speeches and games.

Not all of the students at the school came from Little Egypt. Other African-Americans walked to be educated there. The lives of the people of Little Egypt might be describe as ones of hard work and hardship. Most of the residents made a living doing yard work, babysitting, or cleaning houses.

Even though the land was poor, many families had small gardens and they worked at maintaining their houses. Water was an issue because there was no source on the land, and barrels of water were hauled in. The people of Little Egypt showed faith and joy in the participation in the Little Egypt Baptist Church, which provided recreation and social activities as well as worship. Saturday night fish fries took place to raise money for the church, and people came from as far as Oak Cliff to take part.

Even though Little Egypt was officially within the Dallas city limits, it remained a distinct community until 1962. In 1961, the area was rezoned for retail use and developers bought the 30-35 acre tract across the street from what is now the Northlake Shopping Center. The community by that time had not changed much from its beginnings. It still had dirt roads, no running water, no gas or electricity, and no indoor plumbing.

Two-thirds of the 28 families who owned land in the community wanted to sell their land and find new homes close to one another. In May 1962, the 200 residents of Little Egypt moved to their new homes, led by community patriarch William Hill, who was then 89. Most of the families settled in Oak Cliff or in Rockwall County.

Thanks to Girl Troop 154 from their 1976 project about Lake Highlands and The Handbook of Texas.