

## The Soul of Patience

### Spiritual Equality in the Trespalacios Baptist Church of Deming's Bridge, Texas

*by Ann Landeros*

*"But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."*  
James 1:4, *Holy Bible* (KJV)

In January 1865, Patience's world appeared to be crumbling. The previous spring, her husband Jake disappeared and, if the rumors concerning his absence were true, he would not be seen in Matagorda County anytime soon, at least if he wanted to live. The Trespalacios Baptist Church (TBC), where Patience and Jake had been members for more than a decade, had already expelled Jake. Now the congregation weighed Patience's spiritual worthiness. Had she engaged in "disorderly walk" as charged? If so, had she repented sufficiently to remain a part of the congregation? Under the Baptist doctrine of spiritual equality, before the congregation imposed discipline, Patience had a right to be told what she had done wrong and to defend herself. But would a congregation dominated by Anglo males and slave owners really provide due process to an enslaved woman like Patience?

The TBC clerk recorded the information about Patience, her alleged misconduct, and the church's investigation and judgment of her in the TBC minute book (Minutes), which descendants of the original congregants preserved and published.<sup>1</sup> In all, the Minutes refer to Patience only four times: once in connection with her baptism and three references regarding her discipline. The curt references about Patience typify nineteenth-century church minutes regarding disciplinary matters. The minute keepers seldom detailed the charges or findings in such cases.<sup>2</sup>

To those not schooled in the New Testament, the language describing Patience's alleged misconduct may suggest she literally strutted or sashayed her way into trouble at church. In fact, the charging language derives from a scriptural mandate to conform conduct to Jesus's example.

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<sup>1</sup>Adelaide Hall Pierce, *Deming's Bridge Cemetery, Trespalacios Baptist Church, and Hawley Cemetery* (Palacios: Palacios Beacon, 1960): 5, 31-32. Pierce received the Minutes from Ham Smith, a descendant of a founding member, John Bradburn Smith.

<sup>2</sup>Angela Boswell, "The Meaning of Participation: White Protestant Women in Antebellum Houston Churches," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 99: 1 (July 1995): 26-47, 39.

The charge essentially accused Patience of unspecified, “unchristian” acts; often, “disorderly walk” referred to gossiping and idleness.<sup>3</sup>

Patience’s and Jake’s membership in a predominately Anglo Baptist congregation may surprise the reader accustomed to the racially-segregated churches of more modern American society.<sup>4</sup> In the antebellum American South, however, biracial Protestant churches were not uncommon.<sup>5</sup> Motivated both by religious concerns about salvation and secular concerns about controlling slave activities, Anglo Protestants kept a close watch on the religious activities of their slaves, often by having slaves worship with Anglo-dominated congregations. Not until the decade after the Civil War did the newly-emancipated black congregants begin to withdraw into their own congregations, a withdrawal that resulted in the Sunday morning church service being commonly referred to as “the most segregated hour in Christian America.”<sup>6</sup>

Sent to Texas around 1846 by the recently-established Southern Baptist Convention to organize congregations, the TBC’s first pastor, Baptist missionary Noah Hill, helped establish the TBC and several other Matagorda churches.<sup>7</sup> Hill bore a special charge to minister to the enslaved persons in his assigned district, and this charge possibility attracted Patience and Jake.<sup>8</sup> Hill almost certainly baptized Jake and Patience in the nearby Trespalacios River.<sup>9</sup> Hill served as the TBC’s pastor until 1855.<sup>10</sup>

Patience and Jake joined the church in August 1852, a month after its founding and before it had a building site, but their fellow congregants soon erected a log church building.<sup>11</sup> In 1854, the congregation built a frame structure on two acres donated by Methodist minister Norman Savage from the northwest corner of the Thomas Jamison League, south of where

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<sup>3</sup>The verses in 2 Thessalonians 3 that relate “disorderly walk” and idleness and gossip read: 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us; 3:11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. *Holy Bible*, King James Version, Red Letter Edition (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., undated).

<sup>4</sup>It is estimated that more than half of modern American religious congregations are unracial, and in nine out of ten congregations, eighty percent of members are of a single race. Christopher P. Scheitle and Kevin D. Dougherty, “Race, Diversity and Membership Duration in Religious Congregations,” *Sociological Inquiry* 80 (2010): 405.

<sup>5</sup>Charles A. Israel, “From Biracial to Segregated Churches: Black and White Protestants in Houston, Texas, 1840-1970,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 101:4 (April 1998): 440; Carroll, J.M., *A History of Texas Baptists: comprising a detailed account of their activities, their progress, and their achievements*. (Dallas: Baptist Standard Publishing, 1923): 253. See also various slave narratives in T. Lindsay Baker and Julie P. Baker, eds., *Till Freedom Cried Out: Memories of Texas Slave Life*. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997): 52, 53, 65, 76, and 80.

<sup>6</sup>Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., sermon given November 4, 1956, at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, quoted in Scheitle, “Race, Diversity and Membership Duration in Religious Congregations,” 405.

<sup>7</sup>Pierce, *Deming’s Bridge Cemetery*, 23. The Minutes record that in 1848, Hill baptized Horace Yeamans’ wife Elizabeth Baxter Yeamans at the Matagorda church.

<sup>8</sup>Morrell, Z. N. *Flowers and Fruits from the Wilderness Or, Thirty Six Years in Texas and Two Winters in Honduras*. Waco, Tex.: Baylor UP, 1976. 253, 256-57. Print. Hill owned two female slaves in 1850: a sixteen-year-old and an eight-year-old. U.S. Federal Census 1850, Slave Schedule for Matagorda County, Texas.

<sup>9</sup>Pierce, *Deming’s Bridge Cemetery*, 15.

<sup>10</sup>Hill died in 1867. Z. N. Morrell, *Flowers and Fruits*, 239.

<sup>11</sup>The TBC was organized at a meeting on July 4, 1852, at the home of Daniel and Lavinia Wheeler. The founding families were the Yeamans, Smiths, Tones, Biddles, Partains, and Wheelers. Pierce, *Deming’s Bridge Cemetery*, 5, 16.

Wilson and Trespalacios creeks join to form the Trespalacios River.<sup>12</sup> That same year, the congregation platted its cemetery by the new church building.<sup>13</sup> The area around the TBC chapel grew into a commercial and social center after 1857, when Edward Deming constructed the first county-financed bridge there.<sup>14</sup> This bridge remained the sole river crossing in the area for decades, and as it drew commercial development in the area, the small Deming's Bridge community formed. Of the church, village, and cemetery, only the cemetery survives today.<sup>15</sup>

The Grimes ranch where Patience lived lay along the Trespalacios River about three miles directly south of Deming's Bridge. The most direct route from the ranch to church traversed three miles of flat prairie occupied mostly by cows. But the church lay on the east bank of the river and the Grimes Ranch on the west. If Patience wanted to cross the river by bridge, she had to follow the river's meanders to the Deming's Bridge, which added about a mile to her trip. Patience and Jake may have had access to a boat so they could walk a more direct route across the prairie to church.

The Grimes family, one of the county's richest, began ranching in the early 1840s.<sup>16</sup> Connecticut ship captain and merchant Richard Grimes arrived in Texas in 1837, settling at Palacios Point in Matagorda County. By 1843, he and his son William Bradford (W.B.) had a thriving cattle ranch and hide-rendering plant in the area.<sup>17</sup> In 1850, W.B. owned four slaves, a male and female in their early twenties (most likely Patience and Jake) and two female toddlers.<sup>18</sup> According to the 1860 census, Patience was thirty-three years old that year.<sup>19</sup>

The Grimes ranch must have been a busy place in the mid-nineteenth century. In addition to the ranch cowboys, which included future cattle barons Abel and Jonathan Pierce and the future cowboy-detective-author Charles Siringo, the hide-and-tallow rendering plant employed multiple hands. After the Civil War, the Pierce brothers established their cattle operation, El Rancho Grande, at Deming's Bridge, where Jonathan's family attended the TBC. Siringo used his experiences as a cowboy on the Grimes Ranch in his autobiography.<sup>20</sup> By the early 1860s, the ranches and the TBC began losing men to the Confederate Army. TBC members Jonathan

<sup>12</sup>See *Handbook of Texas*, Thomas Jamison.

<sup>13</sup>Pierce, *Deming's Bridge Cemetery*, 6, 17. The "new meeting" building was dedicated on May 29, 1854.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Wolff, Jr., "Deming's Bridge Site Marked," *The Victoria Advocate*, July 4, 1987, at 43.

<sup>15</sup>Known today as the Hawley Cemetery, Jonathan Pierce unilaterally renamed the Deming's Bridge post office (and thus the community) in 1897 to honor a Texas senator. This change was not without controversy. Pierce, *Deming's Bridge Cemetery*, 8.

<sup>16</sup>According to the U.S. Federal Census for 1860, W.B. Grimes owned about \$80,000 in real and personal property. He ranked among the top ten wealthiest men in the county that year. See, Adrien D. Ivan, "Masters No More: Abolition and Texas Planters, 1860-1890" (PhD diss., University of North Texas, 2010): 180, Table 7.3.

<sup>17</sup>Texas Historical Marker text, "Grimes Cemetery."

<sup>18</sup>U.S. Federal Census 1850 Slave Schedule for Matagorda County, Texas. One of the toddlers was likely the "Liza" referred to by Daisy Ferguson Grimes in her story of her husband Bradford Grimes' (W.B.'s son) life. Mrs. Grimes refers to Liza as being the daughter of "Aunt Patience one of the earlier slaves" on the Grimes ranch. [http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/grimes\\_bradford\\_10.htm](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/grimes_bradford_10.htm)

<sup>19</sup>U.S. Federal Census 1860, Slave Schedule for Matagorda County, Texas. In that count, W.B. had fourteen slaves but only two were adult females, both listed as thirty years old.

<sup>20</sup>Chris Emmett, *Shanghai Pierce, A Fair Likeness* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974):21; Charles Siringo, *A Texas Cowboy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979): 53. In his introduction to Siringo's book, J. Frank Dobie describes it, a perennial bestseller for forty years, as one of the first significant books concerning the cattle range.

Pierce, Robert Partain, and Robert O’Neal, for example, spent much of the period from 1861 to 1864 in Confederate units.<sup>21</sup>

Patience and Jake worshipped independently of their owners. The Episcopalian Grimes family worshipped at home or at Matagorda town’s Christ Episcopal Church on the bay about twenty miles east of their ranch.<sup>22</sup> The TBC’s governing rules required regular attendance for Sunday worship; non-attendance was grounds for expulsion. Jake and Patience’s long-standing membership indicates regular, weekly church-going.<sup>23</sup> Church attendance no doubt served as a social as well as religious outing. Although slaves comprised about fifty-five percent of the county population from 1850 until after the Civil War, Patience and Jake remained largely isolated from the other slave members of the TBC.<sup>24</sup> They needed Grimes’s express permission to be off his property.<sup>25</sup> As Grimes apparently allowed them to attend church regularly, the outing provided Patience and Jake with both a spiritual and a social occasion.<sup>26</sup> When threatened with loss of membership in the TBC, Patience had limited alternatives for worship and probably no other excuses to leave the ranch unchaperoned.

Patience’s and Jake’s TBC membership rested entirely on the good opinion of their fellow congregants. The early Texas Baptist churches operated as independent bodies; the churches affiliated in regional associations, but such associations did not control the local church

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<sup>21</sup>See entries in the National Parks Service Soldiers and Sailors Database, <http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm>.

<sup>22</sup>Members of the Grimes family appear on the list of persons baptized in Matagorda town’s Christ Episcopal Church during the nineteenth-century. See *Baptisms, Register of the Parish of Christ Episcopal Church, 1837-1875*, pp. 24-32, available at [http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/ma\\_cc\\_baptisms1.htm](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/ma_cc_baptisms1.htm), accessed March 29, 2014. The TBC Minutes do not list any Anglos by the name of Grimes as members. The Minutes refer to a “Mr. Grimes” several times, but only in conjunction with his ownership of Patience and Jake. W.B.’s daughter-in-law, Daisy Ferguson Grimes, wrote that her husband was raised Episcopalian and the family had private services at home. [http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/grimes\\_bradford\\_4.htm](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/grimes_bradford_4.htm)

<sup>23</sup>In addition to Article 10 of the TBC Articles of Faith that requires observance of the Sabbath, the Minutes also contain an entry stating: “11. It shall be the duty of every member to partake of the Lord’s Supper and failing to do so they shall be visited by the Deacon or Deacons and the cause of their delinquency inquired into.” Pierce, *Deming’s Bridge Cemetery*, 71-72.

<sup>24</sup>U.S. Federal Census 1850; U.S. Federal Census 1860; U.S. Federal Census 1850, Slave Schedules; U.S. Federal Census 1860, Slave Schedules. The TBC had African-American membership from its founding until 1873. In that period, about sixteen names on the membership roster appear to have been African-American. Pierce, *Deming’s Bridge Cemetery*, 43, 72-74.

<sup>25</sup>A Texas law enacted in 1846 authorized county slave patrols to lash a slave found off the slave owner’s property without the proper pass. Act approved May 9th, 1846. H. P. N. Gammel. *The Laws of Texas, 1822-1911* (Austin: Gammel Printing Company, 1898-1911) 2:1498. The law read:

“Sec. 3. Be it further enacted, That whenever a detachment, or part of one, may find any slave or slaves off the plantation or other premises of his, her or their master, mistress, or employer, strolling about without a pass or other written permission from some person authorized to give the same, said detachment, or part thereof, may give to every slave so offending, any number of lashes not exceeding twenty-five.”

<sup>26</sup>See “Introduction,” Baker and Baker (eds.), *Till Freedom Cried Out*, xvii; John Boles (ed.), *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988): 13.

<sup>27</sup>The TBC’s 9th Article of Faith, “Of Church Governance,” stated its organizing principle as “We believe that each individual Church assuming the word of God for its exclusive and infallible guide possesses within itself all requisite authority for its governance.” Pierce, *Deming’s Bridge Cemetery*, 71.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid*, 17, 32.

operations.<sup>27</sup> Each Baptist congregation elected its pastor and voted on admission or exclusion of congregants. In addition to the pastor, church administrators included a clerk and a moderator. The former wrote the minutes and the latter presided over church business. Most church sessions included a business meeting along with the sermon. Into the 1860s, the TBC paid its pastors one hundred dollars a year to preach sermons on Saturday and Sunday one weekend a month.<sup>28</sup> The moderator role rotated fairly frequently, but the church had only one clerk, Horace Yeamans. A member of Austin's colony who ranched on nearby Cash's Creek, Yeamans served for the entire forty-year period covered by the minutes.<sup>29</sup> Among the moderators was TBC founding member and local rancher Robert Partain.<sup>30</sup> After being ordained in 1889, Partain occasionally preached at the TBC but soon moved to the nearby Red Bluff congregation.<sup>31</sup>

Despite their administrative independence, nineteenth-century Texas Baptist churches followed a uniform standard for church discipline. These standards derived from the biblical teachings in the Book of Matthew.<sup>32</sup> After receiving an allegation of misconduct, the congregation would send an appointed committee to confer with the accused and witnesses, then report back to the congregation. The accused might address the congregation, either to repent or to refute the allegations. Thus, the church's disciplinary process incorporated the rudiments of due process: notice and the opportunity to be heard. The scripture mandated exclusion of an unrepentant person whose transgression had been proven by two or three witnesses.<sup>33</sup> In general, the Minutes reveal an even-handed application of discipline across gender and socio-economic lines. The TBC's uniform administration of church discipline mirrors the findings of a study of five other antebellum Texas Baptist churches, which held their male and female and black and

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<sup>29</sup>Horace Yeamans, Sr., immigrated to Texas from New York in 1829 when his extended family relocated to Matagorda County at the behest of his maternal uncle, Elias Wightman, a surveyor for the Austin colony and a founder of the town of Matagorda. Yeamans received his homestead for service in the Texas Revolution; two of his brothers were slain at Goliad and he escaped death only because he had been sent on a scouting mission. Pierce, *Deming's Bridge Cemetery*, 14; "Home of Horace Yeamans" marker text, Texas Historical Commission marker file, Austin, Texas. Pierce's book contains a note in the index under "Yeamans, S.E." to the effect that Yeamans family lore states Horace Yeamans, Jr. took over the TBC clerk's duties "about mid-way through the "Minute Book of 1852."

<sup>30</sup>Partain was the son of early Matagorda settlers, John C. and Nancy Smalley Partain. In *A Texas Cowboy*, Siringo recounts the piety of Horace Yeamans and Partain. On one cattle drive, Partain offered to increase Siringo's wages by three dollars a month for every month Siringo avoided using swear words; Partain kept his money. Siringo, *A Texas Cowboy*, 56.

<sup>31</sup>Pierce, *Deming's Bridge Cemetery*, 45, 64. The Red Bluff congregation still exists as the First Baptist Church of Bay City, Texas.. "First Baptist Church of Bay City" marker text, Texas Historical Commission marker file, Austin, Texas; Matagorda County Genealogical Society, *Oak Leaves*, Volume XIV, No. 3, May, 1995.

<sup>32</sup>Pierce, *Deming's Bridge Cemetery*, 72. A fragment in the Minutes stated: "12. Private offense shall be settled according to the eighteenth Chapter of Matthew." That verse reads: 15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Matthew 18:15-17. *Holy Bible*, King James Version, Red Letter Edition (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., undated).

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

white members to “roughly the same moral standards and obligations.”<sup>34</sup> Until 1873, when all African-American members were expelled for non-attendance, the only African-American members disciplined were Patience and Jake.<sup>35</sup> In accordance with the scriptural mandate, confession and repentance usually led to avoidance of punishment.<sup>36</sup>

A review of disciplinary cases described in the Minutes reveals a consistent application of the procedural due process. The most dramatic disciplinary actions involved TBC’s adult male Anglo congregants, beginning with the first member excluded, physician and TBC trustee Samuel Pilkington.<sup>37</sup> In 1858, Pilkington answered unspecified charges and “convicted himself out of his own mouth.” He chose not to leave but appeared at church the following month and “denounced the Church saying that she has conspired against him and was determined to cut him off without giving him a proper defense and charged the Church with many things that he could not sustain against her or anyone of her members . . . and could not be kept in order by the Moderator . . .” Ultimately, Pilkington calmed down, apologized to the moderator and left, ending the first and most dramatic case recorded in the Minutes.<sup>38</sup> In another dramatic case, Brother McIntire responded to charges of fighting on the Sabbath by addressing the congregation and repenting of violating the Sabbath but not of fighting.<sup>39</sup> His case was adjourned, but at the next session McIntire told the congregation “that when he joined this Church he thought it was a Christian Church but he did not think so now and would withdraw from it.” He was then excluded by vote.<sup>40</sup>

Most disciplinary matters resolved quickly, although occasionally the investigatory committee could not speak to the accused for many months. In those instances, the congregation delayed consideration of the charges until the accused had a chance to answer either through the committee or in person. For instance, after a charge lodged in September 1859, an appointed disciplinary committee met with the accused, Wiley Kuykendahl. The committee announced it was not ready to report on the matter at the October 1859 session and had no report until March 1860. Based on a report that Kuykendahl had refused “to make reconciliation,” the congregation voted to exclude him.<sup>41</sup> Church benefactor John Pierce repented of a charge of disorderly conduct in 1890.<sup>42</sup> Occasionally, investigations led to dismissal of charges, as with a charge of animal cruelty against Jack Wheeler in September 1865.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Nick Malavis, “Equality Under the Lord’s Law,” *East Texas Historical Journal* 31:1 (Spring 1993): 3-23, and 4.

<sup>35</sup>Pierce, *Deming’s Bridge Cemetery*, 3, 43.

<sup>36</sup>For examples of repentance and forgiveness, see the confession of Henry Wheeler for breaking the Sabbath and of Maggie O’Neal for her first dancing transgression. *Ibid.*, 34, 39.

<sup>37</sup>Pierce, *Deming’s Bridge Cemetery*, 6; U.S. Census 1850.

<sup>38</sup>Pierce, *Deming’s Bridge Cemetery*, 21.

<sup>39</sup>The congregation had several male McIntire members. Based on the date of exclusion, Edwinder McIntire was the most likely person involved in this matter. *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.* 58, 64-65. This was the second charge against Pierce. The Minutes do not state the resolution of an unspecified charge in 1888. In 1913, Pierce and his daughters donated an additional thirteen acres for the church cemetery. *Id.* p. 8

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

Dancing constituted the most common offense by juveniles. In 1864, the congregation excluded Jane Lacy and three other young ladies for that reason.<sup>44</sup> After the Civil War, the congregation's youth seem to have been particularly susceptible to Terpsichore, probably because with the community's growth came additional temptations.<sup>45</sup> From 1865 to 1890, at least nine juveniles were accused of and answered to charges of dancing; the TBC ultimately excluded five for this violation. Having influential relatives was no help when it came to this offense. Maggie O'Neal, Yeaman's granddaughter and Partain's niece, admitted to dancing in 1875 but repented sufficiently to avoid exclusion.<sup>46</sup> By the late 1870s, Maggie O'Neal was again in trouble, along with Allis Pybus and three of the congregation's young men, but all save one boy repented after counseling. In 1880, Maggie finally danced her way out of the congregation.<sup>47</sup> Defection to other religious groups constituted the main reason for exclusion of adult female Anglo congregants. Despite counseling by disciplinary committees, most defectors declined to return to the TBC. In 1858, the Methodist church claimed one of the church founders, Louisa Partain.<sup>48</sup> In 1865, founding member Maria Smith faced charges of consorting with the Carmelite Roman Catholic order of nuns, variously described as "Carnalites," "Camilites," and "Camelites." Initially, Sister Smith returned to the fold but by 1877 was again consorting with "Camelites," only this time Margaret Spore had joined her. After extensive counseling, the two were excluded in 1878.<sup>49</sup>

Before disciplining Patience, the TBC owed her the scripturally-mandated conference and an opportunity to respond. The Minutes terse entries' concerning the case suggests the congregation struggled procedurally with this matter. Despite a history of faithful attendance, indicating she valued her membership and the excuse to leave the ranch that church attendance provided, Patience does not seem to have answered the charge or otherwise defended herself. Procedural quandaries caused the case to take seven months and three church sessions to resolve. The Minutes first mention the case in July 1864, referring to "a call for Conference appointed to settle difficulties that had previously been presented against Patience a colored woman of Mr. Grimes for 'disorderly walk.'" At that session, the congregation considered but tabled a motion to exclude. The motion's tabling indicates some procedural quandary. A second called conference occurred in August, but is not mentioned in the Minutes until February 1865. That entry described a "called Conference held in August relative to Patience a colored woman of Mr. Grimes." Whatever the procedural hurdles had been, the TBC considered the inquiry closed at that point, for the congregants then voted to exclude Patience from the "fellowship of the Church."<sup>50</sup> None of the Minutes mention an appearance by or answer from Patience.

The Minutes lack any reference of Patience's participation in her disciplinary case. Rather than indifference or lack of repentance, this nonappearance may be explained by

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>45</sup> Between 1860 and 1870, Deming's Bridge population increased by about 100 (Anglos). U.S. Federal Census 1860; U.S. Federal Census 1870.

<sup>46</sup> Pierce, *Deming's Bridge Cemetery*, 39.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 51-56. Maggie O'Neal rejoined the congregation briefly in 1883 after her marriage.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 33, 51; U.S. Federal Census 1870 for Matagorda County, Colorado Valley east-west of river, Matagorda Post Office, 7.

<sup>50</sup> Pierce, *Deming's Bridge Cemetery*, 31-32. For instance, at the July 1864 session, the Minutes note a committee was appointed to consul Anglo congregant Elijah Decrow for "disorderly talk. Id.,31.

circumstances recorded in another entry in the Minutes. Patience's alleged misconduct occurred as Confederate fortunes ebbed. For the many TBC members serving or having family members in Confederate army, tensions must have been high. The Minutes' one oblique reference to the Civil War in the Minutes notes the TBC excluded Jake in May 1864 for stealing a boat and "running to the Enemy," perhaps a reference to the Union forces evacuating the nearby coastal town of Indianola in March 1864.<sup>51</sup> As Jake's wife, Patience stood at the center of this wartime drama. No doubt some believed her guilty by association and complicit in Jake's treason. If so, Grimes may have restricted Patience to the ranch for her own safety after Jake disappeared. Under the Baptist doctrine of spiritual equality and the scriptural disciplinary rules, the TBC owed even a slave woman known to have associated with a traitor the right to answer charges. But if Patience lacked freedom to attend church, the scripturally-mandated disciplinary procedures would have been stymied until such time as Patience had been given a meaningful opportunity to respond. The Minutes reveal only that the case came to resolution after two conferences and many months. Given the TBC's generally even-handed approach to church disciplinary matters, the multiple conferences and seven-month delay in resolving Patience's case suggests that the TBC adhered to the scriptural mandates and gave Patience an opportunity to respond despite her association with Jake.

Although excluded from the congregation, Patience's fortunes turned in the summer of 1865, when Gen. Gordon Granger, commander of the federal troops in the Department of Texas, arrived in Galveston to declare the Emancipation Proclamation in effect. Still living on the Grimes ranch four years later, Patience died a free woman in 1869 at the age of fifty. The Grimes family buried her in their family cemetery and marked the grave with a marble tombstone. The epitaph describes Patience as a "faithful servant of twenty-two years."<sup>52</sup>

The historical record of enslaved women in antebellum Texas is imperfect and far from complete.<sup>53</sup> Even the names of most slave women are lost. In the case of Patience, the records consist of a few entries in the minutes of a long-gone church, a gravestone epitaph in a rural cemetery, two census entries, and a brief mention in a family reminiscence. Much of her world disappeared with a few decades of her death—her church disbanded, her village disappeared, her home razed. But her story survived, hidden in plain sight, in the Trespalacios Baptist Church's minute book. Only after close and repeated readings of forty years of minute entries did her story transcend the competing narratives. So, if you seek information about an enslaved person, think about reexamining the known historical record. With a little patience, you might just find she was there all along.

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid, 30-31; Harper's Weekly, "Indianola Evacuated," April 16, 1864. [www.sonofthesouth.net/leefoundation/civil-war/1864/april/indianola-evacuated.htm](http://www.sonofthesouth.net/leefoundation/civil-war/1864/april/indianola-evacuated.htm), accessed April 6, 2014. Indianola was across Trespalacios Bay about twenty miles away from Deming's Bridge.

<sup>52</sup>Grimes Family Cemetery, [http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/grimes.htm#BURIALS\\_&\\_MARKER\\_PICTURES](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/grimes.htm#BURIALS_&_MARKER_PICTURES), accessed April 7, 2014. Grimes family lore notes Jake is also buried in the Grimes family cemetery. If so, there is no marker there for him.

<sup>53</sup>"Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." James 1:4.



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