



Grigsby, Texas, The Santa Fe Depot and agent E. C. Fults



Grigsby, Texas, One of the first homes, built by W. M. McKinzie, ca. 1855

GRIGSBY, TEXAS

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Grigsby is located in the southwest corner of Shelby County in East Texas, sixteen miles northwest of Nacogdoches, fourteen miles southwest of Center, and one mile east of the Attoyac River.

In the middle of the 19th century, a few families migrated to this heavily wooded area from Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee. Texas allowed them to homestead the land.

The early settlers worked together clearing land, building homes, and farming. The houses were mostly alike - a three room log house with a lean-to kitchen, a mud cat fireplace, a dog run, a small smokehouse in the back, and a shallow well in the front. The only literature in the house was the Bible and a mail order catalogue. Therefore most of their time was spent working, reading the Bible, and discussing what each had heard on their once a month trip to the county seat for supplies.

By 1895 there were about eighty families in the community, mostly small farmers and timber workers. They hauled timber by wagon to the nearest railroad, located in Timpson, Texas.

In 1898 a Mr. Grigsby, who was employed by the Santa Fe Railroad, started acquiring land for a right-of-way for a small tram railroad. He was alleged to have spent so much time with the natives while making preparations for the railroad that people began calling the community "Grigsby". This was in 1899. Until this time, all transactions were from Center, Texas or Timpson, Texas.

In 1901 William Yarbrough opened the first store in the community. In 1903 Dr. Jim Bailey opened a store and doctor's office; Rance Emmons built a store-Post Office combination and became the first Postmaster. His brother, Emmit Emmons, was the first mail carrier. (In 1916 E. C. Fultz became the new mail carrier.) In 1907 a depot was built and Rance Emmons became the first agent. In 1912 a school-church combination was built, known as White Rock.

Recreation consisted of log rollings, camp meetings, and Saturday night dances with an occasional tent show. About once a year they would have a box supper to raise enough money to hire a once-a-month preacher and a one-week singing school teacher.

In 1917 industry came to Grigsby. Fred Buckner started a "pecker-wood" saw mill, employing ten or twelve men.

In 1918 the men began returning from war. With little else to do, many began boot-legging and small-time gambling. These activities caused much dissention, fighting, stabbings, and at least five killings. The small town gained a very bad reputation and people refused to move there. They even cautioned their children to

never go near the town. Travellers hurried through, and blacks would go around, rather than through the place. Therefore, as the older settlers began to die, there were only their decendants to carry on.

The K.K.K. was fairly active. They did more good than harm, helping the poor, and trying to control the worst elements as some of the county law were reluctant to go there -- especially back in the whiskey still areas. These conditions prevailed for the following eight years.

In 1927 Grigsby was at its peak. It had five grocery stores, a depot, Post Office, feedstore, doctor's office, mail route, and garage. Lou Fults ran a small cafe, the Tomlin brothers ran a "Jitney" from Center to Nacagdoches, and there were two one-day-a-week barbers. Jim Danley looked after the one telephone line.

One midnight in 1930 the school burned. The students attended school in the church until they could transfer to a nearby school. A great many of them dropped out. In October, 1933 the train made its last one-day run to Grigsby, thus starting the little village on its way out. In 1936 the Post Office closed. In 1946 the original and only store building left standing closed. In 1950 the Grigsby Highway signs were removed and the name gradually disappeared from the road maps. The 1981 Center phone directory listed nine residential phones in Grigsby.

Most of the people that saw the beginning of Grigsby were a close-knit group. They were always willing to divide with the less fortunate and pitch in a couple of days labor to get a neighbor "out of the grass".

During the depression the older men would come to town and sit on the store benches, whittling, chewing tobacco, solving local and world problems, and arguing, mostly the Bible. They were very honorable old people and proud of their heritage. In fact, they were kings in their own right, using their benches as their thrones.

They are all gone now . . . along with the blacksmiths, hitching posts, and gristmills. I, along with many others, miss them.

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(The courthouse in Center burned in 1882, making it difficult to be exact about some of the names and dates. It is a fact that Mr. Grigsby never lived in Grigsby, Texas.)