



Adam Heisel and Family, Former Northern Neighbors

by Jim Barnes (16 September 2007)

The land immediately north of Stevens Park Estates was part of a square mile originally granted to William and Mary Myers in the 1850s as “headright” to the chain of land ownership titles. The Myers sold the northern 40 acres of their northwest quarter-section (everything between modern Atlantic and Remond Avenues, running east from Hampton Road for half a mile) to son-in-law Thomas Phillips. His widow, Harriett, retained ownership until 1878, eight years after Dr. John H. Stevens and wife Mary bought the property that is now Stevens Park Estates. Harriett Phillips also owned an abutting 18+ acre parcel to the east, an irregularly shaped tract including everything north of Coombes Creek to the section-line underlying modern Remond. Both of these tracts were purchased by Adam Heisel in 1879 and his family lived there for the next eight decades.

Adam Heisel had been born in Germany in 1832. In 1877, he and his wife Georgia came to Dallas and lived at the corner of Commerce and Akard, across from the site of the future Adolphus Hotel. Heisel was a shoemaker and leather merchant. When he bought the land north of Atlantic Avenue he moved to the country and became a farmer. My research suggests that no previous owner had ever lived on this site, and in the age before barbed wire, it is doubtful whether this land had ever been fenced or tilled. The Heisels built a house at the intersection of the Fort Worth Pike (which then ran along today's Remond Avenue) and Cedar Hill Road (which was later called Rush Chapel Road, Wheatland Road, then finally Plymouth Road). The Heisel farmhouse stood where "Passions Sport Bar" now presides. Their closest neighbors would have been John and Mary Stevens, whose farmhouse was located south along the country road inside the area that is now known as Middlebrook Place. Adam and Georgia Heisel had three children: Mary L. Heisel (c.1876-1962), Adam J. Heisel (c.1877-1959), and William T. Heisel (c.1878-1953). Their ages ranged from one to four years younger than the Stevens' children, Walter and Annie Lucille. An 1890 letter to Mary Stevens was addressed simply to: "**Highlands**" *West Dallas, Texas*.

The Heisels' land was included in an 1889 plat creating a large suburb named "West Dallas". Hundreds of lots were arranged along dozens of new streets. The subdivision's scheme included a state-of-the-art electric commuter rail line to the Courthouse. A summer hotel would enjoy the spectacular view from a rocky crag just north of the Heisels' farm, a nearby park would surround an "everlasting" mineral spring, a wealthy Dallas gentleman planned to establish a zoological garden, a future college was sited, and a \$1200 telescope was procured for a new observatory on the mountaintop; but almost none of this scheme was ever actually built.

In 1903, the Heisels' daughter Mary wed Robert V. Fullerton and they erected a new home across Wheatland Road from her parents'. Similarly, thirty-two years later when the Fullerton's daughter, June Heisel Fullerton, married Luther January, she and her new husband constructed a third family house nearby.

Adam Heisel died in 1913, and his wife Georgia died intestate in 1917. Their three children amicably divided the inheritance, with brothers Adam J. and W.T. jointly keeping the farmland to the west of Wheatland Road and daughter Mary keeping all the land to the east.

In 1931 Texas State Highway #1B was suddenly laid diagonally across the middle of the brothers' inherited property. During World War II the Heisel brothers sold the remainder of their valuable land, both sides of this new Fort Worth Avenue, to a young architect named Harwood K. Smith who transferred ownership to a large eastern corporation after the War and was then hired to design the Virginia Manor Apartments and the nearby Stevens Park Shopping Center. Mary Fullerton lost a court battle in 1957 when a 2.16 acre corner of her homestead was 'taken' by the new Dallas-Fort Worth Turnpike (Interstate 30) for only \$36,021.56 compensation, less than 1/6 what real estate expert Luther January believed the land to be worth. Architect Douglas Yater bought the farthest tip of the original Heisel tracts, east of Edgefield, and built his ultra-modern dream home above Coombes Creek immediately to the north. Mary Heisel Fullerton died in 1962. Three years later the Brookwood Apartments were raised by John Eulich's Vantage Company on the former site of her and her daughter's houses. In 1973 builder-developer Ronald J. Monesson opened the Kessler Highlands condominiums along the north side of Coombes Creek, on Heisel land Mary had sold 50 years before.

For decades the two Heisel brothers operated a hardware store at 612 Commerce in downtown Dallas. W.T. passed away in 1953. Six years later, at age 82, Adam J. Heisel was severely beaten during a robbery of the store and died a month later. No suspect was ever charged.

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