

DALLAS COUNTY
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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A Truly Unique Treasure

The Everard Sharrock Farmstead

By Fred Durham

No structure better symbolizes the spirit and settling of America than the log cabin. While it seems that the Dallas area has always been the land of the freeway, the suburb, and the corporate office building, it, too first emanated from the log cabin, and tucked away on the escarpment on the southwestern edge of Dallas is proof of this—the Everard Sharrock, Jr. Farmstead.



Everard Sharrock was a member of the Peters Colony, which, beginning in the early 1840s, was one of the first groups of settlers to arrive in North Texas. Upon his arrival to the Dallas area in 1846, Sharrock initially received 320 acres from the colony. The next year, he married, received another 320 acres, and began building on the original acreage.

It is these improvements that Sharrock made that year—and that still remain—that make this site so valuable: a one-room, 15' x 14' cabin built of Eastern red cedar logs and white limestone; a barn also constructed of Eastern red cedar logs; a hand-dug root cellar; and a hand-dug 25-foot-deep well that still provides water.

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One does not have to be an historian or an architect to appreciate the significance of the site as it provides an incredible opportunity to actually see how Dallas' earliest settlers lived and how they built their homes. The log cabin is one of only two cabins in Dallas County that remains on its original site, and it is also thought to be the older of these two remaining cabins.

Not surprisingly, the farmstead is included on the National Register of Historic Places, and when

See **Sharrock Farmstead** on page 4

The Bear Creek Community

A Past Not Forgotten

By Dennis Webb

Situated on the southwestern edge of Irving lies a community with a rich history not known by many in the metroplex and that pre-dates even the city of Irving's founding. This community is Bear Creek which is the oldest documented black settlement in Dallas County.

Generally bounded by present-day W. Oak Dale Road to the south, County Line Road to the west, SH183 to the north, and Beltline Road to the east, Bear Creek was settled not long after the civil war. Many of the people who live in the community today continue to be direct descendants of former slaves. "I remember hearing my grandmother tell stories about coming here," Georgia Farrow, Bear Creek community leader, once recalled. "She and my grandfather were slaves. They settled here after the slaves were free."

Back in the early days, two influences sustained the first residents during the years of hardship while they established new lives. One was their religion. By 1872, the Shady Grove CME church was built. "CME to us stood for Colored Methodist Episcopal Church," said Rev. John Morton, former pastor and brother of Georgia Farrow. "But we changed the name to Christian Methodist Episcopal Church because God didn't have no colored children."

The other sustaining influence for the community was family. Family dynamics bonded the community more than most since everyone was either related or were so emotionally close it was as if they actually were family.

For many years, the community was primarily rural in nature. It was also not incorporated into any city limits, largely because of the community's race. This deprived the residents of common city services that others around them received. Residents remember outhouses, dirt roads, and hauling their own water as late as the 1960s while neighboring Irving was growing by leaps and bounds with expanded infrastructure.

A major portion of Bear Creek was finally annexed by Irving in 1969. The remaining area (south of Rock Island) was subsequently annexed later by Grand Prairie. With most of Bear Creek being undeveloped and with Irving's population having already doubled during the 1960s, the area soon became the location for new home construction.

This construction brought with it a reverse kind of integration. Typically, neighborhoods become integrated when blacks move into formerly all-white areas. However, for Bear Creek, the reverse was true. Jackie Townsell, Irving's first African-American Council member, remembers when there were 1000 people living in Bear Creek. Today, there are about 9900 residents, of which about one-fourth are black.



The Masonic Lodge and J.O. Davis Home at the Bear Creek Heritage Center.

The Heritage Center includes three structures: the Bear Creek Masonic Lodge, which served as the meeting place for both African-American Masons and the community's residents; the Green House, which was the home of Sam Green, one of the community's leading residents; and the J.O. Davis Home, which was the home of Josey Davis, a long-time teacher who lived in the community. The Heritage Center also features a Texas Historic Marker which commemorates the significance of Bear Creek. The community also lives on in the award-winning documentary, "Irving's Hidden History." Such tributes demonstrate how important this early African-American community was to the development of Irving and to the Dallas area.



If some of its early settlers were to see Bear Creek today, they would hardly recognize it. However, the community is certainly not forgotten. The City has acknowledged where the community once flourished with entrance monuments. The small cemetery where many of its early residents were buried remains on the east side of Highway 161 between Conflans Road and Airport Freeway and features a Texas Historic Marker. The City has also created the Jackie Townsell Bear Creek Heritage Center to tell the story of Bear Creek and the African-American experience.

DCHC Presents History Paper

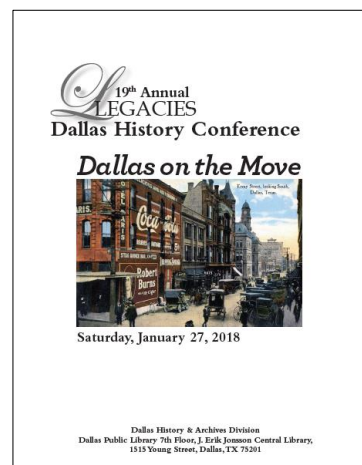
On January 27, a paper that was written by Dallas County Historical Commission members Patricia Hicks and Juanita H. Nañez and County planning director Rick Loessberg was presented at the 19th Annual Dallas History Conference. The paper discussed how, over time, transportation has affected two historic ethnic neighborhoods—Old North Dallas, which originally began as a freedman’s community after the Civil War just north of downtown Dallas, and La Bajada, an Hispanic neighborhood that came into existence during the 1920s-1940s at the western edge of the Continental Bridge.

In both instances, transportation assisted the two communities. The Houston & Texas Central railroad, while it traveled down the middle of Old North Dallas, provided employment opportunities for the neighborhood’s residents. For La Bajada, the construction of the Continental Bridge provided the neighborhood and the rest of west Dallas with a long-awaited connection to most of Dallas and helped give the emerging Hispanic neighborhood its name as “la bajada” literally means “the descent” or “a drop at the bottom of a bridge.”

Unfortunately, transportation also helped lead to the demise of Old North Dallas when first the construction of Central Expressway decisively separated the community’s eastern half from its western portion and then the construction of Woodall Rodgers further divided the community. Similarly, the recent construction of the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge and the conversion of Continental into a pedestrian bridge now puts La Bajada in a position where intense real estate interest may soon overwhelm the neighborhood.

Ms. Hicks and Pauline Laws, who graciously filled-in for Ms. Nañez who unexpectedly became ill, presented the paper to about 200 conference attendees. Both presenters possessed first-hand experience of living near the two communities, attending school either within them or with residents, and having family members from there.

The paper will be published in an issue of *Legacies*, a journal that is exclusively devoted to the history of Dallas and North Central Texas, later this year.



The Impact of Transportation on Historic Ethnic Neighborhoods: The Stories of Old North Dallas and La Bajada

PATRICIA HICKS JUANITA H. NAÑEZ RICK LOESSBERG

Neighborhoods are typically created and influenced by a number of factors like geography, economics, and the availability of transportation. However, for people of color who lived in Dallas prior to the latter part of the 20th century, the law of segregation and the dominant social attitudes of the much-larger Anglo community heavily influenced the origination and existence of minority neighborhoods. These rules and customs not only determined where and why these communities existed, but what happened to them over time.

Two historic ethnic Dallas neighborhoods—Old North Dallas and La Bajada—demonstrate how these various factors came together and how decisions pertaining to transportation that were made by the Anglo population both assisted and later threatened these neighborhoods. Old North Dallas, which was located just north of downtown, was established in the 1860s as a freedmen’s community, and it was, until about 1970, the home of much of Dallas’ black middle class. La Bajada (which continues to exist immediately west of downtown) came into existence during the 1920s-1940s and has generally always been a community for working class Hispanics. Located at the end

Elizabeth Gunby Appointed to DCHC

The Dallas County Historical Commission is extremely happy to announce that Elizabeth Gunby is its newest member. Appointed to the Commission by Dallas County Commissioner Mike Cantrell, Elizabeth is a resident of University Park and brings to the Historical Commission an impressive record of community service and a deep background in historic preservation.

She is currently a member of Dallas Heritage Village, Preservation Dallas, the Dallas Historical Society, and the Park Cities Historical Society. She is a founding member of the Friends of Aldredge House and has served as a volunteer guide at Old City Park. She led the effort to obtain a Texas Historical Marker for the Dallas County Medical Society Alliance Foundation which is the oldest medical alliance in the U.S., and she participated in the recently successful effort to develop a plan with the surrounding Swiss Avenue neighborhood so that the historic Aldredge House could continue to serve as a meeting place for educational and fundraising functions.

She is also a member of the Marianne Scruggs Garden Club. However, she admits that she has a greater appreciation for gardens than she does for gardening.

Born in a small town in Georgia (Louisville) that served as the first permanent capital of the state, Elizabeth is from a family that includes five generations of doctors and nurses. She has helped continue this tradition, being a registered nurse with a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing.



Elizabeth Gunby (left) with husband, Dr. Robert T. Gunby, Jr., at unveiling of historical marker for Dallas County Medical Society Alliance Foundation.

Sharrock Farmstead *(continued from page 1)*



The Sharrock Farmstead log cabin, circa 1934. Photo provided by Niblo family for National Register nomination.

nominated, it was noted that the property was of “exceptional historical significance” and that its structures, although they were over 150 years old, retained “a remarkable degree of historic integrity.”

Sharrock owned the property until 1853. That then began an eighty-year period when the property changed hands six different times with portions of the 640-acre farmstead being individually sold-off. This revolving door of changing owners largely ended in 1934 when Grady Niblo acquired the 220 acres that contained the property’s original structures. Apart from 100 acres south of where the structures are located, which were sold in 1949, the Niblo family continuously owned the heart of the farmstead for the next seventy years.

Niblo used the land for weekend and personal uses—primarily hunting and fishing—and leased the northern and eastern portion for farming. In 1981, family members began living on the property in a farmhouse that had originally been built by the property’s second owner, but which is considered to no longer be historic because of the many modifications that have been made over the years.



The interior of the Farmstead's barn.



The stairs leading into the root cellar.

The property continued to remain in the Niblo family until 2005 when it was sold to a developer, Marlin Atlantis White Ltd. This firm then graciously donated the 33.8 acres that contain the farmstead’s historic structures to the City of Dallas in 2006. The City has since owned the property as park land and has undertaken efforts to stabilize, restore, maintain, and secure the site and its structures.

Something as significant and unique as the Sharrock Farmstead does not just happen or drop out of the sky. That it and its structures still exist is almost a miracle and is only possible because of the actions of a handful of parties—the Niblo family, Marlin Atlantis White Ltd., and the City of Dallas. Without just one of them, the Sharrock Farmstead would, at best, only be a memory or a property recording in the county clerk’s office.



Big State Fountain

Preserving The Past and Creating A Future

By Don Williams

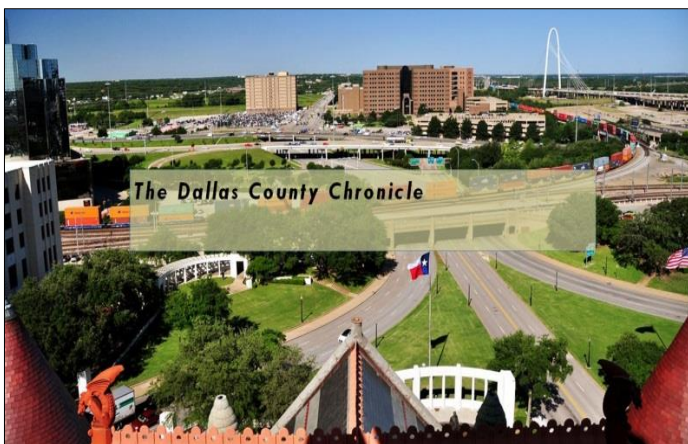
There are few images that denote Americana as much as the soda fountain. For several generations, the soda fountain was *the* meeting place for high school students, college kids, and young adults, and even today, when one looks at a picture of a soda fountain, one can almost actually hear the Artie Shaw, Drifters, or Jan and Dean records that everyone played on the juke box.

Thanks to the Big State Fountain, the city of Irving has had the same experience for seventy years. Located in the heart of Irving's Heritage District on one of Irving's original town sites, what started as a men's haberdashery in the early 1900s became the Big State Drug Store (which, of course, included a soda fountain) in 1948, and it immediately became one of Irving's most popular destinations for getting your prescription filled, for a first date, and for just talking with friends.

However, in 2014, it looked like "the good old days" had ended when the drug store was closed after an amazing seven-decade run. Fortunately, Rick and Susan Fairless, whose families are multi-generational residents of the city, and Dan and Elaine Niemeier, who owned the building, recognized the importance of this institution and worked together to carry on the Big State tradition. Several months after the drug store had closed and the building's interior had been remodeled, the Big State Fountain Grill opened.

Although the drug store part of the business is gone, the all-important soda fountain remains, as does a ubiquitous Wurlitzer juke box. However, the Big State Fountain Grill is much more than a 1950s-style diner. It was important to the Fairlesses that the rich history of both Big State and their hometown be maintained. As a result, a pictorial history of Irving is seen along the restaurant's walls, and an original waitress uniform from a 1950s Big State employee is on display.

That the Big State Fountain continues to exist is not only important to those who remembered it from earlier days, but it is also important to current and future generations who did grow up during that age—while one can read about what something was like, there is no substitute for actually experiencing it. It also creates another destination in the city's Heritage District and will hopefully lead to other investment and preservation efforts within the district.



The Dallas County Chronicle is the official newsletter of the Dallas County Historical Commission.

The Historical Commission serves as the primary advisory body on historic preservation matters for the County.

Its meetings are open to the public and are typically held on the second Thursday of every month at 11:30 a.m. For more information about the Commission and its meetings, please call 214.653.7601.