

Clarksville

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*Because people all lived for and with
each other, as in a sweet corporation
Never shall I forget*

CLARKSVILLE

Clarksville. Almost one hundred years old, Clarksville is one of the oldest existing communities in Austin. Its historical roots reach back to post-Civil War times. The community is now threatened by the advent of two cross-town expressways slated to pass directly through it. In a time of progress and urban technology, it is paradoxical that the deep history of the people has not been recorded, and lives only in the minds of the older residents.

"I want those of the coming generation to know what happened," said Rev. H. J. Carrington.

Most of what Carrington knows about his home and ancestry has come to him by word of mouth, legend, and his reckoning power. Available facts about the area exist, but these facts must be combined with legend to produce the total picture of Clarksville. The following is such a mixture of legend and documented material.

Clarksville is a settlement in West Austin in what is now the Enfield addition, between Waterston and Tenth Streets, bounded on the east by West Lynn and on the west by the Missouri Pacific railroad tracks.

The area was originally made up of land owned by Max Maas, land agent, N. G. Shelly, once mayor of Austin, and a Mr. Hoffheinz, among others. The earliest known settler was Charles Griffin, former slave, whose Freedman's name was Charles Clark. On August 11, 1871, he bought two acres of land on Tenth Street, from N. G. Shelly,¹ and built a house at the address now corresponding to 1618 W. Tenth. The older residents of the community say that Clark's purpose was to begin a settlement for his people, so that they might all live in one place. Clark, as he was known in the community, transacted business by the name of Griffin.

Essex Carrington, grandfather of current resident Rev. H. J. Carrington, followed on December 9, 1872, buying land on Waterston Street from Max Maas. Jim Morris, whose house still stands on 11th Street, moved into the area in 1876. Other early settlers included Henry Harrison, Jim Haynes, and Quinton Bolden, father of Dan Bolden, Sr., and former minister of Sweet Home Baptist Church. Most of these settlers moved into the area near the church.

The older residents recall the area around Clarksville as being a wilderness, broken only by the Missouri Pacific tracks and an occasional dirt road. The build up of the area was gradual, finally evolving into the present community, in which many persons are related by family ties. In 1875, Rose Walker bought land in the area of W. 11th and Essex Avenue from Max Maas. Mrs. Walker and her husband raised Bettie Bryant, wife of Reason Bryant. Upon Mrs. Walker's death, Mrs. Bryant was sold one lot on the northeast corner of that intersection for one dollar, because, in the words of the Rev. S. J. Thompson, Mrs. Walker's son, of "the love of said Bettie in being my foster-sister and (in showing) kindness to Rose Walker in her lifetime."² The land later fell heir to Mrs. Bryant's daughter, Mrs. W. S. Edmerson, who lives there now.

The McNeil family moved in directly across the street from

Internal Revenue 50 ct Stamp Canceled

The State of Texas, } Know all men by these presents that N. E.
County of Travis, } Shelley, of the County of Travis, State of Texas
for and in consideration of one hundred dollars to me paid by
Charles Griffin (Bredman) of the County of Travis, State of Texas, the re-
ceipt whereof, is hereby acknowledged, have sold and conveyed, and by these
presents do sell, convey and deliver, unto said Charles Griffin his heirs
and assigns all that tract or parcel of land, lying and being in the County
of Travis, and described as follows, to wit: Being two acres taken out of
the South west corner of lot No. 15, in a Subdivision of 252 acres of the
Chambers & League Grant, covering the City of Austin, and also a part
of the G. W. Shivers League in conflict with said grant, the two acres here-
by granted being in a square, and commencing at the South west corner
of said Lot 15; thence the South line ninety seven yards and thirty
five inches. Thence North $\frac{1}{4}$ at right angle the same distance. Thence
at a right angle to the west line of said lot 15. Thence with said
line to the place of beginning, to contain two acres. To have and to
hold all and singular the premises above mentioned with the rights
members, incidents and appurtenances to the same belonging
or in any wise incident or appertaining unto the said Charles
Griffin his heirs and assigns forever. And I hereby bind myself
my heirs, executors and administrators, to warrant and forever defend
all and singular said premises unto the said Charles Griffin his heirs
and assigns against every person whomsoever lawfully claiming or to
claim the same or any part thereof. In testimony whereof I have here-
unto set my name & seal for seal the 11th day of August, A.D. 1871,
In presence of: H. J. Peim N. E. Shelley
The State of Texas, } Before me L. H. Collins, a Notary Public, Travis County
County of Travis, } personally appeared N. E. Shelley to me well known
and acknowledged, that he signed, sealed and delivered the above and
attached deed, dated 11 day of August A.D. 1871, for all the uses, purposes
and considerations therein stated: In testimony whereof, I hereunto set
my hand and affix the seal of my office, this 11 day of Aug. A.D. 1871
L. H. Collins, Notary Public, Travis County.
Filed for Record August 11th 1871, at 9 o'clock A.M.
Recorded August 12th 1871, at 10 o'clock A.M.
A. C. Morris Clk. By A. J. Garrett. Deft. Clk.

CHARLIE CLARK DEED

the Bryants'. One of Mr. McNeil's daughters, Mrs. Henry S. Overton, now lives in another part of the city. Also in the west end of Clarksville were Essie White, who built many of the homes in the east end, Ed White, Dan Bolden, Sr., and Ewing Edmonds.

As soon as people began settling permanently in Clarksville, they began to organize informally their church home. Mrs. Mary Smith, wife of Edmund Smith, who later became trustee for the church along with Thomas Shelby and Reason Bryant, began holding prayer meetings in her house, which was on the same lot as that of Solomon Taylor on W. 11th Street near where the church was to be built. These prayer meetings became the basis for community interaction and exchange, which was later to continue in the church structure itself, directly across from the Jim Morris home.

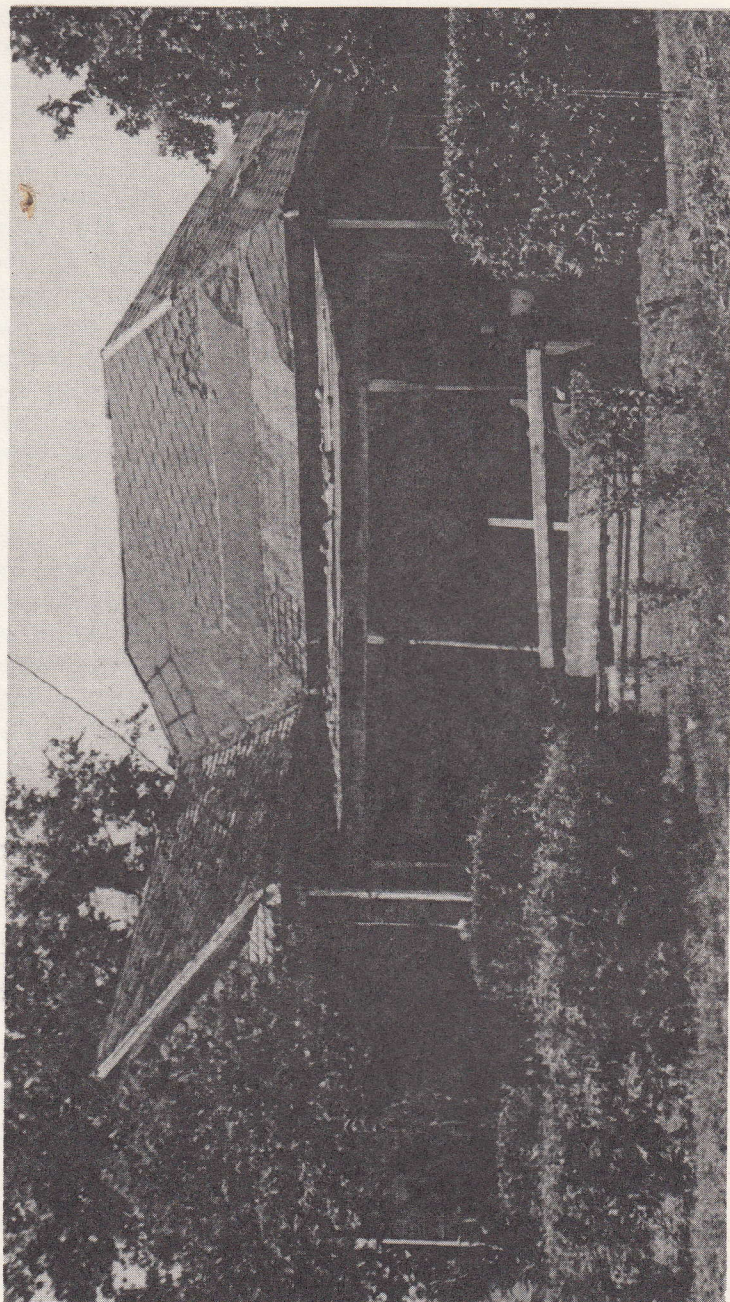
The land for the church was bought from Max Maas and his wife on July 1, 1882, for \$50 "cash in hand."³ Regarding the name *Sweet Home Church*, Rev. H. J. Carrington tells the following story about the pervading community spirit and accord in Clarksville. He recalls the "oldtimers" telling him of days when the community would wake at dawn to begin the work day. Old Lady Mary Smith would be one of the first to step outside of her house in the morning. She would sing this song as she began the day:

*Soon in the morning when I 'rise,
Soon in the morning when I 'rise,
Soon in the morning when I 'rise,
Give me Jesus.*

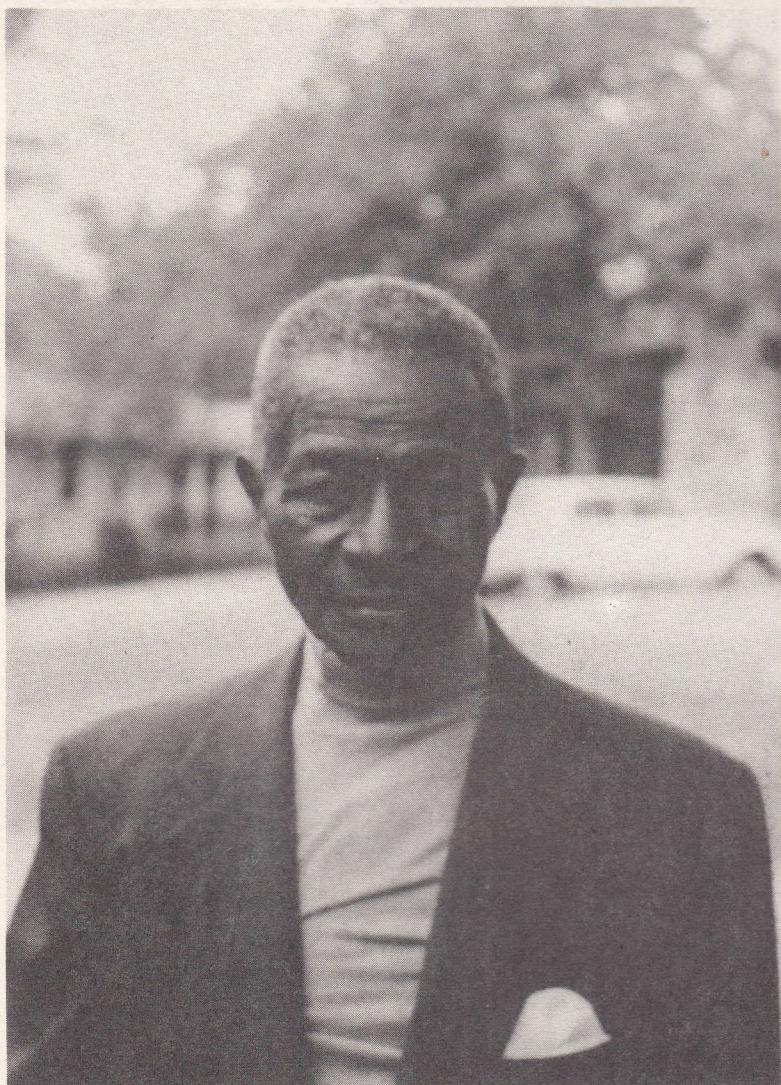
Old Lady Haynes would step out on her front porch and sing back the second verse:

*Dark midnight was my cry,
Dark midnight was my cry,
Dark midnight was my cry,
Give me Jesus.*

The song would reach out to other neighbors, who would join in and send the chorus "Give me Jesus" out into the unobstructed wilderness, unhampered by the city noises. Rev. Car-



JIM MORRIS HOME



W. W. (BEN) MAY

rington says that this early morning worship was a reminder to the residents that they were all one in their community and in their faith, and that Clarksville was truly a "sweet home" for its residents.

The first meetings on the church property were held under a brush arbor, obtained from the nearby Shelby dairy. Other buildings were subsequently built on the property. The last one before the existing structure was built facing east, but the orientation was changed to the north in 1935, when the present edifice was contracted by W. S. Edmerson. He constructed the church along the lines of other Early Christian basilica forms with which he had had experience in Austin area building construction.

One of the most important early residents of Clarksville was Elias Mayes, who purchased two lots on West Tenth from Charlie Clark in 1884. Mayes settled in Clarksville while he served in the Texas Legislature, as is noted in the book, *Negro Legislators of Texas and Their Descendants*:⁴

. . . Elias Mayes was born in Conecuh County, Alabama, on February 15, 1831. He was the son of Louis and Gillette Mayes, of African descent.

He came to Texas in 1863, and settled first in Montgomery County. In 1866 he removed to Brazos County, representing that county in the sixteenth and twenty-first sessions of the Legislature. He served in the latter term on the Committees of Penitentiaries and Education. In the latter session, among other bills he introduced is one that restored to the Grimes County Court its civil jurisdiction. He was pastor of a church in his neighborhood and occupied himself with farming.

He was a fine specimen of his race and bore in his face the improvement of education. In the Legislature he was very unassuming, but attentive to his duties, which he discharged with intelligence, and held the respect of his fellow members. He has two grandsons living in Dallas, Seth Robinson and L. L. Robinson.

The son of Elias Mayes, Ben May, 85 years old, still lives in Clarksville. Mr. May sold part of the Elias Mayes land to Mrs. Mary Freeman.*

* At some point the last two letters were dropped from the Mayes name.

Since the early settlers of Clarksville were freed slaves, or sons of freed slaves, they had few tools of education and had only their physical strength to rely on in making a living. At that time, wilderness surrounded the Clarksville land; people could shoot rabbits and squirrels from their front porches.

Many residents worked on the "third and fourth" basis, meaning that every third or fourth bale of cotton or load of corn went to the landlord, and the others to the owner. The pickers earned 40 cents for 100 lbs. of cotton, and 75 cents for scrapping (going over already picked bushes). They could pick about 600 lbs. a day. Fifty cents was paid for plowing. The whole family except the mother, Matilda Allen Carrington, worked in the cotton fields every fall from September to November.

Albert Carrington also worked at a compress, earning \$1.50 a day, and served as a preacher at Sweet Home Baptist Church and Hunter's Bend. Matilda Carrington did washing and ironing. The family as a whole made \$14 a week to support 13 children. As H. J. Carrington said, "It was a rough old go . . . you had to root hog or die."

On Saturdays, the children picked cotton for their own money. The Carringtons attended school from the first of the year through the spring because their labor was needed in the fields during the fall. H. J. Carrington quit school in the sixth grade to work full time, but later completed seven more years of schooling through the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.

The earliest settlers of Clarksville had various jobs. Reason Bryant was employed at the Round Rock rock quarry. Essex Carrington, grandfather of H. J. Carrington, worked on the Negro staff of the Washington Hose Company, an early fire department. Clarksville had a community store owned and operated by Leroy Robertson, at 1710 W. Tenth. Jim Morris worked for Governor Pease on the Pease Estate; Elias Mayes served in the sixteenth and twenty-first legislatures of the Texas House of Representatives. Various other men in the community worked on construction jobs around Austin.

Mary Freeman, 70, remembers taking in laundry from the Old Confederate Home which served as a hospital and old folks

home for veterans of the Confederate army.

Between 1900 and 1925, Hymen Bolden worked as a mechanic for Walter Typsey's Foundry, and his brother Richard worked on construction jobs at Camp Mabry. Ben May recounted earning \$1.50 a week, taking cows out to the Camp Mabry area near Shoal Creek. H. J. Carrington earned \$1.25 a day, working at the Zilker Brickyard from 1910 to about 1917. John Williams owned a pair of mules which he used for hauling and surveying from 1917 to 1918. In 1921, W. S. Edmerson, contractor, settled in Clarksville after marrying Lillian Bryant, a native of the community. Edmerson drew up the plans for rebuilding Sweet Home Church, to be modeled after the West Austin Baptist Church. Mr. Edmerson built the homes of the Diggs and Bolden families and three houses on Waterston, as well as the First New Mount Olive Church, Rosewood Church, St. Peter's Methodist Church, and McKinley Heights Church.

There were two small-scale emigrations of people from Clarksville to California, one during the first World War, and the second, in 1943. Among those who left, searching for a better life, were Dan, Eugene, and Quinton Bolden (who left during World War I), and Alonso Johnson. Eula Ginyard also spent fifteen years in California, but she returned to her Clarksville home in 1937.

Until about 1930, much of Clarksville was surrounded by wooded area. Most of the residents raised chickens and hogs on their property and kept a cow for fresh milk. Since a 1940 law in Austin, Clarksville residents have been able to raise only chickens. Water was procured from "rain-catching" barrels and water cisterns. Ben May remembers hauling water from the Colorado River in two large whisky barrels. "You had to put a cloth over the top and strain out the wiggle tails." An iceman, with horse and wagon, sold blocks of ice to Clarksville residents: 100 pounds for 30 cents. The ice was held in a tub with tow sacks soaked in the bottom. Toilet facilities were located outside the house and kerosene lighting was used in Clarksville until the 1930's.

Since money was scarce and the stores were far away, the people produced much of their food and made their own cures.

People canned and stored food over long periods of time. Beans, corn, black-eyed peas, cabbage, and other vegetables were stored in large wooden boxes underground. The entire Carrington family participated in preparing the meat of hogs for storage. The men cleaned the hog; the children washed the "chittlins;" the meat was sliced into sausage in a grinder; and there was a large pot of hot water in which the meat was boiled. The smokehouse was indispensable for storing the meat, and often several families shared a smokehouse.

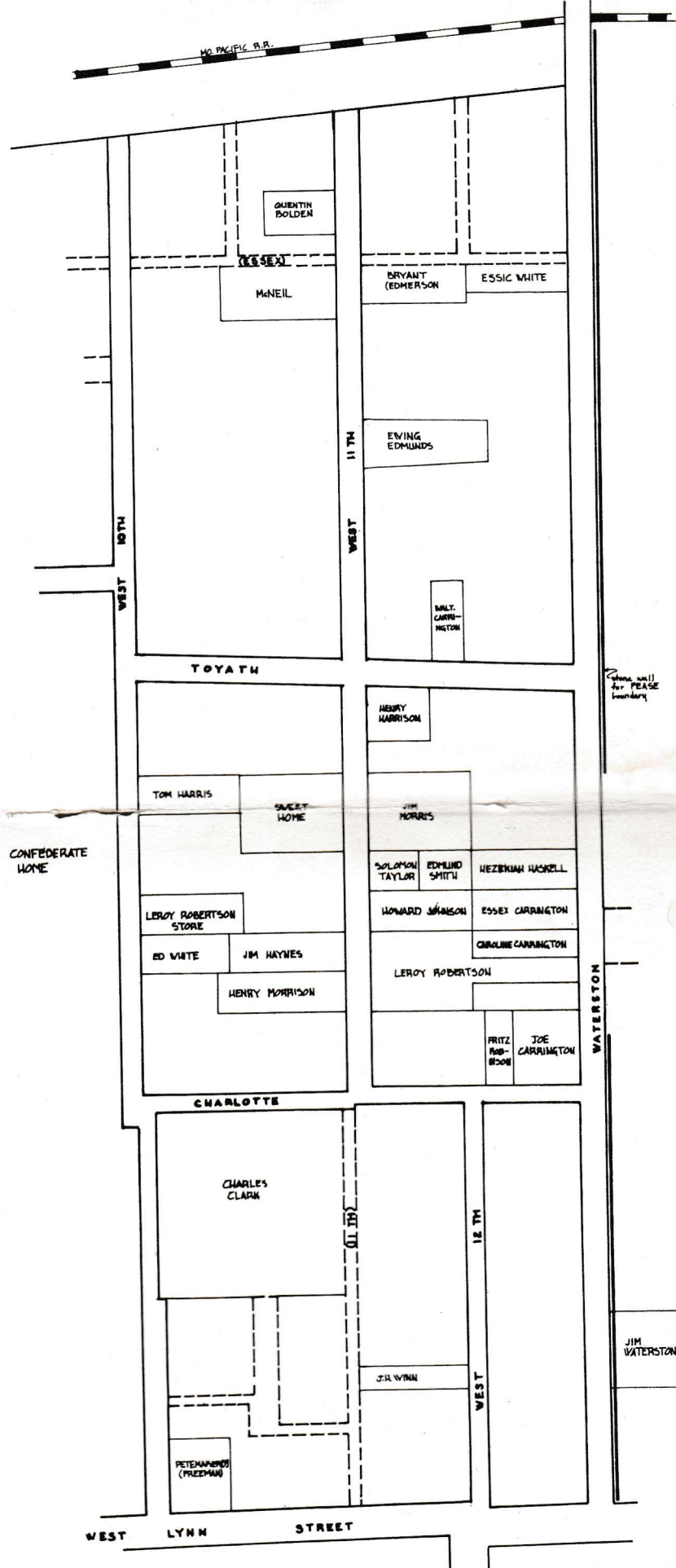
A popular cure for fever was to pick the yellow blossoms of the Camile weed, boil them in salt water, and then drench the fever victim with it. H. J. Carrington remembers how he, with help from the Lord, cured his children of diphtheria. Carrington took a 24 lb. bag of wild sage, belmonte tea, and a string of hog's hooves, and mixed them with molasses. He gave his children a tablespoon every three hours.

For fellowship, Clarksville residents joined together for quilting bees, picnics, and baseball games. At the quilting bees, tea cakes were served, fellowship was enjoyed, and necessary quilts and garments were made. Various families held candy-pulling parties during the spring; Rev. H. J. Carrington recounted incidents where the candy made was used to relieve illnesses in the family. Numerous picnics, especially those on June 19 (Freedom Day), were held at Midway neighborhood park or on the Pease Estate. W. S. Edmerson played bass tuba in a band at several of the picnics. Another memory of Clarksville "oldtimers" was of the annual Christmas parties given on the Pease Estate for the children of Clarksville. Each child received a bag of candy or fruit, and a silver dime.

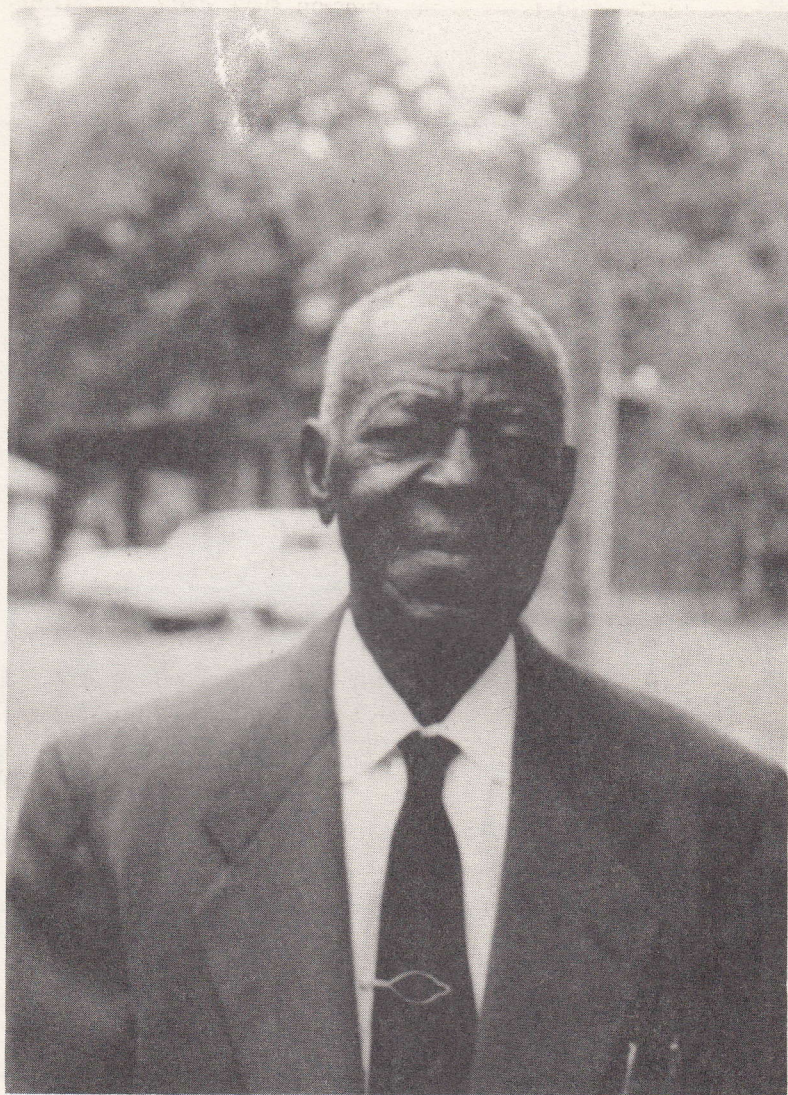
Some early residents of Clarksville are mentioned in *An Historical Outline of the Negro in Travis County*:⁵

Beautiful homes were not only owned by the business and professional leaders but also by the laboring class of Negroes. Surrounding the homes were well-kept lawns and clean back yards. Those owning some of these homes were: E. H. Carrington T. J. Clark N. J. Johnson Ewing Edmonds

E. H. Carrington, mentioned above, was not a resident of Clarksville, although he was an acquaintance of the Clarksville



CLARKSVILLE:
THE EARLY SETTLEMENT



REV. H. J. CARRINGTON

Carrington family. The two groups used to joke about their possible relationship through the common slave name of Carrington.

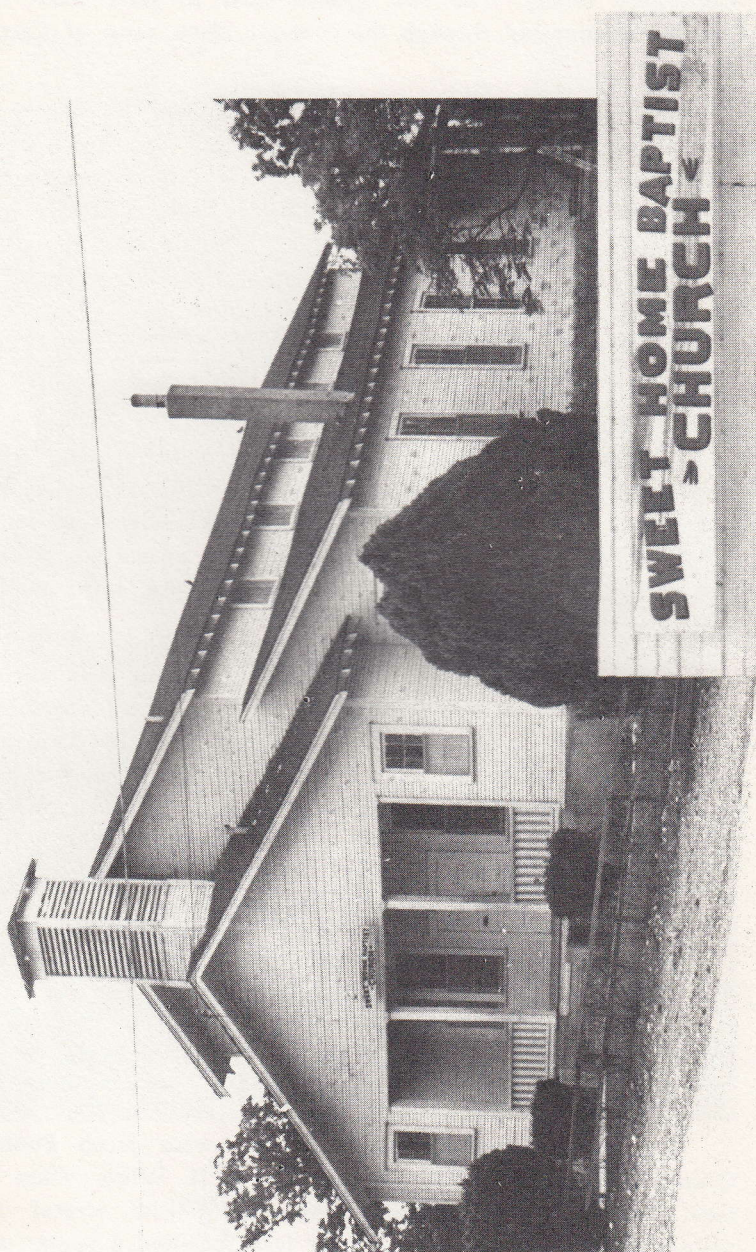
Binding the community together throughout its history has been the Sweet Home Baptist Church. As Rev. Carrington recalls, the church formed a "sweet corporation . . . All the people lived for and with each other." The name *Sweet Home* was chosen for the church as a reflection of the faith which bound the people together. The building served as a meeting place for community organizations. The church itself was the focal point of the unity of the people, and the faith therein provided the source of strength in their daily lives.

The first residents met together in the home of Edmund and Mary Smith⁶ for prayer and fellowship. Land for Sweet Home was bought in 1882 and the first structure was a "brush arbor": branches covering a wooden frame. The first church was built in the 1880's, and has since been rebuilt three times. According to the plan of W. S. Edmerson, the last structure, now standing, was built in 1935 to face north.

Daily living is an expression of the spirit and faith nurtured in the church. Family life especially centers around religion. In the Carrington family, the children read the Bible out loud every morning around the breakfast table. The faith was transferred from parents to children. On his deathbed, Albert Carrington said to his son, "You're going to forget some important things in your life, but don't you forget God." Even in the most difficult times, a common belief that the ". . . Lord will take care of us," prevailed. H. J. Carrington tells of one incident:

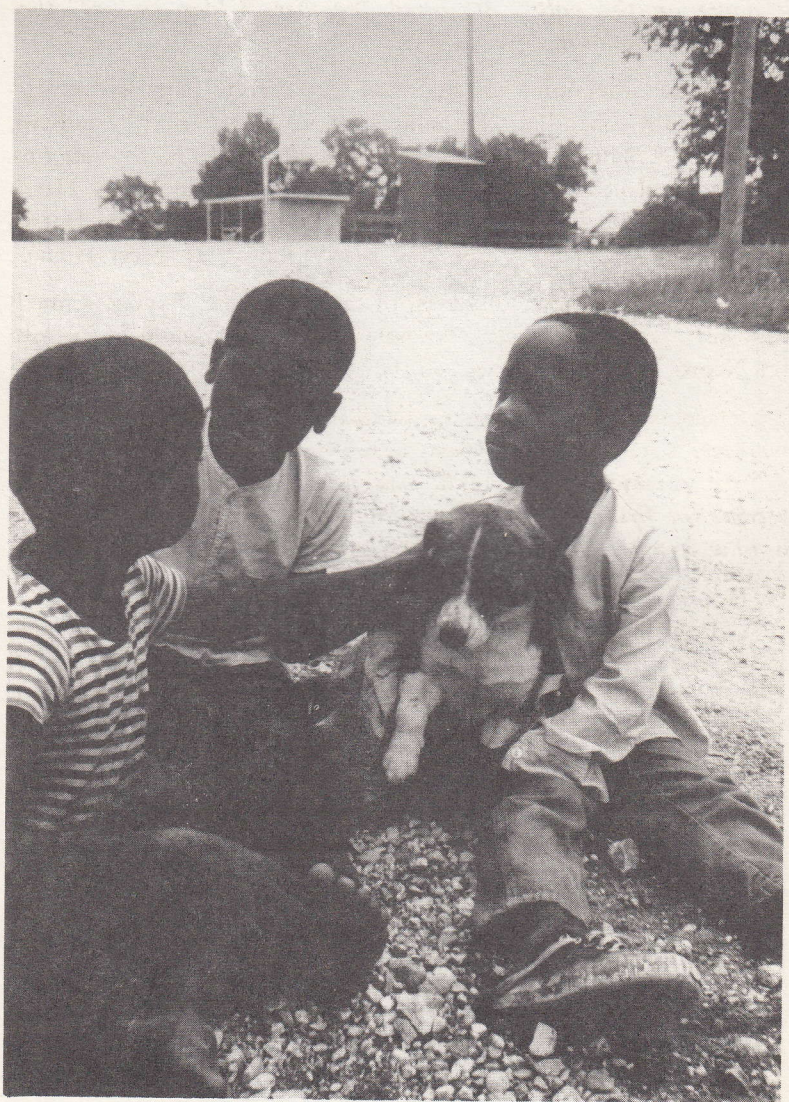
I remember when my wife and I sat on that bed, over there, and watched our three children eat the last morsels of food in the house. Then I took Job's words into my heart, and knew that, "Though He slay me, I'll still trust Him."

The earliest ministers of Clarksville were Jacob Fontaine, Quinton Bolden, Albert Carrington, and J. H. Winn. Winn baptized Mrs. Edmerson in Town Lake along with several other young people. The procession to the lake followed a prayer meeting service at Sweet Home. Others were baptised in the Colorado





CLARKSVILLE SCHOOL TWELVE YEARS AGO (1957)



River. Ben May and H. J. Carrington talked of the time when,

Louis Morris, believing in Devilment, got a black crow and plucked off all the feathers except the wings. Then they dropped it down on the pulpit. It scared Preacher Bolden so bad, that he yelled, "Goddurn, get out'a there!"

Several other ministers at Sweet Home were Sampson Anderson, Timothy Chandler, William Anderson, Dr. H. B. Southern, Rev. L. J. Griffin, Rev. W. L. Holland, and Rev. E. M. Loggins. Rev. Holland helped organize the day care center, in Henry Harrison's old home, in the late 1950's. A blind man, Isaiah Harris, is remembered as one of the first piano players at Sweet Home.

One of the first ministers of Sweet Home Baptist Church was Rev. Jacob Fontaine, who was instrumental in unifying Austin Negro Baptist Churches.

*A century ago, through the broad vision of a noble pioneer minister, began the movement which today has terminated into a great reality. Under an old oak tree . . . Rev. Jacob Fontaine became the first leader of Travis County Baptist Association, which is now known as St. John's Regular Missionary Baptist Association.*⁷

There is also a record of a man by the same name who published the first Negro newspaper in Austin, *The Gold Dollar*. It appears that Rev. Jacob Fontaine, who preached every Sunday at Sweet Home for several years, although he did not live in Clarksville, wrote *The Gold Dollar*. A photostat copy of the paper is now in the Texas History Library of the University of Texas.

THE GOLD DOLLAR

*The gold dollar is the name
of this little Paper Its name
taken from A gold dollar
which was presented to me
by my sister nelly miller on a
viset to Mississippi in
1872 as we had been
sepperrated by the evel of
slavery for twenty years
this gold dollar I have traded*

*with sence that time
and made sixty dollars of
it with which I have bought
this little Office and started this little Paper*

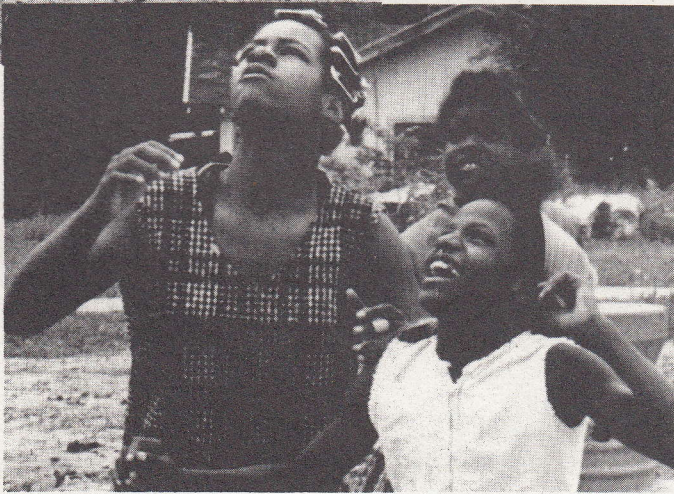
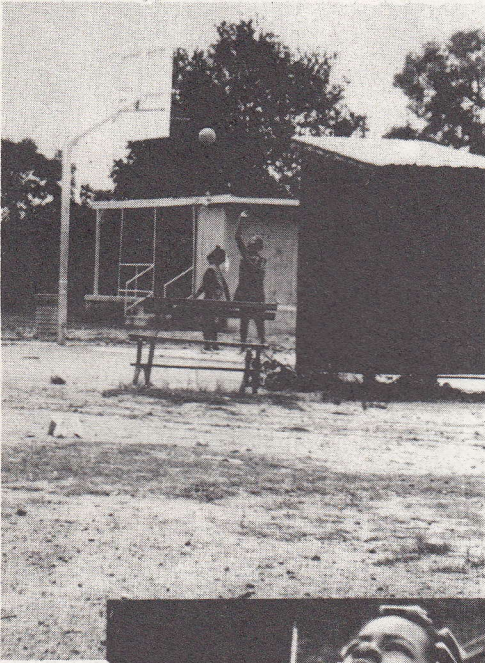
Rev. Jacob Fontaine
1876⁸

Clarksville School was an important element in the growing community. It represented a link with the rest of Austin in the form of organized education, and was recognized in records of Travis County from 1940: "Clarksville Elementary School, located at 1807 West 11th Street. Principal, Mrs. Josephine Kavanaugh, one other teacher, and seventy pupils enrolled." Enrollments taken over the years included:⁹

May 29, 1896	1924	1934
47	69	66

Few people can remember exactly when the school was moved, but the building now stands among others like it within O'Henry Junior High. There is a baseball field and a playground remaining on the lot where the school once was. Children playing there today do not remember the school. They do not know of the early peoples and history of Clarksville and never will unless it is made possible for those who do remember to retell the stories of a people passed over by the history books of their time, and perhaps by time itself.

To these children, this history is dedicated.





This history of Clarksville is the result not only of two months of private and collective research, but of countless pleasant hours spent in conversation with those who gave us a more personal side to the past. We owe many thanks to these people of Clarksville who shared with us their memories and their thoughts: H. J. Carrington and Matilda Carrington, W. W. May, Mrs. W. S. Edmerson, Mrs. Mary Freeman, Willy Lee Parr, Mrs. Eula Ginyard, Mr. Squire Johnson, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Bolden, Mrs. Pearline Hill, and Mrs. Mathews.

We greatly appreciate the inspiration and knowledge of Reynell Parkins.

Betty Fine
Charles McDonald
Don Priefert
Louann Rank
Carolyn Shirley

May 23, 1969

