

DALLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
**THE DALLAS COUNTY
 CHRONICLE**



Dallas County Historical Commission

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June 2012

Volume 38, Issue 2

Moorland YMCA Serves African-American Community

By Marcel Quimby, FAIA

The historic Moorland YMCA building, located at 2700 Flora Street in what was historically known as North Dallas, is now part of the thriving Arts District at the edge of downtown. The building has served Dallas’s African-American community from 1930 as the city’s only YMCA for African Americans to its present home of the internationally known Dallas Black Dance Theatre.

Founding and Construction



Young boys sitting on the steps of the Moorland YMCA, 1946. Courtesy Dallas Public Library. Used with permission.

The first YMCA in Dallas was begun in 1885 by 24 young men and included religious and athletic activities for white men. In 1902, a group of young African-American men formed a similar association that merged with the Dallas YMCA as a branch organization following World War I.

The need for a larger YMCA facility to meet the educational, physical and cultural needs of Dallas’s growing African-American population was recognized, and in 1928 the new Moorland YMCA was planned. Dallas’s African-American citizens were charged with raising \$50,000 toward its construction and,

Inside this issue:

Moorland YMCA Serves African-American Community	1
Sons of Hermann Marker Dedicated	4
DCHC Member Profiles	5
DCHC Members Tour Historic Farmstead	6

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Moorland YMCA Serves African-American Community (Continued)

despite the economic depression, raised \$75,000. The site for the new YMCA was Flora Street in North Dallas. This area was then transitioning from a formerly white neighborhood to a predominately African American, with larger homes purchased by affluent black doctors, educators, and businessmen and for multiple family housing. Nearby institutions included Booker T. Washington High School, Colored School #2, St. Paul United Methodist Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church and St. John Baptist Church. Moorland YMCA was named for Dr. Reverend Jesse Edward Moorland, the second secretary of the Colored Men's Department of the YMCA in Washington, D.C. The cornerstone was laid on April 6, 1930, by members of the black grand lodge of the Knights of Pythias of Texas. The YMCA site, building and furnishings cost approximately \$175,000. Architects for the new facility were Ralph Bryan and Walter Sharp of Dallas. The building was three stories high with a basement and clad in red brick with cast stone ornamentation. Two arched entries led from the front steps into the building; these cast stone arches had "Men" and "Boys" inscribed over each to indicate where each group was to enter. Women used a side door when attending special events or swimming classes.

According to an article in *The Dallas Morning News*, the new building contained "social, physical and spiritual outlets such as are not now available to the young negro in Dallas. Equipped with a gymnasium, club rooms, swimming pool and modern dormitory the building will be unique and is designed as a monument to Christian manhood and good citizenship." The building provided 37 sleeping rooms for visitor use; many prominent African Americans stayed here when traveling as hotel facilities for African Americans were limited. When completed, Moorland was the only YMCA for African Americans in the South-west.



Fleet and drivers of the State Taxi Company parked alongside the Moorland YMCA, 1947. Courtesy Dallas Public Library. Used with permission.

Expansion

In a city that offered few places outside of church for African Americans to congregate, Moorland became the location where professionals could meet, clubs and organizations could come together, and young men could play and engage in extracurricular activities. The building's gymnasium was used by black schools that lacked athletic facilities, and schools held their proms there.

In 1947, the need for expansion was recognized; after a successful campaign, a three-story addition with an auditorium, cafeteria, club room and dormitory space was constructed at a cost of \$75,000.

During the 1950s, Moorland continued to serve as a meeting place for many organizations, in-

cluding civil rights advocacy groups, with much of the civil rights movement in Dallas based at this facility. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People held its public meetings there, and many travelers to the area during the 1950s and 1960s stayed at Moorland.

Moorland YMCA Serves African-American Community (Continued)

Relocation to Oak Cliff

By 1967, the facility needed additional space for its programs and a building committee struggled to address the issue of remaining at the site or relocating elsewhere. The decision to relocate to Oak Cliff was based partly on studies showing that Dallas's African-American population had shifted away from the North Dallas area. Another factor was change in area transportation – in 1949 Central Expressway had cut across North Dallas and isolated the area from the rest of downtown. Later, Woodall Rogers Freeway would further change the landscape of the neighborhood. After 40 years of service, Moorland closed in 1970.

Ground was broken at the new Moorland YMCA at 907 Ledbetter on January 22, 1972, and it opened on July 1, 1973. The facility stands on a 10½ acre site and includes a gymnasium, sauna, game and conference rooms, exercise rooms, computer center, tennis courts, swimming pool, baseball and football fields, a playground and a picnic area; it cost approximately \$1.5 million.

Role in Dallas Community

Moorland YMCA served as the Dallas African-American community's social, civic and political center. During segregation it provided a place for black men to stay while in Dallas, and during the Civil Rights movement it was the "town hall" for leaders of the black community. In 1967, *The Dallas Morning News* summarized its impact, stating that Moorland YMCA had "served as a focal point in the shaping of the destiny of a total community...Between these walls momentous decisions have been made. Historical meetings have been had which have resulted in better understanding between the races. Little children have been helped to know a better life through its Christian programs, camps and recreation facilities. It has, through the years, provided the space for all citizen groups, meeting in forums, seminars, bi-racial meetings, and has even served as hotel accommodations for railroad men. Through these doors, great personalities have passed."

Indeed, great people had passed through the doors of Moorland YMCA. Welterweight champion Curtis Cokes began boxing there. Professional football player Jimmy ("Iron Claw") Hill got his start at Moorland, as did Chicago Cubs shortstop Ernie Banks, who was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1977. In 1959, Banks returned to Moorland to talk to boys about "the value of participating in sports, getting a good education and learning to co-operate with fellow players." He recalled his days at the YMCA, where he played and worked as a youth. When segregation prevented African Americans from staying in local hotels, Muhammad Ali, United States Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and other national figures stayed at Moorland.

Subsequent Owners and the Dallas Black Dance Theatre

A year after it closed, Pearl Forester bought Moorland and consolidated Forester Telephone Answering Service, which had been in business since 1921. The company remained until her retirement in 1985. The building was purchased by Proxy Answering and then sold to the Dallas Black Dance Theatre, which had raised approximately \$10.3 million to purchase and renovate it. The Theatre moved into Moorland in December 2007. The 32,000-square-foot building provides the company with a permanent facility with three rehearsal studios, training classrooms, administrative offices and space for community events and meetings.

Marcel Quimby, FAIA, is a principal with Quimby McCoy Preservation Architecture, LLP in Dallas.

Sons of Hermann Marker Dedicated



Local historian Frances James spoke on the history of the fraternal organization.

Friends and associates of the Sons of Hermann gathered for the dedication of the building's Texas Historical Commission marker on Saturday, January 14. David Lewis, chair of the Historical Committee of the Sons of Hermann Home Association of Dallas, Texas, Inc., led the ceremony and spoke on the organization's history and civic contributions. The national fraternal organization was organized in New York in 1840 to preserve German traditions while aiding the transition of German immigrants into American society. The Dallas chapter organized a school in 1893 to teach children to read and speak the German language and hosted annual parades and statewide chapter meetings.

The Sons of Hermann in Texas was one of the largest and most successful fraternal groups in the country. Although its original membership was limited to those of German descent, by 1994 its membership was open to all ethnic groups. The organization remains active today with dances, State Fair of Texas events, golf tournaments and youth activities and continues its charitable activities in keeping with the Sons of Hermann motto, "Friendship, Love and Loyalty."



The Sons of Hermann site, completed in 1910, was built as a temporary facility but later found use as a dance hall, bowling alley and meeting place.



David Lewis, chair of the Historical Committee of the Sons of Hermann Home Association of Dallas, Texas, and DCHC members Lena McIntosh, Ann Spillman and Mary Katherine Maddox attended the dedication of the Texas Historical Commission marker.

DCHC Member

Profiles

Dallas County Historical Commission members are volunteers appointed by the Dallas County Commissioners Court for two-year terms. They serve as the first level of review for state historical markers, advise the Court on historical preservation topics and conduct activities to assist in the preservation of the County's historical heritage.

Mary Katherine Maddox was appointed to the DCHC by Commissioner Mike Cantrell. She is a native of Dallas County and lives in University Park. Her interests in history, genealogy and antiques are exemplified in cherished family items and furniture from the Bremond Home in Austin, which her grandfather purchased in the 1920s. Her father, Senator George Clark Purl, served in the Texas legislature in the 1930s, and her mother, Bernice Blanton, and stepfather, O. E. "Eddie" Blanton, were Dallas realtors for many years.

She was married for 45 years to William G. Maddox, Jr. DDS; they have four sons and eight grandchildren. Maddox and her husband traveled extensively and turned that interest into a ten-year career in the travel industry, specializing in Western Europe and Eastern Africa. She is a member of Northwest Bible Church and active in many civic and social organizations. Maddox previously served on the DCHC.

Mildred Derrough Pope was appointed by Commissioner John Wiley Price. She currently serves as Program Vice President of the League of Women Voters-Dallas and Unit Leader of the Wednesday unit. Her civic involvement has included the City of Dallas Police Review Board, United Way Metropolitan Dallas Leadership Blueprint and Allocations committees, JP Morgan Chase Community Advisory Council, chair of the Greater Dallas Community Relations Commission and second vice president of the Trinity Foundation.

Pope and her husband, Leonard, have three daughters and five grandchildren. She is a member of Holy Cross Catholic Church and has served as chair of the Pastoral Society, in the Altar Society and as a youth group leader and choir director. She also has served as a Diocesan level chair of the Black Catholic Network and as a member of the Bishop's Ecumenical Council, the Diocesan Network of Chairs and Catholic Daughters of America Court of Our Lady of Lourdes #1784.

DCHC Members Tour Historic Farmstead



Members of the DCHC, accompanied by Dallas County Commissioner Dr. Elba Garcia and Dallas City Councilman Scott Griggs (left), recently visited the Sharrock/Niblo property in southwestern Dallas. The site includes a log cabin (right), log barn, cistern and root cellar built in the 1840s. The surrounding land was farmed until the 1970s and then was donated to the City of Dallas Park and Recreation Department for future park uses. The property is one of the few sites with intact structures that date from the first years of Texas statehood and remain on the original site in what is now the City of Dallas and Dallas County.

The Dallas County Chronicle

The Dallas County Historical Commission is a County board appointed by the Dallas County Commissioners Court. *The Dallas County Chronicle* is a publication of the DCHC for historical groups in Dallas County and the general public. This issue was edited by Charles Stokes, Ann Spillman, and Rick Loessberg. Articles should be sent to Ann Spillman at acspillman@sbcglobal.net or by mail to the Dallas County Historical Commission, 411 Elm Street, 3rd Floor, Dallas, TX 75202-3301. Visit the DCHC on the web at www.dallascounty.org under the "History" option of the "About Us" feature at the top of the webpage.