

## **Coker Elementary 60<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Celebration 1955-2015**

### **[SLIDE 1]**

Introduce myself (if they have not already done so)

How many of you have attended a school in North East School District?  
**RESPONSE.** In 2005, NEISD celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The school district had several celebratory events, produced a wonderful video with Royce & Jeanette Jones that told about old Coker School & produced a publication that talked about the history of the district. **[SLIDE 2]** I am thrilled to have the opportunity to talk to you today and share this program with you.

**[SLIDE 3]** What would become known as Coker Community in rural Bexar County, Texas, about ten miles to the north of downtown San Antonio on the Salado Creek, was originally a grant of land consisting of one-third league (1 league = 4428.4 acres), that was given to John “Jack” Coker, a bachelor from South Carolina, by the Republic of Texas. Coker came to Texas in 1834 and fought in the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836. Today the area is part of the City of San Antonio and is a much developed suburban community adjacent to the airport. **(Discuss vicinity map – point out cemetery, airport, streets, new Wurzbach Parkway, present day Coker School, etc.)**

**[SLIDE 4]** Did any of you live in the area prior to the mid -1970’s? **(describe drive to BAC & passing garage & grocery store)** Werner Store about 1930 became Gerfers Store in 1946.

(L to R) Emma Werner, May Coker DeKunder, Mrs. Carl Kreitz, Linda Werner Hanz

I am often asked, “Where is or was John Coker’s land grant?” Up until a few years ago, I was unable to give a definitive answer. However, if you have ever landed or taken off on the main runway (East-West), you are on the Coker Land Grant.

**[SLIDE 5]** I was able to locate a copy of the land grants in the area laid on top of current roads. **[Point out corners on map]**

**[SLIDE 6]** In 1836, John Coker fought at the Battle of San Jacinto where General Santa Anna of Mexico was defeated avenging the great loss at the Alamo. Y.P. Alsbury recorded the story in a letter to the Honorable Jesse Grimes in San

Antonio in 1857. The letter was then printed in the 1861 edition of the Texas Almanac, pages 55-58. The story's highlights are as follows:

On the morning of the twenty-first of April, 1836, Capt. Karnes' cavalry company, commonly called Deaf Smith's Spy Company, were drawn up, in line, on the edge of General Houston's position. As well as I can recollect, we were between thirty and forty strong. The Mexican cavalry, whom we fought the evening before, at that moment were drawn up, in line, on the south of our position, about six hundred yards distant. I think they were from sixty to eighty strong... While sitting in our saddles, John Coker, my left file-leader, made the following remark, and the suggestions following:

**[SLIDE 7]** "Boys, before many hours, we will have one of the damnedest, bloodiest fights that ever was fought, and I believe it would be a good plan to go and burn that bridge, so as not only to impede the advance of reinforcements [sic] to the enemy, but it will cut off all chance of retreat of either party."

The story goes on to say General Sam Houston approved the plan and Deaf Smith returned to his group and asked for six volunteers. John Coker was one of the volunteers to proceed to burn Vince's Bridge at San Jacinto. **[SLIDE 8] [Show Vince's Bridge Memorial]** and **[SLIDE 9] [show modern day Vince's Bridge]**

For his participation in the battle of San Jacinto, John Coker received a land grant from the Republic of Texas. John invited his brothers, James and Joseph, to come West and bring their families to help him settle his land grant.

James Coker got as far as Cherokee County in East Texas but stopped and stayed with his large family there. Joseph continued on to join John and settled on the banks of the Salado Creek bringing into existence Coker Community and eventually Coker Methodist Church, Coker School, and Coker Cemetery. Both Coker Church and Coker School are still in existence today although the school has relocated twice. The school the first school in NEISD and has been located on Heimer since the mid 1950's.

**[SLIDE 10]** At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the area that now comprises NEISD was mostly brush, rocks, rattlesnakes and prickly pear. A few hardy pioneers had settled along the banks of the Salado Creek & other areas where there was an

abundance of water. [Read schools from slide] Others schools that came later to the area were:

- Seay Common School
- Olmos Common School
- Serna Common School
- Lookout Valley Common School

[**SLIDE 11**] It is believed that this was the first building used for school and also served as the church house and was located in Coker Cemetery.

[**SLIDE 12**] This wooden structure served as the second school until it burned down in 1924 on Halloween night.

[**SLIDE 13**] This is a picture of the students of Coker School in 1923. [point out mom, uncle henry & ?]

[**SLIDE 14**] This brick building was completed in 1925 & later expanded. It was replaced by the campus on Heimer Road in 1954.

[**SLIDE 15**] This building opened in 1954 & is the Coker School that I knew & loved when I began attending there in 1958.

[**SLIDE 16**] [www.CokerCemetery.com/articles](http://www.CokerCemetery.com/articles)

In conclusion, I would like to thank Coker Elementary PTA President – Tina Zimmerman for inviting me to be with you today. She graciously allowed me access to their records dating back to 1936 a year ago that allowed me to complete work on a presentation of the impact that Coker community had on the founding of the district. Thank you again for allowing me to be with you today.