

Chapter 7

FROM THE FARM TO THE URBAN "FRONTIER"

In 1850 the children of Abram T. Smith were settled in southeast Dallas County. The two oldest, Patrick and Rhoda, were married and starting their families. Abram's widow, Alcy, and her second husband, Albert Pruitt, their two sons and the three youngest Smith children were living near by. The only child not accounted for in 1850 is Susan P. Smith, age 10. Ten years later, in 1860, all the Smith children, but the youngest, Mary, were married and living close to one another around the community of Patrick. The little town was named for the Smith son-in-law Callaway H. Patrick and probably located on Ann Smith Stokes' Dallas County survey. Patrick P. Smith, the eldest Smith child, had died in the last part of the 1850s. His widow, Martha Angelina Ellis Smith married in 1859 to Thomas S. Ramsby and the four Patrick Smith children were living with them.

Another family in the area was in all probability related to these Smith families. The family consisted of Robert (Bob) Parks, his wife, Tennessee born Chrissy, and their two children, Patrick and Susan. Bob Parks was presumably the younger brother of Elsie/Alcy W. Parks, widow of Abram Smith and now wife of Albert Pruitt. William (Bill) J. Parks, who witnessed a land sale between Abram Smith and his brother, John Ingles Smith in Arkansas, was in all likelihood another brother. Bill, however, remained in Arkansas, settling eventually in Yell County with his wife, Hannah Stokes Parks, and their children.

Robert (Bob) Parks died April 3, 1847, in the Dallas County, Texas, area. His death is mentioned in a letter written July 1, 1847 by John S. Jones of Washington County, Texas, to his brother Bird Jones, in Tennessee.[\[492\]](#) John Jones reported that the widow and children had returned to Arkansas. The Jones letter is strong evidence of some sort of family kinship. Bob's widow, however, is listed on the 1850 Dallas County census and if she returned to Arkansas, three years later she was back in Dallas County. She is shown as "Chrislin," head of household, age 35 with her son Patrick, 16, and Susan, 10. Both children were born in Arkansas.

Chrissy Parks died between 1850 and 1852. In 1852 Callaway H. Patrick, 29, and his brother-in-law, Patrick P. Smith, 25, were appointed guardians for Susan Parks, 12, minor daughter of Robert and

Chrissy Parks, both deceased. Since it is a very rare that non-relatives are made guardians of a minor, this is more evidence of a relationship.

Assuming that Elsie/Alcy W. Parks Smith Pruitt and Robert (Bob) Parks are siblings, it is possible that they are the grandchildren of either Benjamin Parks (b. 1746 in Virginia, died 1839 in Georgia) or his brother, Charles Parks (b. 1749 in Virginia, d. in Georgia). Benjamin had 11 children. There is information on two of his children. Benjamin and Charles Parks were sons of John and Mary (Sharp) Parks. Another son of this couple was John Parks, father of George. Two of George's sons,

Meredith (Maraday) and Curtis Parks, were Peters Colony settlers and are listed on the 1850 Dallas County, Texas, census. Also on that census is George's widow Melinda Parks.[\[493\]](#)

Thus was set a pattern for these Smith descendants that continued through the remainder of the century. The Smith children, their spouses and children continued to live near one another in a large extended family. It appears that these families were close, closer than the McClellans, at least in living near each other. The McClellans, while living in the same area, were less likely to be near neighbors. This might be partially explained by the fact that there were only six Abram Smith children, with the eldest only 13 years older than the youngest. In the family of Juliet Smith McClellan, the age range from the oldest of the 10 children to the youngest was 23 years, creating a large gap where common interests were less likely.

The land of southeast Dallas County, where these families settled, was exceptional farm land for the most part, being part of the Blackland Prairie. The soil, a black clay type, was problematic for the residents when it rained, causing a slippery mud, but it was extremely fertile and produced bountiful crops. Certainly, the land provided for some large families among these Smith descendants. Two families, that of Rhoda Smith Patrick and John Ingles Smith, produced ten children each. Both of these families, for the large part, remained in the area, and within very few years, Rhoda and her brother were surrounded by a bevy of grandchildren.

One important fact to remember about Abram Smith's children is the difficulty Abram had in providing for their education in Arkansas. As mentioned by Abram in his 1832 letter to his brothers in Tennessee, Abram, while having plenty of land, had trouble getting cash with which to pay for education. Education, including primary education, was not free during most of the nineteenth century. As previously noted, most schools of this time were subscription schools where students' parents had to

pay tuition for their children to attend. Cash was sometimes hard to come by, especially in frontier areas where the economy was run on a barter system. This meant that various goods were traded for other goods of like value. A cow might be traded for help in harvesting, a shirt sewn to pay for plugs of tobacco. Sometimes tuition was paid by letting the teacher board with a family, such as Abram did for his children's teacher.

In a day when women did not work outside the home and when men were expected to fulfill the traditional roles as the heads of the family, the education of male children was considered more important than that of female children. With limited resources to spend for education, one could logically expect that it would be spent on sons, not daughters. This seems to have been the case with Abram and Alcy Smith's daughters. The result was that Rhoda Smith Patrick and her sisters, Elizabeth Smith Lacy and Susan P. Smith Lovett, were not able to read or to write.

To compound the problem of acquiring cash and that situation's impact on the educational opportunities of these Smith children, the early death of Abram in 1841 left his six surviving children before their education could have been completed. The eldest, Patrick, was 13; the youngest, Mary, was only a year old. There is no record of Patrick P. Smith's ability to read or write due to his early death. It is possible he and his brother, John Ingles Smith, who could read and write, also experienced some lack of educational opportunity, although not to the degree of their sisters.



Rhoda Smith Patrick

Abram had been so proud of his children, describing them in his 1832 letter “as the best look(ing) children you ever saw. Look(s) like the blood will burst out of their faces...my little Rhoda is the liveliest child in one thousand miles of this place. Bird (who apparently later died) is the best grandchild (?) in the Territory...” If Indians had not killed Abram the educational opportunities for his children might have been very different. There are many cases where when the father died, the prosperity level of surviving family members declined and did not recover for as long as two or three or more generations. The loss of the family breadwinner could be devastating even when the mother remarried. Certainly this was not always the case, but it was a frequent enough situation.[\[494\]](#)

The Smith families in southeast Dallas County seem to have slightly less wealth in 1850 and 1860 than their counterparts in some other counties. When compared to like aged married men in Collin County, north of Dallas County, and to other like aged married Smith descendant men in Washington and neighboring counties, the Dallas County men were not as prosperous. Information, however, is scanty and may be misleading. The families were certainly prosperous enough that few of them felt it necessary to leave the area for greater opportunity.

A few of the Smith men and their kin were of an age to serve in the Civil War. Most, like Callaway H. Patrick, were a bit old for service, but enlisted nevertheless. There do not appear to have been any lost in the Civil War, and they returned to continue their apparently tranquil lives surrounded by their relatives. John Ingles Smith was active in local affairs and eventually delivered mail in the area, one of the first mail deliverers to do so. Callaway Patrick, the veteran of the Rangers, the Mexican War and the Civil War, was active in the Dallas County Pioneer Association.

As the first members of these families died, they were buried in the Patrick-Pruitt Cemetery, located on a bluff overlooking the Trinity River. There, as they had in life, they lay close to one another for all eternity. As the industrial world reached southeast Dallas County, however, there were changes.

One of these changes was the demise of the tiny community of Patrick. The railroad arrived in Dallas County in 1872 and caused the creation of the town of Wilmer. As in Washington County, people soon settled near the new source of transportation. Southeast Dallas County never appears to have had the population density that Washington County had at like times, perhaps because the city of Dallas drained population away. Dallas became the magnet for young people seeking the new non-agricultural jobs wrought by industrialization.

The effects of this new world order were not immediately felt in southeast Dallas County. It was about three years after the arrival of the railroad that Rhoda Ingles Smith Patrick had her tenth and last child, 26 years after the birth of her first child. Little Emma Amelia Patrick was a child born both of the frontier and of the new industrial world. She would live until the middle of the twentieth century, her life spanning from the pioneer world of her parents to the nuclear age of her great grandchildren.

Emma, 14, first married Sylvester B. Ashley, from another early family, by whom she had one son, Henry, before her husband died. About two years later, Emma married for a second time to Samuel Henry Birkhead, who had lost both his wife and one of his two sons. The Birkheads were another early family in the area, having migrated from Kentucky. An old American family, the

Birkheads had lived in colonial Maryland where one Birkhead/Birchhead family member, Christopher Birkhead was a colonel in the American Revolution. Several other family members also served in that conflict. Members of this family moved to Virginia and on into Kentucky in the early days of settlement in that state.

Emma and Sam had one daughter and Emma was pregnant in the summer of 1897. In this atmosphere of new beginnings, there was an ending. Emma's little son, Henry C. Ashley, six, drowned. Six months later Emma delivered a daughter. Two years later the number of Birkhead daughters doubled when Sam and Emma had twins in the summer of 1899. Unfortunately, less than two months after the twins' birth, Sam's last surviving son from his first marriage died. He was only 11 years old. In 1901 when the Birkhead twin daughters were only 21 months old, their father, Sam Birkhead, 38, died. Emma, 27, was again a widow, this time with four young children. By this point, life must have felt very tenuous for Emma, since the giving of life seemed to match the taking away of life so often.

Twice widowed, Emma married for the third and final time in 1901 to W. M. Witt by whom she had one more daughter. All of her daughters survived to endow their mother, by then called "Ma Witt," with numerous grandchildren. One, Emma's eldest daughter, Sarah Frances "Sallie" Birkhead, married young and had seven children.

An elderly woman was once asked why her sister had married at the young age of fifteen. She laughed and said that there that was not much to do in the country but to get married. In her case, she had decided that she did not like farm work and became a teacher, the transitional female job of the time. Options were few for women. So when a young girl met the right man early marriage became an attractive option. The right man for Sallie Birkhead was good looking Guy Patterson, the son of another Kentucky immigrant family. Married over 60 years, the couple had three sons and four daughters. The eldest Patterson child was given all family surnames, Wilson Birkhead Patterson. Wilson was his paternal grandmother's maiden name and Birkhead, of course, was his mother's maiden name. As

happened, however, others “changed” his name and he was called “Pat” because of his last name.

Pat Patterson and his sisters and brothers were born into an agrarian society; a relatively isolated cohesive community of people of like beliefs and expectations. Industrialization had touched this part of Dallas County without doubt. Yet the Patterson children still grew up in a rural area surrounded by relatives of one degree or another attending a church whose doctrine was fundamental Christian.

In the early twentieth century, people in the Dallas area experienced the effects of industrialization in various ways. Transportation was affected by the arrival of the railroads some 30 years before Pat’s birth. Soon there was an interurban electric streetcar system that connected the cities of Dallas and Fort Worth with the various smaller outlying communities. These new forms of transportation affected not only the movement of goods, both agricultural and manufactured, but also the movement of people who now had access to the cities.

New forms of power also had profound effects. The rural areas had long depended on coal oil lamps for lighting purposes and many continued to do so for several more decades. Now, however, electricity became available in the urban areas. Electricity, of course, had a great impact on many different aspects of human life, both business and personal. This new power source created new jobs and influenced diverse parts of daily life, from manufacturing to more night time activities. For now, however, rural areas only had coal oil.

From the Farm to the Urban "Frontier"

153

Pat Patterson was the fourth generation of his family in southeast Dallas County, but his childhood was vastly different from the childhoods of the previous generations. Increasingly, rural people were being exposed to new influences, from the delivery of magazines describing new farming techniques and recipes for farm wives to the new crystal sets and later radios. Riding the interurban streetcar to Dallas, the formerly isolated people from southeast Dallas County could see the new motion pictures and shop in stores that had a multitude of goods.

During Pat’s childhood Prohibition was passed, the result of years of campaigning against “Demon Rum.” This idea was one with which the rural people could readily identify, considering their fundamentalist beliefs. Dallas has in more recent times, been referred to as the buckle on the Bible Belt, and it perhaps an apt description. There is a flip side to many people however, and the attitudes of the Roaring Twenties were seen in Dallas as they were in other parts of the nation.

The very proximity to the city of Dallas meant that the people in the county experienced a faster

degree of industrialization than, say, people in Brown County in West Texas. Yet the farm was mostly unchanged in the early part of the century. Farmers still plowed with mules and people still went to trade days in their nearby communities to conduct business, just as Smith families had done 200 years before in Virginia. Farm homes were lit with coal oil lamps and the children still attended rural schools that were frequently one room. The isolation, however, was gone. Previously boys mostly expected to grow up to be farmers, and girls planned to be wives and mothers. Ideas were imparted by parents, church and school. Now new ideas were flowing from magazines, radios and movies. People were traveling to Dallas and seeing and experiencing new things. The arrival of the automobile age only sped up the process. Only a toy of the rich at first, Ford's Model T brought the car to the average American.

Industrialization was slower to come to the farm. There is much romanticizing of farm life by current urban dwellers, but life on the non-mechanized farm was one of hard labor; and mechanization of the farm was an uneven process. Not every farm suddenly got a tractor or other mechanized machinery. Into the fourth decade of the twentieth century, some Dallas area farmers were still plowing with mules. Electricity did not come to many farms until Franklin D. Roosevelt's Rural Electrification bill was passed in the 1930s. The first sign of industrialization seen by many farm families was the telephone. Of course, it was a party line, not conducive to private conversations, but nevertheless it was a significant factor in eliminating rural isolation, for better or worse.

Like thousands of other Dallas area young adults, Pat Patterson decided take a job in Dallas. His siblings would eventually follow him into the city. In doing so they moved from a primarily agrarian society to an industrialized society. These young adults were to experience virtually a cultural shock, perhaps not so different from that experienced by a newly arrived person in a foreign country. At least this new culture spoke English and the parents were not somewhere back over the ocean, but only a few miles away by streetcar, bus or train. That may have made it more insidious; they may never have really realized that urban life was profoundly different from rural life. At least the new immigrant from another country usually understood that his challenges would be great.

All over the nation people were on the move. Instead of moving to the latest isolated land frontier, they were moving into areas of greater population density. Families were moving from the farm to the nearby small community, from the nearby community to the county seat and from the county seat to the cities. Jobs were the motivating force and those jobs, created by industrialization,

were in these communities, small towns, county seats and cities. The wheelwright became an auto mechanic, the farm carpenter built houses, the small dry goods merchant became a grocery salesman, and sons like the Ratliffs in Fort Worth were beginning careers in the railroad industry that had not existed in Texas before.

This change in society inevitably caused conflicts between the new arrivals' upbringing and their adaptation to the new society. As had happened to the Gilliland children of the previous generation, this change and conflict caused stresses. Novice participants in the new industrial society were exposed to temptations never envisioned by their church upbringing and without the stabilizing effect of people who had known them and their families forever. Now those old ways were considered stifling and nosy.

One area directly affected by this era of industrialization was relationships. Industrialization created choices where few or none had previously existed. Women had been wives and mothers; there was no choice. Now they were becoming teachers and nurses like the Hennigan girls in Brown County. Women still worked only before marriage; it was unheard of for a married woman to work. Yet having the potential ability to work meant that married women had choices. No longer did they have to settle for a bad marriage. If willing to endure social criticism, a woman could end her marriage without having to return to the parental home, a liability to her parents.

Marriage in the industrialized society was different from one in an agrarian society. On the farm the married couple was a team, directly providing for their family together. If roles were rigid, they were widely understood. In the industrialized society the man was the breadwinner. He was gone for hours every day, commuting and working. The sense of teamwork was more tenuous in these situations, the object more abstract and less easily understood.

When young adults like the Parks children of Brown County and the Patterson children of Dallas County were ready to go to work in the industrialized world, they were thrown another obstacle: the Depression. This event would forever influence many of these young adults. If adaptation from rural society to industrial society was not enough, this generation had to contend with sheer economic survival. Marriages were delayed; plans were postponed and altered. Education, already the key to advancement in the new society, became more difficult to achieve. Then, just as economic times were improving, along came World War II. The Depression and the war were of course linked in a cause and effect, but for these young people an additional stress was added. The very likelihood of death and separation of families for sometimes years is extremely stressful. There were overt signs of these stresses being experienced among these Smith descendants. Some had divorces and multiple marriages. One wife had had an annulled previous marriage. Other effects were less easy to discern such as aborted career plans. The dentist-to-be became a utility salesman. The people who lived through the first 40 years of the twentieth century faced more complex difficulties than their ancestors. Yet in many ways, they conquered their frontier and finally founded a new society of their own. It is perhaps a

shame that this generation received so little acknowledgment of their achievements in conquering their “frontier.”

[492] See Appendix C, Letter 10, pp. 205–206.

[493] See footnote 461.

[494] See Patterson, Sue. *Honey Creek, the story of Thompson and Abigail Helms*, (1986) 1995 (Available at the Dallas Public Library, Genealogy Section, Dallas, Texas, and Clayton Library, Houston, Texas).