

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT AND DALWORTHINGTON GARDENS, TEXAS: HOW A
NORTHERN FIRST LADY SOUGHT TO SALVAGE THE SOUTH

by:

Anna Leinweber

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Project Approved:

Supervising Professor: Kenneth Stevens, Ph.D.

Department of History

Rebecca Sharpless, Ph.D.

Department of History

Curby Alexander, Ph.D.

College of Education

ABSTRACT

Dalworthington Gardens, Texas is a small city in Tarrant County, south of Arlington. It is nearly obvious that its name is derived from the three largest cities in the area, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Arlington, which also hints at its abnormal establishment. Most small towns that currently comprise the DFW metroplex originated due to average people discovering agricultural benefits of the area. Dalworthington Gardens' story is entirely different. Eleanor Roosevelt and the Subsistence Homestead Administration established Dalworthington Gardens during the Great Depression as a federal government project. Mrs. Roosevelt thought the spot of Dalworthington Gardens would be a great place for the homesteaders to have their own gardens and a few animals, while still placing them close to and between industrial job opportunities in the two big cities. Due to its careful creation and relatively late establishment in the 1930s, Dalworthington Gardens has always been inextricably linked to the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, yet still maintaining links to its strange history. Dalworthington Gardens has a unique identity through its history as a neighborhood for agricultural productivity amidst industry. While it started merely as a neighborhood, the citizens voted to make it a city in the 1960s, which reveals that its residents prefer to maintain a distinctive identity in the face of suburban expansion. The Gardens is arguably the most peculiar little city in the metroplex due to its history and direct link to Eleanor Roosevelt and the federal government.

Homesteads, in the original convention of the term, hearken to the lofty American concept of Manifest Destiny, the great drive of westward progress in the nineteenth century. These were a staple of the American Dream, the pinnacle of western civilization's individualistic ideals. Yes, the pioneers traveled in groups across the Plains, but homesteads were generally plots of land claimed and tamed by a single family. These homesteads marked an escape from government, from control, and from social groups. The federal government originally owned the land that these pioneers homesteaded. It was granted, however, to individuals who often intended to make a great wide settlement for farming or ranching.

Other versions of homesteading also have been a part of American history. In the 1930s, during the dark times of the Great Depression, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the New Deal, and underneath that wide social program umbrella, the Subsistence Homestead Administration. The Subsistence Homestead Administration set out to create entire communities for those displaced by economic downturns, both in agricultural areas from the Dust Bowl, and in cities from the result of layoffs in industry. The federal government planned and constructed these strategic communities, and invited residents to live in them. Some historians have even referred to them as "planned utopias." This emphasizes the point that they intended to help alleviate the problem of sudden and acute poverty in America. Needless to say, these homesteads differed from the first type in their planning and community construction. The first homesteads were natural, or intrinsically formed by pioneers setting off on their own as a result of the grand idea of Manifest Destiny. The latter version of homesteads was calculatedly created by the federal government, and then acquired the people as a secondary aspect.¹ The U.S. intended for subsistence homesteads to be a refuge in many ways. The economic hardships brought on by the

¹ Kathy Mapes, "Subsistence Homesteads Division." *Encyclopedia of the Great Depression*, ed. Robert S. McElvaine. Vol. 2. (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004).

Great Depression moved President Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt to work on creating these homesteads to provide stability and security for people in such a difficult time.²

The origins of subsistence homesteads began in Europe where Germany and England, among other Western European nations, had also implemented similar programs for their equally suffering citizens in the aftermath of World War I. The defining similarity between the European homesteads and the American ones were that they were both rural escapes on the outskirts of industrial centers. While the idea for the Subsistence Homestead Administration undoubtedly stemmed partially from Europe, the Roosevelts had incorporated a system for New Land Use for reforesting areas and utilizing new land planning methods while FDR served as governor of New York.³ During that time, Roosevelt's new land planning program involved the reforestation of sub-marginalized farmland.⁴ Essentially, Roosevelt's platform regarding land over which he governed was to ensure the maintenance of nature as much as possible, while at the same time, utilizing it optimally for the economy. The ideals associated with subsistence homesteads did not halt at the creation of buildings, but rather, the project set out to encourage improvement in all aspects of life and included a social and cultural piece that could not be ignored.⁵

The federal government also took a strategic approach to the locations chosen for the homesteads and reasons for the regions they were placed in. In the case of Dalworthington Gardens, the government chose locations in the South that had proximity to the textile industry. Specifically, cotton production remained a dominant industry and economic aspect in the South

² Pennie Boyett, "Back in the old neighborhood-Origins of Dalworthington Gardens lie in New Deal housing program," *Dallas Morning News*, May 23, 1999.

³ Ross H. Gast, "The Subsistence Homestead Program." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 175 (1934): 240-243.

⁴ Laura Vozzella, "Dalworthington Gardens homestead beginning saw plenty of hardship," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 15, 1997.

⁵ Ross H. Gast "The Subsistence Homestead Program."

and Texas into the twentieth century. In addition to the prominence of the cotton industry in Texas, the Dust Bowl drought that affected the North Texas plains simultaneously hindered the economic difficulties Texans faced, making the region a good location for a homestead.

Although industrialization continued to grow in the Progressive Era, agrarianism did not disappear and remained the consistent secondary aspect of American society. Therefore, as the Great Depression continued, a redefinition of agriculture and industry did not seem too far off. Roosevelt's New Deal programs sought relief for American citizens, and the Subsistence Homestead program realized the shortcomings of both industry and agriculture. Therefore, if both of the top means of living in America ceased to meet the needs of its people, it was logical that it would be simplest to combine the two in a "divide and conquer" approach to surviving economically hard times, thus the President created the Subsistence Homestead project.⁶ The homesteads across the country reflected a decentralization movement among big business and industry, which overall helped America transition into the post-war world with ample diversity of private enterprise for citizens to engage in. Homesteads, as new, planned communities with multiple moving parts, both dependent on the land as well as nearby industrial centers paralleled the diversification of the American economy. The Roosevelts' position has been considered anti-urban and their program thought to be more than just creating housing and solving homelessness, but that it would create a new way of life, one not dependent solely on agriculture or industry, but instead, partially dependent on both.⁷

Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, became personally involved in the projects, beginning in Arthurdale, West Virginia. The First Lady's social

⁶ David B. Danbom, "Romantic Agrarianism in Twentieth-Century America." *Agricultural History* 65 (1991): 1-12.

⁷ Pennie Boyett, "Back in the old neighborhood."

activism led to her heightened involvement in these projects by visiting them and consulting with the appointed leaders of the programs. Roosevelt's intimate involvement with the program caused her to continually look for new locations in the country where these homesteads could be a good fit.⁸ The First Lady undertook personal involvement in the Subsistence Homestead Project, as she took a keen interest in village life in France and admired its self-sufficiency. Eleanor Roosevelt also believed that women, such as herself, joined political movements specifically to improve the daily lives of others, and she saw Subsistence Homesteads as the perfect opportunity to exercise that positive change.⁹

As New Deal administrators constructed homesteads across the country, mostly in the Southeast, in areas of the poor Appalachians, like West Virginia, Tennessee, and Alabama, the Roosevelt family continued to proceed through life. In 1933, one of the Roosevelt's sons, Elliott, became engaged to Ruth Googins, a socialite from Fort Worth.¹⁰ The First Lady, an involved mother even through the pressures of the presidency, visited Elliott in Texas to meet Ruth. This visit first introduced her to the undeveloped farmland between Fort Worth and Dallas that soon became Dalworthington Gardens, a homestead.

According to local lay history, on the aforementioned visit, the First Lady took notice of the completely open, undeveloped pastureland south of Arkansas Lane near Arlington.¹¹ And it immediately caused her to remember her other homesteads.¹² Therefore, the federal government

⁸ Blanche Wiesen Cooke, "Creating a New Community," *Eleanor Roosevelt: Vol. 2 1933-1938*, (New York: Viking Penguin, 1999), 130-152.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum Archives. "Roosevelt Genealogy." Accessed October 1, 2015.

<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/resources/pdfs/genealogy.pdf>

¹¹ Laura Vozzella, "Dalworthington Gardens homestead beginning saw plenty of hardship."

¹² Souvenir Program, 75th Anniversary Celebration, June 10-12, 2011, Ed. Velma Bogart. University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

planned and created Dalworthington Gardens, a small neighborhood community in the middle of the three cities of Dallas, Fort Worth, and Arlington, from which the creators derived its name. Dalworthington Gardens, Texas, thereby, had a distinctly different conception than every other community in the eventually burgeoning metroplex. In fact, there were only four other subsistence homestead projects in Texas, and the nearest one was in Wichita Falls.

Within the Gardens itself, the street named Park Drive was originally named Eleanor Drive, yet early on in the homestead process the residents became disgruntled with the building difficulties and removed the First Lady's name from their street.¹³ Ultimately, the residents removed the First Lady's name from the street to express their contempt with the utilities problems, specifically the water contamination crisis due to the poor quality pipes installed.¹⁴ While that might appear like a personal insult to the First Lady, the fact that the residents kept the name Roosevelt Drive also in the community indicates that there was just a brief period of tension and not an overall disdain for the First Lady. Most likely, the residents removed her name from the street solely because it would ultimately cause less scandal to remove the First Lady's name instead of the President's. In fact, in spite of early and brief turmoil, the Subsistence Homestead program seemed to be a bust by those that evaluated it, yet the Gardens became known as a shining exception to the rule of failure because of the lack of support infrastructure that some other homesteads encountered.¹⁵ A key aspect of the Gardens' ability to thrive was the local creation of the Homestead Association in 1936. The residents joined forces with the federal Resettlement Administration to create this locally run council in which residents gained representation for their needs. Guy Estill, a local man who lived on Sunset Lane, was

¹³ Pennie Boyett, "Back in the old neighborhood."

¹⁴ Laura Vozzella, "Dalworthington Gardens homestead beginning saw plenty of hardship."

¹⁵ Pennie Boyett, "Back in the old neighborhood."

appointed the first administrator in 1937 and viewed by many as a great early leader who contributed to the prosperity of the community.¹⁶

Although the Gardens was a homestead intended to aid people who suffered in the Great Depression, not just anyone could live in the new neighborhood. People from the area who wanted to live in Dalworthington Gardens during the inaugural years had to engage in a lengthy application process. Hopeful residents had to fill out a nine-page application and disclose their employment and personal history, and a financial statement. On top of all of that, the applicants provided five references and wrote an essay on why they wanted to live in the homestead.¹⁷ The Gardens was originally created for World War I veterans. The Roosevelt administration worked to express gratitude and care for veterans, in contrast to the Bonus Army scandal that plagued Hoover's presidency, yet the administrators widened the scope of residents because not enough veterans applied to live in the Gardens. Former Mayor Raymond Grimes noted that when he moved to the Gardens in 1940, out of the sixty-five families, there were only ten families of veterans living in the Gardens.¹⁸

Applicants for Garden's residency were also required to disclose their race. The community was created as segregated and strictly prohibited African Americans and Asians from obtaining residency. A deed from 1949 explicitly stated that African Americans could not occupy property on the homestead unless they were specifically there as "bona fide servants."¹⁹ To a large extent this de jure segregation explains the lack of racial diversity in the Gardens

¹⁶ Souvenir Program, Semicentennial Celebration, June 1, 1986. Semicentennial Committee, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

¹⁷ Pennie Boyett, "Back in the old neighborhood."

¹⁸ Anne Marie, Kilday, "He's ready for his 10th term as mayor," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, April 5, 1978.

¹⁹ Laura Vozzella, "Dalworthington Gardens homestead beginning saw plenty of hardship."

throughout the rest of its history, as overcoming approximately thirty years of legal discrimination has always proven to be an extremely complex challenge. In many ways, the racial segregation that accompanied the creation of the homestead seems contradictory to Democratic ideals and the Roosevelts' beliefs, as the First Lady in particular was known to be a staunch opponent to segregation.²⁰ However, the fact that segregation was legal in the Gardens indicated that the community's context had extreme and unavoidable influence upon it. While the federal government envisioned the community, local politicians ensured enough of their southern ideals made their way into the plans. Therefore, from the beginning, the Gardens was not entirely unique from its surroundings and resembled neighboring communities in the major ways, such as diversity, or in this case, lack thereof.

Race, it would seem, was not the sole version of discrimination in the early years of the Gardens. Political bias appeared distinctly in the community in the early years, although some considered it to be a mere coincidence. Nearly every resident in the beginning decades of the Gardens affiliated as a Democrat. Which might flow logically from the fact that the community was created by a Democratic presidential administration. Moreover, in the Great Depression years, a vast majority of Texans were registered Democrats, thus, it would be expected that the majority of people in any town in Texas were registered Democrats. To provide a third explanation, the residents conceded to the government administration's authority to investigate their private and professional lives before they would be allowed to officially purchase a home in the community. In fact, Miller, an original resident specifically recalled that there was only one Republican man, by the name of Lett, who lived in the Gardens in the early

²⁰ Maurine H. Beasley, "Reaching the Dispossessed," In *Eleanor Roosevelt: Transformative First Lady*. (Manhattan: University of Kansas Press, 2010,), 131.

years.²¹ Due to the political party shift in the second half of the century, and an influx of wealthier suburbia-seeking residents, a major shift in political affiliation occurred in the community and the Republican residents outweighed the Democrats by the 1980s.

Dalworthington Gardens, often referred to as “the Gardens,” seemed an artificial addition to the area. Most communities in the Dallas-Fort Worth area were already established by the 1930s. Many began as individual agricultural communities. For the most part, however, these communities melded into the greater metroplex naturally as a result of unhindered suburban expansion over time. Dominant forces in the economy and trends in transportation led to continued interconnectedness of economies and social activities amongst most towns. Their founders and residents tended to follow trends of the times, and overall, that trend was connection, basically suburban similarity. The Gardens, however, had federal administration that determined how rural it would seem.

When the Gardens were first established, the borders of the city of Arlington were four miles north of the town.²² Dalworthington Gardens’ geographic distance, along with federal government management, made it quite distinct from nearby cities, such as Arlington and Dallas. Some of the designations set by the federal government for the Gardens related to the size of their plots of land, the types of animals, and how many, were allowed in the community, the lakes and parks in the neighborhood, and community service. In the first wave of construction in the Gardens, the smallest individual lot was larger than three and a half acres.²³

The government and administrators over the Gardens strongly encouraged residents to raise their own cows, chickens, and pigs, as a way of subsisting from the land. Keeping cows for

²¹ Laura Vozzella, “Dalworthington Gardens homestead beginning saw plenty of hardship.”

²² Pennie Boyett, “Back in the old neighborhood.”

²³ Historical Marker for the City of Dalworthington Gardens, Texas. “City of Dalworthington Gardens, Texas.” University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

their milk became fairly common in the Gardens, although it was difficult originally because of a lack of fencing. During the construction phase in 1935 and 1936, the administrators and contractors focused primarily on building the quota of houses for the neighborhood, which meant fences did not exist. Residents, therefore, experienced entertainment and annoyance from roaming and returning cattle to their rightful owners. Finally, fence construction began in 1938 when the Works Progress Administration came to town with the supplies. Joint efforts of the WPA workers and Dalworthington residents brought about the much-needed fence completion.²⁴ The fact that the residents of the homestead worked alongside the WPA workers on the fencing project signifies the distinction of the Gardens' community. Without residents working together, the completion of the fencing would have been delayed even longer, which would have decreased the standard of living significantly over time. However, residents participating in their community service and working for the benefit of the whole community assisted the Gardens' in attaining and maintaining a reputation of prosperity.

Although there were no formal designations, the federal administrators also highly encouraged and expected the original homesteaders to participate in gardening in the community. Unfortunately, gardening also proved a difficult feat for many residents. As the residents were originally from the cities of Dallas and Fort Worth, most of these urbanites were not familiar with gardening crops. The animals posed a major threat to gardening success, as all aspects of the small town influenced one another, the loose cattle detrimentally affected crop growth. Additionally, the urbanites turned homesteaders struggled with the land itself, and tending it to

²⁴ Souvenir Program, Semicentennial Celebration, June 1, 1986. Semicentennial Committee, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

yield crops. Yet by the end of the 1930s, most residents had grown a variety of vegetable crops.²⁵ While some residents reported the soil as unsatisfactory, it was known to be rocky and clay-like.²⁶ Scientifically, the type of soil present underneath the land in Dalworthington Gardens was crosstell-gasil-rader, which is deep and loamy on uplands.²⁷ Some oral accounts of others claim that people grew melons, potatoes, onions, corn, and tomatoes in their gardens, which covers a wide range for subsistence gardening.²⁸

Parks and lakes were originally planned into the neighborhood, and in the 1930s the government set aside forty-three acres for a large park and the community house.²⁹ In a 1936 map of the community, the park stands out as the distinctive space. The creators constructed the park in a backwards “z” formation. The community park lay on the northern side of the homestead and its eastern side lay adjacent to Roosevelt Drive, the major thoroughfare of the community. This eastern side was also the portion of the park that held the community center.³⁰ The original map did not indicate a lake within the park, although there is a relatively large one there today. Although the lake was not originally part of the park, it was added prior to 1986, when the community celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. The Souvenir Program from 1986

²⁵ Historical Marker for the City of Dalworthington Gardens, Texas. “City of Dalworthington Gardens, Texas.”

²⁶ DWG 75th Committee. 2011. *Oral histories, residents & former residents: Dalworthington Gardens, Texas*. Dalworthington Gardens, Tex: DWG 75th Committee, pg. 135.

²⁷ United States. Soil Conservation Service. and Texas Agricultural Experiment Station. *General Soil Map, Tarrant County, Texas*, Map, 1981.

²⁸ DWG 75th Committee. 2011. *Oral histories, residents & former residents: Dalworthington Gardens, Texas*. Dalworthington Gardens, Tex: DWG 75th Committee, pgs. 7, 37, 60, 80.

²⁹ Historical Marker for the City of Dalworthington Gardens, Texas. “City of Dalworthington Gardens, Texas.” University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

³⁰ Map of Dalworthington Gardens, Texas. 1936. Surveyor, Frederic D. Armstrong. University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

devoted half of a page to a drawing of the park renovation and enhancement, which also indicates positive growth and development of the community over its first fifty years.³¹

Similar to the park, the community house was also a mark of distinction for the neighborhood. This community house became notable because Dalworthington was not a country club neighborhood, in the sense that high social status and membership was not preeminent. Therefore, anyone could spend time in this multipurpose facility. The community house had a big room and large windows, with a fireplace on one end and a stage on the other.³² A variety of events occurred at the community house. Meetings for official groups, organized sessions for advice on canning and farming, Saturday night carnivals, and many bingo parties took place in the community center. The equipment used for the canning information sessions was owned by the community and shared among residents.³³ The building was so popular that residents converted a portion of it into a library, which indicates that the community valued learning and literacy alongside their affinity for socializing, which most likely positively influenced the community's successful development.³⁴ According to one resident, the library also employed a woman as the librarian, although her level of formal training is unknown. A bookmobile traveled into the Gardens down Arkansas Lane in the 1950s, which many children in the Gardens' enjoyed.³⁵ Advertisements from the late 1930s revealed that "talkies," or movies were another common neighborhood event that all residents were invited to enjoy in the Gardens

³¹ Souvenir Program, Semicentennial Celebration, June 1, 1986. Semicentennial Committee,

³² DWG 75th Committee. 2011. *Oral histories, residents & former residents: Dalworthington Gardens, Texas*. Dalworthington Gardens, Tex: DWG 75th Committee, pg. 69.

³³ Laura Vozzella, "Dalworthington Gardens homestead beginning saw plenty of hardship."

³⁴ Historical Marker for the City of Dalworthington Gardens, Texas. "City of Dalworthington Gardens, Texas." University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

³⁵ DWG 75th Committee. 2011. *Oral histories, residents & former residents: Dalworthington Gardens, Texas*. Dalworthington Gardens, Tex: DWG 75th Committee, pg. 69.

Community Center.³⁶ The residents used the community center frequently enough that it was known outside of the Gardens, revealing the community influenced the area around it as the outside communities also influenced it.

As early as the 1930s, Arlington High School dances and various other social functions took place in the Dalworthington Gardens Community Center. The dances that occurred in the DWG community center indicate more than one significant aspect of the neighborhood's development. Primarily, it shows that the community reached a point of accessibility and a standard of decency that matched that of nearby Arlington, at minimum, for youth events. Secondly, Arlington High School's choice to have a dance in Dalworthington Gardens points to the assimilation of the community into the surrounding towns. The high school served the adolescents of the Gardens, and also all of Arlington. Therefore, it represented the linkages between the two communities and their similar social statuses. The community center, while mostly enjoyed and utilized by Gardens residents, did serve as an overarching connection to the world outside of the homestead. These references from the Arlington High School newspaper, *The Colt* in 1937 mark an early indicator of the Gardens' seamless assimilation into the budding metroplex.³⁷

The popularity of the Gardens' community house and the positive connotations the people had with it cannot be overlooked. At least one other homestead in the nation existed in which the people of the community began to shun their community house because they associated it with feelings of being people of a government experiment that they could not

³⁶ Souvenir Program, 75th Anniversary Celebration, June 10-12, 2011, Ed. Velma Bogart, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

³⁷ "Dramatics Club Dance," *The Colt-Weekly Publication of Arlington High School*, November 17, 1937.

escape.³⁸ The popularity of the community center set the stage for the close-knit, distinct quality the Gardens has maintained to this day. Even through the recent decades there are two annual community-wide events, the summer Gardens Gathering and the Christmas Party. In true fashion of a small town, Dalworthington developed a tradition of distributing awards for best home and yard decorations at the Christmas party.

Similar to the concept of a community center, is the concept of community service. Expectations and requirements concerning community service made this neighborhood unlike all others nearby from the outset. This also made the community vastly different from the isolated nineteenth-century homestead. Each male resident of the emerging neighborhood was required to contribute at least one hour of service to the community per week in the early years under federal administration. The blocks within the development earned work points, which led to a competition and winning prize of a picnic for the block.³⁹ Therefore, even volunteering within the new neighborhood seemed idyllic. Mostly, the fact that the resident's gave their individual time and energy in exchange for the benefit of the greater community revealed a collective, group-oriented side of American life. The residents' willingness to work together, exhibited through the citizens' community service, was important because that attitude of mutual support was typically suppressed in the years between the Red Scares and communism's expansion in Europe.

The homestead's comparison to communism and socialism dealt with much more than just community service, it also branched into healthcare. While under federal administration, the

³⁸ T. Swann Harding, "The Record of the Subsistence Homesteads," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 4 (1945): 499-504.

³⁹ Herbert N. Antley, "A New Deal experiment in planned utopia: a study of Dalworthington Gardens and the subsistence homestead program, 1933-1937," (master's thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, 1980).

Gardens had a medical cooperative in which a family could receive care from a physician at a cost of a dollar a month. Outsiders viewed this as an experiment in socialism, although that ridicule did not stop early residents from joining the cooperative. The application for residency ensured that the community members did not make more than two hundred dollars a month, which meant this healthcare plan served to alleviate many stresses associated with the Great Depression.⁴⁰

Not all was idyllic, however, and scandal and bad national press became a critical downside to the federal government's direct creation of Dalworthington Gardens. In 1936, nine men who worked in the construction of the Gardens were convicted for attempting to swindle and use inferior materials.⁴¹ Two of these men were the architect, Kuehne from Austin, and the contractor from Dallas, Mote.⁴² This brought a negative tone upon the neighborhood, as this crime was federal and reported in the *New York Times*. Although this was relatively a minor crime, in the sense that it did not endanger or harm anyone, it reemphasized that homesteads, such as the Gardens, possessed a national influence.

Therefore, the town was not even fully developed before it made headlines. The Gardens was simultaneously viewed as strange and as a model for other towns in Texas. After all, the grander vision the Roosevelts' had for their subsistence homesteads was a "back to the land" type of movement and re-emphasis on agriculture, in that way, much like the original nineteenth century homestead. The Gardens location near major cities proved its most modern qualities. Essentially, the Gardens and the Roosevelts' acknowledged that cities were needed but also need not be the only option for life in twentieth century America.

⁴⁰ Laura Vozzella, "Dalworthington Gardens homestead beginning saw plenty of hardship."

⁴¹ "HOMESTEAD FRAUD CHARGED IN TEXAS." *New York Times*, Mar 22, 1936.

⁴² "Texans named in government swindle case," *The Port Arthur News*, March 23, 1936.

As the U.S. government created Dalworthington Gardens less than a decade before the start of World War II, a number of young men associated with the Gardens fought in the war. Dalworthington's loyalty to the nation followed naturally from the notion that its founding father, Franklin Roosevelt, was still in office for the majority of the war. Roosevelt's New Deal and the creation of the Gardens represented hope and a bright future in hard times, therefore, the Gardens' residents supported the war effort. Another way the Gardens aided in the American war aim was its associations with NTAC, or the North Texas Agricultural College nearby in Arlington. This institution fell under the Texas A&M University System during the 1940s, and eventually became the University of Texas at Arlington. NTAC's association with Texas A&M meant that it had a Corps of Cadets that became vital during the war years. NTAC's proximity to the Gardens provided a second layer of national governmental importance to the community. One Dalworthington man, Harold Nesbitt's father, taught engineering and mathematics courses to these soon-to-be servicemen enrolled at NTAC. The Gardens' location proved to be prime for war effort support and a known location for young men from all around North Texas. North Texas Agricultural College was not the sole draw of higher education to the area, as some veterans also settled in the area to attend Arlington State College.⁴³

Robert Eugene Coats, a two-time mayor of the Gardens', fought in World War II. Before he became Mayor Coats, he was part of the Army Air Corps and worked in navigation technology for them. Coats governed the Gardens from 1972 to 1976 and even after that he served as a member of the Planning and Zoning committee for the community. Mr. Coats' participation in civic committees even after his official terms of service reinforced the ideal of citizenship in of the Gardens. Dalworthington Gardens, since its creation has always been a place

⁴³ DWG 75th Committee. 2011. *Oral histories, residents & former residents: Dalworthington Gardens, Texas*. Dalworthington Gardens, Tex: DWG 75th Committee, pg. 73.

where people do not settle for a typical or average life of the times. The Gardens, exemplified in Mayor Coats, has always been a place that praises those who go the extra mile and sacrifice for the good of their fellow man and the community.⁴⁴

Although Dalworthington Gardens existed solely due to the federal government, it became independent relatively soon after its creation. According to one resident, the Gardens became an independent, incorporated town in Tarrant County in 1947, although two other accounts in the same document claim it was 1949. Either way, it meant the federal government left prior to the second half of the century. According to Bagby, 1949 was the year that a majority of residents began a petition for the homestead to be incorporated. When the town became an autonomous city, the residents elected a mayor and city council.⁴⁵

The first mayor of Dalworthington Gardens was H. Leroy Rhodes, who served the city from 1949-1951 and again from 1953-1957. Rhodes was the president of the Homestead Association previously. The Gardens has had a mayor ever since, and in 2006 the community elected Michael Tedder as Mayor and he initiated a monthly newsletter for the residents that can be found online. In addition to the mayor, the Gardens initiated the use of a city council with five other members sometimes referred to as aldermen. The city has held elections every two years to elect a mayor and city council, and the mayor then appoints a city administrator and chief of public safety. On the third Thursday of every month the city council has meetings and residents are encouraged to join them at City Hall.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ The USGenWeb Project. "Robert Eugene Coats." Accessed October 14, 2015.

http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txccarro/People/C/Coats_Robert_Eugene.htm

⁴⁵ Souvenir Program, Semicentennial Celebration, June 1, 1986. Semicentennial Committee, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

⁴⁶ Two-page insert for DWG 75th Celebration Souvenir Program, June 10-12, 2011. University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

Since Dalworthington Gardens' first began electing a mayor in 1949, the citizens have elected a female only once. The Gardens first and only female mayor, Jean Gibbons was elected in 1979 in a special election. Mayor Gibbons served the city as the Planning and Zoning Commissioner prior to her mayoral run. Gibbons first served as mayor for seven months, to finish the term of the former Mayor Grimes, Gibbons won the election of mayor over Mayor Pro Tem Kent Besley by a decisive vote of 156-51.⁴⁷ Following that short term, she ran unopposed in the spring of 1980, and again against Mayor Pro Tem Jimmy Catrina in 1982, an election she also won.⁴⁸ Although Gibbons has been the only woman to serve as mayor of Dalworthington Gardens, her unopposed run and then victory again in 1982 prove that she served quite capably and was well liked by the citizenry, even in a conservative dominated place and time in history.

Al Taub, a former Dalworthington mayor and councilman served on the front lines of a struggle to help the Gardens maintain its distinctions from Arlington, although his property was technically part of Arlington itself. In the 1980s, the City of Arlington came to put a new sewer line, yet their plans would tear up Taub's property. Taub told them to protect his trees, but they disregarded them. Taub and his lawyer finally sued the City of Arlington, yet through the process Taub ensured that his property was officially de-annexed from Arlington to the Gardens as a result, so Taub considers that the best aspect of the entire situation.⁴⁹

During Taub's mayoral term, liquor stores in the Gardens became an issue. Generally, the citizens seemed against them, however, a man named Dennis Barnes supported liquor stores in the Gardens. Barnes maintained that it would provide significant tax revenue for the city, especially as it related to nearby Fort Worth because of the revenue that city received from the

⁴⁷ "Area Elections: Dalworthington Gardens," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 12, 1979.

⁴⁸ "Today's candidates and issues," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, April 3, 1982.

⁴⁹ DWG 75th Committee. 2011. *Oral histories, residents & former residents: Dalworthington Gardens, Texas*. Dalworthington Gardens, Tex: DWG 75th Committee, pg. 104.

store Big Daddy's, just close enough to the Gardens to create competition. Now, after changes during Taub's tenure liquor stores exist in the Gardens and the tax revenues have been beneficial.⁵⁰ Al Taub's interesting mayoral changes did not stop at liquor; he also dealt with the addition of sidewalks within the community in the early 1990s. Many residents, including Marcellus Miller, a long-time resident of the community, believed that adding sidewalks in the Gardens would take away the country character the city still held onto and many residents still took pride in. In contrast, Marcellus' son Joe, a resident of the Gardens as a child and adult, knew the addition would not be too revolutionary, especially as sidewalks were needed around Key Elementary. Mayor Taub, however, financially supported the sidewalk project after the council voted for it in 1993.⁵¹

Working in tandem with the city government, Dalworthington Gardens also has its own Department of Public Safety that upgraded from a simple police force in the late 1980s. In 1988, the department expanded and included police, fire, and emergency response teams for the city. This expansion also brought a building renovation and the new Public Safety and City Office center was dedicated in April 1989.⁵² This building addition also included a jail solely for the Gardens. In terms of equipment, the Dalworthington DPS received its first fire truck from Arlington, a recently renovated one. An Arlington firefighter, Evans, helped the Gardens get the first truck, which had originally been a brush truck before its renovation. Evans also helped the Gardens make a contract with the City of Arlington for use of an ambulance.⁵³ Thus, Dalworthington Gardens relied on Arlington for a variety of services, and even utilities in the

⁵⁰ Ibid, pg. 105.

⁵¹ Ibid, pg. 65.

⁵² Souvenir Program, 75th Anniversary Celebration, June 10-12, 2011, Ed. Velma Bogart, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

⁵³ DWG 75th Committee. 2011. *Oral histories, residents & former residents: Dalworthington Gardens, Texas*. Dalworthington Gardens, Tex: DWG 75th Committee, pg. 106.

early decades, a relationship necessary for the Gardens to function effectively as such a small community. As the federal administrators knew from the beginning, without the infrastructure of established cities nearby, the Gardens would have been left to struggle.

Additionally, the 1980s saw the first paid positions in the public safety department, as it evolved from volunteer force. By the end of the decade, the DPS had over fifty paid and volunteer members, which made emergency response exceptionally more efficient. Specifically, the year 1982 saw the first full time paid officer achieve such status, which was groundbreaking in terms of citizen care. Now the city officers respond to emergencies twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and boasted in an average response time of under three minutes.⁵⁴ By 2011, the Gardens claimed to have eight full-time members of the police.⁵⁵ In terms of other services the city offers, there is a public works team that trained in both firefighting and emergency care. This full time team has a mere three members, yet fifty volunteer citizens who have an array of occupations support them.⁵⁶

The institutions that worked diligently to make the Gardens a safe and secure town helped set it up as a prime place for a variety of businesses to begin. Green's Produce at the corner of Arkansas and Roosevelt is and presumed to be the oldest continuously run family business in the Gardens. Dalworthington's expansion with Bowen Road increased business development in the area and currently there are about 150 businesses in the city.⁵⁷ Where Bowen Road meets Arkansas Lane, Raymond Grimes ran a grocery store and gas station for thirty-three years, from 1940 to 1973. Similar in historical significance to Green's Produce, Raymond

⁵⁴ Souvenir Program, 75th Anniversary Celebration, June 10-12, 2011, Ed. Velma Bogart, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

⁵⁵ Two-page insert for DWG 75th Celebration Souvenir Program, June 10-12, 2011. University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Grimes' grocery store and gas station was one of the last independent stores in the Gardens' when it closed. Grimes also served the Gardens as mayor for almost two decades. Grimes' economic venture with his grocery store alongside his many years as mayor proves that the Gardens' maintained a small town uniqueness that was becoming less and less common for the metroplex into the 1970s. As late as 1978, Grimes noted the attitude of friendliness as distinct within the Gardens.⁵⁸

With business comes education and while Arlington High School quickly became linked to the Gardens' in the 1930s through the community center, the most notable school in the community did not appear until the 1970s. Prior to the creation of this school, elementary aged children went to Johnson Station School, Foster Elementary, and then Short Elementary.⁵⁹ Additionally, the town was originally four miles away from Arlington city limits, but quickly became a town that one could drive in and out of, and it was even cost effective for school buses to trek back and forth through, as the school bus system serviced the neighborhood rather early on in its history, some sources noting as early as 1937.⁶⁰ The school buses used by the Gardens were provided through Tarrant County.⁶¹ Children from Dalworthington Gardens received transportation to school even before there was Key Elementary within city limits, which reinforced cooperation between Arlington and Dalworthington Gardens in terms of both education as well as infrastructure.

⁵⁸ Anne Marie Kilday, "He's ready for his 10th term as mayor," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, April 5, 1978.

⁵⁹ DWG 75th Committee. 2011. *Oral histories, residents & former residents: Dalworthington Gardens, Texas*. Dalworthington Gardens, Tex: DWG 75th Committee, pg. 13.

⁶⁰ Souvenir Program, Semicentennial Celebration, June 1, 1986. Semicentennial Committee, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

⁶¹ DWG 75th Committee. 2011. *Oral histories, residents & former residents: Dalworthington Gardens, Texas*. Dalworthington Gardens, Tex: DWG 75th Committee, pg. 97.

Key Elementary School, a part of Arlington Independent School District, was the first school built within the city lines of Dalworthington Gardens and it began enrolling students in 1975. Contractors placed Key on the southern curve of Roosevelt Drive when rounding the park. In the 1980s Key expanded and student enrollment in 2011 reached 700 students, from kindergarten through sixth grade.⁶² In many ways Key Elementary mirrors the city itself, expanding at one point in the past but remaining distinct and rather small. Key Elementary, as a part of Arlington Independent School District, reveals two key aspects of Dalworthington Gardens. In one sense, the establishment of the school marked the notion that the neighborhood was prominent and established enough to be the home of an Arlington elementary school. Somewhat conversely, the school also represents the influence of the growing metroplex onto the Gardens'. Therefore, Key Elementary's establishment marked both Dalworthington Gardens' presence in the greater Arlington area, but it also revealed the Gardens' status as a sort of sphere of influence in the hegemony of Arlington. With its own school, the Gardens established a presence in AISD, a way of educating their children in their own community, and an even more explicit notion of their distinction.

Another school noted in the 75th Anniversary Program is the Montessori Academy of Arlington that is also located in the Gardens'. The school first opened in 1981, but its name was Arlington Cooperative Montessori School. This school, diverging significantly from the typical American public school, was aptly named "cooperative," as its conception was due to parents and staff working together. The original location for the school was in a converted office buildings on Michigan Avenue.⁶³ The fact that Dalworthington Gardens had a Montessori School

⁶² Souvenir Program, 75th Anniversary Celebration, June 10-12, 2011, Ed. Velma Bogart, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

⁶³ *ibid.*

in the 1980s might seem minor, but it provides further evidence that the town was perceived as normal, ordinary enough to be the chosen home of a new wave of educational thought and practice.

Currently, Key Elementary and the Montessori school remain the only two official schools in the city. Older students from the community attend Gunn Junior High in Arlington and then move on to Martin High School or Arlington High School. Noting that Dalworthington Gardens has never had its own junior high and high school reaffirms its small size as well as its accessibility to its surroundings.

Straddling Dalworthington Gardens and greater Arlington along West Arkansas Lane and South Bowen Streets is a school with three campuses, named the Arlington Classics Academy. This academy is a charter school containing a primary, intermediate, and middle school, each with their own building.⁶⁴ While the academy follows the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills curriculum like other Texas public schools, it also incorporates the classical style of trivium and has additional curriculum foundations in the values of Western Civilization. The schools perform well and the largest demographic of students are caucasian.⁶⁵ In regard to demographics, it should be noted that there were no schools in the Gardens' until after the Civil Rights movement. Key's establishment in 1975 came after the turbulent 1960s, the decade of integration turmoil. Therefore, the Gardens does not have any direct connection with the history of school desegregation. Arlington Classics Academy's proximity to the Gardens' reveals that the neighborhood has not let its origin as a social program hinder its relevance and reputation in the

⁶⁴ Arlington Classics Academy. "Arlington Classics Academy-Knowledge for a Lifetime." Accessed October 5, 2015. <http://www.acaedu.net/site/default.aspx?PageID=1>

⁶⁵ Great Schools. "Arlington Classics Academy-Primary School." Accessed October 5, 2015. <http://www.greatschools.org/texas/arlington/8582-Arlington-Classics-Academy---Primary-School/>

greater Arlington area. While the homes and streets are older, the neighborhood connects well to the positive side of the public education system. After all, Dalworthington Gardens itself fit the bill as a high performing “charter” community in many senses, so it follows naturally that the same situation appears within education in the area.

The city’s ethnic makeup, is currently predominantly white. According to the 2010 federal census, over 80 percent of the population of the city consisted of whites. Blacks only made up 7.6 percent of the population, which was followed by an Asian population of 5.1 percent. Merely 6.7 percent of the population claimed to be Hispanic or Latino, which is relatively very low for the metroplex.⁶⁶ Recent census data, indicates that the community has been predominantly white since its creation. The Gardens’ lack of ethnic diversity correlates with an overall lack of information about integration and the Civil Rights Movement, as Dalworthington residents did not experience the turmoil of that era within their own city limits. Rather, it was a societal revolution outside of their geographic lines, undoubtedly linked to its exclusively white origins.

Beginning with Key Elementary’s creation, the 1970s and generally last three decades of the twentieth century marked the time when the Gardens came into its own. The city, while already established, solidified its place in the metroplex as unique but familiar enough not to be strange. For instance, in 1949 when the Dalworthington Gardens Homestead Association dissolved, a contract existed that stated the Gardens had to remain a residential city until 1976. Therefore, in 1976, the Gardens government made certain to have the city continue on as residential, considering it did not have tourism or industry of its own. In just twelve years from 1960 to 1972 the Gardens grew in population by approximately 50 percent, a fact that supported

⁶⁶ City-data. “Dalworthington Gardens, TX.” Accessed October 4, 2015.

the city's position.⁶⁷ Undoubtedly, the 1971 updated route that placed Interstate 20 only two miles away from the Gardens served as an instigating immigration pull-factor for the city.⁶⁸

By the 1970s, the residential nature of the Gardens caught many suburbanites' attention. Many people also found themselves attracted to the Gardens based on its proximity to Lake Arlington, which was completed in 1957 and considered a "miracle lake," because of the water it provided to its surrounding area of west Arlington, which overall reinforces the Gardens' rural nature.⁶⁹ Furthermore, in the 1970s the Gardens became associated with the federal government again in terms of grants for new tennis courts.⁷⁰ These helped the Gardens maintain a culture that supported recreational activity but also proved that the Gardens held a place as an upscale community, as tennis is often considered a semi-wealthy sport.

From its humble start, the Gardens slowly climbed the ladder of socioeconomic status in relation to its surrounding area. While Lake Arlington proved to be one major geographic pull to the city, the 1970s updated route of I-20 through south Arlington also brought more attention to the area.⁷¹ Thus, by the 1980s, a portion of Dalworthington provided the home for the subdivision "Enchanted Gardens." This neighborhood in the southwest corner of the city was considered to be a luxury residential area, noting that the Gardens was becoming upscale.⁷²

⁶⁷ "Suburb Likes Present Status," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 20, 1972.

⁶⁸ Interstate Guide, "Interstate 20," Accessed November 30, 2015. <http://www.interstate-guide.com/i-020.html>

⁶⁹ Kevin J. Shay, "'Miracle lake' gave city confidence, sure water supply," *Dallas Morning News*, July 25, 1999.

⁷⁰ "Suburb Likes Present Status," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 20, 1972. Accessed October 5, 2015.

⁷¹ Interstate Guide, "Interstate 20," Accessed November 30, 2015. <http://www.interstate-guide.com/i-020.html>

⁷² "Enchanted Gardens," *The Arlington Citizen-Journal*, May 25, 1986. Accessed October 4, 2015.

Hemingsfords represented another upscale subdivision within Dalworthington Gardens that became prominent in the late 1980s. The Hemingsfords neighborhood was advertized in the Arlington Citizen-Journal and boasted about the lakes and their addition to the quality of life. The information about Hemingsfords also references the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport and its proximity to the Gardens, which aided in the rising profile of the Gardens in the latter decades of the twentieth century.⁷³

After the residential boom of the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s saw a resurgence of the citizens' value of Dalworthington's unique history. In 1993 a group of dedicated citizens created the Dalworthington Gardens Historical Committee with a multipurpose outlook. The committee desired to create a repository of DWG historic artifacts, documents, records, and pictures. The group was very interested in the identification of original homes and buildings that were around in 1936. The committee estimated that 35 out of 79 original homes are identifiable and set out to locate them.⁷⁴

The historical committee had no intention of being exclusive toward some homeowners. Instead, their goal was to be as historically accurate as possible by using the 1951 aerial photograph to determine which homes were originally part of the community. The committee connected history to present-day life by using their historical discoveries of the oldest maps to make a pamphlet for new residents as they moved into the city. The pamphlet contained the historical map as well as a current map of the city, which provided a tangible way for the committee to show new residents the historical significance and uniqueness of the city. The work of the Historical Committee in the 1990s and 2000s for the pamphlet, maps, historical

⁷³ "The Hemingsfords," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, November 23, 1986. Accessed October 5, 2015.

⁷⁴ Two-page insert for DWG 75th Celebration Souvenir Program, June 10-12, 2011. University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

designations, and preparation for the sesquicentennial greatly helped the community remain distinct in the midst of rapid and growing suburbanization.⁷⁵ This work also resulted in the town earning an official Texas historical marker for the community park, a key public feature that sets the neighborhood apart from most suburban communities.

In many ways, Dalworthington Gardens and the other homesteads served as the beginning of automobile-based suburban America. While the Gardens has remained distinct from the other suburban areas of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, it represents a planned migration away from the city, yet close enough to benefit from its most desired aspects and economic activity. From the beginning, the Gardens residents lived partially self-sufficient lives, yet relied on bigger businesses, educational opportunities, and healthcare in the nearby cities. Prior to Roosevelt's administration, such places did not exist in strategic ways. There were towns near cities, but never before were the towns distinctly prescribed to be half-country, half-city, such as the Gardens became. Indeed, these homesteads revealed the prosperity that can result from proximity to urban activity, yet the increase in standard of living that the rural landscape often brings. After all, Roosevelt's New Deal and Subsistence Homestead program came two decades prior to Eisenhower's defense system and the creation of interstate highways, commonly considered by geographers to be a direct instigator of American suburbanization.

While Dalworthington Gardens has undergone many changes since its creation in 1936, its old single-story homes with lots of side-yard space, minimum acreage requirements, and large park, help the city remain distinct from the rest of the metroplex. The Gardens remains considerably different than most suburbs, with deep front yards and narrow streets. Although the geographic gap between Arlington and the Gardens no longer exists, the existence of the mayor

⁷⁵Pennie Boyett, "Back in the old neighborhood."

and city council provide evidence that Dalworthington holds a specific and separate place on the map of the metroplex. Ultimately, the Gardens remains unique through the effort and enthusiasm of the residents that published such complete souvenir programs for both the fiftieth and seventy-fifth Anniversary Celebrations. Mostly individual families and residents of the community sponsored these celebrations and souvenirs. However, some businesses contributed, such as Republic Services, The Owners Association of Enchanted Gardens, Inc., and Wellspring Insurance Agency, Inc.⁷⁶ The celebrations themselves also reveal that the community members possess a sense of pride in their city today that does not appear in most suburban communities. Dalworthington Gardens, Texas possesses a history unlike any other city in Texas, much less the burgeoning metroplex. Its origin narrative remains crucial to its identity as a separate city surrounded by massive populations.

⁷⁶ Souvenir Program, 75th Anniversary Celebration, June 10-12, 2011, Ed. Velma Bogart, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Library.

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