

JC Johnson Georgetown Cemetery

___: This is a oral history/history done 5/13/2010 with a lead-in by Laura Smith, and the speaker is J.C. Johnson. This is a history on the Old Georgetown Cemetery, sometimes referred to as the San Gabriel Cemetery or also colloquialism of the "black" cemetery.

LAURA SMITH: Yeah. As you know, I'm just shy (inaudible). Anyway, I was asked in the meeting in finding me anything about the black cemetery down here. And I've lived here all my life, and I said, "No. I don't know anything about it. All I know is it's the black cemetery." Well, come to find out, it's not the black cemetery. I found somebody who knows and can tell us about that cemetery down here. This is J.C. Johnson. He does a lot of volunteer work with the Heritage Society. If there's anything you want to know about Georgetown, ask him. Because he can either tell you, or he can find out. J.C. and his wife Linda live in a house that was built in 1879. And this house belongs to his friend, and it's over there right close to where the Conway Transmissions is. This is J.C. Johnson. And I would like to introduce him to you, and I would like for him to tell us about the black cemetery.

J.C. JOHNSON: Well, thank you, Ms. Laura. I'm -- J.C. is what they call me, and my name is John. Those of us who have Biblical names, you know, are glad about that, I guess. But we need -- if we're going to name our children with a Biblical name, we need to be careful of -- I mean, we know a lady in the United States -- we don't know her, but we know that she was not careful. And she named her daughter Oprah when she meant Orpha [sic], because Orpha was the sister -- well, Orpha and Ruth were the daughter-in-laws of Naomi. And this is what she was talking about, but she got it as Oprah. So we all know Oprah Winfrey, but it was supposed to be Orpha. OK? Now there is another person I want to talk to you about a little bit here, and I don't think you'll be able to see this very well, especially those of you who are behind it. OK? But this is a lady whose name is [Keziah]. OK. Now, who -- does everybody know who Keziah was? This is a Biblical name. Keziah was one of three daughters of Job. And the last chapter of the book of Job, they talk about Keziah. She was the middle of three girls. You remember Job had lots of troubles. OK? And part of his troubles was that his children, his sons and his daughters, all died. But then -- and he lost all his money. Everything bad happened to Job. He got sores and all this. OK. But then, he had a turn of fortune.

God then favored him again, after he got through a big contest with the devil and so forth. And so, Job was restored. And the last chapter, it talks about how many thousand camels he had and how many thousand she-asses. And he had three more daughters and seven sons. Busy man. He was about 140 years old when he died, so it would have taken him all that time. Well, he had three daughters. The first three that died were not mentioned. But the second three were, and the oldest of the three was Jemima. Aha! Aunt Jemima? You know, makes the syrup and all that sort of thing? OK, that Jemima was the daughter of Job. The middle one was Keziah, which is catchy enough, is a name that we use in English when we're talking about cinnamon. OK. So, "cassia," Keziah, is -- it was used as perfume. This is what they're talking about, is she smelled nice. I guess even as a baby, which is remarkable. And then there was a third one, Keren-Happuch, which is not easy to pronounce or say, and so we don't use that in English. And we don't use Keziah much anymore, but Keziah, we can tell a lot about Keziah's tombstone here. Keziah was the mother of Benjamin Smith, and she was born in Virginia in -- October 15, 1794. Who was president of the United States in 1794? George Washington is who. When this lady was born, George Washington was president and

would be for a couple more years. And she joined the AME Church in 1830. And came to Texas in 1835, and to Georgetown in 1880. And she lived a faithful Christian until her death on June 30, 1892. Aged 98 years. OK.

LAURA SMITH: Now that's her tombstone?

J.C. JOHNSON: This is a rubbing of her tombstone.

LAURA SMITH: Mercy!

J.C. JOHNSON: Yes. Which is down here in the Georgetown Cemetery, OK? Now, this lady by any standard would be a distinguished early settler, OK? Because she got here before the revolution. Was here during the republic. She would have been, hey, right there in the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, right? Wrong! No. No, she was black.

LAURA SMITH: The AME Church.

J.C. JOHNSON: She joined the AME Church, African Methodist Episcopal Church. And so she was born in Virginia. She was -- hey, she was born a slave. And was a slave when she came to Texas. OK?

LAURA SMITH: We have black members.

J.C. JOHNSON: Now. But you wouldn't have --

LAURA SMITH: Then.

J.C. JOHNSON: Then. Yes. OK? Now, we know another thing about her, and that is that her son, Benjamin Smith, did very well in 1892 when she died, in a time when not many

black people were doing all that very well. Enough to buy a very nice tombstone for his mother, and another one right next to it for his wife. And I don't know where he's buried, but presumably he has a nice tombstone, too. I hope he does. But anyway, he did well enough to spend a good bit of money on tombstones for his mother and his wife, and they're buried down there. Well, I just wanted to start off by telling you that. And so, we need to know -- if we're going to talk about that cemetery out there, before there was a Williamson County Historical Commission, before there was a Texas Historical Commission, there was a State Historical Survey Committee. And they put markers around on places. They're your predecessors. The Presbyterian Church has a marker that was put there by the State Historic Survey Committee. And in 1963 the State Historic Survey Committee put one down here on the old cemetery. Now the mayor -- I was talking -- I was in a meeting the other day with -- while we were there, and the mayor was there. And I told him I was going to be talking about the Old Georgetown Cemetery. He says, "Oh." He said, "Hey, my wife and I have already bought the lot out there." And I said, "Wait, wait, wait. You're talking about the wrong -- you're talking about the old section of the Odd Fellows cemetery." "Well, isn't that what you were

talking about?" "No, no, no, no. I'm talking about the one down by Blue Hole." "Oh..." And he didn't know about that cemetery. Well, hey, this is a city cemetery. And on that historic marker that's down there that's by the State Historical Survey Committee, they give it a name, and they call it the Old Georgetown Cemetery. And this is the cemetery -- this is what was laid out -- you know, when we got the land from George Washington Glasscock, this was where the cemetery was put.

LAURA SMITH: Do you have a date on that? When it was first --

J.C. JOHNSON: When it was --

LAURA SMITH: -- designated as the --

J.C. JOHNSON: 1848 was when it -- the city was laid out.

LAURA SMITH: Right. Right then?

(inaudible; overlapping dialogue)

___: The marker was 19 --

J.C. JOHNSON: OK. So the marker was 1963. This last slide here is saying 1915 because it was updated. And there it says "Graveyard" as of 1915. And that's (inaudible) right there. OK. Nowadays around here, what a lot of times people will talk about it as being San Gabriel Cemetery. And they will think, as Laura says, that this is the black cemetery because when we were kids, when Laura and I were kids and when you were kids --

LAURA SMITH: Now he's older than I am, though.

J.C. JOHNSON: No! I'm not going to talk -- I'm not going to say anything about that. But when -- in olden times, in olden times we didn't go down there to that cemetery. This was over on the ridge, and this was where all the black people lived. And the schools were segregated, and we didn't go over there. Now, I went over there once upon a time when I was in the third or fourth grade. And my mother, we went driving down the old dirt roads over there. And little shotgun houses, and some of them about to fall down until urban renewal helped in the '60s. But in the '40s when I went over there with my mother -- and we went down there in the midst of high brush and weeds and grass to try to find our family down there, because I have a great-great-great-grandfather and his wife buried down there. And so we went and looked. Just -- and we found them. And then later my uncle, who lived out in Fort Stockton and didn't know any better, had somebody cover the lot with cement, with concrete. OK. So, if you know anything about old cemeteries, and preservation and restoration of old cemeteries, you will know that you should not cover your cemetery lot with concrete. The reason being that after a while, even around Georgetown, Texas, it's going to rain. And when it rains, especially

in the wintertime, and the water seeps in -- after a few years in between the concrete and the marble tombstone, and then it gets cold at night and freezes. Then, which is harder, the concrete or the marble? The concrete is harder. And so, when the water goes to expand, it will expand, and it will shatter and break the marble of the tombstone. So, this is why you should not put concrete on top of your cemetery lot, which my uncle did many years ago. And I have not seen any damage. I go down (the path?) there once in a while to see if water has frozen and damaged the tombstone, but it hadn't. At least not yet. So you have to be patient if you want to see the damage that is done by this freezing. There are two that are tombs' lots down there covered with concrete. One is my great-great-grandfather's lot where he buried his mother-in-law and father-in-law, who was one of the first Baptist preachers in Texas, his father-in-law. And he was -- my mother, bless her heart, she was a delicate person. And she always said that he died of a broken heart. Well, he did, sort of. Which actually it was a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. But his wife had died about a year earlier in -- they were not from Georgetown, but they were visiting their children here in Georgetown. And while they were here, she got sick in 1878 and died. So, they

didn't take her all the way back home. They just buried her right here because they had a lot already anyway. And so they buried her here in the old cemetery. And a year later her husband came. And my great-great-grandmother, Mr. [Clamp]'s daughter, talked to him about her grandfather. Said that he was acting a bit (freakish?), whatever that meant. Crazy, I think. Anyway, he did himself in while he was visiting there, and so they didn't take him back up home either. They just buried him out there beside his wife, and they're still there. OK. And they were white.

LAURA SMITH: Who poured the concrete?

J.C. JOHNSON: He was an (Ellis?) who lived in Fort Stockton. He did (inaudible).

(inaudible from audience)

J.C. JOHNSON: Yeah. Well... Anyway, Mr. Clamp buried three infant children out there, too. So, he had 11 that lived, but 3 didn't. So, you know, she was -- Mrs. Clamp was a busy lady. OK. But these ladies were all white. OK. And they're buried out there. And so then somebody comes and says, "Hey, this is a black cemetery out there. That's just not so." Although there is a road, as you know, that runs right through it. That road was not there until about 1953 or later.

LAURA SMITH: Really!

J.C. JOHNSON: Yes. There was no road through the cemetery when I was a kid.

LAURA SMITH: That was all one cemetery --

J.C. JOHNSON: It was all one cemetery.

LAURA SMITH: And where you see all of the tombstones and stuff was all part of that part to the west?

J.C. JOHNSON: It seems to me -- and I mean, you know, we don't put color on people's tombstone as to what color they were. You have to sort of figure it out or know. And it looks to me, though, as though everybody to the east out in the open of that cemetery is all white. Here you find distinguished early Georgetown citizens. The names are around the square of the Mileham Building across the street. OK? The Milehams are down there at the cemetery. There was a guy named [Dalrymple]. You remember the story about the commissioners sitting under the oak tree, and here came George Washington Glasscock riding up the -- OK. One of these commissioners was Mr. W.C. Dalrymple. OK? And he was not -- he's not buried down there. But his wife, who was a Wilbarger, is buried down there. And then you've got Wilbarger (inaudible), that whole -- Mathias Wilbarger is buried down there. He was a surveyor who chopped Georgetown up into lots when they had the first sale of the

lots. That was Mathias Wilbarger. OK. There are about 85 discernible graves, where you look and you say, "I don't see a tombstone necessarily, but there's somebody, it looks like to me, buried there." And there's about 63 graves that are marked with a tombstone. So, what does that mean? That there's 85 people buried down there? No! This was in the frontier days. In 1870 the population of Georgetown was only 300. So this was the frontier. What do you think of when you see (inaudible) in the cowboy movies? Hey, they made the tombstones out of wood. A piece of wood. OK? And this is what you would have down here in this old cemetery. Any of the tombstones were made of wood. And what happens? Well, the flood washes them away, or the termites eat them up, or they just get weathered. And they go away, and by that time the kids are not around anymore to check and see if the concrete is expanding and all that. See? So, not everybody keeps up with cemeteries like I do. I keep up with them. And anyway, I think that there are -- we could safely say that there are many more people buried down there in that cemetery than are marked. There was a fence. There is currently no fence around that cemetery on any side. OK? But once upon a time, there was, not too many years ago. And so we became concerned. The County Historical Commission became concerned, and the Heritage

Society became concerned, and I became concerned, and the State -- they became concerned about have we got that fence big enough to where everybody is inside the fence. Or is there graves outside the fence? Well, now, how do you determine that? Well, you can look outside the fence right here down toward Imhoff Dam. You know, they stop Blue Hole, you know, down there. That's Imhoff Dam. Blue Hole is on down the stream a little bit. But anyway, there is a grave, I believe, outside of what used to be the fence. It's sort of in a picnic area then. There's a rectangle with iris growing out of it because they've been growing out of it forever. I think there's somebody buried there. And there are other places outside the fence, particularly where -- up there near the road. There's the paved road going through it, and so we said, well, let's see about getting a survey done by professionals. And so, they -- we got in touch with an outfit called Archaeological and Environmental Consultants. And this was back in 1998. And they came and -- Mr. (inaudible) came and looked -- and [Shelley] Davis was on the city council at that time, and he was corresponding with Shelley Davis with the city, because it was a city cemetery. And he -- actually, what they were going to do is we're going to get ground-penetrating radar in here with, sure enough, certified

archaeologists. And they're going to tell us who -- are the people inside the fence, or are they outside the fence? And that's about all they can tell us, but they're going to charge us a great deal of money to do that. And these are -- this is the letter with budgets and estimates from this archaeological society in 1998. And they were going to charge about \$5,000, and that's not with ground-penetrating radar. Then they were going to -- if they could use the ground-penetrating radar and there was reason to do it, then they'd come back and they would charge us another \$6,000 to use the ground-penetrating radar and come and do a report, and they'd give us a copy of it and send a copy to the State Historical Commission and all that. Well, the city decided that they weren't going to spend all that money to have the ground-penetrating radar. It didn't matter that much, as it turns out. And the Heritage Society wasn't going to do it, and the County Historical Commission wasn't going to do it. So nobody was going to do it, so Mr. [Arkell] went ahead, went on, you know, somewhere else and did his business. But he wasn't doing any business in Georgetown. And the city's solution to that problem is take down the fence. Then nobody is buried outside the fence. Right?

(laughter)

J.C. JOHNSON: OK? Hey, we don't elect this people to be our leaders for being stupid. Do we? No. OK. So, there's no fence currently. But there was another project that went on down there, and that was in 2000. There was a "restoration" by the city of Georgetown when they hired a firm, which was called Eagle Services, out of Centerville, Texas. OK? And they came down there. And admittedly, the old cemetery was in bad shape, and there were many broken tombstones and collapsed grave covers. It was in bad shape, bad shape. And the city was maintaining that they were just mowing it. So, the city of Georgetown spent \$14,451.76 to hire this outfit. And they came in, and they took the pieces of tombstones, and they put them back together. They would make a big concrete tombstone sort of in the shape of what they had and hauled it out, and they would stick in the little pieces of tombstone, and they would restore it. And there's -- here's directions as to how that should be done. OK? And this is from the State Historical Commission. But they didn't do it this way, but they did it sort of this way. And there was a man named Gerron Hite, a name that you need to reckon with and who was head of the cemetery -- if you want to know anything about what to do about cemeteries, or what's being done about cemeteries, Gerron Hite is the person to ask. And

they went and met him once upon a time, and that's their only dealings with Gerron Hite. And I've talked to him about this outfit, and I wouldn't recommend that you hire them again to restore your family cemetery or anything like that.

LAURA SMITH: You didn't think it was well done?

J.C. JOHNSON: No. He didn't. And (inaudible), he didn't think it was well done. And no one thought it was well done. And Randy Moore, who (charges?) cemeteries, apologized. There were many of us who were very upset with what was done because they ended up, after they glued them back together, then they painted them white.

LAURA SMITH: Oh!

J.C. JOHNSON: Well, I mean, that's sort of the color of tombstones. Well, and the city said, "Unh-unh!" And so they made them tone it -- put another coat on there that was sort of sand -- more sandy-colored. But you go down there and look now. The white's what shows. And you can see what they have done to the -- well, OK. Is that good or bad? It's not good, but it's not... Something needed to be done. Something needed to be done. Even if it was maybe a bad thing. I wish it had been a good thing. I wish it had been -- I wish we had gotten our \$14,000 worth. But so -- but we didn't. And -- but anyway, you go down

there now, and you can see that here on this side, on the east side of the cemetery, which is all open and clear, is where apparently all white people were buried. Now if you go over into the woods a little bit on the other side of the road, which was not there when they were burying people -- but on the far end down there, then I was -- that's where Keziah Miller is and her family are buried. And several other people who have tombstones that are black people. Now, how did that happen? I don't know. I don't know. It was (caught?) up to the segregation at the time. They quit using that cemetery in 1902. That was the last time anybody was buried -- that used the... According to the research for the marker, which was signed by Judge Stone, a name to reckon with, and Mayor Rawleigh Elliott, they said that the cemetery was used from 1840 to 1902. Then you had the Odd Fellows come along, and the Presbyterian group having their own cemetery by that time. And so, Dalrymple, what was his name? W.G. [sic] Dalrymple, a name to reckon with. He was one of those commissioners. And he is not buried down there, but his wife is buried there. He's buried in the Presbyterian cemetery. Because, you know, it was more uptown by that time. And so, Greenville Crisp -- where the Texas Hotel used to be, that is now [Blythe]'s law office. OK. That

was the Crisp house there once upon a time, and he's buried out there. John S. [Knight] and his son Eli Knight. Knight Springs, everything you read about when you're talking about the environment down on the Booty's Crossing and all. OK. The Knights are buried out there. William [Ake], over here where the title company is now. It used to be cafés in there. We had the [Sixth?] Café once upon a time. Had a sign up in there that says, "It's tough to pay 75 cents for a steak, but a 50-cent steak is tougher." I saw that in Sixth Café. But that was once upon a time the Ake Hotel. OK? Mr. Ake is buried down there. The Milehams of the Mileham Building across the street. Allen Clark. I'm going to conclude with Allen Clark. He's buried down there. My great-great-grandmother kept a diary. And I bet it was when she was a young teenager and a young preacher's wife here, you know. And on the New Year's Eve of 1869, she wrote this: "A horrible affair took place in our town on Wednesday evening, December 28. Mr. Allen Clark hauled in his beef as usual for market the next morning and deposited it at the market house. On his return home he stopped at the grocery, as I believe was his habit, to warm." Because this was in December, remember? "Presently, Eugene Hawkins stepped in and began to call Mr. Clark all kinds of names, Mr. Clark only denying that he

was any such thing, whereupon Eugene drew out his revolver and shot Mr. Clark. The ball entered his side and lodged in behind his spine. He is still lingering in great agony. The doctor thinks he cannot live long. They had a previous difficulty about a dog. The way we heard it, one of Eugene's dogs kept running Mr. Clark's cows, Eugene encouraging it. Mr. Clark asked Eugene not to do it anymore, but the next day it was the same way. Mr. Clark went out and shot the dog, killing it, whereupon Eugene came bullying around, making awful threats, when Mr. Clark seized him and gave him a good shaking, when Eugene left and Mr. Clark thought nothing more about it, I believe. At least they had passed each other several time after that, and Eugene showed no resentment. It was an awful thing. Eugene is a neighbor boy raised in Georgetown. I have gone to school all my life with him. Lately he has had very bad habits. He took to drinking. His father is a drunkard. Eugene is now in jail. I feel sorry for both Eugene and Mr. Clark and his family. I hope Eugene may be led to reflect and feel the sinfulness of the crime his (horse?) has led him." Well, another day or two and Mr. Clark sure enough died, and he was buried with Masonic honors out there under the other lot, with concrete on top of it.

LAURA SMITH: Oh, no!

J.C. JOHNSON: I don't know who put that concrete on, but it was not my family. But if you go down there, you'll see two concrete-covered lots, and one of them is by himself, Mr. Allen Clark, who was married to a daughter of John Berry. So, you know, he was a distinguished sort of guy. There was another guy, Jones Rivers. There is a centennial marker out here on the west side of the courthouse, put there in 1936 celebrating the life of Jones Rivers, who was not from Georgetown, but he was passing through and was staying at the Ake Hotel when he got sick and died.

LAURA SMITH: (inaudible) buried?

J.C. JOHNSON: And was buried out east. OK? And he is the one that Clara Scarbrough quoted as saying that he was lying there, and the preacher came to call on him while he was in his hotel room sick and dying. And he said to the preacher, he said, "You know, as I look out the window at this" -- it was in December -- "at this sheer landscape of Georgetown -- you know, I have been to Europe and to the capitals of Europe and the universities in Europe. And with all these sights, I can tell you that there is no place that I am more ready to leave than Georgetown, Texas."

(laughter)

J.C. JOHNSON: And with that he turned his face to the wall and
was no more.

(laughter)

J.C. JOHNSON: OK. I thank you very much.

(applause)