

History of Rollingwood

Native American Tonkawa and Comanche tribes were the first inhabitants in this area. The land Rollingwood is on was deeded from Mexico to Henry P. Hill for colonization in 1835.

1904 - 1,800 acres of land was bought by Condidio Dellana who had immigrated from Italy in the 1880s and had worked as a stone mason on the State Capitol building until its completion in 1888. The Dellana ranch stretched from Barton Creek on the south to the Colorado river on the north and included the land on which Rollinwood, Treemont, Barton Creek Mall and MoPac freeway now sit. Dellana, an enterprising and hardworking man paid for his ranch by selling hundreds of pounds of bat guano, which he harvested out of caves located on his property. The little community of sparsely scattered cabins and houses remained sparsely populated and remote from Austin because there were no bridges across the Colorado river until the 1880s.

1946 - Brothers A.B and George B. Hatley bought 300 acres from the Dellana ranch for \$300 an acre. While A.B developed the land along the Colorado river with a main thoroughfare named Stratford Drive, George developed the inner portion of Rollingwood. Almost all street names in Rollingwood are named after members of the Hatley family and their friends. The Hatley brothers are reputed to have been rivals in business ventures. Their disagreements caused them to divide Rollingwood Drive with the North half being developed by George and the South by A.B, who then divided the land into smaller lots to allow for more lots.

1955 - The Village of Rollingwood was incorporated with Frank L. Scofield as its first mayor. There were only 28 homes in Rollingwood. Scofield recalled how the first City Council operated for 3 years without any bookkeeping or organization. All officers of the Village served without pay except for L.T. Gunn who served as Marshall, was paid \$30 a month, was given a whistle and had to use his own car to patrol the city. From 1958 -1975, Clarence Wilson conducted city business from his home at 3202 Gentry Drive. There was no trash collection until 1960. Trash used to accumulate in open trash dumps. One dump location was where Corky Logue's tennis courts now reside at 3016 Hatley. Residents had to seek out their own garbage collector.

1963 - In May the Village incorporated as a municipality with a Mayor-Council form of government. The city entered into an agreement with Austin for water. Before this water was provided by several companies with their own water wells. There was a water tower bearing the letters ROLLINGWOOD that was located between Wallis and Almarion.

1970 - Helen Shaw, who was Mayor at the time wrote "As the 1970 council took office they were shocked to find that there was not a bit of money in the coffer to run the city, so the men borrowed on short term notes from month to month to operate the most basic functions of the city. They also laid down some fine basis for a "Do it yourself " government". Elected officials and residents met in private homes or in downtown Austin buildings to conduct city business. Rent was being paid to hold court at the Optimist Club building. Shaw recounts "Two of us would go early to clean up the dirty plates left and toss out the beer cans before we could hold court. The court clerk (Flo Maclin for many years) sat with her back to a hole large enough for

any amount of snakes to crawl through. The desire to have a City Hall was in high gear. The councilmen did many jobs themselves to save each penny they could and at the end of each year the Council was very proud to put what they saved into the City Hall building fund.” Mayor Shaw, wrote that the bids that came in to build City Hall were just over what the City could afford but said, “Then in one of the brightest days of my life, two things happened. I received a letter from Marge Loehlin (RWC president from 1968-69) saying that her committee appointed to raise funds for City hall could donate \$1,600. The next was that the Volunteer Fire Department sent a petition signed by all members that they desired to use all their County Revenue sharing money on the project. This put us over!”.

1971 - The City of Rollingwood purchased 1.0009 acres on Nixon Drive from the Optimist Club of Western Hills. This is the land the City Hall was built upon in 1975 for the future municipal building, which was built in 1975.

1975 - After years of planning, saving and raising funds, the 3,500 square foot City Hall was built. It took 120 days to build and cost \$50,000. The project did not incur any debt. Many fund raising efforts went into furnishing the new City Hall. At a program at the City Hall, Artist Dalhart Windberg demonstrated the art of oil palette painting and painted “Hill Country Sunset”. He then donated the painting to the Rollingwood Women’s Club. The RWC had a drawing with tickets sold at \$1 each. The Capitol National Bank won the painting and donated it back to the City. The Women’s Club made \$2000 on the sale of the painting. Look for the painting that hangs on the far wall at City Hall. Other fund raising efforts included garage sales, sale of spices, consignment clothing sales, year book ad sales. All together \$4,700 was raised by the RWC to pay for donation of furniture including 50 folding chairs, 10 folding tables, one desk, 1 swivel chair, 4 side chairs and 4 file drawers (\$1150) drapes (\$600), the patio (\$768), landscaping (\$1000) and Official building plaque (\$225) for the newly built City Hall. The other major fundraiser held by the RWC, and a highlight at the end of each year is the July 4th parade. This was started by Hazel Maxwell in 1978 to bring neighbors together and to foster community. The first parade had the fire truck “Big Red”, trash truck, decorated cars, bicycles and yes, HORSES! When the parade began, the noise from the fire truck spooked the horses, sending them galloping in a frenzy all the way back to the stables on Bee Cave Road. Horses were outlawed after that!

1985 - Voters elected to join Travis County Rural Fire Prevention District 1. Until 1985 the city had a Volunteer Fire Department. A city newsletter describes the department “as a motley group that consists of teenagers, retirees, doctors, dancers, civil servants, red-necks, accountants and even a little old lady in tennis shoes”. Harry Rogers was Fire Chief in 1974 and for years all emergency calls 24/7 were handled by Harry’s wife Lavonne Rogers and their 3 daughters who attended to the phones and the CB radio and scanner. Funding for the fire department was from an annual barbecue at which the RWC provided desserts. Harry Rogers almost lost his life on several occasions while attempting to rescue motorists whose vehicles

had been swept into the flood waters on Rollingwood Drive near Barton Springs Road before that bridge was built.

As Rollingwood Women's Club historian Shanti Jayakumar, once pointed out, an article in The Picayune September 1987 sums it very appropriately: "If you need something done, chances are it can get done in Rollingwood. For 30 years, the residents of the community have been taking volunteerism to new levels. Rollingwood residents can tell countless stories of volunteerism. Chris Byrne battling the July heat and digging up rock to plant grass. Anderson used to recycle aluminum cans and use the money for park upkeep.....Dick Brown mows the yard around the Municipal building...." Dozens of Rollingwood residents can be relied on to get the necessary jobs finished. Hazel Maxwell summed it up "The only reward is gratification, and that seems to be plenty enough for Rollingwood volunteers." People in Rollingwood have had that spirit for a long, long time.

References:

- Eanes: Portrait of a Community. Linda Vance and Dorothy Depwe, 1986 (Taylor Publishing Company)
- Picayune articles from various years
- Information gathered from personal interviews with longtime residents
- Documents and letters provided by longtime residents