

George's House

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On March 11, 1911, Northern Texas Traction Company officials made it publicly known that they intended to construct an electric interurban railway south from Fort Worth to Cleburne through Burleson.

With 3,410 tons of rail stationed on 87,500 railroad crossties embedded in well-graded ballast¹ stretching nearly thirty-four miles, on September 1, 1912, the Fort Worth Southern Traction Company, a subsidiary of the NTTC officially went into operation. Construction of two electrical substations to regulate electrical current was required prior to operation of passenger and express service. Other facilities were also necessary. A temporary passenger station was located on the north side of Cleburne. A wood frame depot was constructed to accommodate Joshua, with intermediate small wooden passenger shelters at various locations along the new line.

In Burleson, the passenger accommodations were a bit more extravagant. The Northern Texas Traction Company constructed a brick building specifically to address the needs of its soon to be proprietor, pharmacist Albert Hendon Loyless. A comfortable indoor shopping environment with refreshments from a soda fountain helped passengers relax while waiting for the next car to arrive.²

A local electrical power distribution station stood adjacent to the rear west wall of the building to supply power to the downtown citizens. Electricity was made available to residents through Ordinance No. 26 approved by the City of Burleson on June 12, 1913.

¹ Stone & Webster Public Service Journal, pg. 330-333

² Donna Loyless Hayes Interview Excerpts by Michael H. Beard

Besides these, one other forgotten element made up the Burleson interurban stop. The traction company saw fit to build a small building across the wye track at the rear of the Loyless Interurban Drugstore. Often referred to as a “Motorman’s Shack”, the modest white, wooden frame shelter provided sleeping quarters for interurban car operators and other such employees in the case of overnight layovers.

Nothing about the interurban railway was ever wasted. Even though the trains stopped running on April 30, 1931, the Loyless Interurban Drugstore continued to serve the community. Once vacated in 1935 by Mr. Loyless through necessity, the building continued to serve the citizens as a newspaper office from the late thirties into the eighties. The tracks are now gone and the rail sold as scrap, but farms surrounding the town reinforced their fences with the abandoned crossties. The small electrical power distribution station that sat next to the building was dismantled as a more advanced one was erected elsewhere.

The small building to the rear of the drugstore had its own story of continuing use. One day a transient arrived in Burleson. The depression sent many to the road in the thirties. Migrant workers moved about as best they could, searching for jobs, often gratefully accepting a meal as payment. Many were the hoboes who hopped the freight trains. The arrival of World War II brought more tough times. Though the war ended in 1945, the endless job search for many did not. An enormous number of veterans returned from war in need of jobs. Few these days are aware of the plight faced by returning vets of the First World War.

According to relatives, George Conway had come home to Texas after World War I, having received a head wound during service as a member of the 24th Construction

Company detached to the U. S. Army Air Service. Rather than returning to his hometown, he chose to travel for a time living out of his horse drawn wagon.³

George Conway was born on January 4, 1892 or 1894 in Joshua, Texas, making him about 41 when he came to Burleson. He had both a sister and a brother, his brother dieing during World War II.

No one was certain why he chose Burleson or from where he had come, but at that point in time (said to be in 1935)⁴, he must have had a desire to settle. Seeking work from various individuals along his way into Burleson, he was not discouraged by the fact that there was little available. It is conceivable for some to have distanced themselves from him, as he was a stranger in a small town where everybody knew everybody and everybody's business. On the other hand, this worked in his favor. A citizen directed him to the turning point in his search, a man well known for his honesty, generosity and humanitarianism.

A. H. (Poss) Loyless agreed to provide work to George and gave him enough for a day.⁵ George had some unusual traits according to some in those days. It was said that he would talk to himself, tell jokes to himself, responding in laughter, but according to those who remember him, he was harmless and good-natured.⁶

He did his work and at the end of the day, he would disappear until the next day when he would return for another task. Mr. Loyless apparently recognized George's honest efforts to the task at hand, and encouraged him to return. Soon, others realizing George's trustworthiness, also gave him work.

³ Larry Pack Interview (January 22, 2006) – Michael H. Beard

⁴ Larry Pack Interview – Robert Griffith

⁵ Donna Loyless Hayes interviews – Michael H. Beard

⁶ Recollections of Doris Jo Haas (2005) – Michael H. Beard

Concerned for his wellbeing, one day 'ole Poss inquired as to where George was living. It seemed he was living out of his wagon, as he had done for some time⁷. This disturbed Mr. Loyless and so he decided to find George more permanent quarters in which to stay. He remembered that the motorman's house constructed for weary interurban car operators was still behind the old drugstore. It had been of no use to anyone following the demise of the interurban railway from Fort Worth to Cleburne. He had contacted the company's officials and questioned them as to the future of the old frame house. No doubt, it was to be removed someday. Poss told them that he would buy the building from them if they wished to sell it. They were in agreement and told Mr. Loyless that if he would remove the building from the premises, they would give him the structure at no cost. He was ecstatic, but insisted on paying for the small shack. He bought it for the sum of five dollars⁸ and had the building moved behind Fain Stevens' garage near the rear of the new drugstore. Poss knew that the building erected to serve employees of the rail line in such a capacity could be easily outfitted to accommodate a single individual. A cot and a small stand could provide necessary furnishings.

The small house was moved again during the late 1940's. Raymond McAlister, brother to Louis McAlister and Henry Owens towed the building with Owens' Moline tractor and McAlister's Farm-All tractor to the southeast corner of the lot of the Loyless residence. Once in place, Raymond returned for George and his personal belongings. They were loaded into the wagon and George sat in the old rocker holding onto his fiddle case as Raymond drove him to his home at its new location.⁹ Poss had a small bathroom

⁷ Larry Pack Interview (January 22, 2006) – Michael H. Beard

⁸ Donna Loyless Hayes Interviews – Michael H. Beard

⁹ Louis McAlister Interview (2005) – Robert Griffith

installed in the corner of his garage for George's convenience¹⁰. He provided the living quarters to George for as long as he wanted, and they became good friends as George continued to work for him and around town for several years.

George's health declined considerably during those years, some say leaving him possibly diabetic. He acquired a foot infection and Poss and his wife Myrtle both tried everything in their power to get George to see a doctor.¹¹ Doyle Conway, George's nephew took him to the veteran's hospital in Marlin, Texas, and friends and relatives alike rallied in support.¹² Upon close examination, the doctor attending George determined his infection to have turned to gangrene and that the damage was irreversible. He warned George that he must operate soon to remove the infected leg. George declined however, declaring to his nephew that "he would rather leave this world with his leg intact than leave without it"¹³. The infection in his leg spread.¹⁴ During his last hours, George remained bedridden in the hospital. Doyle had returned home for a quick change of clothes when he received the call that George had passed away during those hours of darkness on December 12, 1967.¹⁵ Final arrangements and provisions for George's funeral were made. He was to be buried at Marystown Cemetery.

Some of George's family members, residing in Joshua, Texas returned to the small house that remained on the lot behind the Loyless residence to take home George's personal belongings, among them his fiddle and rocking chair. Two years later in 1969,

¹⁰ Donna Loyless Hayes interviews – Michael H. Beard

¹¹ D. L. Hayes, Ibid

¹² Larry Pack, Ibid.

¹³ Larry Pack and Doyle Conway interview – Robert Griffith

¹⁴ Larry Pack interview (January 22, 2006) – Michael H. Beard

¹⁵ Larry Pack and Doyle Conway interview – Robert Griffith

Mr. and Mrs. Loyless sold their home and moved down to Austin to be near their daughter Donna.

Today, the small white frame motorman's shack built to comfort weary travelers away from their homes and that provided warmth to someone in need of more than just a place to stay still stands long after the Loyless home perished. It is a memorial to friendship, loyalty, trust and the kindness that founds such qualities.

It is important to understand the value of this tiny building erected in 1912. While it is not a unique style of architecture, nor is it adorned with elaborate furnishings, its story is very special, and it very well may be the only remaining structure of its type left in Texas. It should be historically preserved to illustrate an important community character trait of goodness and friendship that once existed during very different and often difficult times.¹⁶

Bibliography

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¹⁶ Personal Observations and Conclusions(2005) – Michael H. Beard