

The Story of Sowers Cemetery

Edmund D. Sowers arrived in the area, that is now West Irving, from Illinois in 1856 and claimed 32 acres of good land with available spring water in the Parsons headright, or land grant, near what is now Pioneer Dr. and Beltline roads in Irving, which is just to the west of the Sowers cemetery.

The Parsons land grant was basically a rectangle of land extending east, west and south about 1 ½ to 2 miles with the cemetery on the north side.

Sowers was the owner of the first store in the Sowers community and the town was sometimes called Sowers Store. Along with the store, it had a school, and two physicians.

Before the civil war began in 1861, there was a once per week mail stop at the Sowers store on the Dallas to Birdville route. It was discontinued for several years during the war. Birdville's original name was Ft. Bird and was the earliest settlement in Tarrant Co. Birdville is just north of Ft. Worth and close to Hurst and N. Richland Hills. It was annexed into Haltom City in 1990.

After the civil war which ended in 1865, Mr. Sowers reestablished a post office and served as postmaster for the Sowers area before it passed to H.N. Lucas. The mail route was then Dallas to Grapevine serving Sowers and Estelle. Estelle being just east of present day DFW airport near the Dallas and Tarrant county line.

In 1868 it's believed that the first interments at the cemetery were on the Parsons land grant, marked only with stones and on a section of the cemetery that would be known as Beulahland Memorial Park in the 1930's. According to folklore and documented on the Texas Historical marker (the first in Irving dedicated in 1973), these graves were believed to be unmarked graves of a woman and her daughter who befell an unknown tragic death.

To challenge the folklore of the first interments of 1868, and to add a level of complication, 1867 is the oldest death date in the cemetery on a modern day stone of Catherine Caster Hawes Worthington who is also buried on this same northernmost section of the cemetery.

To add to the lore, a recently discovered newspaper article from 1964 sites a man with the surname Applewhite as the earliest interment. The article specifically mentions the Applewhite grave as one of the motivations for Sower's adjacent property donation in 1874.

Whatever the history of these earliest graves, on August 14, 1874 Mr. Sowers honored existing gravesites by providing a property for school, church and cemetery purposes on his property south and adjacent to the earliest gravesites. This is the southwest portion of today's cemetery. On his land he gave free plots to members of the community. It is worth noting that there are graves on this section of property that are older than 1874.

County land records reveal that the owner of the original burial property was probably SS Connor and not Sevier Smalley as indicated on the historical marker. The records obtained from the State for the historical marker application did not dispute this newly discovered fact. The earliest county land records indicate that Sevier Smalley did not yet live in the state and was not of an age to own property in 1868. County records further reveal that Smalley did not purchase the property until 1891 from Pete and Lidia Faucher.

With 1868 being the unofficial date of the establishment of Sowers Cemetery, as to historical perspective, the founders of Irving would not arrive to the area for another 30+ years.

It is interesting to note why settlers were coming to this part of North Texas. The civil war ended in 1865. Many southerners who had been hurt financially during the war came to the area to rebuild their lives. North Texas farm land meant opportunity. Dallas county continued to grow during the Reconstruction years, which did not have the added burden of many areas of the South with major rebuilding.

A school was built on the west half of the 1874 donated property, which was eventually destroyed by fire in 1960. This land just west of the current cemetery is now owned by Irving Independent School District which took over the Sowers School District in 1956. There are many people today that still remember attending the old school.

A church was never built. But it was common for the school to be used by church groups. The Sowers Road name was changed to Pioneer Drive in the early 1960's.

By 1884 the town had a population of seventy-five and several businesses including a church, school, doctor, blacksmith, druggist and two steam gristmill-cotton gins.

In 1899, For \$1, Edmund Sowers donates a second piece of adjacent property east of the first dedicated property to increase the cemetery size.

In 1926, one of the founders of Irving, Otis Brown, donates the eastern most portion of the cemetery which operated as a separate cemetery under the name Sunset Memorial Park. To this day it causes confusion on sites like findagrave.com because obituaries and death certificates make reference to Sunset Memorial Park and not Sowers. The operation of Sunset Memorial Park was turned over to the Sowers Cemetery Association in 1966.

A corporation called Beulahland Memorial Park purchased a 5.556 acre piece of property in 1934 which included the original burial property. The intention may have been to commercially expand the cemetery which obviously never materialized. Regardless, the small original burial area became land-locked between the Sowers Cemetery, a 1950's housing development north and IISD property acquisition on the west.

Because the IISD took over the Sowers School district in 1956, it also inherited the 1874 cemetery property. This correlates with the time period the City of Irving was annexing the Sowers community.

The Sowers meeting minutes indicate as late as 1975 the Beulahland owner's desire to finally quitclaim the original burial property over to the Sowers Association. However, there is no known document of conveyance at this writing and the school district is recognized as legal owner of this property as well as the 1874 property, for a total of 2.1 acres of the cemetery.

Work continues to quitclaim deed the original burial property over to legal ownership of the Sowers Association.

It is worth noting, however, all indications are that the Association assumed responsibility for the entirety of cemetery grounds care and maintenance regardless of origination or ownership, as it does today. Prior to the formation of the Association, plot owners were responsible for the

cemetery's condition. The cemetery receives no maintenance and operations assistance from the school district.

As the largest community cemetery in Irving, Sowers has about 1300 interments on 4.6 acres of property. Many streets, parks, and schools in Irving are named for those interred, such as Barton, Britain, Caster, DeHaes, Farine, Gilbert, Irby, Lively, Metker, Sowers, Story, and Toler.

Our documents indicate that the Sowers Cemetery Association was formed in 1961. After a prolific and active 20 years, the Association was all but disbanded in 1980 and was almost dormant until early this decade when a few citizens realized financial sustainability had eroded along with deteriorating conditions at the cemetery.

Today the Association is working to get recognized as a Historic Texas Cemetery designation, achieve 501(c)(13) status and find revenue and volunteers to sustain the cemetery into the future.

Although it is certain there are many unoccupied grave sites, the Cemetery Association has incomplete records of grave site sales and is seeking any information or volunteer research from the public that may have cemetery records.

A big focus today is to identify new grave sites for sale and use old fashioned revenue sources like garage sales, fundraisers, cemetery tours and seek donations from descendants to offset shortfalls to the operational budget and increase the trust funds.

We are always open to local clubs, groups and associations to volunteer at the cemetery for maintenance and adopt projects.

Sowers is the oldest, largest and most visible Community Cemetery in Irving, located at 3101 W. Pioneer Dr. Irving 75061.

Send or receive information through the following contact information.

Address all physical mail and donations to:

Sowers Cemetery Association

817 W Pioneer Dr. #1007

Irving, TX 75061

Email: info@sowerscemetery.com

Phone: 972-754-6547 (Gerald Farris)

[Sowers Website](#)

[Sowers FaceBook Page](#)

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