

Wren Cemetery – African American History in Kendall County - Part II

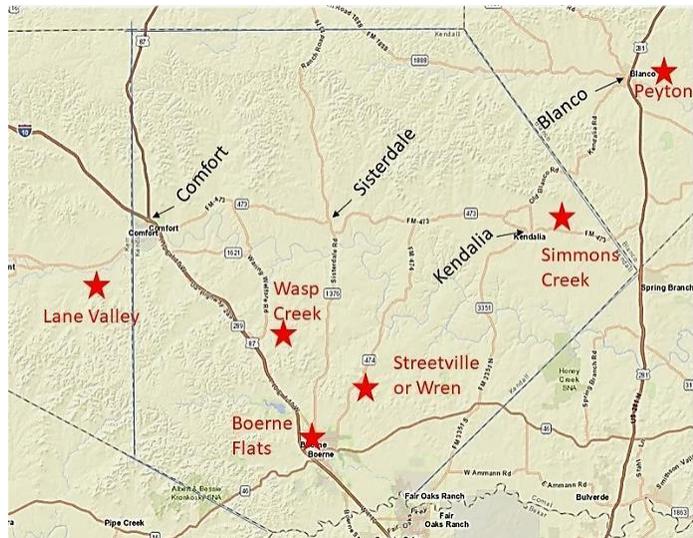
By John Benedict

If you read Part I of this series, you were likely wondering what happened after 1865 to the more than 89 African-American slaves that were freed here in Kendall County. What kind of life did they have, and where are their descendants today more than 150 years later? In quick broad-brush strokes I hope to paint a picture of these folks and their hardscrabble lives. I say hardscrabble because 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 quickly enacted laws to restrict and separate the African-American population from the white population—known as the Jim Crow Laws.¹ 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**”

here in Kendall County where acceptance was greater, persecution less, and lynching unheard of.² More than 600 colonies have been discovered in Texas.³ Nevertheless, the life of freed African-Americans was almost as difficult as their previous life in slavery.⁴

Once freed they bought or patented land (a type of homesteading) to build their homes, farms, and colonies. Four rural Freedom Colonies 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; the **Wren Colony** (600 ac.) made up of at least four families including Wren, Warren, Young and Street. The fourth, known as the **Boerne Flats Colony**, was unique in that it was urban and formed later as families moved off the farm and gathered in Boerne near the turn of the century. The Flats Colony was located on the west side of Cibolo Creek between School, Hosack, Irons, and Theissen Streets—18 homes in 1930. It was a racially mixed community of whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics. There were two other nearby colonies just outside Kendall County, the **Peyton Colony** just east of the city of Blanco, and the **Lane Valley Colony** southwest of Comfort.



African American Freedom Colonies highlighted in red, in and near Kendall County.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Crow_laws

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lynching_in_the_United_States

³ Fehrenbach, T. R. 2000. *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans*. Da Capo Press. 3ed. p. 679-687.

⁴ Mason, K. 1998. *African Americans and Race Relations in San Antonio, Texas, 1867-1937*. Garland Publishing, Inc. NY. Pp. 23-43. Mears, M. M. 2009. *And Grace Will Lead Me Home: African American Freeman Communities of Austin Texas, 1865-1928*. Texas Tech Univ. Press. pp. 155-163.



*Mt. Horeb Baptist Church at the Peyton Colony
Peyton, Texas.*

All African-Americans in these colonies have since passed away or left the area, except in the Peyton Colony. This colony's Mt. Horeb Baptist Church and school building are still there, and the church holds services most Sundays. They have a large active cemetery with about 176 graves, including many Wren, City and Hardin family members that are related by birth or marriage to folks in the Wren Cemetery. Hiram City (1837-1896), who owned property and lived in the Simmons Creek Colony for a time, was the postman for the Peyton Post office for many years. He had been one of Daniel Rawls' slaves, along with the Wren family

when they all arrived in Kendalia in about 1852. Hiram married Rachel Hines, who was from the Peyton Colony.

The members of these Freedom Colonies interacted within and between colonies. For example, members found spouses in their colony or other nearby colonies, including those in Kerrville and San Antonio. Their bigger challenges were getting an education and finding work. Eventually their search for work and a better life spread them across the United States—as part of the great African-American migration to major US industrial centers that took place from about 1900 into 1950's.

For example, Glynn Wren (1902-1987), one of Alex Wren's more than 50 grandchildren, wanted to be a postman.⁵ He grew up in the "Flats" in Boerne and went to the Royal School established by this African-American community. It was located at 623 O'Grady St. The community also built their own church there in the Flats, the Mt. Nebo Baptist Church, located at 503 W. Graham St. It was the center of their social and spiritual life. Now it is a home. 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.

After he graduated from high school, he was admitted to Prairie View College where he graduated in 1936. He then spent 2 years in the army, after which he finally realized his dream. In 1938 he became a postman in San Antonio. His wife, Elizabeth T. Wrenn (1902-1973)⁶ 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 school after her—the E.T. Wrenn Middle School.



*Glynn Wren, teacher,
deacon, postman, and Army
Veteran.*



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

⁵ Edwards, Jay. 2004. *Wren Wanted To Be A Train Postman*. The Bandera County Historian. Vol. 25 (1).

⁶ <https://www.eisd.net/domain/1771>