

UNCOVERING TARRANT
A City That Might Have Been

Weldon G. Cannon

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Preface

This is a brief history of Tarrant, Tarrant County, Texas. Established in 1903, today Tarrant is almost forgotten, buried under the dust and debris of time. However, it had the potential of becoming a major city, comparable to nearby Irving in Dallas County. The site was long considered part of Euless. When established, Tarrant was in the Euless voting precinct and the Euless school district. It is now within the city limits of Fort Worth, although it is still part of the Hurst-Euless-Bedford school district. The entry for Tarrant, Tarrant County, in THE NEW HANDBOOK OF TEXAS, 1996, is inadequate and has numerous inaccuracies. At this Website a shorter version, with illustrations, is available.

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By Weldon G. Cannon

At 8:15 on the morning of December 1, 1903, a special train left Fort Worth, bound east to Dallas. It had originated in Chicago, and for this last segment of its journey carried about 25 passengers and several officials of the Chicago, Rock Island and Gulf Railway Company. No. 11, as the train was officially designated, consisted of an engine, a combination mail and express car, a baggage car, a day coach, a chair car and a Pullman coach. This was the inaugural run over the Rock Island's newest addition to its extensive railway system, 34 miles of track linking Fort Worth and Dallas.

The train passed three local stations that were under construction along the route. The first station was Hurst. Next came Candon, where a town was being developed. Across the Tarrant County line, in Dallas County, was Irving, where another town was developing. The special train reached Dallas at 9:30 a.m.

The railway company, commonly called the Rock Island, was organized in 1847. It eventually became known as the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific, which by 1892 had completed a line across Kansas and Oklahoma Territory to the Red River. Before it could build lines in Texas, however, the company had to secure a Texas charter, which was done under the name Chicago, Rock Island and Gulf. The company was authorized to build to Fort Worth, then to Dallas and eventually Houston.

The railway company completed its line to Fort Worth in 1903. But even before finishing that project, it began planning its line to Dallas. In April, 1902, engineers ran a survey through Arlington, which already had the Texas and Pacific Railroad and an interurban line linking Dallas and Fort Worth. Another survey was also run on the north side of the Trinity River, about 2 miles south of Bedford and 1 1/2 miles south of Euless. The proposed northern line also missed two communities in western Dallas County, Sowers and Kit.

After deciding to adopt the northern route in June 1902, the railway began acquiring right of way for the road. Some property owners near Euless, such as Robert and Henry Ferris, father and son, donated right of way, to be sure the line came their way. Others, such as Adam Euless, sold their land to the company. By August, construction contracts were let. In the fall of 1902 and through much of 1903, land was cleared, grading finished, bridges built, track laid and depots built. In June 1903, the Ferris family sold 90 acres of the farm south of Euless to the

railroad for a town site for \$4,100. The donation of right of way had paid off handsomely. Also in June it was announced that the new town would be named Eules.

A railway building through the countryside could be a bane or a blessing for an existing community. If it built through the community, it was a great blessing. If it missed by a few miles, businesses had to pack up and move to the railroad to survive, and the old community withered. This process played out repeatedly. Eules people were excited at the prospect of getting a railroad. Although they would have to move, the new site would still be called Eules.

In the summer and fall, right of way was fenced, telegraph lines erected, and the road was ready for the first train on December 1. Supervising the project was Fred Peters, Rock Island civil engineer who had long worked for the railway company.

By December 1, 1903, however, the railway had made another decision--the new town would not be called Eules, but Candon. Why it was renamed Candon is not now known. There is no evidence that there was a community or a family by that name in the area. It is a rather unusual name. But Peters was born in New Hampshire in 1854 and his father had been born in Vermont when there were a number of families with that name in New England and nearby New York and New Jersey. Could Candon have been a family name of Mr. Peters? Further research might reveal evidence to substantiate or discredit this suggestion.

The origin of nearby Hurst is absolutely clear—William Letchworth “Uncle Billy” Hurst donated right of way through his farm with the provision that a station be erected there named Hurst. The origin of Irving's name is not as certain, but has been established to the satisfaction of Irving historians. Washington Irving was the favorite author of Mrs. Otis Brown, wife of developer of the Irving town site. Historians surmise that this is the origin of their town's name.

Regardless, the Eules station had a new name and the inaugural run was made over the line on December 1, 1903. On January 29, 1904, an ad appeared in the DALLAS MORNING NEWS, announcing the sale of town lots at Candon on February 4. Several more ads appeared, and articles in Dallas and Arlington newspapers proclaimed the coming event.

Mr. Peters filed a town plat for Candon on January 22 at the Tarrant County Court House. It was officially recorded on February 19. There were 144 business lots and 187 residential lots in the new town. Streets were named Eules, Ferris and Violet, plus the usual Main and Front and the rather common Oak, Elm, Peach and Plum. Streets named Eules and Ferris were logical. No reason has been discovered why a street should be named Violet. Perhaps it came from Peters or some other person associated with building the railroad.

A long passing track was laid at Candon so trains could pass each other at the midway point of their Fort Worth-Dallas run. A house track was laid so passengers could safely load and disembark. A fine depot was finished, along with a section house and bunk house. A deep, free flowing artesian water well was drilled. A pump house and a large overhead water tower were erected and a surface water reservoir dug.

Eulesse seemed doomed. One of its leading citizens, Dr. Luther F. Rhodes, a highly respected physician, built a new house and an office in Candon. John Cruse, another respected citizen of Eulesse and active in Tarrant County affairs, also established residence in the new town. For some now unknown reason the editor of an Arlington newspaper named Cruse "Mayor of Candon." Other leading Eulesse citizens--Fullers, Huffmans, Blessings--relocated homes and built businesses in Candon.

Other indicators of a developing town became evident. In March 1904, a Baptist Church was established in Candon under the leadership of Dr. A. H. Boyd, another Eulesse physician, and Marion Jernigan, another prominent Eulesse citizen. They had previously attended the Bedford Baptist Church. In April, 1904, Candon citizens applied for a post office for their new town. All of the application blanks were properly filled in--Henry F. Ferris would be postmaster, Trinity was the nearest river, Hurricane the nearest creek, and the place was on the Chicago, Rock Island and Gulf Railroad. Neighboring post offices were Enless (the official, though misspelled, postal name of Eulesse), Arlington and Grand Prairie. Enless postmaster, Thomas W. Fuller, even gave his signed blessing as head of the nearest post office.

The application came back from Washington, D.C, with quite a surprise. Candon had been crossed out, and Tarrant written above it. Washington authorities were final arbiters of a post office name. Postal application forms suggested that local citizens submit several names so officials could select the one they thought best. It was even suggested that prefixes or additions such as North, South, Old, New, Town, Point, Hill, Vale, etc., should be avoided to lessen the likelihood of confusion. Furthermore, a name similar to an existing post office in the same state would never be allowed. There were already offices in Texas named Canton and Camden. The addition of Candon to this list could result in much confusion. Hence, some Washington official ruled out Candon and chose Tarrant, probably for Tarrant County. Ferris assumed office at the newly christened Tarrant Post Office on August 12, 1904. The railway next changed the name of its station from Candon to Tarrant. Then, Peters' Candon officially disappeared on November 21, 1905, when he filed this notice with the court clerk--"In order to conform to the name given the said place by the Post Office Department and the name now given to the Station by the Chicago, Rock Island and Gulf Railway Company; . . . henceforth the town of Candon shall be known by the name of Tarrant."

Eulesse still seemed headed for the junk heap of history, but now it would be terminated by a place called Tarrant, not Candon. Tarrant boomed. New residents flocked to the town and several businesses were established. At least three stores were built, selling general merchandise, groceries or drugs. A cotton gin, known locally as the "Blue Goose," and a lumber yard were built. The Woodmen of the World, a fraternal order, established a camp in Tarrant and erected a two-story building. Their lodge hall was on the upper floor. The lower floor was available for community meetings and was often used by various nondenominational churches. Tarrant became a favorite preaching site for itinerant preachers. The county evangelist for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), or Churches of Christ, conducted a revival meeting in Tarrant, at the invitation of Dr. Rhodes and Arch N. Cannon, local leaders of the denomination.

No congregation for this group was established, but the Baptists soon built their own building. As the school age population grew, Tarrant residents wearied of sending their children along unpaved dirt roads 1 1/2 miles to the school at Euless. Hence, a new school was built in Tarrant for local students, although it remained part of the Euless district. Tarrant, by 1910, had become a real town.

The railroad depot became the transportation hub of an area north of the Trinity River between Arlington and Grapevine. Two passenger trains stopped every day headed each for Dallas and Fort Worth. People walked to the station or rode horses or in buggies or wagons. They traveled to Fort Worth or Dallas for business, pleasure or shopping and returned the same day. Freight trains also stopped regularly, transporting goods into and out of Tarrant. For example, Arch Cannon, nurseryman who lived between Tarrant and Euless, shipped thousands of shrubs and trees from the station each year, plus large amounts of fresh fruit and berries.

Many interesting stories spring out of Tarrant history. In 1909, Jeff Craft, owner of the Tarrant Lumber Company, planned marrying Mattie Mayes of Euless. The prospective groom asked the Rev. D. C. Sibley, a Methodist minister in Arlington, to perform the ceremony in Euless at the bride's home. But on February 14, the appointed date, a "full grown norther" came through that "howled in goulish rage," according to a report by the minister. He feared freezing to death if he tried getting to Euless, 8 miles away, across the Trinity River and through the river bottom lands. Determined that the ceremony must go on, he discovered that he could take the Fort Worth-Dallas Interurban line to Dallas, where he could then catch a train to Tarrant. The scheme worked. The newly married couple boarded a train later that evening for Dallas for their honeymoon.

"Mayor" Cruse was an important but tragic figure in the history of Candon (Tarrant) and Euless. After seeming to simply appear in Euless from nowhere about 1902, he became a county tax assessor for the Euless area and school census taker. He also worked as bookkeeper for Arch Cannon in the Euless Nurseries. He told such incredibly tall tales about his fishing and hunting exploits that even his sporting buddies sometimes denied them. He attracted considerable attention once after presenting a nine pound sweet potato to the Arlington newspaper editor. For a while he served as a deputy sheriff, supervising a chain gain at a convict camp near Tarrant while the prisoners worked on county roads. He often boarded with Euless families such as Tom P. Huffman, Tarrant County Commissioner for precinct three, and Tom W. Fuller, Euless storekeeper and postmaster for many years. Sometime before 1920, while working on a farm, he was trapped in the blades of a mowing machine, an old fashioned sickle mower, pulled by horses. One leg was so badly mangled that it had to be amputated. The severed limb was buried in a garden between Fuller's store and his house, presently the south lane of West Euless Blvd. at Main St. (Might the leg still be buried there, under the concrete?) At the time he was engaged to be married, but because of the accident, broke off the engagement, and never married. He worked for Tom Fuller in the store and even continued operating the store after Fuller died. However, he was a very poor businessman. The store was dingy and dirty and friends who hung around much of the day distracted him

from his business and took advantage of him by taking merchandise they did not pay for. He died in 1935, at age 74, and was buried in Calloway Cemetery.

Dr. Rhodes was probably the most notable citizen of Candon, or Tarrant. He delivered hundreds of babies in the area and treated all people, black and white, for many diseases, traveling over a sizeable part of eastern Tarrant County on horseback or by buggy. He served several years as Tarrant Postmaster, succeeding his father in the position. He was also Tarrant County Health Officer and during World War I was on the county draft board. In 1921 he moved to Fort Worth where he had an office on Main St., only a block from the court house.

Grady Walker, who married Maude Hurst, was also an important figure in Tarrant and beyond. He served as station agent for the Rock Island Railroad at Tarrant for a few years, about 1910-1912. At other times, he held the same position at the Hurst and Irving Stations.

The town continued developing and seemed to have a bright future. In 1919, Dun, a credit rating company, credited Tarrant with a population of 200, while Bedford had only 50 and Euless 25.

So, what happened to Tarrant? Why did Euless survive, and become a city of 60,000 people, while Tarrant disappeared and is nearly forgotten? Tarrant was founded by a railway company just as the railway age, the age of steam, reached its peak and was about to decline. The highway era, the age of the automobile and the truck, powered by the internal combustion engine, was beginning. A bridge across the Trinity River, connecting Tarrant with Arlington and Grand Prairie, washed out and was not rebuilt, leaving Tarrant on a dead end road. Its population declined and businesses closed. The Tarrant school merged with the Euless school and a fine new brick building was built near Euless in 1913. It was known for some time as the Euless-Tarrant School, but Tarrant was soon dropped from the name. About 1914 the Tarrant Baptist Church moved to Euless, and in 1923 the Tarrant post office closed. Regularly scheduled passenger train service ended. For awhile trains could be flagged for a stop, but even that soon ceased.

New businesses were established in Euless. Homer Fuller opened a store in 1926 and was soon joined by his brother Warren. It quickly became the business center of Euless and an expanse of Northeast Tarrant County. Tennessee Dairies built a milk cooling plant in 1927 to serve the extensive dairy farming population in eastern Tarrant County. In the early 1930s, as Texas prepared for its 1936 centennial observance in Dallas, a new highway was planned, north of the Trinity River, linking Fort Worth and Dallas. The new highway missed Tarrant, passing through Euless. This was the end of Tarrant. Almost.

Beginning in 1936 the Burlington-Rock Island Railroad ran the fabled Burlington Zephyrs hauling passengers from Chicago to Fort Worth, Dallas and Houston through Tarrant on sleek modern stainless steel diesel operated trains. The first streamliners in Texas, they were known as the Sam Houston Zephyr and the Texas Rocket. Trains passing through Tarrant had a special fascination for Euless people, who sometimes would go to Tarrant just to watch them. More

than once Euless parents took carloads of children to Fort Worth where they boarded the Zephyr, then raced to Dallas in automobiles to pick them up. When the train passed through Tarrant, other area people were there to wave at the children on the train who were having a grand excursion. After passenger service was discontinued in 1966 the tracks carried only freight. Dallas Area Rapid Transit Authority and Fort Worth Transit Authority acquired the line and established regular rail service between the two cities in 1996, the Trinity Railway Express (TRE). There are two Irving stations, a Hurst-Bell Helicopter Station and a Centre Port Station near Tarrant, but none bearing the Tarrant name. Today, there is not even a sign along the tracks that is labeled Tarrant.

While Tarrant faded away, Euless grew. An independent school district was created in 1925, a large school auditorium was erected in 1930 and a new high school building in 1935. In 1949 a new post office was established, this time with the correct name, and the following year the community was incorporated as a municipality. (The corporation was dissolved in 1953 but immediately incorporated again.) Euless could never annex Tarrant, however, because in 1948 Fort Worth annexed a strip of land along Pipeline Road, one mile south of the center of Euless and between Euless and Tarrant. The strip connected Fort Worth with its new airport, known later as Greater Southwest International Airport, Amon Carter Field, which was located just east of Euless and immediately south of present DFW International Airport. Fort Worth eventually annexed Tarrant, even though its post office address remained Euless.

How big might Tarrant have become? Look at a map of Irving. Let us suppose that Tarrant had become a city as large as Irving, just across the Tarrant-Dallas County line from Tarrant. Its population would be about a quarter million and it would cover 50 or 60 square miles. What if Tarrant, on the Tarrant County side of the county line, had the same geographical configuration as Irving in Dallas County. Suppose a hinge was placed at the county line and the Irving outline was flipped into Tarrant County, with the area being in the City of Tarrant? Euless would be completely absorbed by Tarrant, as well as most of Bedford. Much of Grapevine and Colleyville would also be in Tarrant, as well as a considerable part of Southlake and some of Hurst, Fort Worth and Arlington.

Euless is now a small but widely known city in the heart of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. Tarrant is forgotten, except in the memory of a few old timers. This then is the story of Tarrant, a city that might have been, but wasn't, a community with great potential that ultimately failed, becoming covered with the dust and debris of events that it could not control.

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SOURCES

- Tarrant County public records, especially deeds and plats.*
- Interviews with numerous people who lived in Euless and Tarrant.*
- Contemporary Arlington, Fort Worth and Dallas newspaper articles.*
- U. S. Census and Post Office records.*
- Photos made by Mrs. Ross (Winnie Day) Cannon, the H. Grady Walker family and relatives of Fred H. Peters.*
- Correspondence with the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railway Company and descendants of onetime railroad employees.*
- Railway publications.*

