

History...the way it was

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Lot 96



Alfred Pitts and the White House on the Hill

High on a Texas hill in 1884, with the Red River to the north and Big Mineral Creek to the east, William Alfred Pitts (1844-1915), built a two-story frame house overlooking his 1,111 acre farm that eventually grew to be one of the largest estates in Grayson county totaling 1,700 acres.

Built as the “better type of Texas house” in the 1880s, with lumber transported by ox wagon from Jefferson, Texas, the Pitts place has a wide center hall with a closed stairway, end chimneys, fireplaces all over and a double-decker front gallery.

Pitts was a native of Plymouth, England, baptized by the Archbishop of Canterbury and apprenticed in the Bank of England where a relative was a director. As a young man, he worked as a bookkeeper for a coffee and tea company in Newfoundland, came to the New World, then south to Texas.

He was working at the Merchants & Planters Bank in Sherman in the 1870’s when an acquaintance suggested he purchase land and helped him select his 1,111 plot.

He married Jo Ella Burden, the daughter of a Gordonville physician, and lived for a while in a 1-1/2 story house near the river bank in the former home of the commanding officer of the Red River Calvary, Captain Bourland, who was responsible for guarding the river from Indians and Kansas Jayhawkers.

He was evidently a very feisty guy since he exercised political control of the Cedar Mills area for many years interacting with Indians and gangs such as the Dalton’s, Basses’ and

Quantrill’s who were allowed to bury their dead in a little unmarked cemetery within the sight of his house.

His property included a vast amount of wooded area that he called his “park” and he grew cotton, corn and alfalfa in the fertile bottom lands in the valley east of the Boat Club pavilion.

Fortunately he passed away 30 years before he saw the federal government force his family to sell of 1,200 acres of his property for an average price of \$36.85/acre and flooded it with water.

Facing old age herself, his remaining daughter (Anna) sold the house and 36 acres to Alfred’s grandson (Harold Pitts) in 1961 and the remaining 463 acres to two developers who divided it into 3,000 lots creating Sherwood Shores.

We’re living on land previously owned by Alfred Pitts. There was NO Sherwood Shores or Hillcrest Circle in 1958 when the road to the Boat Club was cut through from Hwy 377 — just gravel leading off the highway to the east. It came to a dead end at the Pitts pasture (now the five-way stop), then members had to turn North and make a loop around the house on what is now Lake Road. We entered the club at Lot 1 (the original entrance) on the north end of Pecan Tree Rd.

I was fortunate to interview Harold in 2012 during one of his rare visits to the house, then it went on the market for several years with no success. Sadly, none of his family was interested in it and he passed away in 2018 -- but even with them gone, the white house and Alfred Pitts will always remain part of this community.

