Driving along narrow County Road 49 through the pastoral countryside of northwest Smith County, Texas, a casual passerby may miss the remnants of Mechanicsville, one of Texas’ largest furniture manufacturing centers in 1870. The most accessible reminder, the small Bauman (Robbs) Cemetery is located just off the road south of its junction with CR 419, but it is easily overlooked. Mechanicsville has been abandoned for over one hundred years. Though a few old-timers from Mount Sylvan or New Harmony still recall the settlement’s name, its history is vanishing with time, as has the physical evidence of its existence. But the story of this once-productive community, pieced together from fragments of memories and surviving documents, is worth remembering, and adds to the richness of our East Texas heritage.

Beginnings: “the road…running to Moore and Carters Mill”

The Civil War had just ended when Christopher Bennett Carter and William Jackson “Jack” Moore, both experienced in the lumber business, formed a partnership to cut and mill timber about thirteen miles northwest of Tyler. Carter, age thirty-seven, had moved from Newton County, Georgia, first to Cherokee County, Texas, in about 1851, and later to Smith County, where a local newspaper reported that he operated a mill at Tyler in 1864. His extended family lived in the vicinity of Garden Valley and Flora and included brother-in-law, Richard B. Hubbard, father of future governor, Richard B. Hubbard, Jr., and brother, Milton Carter, a Baptist minister, both large slaveholders before the war.

Moore, born in Georgia about 1830, was working as a mechanic in Alabama by 1850, but moved his family to Texas in the mid-1850s, arriving in Smith County in 1859. Apparently, Moore was a renowned logger. In April 1861, R.T. McFarland advertised for sale in the Tyler Reporter newspaper 500,000 feet of pine lumber, which “was sawed by W. J. Moore, one of the first class sawyers and Engineers in Texas, who still stands at the head of affairs. It was taken from a fresh Pinery, and sawed by new machinery.” The address given was four miles northeast of Starrville. Moore is likely the W. J. Moore who served as a private in Company D, 15th Texas Infantry, during the war.

Carter and Moore’s partnership was first documented in the 1865 Smith County tax list. That year the business was taxed for 500 acres of real property, which they acquired from Christopher Carter’s brother, Milton. Over the next few years, the partners purchased additional tracts, bringing their holdings to more than 1000 acres of land on the Marshall University, Jesse Crisp, J. J. Smith, and J. B. B. Martin headrights. In addition, they contracted to log pine timber from nearby property.

Carter and Moore set up their sawmill about two miles east of the Neches River and two-and-a-half miles southwest of Mount Sylvan. Finished lumber was in demand, so planing machinery was added to the mill. Power was provided by a steam engine, using water from nearby Terrapin Creek (also known as Davis Branch). According to an October 29, 1939, Tyler Courier-Times-Telegraph newspaper article on Mechanicsville by Ray Cooper, this was one of the largest steam engines west of the Mississippi River.

No account of their Smith County mill operation exists, but 1872 deeds describe Carter and Moore’s subsequent venture in Rusk County as “consisting of steam boiler and engine saw and grist mill, all belts, wrenches, blacksmith tools and iron, two log carts, three road wagons, one dust cart, oil and cans, fifteen oxen, fifty head
stock hogs” plus two boarding houses for the mill hands. The partners’ Smith County mill business must have been very similar.

Carter and Moore hired local men and then drew from devastated Southern states these men’s relatives who were looking for employment after the war. One early arrival was Thomas Jefferson Barron, who brought his wife and young daughters all the way from Coosa County, Alabama, to Smith County, Texas, in December 1865. The trip was dangerous and Barron arrived with only fifty cents in his pockets, but he already had family living in the area and a job waiting for him at the mill.

Interestingly, Barron’s grandfather and Carter’s father hailed from the same community in Newton County, Georgia, where they attended church together thirty years earlier. The younger Barrons and Carters in Smith County had a nodding acquaintance and a strong common heritage that may have convinced Thomas Barron, his brothers, and his Tucker in-laws to work for Carter and Moore. Members of the Barron and Tucker families and, in the early days the Carter family, composed a relatively large percentage of the workers at the mill and in auxiliary industries that grew up nearby.

As early as January 1867, Carter and Moore’s mill hands were required by the Smith County Commissioners Court to maintain nearby public roads from Tyler to Garden Valley and Tyler to Canton. By April 1868, the volume of mill business led the Commissioners to approve an application to support the Tyler, Neches, and Garden Valley Road, stating: “the road diverging from the Porters Bluff at Smith A Shelton & running to Moore and Carters Mill be and the Same is hereby [sp] declared to be a Public Road.”

In addition to providing lumber to Tyler and nearby communities, the mill served customers located as far west as Dallas. According to Will Woldert, an early Smith County historian, “The western plains affording no timber naturally, its settlers had to come to [the] nearest locality with their ox and mule teams and haul, sometimes hundreds of miles.”

The Heyday of Mechanicsville: A Forgotten Community Remembered

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Thomas Barron’s brother, John Wood Barron, lived just a few miles from Carter and Moore’s mill. John Barron had arrived in Smith County in 1852 at age twenty, traveling with his wife, infant daughter and Adams in-laws from Coosa County, Alabama. He served in the local Texas 14th Infantry as a teamster during the Civil War and later found there was a need for his skill to transport lumber from the mill to distant customers. He may have been joined on these trips by his neighbor and younger brother, Joseph Smith Barron, who is said to have hauled lumber, probably from Mechanicsville. Ray Cooper’s 1939 article colorfully describes John Barron’s journeys to Dallas:

Mr. Barron found it highly lucrative to make the long haul over the Dallas-Shreveport road. He made many trips to the growing hamlet of Dallas, driving three and sometimes six span of oxen to the immense wagons of the period, loaded with East Texas heart pine lumber. Later, he added flour and furniture to his loads, but that’s getting ahead of our story.

Lumber for the first Methodist church ever built in Dallas was hauled from Mechanicsville in Mr. Barron’s wagons. These trips, old-timers say usually required about three weeks for the round trip. Sometimes three or four wagons made up the train and always the chuck wagon went along. The Texas and Pacific railroad had not yet been built west of Shreveport and the ox wagon’s sole competitor was the Trinity River Waterway.

Naturally freight rates were high and after every trip the comforting jingle of gold coins in his saddle bags compensated mightily for whatever hardships Mr. Barron endured on the trail.

And overhead! — well there wasn’t any hardly, because after being outspanned each day, the oxen promptly refueled themselves off the lush grazing afforded by the prairies of Kaufman and Dallas Counties.

Carter and Moore added to their land and timber holdings through May 1870. But soon afterward they began phasing out their presence in northwest Smith County. As early as autumn 1869, the partners were focused on purchasing timber lands along the Sabine River on the border of Rusk and Smith Counties to begin a new sawmill venture. Perhaps they had depleted the vast pineries near the Neches River and were looking for virgin forests to fell.

Diversification: “a first rate furniture factory”

In August 1869, Carter and Moore sold to Daniel Sanford “Sant” Tucker and John Ceborn Tidwell a small tract of land in the Marshall University headright, located near its eastern border and almost centered between the survey’s north and south boundaries. The two acres was situated at the fork of two roads, one of which was probably the Neches and Garden Valley Road. Tucker and Tidwell acquired more than land from Carter and Moore, also purchasing “all the appurtenances thereunto belonging or in any way appertaining consisting of work shop & residence together with the steam machinery and tools now being used in carrying on the work of the shop.” Tucker and Tidwell were partners in a firm “carrying on a cabinet business,” or in today’s language, a small furniture manufacturing workshop. The partnership between Sant Tucker and John Tidwell formed the foundation of what later became the Mechanicsville Manufacturing Company, one of the largest furniture makers in Texas at that time.

The first known use of the name “Mechanicsville” in conjunction with the community, which encompassed the sawmill and adjunct industries springing up around the mill, is in an agreement dated March 5, 1870. This document created the Mechanicsville Manufacturing Company, a partnership chartered with original furniture-making partners Sant Tucker and John Tidwell and four others: Francis Lang, Robert Eason, William H. Sheppard
and John T. Richardson. The agreement was backdated to January 1, 1870 and was made “for the purpose of carrying on a cabinet and furniture shop at Naches Mills Smith County Texas.” Each partner was to advance equal capital and give undivided attention to the firm. And each was to receive wages according to his mechanical skill and actual work done. Additional employees could be hired as needed to carry on the work of the shop.

Who were these men that joined in a speculative venture to manufacture large quantities of furniture in rural Smith County? All were skilled mechanics and/or cabinetmakers. Several had made names for themselves in Tyler or nearby East Texas counties; others had migrated only recently from Alabama or Mississippi. The 1870 Smith County census enumerates these partners (except John Richardson) on the Garden Valley Beat in a core neighborhood of other families employed in Mechanicsville.

Daniel Sanford “Sant” Tucker, age thirty-nine, was the brother-in-law of mill employee, Thomas Barron. Tucker arrived in Smith County from Coosa County, Alabama, by 1867. He began his partnership with John Tidwell several years later, establishing the original furniture shop on which Mechanicsville Manufacturing Company was based. In August 1870 he purchased an additional forty-five acres from Carter and Moore near the shop location. Tucker was listed twice in the 1870 census within a few pages. Listed as Dan Tucker, Jr., he gave his occupation as house carpenter; under a second enumeration as Daniel Sanford (sic), his occupation was cabinetmaker. These records were collected four days apart. Interestingly, the first listing included partner Robert Eason living in his household; the second shows partner William Sheppard in his home. Robert Stell Eason, age twenty-three and unmarried, was a cabinetmaker born in Georgia; his parents lived a few doors away. Eason had been a member of nearby Carmel Baptist Church in Garden Valley since the mid-1860s.

William H. Sheppard, age thirty-five, from Kentucky and recently married, was well-established in Smith County. He had set up a furniture shop just off the square in Tyler in 1858 and partnered with J. C. Rogers in 1859. In an advertisement in the Tyler Reporter in April 1861, they described themselves as furniture merchants and cabinetmakers with an extensive cabinet shop carrying “a full assortment of Furniture, consisting of Bureaus, Wardrobes, Lounges, Book cases, Cupboards, Sofas, Bedsteads, Washstands, Dining Tables, Toilet tables, and every description of Furniture usually found in the country.” Sheppard’s work was interrupted by service in the Civil War when he enlisted in the Douglas Battery in June 1861. He served in the Battery with Joseph Smith Barron, who family tradition indicates later worked as a teamster at Mechanicsville. In January 1862, Sheppard granted power of attorney to his partner, J.C. Rogers. The document was witnessed by James P. Douglas, leader of the Douglas Battery. Sheppard was paroled May 13, 1865.

Soon after the war, Sheppard and Nath. C. Hall formed a new business in Tyler, describing themselves as cabinet workmen and architects. Their shop was located on the public square. In a July 4, 1866 advertisement in the Tyler Reporter, the partners offered plain furniture, house building or finishing, or other architectural work. However, by 1868, Sheppard apparently had rejoined his old pre-war partner, J.C. Rogers. The Texas Republican newspaper, published in Marshall, Texas, noted on March 21, 1868, that “on the morning of the 5th inst. the furniture shop of Shepherd & Rogers was consumed by fire. It contained a considerable amount of furniture. Loss
from 12 to $1500.” Perhaps this disaster influenced Sheppard to join in the Mechanicsville endeavor, but his partnership with Rogers may have continued at least until 1871.

The 1870 census gives the occupation of **John Tidwell**, Sant Tucker’s original partner, as cabinetmaker. Tidwell, age thirty-four, had experienced tragedy as a young child. Born in Georgia in 1835, he moved with his family to the Stroud Settlement on the Brazos River in Robertson County, Texas, in 1837. In July 1840, Indians raided the homestead, killed his father and took him, his mother, brother, and baby sister captive. His sister sickened and died. After three months, the remaining family members were ransomed by Tidwell’s uncle from Arkansas. Tidwell lived with his uncle’s family for most of his youth. He returned to Texas when a young man and married Christopher B. Carter’s niece, Frances Elizabeth, in Cherokee County in 1866. By 1869, they had joined Carter in Smith County. Tidwell witnessed Carter’s will, written September 29, 1869.

Passed down in Tidwell’s family is an old ladderback chair with a leather seat. Family tradition says the chair was made by Tidwell’s slaves. However, no records indicate that Tidwell ever owned slaves. The Tidwell descendants were unaware that their ancestor was a furniture maker himself. Perhaps this family heirloom was made by Tidwell.

Partner **John T. Richardson**, age thirty-six, was born in North Carolina, moved to Mississippi in the 1850s, and worked as a wagon maker in Attala County during the 1860 census. He arrived in Texas sometime after 1866 and settled in the city of Tyler by the 1870 census, where his occupation was given as carriage maker. Richardson was the only one of the six partners who did not live on the Garden Valley Beat near the mill and workshop. However, he did purchase land in the vicinity. In September 1870, Richardson and Sant Tucker took possession of 140 acres of the M.L. Gregg survey, just east of Mechanicsville.

**Francis Lang**, the oldest of the partners at age fifty, was perhaps the most colorful. Ray Cooper wrote that he was “variously described as a ‘funny-talking German’ or ‘some other kind of furriner’ [who] drove into Mechanicsville with not a great deal of worldly goods but possessed of a marvelous aptitude for furniture making.” Born in Germany, Lang immigrated to America through the port of New Orleans in 1838. He first appeared in Harrison County, Texas, tax records in 1854. By 1857, he had purchased lots located a block from the public square in the town of Marshall, where he opened the Marshall Steam Turning Mill, described as a “Chair and Furniture Manufactory.” His 1859 advertisement in the *Texas Republican* (Marshall) newspaper announced that he had “an ample supply of the best seasoned timber for the manufacture of the various kinds of Furniture, and that he has procured the services of the best Cabinet Makers in the country.” Further, his shop kept on hand a supply of chairs and bedsteads, washstands and tables, safes and wardrobes.

In the 1860 census, Lang’s occupation was given as “furniture m.” Living in the same household were three men with occupation identified as “micanic” and three others as clerk, all from various European countries. Lang’s family lived next door to his shop in a home built by blacksmith Albert Arnot in 1848. The house is now on the National Register of Historic Places and is the oldest residential structure standing in Marshall. While living in Marshall, Lang was known as an accomplished musician as well as a skilled furniture maker.

Lang apparently joined the Texas 14th Infantry during the Civil War, though he served in a different company from two men with whom he would later associate in Mechanicsville. Could acquaintance with John Barron and
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Jesse Human in the Texas 14th Infantry have influenced Lang’s decision to move to Smith County when his furniture shop in Marshall failed after the war?

Lang first appeared in Smith County records in spring 1868, when he filed for bankruptcy. In December of that same year, his business lots in Marshall were publicly sold to pay holders of his mortgages. By 1870, the Lang family was living in Smith County on the Garden Valley Beat in close proximity to others employed at Mechanicsville. Lang soon purchased the bulk of Carter and Moore’s property surrounding the sawmill and shop.

The 1870 census listed Lang’s occupation as farmer. This description may seem rather odd, but in their book, Texas Furniture, The Cabinetmakers and Their Work, 1840-1880, published in 1975, Lonn Taylor and David B. Warren provide insight into the lives of rural furniture makers:

Since the economy of rural Texas was less specialized than that of the cities, many East Texas cabinetmakers did more than make furniture…. Most rural Texas cabinetmakers owned and worked farms…. As farmers they built barns, repaired tools, fixed harnesses, and performed the diverse chores required to manage an unmechanized farm…. Some East Texas cabinetmakers doubled as carpenters, framing, raising, and roofing their neighbors’ houses as well as making furniture to go in them. A few were not only craftsmen but also mechanics – men who understood the intricacies of machines with moving parts.

In this passage Taylor and Warren also provide a plausible explanation for the naming of Mechanicsville Manufacturing Company and the community of Mechanicsville. In the mid-1800s, the term “mechanic” was commonly used to describe artisans skilled in using tools to produce or repair structures or products.  

Information gleaned from the 1870 census Products of Industry schedule bears out the significance of the Mechanicsville furniture making venture. The schedule recorded only those manufacturers reporting annual product values over $500. The Mechanicsville Manufacturing Company was listed on the schedule under the name of partner William Sheppard. The operation was the only cabinet shop of this size identified in Smith County and, though there were five large sawmills enumerated in Smith County, Sheppard’s was the only one listed on the Garden Valley beat.

At the time, the sawmill employed just one man at $250 for four months of the year. Using one circular saw powered by steam, the mill processed pine, gum, oak, and ash logs worth $1500 into 100,000 feet of lumber valued at $2000. The twenty-five horsepower steam engine was shared between the mill and furniture operation, with ten horsepower devoted to the mill and fifteen horsepower devoted to the shop.

The furniture shop operated year-round. From the census schedule it appears that Mechanicsville Manufacturing Company may have been the most highly mechanized cabinet business in Texas, in terms of number of machines. Power from the large steam engine operated the furniture shop’s four lathes, two boring machines, and one “tenant” (perhaps a tenoning machine for use in creating mortise and tenon joints). Ten men were employed, using pine, gum, hickory, and pin oak valued at $3,000 to produce furniture valued at $5,500. Unfortunately, the quantity of furniture pieces crafted at Mechanicsville was not shown (the 1870 Products of Industry schedule states “no record”). Using information from the census schedule provided by furniture shops in other Texas counties, it is estimated that the Mechanicsville operation may have produced from five hundred to as many as one thousand pieces of furniture that year.

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The shop had a capital investment of $2000 and a total annual payroll of $1125. The 1870 Smith County tax records list “Mechanicksville Manfctg Co” with two acres of land (the property purchased by the earlier partnership of Tucker and Tidwell from Carter and Moore) valued at $4,400. This valuation was significant for such a small tract, indicating that machinery and equipment were included for taxation purposes.

Most Texas furniture making businesses in 1870 were small and hand- or horse-powered. Of the fifty-seven cabinet making shops in Texas with furniture output values of $500 or more, only six shops employed more than three men and only four shops generated power by steam. When compared to most of these businesses, the Mechanicsville Manufacturing Company is better described as a primitive furniture making factory. That year, its steam engine was the largest used in furniture manufacturing in Texas. Further, the factory operated the most machines in producing furniture. Only one other Texas furniture shop employed more hands on its payroll.

With such an array of talent and equipment at the newly formed Mechanicsville Manufacturing Company, even the Dallas Herald newspaper, in an item borrowed from the Tyler Reporter, declared in its August 6, 1870 issue, “Smith County can boast of having a first rate furniture factory.”

Mechanicsville is known to have produced beds, chairs, dressers, tables, wardrobes, sideboards, and other essential furniture pieces for homes in nearby communities. Unlike lumber from the mills, which could be transported more than one hundred miles on poor roads traversed by mule or oxen drawn wagons, finished furniture could not withstand the hard handling. So furniture makers during this period usually did not ship their product for long distances, but more often served local markets. By 1872, the Tyler, Neches, and Garden Valley Road, which had been designated a public road to the Carter and Moore sawmill four years earlier, was referred to as the “Road from Smith Shelton’s to Mechanicsville.” This road and the Tyler and Canton New Road (a portion of which was sometimes called the Mechanicsville Road) provided direct access for Mechanicsville’s products to Tyler.

Ray Cooper wrote that Mechanicsville furniture was solid wood (unlike the veneer pieces mass-produced in large industrial cities of the Midwest) and described its construction as “so ingeniously dovetailed and put together with wooden pegs as to be almost indestructible.” Unfortunately, few pieces appear to have survived. Since Mechanicsville Manufacturing Company apparently did not mark its furniture with a logo, known pieces are identified only by family tradition. Pictured below are three Mechanicsville chairs.

The only known pieces of Mechanicsville furniture are these three chairs. See footnote seven below for details.
Heyday: “formed a ‘settlement’”

From 1870 to perhaps 1875 was the heyday of Mechanicsville. Settlers with skills other than logging timber and creating furniture established new industries nearby, taking advantage of unused power from the mill’s steam engine. Albert Woldert’s 1948 A History of Tyler & Smith County, Texas, describes early Mechanicsville: “At first a shed was built and then later a frame building was erected. The factory and sawmill, together with perhaps a dozen frame houses, formed a ‘settlement.’” Ray Cooper’s newspaper article, based on reminiscences of local old-timers, told of a flour and grist mill, two tanneries and a shoe making shop, a school, and a Methodist church. Cooper stated that there were several feeble attempts to open general stores, but the mill and shop ran a commissary and required hands to buy their merchandise there.

A flour and grist mill was an early part of Carter and Moore’s sawmill operation. Other sources indicate that Sant Tucker operated the grist mill for a time, followed by Francis Lang

The tanneries were owned by William H. Herrin (or Herring) and Seldon McSpadden. Cooper states that Herrin’s was the larger and that his pool of clear water was used by the local church for baptisms. In 1868 and 1869, Smith County Commissioners Court minutes instructed the hands at “Herrings Tanyard” to maintain a portion of the Tyler and Canton road from Prairie Creek to the Smith / Van Zandt county line. Herrin, age thirty-five, lived in the midst of the Mechanicsville workers during the 1870 census.

Thomas Seldon McSpadden, age forty-three, owner of the second tannery, was married to Nancy Caroline Tucker Barron, sister of Sant Tucker, and widow of Jeremiah Barron, brother of Thomas, John, and Joseph. Several sources state that for a brief time McSpadden operated a sawmill in the Mechanicsville vicinity. The 1870 Smith County tax records indicate that McSpadden may have joined with Jesse Gray Human, a shoe and boot maker, in a partnership, McSpadden & Human. The arrangement would have made sense: McSpadden providing the leather for Human’s boots and shoes. Human had grown up in a cobbler’s home and according to family stories, during his service in the Texas 14th Infantry he made shoes for soldiers. The 1870 census shows Human, age thirty, living near other Mechanicsville workers. In his household was a Norwegian by the name of Andrew Ulstrap, employed as a tanner.
Albid Nigh Bauman, age thirty-eight, a mechanic, blacksmith, and woodworker from Tennessee, settled on the northern portion of the Marshall University survey in 1869, adjacent to Carter and Moore’s land. In the 1870 census, Bauman’s occupation was given as wagon maker. On his property, which straddled a road through Mechanicsville, he operated a twenty-by-forty-foot workshop. Like most of his neighbors, he also farmed, growing cotton as a cash crop. In several deeds, dating as early as 1871, he identified himself as being “of Mechanicsville.” Bauman struggled financially, first mortgaging his land in 1873 to Williams and Bonner, attorneys in Tyler, and selling the property to them in 1875. In this transaction, Bauman reserved one fourth of an acre to include the grave of his first wife, Rebecca. Family tradition says that Rebecca died in childbirth and her child was buried with her. The grave is marked by a stone with the name “Rebecca [sp] Bauman, born Apr 6, 1836, died May 12, 1873.” A barely decipherable inscription reads “A devoted wife and Mother and a lover of the Lord Jesus.”
Neighbors later used this plot of ground as a community cemetery. There are a number of unmarked graves. Many members of the Robbs family, more recent residents of the area, were interred there and it has been called Robbs Cemetery for some years, though a wooden sign with the name Bauman currently hangs from the cemetery fence. Today, this vantage point overlooks the former site of Mechanicsville—now pasture land to the south and east, with dense stands of trees hiding the ravine cut by Terrapin Creek.

Economic Decline: “drive away every…mechanic who comes amongst us”

Despite the cabinetmaking abilities of the partners at Mechanicsville Manufacturing Company, it seems that the venture was never successful. By November 1871, Francis Lang became the only remaining original partner when William Sheppard sold his portion of the business. For $718.41, the agreement conveyed Sheppard’s title and interest in the firm, now called Lang, Sheppard & Company, “doing business in the manufacture of furniture at Mechanicksville [sp],” to Lang and a new partner, James D. Campbell. One of the witnesses was Sant Tucker.

Francis Lang apparently purchased all of the property and equipment used in the Mechanicsville mill and furniture operations. In June 1872, he took out a mortgage for $2743.77 at the exorbitant rate of twenty percent interest. Lang’s surety consisted of the two acres Carter and Moore had sold to Tucker and Tidwell in 1869, “on which the cabinet & mechanic shop is built,” plus almost 500 additional acres of the Marshall University survey, “together with all the improvements, steam engine & boiler, machinery, machine shops, saw mill, grist mill and all the tools on the premises used for mechanic purposes, all of which items afo. [afore said] are on the premises.” The mortgage must not have improved his financial situation. By 1873, two court cases were brought against Lang and J.D. Campbell (and William Sheppard in one instance) for unpaid debts of several hundreds of dollars. The defendants did not appear in court, defaulting on their debts. Perhaps the furniture factory was already failing by that time.

Smith County tax records document the existence of Mechanicsville Manufacturing Company for only two years: 1870 and 1873. In 1873, “Mechanicsville Co” owned one acre valued at $1000, down from the two acres at $4,400 mentioned in 1870.

Most of the original partners and other men who had worked at the shop drifted away, looking for new opportunities in other parts of Texas.

By August 1871, original partner John Tidwell had separated from his wife, Elizabeth, and their children, as she was teaching school in Cherokee County. According to family tradition, her father, Jesse M. Carter, who was a hard-shell Baptist minister, was not pleased with his son-in-law’s free and easy ways: Tidwell loved to play the fiddle at dances and parties. Carter had succeeded in driving a wedge between Tidwell and his wife and finally “ran him off.” In 1872 Cherokee County, Tidwell signed over his right to inherited property to his father-in-law. During the 1880 census, Tidwell was boarding with a household in Bell County, Texas, and working as a carpenter. He later moved back to Arkansas, where he remarried. The Battle Book (by Herman Bemerton Battle, 1930), states that he died in Fayetteville, Arkansas, in 1886, at age fifty-one.

Robert Eason continued to live in Smith County through 1878, during which time he was appointed a constable in Precinct Five. However, by the 1880 census, he was located in Wood County, Texas, listed just seven pages from another former Mechanicsville partner, J.D. Campbell. Eason’s census occupation was described as “getting wood.” Campbell was working as a “clerk in store.” Eason apparently continued to reside in Wood
County, where he died before 1900. Campbell may have remained in Wood County, but was hired by Smith County as late as 1884 to build a bridge just north of Garden Valley on the road to Mineola.

John T. Richardson moved his family to Palestine, Anderson County, Texas, where he was working as a carpenter in 1880. Sadly, by 1900, J.T. Richardson, age sixty-five, former carpenter, was listed among over one thousand patients in the North Texas Hospital for the Insane, located in Terrell, Kaufman County, Texas.

William Sheppard apparently moved back to Tyler after opting out of the furniture factory partnership. There, he may have resumed his longstanding arrangement with J.C. Rogers. By January 1873, this partnership had evidently dissolved. Rogers had moved to Van Zandt County, and he and Sheppard agreed to divide their former shop location, lot 10 in Tyler, between them. Sheppard sold his half of the lot in November 1874. In May of that year, Sheppard advertised in the Tyler Reporter his new solo business as undertaker and cabinet workman. He promised to furnish coffins at greatly reduced prices, to manufacture sashes and doors, and to repair all kinds of furniture. The skilled furniture maker was reduced to undertaking and carpentry, no longer able to make his living by handcrafting furniture in Smith County. Sheppard appeared on the Smith County tax rolls through 1875. The 1880 census recorded that Sheppard had moved west to Hunt County, Texas, where his occupation was given as cabinetmaker.

Francis Lang was remembered by old-timers as the promoter of the Mechanicsville furniture factory, continuing the operation as his partners dropped out. But he faced personal, as well as financial, woes. In 1874, his young son Theodore died. According to Ray Cooper’s 1939 newspaper article:

> Mr. Lang elected to bury Theodore in his back yard, which his neighbors thought was almighty queer. Notwithstanding, there was a Methodist Church in Mechanicsville, the family didn’t use it on this said occasion. A Catholic service at the grave, coupled with Mr. Lang’s explanation that he was burying “Tee-o-die” where he could always be close to him, further substantiated the belief on the part of his Protestant neighbors that the simple old German was slightly “teched in the haid.”

Lang’s intentions to stay in Mechanicsville near his beloved son did not work out. In early 1878, Lang sold the Mechanicsville property to W. S. Herndon, a prominent Tyler lawyer and politician. Today, a broken stone, with a large cross carved above the inscription, marks Teddy Lang’s grave on a lonely ridge in a private pasture south of the Bauman (Robbs) Cemetery. The inscription reads: “Theodore Lang, son of F. & F. Lang, born Jan 9, 1866, died Nov 3, 1874.”

During the 1880 census, “F. Lang” and family were living in the household of Isaac Wells of Van Zandt County. Lang’s occupation was listed as mechanic. Lang appeared in Van Zandt County tax lists in 1881 and 1882. The family moved to Kaufman County and later to Muenster, a German Catholic colony founded in 1889 in Cooke County.
County. Lang died sometime before the 1900 census, as his wife Fredericka was recorded as living in Dallas with
dughter Mollie Averitt.

Of the Mechanicsville Manufacturing partners, only Sant Tucker remained in the area. Tucker and his
extended family lived out their lives a few miles from the old Mechanicsville community. He sold his remaining
property in the vicinity of Mechanicsville to George McSpadden in April 1873. Tucker’s brother, Jerry, purchased
the land from McSpadden in 1875, holding the property until 1894.

Why did the Mechanicsville furniture factory fail? One story told by several writers in the 1930s and ’40s
describes a massive fire that swept through the forest and destroyed the factory. But no contemporary documents
support this tale. Indeed, the loose community of Mechanicsville, including its church and school remained active
for another twenty years. 8

A more likely explanation centers on the coming of the railroad to Smith County, bringing cheap competition
in the form of mass-produced furniture from the Midwest. Rail service to Tyler began in 1873 and to Lindale by
1875, allowing delivery of inexpensive furniture to Mechanicsville’s closest markets. Two telling editorials
appeared in the August 15, 1874 Tyler Democrat newspaper, expressing dismay that the population of Tyler was
“under some peculiar obligation to kill out and drive away every manufacturer and mechanic who comes amongst
us, and pour our money into the gaping pockets of foreign yankees…..” The paper exhorted its readers to buy goods
from local industries:

The mechanic who is already amongst us, or who may come here, must be supported and
encouraged in his enterprise. Instead of going to distant markets, and purchasing the very articles
which he makes better at our doors, we ought to be willing to pay home manufacturers even better
prices, knowing that the money we thus spend will soon come back to us again, in the regular
course of circulation and trade.

The pleas to support “home industries” fell on deaf ears. Lonn Taylor and David Warren, in their book Texas
Furniture, The Cabinetmakers and Their Work, 1840-1880, indicate that the fate of local furniture makers such as
the Mechanicsville Manufacturing Company and its founders was common throughout Texas. Due to the influx by
rail of cheaper goods from urban manufacturers, “in the mid-1870’s [small-town Texas craftsmen] gave up and
became farmers, furniture dealers and repairmen, or (because of their coffin-building abilities) undertakers.”

No documentation has been discovered regarding the closing of the Mechanicsville furniture factory. But the
operation must have shut down prior to Francis Lang’s sale of the property in January 1878—perhaps several years
earlier. By September 1879, local residents had petitioned the Smith County Commissioners Court to discontinue
that portion of the Tyler and Mechanicsville Road west of Mechanicsville to the county line.

Neither Mechanicsville’s furniture shop nor its sawmill was found on Smith County’s 1880 Products of
Industry census schedule, which recorded manufacturers with products valued at $500 or greater. In fact, there were
no furniture makers listed in Smith County and only two sawmills (a decrease from the five sawmills noted in the
1870 schedule).

Other Mechanicsville businesses closed. Seldon McSpadden, owner of one of the tanneries, and Jesse
Human, who used the leather to craft shoes, left the county before 1880. McSpadden moved to Wood County,
where he began a sawmill operation about 1879. Human settled in Tarrant County. Both were identified as farmers on the 1880 census.

Albid Bauman, whose first wife, Rebecca, was buried on a ridge overlooking Mechanicsville, left Smith County in 1875, living for a while in Van Zandt and then Kaufman County. He returned to Smith before 1880, but settled in Upshur County by 1885. He later operated a repair, blacksmith, and woodworking shop in Mineola. Bauman died there in 1891.

Memories: “people came from miles around”

Others stayed on. The Barron brothers still farmed in nearby New Harmony and William Herrin, one-time owner of Mechanicsville’s larger tannery, moved his family just a few miles south to Noonday.

Though Mechanicsville’s furniture shop had closed, its church and school continued their service to the community. The school roster in the 1880s and 1890s included students with surnames of Tucker, Robbs, Dowell, and Wagner. Extant records indicate enrollment averaged about twenty students.

According to Ray Cooper, during this time “Mechanicsville attained considerable importance from an educational and social standpoint. The school and church were the scenes of many gatherings when people came from miles around to attend camp meetings or singing school.”

In 1886, Methodist preacher C. H. Smith reported to the Texas Christian Advocate: “The Lord is doing great things for us on Lindale circuit, East Texas Conference.” A July revival meeting in “McComicksville” (sic) had resulted in twenty-two professions of religion and fifteen accessions to the church.

A tragedy during one of the gatherings lingered in residents’ memories for many years. Mick Ferrell, who lived in nearby Mount Sylvan, traveled throughout the region conducting singing schools that were popular with young people of the communities as both social events and opportunities to learn and enjoy music. A school was underway at Mechanicsville on the evening of July 22, 1891. The organist was Miss Onie Tucker of Mount Sylvan, a niece of original Mechanicsville furniture partner, Sant Tucker. Her father was Jerry Tucker, who happened to own most of the old Mechanicsville property, having purchased it from lawyer W. S. Herndon earlier that year.

Onie was sixteen years old and engaged to Verner Davidson of Edom. In a letter to Onie the previous week, Verner had written that “We will set the time to marry the next time we get to talk…” and mentioned meeting on Friday after next [the 24th]. But Verner never saw Onie again. As related by Ray Cooper, “On the night of the singing class, …Miss Onie was seated at the old-fashioned organ as Mr. Ferrell led the singing. One of the group, in turning the sheet music for her, accidentally tipped over a kerosene lamp. In an instant she was covered with flaming oil. She lived but a few hours.”

Onie was buried in Mount Sylvan Cemetery. Her stone was inscribed: “Onie Tucker (dau of Jerry & Laura Tucker) d. July 22, 1891, aged 16 yrs. 8 mo 5 da. Erected to the memory of Miss Onie Tucker by the music class at Mechanicsville, Smith Co. Texas.”

Doubtless Verner never forgot Onie. But in 1894, he wooed and wed Onie’s younger sister, Mattie Wilmoth Tucker. Verner and Willie were married for thirty-five years and had five children. One daughter, Onie Wilmoth, was named for both his wife and her older sister. Verner’s courtship letters to Onie remain in the family.
Mechanicsville soon ceased to function as a community. It is not known when the Methodist church closed its doors. The school continued classes at least through 1896 and likely closed sometime before 1901, probably sending its students to nearby Mount Sylvan.

Today, Mechanicsville cannot even be considered a ghost town, as so little remains. The shops, houses, school, and church are gone. But the careful observer can uncover vestiges of Mechanicsville’s past. Rebecca Bauman’s weathered stone still stands in the Bauman (Robbs) Cemetery. With directions from the property owner and persistence, the grave of young Teddy Lang may be located in a pasture south of the cemetery. And it is said that if you know where to look, you can find rusty remnants of mill equipment and, on a nearby hill, a few rocks that mark the site of the Mechanicsville school.

The memories of Mechanicsville have dimmed with the passing of time and generations. But forgotten pieces of furniture, as well as clues about the devastating fire or the long-abandoned church and school, may still exist in homes of Mechanicsville’s scattered descendants, waiting to be recovered from hidden corners of closets and attics.

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August 2008

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This map of a section of northwest Smith County, TX, shows the location of the remnants of Mechanicsville: the Mechanicsville or Bauman or Robbs Cemetery and Teddy Lang’s grave (marked by the gray box in the upper left).
1 The Tyler, Neches and Garden Valley Road was described in the Smith County Commissioners Court minutes of April 1868 as “diverging from the Porters Bluff [Road] at Smith A Shelton & running to Moore and Carters Mill.” When $200 was appropriated in August 1872 for a bridge over Lower Black Fork Creek, this route was identified as the “Road from Smith Shelton’s to Mechanicsville.”

The roadbed of Highway 64 west of Tyler closely follows what was once called the Porters Bluff Road. Smith Shelton owned the William Gordon survey, located near the present day intersection of Highway 64 and FM 724. It is a reasonable assumption that much of the old Tyler, Neches and Garden Valley Road was incorporated into present-day FM 724: winding from its intersection with Highway 64, over Verner Hill, crossing Black Fork Creek, and through the New Harmony community before branching off west across Davis Branch (Terrapin Creek) toward Mechanicsville.

After 1872, the Commissioners Court minutes made no further mention of this road using the names “Tyler, Neches and Garden Valley” or “the road from Smith Shelton’s to Mechanicsville.” However, the description of Verner Road in 1876 indicates that it may have approximated a portion of the same route, commencing at Smith Shelton’s on the Porter’s Bluff Road, extending across Black Fork Creek, and ending at Davis Branch (which flowed near Mechanicsville), where it joined the Tyler and Canton New Road.

The Tyler and Canton New Road apparently also ran through Mechanicsville. Will Woldert described its route in his unpublished manuscript: “A lower road branched off to the left from the main Mt. Sylvan road [today’s Highway 110] when it was about 5 miles W. from Tyler, which branch road was known as the ‘Mechanicsville’ road, and passed this place when about 13 miles from Tyler, going on and crossing the Neches river over the old ‘Stell’ crossing at about 14 miles NW from Tyler, passing just N. of the ‘Marr’s Lakes’ immediately after crossing the river, and continued on into Vanzandt [sic] county points.” This description closely mirrors specifics given regarding the Tyler and Canton New Road in the Commissioners Court minutes. In fact, a road request change in the February 1892 session was headed “Tyler and Canton New Road, Mechanicsville Division.”

2 Several sources, including A History of Greater Dallas and Vicinity, Volume 1, by contemporary Dallas lawyer Philip Lindsley, Adolphus Wherry’s History of the First Methodist Church, Dallas, Texas, 1846-1946, and a May 27, 1867 letter written by another Dallas lawyer, John C. McCoy, indicate that the first Methodist house of worship in Dallas was erected in 1867/1868. Previously, the congregation met in the local Masonic hall. The church building was frame and according to Lindsley was built of pine. These facts lend some credence to the claim that lumber from Carter and Moore’s mill may have been used in the church’s construction.

3 In August 1870, Christopher B. Carter and William J. Moore sold much of their property surrounding Mechanicsville: 45 acres were purchased by Sant Tucker and 403 ¼ acres by Francis Lang. Carter and Moore turned full attention to their new sawmill operation located thirty miles northwest of Henderson, near Camp’s Ferry, in what was then a part of Rusk County. This area south of the Sabine River was given to newly-formed Gregg County in 1874.

Except for the period of July 1872 through July 1874, when Moore sold out his interest to John H. Wilkins of Gregg County, Carter and Moore’s partnership endured for a decade. In his will, written in September 1869, Carter described Moore as “my esteemed friend.”

In September 1875, William J. Moore deeded his half interest in land and the sawmill operation to Christopher Carter and left the East Texas piney woods for the prairies of Somervell County. Moore resided in
Glen Rose until 1879, moved to Parker County for a few years and then to Tarrant County by 1885. Carter
continued in the lumber business in Gregg County, partnering with John H. Wilkins (1872 through 1874), James T.
Lantrip (1876) and later doing business under the names “C. B. Carter & Son,” “Carter & Co.” and “C. B. Carter &
Brother.” The company logged and operated a large sawmill at Carter’s Mill, six miles west of Longview near the
site of present White Oak, and expanded operations into Upshur County. By 1879, Carter moved his family to
Kaufman County and added the Carter Lumber Company in Terrell to his business. He died there of pneumonia on
February 23, 1880. Carter’s wife and sons continued the lumber operation for a number of years, buying and
selling land for timber in Gregg and Upshur Counties. The company had become insolvent by 1890 and
discontinued operation. In 1897, to pay its indebtedness of $20,000 to the Ninth National Bank of Dallas, the
family signed over its lands and equipment in Gregg, Upshur and several other counties.

4 Carter and Moore’s mill may have been known as “Neches Mills” prior to the charter of Mechanicsville
Manufacturing Company in 1870. As early as April 1868, the County Commissioners Court had designated the
Neches and Garden Valley Road as a public thoroughfare. And the 1870 Mechanicsville Manufacturing Company
agreement indicated that the furniture shop was located at “Naches (sp) Mills.”

5 In Ray Cooper’s newspaper article, old-timers attributed the name Mechanicsville to Carter and Moore,
specifically describing it as their Alabama hometown. This seems quite unlikely, especially since several records
indicate that at the time they owned the mill, it probably went by the name of Neches Mills. Further, Carter
apparently never lived in Alabama, and no evidence has yet been found that Carter and Moore were acquainted
before their arrival in Texas.

6 Workers at the mill and shop in addition to the partners likely included Thomas J. Barron, John A. P. Tucker,
Frederick Bossman, James D. Campbell, Joseph Hall, John Browning, and Robert Greer. All of these men lived in
close proximity to Mechanicsville and are known to have been mechanics, engineers, or cabinetmakers.

Thomas Barron’s occupation on the 1870 census was farm laborer, but he was identified as a mechanic on
the 1860 census. And the newspaper article written by Ray Cooper contained a picture of a child’s chair that Barron
made at the mill for his nephew.

John Tucker was described as a cabinetmaker on the census. This younger brother of Sant Tucker moved to
Smith County from Coosa County, Alabama, in the fall of 1869.

Frederick Bossman was living in the household of Francis Lang in the 1870 census and was described as a
house carpenter.

Joseph Hall was brother-in-law to Sant and John Tucker and likely arrived in Smith County with others of
the Tucker family in late 1869. His occupation was engineer, the same title given to William J. Moore, who was a
logging expert. So Hall may not have worked in the furniture operation, but may have been employed by the
sawmill.

The occupation of John Browning and Robert Greer was recorded as cabinetmaker on the 1870 Smith
County census, Garden Valley beat.

James Campbell, age thirty-six, who had arrived from Georgia after 1866, lived near the known mechanics at
the mill, but his occupation in the census was given as farmer. However, Will Woldert identified Campbell as a
worker at the furniture shop and a November 1871 debt case listed Campbell as a partner with Francis Lang.
Campbell was taxed for 320 acres of the J. B. B. Martin headright, formerly owned by Carter and Moore, beginning
in 1871.
Will Woldert also named Henry Gradick, J. Carroll Rogers, and George W. Abernathy as mechanics at Mechanicsville. These men were not living in the neighborhood during the 1870 census. Gradick was enumerated in the industrial community of Etna in both the 1870 and 1880 censuses. J. Carroll Rogers was the partner of William Sheppard for an extended period. He resided in Tyler, as evidenced by census and tax records. George Abernathy, age sixteen, was living with his father, Henry, a cabinetmaker in Starrville in the 1870 census. Though these men were all mechanics or cabinetmakers, there is no other evidence currently known placing these men at Mechanicsville.

7 A child’s chair made by Thomas Barron was pictured in Ray Cooper’s 1939 *Tyler Courier-Times-Telegraph* article about Mechanicsville. The whereabouts of this chair is unknown. Another Mechanicsville chair is a ladderback rocker that has remained in the Dowell family for generations. Peter Dowell lived near the furniture factory in the 1870s. This rocker now is owned by his great granddaughter, Mary Westberry Davis, who still resides in the old homeplace. The third chair is also a rocker, but of a different and more elaborate design, owned by Dorothy Boynton Clark of Mt. Sylvan. Her grandmother was a Denman, related to J. W. Denman, who co-owned the Mechanicsville property in the 1890s.

8 Tyler newspapers from this time period have been lost. No reference to the Mechanicsville fire has been found in Marshall or Dallas papers. Will Woldert’s unpublished manuscript, perhaps dating from the first two decades of the twentieth century, made no mention of a fire either.

However, Ray Cooper’s 1939 newspaper article and Albert Woldert’s 1948 book, *A History of Tyler & Smith County, Texas*, both indicated that a conflagration consumed Mechanicsville while it was “a thriving settlement.” Cooper identified the time frame as a year or two after Teddy Lang’s death in 1874. “Fire swept over 2,500 acres of virgin pine and, though hundreds of men battled the flames for two days and nights, when the holocaust was passed, Mechanicsville lay in ashes,” Cooper wrote. “Built close together as they were—to utilize the central power plant—the furniture factory, flour mill and saw mill all went up in smoke. They were never rebuilt.” Theses on the history of Smith County written by Edna Hatcher and William R. Ward in the early 1940s refer only to the burning of the furniture factory, not to an extensive fire in the vicinity, and neither provide a date for the blaze.

If a fire did occur, it may have burned the shop and sawmill at a much later time—after Mechanicsville’s heyday. Francis Lang’s 1878 deed of the Mechanicsville property to W. S. Herndon included “two acres of land … on which the Cabinet and Machine Shop is built …,” wording which may indicate that the furniture shop still existed. G. T. McSpadden contracted with Herndon to buy what was “known as the Francis Lang place” in 1886, but failed to pay. Herndon then sold the land to J. W. Denman and J. A. Tucker on February 2, 1891. The next day, McSpadden sold half interest to Tucker in “Engine & boiler 3 yoke oxen wagons utinsels (sp) Lumber timber chains & everything appertaining to and about saw mill in vicinity of Mechanicsville Smith County texas including saw mill fixtures.” If this was the old equipment from Lang’s sawmill, then the mill, or at least its machinery, had survived the presumed time of Mechanicsville’s fire by more than a decade.

Publication note: An earlier version of this article was published by *Chronicles of Smith County, Texas*, vol. 43, 2004. Additional material and photographs have been incorporated into this revised and expanded article.

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Appendix:

“Carter and Moore”
A second look at the partnership that founded Mechanicsville

Christopher Bennett Carter and William Jackson Moore were introduced in the article, “The Heyday of Mechanicsville: A Forgotten Community Remembered”. New information provides additional insight into the partnership of “Carter and Moore” as well as the later years of these entrepreneurs.

Mechanicsville revisited

The era of Reconstruction was underway when C. B. Carter and W. J. Moore forged a partnership to furnish pine lumber to growing towns in East Texas and west to the prairies. Their first logging camp and sawmill began operation in 1865 and were situated in northwest Smith County, a few miles from Mount Sylvan, at a site later known as “Mechanicsville.” The partners invested in a large steam engine and with its excess capacity powered a gristmill on-site. Lumber was sold at the mill site for about one dollar per hundred feet, or was delivered by wagon over primitive roads, mostly to local customers. For more distant deliveries to the prairies, a resident of Kaufman County reported that traders charged three dollars per hundred feet for lumber from East Texas mills, payable in specie or grain. No paper currency was accepted.

Over the next five years artisans and craftsmen—“mechanics” they were called—were drawn to the community by the availability of steam power. These newcomers opened furniture-making, tanning, and shoemaking businesses. (See their story in “The Heyday of Mechanicsville: A Forgotten Community Remembered.”)

During this period Chris Carter directed in his will “that should I die before the present partnership between myself and W. J. Moore in the Steam Saw Mill and Grist Mill business expires or is dissolved” the business should be handled “for the interest of my Estate as well as the interest of my esteemed friend and present partner.” Carter outlived his 1869 will by ten years and his partnership with Jack Moore endured until 1875.

By 1870, the new industries were flourishing and the little settlement was christened “Mechanicsville.” But the available timber was rapidly being depleted. Lumbermen Carter and Moore sold their land holdings and some equipment to the mechanics for farms and businesses and moved east to virgin forest for a new venture.

A new venture

In a Smith County deed dated January 18, 1870, Carter and Moore purchased eight hundred acres of the W. W. Avery League (a land grant equivalent to 4428.4 acres) for their second logging and sawmill operation. The property was “located partly in Smith County and partly in Rusk County” on the Sabine River near Camp’s Ferry Road and including Camp’s Ferry, about twenty four miles northeast of Tyler. Camp’s Ferry was situated in Rusk County (this area became a part of Gregg County in 1874), just east of the Smith County line, on the road from Tyler to Marshall. The ferry crossed the Sabine River a short distance downstream from the present US Highway 271 bridge.
The partners expanded their land holdings to more than one thousand acres by purchasing additional tracts in the Avery League in Rusk County. As in Mechanicsville, their business consisted of both a sawmill and a gristmill and included a steam boiler and engine, blacksmith tools, two log carts, two log wagons, three road wagons, one saw dust cart, fifty head stock hogs, cows, eleven yoke of oxen, plus two boarding houses for the mill hands.

In July 1872, Jack Moore sold his half interest in the partnership to John H. Wilkins, a forty-two-year-old native Georgian, who had moved to Rusk County twenty years earlier. Wilkins remained in the timber business with Chris Carter for two years. In July 1874, Wilkins and wife “C. Rebecker” (both now of Gregg County) sold the partnership’s half interest back to Moore, who was residing in Smith County. Moore continued in business with Carter for just over a year, but during that time Carter was clearly the dominant figure in public life. Apparently Carter was instrumental in organizing the local Grange, part of the new agrarian order that promoted community improvement through social gatherings, political lobbying, education, and cooperative buying and selling. By early 1875, a Grange Hall was built on the Avery League “near the line between Smith and Gregg counties.” One acre of land was deeded by S. W. Wallace to Carter Grange No. 635 for use by grange, school, or church. C. B. Carter witnessed the deed.

In September 1875, Carter bought out his old partner, W. J. Moore, assuming Moore’s half interest in the sawmill operation and the land in the Avery League. Moore, who had harvested timber in East Texas since before the Civil War, apparently quit the business and left the piney woods for the prairie land of Somervell County. In August 1875, even before he ended his partnership with Chris Carter, Moore, who was still residing in Smith County, purchased four hundred and thirty one acres on the Brazos River in Somervell County near Glen Rose. Later that year he added another one thousand and forty nine acres, complete with a gin house, ginning stands, and cotton press, and settled down to raise cotton and corn on his new plantation.

About 1879, Moore moved north to Parker County where he continued growing cotton. In 1883, “William J. Moore, of Weatherford, Texas” patented a “light, durable and strong” wire basket “especially designed for handling cotton and farm produce.” He partnered with local real estate agent Ira B. Taylor with the intent to manufacture and sell the baskets, but the outcome of this venture is not known. By 1885, Parker County tax records listed Moore as a resident of neighboring Tarrant County.

The C. B. Carter Lumber Company

Christopher Carter remained in the lumber business in Gregg County, partnering with James T. Lantrip in 1876 and purchasing almost seven hundred acres farther east on the John Ruddle headright, straddling the new Texas and Pacific Railroad line. The partnership with Lantrip was brief, and Carter later did business under the names “C. B. Carter & Brother,” “Carter & Co.,” and “C. B. Carter & Son.” In 1878, Carter acquired three hundred and eighty acres of the S. S. Davis headright, adjacent to the Ruddle survey. The company logged the thousand plus acres, operated a large sawmill, and established a small community named for Carter. Carter’s Mill, six miles west of Longview near the site of present White Oak, boasted a post office, a general store, and a number of houses. “Chris E. [sic] Carter” was the first postmaster (from January 18, 1877) and his son “Jos. J. Carter” was postmaster by April 15, 1880.

Carter continued to expand his operations, establishing an office in Longview and purchasing new equipment from the Marshall Manufacturing Company for his mill (a four-by-four roll planer and matcher, and a resawing machine with shafting and pulleys). By 1879, he moved his family to Kaufman County and opened the
The Heyday of Mechanicsville: 
A Forgotten Community Remembered

C. B. Carter Lumber Company with locations in Terrell and Forney. The railroad provided cheap and quick transportation for his East Texas lumber products to customers in the Blackland Prairie region. Carter had fully integrated his business—from logging and milling the timber in Gregg County to selling the finished lumber in full-service stores in Kaufman County, ninety miles distant. About the time his business fortunes hit their peak, Carter fell ill with pneumonia and died in Terrell on February 23, 1880. He was fifty-two years old.

Carter’s wife and family continued the lumber operation from their home base in Kaufman County. The 1880 Products of Industry census schedule for Gregg County gives the value of the sawmill at Carter’s Mill as $24,000. During the previous twelve-month period, the mill cut two-and-a-half-million board feet of lumber valued at $27,500 from $14,150 worth of raw materials. One steam boiler and a forty horsepower engine provided power for one circular saw and one “muley” saw. Up to thirty-five men were employed to operate the mill for ten months of the year. The mill hands were paid a combined total wage of $6,000 at a rate of $1.35 to $3.00 per day for an eleven-hour shift.

The existence of Carter’s Mill was short-lived, as the timber in the vicinity was soon exhausted. The post office closed on May 23, 1881, and by 1900 the community no longer appeared on maps.

After Carter’s death, the C. B. Carter Lumber Company survived for a few years, buying land for timber in Gregg and Upshur Counties as well as part interest in a sawmill in Upshur County, but the business did not experience the success that Christopher Carter had enjoyed for fifteen years. Its lumber yards in Kaufman County closed by 1888. The company became insolvent and discontinued operation in June 1891. In 1897, to pay its indebtedness of $20,000 to the Ninth National Bank of Dallas, the family signed over its lands and equipment in Gregg, Upshur, Kaufman, and several other counties.

The business ventures of Christopher B. Carter spanned from the post-Civil War era of a local, self-sufficient East Texas economy to the beginning of the “bonanza era” in the Texas lumber industry, when improved sawmill technology increased the production of lumber and the coming of the railroads permitted its wide distribution. Though they are now largely forgotten, entrepreneurs like Carter and his “esteemed friend and…partner,” William J. Moore, were essential for the development of East Texas in the nineteenth century.

Publication note: An earlier version of this appendix was published as an article by Chronicles of Smith County, Texas, vol. 44, 2005. Additional material and photographs have been incorporated into this new version.

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August 2008

Notes

1 William J. Moore’s patent for a wire basket designed to carry cotton and produce is described and pictured below:
The Heyday of Mechanicsville:
A Forgotten Community Remembered

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

WILLIAM J. MOORE, OF WEATHERFORD, TEXAS.

WIRE BASKET.


Appendix filed September 4, 1882. (Xe mod.)

To all whom it may concern: Be it known that I, WILLIAM J. MOORE, of Weatherford, in the county of Parker and State of Texas, have invented certain new and useful Improvements in Wire Baskets, of which the following is a full, clear, and exact description.

This invention has for its object the production of a light, durable, and strong basket, made of wire, and more especially designed for handling cotton and farm produce, including potatoes and fruit.

The invention consists in a certain combination, arrangement, and connection of a series of wires, whereby great strength is attained, the same including upper and lower hoop wires, upright or straight wires arranged to connect said hoops and wire frame bottom, and reversely arranged diagonal wires or braces also connecting the top and bottom hoops, and twisted or wrapped around the upright wires immediately of their length, substantially as hereinafter described.

Reference is to be had to the accompanying drawing, forming a part of this specification, in which the figure represents a view in perspective of a wire basket embodying my invention.

The basket is made of circular form and of any desired size, with its top somewhat wider than its bottom, to facilitate emptying it of its contents. Stout wire hoops a, c, are arranged around its upper and lower ends, and its bottom frame is composed in part of the wire ring or hoop b, in part of a spirally arranged lighter wire d, and in part of crossing straight wires e, arranged at suitable distances apart all around the basket. These wires e are bent upward to form the sides of the basket, and are twisted or wrapped around the two hoops b, and bottom hoop a, and extended or interlaced with the spiral wire d of the bottom frame of the basket, which frame said wires e cross, the same passing down one side of the basket and up the other, thus making a firm connection of the bottom and sides, the lower hoop a, forming the main support for the bottom. The basket is further strengthened and its sides inclosed by an open net-work of reverse diagonally arranged or crossing wires f, twisted or wrapped around the upper and lower hoops, a, c, also around the wires e, immediately of the depth of the basket, as a is. These braces may be thus woven to connect the top and bottom hoops and the uprights either from a single piece of wire or from several pieces.

Wire of any suitable kind and size may be used in the construction of the basket, which is provided on opposite sides with handles g, g.

Having thus fully described my invention, I claim as new and desire to secure by Letters Patent—

In an interlacing-wire basket, the combination of the top and bottom hoops, a, c, the spiral wire bottom d, the wires e, arranged to cross and interface with said bottom and twisted or wrapped around the hoops b, c, and the reverse diagonal braces f, twisted or wrapped around the lower and upper hoops and around the uprights at the side of the basket immediately of the depth thereof, substantially as shown and described.

WILLIAM J. MOORE.

Witnesses:

FRANK S. KERR,
W. H. HANNON.

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