



The Fussell and Schmidt families are founding members of Katy and many of their descendants still live in the area

Fussell-Schmidt Family

KATY LEGACIES

Four multigenerational families trace their roots back to the community's first settlers

Written by Ella Hearrean | Select photography by Sara Isola



Lawrence and Pamela Beckendorff with their son, Trey

Beckendorff Family



The Cardiff families are descendants of the namesake family for Cardiff Junior High School

Cardiff Family



The granddaughter of the Franz and Fry families, Donnah Jones and her husband Larry, now live on the family homestead

Franz-Fry Family

Back when there was only one high school and the Firethorne community was a series of rice fields, four well-known Katy families planted roots in a community that they would spend generations investing in. They have built a legacy that impacts not only their families but future Katyites as well.

The Fussell and Schmidt Families

As a child, Sandy Fussell Schmidt watched the buzz of downtown Katy from her mother's antique shop. She remembers the excitement when her father, Katy's first volunteer fire chief, heard the siren. "Anyone who had a business was a volunteer. Men from the hardware store and grocery store would come running out in their aprons."

Schmidt's small town roots began in the early 1900s, when both of her grandfathers settled in Katy, one as a rice farmer and one as a grocery store owner. Her family has long since been prominent members of the community. Her mother, Blanche, served as the Chamber of Commerce secretary; her uncle, Durwood Fussell, began what is now Brazos Valley Schools Credit Union from his desk drawer as business manager of Katy ISD. Her uncle Mel Jordan, a lifelong rice farmer and rancher, still calls Katy home, along with 38 of his 51 family members.

Her immediate family is just as deeply rooted. Her husband, Hank, served as fire chief, a city council member, and mayor. Her son, Trey, works at Schmidt Funeral Home, and her daughter, Kris, and son-in-law, Arturo Gonzales, are both doctors in the area. "Everyone has always been active and knows what's going on with everyone else," says Schmidt.

Today, Schmidt stays busy with Keep Katy Beautiful, Katy First United Methodist Church, and with her four grandchildren. "I'm amazed at the explosive growth of this city - it's hard to figure out who's who. But there's a spirit here. This is home," she says. To the next generation of Katyites, Schmidt gives this advice: "Be involved. Help grow it. You get what you give, especially in a small community."

The Cardiff Family

Hal Cardiff remembers Katy High School before its winning reputation. As quarterback of the school's first 11-man

football team, he lost every game his first year. "We were this little farming community with a small, old stadium surrounded by larger, more experienced schools. We played both offense and defense because we were barely able to muster up enough players," remembers Cardiff.

His father, Charles, was one of many Cardiffs who had settled in Katy in the early 1900s as a rice farmer. After his high school graduation in 1947, Hal and his older brothers inherited their father's land and continued to farm rice. Over the years, they and other Cardiff family members have served the community as city council members, school board trustees, and teachers.

The Cardiff family was honored as the namesake of Cardiff Junior High in 2008 for their pioneering efforts. Now retired, Hal Cardiff and his wife, Lynn, have four children.

Their 11 grandchildren closely follow the success of the Katy Tigers. He is delighted that his son-in-law, Mickey Thompson, is one of the coaches. "Katy football is just so different now, but it is still home to me. Football brings everyone together."

The Franz and Fry Families

David Peter Franz arrived in Katy in 1896 when he traveled from Russia to escape military service. Formerly a jeweler, Franz reinvented himself as a farmer and raised crops such as peanuts, corn, and rice. His sons continued the farming business after he retired; one of his sons, C.D. Franz, married Carrie Fry in 1906.

Their granddaughter, Donnah Mau Jones, lives in her grandparents' home and recalls memories of growing up on a farm. "All I could see were rice

fields for miles. My cousins lived a mile or so from me in either direction," says Jones. She remembers gathering eggs, digging for bullfrogs, and jerkily learning to drive a tractor with her dad. "I couldn't call friends after school because we shared a party line with a cousin that talked all the time. I'd keep picking up the phone, and she'd still be talking," laughs Jones.

Several local landmarks honor both sides of her family, including Franz Rd., Franz Elementary, and Fry Rd. Now retired with two children and two grandchildren, Jones and her husband, Larry, are happy with the new developments in Katy. "I'm quite pleased with the hospitals that are out here



Hal and Lynn Cardiff



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The Schmidt family has several connections to the Featherston House, including the fact that Sandy's parents lived there for a short time after they were married in 1937

KATY LEGACY FAMILIES' FAVORITE SPOTS

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Joe 5 Star Pizzeria & Ristorante
Kay's Tea Parlour
Los Cucos
Midway Barbeque
Royce's Deli & Catering
Snappy's Café and Grill
Victor's Casa Garcia Mexican Restaurant

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Katy Heritage Park
Mary Jo Peckham Park
MKT Depot and Caboose

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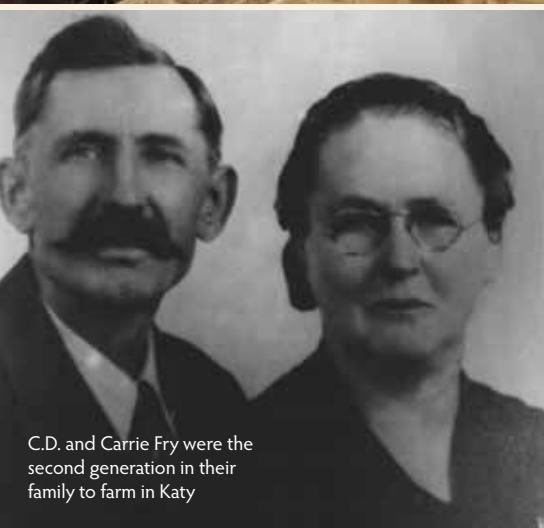


Cousins Charles C. Cardiff III,
Diane Cardiff Murphy, and
Kim Cardiff Thompson

Interior of the grocery store located on Second St., near Ave. A, ran by Gordon Fussell and William McGuire



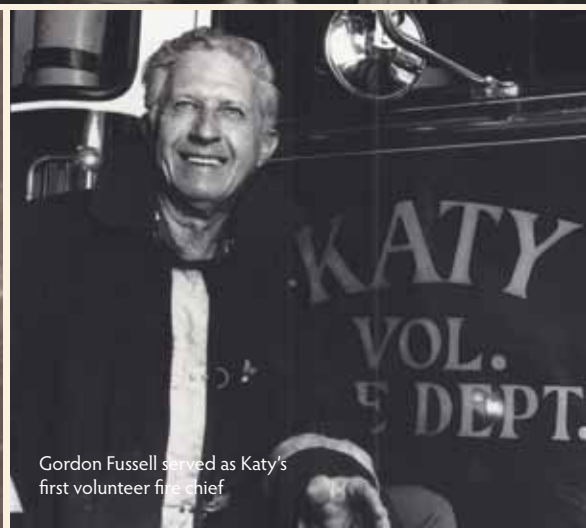
Fussell family members Chester Jordan, Leonard Jordan, Melvin Jordan, Olga Jordan, Blanche Jordan Fussell, and H. E. Jordan



C.D. and Carrie Fry were the second generation in their family to farm in Katy



H.E. and Olga Jordan were married in 1910 and settled in Katy



Gordon Fussell served as Katy's first volunteer fire chief

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now. They are really good for our community; there is very little reason to go into Houston.”

The Beckendorff Family

When Lawrence Beckendorff graduated from college with a degree in agriculture, he joined his father in the family rice farming and ranching business that had been established by his great-grandfather and grandfather in the early 1900s. “I enjoyed farming because you knew what you had to do and when it had to be done,” says Beckendorff. “There was always something different to do and after the harvest, most of the early farmers spent their time off hunting.”

Beckendorff says that over 60,000 acres of prairie in the area have gradually dwindled to only around 5,000 acres due to years of development. “It’s unreal how fast Katy has developed. Homes and traffic have replaced farms and rice fields. I remember when I-10 was just two lanes. Not only is it bigger, but now the Grand Pkwy. has opened the whole area.”

In 2004, Beckendorff Junior High was named in honor of the family legacy. Beckendorff and his wife, Pamela, have one son, Trey, and are active members of the Katy Heritage Society. “A lot has changed, but it was inevitable because of our proximity to Houston and our good school system. It’s a great place to be.”

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ELLA HEARREAN is a freelance writer, editor, and proofreader.



Gordon Fussell, Dwayne Fussell, Blanche Fussell, Marsha Fussell Wiesner, Belva Fussell Cardiff, and Sandy Fussell Schmidt decorating their 10-foot Christmas tree in 1959

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