

**ROSE HILL CEMETERY**  
**Blooming Grove, Navarro County**  
**Narrative History for Texas Historical Marker**

**I. CONTEXT**

Rose Hill Cemetery is located in western Navarro County just off W. State Highway 22, less than a mile west of Blooming Grove and about 16 miles west of the county seat of Corsicana. It is the second cemetery founded in Blooming Grove.

Rose Hill Cemetery reflects the multifaceted history of small towns in Texas, where cemeteries carry the fascinating and sometimes forgotten stories of the individuals buried there, both famous and unknown. The cemetery covers the entire history of this rural agricultural community, and it continues to serve the area almost 140 years after the first burial in 1890.

It is a large cemetery for such a small town, with almost 2,100 graves over 18 acres of open, well-tended land. It is surrounded by fenced ranchland dotted with cattle, and it is overlooked on the southeast by an elementary school. It sits to the west of town, just off Highway 22. A canopy of trees covers gravel-topped Rose Hill Road.

The cemetery gently slopes down south and back up toward the school. The oldest parts of the cemetery are toward the entrance and have several mature trees (see map and photos). The newest additions are south and have no trees, and the latest is just a mowed field at the south end.

In the late 1880s, residents thought the original cemetery, White Church—which is a mile away—was too far from downtown. The town needed a new cemetery closer to the train depot and the road to Corsicana. *The Blooming Grove Times* in 1939 stated, “Mr. Deason says back in those days the town boasted of a canning factory, and that was not all, there was a brick yard.

Pete Hanson (who later killed his wife in a murder-suicide in 1896)<sup>1</sup> made brick over near Rose Hill cemetery and nearly all the old business brick houses of the town were made of Hanson's brick."<sup>2</sup> It was close enough to downtown yet near a business that wouldn't invite much development.

The original deed for Rose Hill Cemetery is missing, but a 1958 *Corsicana Daily Sun* article states the cemetery was established "70 years ago," in 1888.<sup>3</sup> There are no published records or recollections as to why the cemetery is called Rose Hill, though there are plenty of wild flowers and berry plants around the fence line.

## II. OVERVIEW

Sometime between 1840 and 1849, Maj. H.P. Darling settled in western Navarro County, where he started Darling Ranch with around 900 sheep.<sup>4</sup> After the Civil War, veterans and settlers started buying land just south of the Darling Ranch. A small settlement soon developed, later named Gradyville after two brothers, R.J. and W.D. Grady, who owned and operated the general store.<sup>5</sup> In 1868 the residents put aside a little more than six acres along the banks of Rush

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<sup>1</sup> *Western Kansas World*, Wakeeney, Trego County, Kansas. Nov. 7, 1896, p. 2, column 3. Hanson, his wife, and a son are buried in White Church Cemetery. Stories claim phantom lights appear above their graves at night.

<sup>2</sup> "History and Progress of Blooming Grove," by R.W. George, *The Blooming Grove Times*, vol. 48, no. 12, April 14, 1939. Accessed 03/02/2022. URL

<sup>3</sup> *Corsicana Daily Sun*, April 11, 1958, pg. 9.

<sup>4</sup> 1850 U.S. Census Redistricting Data, Navarro County, Texas, (Roll 913) p. 112a; 1860 U.S. Selected Federal Census Non-Population Schedules, Navarro County (Roll 6) p. 25; 1860 U.S. Census (Roll M653\_1301), p. 236. Maj. Darling was quite successful and had several sheep ranches in Texas. Unfortunately, according to *The Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, a dispatch from the San Antonio *Ledger* detailed a surprise attack and massacre of "Major H.P. Darling ... of Navarro County" and his employees by Indians near his Laredo sheep ranch. *The Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, Houston, vol. 32, no. 42, ed. 1, Friday, June 22, 1866, page 5. Accessed 03/11/2022. URL: <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth236341/>.

<sup>5</sup> *Navarro County History*, Navarro County Historical Society (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1973), Vol. I, p. 184; Love, Annie Carpenter, *History of Navarro County* (Dallas: Southwest Press, 1936), p. 208-209.

Creek, located about one mile east of Gradyville, for a small, white frame church/school. They called it White Church.<sup>6</sup>

The U.S. government announced plans in 1871 to build a post office in Gradyville. Residents gathered at White Church to choose a name, and since the wildflowers were in bloom, they chose “Blooming Grove.”<sup>7</sup> The Blooming Grove post office was located in the store,<sup>8</sup> but most residents continued to call the community both Gradyville and White Church.

On February 3, 1888, the St. Louis Southwestern Railway (commonly known as the “Cotton Belt” line) located its Corsicana-to-Hillsboro extension one mile northeast of the town. Almost overnight, residents left White Church and Gradyville (which residents later nicknamed “Old Town”) and relocated to the rail line. The new town was called Blooming Grove. The settlement soon rapidly grew from a population of 200 in 1884 to 800 in 1890, the year it incorporated and set its city boundaries.

The town’s first newspaper, the *Blooming Grove Sun*, was founded in 1889. In the early 1900s, Blooming Grove had four gins, four churches, several grocery stores, cotton buyers, gristmills, lumberyards, restaurants and even two hotels. Blooming Grove’s population reached its peak in 1933 with 1,500 residents, but it dropped to fewer than 900 by 1936. The Great

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<sup>6</sup> Ramsey, Ruth, *Summary of a Century*, (Blooming Grove United Methodist Church, 1973), p. 12-14.

<sup>7</sup> *Navarro County History*, Vol. I, p. 184.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Appointments of U.S. Postmasters 1832-1971, p. 632. W.D. Grady was appointed in 1882.

Depression and falling cotton prices caused the town to decline, and in 1940 the railroad abandoned the line.<sup>9</sup> In 2020 the population was 857.<sup>10</sup>

The first person buried in Rose Hill was Willie Thomas Buckalew,<sup>11</sup> who only lived 18 months and died on May 15, 1890. Notable locals buried there include national heroes, mayors, local judges, and newspaper editors. There are numerous lawyers, doctors, nurses, and veterinarians. Of course, there are many farmers and ranchers—the lifeblood of the area. Organizations such as Woodmen of the World, Masons, Odd Fellows, Eastern Star, Rebekah, and Woodmen Circle are represented there.<sup>12</sup>

The cemetery was segregated. The first Black person buried there was a former enslaved person named Jack Patterson (1856-?). Mr. Patterson was given to Alice Elizabeth Chambers (1857-1902), who later married Dr. Jefferson Davis McClanahan Sr. (1849-1926).<sup>13</sup>

He was known as Jack McClanahan, lived with the family and did not associate with anyone in the Black community. When Mrs. McClanahan died, she left four boys, practically in their teens.

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<sup>9</sup> “History and Progress of Blooming Grove,” by R.W. George, *The Blooming Grove Times*, vol. 48, no. 12, April 14, 1939. “80 Years of Transportation Progress,” *Cotton Belt News* (Cotton Belt Public Relations Department, October 1957). Edition based on a seven-part series of articles written by Jacob E. Anderson and published in the *Cotton Belt News* from January to August 1947; Rushing, Carol M., “Blooming Grove,” *Handbook of Texas*, Texas State Historical Association. Accessed 02/10/2022. URL:

<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/blooming-grove-tx>

<sup>10</sup> Rushing, *Handbook of Texas*; 2020 U. S. Census Redistricting Data, Blooming Grove town, Navarro County, Texas.

<sup>11</sup> Dr. William Thomas Buckalew, Willie’s father, was one of the early settlers of Blooming Grove, He built “one of the first three homes to be erected back in the late 89’s (sic) immediately following the coming of the railroad.” “History and Progress of Blooming Grove.” *The Blooming Grove Times*, April 14, 1939.

<sup>12</sup> *Navarro County Cemetery Records*, Vol. VII, Navarro County Genealogy Society, 1987, and records provided by Diane Richards, Rose Hill Cemetery Association Secretary/Treasurer.

<sup>13</sup> Alice McClanahan Banister, personal letter to Rose Hill Cemetery Association, February 17, 1985.

Dr. McClanahan was very busy with his practice, so taking care of these lively boys was left up to Jack. The boys loved him, but when they would not do whatever Jack wanted them to, he would cry a little. That would bring them around.<sup>14</sup>

After Mr. Patterson died, he “was supposed to be buried at the foot of Mrs. McClanahan’s grave, but instead he was placed in the northeast corner” of the family’s plot in an unmarked grave. In the 1950s, the youngest of the boys made a visit to the cemetery and placed a simple stone on his grave that says “Jack.”<sup>15</sup>

The first Black person buried in a marked grave in Rose Hill was John ‘Kildee’ Ingram (1882-1961). Kildee ran a shoeshine chair in the barber shop from 1916 until his death in 1961. The mayor and white funeral director led the funeral, and he had three Black and three white pallbearers.<sup>16</sup> The Dallas newspapers carried the story about his funeral and noted that, “The spotlight on Kildee’s new grave evoked no protest from the white people who own cemetery lots in the Rose Hill section where he was laid.”

Kildee’s grave was in the newest addition to the cemetery, which was added in 1955 (see map). This addition to the south was the largest yet and more than doubled the size of the cemetery. However, Kildee was segregated from the rest of the gravesites. “The R.W. George estate, which donated the land for an addition to the cemetery’s Rose Hill section, has come forward with an offer to give another sizable tract adjoining the first one—to be used by other Negro citizens.”<sup>17</sup> But no other Black citizen was buried at Rose Hill until Lucinda Davis in

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<sup>14</sup> Alice McClanahan Banister, personal letter to Rose Hill Cemetery Association, February 17, 1985.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> “Blooming Grove hailed after burial of Kildee,” by Thomas Turner, *Dallas Morning News*, Sunday, June 4, 1961, Section 1-25.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

2019. “Most Blacks in the area preferred to be buried in Raleigh near Dresden or in Woodland Cemetery in Corsicana.”<sup>18</sup>

More than 300 veterans are buried at Rose Hill, including several prisoners of war. They served from the Civil War to Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup> A Civil War veteran, Freeman Jackson Barham (1841-1918), enlisted in the 33rd Regiment, Tennessee Confederate Infantry, on October 1, 1861, at Camp Brown, Tenn.<sup>20</sup> This regiment fought at the battles of Murfreesboro and Shiloh.<sup>21</sup>

Judge James Carroll “Bud” Sewell (1912-1976) was born in Blooming Grove and graduated in 1928 from Blooming Grove High School. He served in the Navy during World War II. He was aboard the USS Hornet in 1944 when a plane exploded and a fragment hit his head, leaving him totally blind. He attended schools for the blind, earned his bachelors and law degrees, and was elected to the Texas Legislature in 1948. He was elected Navarro County Judge in 1952, and from 1957-1972 served as District Court Judge.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Statement from Diane Richards, Rose Hill Cemetery Association secretary/treasurer, 2023.

<sup>19</sup> *Navarro County Cemetery Records*; Richards, 2025.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Civil War Records. Accessed 2/24/2025. URL [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com). A note in the Rose Hill Cemetery Association scrapbook kept by Secretary/Treasurer Edith George Albrecht, 1952-1986, states that “Company rolls for May and June 1863 say that he deserted April 18, 1863.” There are no official records confirming this, though “apparently his brother-in-law, William S. Moses, substituted for him,” accessed 2/20/2025. URL: [https://texaslocalhistory.com/navarro/biographies/b/barham\\_family.htm](https://texaslocalhistory.com/navarro/biographies/b/barham_family.htm). The note also states that “According to the Rose Hill Cemetery Association, his grandson stated that “Grandpaw went back after he planted his crops.” The note states that Barham was captured at Shelbyville, but the 33rd did not fight that battle and thus there are no records of his capture.

<sup>21</sup> Accessed 2/24/2025. URLs <https://www.fold3.com/memorial/662924688/freeman-jackson-barham-civil-war-stories>, 33rd Infantry Regiment, Tennessee Confederate Infantry, and National Park Service Civil War Soldiers & Sailors Database, <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-battle-units-detail.htm?battleUnitCode=CTN0033RI#:~:text=33rd%20Infantry%20Regiment%20was%20for%20med,Shelbyville%20for%20a%20few%20months>.

<sup>22</sup> Sewell, Jim. Navarro County Biographies, [https://texaslocalhistory.com/navarro/biographies/s/sewell\\_jim.htm](https://texaslocalhistory.com/navarro/biographies/s/sewell_jim.htm).

Capt. Minnie Lee Allmon (1919-1976) served in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. She was a graduate of Blooming Grove High School.<sup>23</sup>

U.S. Army Air Corps Flight Officer Richard Massengale Jr. died in 1943 at age 22 during a flight training exercise over North Africa. He initially was buried in Tunisia, but five years later his body was returned to Corsicana by rail. His mother held two services for him: the first after he was killed and the second when his body was finally returned.<sup>24</sup>

Other veterans include: James Doyle Carroll, DVM, Wilson Green, and Rev. Kenneth Bass. Rev. Bass was a prisoner of war captured on Christmas Eve, 1944, at the Battle of the Bulge. He was liberated by the Russians on April 23, 1945.<sup>25</sup> James Edwyn Hinkle, who served in three wars, was stationed in Qinhuangdao, China, when he was captured by the Japanese right after Pearl Harbor. He was released in 1945.<sup>26</sup> Those killed in service include: Phillip Perrin Barham, Samuel Franklin Crouch, Egbert Fulton, Norman Godwin, James Richard Griffin, Vernon Hartley, John Ralph Hewett, Barney Hughes Jr., Jake Fred Kupper Jr., Frank Burk Taylor Jr., and Gary Winston Watkins.

One of the most famous people buried at Rose Hill is Elmer Lloyd “Sonny” Boyd (1927-2024). Boyd graduated from Blooming Grove High School in 1946 and was a veteran of the US Navy. In 1952, he joined the Dallas Police Department as a patrolman and became a detective in 1957. Boyd was the last surviving investigator of President John F. Kennedy’s assassination. He was one of three officers who combed the sixth floor of the School Depository Building after the

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<sup>23</sup> *The Blooming Grove Times*, June 8, 1984. Accessed 3/26/2026. URL <https://www.fold3.com/record/625530108/minnie-allmon-1919-us-veterans-affairs-birls-death-file-1850-2010>.

<sup>24</sup> Personal letter from Massengale’s cousin Jackye Rogers, 2023, and a Western Union telegram from the U.S. Air Force dated May 10, 1948.

<sup>25</sup> [https://texaslocalhistory.com/navarro/biographies/b/bass\\_ken.htm](https://texaslocalhistory.com/navarro/biographies/b/bass_ken.htm).

<sup>26</sup> [https://texaslocalhistory.com/navarro/biographies/h/Hinkle\\_James\\_E.htm](https://texaslocalhistory.com/navarro/biographies/h/Hinkle_James_E.htm).

shooting, and he was the first to interrogate Lee Harvey Oswald.<sup>27</sup> The photo of Boyd in his cowboy hat next to Oswald while he was in custody at the Dallas Jail is known the world over.

The George family—who donated almost half of the cemetery’s land<sup>28</sup>—is buried at Rose Hill. John David George (1883-1976) was a merchant, landowner, and cattleman in Blooming Grove. He came to Blooming Grove at 8 years of age, with his parents, from Alabama. A family memoir states:

My father was a farmer. He also ran the grocery store in town, and he was an officer of the bank. When the Great Depression hit and the bank failed, all of the depositors got a few cents from every dollar—except the officers. The officers lost everything. The family survived because their house was paid for, they could grow their own food, and they had income from the grocery store. John David George owned five farms. He sold one in the 1930s to get the rest out of financial trouble.<sup>29</sup>

Several ministers, such as “circuit rider preacher” Rev. Claude Tuttle Brockett (1876-1956), are buried at Rose Hill. Well-known citizens interred there include Tillman Howard Butcher, the town’s first elected city marshal, Navarro County sheriffs Walter Lavosier Pevehouse and Rufus Herrin Pevehouse, town mayors William Erwin “Sam” Carroll Sr. and Royal McGaha, and newspaper editors W.A. Crawford, Mack Crawford, and Alice Bell.

The community has been a strong supporter of the cemetery since its beginnings. The earliest mention of the Rose Hill Cemetery Association is in the earliest surviving cemetery

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<sup>27</sup> *The Times* (UK), June 20, 2024. Accessed 02/19/2025. URL: <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/obituaries/article/elmer-boyd-obituary-detective-who-took-lee-harvey-oswald-into-custody-krtpb2qm9>

<sup>28</sup> Several members donated a total of 8.677 acres out of the cemetery’s current 18.189 acres.

<sup>29</sup> Personal letter from Suzanne Graham, 2023.

deed—from W.J. and Nettie Moody—dated 1918.<sup>30</sup> A 1930 newspaper article mentions the annual meeting and a benefit baseball game.<sup>31</sup> At first, families and volunteers were responsible for cleanup and preservation. In 1952 the association reorganized and hired caretakers to maintain the cemetery.<sup>32</sup> The first president in 1952 was Mrs. Cora Brooks, who landscaped Rose Hill Road from Highway 22 for easier access. Families donated land, built a gate to protect it, and raised funds for a pavilion where descendants can gather in the shade.

All faiths are welcome in the cemetery. Gravesites feature various types of ornamentation such as benches, iron gates, brick borders, a flagpole, glass, and brick markers. Visitors will find covered concrete graves, statues, orbs, pinwheels and toys, and tall monuments.

Several families donated additions to the cemetery: the Moodys; the George family with two additions; the Low family with one; and the Carroll family with one addition.<sup>33</sup>

Improvements included a new road in March 1942.<sup>34</sup> Frances (Carroll) Holdeman donated funds for a pavilion in 2003, and Ralph George's family added a podium in his memory in 2012. Margie Barham donated a new gate in 2003 in memory of Estil Ocie Barham, and later Margie's family added a flagpole in her memory.

### III. SIGNIFICANCE

Few small-town cemeteries in Texas can claim a burial linked to one of the most violent, scrutinized, and important events in American history, yet Rose Hill Cemetery is exactly that

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<sup>30</sup> Deed Records, Office of Navarro County Clerk, Navarro County Courthouse, Corsicana. March 3, 1918, Vol. 216, pg. 574.

<sup>31</sup> *Corsicana Daily Sun*, April 19, 1930, pg. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Scrapbook, Edith George Albrecht, Rose Hill Cemetery Association secretary/treasurer, 1952-1986.

<sup>33</sup> Deed Records, Office of Navarro County Clerk, Navarro County Courthouse, Corsicana. March 3, 1918, Vol. 216, pg. 574; May 13, 1955, Vol. 599, pg. 9; August 15, 1955, Vol. 598, pg. 569; June 21, 1996, Vol. 1342, pg. 846.

<sup>34</sup> *The Blooming Grove Times*, March 20, 1942.

kind of place. It's a quiet repository of stories both intimate and nationally significant. Established to serve a rapidly growing railroad town, Rose Hill documents the full breadth of western Navarro County's past: pioneer settlers, farmers and ranchers, merchants, civic leaders, judges, mayors, newspaper editors, and more than 300 veterans who served in every American conflict from the Civil War to today. Its segregated history, from the grave of a formerly enslaved man to the integrated burial of a beloved shoeshine man, reflects the complicated racial realities of rural Texas across more than a century. Still actively serving the community after nearly 140 years, Rose Hill is an enduring chronicle of local history.

A Texas Historical Marker would provide essential public interpretation of this remarkable place, honoring the pioneers, heroes, and everyday people buried there. It would ensure that future generations, including the children attending the elementary school just beyond the fence line, understand and take pride in the irreplaceable and fascinating history that lies there.

Rose Hill's place is best summed up in a passage from a *Blooming Grove Times* editorial written by Richard Warren (R.W.) George in 1939:

Blooming Grove of today is 'up town' in the estimation of its own citizens, is great in the estimation of others, held up as a good town by all, but what we owe it to those who so nobly wrought and so wisely balanced the mortar that went into the foundation work of a town destined to endure and go on through tempest as well as through sunshine.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "History and Progress of Blooming Grove." *The Blooming Grove Times*, April 14, 1939.