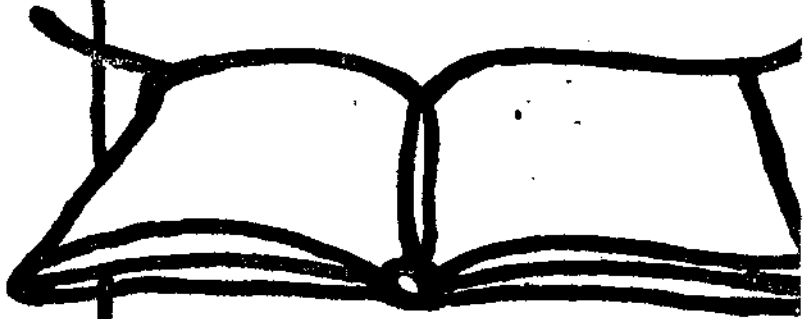


Billie Bennett

THE HISTORY OF
LATEXO
HOUSTON COUNTY
TEXAS



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Compiled and written by

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THE HISTORY OF LATEXO

During the past 75 years or so the community of Latexo, Texas, has been known by three different names. Around the turn of the century it was a small community called Bethel. The old Bethel school stood near the present site of the Campus Store and Post Office.

Several persons who attended Bethel school still live in Houston County; they include Mrs. J. B. Kelley, formerly Dora McQueen, Mrs. A. C. Butler, formerly Eula Bowman, who still reside at Latexo, Mrs. Maud Spence, formerly Maud Bruton, who resides in Crockett, Taylor McQueen, Mrs. Georgia Walling, formerly Georgia Dixon, and Mrs. Mary Luce, formerly Mary Sims, all of them now living in Grape-land.

One of the teachers at old Bethel school was George Alexander. The Bethel Church stood on the old Palestine highway, not far from the present home of Mr. and Mrs. Dave Gallant. Sometime before 1900 a man by the name of Starks built a sawmill approximately two miles west of the railroad. The I & G N Railroad, now Missouri Pacific, built a siding to serve this sawmill. The Railroad Company assigned the name "Starks Switch" to this siding. In the early 1900's a community sprang up in this area, which is now called Old Latexo. In this vicinity, and north of the switch, a sawmill was built by Blount & Summers. A large number of houses were built around the sawmill to accommodate the mill workers and their families. The sawmill company had its own commissary for the use of the sawmill families. A doctor was kept on the sawmill payroll, and a clinic was built for the use of the doctor and his patients. During this period of time, the doctors who served the sawmill and community were Dr. Merriweather, Dr. Punch, Dr. Buss Taylor, and Dr. Heard.

The sawmill operated a planer and a dry kiln. A tram road was built from the sawmill west to a point near the Trinity River. This tram road was used many years to haul logs from the woods to the sawmill. Steam locomotives were used and were fired with pine knots and cord wood.

During this time the east side of the railroad was also growing as numerous homes and businesses were built. The area of growth was near the present railroad crossing. Across from the house in which Mrs. E. P. Gibson lives on the old Palestine highway was a road which ran down to the present cemetery, and then curved back to the railroad crossing. Although it is now part of a pasture, it is still possible to see the old road bed.

At one time there were four stores besides numerous other businesses in the community. Some of the people who operated these stores were Mr. and Mrs. Cary Spence, Shults Jones, John Sims, A. C. Butler, Will Stiff, Hubert Leaverton, Mr. Brailsford, and Mr. Mathews.

At least one of these stores was a general merchandise store, handling dry goods, hardware, wagons, harness, and many other items. A grist mill was built and operated by Mr. Tilley. Bob Skidmore ran the first barber shop; later other barbers were Tom Sims and Jeff Raines. A two-story hotel was built to serve the bustling community. It was run by Mr. Young. The hotel was built on the site of the present home of Lacy Rawls. Over one of the stores there was a Woodman Hall. There was also a Masonic Hall in the community.

The old Bethel school was torn down and moved to Starks Switch. It was the first of three schools erected in the community. The first stood at the present site of the home of Mr. Cleveland Willis. The second was on the site of the present Stokes Reed home. This building was sold to the Baptist Church and was used by them for worship services for many years. The third school stood on the site of the present home of G. C. (Bill) McKinney. Many people will remember this as the old Ed Burton home place. The third school was moved to its present site in 1930. Some of the teachers who taught in the Starks Switch and old Latexo schools were John Mason, Sam Duitch, Adelia Duitch, Miss Lizzie Rice, John Snell and Mrs. Tucker.

Beyond the sawmill along the old Palestine highway was a large negro community, most of them being employed at the sawmill. About one and a half miles west of the railroad a negro college was built. This college employed some 17 or 18 teachers. A few years ago approximately four feet of iron ore gravel was taken from the surface at the site of this old negro college to widen and resurface Highway 287 through Houston County.

Blount & Summers sold the sawmill to Harry Mound. It closed down in 1915 but was bought by the West Lumber Co. of Houston during World War I. Lumber was shipped from the Latexo sawmill to be used for the building of ships. The sawmill finally closed down about 1922 or 1923. When it was moved, the tram road was left intact. It was later used by another company to haul logs from the woods to the I & G N Railroad and loaded cars were transferred

to the main line and hauled to the mill to be cut into lumber.

In 1907 the name of the community was changed again. The name "Latexo" came about in a rather unique manner. At that time an extensive real estate promotion took place in this area which brought a number of families from northern states, Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Maine. Also a number from southern Louisiana. A large fruit company was organized and incorporated under the name of Louisiana-Texas Orchard Co. Using the abbreviations of the words contained in the name of the company - "La" for Louisiana, "Tex" for Texas, and "O" for the word orchard, thus we have the name "Latexo".

This land was bought from its various owners by the Louisiana-Texas Orchard Co. A large portion of the land was planted in Elberta peaches and other fruit.

During this promotion the company chartered special railroad coaches and brought a large group of people here from some of the northern states. These cars were parked on the siding at the old railroad station for the prospective buyers to stay in and use for headquarters while they completed the purchases of the tracts of land selected. During their stay in the coaches a big barbecue dinner was sponsored by the company, and the people of the surrounding community were invited.

Some of the people who bought tracts of land here without inspecting it moved their furniture here, and finding it was not what they wanted, shipped their furniture back to their original homes without even uncrating it. Others stayed, among them the Saulsbury and Brailsford families, who built homes at Latexo.

Some of the land that had been planted in fruit trees sold as high as \$125.00 per acre. For one reason or another the orchards failed and many of the families consisting of various nationalities, moved away.

Where the present road runs parallel with the railroad south from the railroad crossing, there was a wide street. On the east side of this street, and on the hillside was a pleasant shady park. A large star made of native rock and painted white was laid out on this hillside near the school building.

Leo Goolsby ran a meat market in the community. There was also a post office and a railroad depot. The depot was located just south of the present railroad crossing. Taylor McQueen was the first depot agent. The first depot burned down, but was rebuilt. A cotton gin was built to serve the cotton farmers of the area. The first operators of the gin were Hubert Leaverton and Mr. Brailsford. Later, it was operated by Mr. A. C. Butler and Mr. Lem Lane.

Charles Uptigraph moved to Latexo from a northern state and bought up a considerable amount of land, much of which he planted in Irish potatoes. He persuaded other farmers in the community to do the same, and for several years Irish potatoes, also cabbage, were shipped north.

The Methodist Church erected a church building on a lot just west of the old school building site. Church services were held in this building for many years. The present Methodist Church was erected in 1946. The old Methodist Church building was sold and converted into a residence. Mrs. Emmett Robert is now living in this building. The community then known as

Latexo is today called Old Latexo.

With the completion of US Highway 287 in about 1931, homes and businesses began to go up on both sides of the new highway. The first building to go up was a store building constructed by Mr. Sam Shaver. When the frame work of this store building was practically completed, a tornado struck on October 6, 1930, destroying it. The lumber was salvaged and work started immediately for completion of the building.

The tornado also blew away a section foreman's house in which Mr. and Mrs. Bob Westbrook lived, and destroyed the homes of Charlie Sims and Chester Spence, the railroad depot tool house, and a laborer's home. Several persons were badly injured. Some of the personal belongings of the victims were found as far away as Irontown, near Jacksonville, carried there by the wind.

Shortly after the completion of the store building, Mr. Sam Shaver, with a vision of considerable future development along the new highway, built a sawmill back of the store, toward the railroad. With lumber from this mill he built two houses along the highway, and sold them. Other people bought lots and built homes in this area. After the sawmill was built Mr. Shaver permitted the Latexo Baseball team to lay out a baseball field in the area between the highway and the cemetery. He built a stadium under the large trees near the present home of Mrs. Linda Rice. On this field the local team played the baseball teams of other communities and towns over the county. Willard Spence and Claud Beard played on this team. Both of them are residents of Latexo at this time.

A few years after the store was built, Mr. Shaver built some tourist courts on the lot adjoining the store building. This was

known as Breezy Hill Courts. A filling station and cafe was operated across the highway from the store. The Post Office was moved to this area from Old Latexo for a short period.

The present Latexo School was started in 1930 when the Latexo and Ephesus school districts were consolidated. The school was completed in 1938.

After the school was moved to this new building, the Campus Store was built at the northwest corner of the school campus. The Post Office was later moved to this building. Mr. and Mrs. A. C. Butler operated the store and Post Office. Mr. Butler built several homes in this area, and sold them. Other people bought lots and built homes. The present Baptist Church was built in 1945, and the present Methodist Church was built in 1946. They were both moved from Old Latexo.

In 1946 Mr. A. C. Butler opened a new subdivision north of the school. He built and sold several homes, and other people bought lots and built homes in this area. A recent survey showed fifty eight new homes were built in Latexo during a 14 year period from 1946 through 1959.

The Latexo area has provided the largest source of iron ore gravel in Houston County for building the highways throughout the whole county.

Today Latexo is a pleasant and active community. Besides the school and the two churches, there are three stores, a Post Office, beauty shop, nursery and barber shop.

Latexo has an active Community Council which meets the first Thursday night of each month at the school. Other community organi-

sations that also hold their regular meetings at the school are the Bluebonnet Garden Club, organized in 1956, the Parent-Teacher Association, the 4-H Club, and the Boy Scout Troop that was organized this year, and is sponsored by the Latexo Community Council.
