

Wren Cemetery, A Historic African American Family Graveyard in Kendall County, Texas

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ABSTRACT

The Wren Cemetery is a Historic African American Cemetery with over 122 grave sites representing more than 30 different African American family names from Kendall and the adjoining counties. Slightly under two and a half acres in size including an access road, the Wren Cemetery served as the family burial ground for a community of families living on their own adjoining homesteads in the late 1800's after they were freed from enslavement. These properties formed a somewhat isolated, 600-acre community, which I will call the Wren Freedom Colony. In this colony, former enslaved folks could farm and ranch, socialize, raise their families, find support and spouses, and learn to cope with their changing social status after emancipation in 1865. The cemetery is embedded within the Wren Freedom Colony and those interred here are related by birth or marriage to the Wren family. The earliest known burial was 1899 and the most recent 1999. This cemetery is recognized as a Historic Texas Cemetery by the Texas Historical Commission (THC) and will soon have a THC Historic Marker to tell the story of the Wren Cemetery and Community.

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2018, several Hill Country Archeological Association (HCAA) members, Stephen Bishop, Frank Binetti, Tom Harrigan, and Francoise Wilson, and I, the author, visited the 1850's homestead of Johann Schertz (1823-1860) and Johann's grave site. It is located on Spring Creek Road, 3 miles north of downtown Boerne in Kendall County. In addition to purchasing two plots in the newly formed town of Boerne in 1852, Johann was a member of the Schertz family that helped settle New Braunfels and Schertz, Texas (Mergerle 2009). While there, we were told of a large historic African American cemetery located on the adjoining property to the east, called the *Wren Cemetery* (Figure 1). The same day, I visited the cemetery and discovered it was composed of the graves of former enslaved African Americans, their family members, and descendants. After being freed one of these former



Figure 1. Descendants of Wren Family, Gloria Thompson (left) and May Herndon (right), at the Wren Cemetery entrance.

enslaved folks, Alex Wren, had acquired this property and lived here! Most surprising, many of those buried here had been enslaved in Kendall County.

I had no idea there had been slaves in Kendall County, I assumed because the county was settled primarily by German immigrants who opposed slavery, that slavery would not exist here. I was wrong. After investigating the history of this cemetery, I decided to record it with the county clerk and the Texas Historical Commission (THC) as an Unknown Cemetery. Then in 2019 I recorded details of the cemetery with the THC as a Historic Texas Cemetery. Currently some of the descendants of those buried here are working on obtaining a THC Historic Marker to tell the story of this cemetery and the families that once called this land home.

My purpose in writing this paper is to introduce you to the historic Wren cemetery and the people that are buried there, and in so doing answer the question of “*how this historic African American Cemetery came to be here in Kendall County?*”

HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE WREN CEMETERY

The Wren Cemetery is named after Alex (or Alexander) Wren (or Wrenn) and his wife, Charlotte Manning (1848-1940) who once owned the property where the cemetery is located (Figure 2). Alex Wren was a teenager perhaps 14 years old when he arrived in 1852 in the Curry’s Creek community, just 15 miles NE of Boerne (Jonas 2012). This was just a few miles west of present-day Kendalia. He along with at least 19 other enslaved folks, including his parents, Benjamin “Ben” (1806-1884) and Catherine “Kitty” Wren (1815-1880), and 7 siblings arrived with their owner, Methodist Parson Daniel Rawls (or Rawles) and his family (Gray 1949 pp. 169-171). Rawls bought land and settled with his family and slaves to farm and ranch on what is now called Rawls Creek. It is a tributary of Curry’s Creek. Parson Rawls was relatively wealthy for the Curry’s Creek-Kendalia area. He helped establish the Methodist Church in Blanco and built the first cotton gin in Kendall County.

Today when I drive FM473 and cross Rawls Creek I think about these enslaved families that lived here and wonder what their life was like. The ruins of the Daniel Rawls home and one of the slave cabins are still standing as a reminder of the past.

Alex Wren was born June 1, 1838 in Louisiana and died on June 14, 1924 in Boerne according to his gravestone. His brothers and sisters were: **Burrell** born Aug 1832 (married Millie Riley), **Ezekiel** born 1833 (married Mary ?), **Milly** born 1835 (married Louis Hemphill), **Amanda** born 1846 (married Richard Street), **Nicodemus** born 1846 (married Lucy Meadows), **Mary Jane** born 1855 (married Alvin Coleman), **Mary Ann** born 1859 (married Daniel Blair)—all were born into slavery.

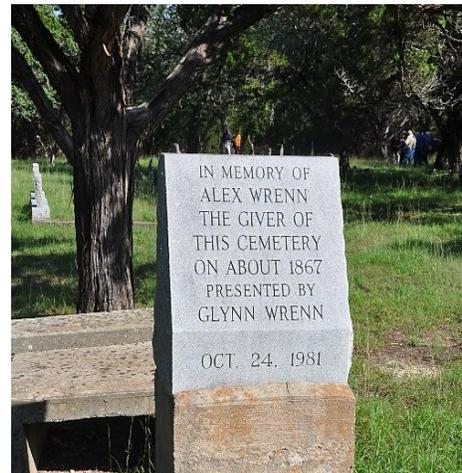


Figure 2. Dedication Memorial to Alex Wren for the gift of the cemetery to his family. Glynn Wrenn was one of Alex’s many grandsons. Located in the Wren Cemetery.

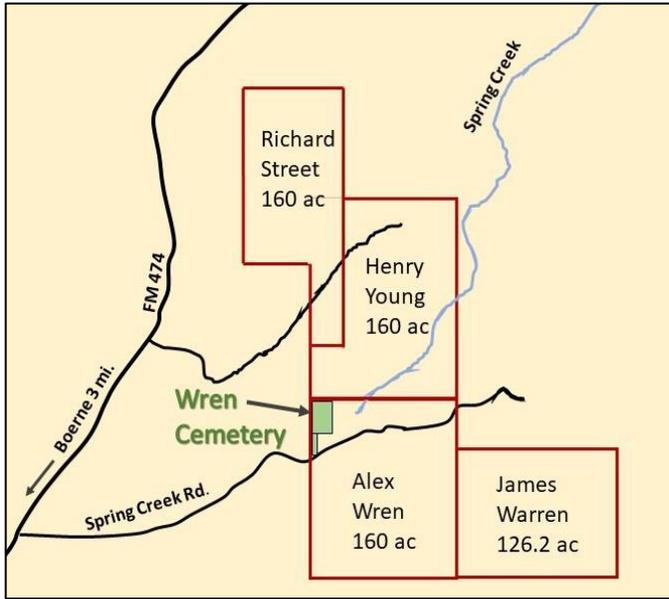


Figure 3. The Wren Colony properties consisted of at least four properties outlined in red. The Wren Cemetery (in green) is located on the former Alex Wren property. The entrance to the cemetery is at 150 Spring Creek Rd. 3 miles north of Boerne.

About 1865, as soon as he was free Alex married Charlotte nee Manning who was born in Mississippi in 1848. Beginning in 1873 or earlier Alex and Charlotte homesteaded, through a Pre-emption Land Grant or Land Patent from the governor, a 160-acre piece of public land just 3 mi. north of Boerne (Benedict 2019, Kretzmier 1977). The Wren Cemetery is located on this land (Figures 3 & 4). Alex and Charlotte raised their 18 children here. Other former enslaved African Americans also acquired large tracts of land by Preemption Land Patent adjacent to Wren forming a community or colony, where they worked together and raised their families. These “Freedom Colonies” were common across the South following June 19, 1865 when all enslaved African Americans were declared free (Roberts 2019)—by 1900 there were 3 rural and 2 urban Freedom Communities known in Kendall County.

After the Civil War, formerly enslaved African Americans numbered around 4 million across the USA, and at least 89 were freed in Kendall County (US Slave Census records for 1860). The total population of Kendall County was estimated at 1,100 in 1864 (Moon 2019). Surprisingly, slaves composed about 8% of this population. Of the counties adjoining Kendall, Bexar County had the largest number of slaves, 1,193 at that time.

As was typical of the 1800’s, when a family member passed away, they were quickly buried on the family property, and over time this practice resulted in a family cemetery (Jordan 1982). This allowed early settlers to keep their deceased loved ones close, where they could visit their memory and final resting place. There are more than 100 known family cemeteries in Kendall County including the Wren Cemetery and two additional small African American cemeteries that contain relatives of those buried in the Wren Cemetery (Anonymous 1983).



Figure 4. Graves of Alex and Charlotte Wren in foreground. Visitors are (L to R) Virgil Hardin and May Herndon, descendants of Alex and Charlotte, and County Judge Darrel Lux, 2018.

Alex and Charlotte Wren set aside 2.4 acres on their 160-acre homestead for the Wren Cemetery, and a roadway from Spring Creek Road to the cemetery (Figure 3) (Harwell 2018). Today it can be accessed by a paved driveway beginning at 150 Spring Creek Road. The Wren Cemetery is a family cemetery with approximately 122 burials of family members, most of whom are related to one another by birth or marriage (Anonymous 1983, Benedict 2018). The family members buried here are Alex and Charlotte Wren, Alex Wren's siblings and children, many of Alex and Charlotte Wren's 18 children and their spouses, and some of their more than 50 grandchildren and their spouses and children. Family names of those interred here are *Benson, Blair, Brown, Buirst, Butler, City, Clark, Davis, Dilworth, Edmondson, Eggleston, Ferrell, Hemphill, Hillyer, Holmes, Houston, McClure, Meadows, Norman, Raybon, Smith, Spears, Street, Thomas, Warren, Washington, White, Wilburn, Wilson, Williams, and Wren*. Surprisingly, Alex's mother and father, Kitty and Ben, are not buried here. Instead they are buried in a small African American family cemetery in what was the Wasp Creek African American Colony which they helped found on Preemption Land. It is located near the town of Welfare, about 10 miles north west of the Wren Cemetery.

In 1924 shortly after the death of her husband, Alex Wren, Charlotte sold their 160-acre homestead but set aside the 2.44 acres containing the cemetery and the road leading to it.¹ Census records for 1910 list Charlotte as living in Boerne, in the "Flats" community, as head of household in a rented home with 6 family members. They were her son-in-law "Ray" Rayborn (or Raybon) and his wife, Malinda "Tillie," nee Wren, who is one of Charlotte's daughters, and Rayborn's two children who are Charlotte's granddaughters, Sarah (or Sara) Etta "Doretta" (see Figure 11 for her photo at school) and Elizabeth Raborn, Bella Banks nee Wren another of Charlotte's daughters, and Bella's daughter, Mardie, another of Charlotte's granddaughters.

In 1925 Charlotte deeded the 2.44 acre cemetery property to the "Boerne Colored Cemetery Association" to oversee the cemetery in perpetuity.² The first trustees were, Ben Ferrell (1877-1946), Sam Warren (1871-1939) and Willie Davis (1861-1933). Ben and Willie were sons-in-law of Charlotte. Ben Ferrell had married Emma Wren and William Davis had married Ida Wren. Sam Warren was related to Charlotte through his sister Lizzie Warren who married Peter Wren. They all lived in the Flats. In 1989 a caretaker, Rene Gibbons, was appointed who lived on the cemetery property until January 2020 when she died.

When I visited the Wren Cemetery in 2018, I found 122 possible grave sites. However only 68 of these had gravestones or metal funeral markers clearly identifying who was actually buried there. The grave markers range



Figure 5. Headstone for Peter Wren (1865-1899). First born son of Alex and Charlotte Wren.

¹ Deed Records 1924, Kendall County Clerk, Volume 41, Pgs.7-18.

² Deed Records 1924, Kendall County Clerk, Volume 41, Pgs. 184-185.



Figure 6. The Street family owned 160-acre property near the Wren property in the Wren Colony. During his later adult life Burrell lived in the Flats with his family. His father Richard owned the farm in the Wren Colony.

from very elaborate polished granite to simple homemade headstones to metal funeral markers. The earliest clearly marked burial was Peter Wren’s, born 1865 and died 1899 (Figure 5). He was Alex and Charlotte’s first born. There are several home-made carved tombstones (from limestone) with footstones that are possibly older. The most recent burial was Jewell “Sandy” Benson, born 1920, died 1999. Jewell lived in the Flats in Boerne as did many others buried here. Jewell had married Jenette Davis who was the daughter of William Davis and Ida Wren, another of Charlotte’s daughters. The Davises lived in the Flats at 406 Lott St. for most of their lives.

The most complete list of those buried in the Wren Cemetery records the names of 102 individuals.³ Hal Harwell (2019) with the Genealogical Society of Kendall County and May Herndon, a Wren descendent, have developed family trees for the Wren Family that provide extensive genealogical information on those buried in the Wren Cemetery and their descendants, up to the present.

Many graves are marked with beautifully inscribed and polished granite headstones, and many have a concrete base for the headstone to rest upon. Some plots have large gravestones with concrete borders, while others have only the metal funeral home markers. Most of the granite tombstones are made of grey granite but some are of reddish or pinkish stone. A few are of marble, fieldstone (limestone), or wood. The wood markers have deteriorated with time and are unreadable. Almost all the graves in this cemetery face towards the east with the headstones on the west or head end of the grave. Frequently family members are placed close together sometimes in family plots, and sometimes outlined with a curb of cement. A number of tombstones have



Figure 7. Headstones of Alex and Charlotte Wren. Note the porcelain portraits of each at the top center of the stone.

³ <http://www.txgenwebcounties.org/kendall/cwrenn.htm>

both husband and wife listed on the same large stone (Figure 6). Many gravestones also have a porcelain portrait of the deceased. Most portraits are in excellent shape. Both Alex and Charlotte Wren have very good porcelain portraits on their gravestones (Figure 7).

Some Wren Cemetery grave sites can only be identified by the presence on the ground of a 7 to 8 ft. oval of loose fist-sized limestone rocks surrounding a deep depression where the soil has sunken over time as the casket deteriorated and the soil settled.

Interestingly, there are several ancient hand carved headstones and footstones, that appear to be carved from local limestone (Figure 8). These may be earlier than Peter Wren's 1899 burial. Sadly, there are many graves with only the metal plate and stake provided by the funeral home, but nothing remains on the metal plate to identify the person buried under these markers. Even more distressing is that other African American cemeteries are present in Kendall County, and across Texas and the southern states, which are undocumented, uncared for, and unprotected.

Based on death certificates and other records there are three veterans buried in the Wren Cemetery: John Warren (1847-1917) (Figure 9), a Civil War Soldier; Jack O'Neil Wren (1894-1918), a Pvt. Co. B. 507th, Eng. NA. World War I Army; and Isaac William Meadows (1916-1972) World War II Army. John Warren acquired and farmed the 126.2 acres of Patent Land adjoining the Wren, Street and Young properties (Figure 3). Because Jack O'Neil died in World War I his name is listed on the Boerne War Memorial in Veteran's Plaza at 801 S. Main St. in Boerne.

Today the Wren descendants have established a non-profit association to manage the cemetery, named the *Wren Cemetery Preservation Association*. They plan to maintain the cemetery as a historic and sacred burial ground representing Wren family history in central Texas from the 1850's thru 1999 (Street 2020). There will be no more burials in the Wren Cemetery.



Figure 8. Possibly the oldest graves in the cemetery are made of wood or hand carved limestone. Note the footstone and headstone in the right foreground.



Figure 9. This headstone is for John Warren's son, Samuel (1871-1939) and his wife Laurina nee City (1873-1958) who were living with their children in the Flats in Boerne in 1930. See their children in Figure 11.

HISTORY OF THE WREN FAMILY IN KENDALL COUNTY

Boerne and Comfort were German Communities and most Germans opposed slavery. However, there were other smaller communities in Kendall County made up of Anglo-Americans, who migrated to Texas beginning shortly after 1846 when Texas joined the US. Some of these European Americans brought their slaves with them from the old southern plantation states. They also brought their slave culture and mindset with them. These immigrant southerners developed small farming and ranching communities along the Guadalupe River and some of its tributaries from the coast to Kerrville. In Kendall County they established farms from the Guadalupe up Curry's Creek to just northwest of Kendalia—where good farmland was available for raising crops, especially cotton, with enslaved people. They settled near Blanco, Comfort, Center Point, Fredericksburg along the Pedernales River, and San Antonio.

By 1860, 77% of heads of households in Texas had been born and raised in the old south. Texas was very much a southern confederate state. About 25% of Texas families owned 1 or more enslaved people—owning 1 to 3 was most common. According to the US Census of 1860, there were 182,566 slaves in Texas and their number was growing rapidly.

You may be wondering what life was like for the 89 African American slaves that were freed here in Kendall County, many of whom are interred at the Wren Cemetery. It was difficult!⁴ They came out of slavery with little material wealth and were severely handicapped by white attitudes, and lack of social status and education—most former slaves could not read or write. Can you imagine trying to carry on your life today as an adult with a family to care for without being able to read or write?

To make their human condition worse, governments, especially in the southern states including Texas, quickly enacted laws to restrict and separate the African American population from the white population—known as the Jim Crow Laws.⁵ Because of these laws, African Americans in Kendall County had to develop their own schools, churches, business, and places to socialize. This is in part why they formed their own communities or “*Freedom Colonies*” or “*Freedmen’s Colonies*” (Figure 10) here in Kendall County where acceptance was greater, persecution less, and lynching of African Americans unheard of.⁶



Figure 10. African American Freedom Colonies in red, located in and near Kendall County beginning in 1870's.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_the_United_States

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Crow_laws

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lynching_in_the_United_States

Formerly enslaved Black Texans aggressively pursued land ownership after the Civil War in secluded locations in Texas. More than 600 freedom colonies have been discovered in Texas (Roberts 2019). Nevertheless, the lives of freed African Americans were almost as difficult as their previous life in slavery (Fehrenbach 2000, Mason 1998, Mears 2009).

Once freed, they worked hard, saved and bought or acquired Preemption Land to build their homes, farms, and freedom colonies. Three rural Freedom Colonies are known to have formed in Kendall County: the **Simmons Creek Colony** (553 ac. total) near Kendalia made up of at least six families, including City, Gilmore, Wren, and Reily; the **Wasp Creek Colony** (280 ac.) near Welfare made up of possibly 13 families, including Meadows, Wren, and Blair; and the **Wren Colony** (600 ac.) made up of at least four families including Wren, Warren, Young, and Street. Their properties adjoined (Figure 3). Two urban colonies or communities also developed, the **Comfort** and **Boerne Flats Colonies**. These are thought to have developed a few years later than the rural colonies, as the African American folks in the rural colonies began to move off the farms and into nearby towns. There were also two other rural colonies just outside Kendall County, the **Peyton Colony** east of the city of Blanco, and the **Lane Valley Colony** southwest of Comfort.

The Boerne Flats settlement developed in the “Irons’ and Graham’s Addition” after 1887. In 1885 Capt. D. S. Irons and Henry Graham purchased the 65 acres that would become known locally as the “Flats Addition” or simply “the Flat.” By 1887 Irons and Graham had subdivided it into the streets and lots similar to what you see today. They began selling them to the public on April 5, 1887 at a very grand public auction held on Boerne’s Main Plaza (S.A. Daily News 1887). However, the development did not quickly mature into the home subdivision Irons and Graham had hoped for.

Sometime between 1887 and 1910 the former African American enslaved folks and their children began moving off the farms owned by their parents in Kendall and surrounding counties. They wanted their own homes, good schools, churches, and a better life.

The Flats Colony might better be called a Community. It was located on the west side of Cibolo Creek more or less between School, Hosack, San Antonio, and Theissen Streets. The 1930 US Census lists 18 homes in the Flats owned or rented by African American families. This census records about 43 African Americans living there at the time. Many of these families were from the Kendall county freedom colonies. The Flats community was a racially mixed community of Europeans, Africans, and Hispanics. Boerne was segregated and had implemented the “Jim Crow Laws” although the white European population here was divided on segregation.

Due to racial segregation most African American communities across Texas had to provide their own schools and churches, and like the European settlers, they first used their homes for these activities. African American social life tended to revolve around the church. The African Americans living in these communities were very concerned about educating their children, worshiping God together, and finding a way to make a living. They knew their children needed an education to survive in post-emancipation America.



Figure 11. Students at the Royal School in the Flats 1920. Most of these children lived in the Flats. Starting at the bottom left, they are John Warren, Charles Warren, Samuel Warren, Perry Houston, Lorenzo Brown, Felton Brown, next row starting at left, Sarah Etta Raborn, Minnie Houston (face missing), Juanita Warren, Lillian Washington, Nettie Davis, Annie Houston, Dorothy Biggs, Glenna Mae Houston, Pearl Houston, next row, Elmora Dorin, Maudie Clark, Lola Warren, Florence Wren, Mrs. Armstrong (teacher?), Amy Warren, Ima Mae Houston, and Margaret Washington. Identified by Diane Taylor of Boerne 2018.



Figure 12. Frankie Ferrell (1903-1989), cook, maid, caregiver, and friend of Diane Taylor. Photo taken after 1960. She had two children who were not allowed to attend Boerne public school in 1958, but later were permitted.

The African Americans in Flats Community built or acquired the buildings for the Royal School (Figure 11) and Mt. Nebo Baptist Church between perhaps 1900 to 1910. Both structures are homes today and are thought to be located at their original sites, the church at 503 W. Graham St. and the school at 623 O’Grady St. The Mt. Nebo Baptist Church in San Antonio was known to send a preacher and choir to conduct services at the Mt. Nebo Church in the Flats. Both the church and school were likely used by the members of Wren Colony since these facilities were only 3 miles from the colony. Also, by 1910 many Wren family members had moved to the Flats including Charlotte. Charlotte first rented starting some time before 1910, then for \$200 dollars purchased lot 136 at 518 O’Grady St. in Feb. of 1914. She built a home there and helped care for her adult children and grandchildren—she was a remarkable person.

Miss Frankie D. Glenn in her book, *Reminiscences*, talks about her life as a white child living in the Flats with her family beginning about 1922 (Glenn 1994, pp. 43-44). Her favorite childhood neighbors in the Flats were Aunt Charlotte Wren, and her daughter Aunt Ida, and Ida’s daughters, Hattie and Nettie Davis, and Adam Warren. Frankie said, “*Some people are important markers in our landscape of life. They add weight to our sense of place and belonging. These neighbors were very meaningful people to me.*” Nettie Davis married Jewel Benson and they lived on Irons St. most of their adult lives. Ida married William M. Davis and lived in the Flats at 406 Lott St. She worked as a nurse and midwife for Drs. W. T. Reeve and J. F. Nooe. Dr. Reeve lived in the Flats beginning in about 1902, at 402 Herff St. near the intersection with O’Grady St. (Glenn 1994, p. 25). Miss Glenn and her family bought the Reeve’s home after the doctor died in 1922.

Dr. Reeve was the second Mayor of Boerne beginning in 1911.⁷ His home in the Flats was very close to the homes of Charlotte and her extended family.

By 1930 Charlotte Wren had sold the old Wren homestead on Spring Creek Rd. and was living in the Flats in her own home thought to be located at 518 O'Grady St. At this time she was 84, head of household, working as a laundry woman, and had her son, Grant Wren, was living with her. Also living with her were two teenage grandchildren, Charles O'Neal Wren and Christian Wren, and a boarder, Perry Houston. Perry attended the Royal School in 1920 (Figure 11).

Diane Taylor nee Davis⁸ of Boerne has fond memories of attending Mt. Nebo Church services in the 1950's as a white girl in the care of Frankie Ferrell, who was the Davis family's maid and cook, and Diane's caregiver (Figure 12). Frankie had married Eugene "Buddy" Ferrell who was the son of Benjamin Ferrell and Emma Wren. Frankie and Buddy lived at 518 Graham St. in the Flats in the 1950's and are buried in the Wren Cemetery.



Figure 13. One-room schoolhouse in Welfare, Kendall County, about 1900.

The small African American Colony in the town of Comfort formed much like the Flats community. At first, the Comfort African American Community held school in homes. Then in about 1910 they acquired a schoolhouse that was located on Altgelt Street where most of the African American Community lived (Stewart 2006). The Simmons Colony is said to have had a schoolhouse too. The Wasp Creek Colony could use the Welfare Community one-room schoolhouse (Figure 13) after 1905, but only when the classes for white children were not being

held. This was not a practical solution. Keep in mind this was 40 years after emancipation!

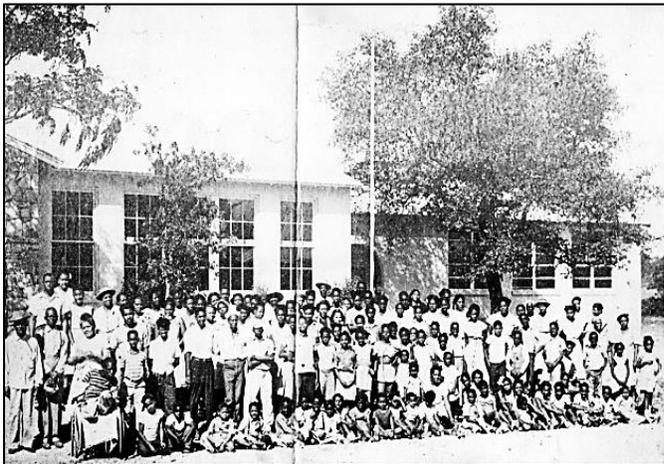


Figure 14. The Doyle School for African American students in Kerrville, May Day 1947.

Because the children of these African Americans were excluded from the white public schools, over time a number of African American families moved to communities where there were better schools with a broad curriculum for their children, like the Doyle School in Kerrville (Figure 14). Today the Doyle School, located at 110 W. Barnett St., is a community center. Before the Doyle

⁷ Minutes of Boerne City Council Meeting confirming W.J. Reeve as new mayor 4-11-1911.

⁸ Personal Communication, Diane Taylor, Boerne, TX, 2018.

School there was the Cabbage Hill School, a one-room schoolhouse similar to the Royal School. The Doyle school began about 1909 and was closed in 1966 when African American students were integrated into public schools with the white students in Kerrville. Compared to public schools for white children, the early schools for African American children suffered from a lack of funding and quality of textbooks, teachers, and facilities.

The types of jobs held by the Wren family living in Kendall County after emancipation are listed in the census records. Many initially worked for their former slave owners as well as developing their own farming, ranching or other businesses, or for the county. Keep in mind they had been the backbone of the labor force in the south for generations. The women commonly worked as *Domestics*, serving in homes and businesses, or as *Clothes Washers* working from home or in businesses. Some worked as *Teachers* at the Royal School, or as *Midwife* or *Nurse*. Men worked as *Labors* on farms, or for other businesses or the county, or as *Farmers* or *Ranchers* on their own farms, or *Cooks* for the local hotels and restaurants, or as *Delivery Men*, or *Freighters* some furnishing their own wagons and livestock to pull the wagons, or as *Saddle Makers*, *Teachers*, *Charcoal Makers*, *Shingle Makers*, or *Cattle Buyers*.

As an example of how these folks in various colonies were connected to the Wren Colony let's look at the genealogy of the professional African American football player Jesse Van Stokes (1944-2019) who died in San Antonio last year. He was born in Kendall County and raised in the



Figure 15. A photo of Comforts African American Community about 1955. Left to right: John Stokes, Walter Stokes (Nellie's husband), little boy is their son, Jesse V. Stokes, Arthur Lee Bolden, his mother Marguerite Bolden, Nellie Stokes, little boy is Garland Blanks (grandson of Walter and Nellie), Mrs. Wallace (sister of Rev. Thomas), Rosie and George Bedrod, Rev. Walter Thomas, Mrs. Brody (sister of Rev.), boy is J. W. Stokes, and last lady is unknown. Photo courtesy of Gregory Krauter a resident in the community.

Comfort Colony by his parents, Walter Stokes (1897-1978) and Nellie nee Washington (1901-1971) (Figure 15). Nellie was raised in Fredericksburg in the African American community that formed there. Her mother, Lucinda Street (1878-1921), was raised in the Wren Colony. Lucinda was the daughter of Amanda Wren (1846-1899), who was a former slave of Danial Rawls, and the sister of Alex Wren. Amanda married Richard Street (1843-1904) who owned 160 ac of Preemption Patent Land near Alex Wren's property in the Wren Colony. Nellie eventually moved with her children to Kerrville so they could go to the Doyle School. She is buried at Mt. Tivy Cemetery in Kerrville.

Everyone has hopes and dreams. Glynn Wrenn (1902-1987), one of Alex and Charlotte Wren's more than 50 grandchildren, wanted to be a postman (Figure 16) (Edwards 2004). He grew up in the Flats in Boerne and went to the Royal School. When Glynn was age 12 his family moved to west San Antonio and bought a dairy farm. He knew becoming a postman required a good education, so he worked hard at school.



Figure 16. Glynn Wrenn, teacher, deacon, postman, and Army Veteran.

After he graduated from high school in San Antonio, he was admitted to Prairie View College where he graduated in 1936. He then spent 2 years in the army following which he finally realized his dream. In 1938 he became a postman in San Antonio. His wife, Elizabeth T. Wrenn (1902-1973)⁹ graduated from Prairie View in 1938. She became a teacher in San Antonio and went on to obtain a master's degree in Administration & Supervision. She became a principal in the San Antonio School system. After her 41 years of teaching she was so loved and admired that the Edgewood School District honored her by naming a San Antonio school after her—the E.T. Wrenn Middle School (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Logo for E. T. Wrenn Middle School, named after Elizabeth T. Wrenn.

By the year 2000 most African Americans including the Wren family and their descendants had died or moved out of Kendall County. A few African Americans still live in the Peyton Colony in Blanco County. This colony's Mt. Horeb Baptist Church (Figure 18) and school buildings are still there. The church continues to have services most Sundays. They have a large active cemetery with about 176 graves, including many Wren, City, and Hardin family members related by birth or marriage to folks in the Wren Cemetery and other cemeteries in Kendall, Kerr, Bexar, and Gillespie Counties. Hiram City (1837-1896), who owned property and lived in the Simmons Creek Colony in Kendall County for a time, was the postman for the Peyton Post Office for many years. He had also been one of Daniel Rawls' enslaved folks, along with the Wren family when they all arrived in Kendalia area. Hiram married Rachel Hines, who was from the Peyton Colony.

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Figure 18. Mt. Horeb Baptist Church today in the Peyton Colony, Peyton, Blanco County, Texas.

⁹ https://wrenn.eisd.net/about/history_of_wrenn_ms/elizabeth_t_wrenn

Some early members of the Kerrville African American Community have stayed, and that community has grown over the years. Many are related to the 30 families buried in the Wren Cemetery and in the Tivy Mountain Cemetery for African Americans in Kerrville, as well as the small African American Cemeteries associated with the Lane Valley Colony. Moreover, marriage and birth relationships exist between the Wren cemetery members and the more than 1000 enslaved African Americans freed in Bexar County and the Freedom Colonies that developed there (Mason 1998). As you can see the members of these many Freedom Colonies interacted within and between colonies just as the European communities around them did, although they were almost invisible to these European American Communities.

In summary we can see the three greatest challenges for these emancipated African Americans in Kendall County and elsewhere in the US were, (1) being accepted as social equals by white European Americans, (2) obtaining a good education, and (3) finding jobs that were meaningful with fair pay. Their search for these things caused many to move away from Kendall County. They were part of the great African-American migration to major US industrial centers, a move that took place from about 1900 into 1950's and is still going on!

After 1900 this migration from the Hill Country was fueled, in part, by the boll weevil as it invaded the Hill Country and began making cotton farming unprofitable. The boll weevil problems were compounded by the 1930's depression, followed by the drought of the "dust bowl days" from about 1930 to 1940. These events created the perfect storm that forced African American families, as well as white families across much of America to find new sources of income, and more suitable and enjoyable places to live. Many farmers, both black and white lost their farms. Also, at this time racial tensions and prejudices were high and influenced many African Americans in southern states to migrate to friendlier northern and western states (Fehrenbach 2000, Mason 1998, Mears 2009).

Our memory of formerly enslaved African Americans and their persecution was recently ignited by the events surrounding George Floyd's death in the hands of a police officer. As I write these words (June 6, 2020), the public protests and mob violence over Floyd's death are sweeping the country. It seems America has more work to do to change social attitudes and bring equality to African Americans.¹⁰

My hope is that by memorializing, respecting, and helping to preserve the Wren Cemetery and its history, we give humanity and dignity to those who are buried there. Perhaps in a small way this contributes to the healing, understanding and reconciliation of our society's injustice to African Americans, past and present.

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racism_in_the_United_States

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