

## SMITHFIELD

William Turner (1803–1878) and his wife Mary (1819–1906) were among the tens of thousands of immigrants streaming into Texas after it entered the union in 1845. Arriving from Virginia in 1846, the Turners migrated to the Tarrant County frontier in 1856, establishing their home and blacksmith shop on the south side of Watauga Road (present Mid-Cities Boulevard) near the current intersection with Smithfield Road. Their 300 acres stretched toward the current site of the Fort Worth Christian School. The immediate farming area was evidently considered by some to be part of the Willow Springs community. Willow Springs Methodist Church was located two-and-a-half miles west in present Watauga. There are also references to the area as Bethel.

The Turners in the late 1850s attended the Willow Springs Methodist “Class,” a Methodist institution which was a small, local substitute church in a sparsely settled area, visited whenever possible by itinerant preachers. Desiring services in the immediate community, Turner bought a class leader book, printed by the Methodist Church, constructed split log benches at home, and invited friends into his home for services in 1858. They may have clung to the “Willow Springs” name for awhile, but probably the congregation called itself Zion and established that name for the community that grew around the area. Or perhaps the church that was eventually established, the Zion Methodist Episcopal Church, South, founded around 1866, took its name from the community.



Historical Marker of the Smithfield Methodist Church.



Zion Methodist Church founded around 1866, probably first called “Willow Springs.”

Courtesy of Smithfield United Methodist Church



TJ/C

A. M. Hightower, Pernelis Hightower (second wife)

Other early settlers included William and Elizabeth Smith and their three young sons. They migrated from Missouri to Fort Worth in 1859, camped for a year within the present site of Trinity Park, then moved to the community of Zion. Two of the brothers, Dave (1845–1920) and Eli (who was born in Golden Grove, Missouri, 1848), eventually owned land in and around the village. Eli kept some of the first shorthorns in the area.

Alfred M. Hightower (1825–1897) and his first wife, Sarah Hightower (1824–1878) reached Tarrant County in 1858 and entered the cattle business. Hightower was born in Tennessee but was raised on a farm in Illinois. Like many in Texas' north-central tier of counties near the Red River, Hightower was bitterly opposed to secession, but nonetheless served the Confederacy in battle and as a

recruiting officer. At 6 feet, 3 inches and 300 pounds he cut an imposing figure for the time. Not until 1880 did he permanently settle in the Smithfield area, where he raised crops and cattle on 200 acres. He and Sarah had six children.

Still another early settler was L. W. Jones (1817–1895), who hailed from Kentucky and Illinois, and homesteaded 284 acres in Bethel, as he called it, in 1852.

The high prairie grasses in Tarrant County helped cloak small Indian raids. Apparently on several occasions from the 1850s into the 1870s Zion's men slipped out to the north Tarrant County countryside and exchanged gunshots with a few raiders. On such occasions women and children would



Historical Marker—Alfred Madison Hightower, a man though bitterly opposed to secession fought in many battles for the Confederate Army. This marker is located in the Smithfield Cemetery.



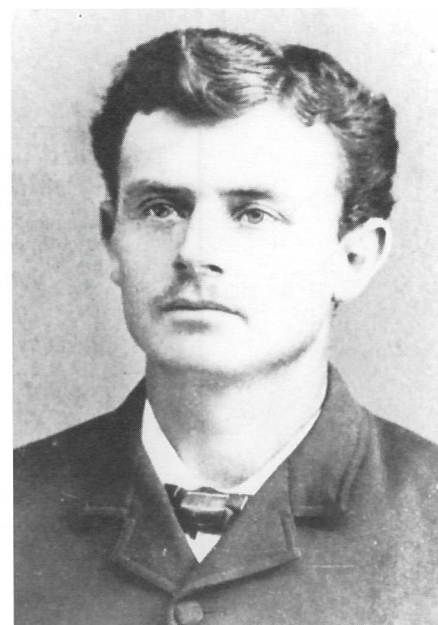
Patricia Richards

Over 100 years later, tall prairie grasses continue to grow along the nature trails of NRH 100 Acre Park off Starnes Road. Photo taken 1998.

take pallets and hide in the corn fields and stay there until the men returned. Excitement was actually meager on the Texas frontier, and was more typically confined to such activities as those enacted by some of Zion's women—dipping snuff and spitting on the little pot-bellied stoves just to hear the hot iron sizzle.

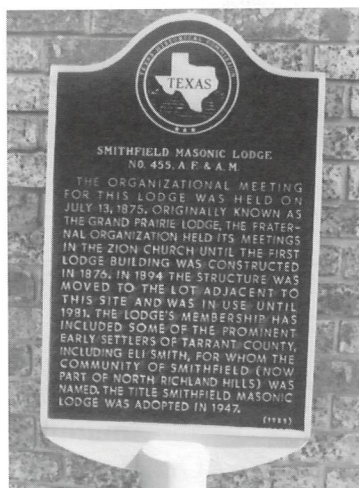
Zion may have had two stores by the early 1870s. A general store, with drygoods and groceries, may have been opened that early by the Reverend Sam Durrell Sansom (1816–1894). The local Methodist minister took one of his sons, S. J. D. Sansom (1861–1913), into the business with him. A hardware store was reputedly operated by Wesley Prather for a time and (perhaps the same store) by James E. “Jimmy” Turner (1842–1917), son of William and Mary. Turner, a Confederate veteran, also maintained a blacksmith shop on his nearby farm for 30 years. He farmed 239 acres in 1890. Turner may have maintained his smithy in town for a time, and a Mr. Holt reputedly had one as well.

Sansom moved from Tennessee to the Republic of Texas in 1837, served as a mounted Ranger in 1839, and ministered various East Texas circuits after becoming a Methodist Episcopal pastor in 1851. His young wife, Sarah King Sansom (ca. 1824–1861) passed away after bearing nine children. Sansom relocated as an elder in the Willow Springs church and married 20-year-old Sarah Thomas (ca. 1842–1934) of Illinois in 1862. Having served the Confederacy, he took the Oath of Amnesty in Fort Worth, September 26, 1865. He became pastor of the Zion congregation when it was established after the Civil War.



S. J. D. Sansom Jr.; First Master of Grand Prairie Lodge and Smithfield merchant.

Courtesy of Smithfield Masonic Lodge

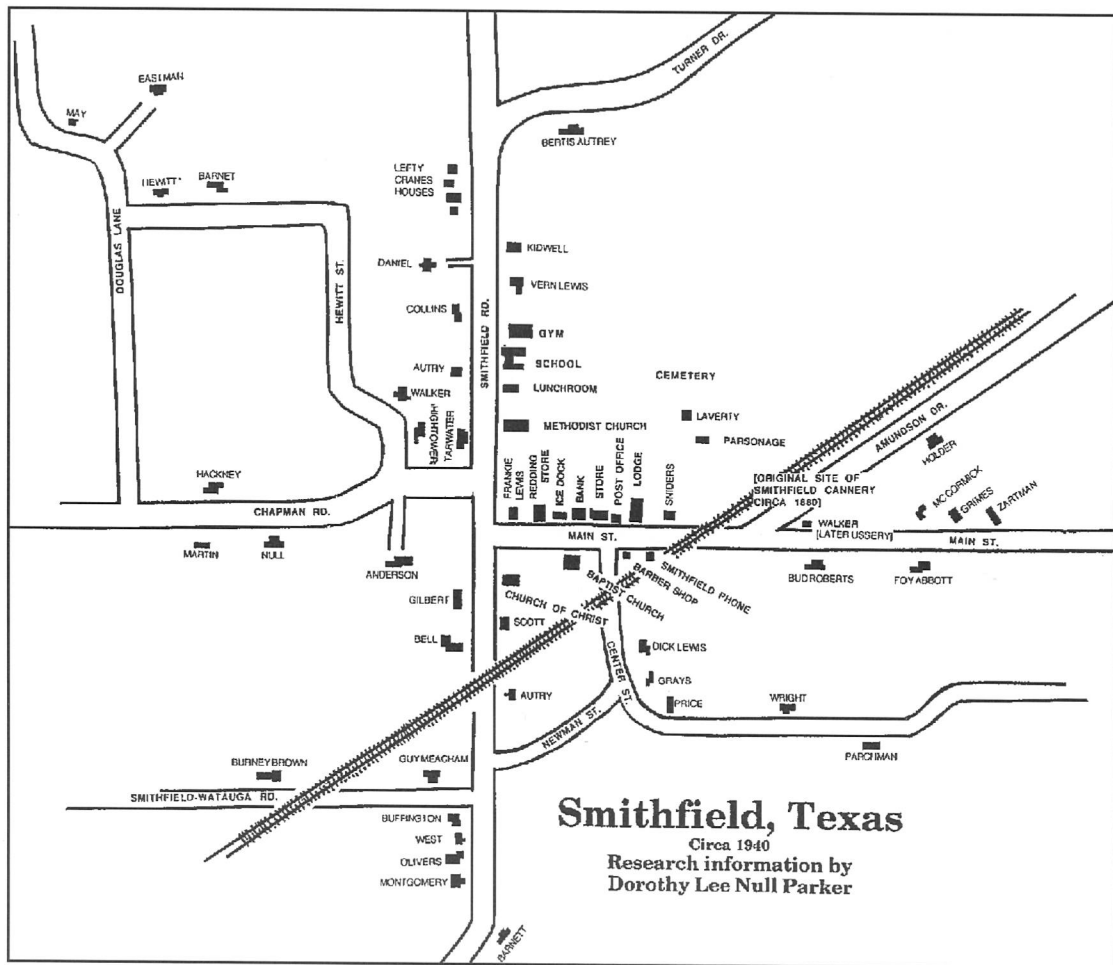


Historical Marker—Smithfield Masonic Lodge No. 455, A.F. & A.M. Lodge was organized July 13, 1875.

Many Methodists also belonged to the fraternal order of Masons, which organized the Grand Prairie Lodge in Zion on July 13, 1875. It was named for its geographical location, along the margins of Texas’ Grand Prairie backland and the Eastern Cross Timbers. Two Master Masons were named in October, 1875, Eli Smith and Dan Hightower, son of Alfred M. and Sarah Hightower. Both were young, but were veteran settlers and community leaders. The Rev. Sansom and Felix G. Bransford, for whom the nearby village was named, were also officers. Lodge meetings were held on Saturdays, “on or before the first full moon in each month.” The meetings would commence in the early afternoons and continue into the night. Lengthy meetings and full moons were necessary since many members had to drive for miles in slow buggies and wagons.

## EARLY SMITHFIELD, 1876–1900

In 1875 or 1876 Eli and his wife, Sallie (Hightower), Alfred and Sarah’s daughter, and perhaps Dave Smith as well, donated part of their cleared land to the community for a Methodist meeting place, cemetery, and/or additional space for the village to grow. The community’s first church building was the Methodists’ small, white frame structure, which was also used as the public school and for early meetings of the Masonic lodge. Reverend Lewis White was evidently the Methodist pastor at this time, but he also served other congregations on his circuit. The donated land is the site of the present day care center at 6700 Smithfield Road. The village of Zion changed its name to Smithfield, undoubtedly honoring Eli and Sallie’s contribution, and perhaps Dave’s. Attorney D. W. Smith (1845–1920), Dr. H. C. Gilbert (1850–1932), former senator A. G. Walker, Jimmy Turner,



Map drawn by Don Tipps

Map of old Smithfield

A. C. Brown, and D. B. Brown chartered the town of Smithfield in 1876; the original charter included some 57 to 60 acres.

The Smiths had already buried two of their infant children in the cemetery when Eli became ill in the winter of 1878–1879 and died on January 27, 1879. He was laid to rest beside his children in the Smithfield Cemetery with the Grand Prairie Masonic Lodge conducting the funeral.

More than 1,000 early settlers and descendants lie in the cemetery, including numerous Civil War veterans. The oldest three acres lie just east of the original Methodist Church lot.

Not everyone qualified for burial in the Smithfield Cemetery. James Autrey, whose Georgia plantation was wiped out by the Civil War, migrated to Texas in 1867. He lived about a mile north of the present Smithfield Elementary School with two old former slaves who stayed on after emancipation and helped with the



Smithfield Cemetery, oldest marker is dated October 13, 1872.



Historical Marker of Eli Smith is located in the Smithfield Cemetery.

farm and the 12 children. There was no black cemetery, so when the couple died they were buried in an apple orchard in the southwest quadrant of Smithfield and Starnes roads.

A succession of doctors—Barkley, already mentioned, Jeremiah Cloud (1821–1878), John Boatner (1845–1904), Lilburn H. Colley (1843–1924), and Henry C. Gilbert—practiced in and around the community in the late 19th century. One could not necessarily make a living just practicing medicine in that era. Dr. Gilbert farmed 242 acres in 1890. He lived on Smithfield Road just south of the Church of Christ in a big two-story house with a huge front yard.

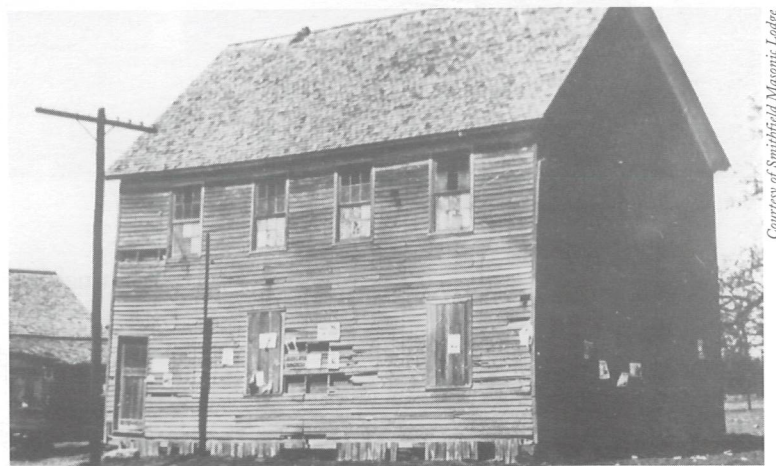
In the spring of 1876 the Masons built their own two-story frame lodge building, about one-fourth of a mile west of the present Masonic Lodge. Skilled craftsmen among the members earned \$1.50 per day erecting their building, common laborers \$1. The total cost was \$412.36. At one point, to help pay for the building, the lodge took out a \$23.37 loan from the Zion Church Missionary Society at 12 percent interest. The Smith and Beddo mercantile firm leased the lower floor in 1878 for \$5 a month on condition that they “agree not to sell or give away any intoxicating liquors.” Portions of the lower floor were rented to storekeepers through the years, including Sansom and Hightower, who opened another general store.



Dr. Henry Gilbert's old home on Main St. in Smithfield, Summer 1975

By 1877 Smithfield definitely included the Methodist Church (though it kept the “Zion” name until 1885 or 1887), the Masonic Lodge, at least one smithy, and a store separate from the ones housed in the Lodge. The separate store may have been Louia Brown’s (1857–1939), who began his business career as operator of the town’s drugstore.

Before the Post Office was established, Dan Hightower served as unofficial postmaster for a time. For awhile in 1876–1877 the Birdville postmaster allowed Hightower to pay 20 cents a trip to youngster T. E. Cloud, who would carry the mail on his pony once a week to Birdville, more than five miles to the southwest, and bring Smithfield’s mail back. The mail was probably distributed at Hightower’s store. A young Mason, John G. Walker (1854–1879), built a frame post office east of Brown’s store in 1878. He served as first postmaster, from February 1878 to



Grand Prairie Masonic Lodge in Smithfield

TG/C

Courtesy of Smithfield Masonic Lodge

October 1879, when he unexpectedly died. It was a fourth-class post office where farmers and villagers congregated to fetch their mail. All had to obey postal regulations, so the offices could not become “the resort for loungers or disorderly persons or the scene of dispute or controversy.” The weekly Pony Express was replaced by a regular mail carriage in 1879. The first hack line went from Fort Worth to Birdville to Smithfield to Bedford to Grapevine and back again. Albert G. Walker Jr. served less than three months as postmaster, then Jerry W. Johnson held office for two years, January 1880 to January 1882. Louia Brown served two stints, January 1882 to August 1889 and May 1893 to November 1897. Daniel LeBow tended the office from August 1889 to May 1893, and Tom Garrett (1835–1919) from November 1897 to June 1905.



Second Building, Smithfield Methodist Church

The school still met in the Methodist Church and numbered 54 students in 1877. Birdville and Willow Springs were the other two “community” schools in Tarrant County. The Zion Community School counted 38 students in 1879, and when its name was finally changed to Smithfield School in 1880–1881 there were 82 “scholastics,” ages 8 to 13,

enrolled and three teachers and one assistant. The school year was only five months long.

Meanwhile, the Grand Prairie Masonic Lodge 455 endured the usual struggles of fraternal organizations, some of whose members could not adhere to the rules. Several members were tried by the lodge for intoxication. In one trial a member was accused of being “beastly drunk,

falling off his wagon and being unable to right himself and return to his wagon.” The defense maintained that the member had climbed down from the wagon and was adjusting the harness when the horses spooked and knocked him in the side, rendering him breathless and unable to get up.

Some organizations were more oriented toward political and economic action than the churches and fraternal lodges, but little is known about their local activities. L. W. Jones (1817–1895) was apparently active in the 1870s and 1880s in the local chapter of the Grange, which spoke out for family farmers against middlemen, such as the railroads and grain elevators. S. J. D. Sansom was a member of the Knights of Labor Smithfield Assembly 4770,



Smithfield United Methodist Church, Summer 1975

established December 12, 1880. The Knights included farmers and small-town mechanics who wanted working people to be able to accumulate a greater share of the national wealth, while the railroads and other corporations would have some of their powers curbed.

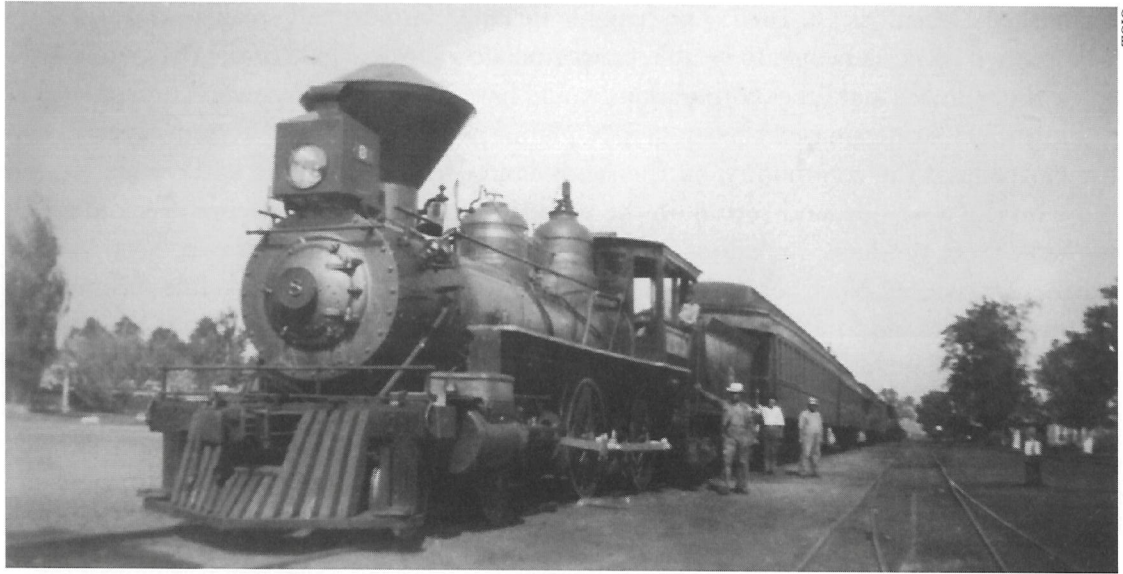
Smithfield farmers raised berries, grapes, plums, peaches, corn, and cotton, especially on the east side of the community, on the sandy land. Wheat, oats, and cattle were located more on the west side, and cotton on the blackland prairie. It took them a day and a half to haul their produce, including wood, eggs, and hens, to downtown Fort Worth. Frequently two old plow horses pulling wooden wagons would slip and slide through the deep ruts of the old Smithfield Road, going south. Often they would set out about noon on a Friday and make it as far as River City (present Riverside) that night, where they slept in or beneath the wagons. Saturday morning they would go the rest of the way. With the money from the produce they sold—minus whatever was spent in barbershops, saloons, the notorious Hell's Half Acre and such—they would fill their wagons with store-bought goods to take home. Dan Hightower was reputedly the talk of the town when he returned once with a pair of red-topped boots with brass toes on them.

John R. Crane (1848–1914) and wife Mary Ann (1847–1914) bought and sold different farms in the area where they raised beans, corn, and fruit and sold tombstones. Smallpox took their first child, Laura Elizabeth, at the age of four in 1873, and the family had to be placed under quarantine. Neighbors brought food and placed it on the gatepost, to help the family as much as possible. From 1875 to 1881 the Cranes owned a 120 acre site northeast of town, from the James Harrell survey, east of Precinct Line and north of Shady Grove Road in the Bransford community, which they purchased for \$480. In 1894 Crane swapped land near Canton for over 38 acres on the northeastern edge of Smithfield, north of the railroad depot, where Crane built a two-room log cabin with a boxed “lean-to” attached. This property, embracing some of the North Tarrant Parkway area today, was worth about \$750 at the time.

Cotton was the cash crop of the Smithfield area, as it was in most of Texas and the South. A cotton gin, run by an old steam engine, was erected in Smithfield in 1885. It was apparently west of town three quarters of a mile, on the south side of what is now Chapman Road, in the Fox Hollow addition. The gin lacked the capacity to handle all the area's cotton, so some farmers continued transporting their crops to Fort Worth or Birdville to have it ginned. Buyers at the gins represented large companies that compressed the bales into still smaller cylindrical shapes for easier shipping. These smaller bales were sold to the mills that made it into thread or cloth.

Settlers continued trickling in and putting down roots in the community. Ozias Rumfield (1842–1919) and his wife Mary Jane (1844–1883) migrated from Ohio and filed for 72 acres of land in 1873. The Rumfield clan lived on the brow of a hill in a log cabin they built on the southside of the present intersection of Rumfield Road and Kirk Lane, east of the Stoneybrooke Addition. William Henry Harrison Meacham (1839–1894) and his wife Martha Ann (1839–1914) moved their family of six children by covered wagon to the Smithfield area in 1879. Settling on a farm, their house stood where the Holiday Heights School now stands on Lola Drive. Their son Will (1863–1925) married Catherine Hightower (1865–1948) and eventually settled on the southwest corner of Smithfield Road and Mid-Cities Boulevard where the La Casita Mobile Home park is today.

One of the grandest events in Smithfield's history was the arrival of the St. Louis, Arkansas, and Texas Railroad (the Cotton Belt) in 1887. Watching the work train lay



TCJC

Early Texas Train, photo taken 1938.

tracks constituted much of the excitement of the day, as men and boys would run down to Big Bear Creek for weeks to take it all in. After the tracks finally reached town, some boys would walk to Bransford, its new site being slightly less than three miles up the tracks, just to pay a dime to ride the train back home. The railroad fare from Smithfield to Fort Worth was thirty-five cents, and the trip took about an hour to cover the eighteen or nineteen miles in good weather. During storms the same trip took three or four hours.

For a time the railroad, which had 679 miles of track in Texas and had been recently absorbed by the Jay Gould system, stopped twice a day, at 10:10 in the morning going southwest to Fort Worth and at 10:10 at night going to points east such as Plano and Greenville. Mail bags would be tossed off or passengers could climb aboard or detrain. The morning stop in particular attracted townsfolk who would gossip and collect news from the conductor. The tracks bypassed the Smithfield business district by about a quarter mile. Undaunted, storekeepers and others moved their buildings southward, closer to the depot, and a new business district was established.



TCJC

Mr. Moody Walker at Smithfield Station

About the time of the arrival of the railroad Louia Brown bought out Dan Hightower and put up a new building filled with general merchandise, including drugs, hardware, implements, buggies, and wagons. Some of the doctors practiced on occasion in the store's back offices. Brown retired from the mercantile business in



1898 and moved to his 350 acre farm, roughly including the area that today lies between Mid-Cities Boulevard, Rufe Snow, Chapman, and Smithfield Road—the North Park and Fox Hollow additions.

A common saying of the day was that the Cotton Belt railroad began nowhere and went nowhere, but it opened up potential commercial development, and in the late 1880s Smithfield received its first real industry. Louia Brown put up \$500, as did Dave Smith and Birdville entrepreneur Richard Boaz (pronounced boze), to build the Smithfield Canning factory near the depot alongside the tracks, at present 8201 East Main. Smith was the manager and employed twenty to thirty women and children, who canned tomatoes, corn, peaches, and peas grown by area farmers and shipped the tin cans out by railroad. John Brown's berry farm, a mile to the southeast, north of what would become Mangham Field, supplied part of the fruit. Successful for a time, the cannery closed after four or five years because local farmers started getting higher prices at the market in Fort Worth.

The train enabled John Thomas Shivers (1855–1923), who emigrated from Alabama to Texas by covered wagon in 1871, to follow through on his plans. He bought, on credit, 240 acres of timberland for \$13 an acre in the present Thornbridge Addition off the 8300 block of Davis Boulevard. He hauled the logs to the depot and shipped them north to pay for his place. He built a log house, later framed, and remained there on the far northeast outskirts of the Smithfield community.

Other churches were founded as the community grew. Members of the Church of Christ evidently met in Tom Garrett's home for a time, then erected a one-room, frame building facing Smithfield Road at the corner of Main Street, across Smithfield Road from the current Church of Christ. The lot was obtained for \$5 and the first service was October 23, 1888. Later a ferocious storm twisted the building on its foundation. The men of the congregation decided that it would be easier to twist it all the way around so that it faced Main Street rather than to return it to its original orientation.

Twelve Smithfield Baptists, including Dr. Gilbert and John R. Crane's son, J. D. Crane (1878–1957), met in the summer of 1895. Tired of traveling to Birdville for services, they agreed to form a local congregation. They were accepted for membership in the Tarrant Baptist Association, which provided pastors. The Baptists were assigned certain days to worship in the Methodist Church. The Smithfield Methodist "Charge," meanwhile, counted 400 in its flock in 1889, scattered among White's Chapel, Oak Grove, Keller, Roanoke, Elizabethtown, Fossil Creek, and Smithfield itself. The Rev. J. I. Lavender served the seven congregations. In 1893 the Smithfield congregation purchased a lot 187 feet square for \$275 on the west side of Smithfield Road, across from the property given by Eli Smith, which they intended as a site for a parsonage. The Charge, or most of it, (293 members) was absorbed by the Fort Worth District in 1894.

Protestant campground preaching was popular throughout the nineteenth century. A large campground was set aside in the 1860s, about where Cortland, Mickey, Odell, and Cross streets are today, where the faithful would gather in their covered wagons from miles around.



Aerial view of James & Mabel Shivers' farm, circa mid-40s, in the 8300 block of Smithfield, now Davis Boulevard.

Those from outside the Smithfield area would bring bedding and food and might camp for three or four weeks during the summer months to hear old-time gospel preaching. Beds of straw were spread at the altar to soften the ground for sinners' knees. One of the fiery orators was H. S. P. "Stump" Ashby (1848–1923), a Methodist preacher as well as an easy-money, antimonopoly spokesman for the Texas Farmers' Alliance. He was a leader in



Courtesy of Doris Hunter Shipman

Smithfield Baptist Church, founded 1895



Dr. Gilbert of Smithfield, wife, and granddaughter, Maurine Pruitt, who now is Mrs. Maurine Shaw.

the independent political movement in Fort Worth, which succeeded in the midst of the Great Southwest (railroad) strike in 1886 in electing the mayor of the city. While living in Grapevine in 1888 he was apparently defrocked from his itinerant ministry for his criticism of the church's failure to support reform and for his alleged fondness for the bottle. It was said that once he had indulged in too much intoxicating cider, he could "talk hair on a cue ball." His effective oratory gave him his nickname, "Stump." Many members of the Farmers' Alliance and the Knights of Labor founded the new Populist Party in 1891, and labeled the Democrats and Republicans as hopeless pawns of the railroads and hard-money bankers. Stump was one of the founders of the Texas branch of the Populist Party in its Dallas convention in 1891 and was state party chairman in 1892 and 1894, unsuccessfully challenging the dominant Democrats. He lived in Smithfield for a time; in 1895 his place was just south of Little Bear Creek in the current Cherokee addition, about where Ember Oaks and Fireside Drive

converge. In 1902 he attended the Texas state Populist convention as a delegate from Smithfield for the purpose of blocking a prohibition plank in the party's platform.

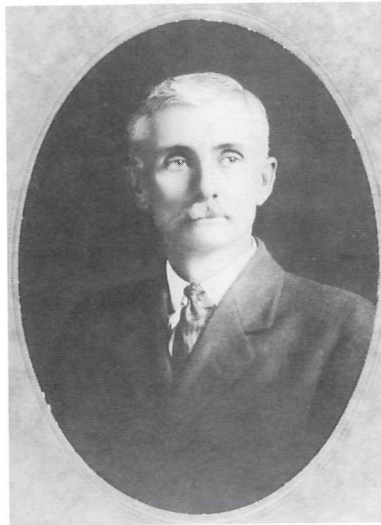
Rainwater cisterns supplied the community since water from shallow wells was so foul that even the stock did not like to drink it. Cisterns, however, supplied inadequate amounts of water during hot, dry summers and the water was suspected of causing various illnesses. People in Hurst had found water at 400 feet, so Dr. Gilbert and Louia Brown drilled a water well on the school grounds around 1890 and it spared the inhabitants from hauling water from the Trinity River, Fort Worth, Hurst, or the springs in Watauga.



Halcie Brown, grandmother of Shirley Brown Newman and Kay Brown Alread

Wagons with water barrels could soon be seen coming and going from the initial well and others, carrying drinking water to various homes.

The railroad stimulated commerce, but the old steamers also tossed out sparks that set dry grasslands or corn crops on fire. Usually railroad officials would reimburse the farmers



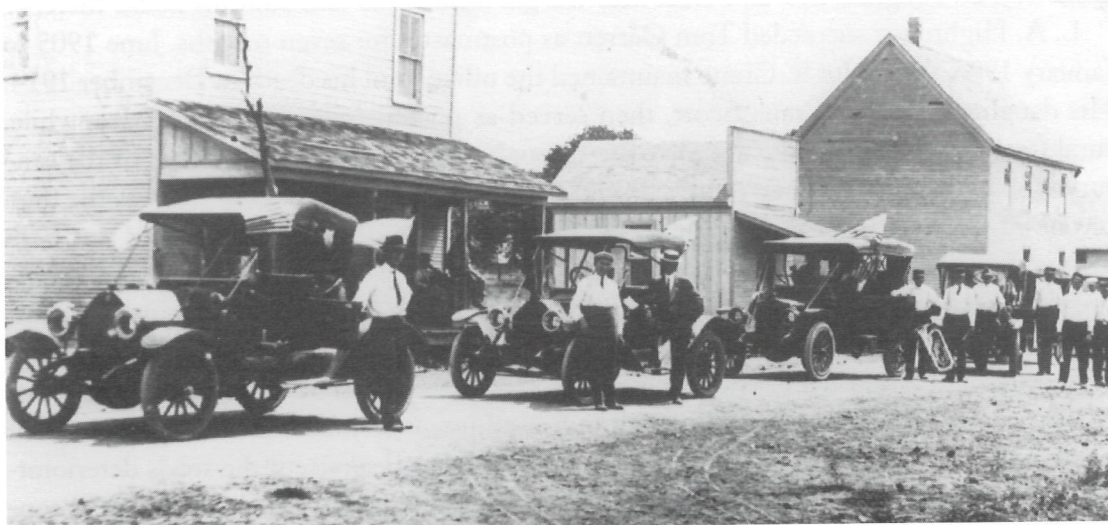
Louia Brown, grandfather of Kay Brown Alread and Shirley Brown Newman

for their losses. Smithfield had no firewagons, but the residents would come running with buckets of water and wet burlap feed sacks to fight the fires. A major fire struck Smithfield in 1890, burning almost all the business district, but the town rebuilt. The Masonic Lodge survived the blaze and in 1894 the lodge building was moved a quarter-mile eastward, toward the railroad tracks—a tedious task that took weeks, using horses and log rollers—to a lot adjacent to the present lodge at 8013 Main Street.

The school year was lengthened to six months in the 1890s. A local school tax election was held, January 28, 1893, and the property owners approved by a vote of 22 to seven the tax rate of 20 cents per \$100 evaluation of property. It was a typical southern starvation level appropriation of the era. The local tax provided about \$136 in revenue in 1896–1897, while the state sent \$436, and local tuition and transfer fees provided some \$78—all for the purpose of educating some 74 boys and 50 girls. P. M. and Mattie Heltzell were the teachers, 1895–1901. P. M. earned some \$50 to \$60 a month, while Mattie received some \$30 to \$40.

## A NEW CENTURY

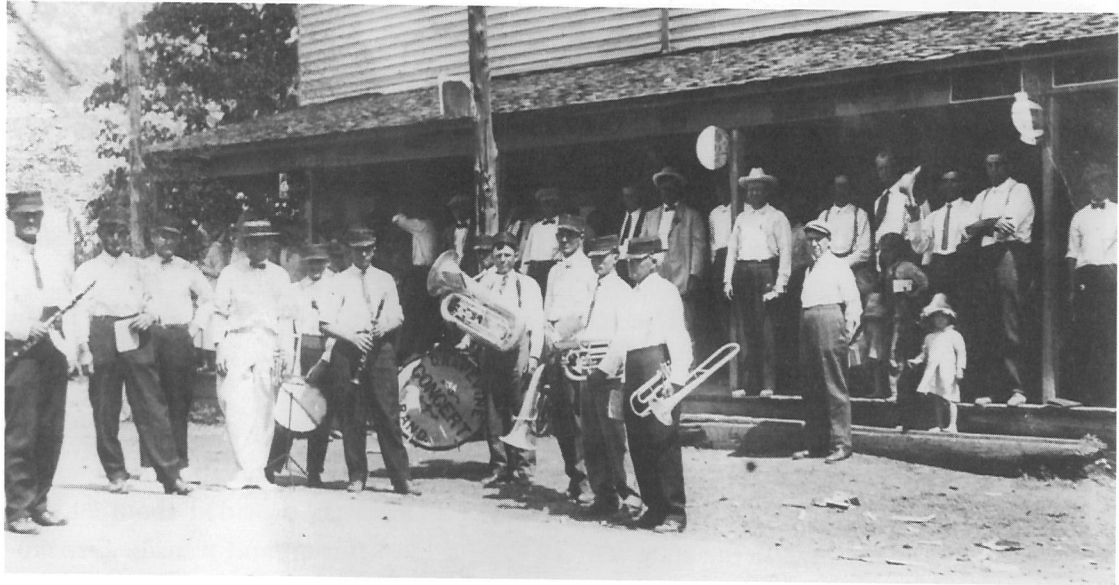
At the turn of the century Smithfield numbered 137 people. By the early 1900s the Woodmen of the World had built a lodge on Main Street and sponsored a brass band, the pride of the village. The first auto came to town, a chain-propelled vehicle with lever steering driven by J. D. Crane. Children and horses ran from it. By this time Dan Hightower's



Courtesy of Smithfield Masonic Lodge

Downtown Smithfield circa 1920s. Masonic Lodge on right.

son, L. A. Hightower (1875–1961) had bought Louia Brown's store. Dr. Gilbert's office was in back of the store. John Shaw had a blacksmith shop and a Mr. Elliot a lumber yard. The W.O.W. lodge rented its lower floor to J. B. Little for a grocery store. Calvin Gillis (1866–1949) opened a sorghum syrup mill in Smithfield before 1915, and his son C. A. Gillis recalled that his father "sold the syrup on halves." The Gillis farms were located astride present North Tarrant Parkway, in the McKee, Shady Oaks, and Forest Glenn additions.



Courtesy of Smithfield Masonic Lodge

Grapevine Band visited downtown Smithfield, early 1900s.

Shortly after the turn of the century J. D. Crane and L. A. Hightower bought a downtown "gin lot," a site for a second cotton gin, though it is not certain that the first one was still operating. It was north of the railroad, just east of present Davis Boulevard. A large water well was dug to provide water for the boiler to operate the gin, but it proved insufficient. Another well some yards away seemed inexhaustible, so a hand pump was installed in it and Crane's sister, Mary Lou Ellie Crane (1874–1961), was hired to operate the pump. The value of cottonseed was now recognized, so it was often accepted in payment by the ginners. J. D. bought a two-acre tract near the gin lot in 1905 and built his house there.

L. A. Hightower succeeded Tom Garrett as postmaster for seven months, June 1905 to January 1906, then John R. Crane maintained the office until his death in December 1914. His daughter, Mayme Crane Scott, then served as postmistress until 1923. Meanwhile, rural free delivery spread like a prairie fire through the countryside at the turn of the century. Bob Curry, who had just returned from the Battle of Manila Bay (1898), was the first, or one of the first, rural mail carriers operating out of Smithfield, and another was Seth Turner. Farmers quickly grew attached to the home delivery service, which conveyed highly-prized Sears and Roebuck catalogs as well as letters. By 1911 two rural routes emanated from the Smithfield office.

Farmers had long been obliged to maintain the roads near their spreads, but this chore became more onerous in the 1910s with increased usage by mailmen and others in their automobiles. Farmers were threatened with the loss of mail service if the roads deteriorated too badly. Farmers and postmen were among the leading lobbyists for federal road construction, and in the late 1910s the government began building the rural post roads. The military favored it also, especially as the nation edged toward war in 1916 and 1917.

John R. Crane's grandson, John Frank Crane, a substitute rural mail carrier in Smithfield, was killed late in World War I (September 23, 1918), while serving with the 315th Engineers, 90th Division, and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Guy Meacham (1893–1978) was on his way to the front with the 324th Field Artillery when the Armistice was signed November 11, 1918.

Smithfield Baptists were able to construct their own building in 1902. G. W. Gunter, a carpenter and member of the congregation, bought nine lots for \$40 and donated two of them to the church. The two lots were located on the corner of Main and Center, the same



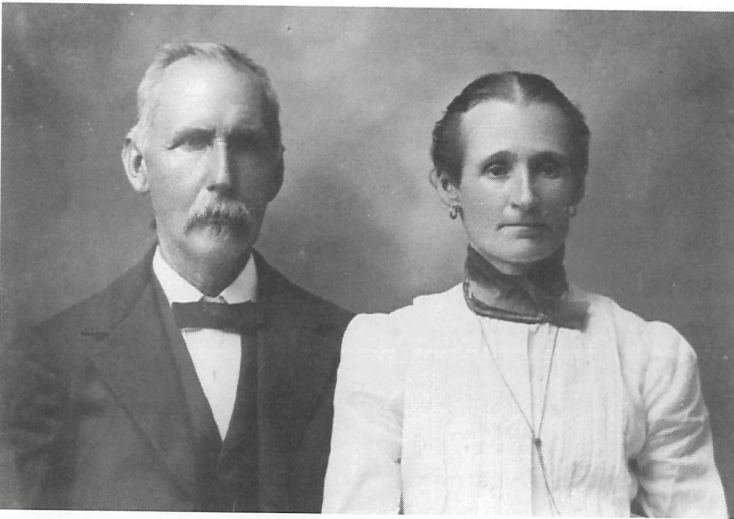
Arthur Guy Meacham

site the church occupies today. Gunter supervised the construction of the \$1,000 building. Baptists and Methodists donated much of the labor. Smithfield Baptists supported area missions and maintained a Sunday School and the Woman's Missionary Union. But the church did not quite have the necessary numbers to survive. Banker Jimmy Jarvis donated coal to the hard-pressed congregation in February 1920, but the church had to shut down in 1925. The Methodist "Charge" numbered 290 in 1910, served by four preachers. The church building was evidently rebuilt in 1912. Some 407 members were claimed in 1913.

The farmers who lived in what are now the suburban neighborhoods along North Tarrant Parkway, that portion of present North Richland Hills north of Little Bear Creek, were considered part of the Bransford community by the late 1880s. The creek was a center for fishing and swimming. Felix G. Bransford opened his general store in 1870, near the current Pleasant Run-Grapevine Highway intersection, about two miles east of the present NRH city limits. Mr. Bransford served as postmaster until he left the area in 1876, and there were a few houses nearby. The site was abandoned in 1888 when the St. Louis Southwestern railroad built through the nearby village of Red Rock. The Bransford post office and store moved about a mile northwest to Red Rock, which adopted the name Bransford. In its heyday in the early 1900s Bransford had four general stores, four doctors (including L. H. Colley), two blacksmiths, and a livery stable. The local school enrolled 117 students and employed two teachers during the 1905–1906 term. In 1903 the area between Little Bear Creek and present state road 1709 was designated the Bransford voting precinct, which contained some 124 families in 1910. Most were farmers, but there were also a half-dozen railroad employees. The Bransford Lodge Hall, erected in 1911, was shared by the Odd Fellows, Farmers Union, Woodmen of the World, and the Knights of Modern Macabees. In April 1913 the Bransford post office was moved to Smithfield. A young Bransford storekeeper, Walter Crouch, was anxious to start his own business, and in October 1914, paid Dr. Lilburn Colley \$50 for two acres and a small house about a mile southeast of Bransford, near the Grapevine road, near the original site of the village. The doctor had something in mind with



Smithfield Baptist Church Vacation Bible School, circa 1952.



Dr. and Mrs. Lilburn H. Colley, Colleyville named for Dr. Colley, 1915

his generous offer. He asked Crouch to give the doctor's name to his store and the area around it. Colley, a Union army veteran, also lent his name to the community by practicing in the area for 40 years. Colley's house was just southwest of Bransford, close to the tracks. The Colleyville name was in use before the doctor died. For decades Crouch's store—complete with coal oil, harnesses, and 300-pound blocks of ice—was the biggest store between Grapevine and Birdville. Meanwhile, John R. Webb, a section foreman for the railroad, opened a general merchandise store in Bransford in 1914 and closed it, the last store in the village, in 1925. Dr. Colley was buried in Smithfield Cemetery in 1924. In 1956 most of the

old Bransford community was absorbed by the growing village of Colleyville.

By 1904 the school term lasted seven months. By 1905 there were more than 150 students. A count showed that library holdings had risen from 21 books in 1903 to 50 in 1906. A two-story Smithfield "grammar" school was built around 1916 on the site that the elementary school occupies today. John Autrey (1853–1939) served as a water boy during construction. There were four classrooms and an upstairs auditorium. By this time the school was in session eight to nine months, and Smithfield usually offered eight to nine grades. Sometimes schools started late because cotton picking was continuing and was deemed more important.

The boys dressed up when they wore their knee-length trousers with a row of three buttons on the outside seam at the knee. Their legs were covered by long, ribbed stockings. Usually, of course, they wore work clothes—blue denim overalls and a bandana around the neck to keep from sunburning. All underwear was made from muslin flour and feed bags from nearby Bewley's Mill. The company slogan was "Bewley's Best," which invariably showed up on the garment itself.

Louia Brown's daughter-in-law, Mrs. Walter H. Brown (1895–1976), writing decades later, recollected that in the early 1900s, "Two teachers of some renown were Misses Kate and Elizabeth Gillis, who lived in Smithfield and taught there, 1903–1912, before going



Building of Smithfield School, 1916, on site of present Smithfield Elementary School.

to Fort Worth, where they taught until their retirement. Their outstanding Christian influence left its mark on the lives of all with whom they made contact." Anywhere from eight to eleven grades were taught there before World War II, when eleven grades were all that was required for a high school education and diploma. There were no bathrooms, no running water, and no lunchroom in the 1920s. The Mothers' Club, a forerunner of the PTA, provided students with hot soup on cold days. On one occasion in the early spring of 1926 the school ran out of money and shut down in the midst of the academic year.

The Johnstride provided dangerous recreation on the school grounds. Mattie Belle Lewis Borden recalls that it was a pole with chains attached at the top and little bars on each chain to hold on to. You would run to gain altitude and speed, and others would pull you and push you. She was zipping around at the height of the pole when her gloved hands slipped off. She fell onto the frozen ground and broke her nose.

The students also played hide and seek, red rover, spin the tops, and marbles. The lunches they took to school might well include biscuits and sausage, baked sweet potatoes, and fried pies. They were required to take ink pens, bottles of ink, and paper to school. The big boys could get out of classes occasionally to carry coal to the coal house at the northeast corner of the building. Another evasive tactic was to volunteer to dust the erasers. Some walked to school for several miles, others rode horses, and a few arrived by automobile.



Getting peaches ready for market.

Spelling bees and dramatic plays were presented at the school. There was a large 4-H Club, which entered animals in state fair competitions each year in Dallas. Recreation was also provided by the Cotton Belt Railroad, which continued to stop at the depot twice daily and was a particular attraction to young couples on Sunday afternoons. The Cotton Belt coaches would stop at least once daily going to Fort Worth and one arriving from Fort Worth in 1911. It would stop again, both coming and going if flagged.

Farmers would sometimes market their own produce, and John Henry Davis (1882–1957) was one of the best at it. He and his son Howard, born 1915, would hitch mules to their wagons loaded with berries, peaches, and plums and haul them to the courthouse square in Fort Worth. They would sleep overnight on cots near the mules. Once he had acquired a truck in the early 1920s, Davis would also tour neighboring towns—Roanoke, Justin, Keller, Ponder, Haslet—ringing a bell and announcing “John

is here.” His fruit was big and plump, irrigated by eight wells on his place. Davis owned 27 acres about two miles north of Smithfield School, toward where Green Valley Raceway later stood (in the present Green Valley, Bathman, Martin Oaks, and Bridlewood additions). Young Howard liked to help, but was not always successful. In 1920 at the age of four he set fire to some paper on the end of a fishing pole to burn a wasp nest. The nest was burning when his mother called him in, and while he was thus diverted the entire barn burned down.



Courtesy of Dorothy Mize Granddaughter

Roy Jenkins Farm Located at Watauga Rd. and Smithfield Rd.

J. D. Crane was another superior farmer. On at least one of his farms, about where the Thompson Parks Estates addition is now, at the southern end of Crane Road, Crane grew large honey ball cantaloupes and sold them to restaurants. He made prize winning sorghum and molasses, which he exhibited at the state fair in Dallas.

While most everyone farmed, some supplemented their incomes by doing other things. Early in the century, on occasion Louia Brown, Jess Turner, and Will Meacham provided the school with supplies, Brown and J. R. Crane provided insurance, and J. D. Crane painted the school or provided paint. Walter Autrey (1883–1965) guarded convicts for the county and did road work. Turner, William and Mary Turner’s grandson, served as postmaster from 1920 to 1937, delivering the mail in a Model-T in the 1920s. B. C. Redding (1902–1985) discovered after World

War I that plumbing was much more profitable than growing tomatoes or milking cows, although he did continue with farm and dairy work.

During Prohibition, 1919–1933, as in many rural communities, the wooded areas and creekbeds around Smithfield, especially to the north and east, were off limits to most citizens because of extensive, illegal distilling of whiskey. A number of farmers were more noted for their stills than their tomatoes. In an era when cotton was sometimes dumped on the side of the road because the price was so low that it would not pay to have it ginned, farmers had to survive however they could. Young men might earn \$10 a night hauling mash in ten-gallon cans from the barrels, where it was fermented, to the stills. The whiskey sold for \$10 a gallon. Pigs and chickens would root in the woods, sometimes get drunk on the sour mash they discovered, and stagger out in comical fashion.

In 1919 Smithfield got its first bank, with Jimmy Jarvis as president, but rural banks were vulnerable during the hard times on the farms in the 1920s. Four men attempted to rob the First State Bank of Smithfield in early March 1929. The combination apparatus was knocked off the



TJC/C

“Barber” Clarence Cobb cut hair in Smithfield for nearly 55 years, customer is Ford Reynolds, picture taken July 8, 1975.



lock to the vault, but the would-be burglars were unable to open the safe, which contained only \$40. The bandits were responsible for other robberies in the area but were captured and charged in late March by the Dallas and Fort Worth sheriffs. The bank had disappeared by 1930.

Clarence G. Cobb (1901–1986), a 1918 graduate of a barber school in Birmingham, Alabama, got off the train when it stopped in Smithfield, November 11, 1920, liked what he saw, and decided to stay. He walked down Main Street to the barbershop owned by D. Q. Brown, asked for a job, and was hired. The barbershop was one of the central meeting places in town, especially on Saturdays. Some would wait three hours for their 20-cent haircut. Many were from neighboring towns that lacked barbers and many were women, in an era before beauty shops entered the area.

George Fry (1883–1952) and wife Bunie (1892–1975) opened a small grocery store just west of the old white post office in the 1920s. They lived in the store. Louia Brown's old store that had become L. A. Hightower's drugstore early in the century was purchased from Hightower in the early or mid-1920s by a rich oilman from Iowa Park, John T. Overbey (1859–1927). He replaced the old building with a new one of 5,000 square feet in 1926. Overbey died in 1927 and I. C. Snider (1874–1940) of Tennessee opened his general store in the building in 1929. It was crammed with clothes, agricultural implements, kitchen ware, hardware, medicines, and a wide variety of groceries and commodities, e.g. candy and snuff. It became the town meeting place, where neighbors would gather on the porch and chat over current events or play dominoes. The Sniders lived in the store for a time. Their son, Sam (1900–1971) inherited the place in the 1930s.

Old-timers and youngsters tried to enhance their quality of life during fairly hard times. Cotton and corn prices slumped after World War I ended in 1918, and many an American farmer barely eked out a living; Smithfield area farmers, like most others, entered into the Great Depression years even before the stock market crash of 1929. Moreover, the village was relatively isolated. The only route into Fort Worth was down Smithfield Road, with its sharp "S" turn south of the tracks on to Grapevine Highway then down Belknap, but there were no movies, parks, or retail outlets along the 13-mile stretch into the big city. (There was only a filling station at Four Points, the intersection of Bedford Road, the Grapevine Highway, and Smithfield Road). Veteran settlers coped in part by launching annual Smithfield reunions in 1919. Among the hymns sung at these gatherings was *The Old Gang of Smithfield*. School kids during the academic year, as well as in the summer, played basketball, volleyball, softball, and baseball against teams from Keller, Grapevine, Birdville, and other villages, but all were miles away and transportation was not always readily available. Smithfield's children and teenagers competed with each other more often. Girls concentrated on basketball more than the other sports.

Ocie Green, one of the town's three telegraph operators in the 1920s, submitted columns of daily events, which were printed with a Smithfield dateline, to the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. Travel was so unusual that even a trip to Fort Worth was reported, or guests coming to spend a weekend from as far away as Weatherford or Grapevine.

The main thoroughfares in the 1920s, all of which dated back to the 1870s or 1880s and very few of which were yet paved, included Main Street, which journeyed due east from the Smithfield Road to the Grapevine Pike, as it was often called. The Smithfield-Bear Creek Road led straight north to about the present Bridlewood Addition, then followed a staircase pattern to the northeast, in a rough parallel with present Davis, to the Keller-Grapevine Road,

intersecting slightly closer to the village of Keller. The Smithfield Road went due south from town, with the “S” jog, to Four Points, from which the Bedford Road wound north of Hurst into Bedford. Also from Four Points the Grapevine Pike led northeast to that community, but past its intersection with Main Street (which may not have borne that name outside of Smithfield), the paved Grapevine Road traveled a much more meandering path than today. From Four Points it traced almost its current course southwest to Fort Worth, except that it followed Broadway through Birdville before turning more to the southwest. Three-fifths of a mile north of Four Points the Old Dallas Road moved eastward to Bedford and took on the name Harwood in later years. The Watauga Road a half mile south of town cut a straight line from Smithfield Road to the village of Watauga. The Birdville-Watauga Road (later Rufe Snow) stretched from the Grapevine Pike north to present Hightower. The present Amundson-Precinct Line-Glade Road course was known as the Colleyville-Smithfield Road until it reached the Grapevine Pike. The Grapevine Pike and the Denton Highway through Watauga and Keller were macadamized (small rocks rolled solid) “cardinal” roads, while the rest mentioned here were graveled “post” roads. There were other unimproved “lateral” roads in the area, including one that went south of town along present Davis and east-southeast on current Cardinal Lane to the Grapevine Road. All of these had been wagon trails, but two had not existed in the 1890s: the Colleyville-Smithfield Road and the stretch of the Old Dallas Road between Smithfield Road and the Grapevine Road. Downtown Smithfield Road was hot-topped in the late 1920s or early 1930s, but had plenty of potholes.

G. R. Montgomery, whose home occupied the site where the North Richland Hills Post Office now stands at 6501 Davis, was a first grader in 1930, and by then a few changes were detectable in toilet facilities and lunchtime destinations. The students still had two 20-minute recesses and an hour for lunch. During these times they were now expected to use the outhouses that had been installed some 75 yards away. The boys’ facilities were on the northeast corner of the grounds, the girls’ on the southeast. They were unheated, of course, and infested with wasps and spiders. Some students walked home for lunch, while others bought nickel hamburgers from Snider’s new store. G. R. took his lunch, which was often fried rabbit and biscuits. The recesses and lunch hour were also used for kite-flying, mumblety-peg, yo-yos, jacks, jump rope, and hop scotch.

## FIRE AND DEPRESSION

The winter of 1929–1930 was a harsh one. Lone Star Gas ranked it the coldest in 30 years. The average temperature that January was 33 degrees. G. R. Montgomery’s family had just moved to the area, but decades later he could not recall another winter like it. “They drove cars on Lake Worth. My daddy milked cows, and bottles of milk beside the bed froze and pushed the corks out.” The weather put a strain on heating equipment and may explain Smithfield’s second great fire. It occurred February 18, 1930, when an oil stove exploded in the back part of a building that served as a home for the W. D. Quinn family. The front part was the telephone exchange, complete with switchboard and “crank” telephone system. Lora B. Buckworth, a 76-year old invalid, may have accidentally kicked over a kerosene lantern to trigger the blaze and explosion. She was burned to death. Also burned was her son-in-law, Quinn, and a dinner guest, Fort Worth oilman Charles Parrot, both of whom rushed into the burning room in an effort to save Mrs. Buckworth. Ed Walker (1870–1954), proprietor of the filling station next door, ran over when he heard Mrs. Buckworth scream and was also burned. The blaze quickly consumed the telephone

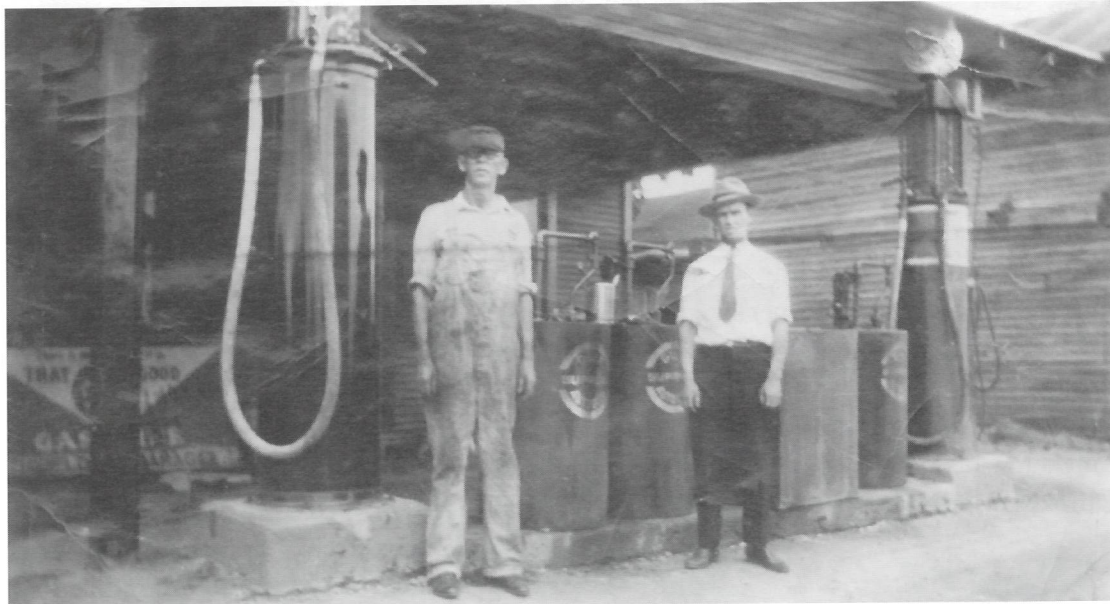
exchange building, Walker's service station, a blacksmith shop, Brown's barbershop, and the town's only electric lighting equipment, two Delco systems, all lined up on the north side of Main Street. The bank, made of brick, checked the rush of flames, though its wooden parts were burned. Those buildings east of the bank on the north side of Main were saved: Fry's grocery, the post office, the Masonic Lodge, and Snider's store at the end of the street, the current address of 8021 Main. The only available water supply was the artesian well at the school that furnished the town, not far from the telephone office, but a hastily



Courtesy of Fran Burns

Picture taken 7/3/87 of the G. R. Montgomery home, the present site of NRH Post Office.

formed bucket brigade, which included many school boys, was unable to prevent the flames from spreading across the street to the Woodmen's Lodge. The Woodmen and Odd Fellows had been meeting in separate rooms on the second floor for three decades, and Verne Lewis' (1887–1946) and Darthula Lewis' (1891–1963) grocery had occupied the



Courtesy of Bill Reeves

Ed and Moody Walker standing in front of Walker's Service Station, Main Street, Smithfield.

first floor for several years, succeeding J. B. Little's grocery. The lodge and grocery burned down. Telephone communication was cut off, and a messenger was dispatched to the Riverside Fire Department. The firefighters were hampered in their efforts by fear that the flames would cause the explosion of the gasoline tanks at the filling station. About half the business district was destroyed. The Red Cross helped out in the emergency.

Evidently undaunted, as they had been 40 years earlier, Smithfield's citizens rebuilt most of their community. "Barber" Cobb bought the box building across the street, painted its wooden posts in the traditional barbershop red, white, and blue, and continued practicing his profession there for over five more decades as his own boss. Verne Lewis relocated his grocery in the bank building. Grand Prairie Masonic Lodge 455 survived the fire, but in



Courtesy of Ella Walker Turner

The Ed Walker Family—L/R-Earl, Moody, Guy, Baby Ella (on bicycle), Ed, Clara, Mattie (mother)

1937 the building was found to be so unsafe that it required extensive repairs. The upper floor was lowered, and the building was turned around to face south.

By the 1930s, of course, the Great Depression had set in, and the town had considerably more spirit than it had cash. A band of burglars seized the safe from the post office in November 1932, and looted Postmaster Turner's confectionary store. The half dozen men, evidently intent on cleaning out the town, were attempting to break into Fry's grocery next to the post office when F. M. Kirk was awakened by the barking of a dog. Kirk, a garage owner, lived about a block away. Impulsively, he ran out into the street and fired his shotgun long range at the men. They returned the fire, while jumping into two automobiles and driving in Kirk's direction. Kirk blasted again at the speeding cars, which roared

through town. A third car, loaded with Turner's merchandise, was abandoned in front of the post office. Evidently the gangsters could not get it started. A posse of aroused citizens chased one car into a blind road, and the occupants fled on foot into the woods. The safe, loaded in the one car that successfully got away, contained post office records, but no money or stamps. Eight Fort Worth police officers and two deputy sheriffs directed the search. The strongbox was found near the Trinity River the next day, its bottom torn out, but no documents were missing. A lumberjack coat peppered with buckshot was also discovered. The robbers evidently escaped. Their take was 75 cents from Turner's cash register.



Courtesy of Ella Walker Turner

Ed Walker house at Amundson and Main, Smithfield, 1914

The community, none too prosperous to begin with, was too hard hit by fire and the Depression to completely rebuild or improve. The Delco lighting system, which supplied only a few buildings, would fizzle out occasionally. Most people used kerosene or gasoline lamps and stayed home after nightfall. The water supply remained inadequate since the old school well was tapped only by a half-inch water

line. As Foy Abbott (ca. 1909–1996) recalled 50 years later, "If you were number one on Saturday to take a bath, you were lucky, but if you were the last one, you didn't get a bath." Dry cleaning was unavailable in town, so folks had to journey to Art Way Cleaners in Haltom City. Barber Cobb still charged 20 cents for a haircut when he could get it, but often took in eggs, chickens, fruit, and vegetables in lieu of money. It was inexpensive entertainment for mothers to take their children to Cobb's shop and stay all day. Magdalene Wright made dresses for her twin girls out of feed sacks. Her hus-



Courtesy of Smith Masonic Lodge

B. C. Redding, Bobby Atwood, "Barber" Cobb, Dec. 3, 1980

band John always had to buy two identical sacks of feed so the girls could dress alike.

President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs eventually lent a helping hand. Free government food for those in dire straits (worse off than Don Wiseman, see pioneer family story), was available at Snider's grocery and general store. Pete Dunlop (ca. 1890s-1965) and others worked on government construction projects. Foy Abbott had just sold a number of pigs for \$3 each, and the government, which was buying cows and pigs by the thousands, granted him \$5 each for all the pigs he had already sold. The Agricultural Department slaughtered cows and pigs in a successful effort to raise prices for farmers. Abbott's farm was one of the sites where the animal carcasses were burned.

School life, at least, improved during the Depression. The school rooms continued to be heated by large, pot-bellied coal stoves that belched dirty smoke, but by the 1930s there were outdoor drinking faucets that came from the town well and a tank tower behind the school. In the spring of 1935 C. C. White stepped down after eight years as superintendent of the



Tommy Abbott and Foy Abbott

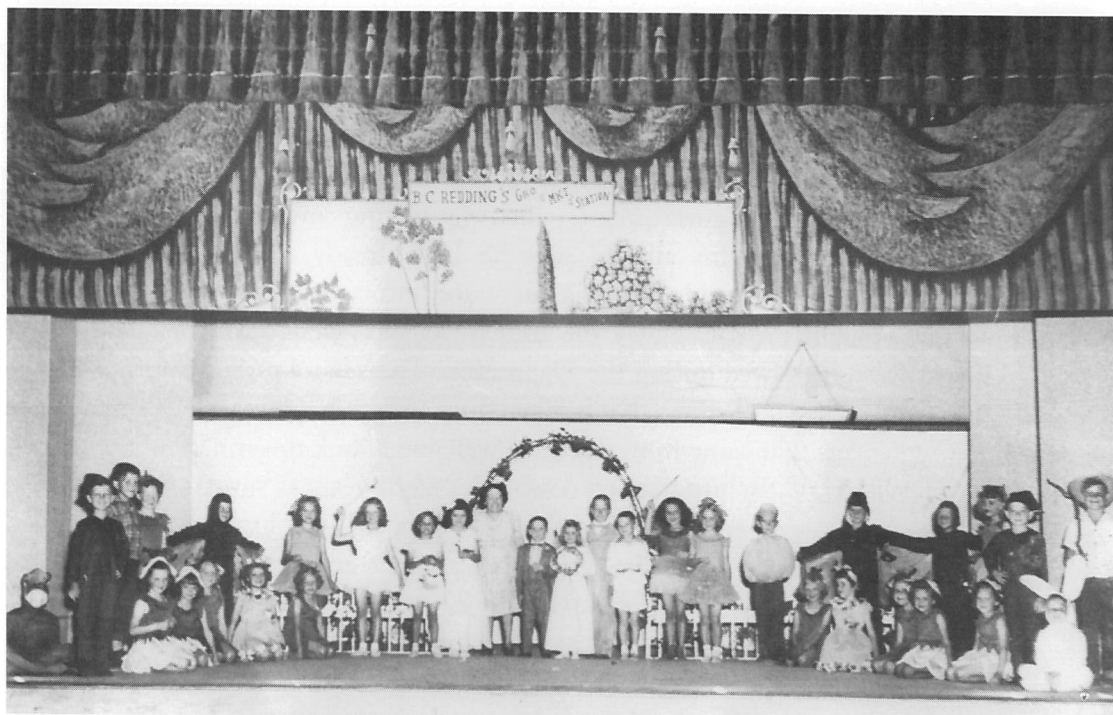
Smithfield School. He noted that 11 grades were offered that year and that student enrollment had grown since 1927 from 125 to 220 and the number of teachers from four to seven. The local Parent Teachers' Association was begun in 1935, with Mrs. Ed Walker (1873-1948) as first president. Teachers often rented rooms from Mrs. Quinn at the telephone exchange. She prepared lunches for them, which Mr. Quinn delivered to the school.

That year's graduating class, as part of their vocational training, erected a new building on the grounds. It housed first and second graders for a couple of years, then became the school lunchroom. One new Ford bus was purchased in 1936, to the relief of many who walked for miles to secure an education. An 86-foot-by-78-foot, \$15,000 gym was built north of the school in two months in 1936 by

some 60 workers, who were on the payroll of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Work relief was a key feature of President Roosevelt's effort to ease the suffering of the Depression. The FERA also provided some of the money for materials, but most was raised by the sale of school bonds in Smithfield. The gym contained two small basketball courts, a stage, and two club rooms. Democratic precinct meetings and other political gatherings were also held in the gym. Despite the eleventh-grade graduation of 1935, however, Smithfield School offered only eight grades most of the time before and after that year.

Not all New Deal programs involved material matters. Geraldine Hall remembered that in the summer of 1937 federal workers were brought into the classrooms to tell stories to the children. That is how she heard Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs for the first time.

Churches coped with the hard times. In 1934 the Methodists razed their old sanctuary, "the little brown church in the vale," after holding a grand reunion presided over by the veteran circuit preacher J. T. Ferguson. The old structure was replaced in 1935 with a masonry building, donated by William and Mary Turner's grandchildren. Two members had planned for some time to be married in the old building (which was white most of the time), but when it was torn down just before their wedding, Sam Snider and Marguerite Crane went to the home of the ailing Methodist minister, the Rev. J. Matthew Scott, who had preached in the area for more than half a century. Scott married the couple March 17, 1934, and died two weeks later.



First and second grade play, Smithfield Elementary, 1948-49

Ferguson died the next year in an auto accident. The Baptist Church was inactive for 10 years until it reopened its white frame building in 1934. Mrs. H. C. Gilbert (1862-1946) was the sole surviving charter member at the time. In 1937 the young voting members of the church, to the consternation of several elders, called 21-year-old Charles Johnson to the ministry. The ladies of the congregation provided weekly food contributions to the Johnsons.

Fay Ballier recollects the baseball games played every Sunday in warm weather. People brought chairs and spittoons and cheered the players. Local berry farmers paid a penny for picking a pint box; kids would often pack 10 of them in order to buy a double-dip ice cream cone at the Gulf filling station in town. She remembers that each teacher had a ruler, a razor strap, and a board with a hole in it and that parents' views toward punishment were not even considered. Discipline was seldom a problem. She does not romanticize the past, since she remembers all too well that, "You sliced your own bread, churned your own butter, milked your own cow, cut your own wood, cranked your own car, oiled your own lamps, gathered your own eggs, quilted your own quilts, picked your own corn, shelled your own peas, and sewed your own clothes."

One highlight of the decade was the emergence of the community from the kerosene age to electric lighting. The Texas Electric Service Company was undertaking rural electrification in Tarrant County and took its power lines into Smithfield in late November 1936. Some 500 persons attended a gala celebration in the recreation center (gym). Company officials noted that surrounding farms would soon also be served. (It took them about five years, however, to reach the Wiseman farm a mile north of town and Walter Autrey's a half mile south of it.) School board chairman John Crane was especially happy with the lighting of the school.

Rail service was still available to the community. Southbound freights left Smithfield at 5:35 A.M. daily and a train with mixed coaches and freight cars departed at 1:15 A.M. if it had been flagged to a stop. Northbound freights departed the old town at 7:44 P.M., while a mixed train left at 9:55 P.M. if it had been flagged.

James Harold “Stormy” Mangham (ca. 1907–1974), who bought land southeast of town in 1932 to pasture his horses, was also delighted by the new electric service. Stormy taught himself to fly in a World War I jenny in the 1920s. He flew a lighted sign for Mrs. Baird’s Bakery and flew for the Internal Revenue Service to spot stills from the air during Prohibition. In 1928 he latched on with Texas Air Transport, the forerunner of American Airlines, and flew for American until he retired in 1966. On his property east of Walker Branch and west of present Cardinal Lane he designed his home in 1938 in the shape of an airplane. It was one of the first houses in the area with an all-electric kitchen. The white stucco exterior was later replaced with brick.

Americans were more trusting in pre-World War II times. Bart May was working in Smithfield in 1940 and renting land some distance out of town for his cows. Driving back from feeding them, he picked up a man who, in the course of casual conversation, stated that he had a little farm in Smithfield that he wanted to sell. May observed that he had two houses in Poly that he was willing to sell. The stranger proposed that they swap without either party seeing any of the properties. May agreed, shook the man’s hand, and drove on to the courthouse in Fort Worth, where the two closed the deal. The Smithfield farm was fenced, with a house, windmill, and barn, and it was a perfect home for the cows.

One new citizen, however, did not always inspire trust. Henry Clay Allison was born in Hood County in 1896, served as a private in the U.S. Army in World War I, briefly attended a chiropractor school in California, and settled in Smithfield in the mid-1930s. He presented himself as a doctor. He opened a chiropractic clinic in Fort Worth and the so-called Smithfield Springs Health Farm near his homestead just south of present Starnes Boulevard near Century Drive in the Century Oaks addition. He launched the village’s first newspaper in 1939, the weekly Smithfield Springs Bulletin, in which he made endorsements in the Democratic primaries, ran columns about the area’s history, and carried ads from area merchants, e.g. Walter Fitch’s grocery in Bedford (which asked 68 cents for 24 pounds of Bewley’s Best Flour). For a time he broadcast news, northeast Tarrant County school programs, and miscellaneous programs every Sunday on radio station KFJZ, claiming that it gave Smithfield widespread publicity. He bought houses and lots in the area. He instigated the Northeast Tarrant Civic League in 1941.

The newspaper was titled Smithfield Springs because that was the name of the “health farm” Allison operated. The spring on the grounds reputedly had healing waters that aided those who were ailing, who needed to get away from it all, and who had good prospects for recov-



Perry Booth—played baseball for Birdville, 1920.



Dr. H. C. Allison



Allison's Enterprises

ery. There were hiking paths, playgrounds, and a herd of registered Jerseys to provide milk and milk products for the patrons. This public image differed somewhat from the reality, which was that many of the participants were mentally ill, while others were alcoholics, and that there was no tangible program to cure them. Their presence was assured by a high fence and by county subsidies. A common threat by parents who were angry at their children, from at least the late 1930s into the 1950s, was to send them to "Dr. Allison's Crazy House." Whether he had a license to operate it is not known.

In 1941 he launched a maladroit campaign to rename the town "Smithfield Springs." The name "Smithfield," he asserted, was often confused with "Smithville," in Central Texas. Moreover, every community that is famous is known for something, he thought, and the healing waters of the Smithfield Springs health "resort" would put the place on the map. The radio broadcasts and newspaper emanated from Smithfield Springs. Allison believed he should be running the community, but most of the old line families in the 1930s and 1940s resented his pushiness.

All parties tried to get along. Old-timer G. M. Autrey (1863–1946), who had lived in Smithfield since 1870, was interviewed by the Bulletin. Home Demonstration Club meetings were advertised. Snider's Grocery and Market advertised its Gold Chain Flour and fresh meat. But it was an uneasy relationship from the beginning. Allison's paper referred to opponents of the Civic League, and the selection of Mickey Hurley to head it, as "back-biters" and "stumbling blocks." The February 7, 1941, issue labeled those who opposed the community name change as "sullen and sulking" in their "obstinacy" and as "aristocratic ladies" trying to block progress. It was an ill omen for the future.

## WAR AND POST-WAR GROWTH

Smithfield's population in the 1930s remained at about what it had been at the turn of the century, but World War II stimulated a spurt of growth in town. The Texas Almanac estimated that Smithfield's population increased from 137 with nine businesses in 1936 to 250 with 15 businesses in 1941–1942. The population numbered 350 or more, if one counted the Smithfield community as a whole. And now there were available jobs nearby that paid more than farming, e.g. working at Fort Worth's Consolidated Vultee Aircraft (later Convair, General Dynamics, and Lockheed-Martin). Better known at the time as the "bomber plant," the factory near Lake Worth opened in April 1942 and built some 3,000 B-24 Liberators and other aircraft. Eagle Mountain Air Base and Fort Worth Army Air Field (later Carswell) also employed hundreds of civilians and purchased food and supplies from area farmers and businessmen.

Charlie Ed Turner (1916–1992), two years out of high school, succeeded his father as postmaster. He was called into the Army, so his wife Imogene and his father ran the post office. One day his dad was calling out the names of those in the building who had received mail when he received a telegram himself. The Army notified him that Charlie Ed was missing in action with the 30th Infantry Division in Europe. It was a sad day for the town, but Charlie Ed was a prisoner of war who returned in 1945 and resumed the postmastership. Others who served included E. E. Parkman, a Seabee with two tours of duty in the South Pacific, J. C.





The Smithfield Home Demonstration Club members contributed to the community with programs on canning, sewing, etc.: First row—Mrs. Maggie Gilbert, Mrs. Louise Brown, Mrs. Sis Whisenand, Mrs. T. C. Bell, Mrs. Halcie Brown, Mrs. Ina Turner, Mrs. E. C. Montague; Second Row—Mrs. Jessie Scott, Mrs. Nancy Scott, Mrs. Imogene Gilbert, Mrs. Aline Shivers, Mrs. Dick Lewis, Mrs. E. F. Crites; Third Row—Mrs. Lahawn, Mrs. Edna Hightower, Mrs. Oleta Lewis, Miss Maria Lahawn, Mrs. Etta Shivers.

Parkman, a B-17 pilot with some 40 missions over Germany, and Leon Wiseman, who took Army ski training at a time it looked like Norway might be a second front. Johnny Rumfield served in the Army Air Corps and was known as “Rumfield from Smithfield.”

B. C. Redding enlisted but was rejected for service because an old injury from a plumbing job made one leg slightly longer than the other. B. C. bought the old blacksmith shop, remodeled its hull into a grocery store, and set himself up in business. He also helped build airplanes for a time at the bomber plant. Crusty, witty, “Uncle Burney,” as many knew him, was also a noted repairman.

Other Smithfield entrepreneurs who benefited were Foy Abbott and Earl Newman. During the war Foy turned from hauling gravel to searching for it by walking the hills and creeks. There was a huge demand for concrete, and Foy formed his own company in 1944. In 1947 he merged with his friend Newman and organized Abbott and Newman Sand and Gravel. They eventually maintained two plants and employed more than 50 workers before selling out to Gifford Hill Concrete in 1961.

Free weekly movies were shown in Smithfield during the war years and perhaps before and afterward. They were shown outdoors in the evenings. People brought quilts and sheets to sit on. Mostly westerns, they were financed by the sale of popcorn and candy. Leonard Brothers Department Store in Fort Worth provided the movies and owned the concessions.

The ninth grade was restored in 1943, and the tenth in 1944, by which year the school had about 135 pupils and five teachers. The students were active in the wartime efforts of the day. The school’s older boys, aided by men in the community, brought in 40 tons of scrap iron one Sunday after church. The school helped the community oversubscribe its \$10,000 quota in the



Mrs. Edna Hightower, Mrs. Jessie Scott, Mrs. E. F. Crites, Mrs. Etta Shivers, Mrs. Ina Turner, Mrs. Maggie Gilbert (seated)



Courtesy of Ella Walker Turner

Ed Walker's Filling Station on Main Street in early Smithfield

fourth war loan by setting as a definite goal enough bonds to buy a jeep, 25 hospital beds, and other equipment. Students canvassed every house in the community for scrap paper, collecting more than 2,000 pounds. They gathered up nine hundred pounds of scrap rubber and more than two hundred worn out tires to ship to the reclamation station. Smithfield School was commended for its war participation record by the state superintendent of schools, but in the 1950s it was reduced to six grades.

Lunches were fifteen cents a week in the 1940s. Dorothy Null Parker recalls that "Some of the girls helped make sauerkraut by mashing up the cabbage in large wooden barrels with a baseball bat. What fun the FDA would have with that today." Extensive repairs were required on the school in 1945, but the gym was big enough for all classes to move into. Those who were able to complete high school usually went on to Birdville or Carter Riverside, whichever had room for the Smithfield kids.

Charles (1908–1976) and Martha (1913–1968) Null moved to a farm three-fourths of a mile west of town in 1937, on what is now the Fox Hollow addition in the southwest quadrant of Smithfield Road and Chapman Road. This was the site of the 1885 cotton gin, and the well was 16 feet across and fed by three springs. Through most of the 1940s modern conveniences had not yet arrived. Light was provided by coal oil lamps. The weekly wash was performed at the well in a huge cast iron pot with water hand drawn from the well and heated over a wood fire. The detergent was a concoction of lye, grease, and ashes. The iron for the clothes was heated on the coal oil stove in the house. The concrete foundation slabs for the old gin are still there on a vacant lot.

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Courtesy of Myrene Montgomery Sanders

The Walter N. Autrey family of Smithfield, 1943; Back Row-Ruby Lee, O. S., Billie Louise, Cantrell, May Jean, Mary Helen, Mildred; Front Row-Etha Mae Autrey (mother), Walter Johnson Jr. (Ruby Lee's son) and Walter N. Autrey (father).

The Cotton Belt, now part of the Southern Pacific system, kept on running for a few years after the war. As late as 1947 three southbound trains, some with as many as 56 cars, stopped daily. One was the Blue Streak, which departed at 9:01 P.M. every night. Two northbound trains stopped every evening, though one had to be flagged. But scheduled service ended after 60 years. By 1949 the connections were irregular and soon thereafter disappeared. The automobile culture took over.

Many families hung onto their farms, but sent members into Fort Worth to secure paying jobs. Dozens worked at Convair aircraft. A connection was made between the plant and Smithfield by a Convair personnel manager, L. E. Adams. L. E. and Beth

Adams led the revival singing at Smithfield Baptist Church even before they decided to move to Smithfield after World War II. He was naturally disposed to hire many of his friends and neighbors in Smithfield as the plant expanded during the Cold War-Korean War era of the 1950s. Convair and other paying jobs brought a prosperity that the area had never known, visibly demonstrated as area farmers began taking vacations and buying cars and refrigerators. The Adamses also had a positive impact on attendance and money at Smithfield Baptist Church, until they and their followers left after a factional dispute in 1956.

Barber Cobb remained on the job, cutting everyone's hair straight up the sides and rather short. He was in the cattle business, too. People would drive up to the shop with a cow or two in a trailer, wanting to sell. Cobb might leave a customer in a chair, half finished, and go out and dicker with the seller for several minutes. If a deal was struck, Cobb would pull out a wad of cash, pay the seller, and tell him to deliver the animals to his lot in town.

The Masonic Lodge almost lost its charter in 1946 because of declining membership and the neglect of its building. The lower floor was rented out to help defray expenses, first as a general store, then as a garage. But an influx of new membership helped revitalize the civic group. In 1947 the lodge received permission to change its name from Grand Prairie to Smithfield, keeping its number, 455. Most lodges bear the name of their hometowns, and, of course, the existence of the nearby town of Grand Prairie made it confusing for the lodge to use that name. The building was remodeled in 1958 with the addition of a kitchen, dining room, and bath; air-conditioning and heating were added years later.

The population growth of the early war years was not sustained. It leveled off at about 250 until the mid-1950s. The number of businesses actually declined to nine in 1943-1944, then to four for the next decade. Perhaps more importantly, after the harsh challenges of the Depression and war, the community seemed to lose some of its closeness after 1945.

## A COMMUNITY OR A TOWN?

Dawson Davis, a lawyer, and his family moved to Smithfield in 1947 and was immediately consulted by many in the community about the antiquated, "crank type" telephone sys-



Quilting Bee 1940s; standing-Faye Hudler, Hattie West, Mae Turner, Mrs. O'Dell, Imogene Gilbert, Kathryn (Morrow) Autrey; seated-Virgie Estill, Pat Baldwin, Billie Wolf, Pauline Morrow, Mary Johnson.



B. C. Redding Store-Johnny Rumfield and Jimmy Ray Scott, Spring 1947

tem. He helped replace the old system with “city telephones.” A group of residents also consulted him about the water situation, since many families were still hauling it from the school well. A mass meeting was held in the school gym, during which Davis and Joe Rady, an engineer, explained that the community would have to hold an election to incorporate, which was necessary to achieve power of contract with water companies.

Incorporation was approved in the community, October 20, 1951, by the less than overwhelming margin of 41 to 36. A petition to incorporate was approved by the County Commissioners’ court, November 1, 1951, signed by many of the old-line families in Smithfield, e.g. the Sniders, Usserys, Meachams, Bells, Reddings, Abbotts, and Zartmans. For a couple of years the city governing body met in the homes of various members, then a modest city hall was constructed on Main Street with voluntary donations and labor. Charles Zartman (1895–1976), an Ohio oilman who had moved to Smithfield in 1928, was the first elected mayor, and Davis was the town attorney.

On Thanksgiving Day, 1952, a huge fire blown by a north wind swept an area five miles long and a mile wide, including the hill on which Northeast Tarrant County Junior College now stands as well as the University Plaza and Richland Oaks neighborhoods. Volunteers from Smithfield, Birdville, and Hurst rushed over with buckets of water, wet tow sacks, and house brooms. The wind ceased at nightfall, and the fire was finally doused. Smithfield, never completely rebuilt after the 1930 blaze, was now determined to take action. The next month about twenty people met in the school gym, and B. C. Redding and railroad worker Jack Gray were among those who took the initiative in organizing the Smithfield Fire Department. It was officially established in January 1953, with the Haltom City fire chief as advisor.

Community donations of \$2,250 purchased a 1941 Ford fire truck from Olney, Texas. It was an old Army truck with a 500-gallon-per-minute pumper. “Old Red” was impractical



Smithfield Lodge, pictured on left. Smithfield Feed & Seed on right, 1975

to use in fighting grass fires, but it would carry the bucket and tow sack brigade to the scene. “Old Red” was vital in dealing with bigger fires; the pumper helped extinguish one fire that started on Amundson Street, burned one house, and spread almost to the Baptist Church.

Street picnics helped bring newcomers into the community and paid for most of the cost of buildings, trucks, and maintenance. The Smithfield band would preside over dancing, and various contests enlivened the festivities. The biggest picnic was a barbecue and political rally June 12, 1954. Twenty-nine candidates, including Jim Wright waging his first congressional campaign, spoke in front of the partially constructed, two-story city hall and fire house. The building on Main Street was soon finished, and two more trucks were added in the next five years. Only one truck was partially paid for with tax money, and that was less than \$2,000. The last truck was literally put together bit by bit over a 13-month stretch by volunteers who worked nights and weekends for about a third of the cost of a similar factory-built truck.

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Jack Gray was elected chief of the volunteer, unpaid group of firefighters. A button in Redding’s store could set off the siren in the fire station, while a committee of women were given firemen’s telephone numbers to call. Upon pushing the siren button, Redding, who served the Fire Department 23 years, would race to the station, leaving any poor customer who might be shopping in charge of the store. The Smithfield Firemen’s Ladies Auxiliary would take coffee and sandwiches to the men if the fire was of long duration. The auxiliary also constituted a pumper team itself, in case no men were available when fire broke out.

Watauga and Chapman roads were still gravel in the early 1950s, but the other main arteries had asphalt by then. One sign of encroaching civilization was the establishment and paving of FM Road 1938 from the Keller-Grapevine Road to the Grapevine Highway in 1956–1957. This was dubbed the Smithfield Highway (named Davis Boulevard in 1960), which supplanted the old unnamed dirt road that ran by the Shivers and Rumfield farms, intercepted and replaced old Smithfield Road just south of its crossing with Watauga Road, straightened out the old “S” curve, and terminated at Four Points. Growth resumed in the mid-1950s. The 1954–1955 Texas Almanac estimated that Smithfield had 350 people and eight businesses.

One surprising development was the building of a private airfield southeast of town. Stormy Mangham opened his airport



Smithfield Feed & Seed, store front, 1975

in 1954, between Cardinal Road and Walker Branch. It was a commercial operation, but also a place for him to store his airplanes. His wife Clara and son Charles were also fliers, and Charles was the airport manager. A hangar was built for a hundred planes and sometimes twice that number were on hand.



*Courtesy of Fern Abbott Redding*

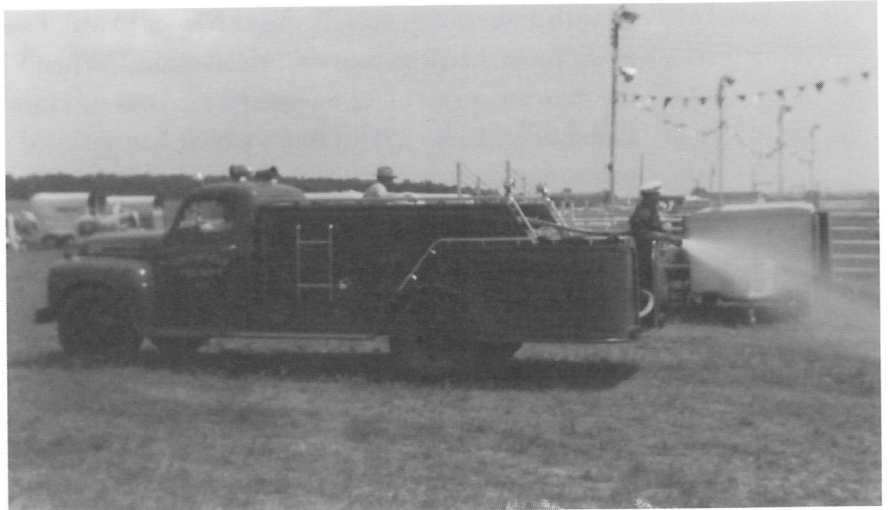
The First Pumper Team, Smithfield Volunteer Fire Department, Roy Buck Hewitt, Melton Rhine, Andy Knight, R. W. Koonze, Chief Jack Gray and Marvin Crane in 1953.

Five men who were members of the Church of Christ, interested in Christian education and somewhat fearful of growing secularization, formed a corporation in August 1957, for the purpose of establishing a Christian school and donated a campus site free of charge. Foy Abbott, Earl Newman, R. H. Banowsky, Clint Price, and Huey Northcutt, through their corporation, took an option on a 212-acre tract west of Smithfield Road and south of Watauga Road (present Mid-Cities Boulevard). Donating 40 acres to the school for its campus, the men planned a residential development on the remaining land. The idea was that some 400 to 500 Christian families would live close together as one community. The corporation even turned over its profits from the sales of the lots and houses to the school. The campus was built, and grades one through eight opened in the fall of 1958. Grades were eventually added through the junior college level. In addition to secular studies, students were required to study the Bible each day and attend daily chapel services. The school offers classes from kindergarten through high school today. The homes were slower to be erected than the campus, since they had to await utilities and general improvements, but the College Hill Addition began with W. A. Ledbetter's house in 1958.

Meanwhile, Mayor Zartman, Councilman Foy Abbott, Fire Chief Gray, Secretary-Treasurer Martha Gray, town attorney Davis, and perhaps others, decided in 1956 and 1957 to expand Smithfield's tax base out into the countryside to the north and west, to start building a larger and more populous community, and avoid being annexed by nearby Hurst. There was no one among them, of course, with the expertise and experience of a modern

city manager, and their reach exceeded their grasp. Some of the farmers who signed on were not qualified voters. Some may have been placed on the tax rolls prematurely.

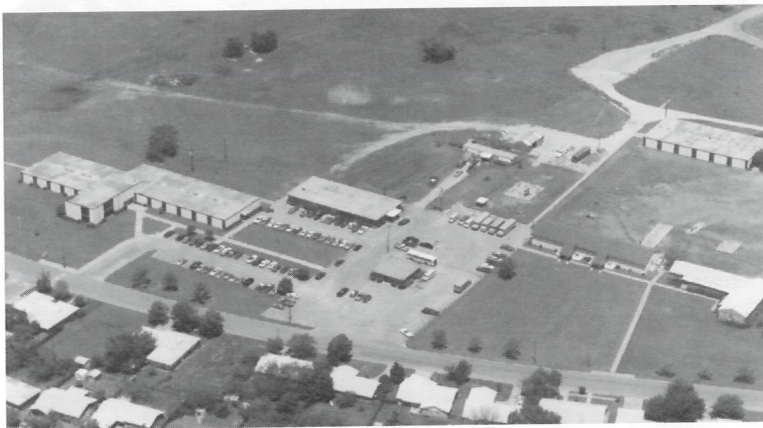
Annexation by Hurst was, in fact, a very real possibility in some strips north of town. Indeed, in February 1957, residents of a two-mile wide area petitioned Smithfield for annexation to prevent becoming part of Hurst. One of the leaders of the move, Mrs. Carl Goerte Jr., lived three miles north of Smithfield. She noted that Hurst could not provide utilities for the area and that “we go to church in Smithfield, we take our dry cleaning there, and some of our neighbors work in stores there.” Smithfield and most other towns in northeast Tarrant County were general law towns that could annex territory only by petition of a majority of property owners in the area. But Hurst, like Fort Worth and Haltom City, had become a home rule city (in December 1956)—it could take over territory without permission of the residents.



At the time NRH annexed Smithfield, the volunteer firemen who personally owned the fire equipment would not let NRH have their equipment for “nothing” and parked the fire trucks in Zartman Park.

## THE BATTLE OF SMITHFIELD

The mid-cities border wars revolved mostly around Hurst, whose city officials were naturally upset that their anticipated southern expansion had been blocked by Fort Worth’s elongated extension to Greater Southwest Field (later Amon Carter field). Hurst moved rapidly, but Euless reacted with its own annexations. Bedford incorporated in 1953 out of fear of being swallowed up by Hurst or Euless. Southlake hastily incorporated in September 1956 to stave off Hurst. Grapevine, Southlake, Colleyville, and North Richland Hills, as well as Smithfield, were petitioned by residents who, because of proximity, preferred one of them to Hurst. Some of the petitioners’ lands had been annexed by Hurst. Rising tensions prompted a conference of nearly a hundred officials from 13 neighboring towns, which convened in February 1957, to work out the difficulties. In the midst of the turbulent gathering, Hurst Mayor W. E.



Fort Worth Christian School Campus. The campus was built, and grades one through eight opened in the fall of 1958. The College Hill Addition began with W. A. Ledbetter’s house in 1958.

Vincent, a real estate developer, presided briefly and blamed Fort Worth for beginning the encroachments. Then the mayor added, “That’s right, another greedy city to the west of us acted first, and . . .” Laughter drowned out his words. After Vincent asserted that Hurst was not grabbing land but just trying to protect everyone’s interests, he was bombard-

ed with a wave of moans. Bedford Mayor David Sloan shouted, "How does that shoe taste by now? You've had it in your mouth all night." When Vincent stood fast on Hurst's annexations, the representatives of 12 towns stormed out of Hurst's First Baptist Church, denouncing the Hurst officials. By 1958 Hurst, which had attained a respectable size, reversed its untenable policy, and deannexed several disputed areas.

Regarding the tracts north of Smithfield, Hurst City Attorney Rex McEntire announced that Hurst would probably give up any territory that it had claimed under first reading if another community wanted it. Actually, Hurst had accidentally included a portion of Smithfield in its claim; if Hurst had not cut across Smithfield's boundary, Hurst could have ignored Smithfield's desires. As it was, Hurst agreed to release the tracts to Smithfield.

Smithfield also annexed land and farms south, east, and west of the old town. Davis estimated that Smithfield's population had grown to 2,500 or 3,000. But many citizens on the north side came to the conclusion in a few months that the threat from Hurst had either never existed or had become negligible. Many formed the Rural Rights Association, retained a lawyer, and filed a deannexation suit. The RRA was established in July, with J. C. Carroll Jr.



*Courtesy of American Airlines*

Grand opening of Greater Fort Worth International Airport/Amon Carter Field, 1953. Later Greater Southwest International Airport. as president. The lawsuit was filed in his name and that of fifty-two others, most of whom lived in the Keller School District.

At this point H. C. Allison strode into the public limelight again. His 177-acre farm had been annexed. Having long since abandoned the *Smithfield Springs Bulletin*, he relaunched his newspaper career with the *Smithfield Signal* in the autumn of 1957. His



avowed purposes were to support the RRA, disincorporate Smithfield entirely, and restore a virtually tax-free country life for the local citizenry. He noted that North Richland Hills had ready cash from building permits and utility service assessments but had no city tax.

The 48th District Court upheld Smithfield's annexations in October 1957, but Smithfield's leaders came to the conclusion that the irate northside farmers were a threat to the community. Allison delighted in observing that the RRA's protests had reached the point that on December 9, 1957, the Smithfield City Council forced itself—unanimously—to deannex four half-mile country areas to the north and west of town to rid themselves of the RRA's hostile voters. He compared the town's machinations to Huey Long's political machine in Louisiana. The town's big-shot bosses, he charged, were cutting their losses and were now desperately trying to stave off abolition of the town government. While Allison blew it out of proportion, it was all true, except there is no proof of Allison's additional charge that the town deliberately collected some countryside taxes, knowing that they were illegal.

Allison made some valid points in the December 1957 issue of the *Signal*:

"Suppose a farmer, leaving a small village, drives through . . . four miles . . . of open farmland to get to his farm home, and learns that he cannot build a residence on his own farm without first obtaining permission of a half dozen citizens of that village and, further, that permission is not obtainable unless the proposed residence has 'a livable area' (exclusive of closets, hallways, etc.) of more than 750 square feet because of a 'law'—what happens to that man's respect for law?"

Allison was identifying a problem, of course, and an ongoing conflict that had long plagued American towns and farmers. Most towns grandfathered those being annexed, tolerating otherwise outlawed practices for the lifetimes of particular dwellers, but some towns were more adroit at it than others. Smithfield's town fathers hadn't thought it through and were making needless enemies.

Five years of taxes, Allison charged, had resulted only in part of a fire truck and an unfinished jail. Keller, Colleyville, and North Richland Hills had no taxes, Richland Hills had only a \$ .25 per \$100 valuation of property, while Smithfield had a one-dollar tax.

The incumbents running for their third terms defended their record in a mailing, signed by others so that it would look as though it came from supportive voters. The taxes helped support the water system, streetlights, and some of the money for fire trucks. Fire insurance rates had been lowered, they claimed. A garbage disposal service was in place. And the curfew ordinance and speed limits had reduced mischievousness. There was a hint that the volunteer firefighters might walk out if the city charter was abolished. But as Allison and others promptly noted, most in Smithfield still depended solely on well water, and fire insurance rates declined only if one lived within 500 feet of one of the few fire plugs. Most of Smithfield was without streetlights, and the \$9 a month lighting bill could be paid for from utility revenues. The city marshal supposedly enforcing curfews and speed limits faced a hopeless task in the sprawling village, Allison argued, and the garbage disposal service was private and was not a city service. And true community volunteers would not threaten to walk off their posts.

The incumbents would have done better to sign their own letter, make note of the unpaid years of service that most of them had contributed, and try to educate the voters about the justification for building codes and the inevitability of towns and services in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, which they could try to slow down and control. They needed to better advertise the efforts of Dawson Davis and Fred Ross, the founder of the Smithfield

Civic League, who put in many unpaid hours just trying to persuade a water company to enter the town. They needed something a little more catchy and relevant than their supporters' campaign pitch printed in the *Northeast Times*, March 29, 1958: "Any dead fish can swim downstream; it takes a live one to swim upstream."

A five-person "people's ticket," vociferously backed by Allison, challenged the old leadership in the April 1, 1958, town elections. They pledged to abolish the salaries of the city marshal and city secretary-treasurer, fire the town attorney, repeal the tax ordinance, and get rid of the jail. What the candidates wanted, and what Allison promised everyone they could have, was the virtual abolition of the town. If the "people's" slate won, the town government could be scaled back and the current town charter retained. If the incumbents retained their offices, Allison wrote, the 270-voter petition requesting the county judge to call an election to abolish the city charter would be submitted—but not until a plan was in place to reincorporate Smithfield into a quiet, nontaxable village that could not be annexed by any other town.

One of Allison's problems was his extreme rhetoric. "Boss" Davis headed the little coterie of "evil minds." Mayor Zartman "spews his venom . . . like a snake that has been injured." The "corrupt" regime was compared to the Communists overseas. Another opponent was compared to cannibals.

School taxes were also a topic of much conversation in 1957. Allison noted, probably correctly, that school taxes in the tiny Smithfield district were about the same as Birdville's, but that the Birdville school was far superior in equipment and instruction. The Smithfield school had lost its higher grades, and the School Board had contracted with Birdville to educate Smithfield's high school students for \$75 per pupil, but obviously Smithfield was vulnerable to a change of mind on the part of the Birdville School Board. Consolidation with Birdville was the only solution, but, Allison said, the "smug and defiant" Smithfield board was holding off. In another article in the same issue of the paper, Allison claimed the Smithfield board realized the problem, and was willing to call a merger vote. Also, Allison charged, the schools were being dragged into politics since one teacher, Jack Gray's wife Martha, was also the town's secretary-treasurer. Tax money, he observed incorrectly, was "being paid to the same person from two sources: the school and the city." Smithfield citizens did in fact vote, June 14, 1957, to abolish their own district and join Birdville's by 194 to 14. Two weeks later a bond issue was approved, raising school taxes from \$1.10 per \$100 valuation of property to \$1.20. (Teachers, by the way, still drove school buses. Some math classes tried to stay very quiet so that Mr. Smoot, tired from waking early to drive the bus route, would doze off.) The school district merger was handled smoothly, without any constructive help from Allison.

In the city elections, however, poor Smithfield faced a choice between good-willed incumbents of marginal competence in governing abilities but with a vision of an urban future, who clearly bungled their arguments on behalf of preserving the township, and good-willed challengers who mistakenly thought they could preserve their country lives and were led by a demagogue who had his own secret plan for Smithfield. The bunglers won. Out of 380 votes the "people's ticket" lost all five contested races, albeit by narrow margins.

Immediately thereafter Allison, after denouncing the election as rigged, presented a petition to the county judge. Containing the signatures of far more than the required 100 eligible voters, it asked for an election on May 24, 1958, to dissolve the town. The *Smithfield Signal* assured its readers that the vote to abolish would return the town to a quiet and peaceful rural community. He admitted that the Richland Oaks neighborhood, far south of

town on the Bedford Road, east of Davis, wanted to be annexed to North Richland Hills, but the rest of Smithfield would retain its name and its lifestyle. He said nothing about his repeated appearances at the meetings of the North Richland Hills Civic League.

The opposition *Northeast Times*, which Allison denounced as a “city-sponsored rag,” warned that “if the city of Smithfield is abolished, the community can be annexed by a home rule city.” The *Times* was published bimonthly for awhile, from the east side of Snider’s store, by Dolores Fuchs and Frances Smoot, both of whom had husbands who were members of the volunteer Fire Department.

In this second campaign, Allison appeared to lose control. The volunteer firefighters were labeled as “fanatic fire worshippers,” and the community needed to remain “attractive to white citizens wanting to live and rear their children in an all-white community.” Finally, Allison charged, “The principles of AMERICANISM have recently been challenged in Smithfield as in many other communities since Communism has infiltrated into the churches and some other organizations.” His opponents, he railed, “are infected with the Communist idea. They will deceive, lie, cheat, and murder when the end warrants.”

Smithfield voted 201 to 193 to disincorporate. Allison changed the next issue of his paper to the *North Richland Hills Signal*. There was no more blather about the Smithfield name or a plan to stave off annexation, but he continued to lash out at the Communist infestation in Smithfield’s “city government, fire department, churches, and other organizations.”

Allison soon transferred his energy to working with the North Richland Hills Civic League in persuading folks in the southern reaches of old Smithfield, in half-mile swathes of territory, that they should petition to join the burgeoning town to the south. It would increase land values, he argued, including his own, and the annexations did in fact increase the value of property in Smithfield.

At this juncture in local history, as late as 1957, if Smithfield had come up with able political leaders, offering political leadership comparable to the economic leadership of L. E. Adams, it might be a town today. By linking with burgeoning North Richland Hills, Smithfield soon put aside its deep community division and eventually became an integral part of a city destined to become the third largest in Tarrant County. The two towns were a natural fit in that Smithfield needed the dynamic leadership and the police protection (established in 1960) of North Richland Hills, while North Richland Hills needed Smithfield’s Fire Department, the railroad right-of-way as a possible industrial tax base, and its countryside for expansion. Smithfield was unable to handle its own expansion, and, as events later proved, North Richland Hills was almost unable to handle it either.

## Early Homes of North Richland Hills, 1920s to 1940s



Hightower/Autrey house at 6725 Smithfield Road. Jimmy Hightower probably built this house for his son, L. A. Hightower, around 1880. This was the home of L. A. Hightower until 1918 when the Bud Autrey family purchased it. This house is one of the oldest in the Smithfield area. Photo taken 1998.



Shivers home, Smithfield Road, 1925, presently Davis Boulevard.