

DALLAS COUNTY
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Mexican Park

Juanita H. Nañez

A site was selected November 1918 for the establishment of a play park on Caruth Street, between Griffin and Magnolia streets. The growing community of Little Mexico was in need of a safe place for the children to play, and Mrs. Louis Well, chairperson for the home service committee of the War Camp, secured the land. Once it was secured, through the efforts of Mrs. John F. Williams, executive secretary of Girls War Work and Mayor Joe E. Lawther, the Dallas Park Board quickly began work to clear the land. The playground was immediately equipped with playground equipment which the city already had, and a tent was set up for motion pictures to be shown. Wading pools were available during summer months, and movies were shown for family enjoyment on summer evenings. A kiosk was added to resemble parks in Mexico. Clotilda Riviera was hired to take charge of the new park and acted as interpreter for the community.

The park was never officially given a name. It was called Parque Mexicano (Mexican Park) by the colonists, and during the 1920s, it was a popular place for fiestas and family gatherings.

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Gen. Obregon, President of Mexico, at Mexican Park. Governor Hobby at left

October 17th, 1920 Dallas Morning News image of General Obregon's visit to Dallas' Mexican Park the previous day.

General Alvaro Obregon (president-elect of Mexico), visited the park on October 16, 1920, along with an entourage including General Jacinto B. Trevino, and General Francisco Coss, Minister of War of Mexico, and they were greeted by 3,000 attendees. Members of the program included Texas Governor, William P. Hobby, Dallas Mayor Frank W. Wozencraft, and Roberto Garcia, Mexican Consul at Dallas. On September 16, 1923, members of the Mexican colony observed Mexican Independence Day (El Diez y Seis de Septiembre) at the Parque, and the following year 5,000 participated in a two-day celebration commemorating the 114th anniversary of independence from Spain in 1810.

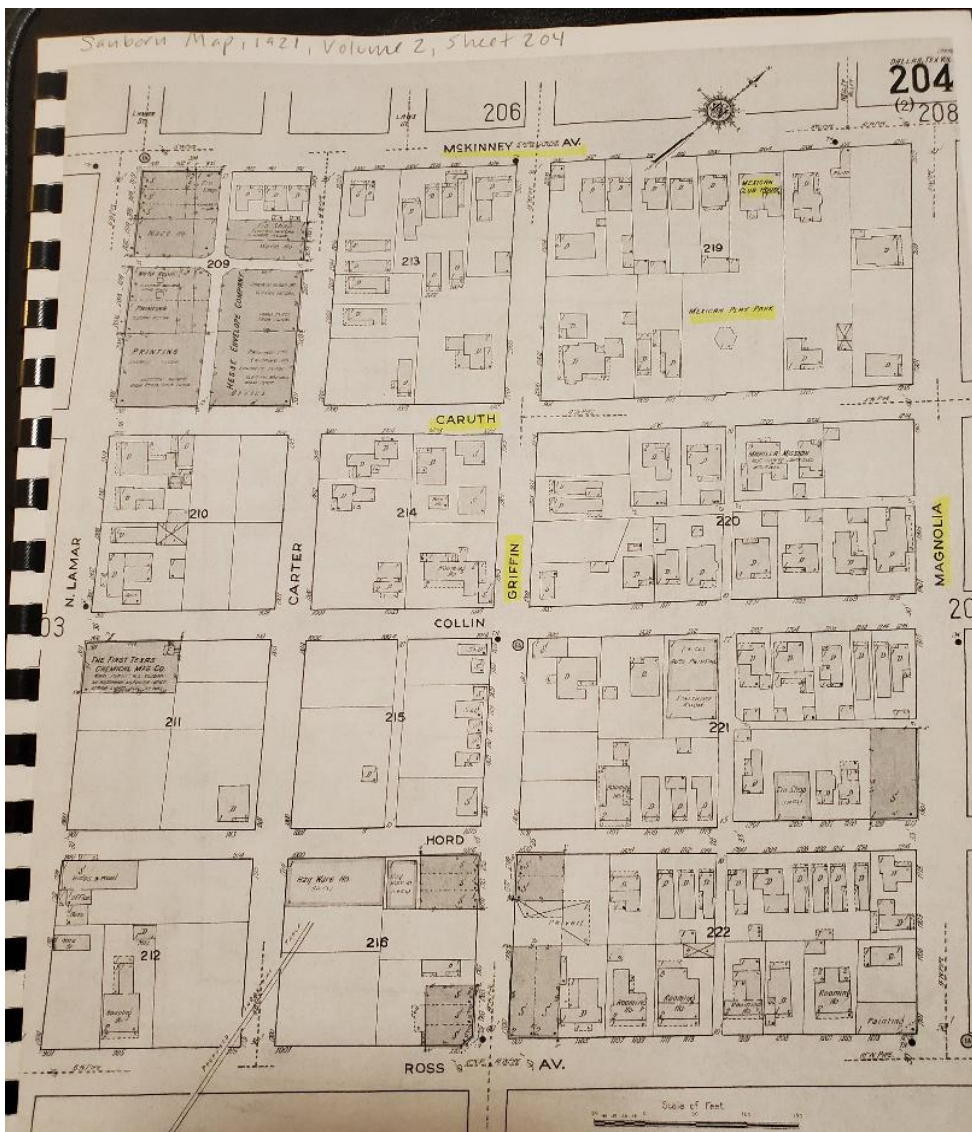
From 1918 to 1924, Mexican Park hosted many important meetings, one such event was the founding of the local Mexican Blue Cross. It functioned the same as the American Red Cross and provided aid in emergencies to destitute people. The Mexican Blue Cross had been in operation in Mexico for only two years. The Dallas organization began with 150 members and based on the rapid progress they were making it was expected to reach 1,000. The fate of the Mexican Park was known as early as August 1921 when Dallas Park Director, W. F. Jacoby, announced that the area was being converted into an industrial district. In 1925, the colonists began shifting to Summit Play Park (later Pike Park). By this time, La Colonia had become recognized as Little Mexico, or El Barrio.

This article is from the research conducted and documented by Rudy S. Longoria (6/9/1939-6/24/2020), "The History of Mexican Park", October 2016. Mr. Longoria, a self-proclaimed Dallas Historian, was a native of Dallas, TX, and a long-time member of the Dallas Mexican American Historical League.

Housing in Dallas' Little Mexico / Little Jerusalem area from the 1912 from the Dallas Municipal Archives. [Little Mexico in Dallas] (Unknown / Courtesy of Dallas Mexican American Historical League)



Historic Sanborn Map



This page from the 1921 Sanborn Map shows the location of Mexican Park on the northwest side of Caruth Street between Griffin and Magnolia Streets.

Founded in 1867 by D. A. Sanborn, the Sanborn Map Company was the primary American publisher of fire insurance maps for nearly 100 years, repeatedly mapping towns and cities as they changed. Sanborn maps remain useful for historical research into urban geography.

2021 Sees Record Number of Historic Marker Submissions

It is possible that a silver-lining of the Covid-19 pandemic is that it has given many a moment to appreciate what we have, and reflect on our history. This year's list of submissions to the State of Texas Historical Commission for new historical markers is long and varied. With a record-breaking number of submissions the Dallas County Historical Commission's Marker Committee did yeoman's duty reviewing and submitting the 2021 applications. In addition to 9 submissions for Texas Historical Marker program, the committee also reviewed and submitted one marker for the State's Undertold Markers program that address historical gaps, promote diversity of topics, and proactively document significant underrepresented subjects or untold stories. Those applications are now under State review. The full list for Dallas County and all other Texas Counties can be found on the Texas Historical Commission website link here: <https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/state-historical-markers/apply-historical-marker>

2021 Marker Submissions List

Collins Radio Echo 1 Project
Harris-Savage-McAlester House (RTHL)
Atty. J.L. Turner Sr.
St. John Missionary Baptist Church
Kiest Memorial Garden
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1966 speech
New Hope Baptist Church
Junius Heights
Hall of Negro Life
Jane Elkins



The Beginning and Legacy of Shady Oak Cemetery in Historic Bear Creek

Jearlene Miller

As new Dallas County communities were being formed during the early years of our County's history, family members mourned the earthly transition of loved ones with an added stress. New settlements lacked burial sites. It is rare today to hear of the start of a new family cemetery. This was once a common solution where families came together to acquire or set aside land to bury their members. Typically, there was an agreement regarding details such as land purchase or donation, retirement of a loan, maintenance of the burial plot, and family member eligibility for burial.



Entrance to the Shady Oak Cemetery, May 2021

Such was the case in the development of west Irving during the late 1850's when the area was little more than a small settlement of whites and their slaves along the upper reaches of Bear Creek. Here, Minnie Shelton purchased 80 acres of land of which the Shelton family donated a small section for use as a cemetery for slave burials. This area, surrounded by private property, had restricted access for burials. This is Shelton's Bear Creek Cemetery, one of Texas' oldest slave burial sites.

After slavery was abolished in Texas on June 19, 1865, former slaves began moving into the area in west Irving now known as the historic Bear Creek community. The freed slaves did not have a place to bury their loved ones as Shelton's Bear Creek Cemetery was private. Mrs. Dixie Morton Caraway, a life-long resident of the Bear Creek community, tells how her grandfather, Sam Morton, Sam Sweat, and Clarence Trigg often discussed the difficulty faced in finding a final resting place for their loved ones because of the difficulty in gaining access to the private Shelton's Cemetery. She recalls reference to the cemetery as "The Hill".



Sam Morton at the State Fair of Texas in 1929

In the early 1920s, the three men Morton, Sweat, and Trigg, began discussing the need for an accessible cemetery. Mr. Morton suggested that the three of them buy land down the road near their homes at the corner of Compton and Conflans Roads. The men were able to make a down payment, and regular payments until they had fully paid for the land. The testament to their hard work and realization of their dream is the Shady Oak Cemetery.

This brought their three families relief as they would have a place to bury family members long after they were gone. These men decided that a non-family member without a burial place could be buried there upon family approval and the payment of burial expenses. It was not until June of 1933 until they had their first burial, Mary, the wife of Sam Morton.

After the three founders died, the oversight of the cemetery was given to Odessa Trigg King, Clarence Trigg's' daughter; Georgia Morton Farrow, daughter of Sam Morton; and Matthew Sweat, son of Sam Sweat. Later improvements to the site included a wall, fence, and gate to surround the cemetery. After conferring with members of the

three families, the West Irving Improvement Association was created to, among other things, care for the cemetery ground needs. Under the leadership of Phillip Wayne Jackson, grandson of Sam Morton, the Improvement Association installed signage bearing the name "Shady Oak Cemetery". Lonnie Green, Jr., nephew of Sam Morton, donated the gate to the cemetery.

Among notable African Americans buried in Shady Oak Cemetery, besides its founders, Mr. Morton, Mr. Sweat, and Mr. Trigg, are the Honorable Jackie Mae Howard Townsell. A business owner in Bear Creek, she was first elected to the Irving City Council in 1977 and served 18 consecutive years until 1995. She is the longest

serving person on the City Council; the second woman serving on the City Council; and the first African American to serve on the City Council. An elementary school and the Bear Creek Heritage Center bears her name. Georgia Morton Farrow, the daughter of Sam Morton, who worked tirelessly for a recreation facility for the children of Bear Creek is also buried there. Georgia Farrow Recreation Center at West Park honors her hard work and dedication.

In more recent years, Dorothy Trigg Brewer and Dixie Morton Caraway have overseen maintenance of the ground assisted by Stephen Spruiells and William Trigg, great grandsons of Sam Sweat and Clarence Trigg, respectively. It is their desire when they are no longer among us, that other family members will take over management of this small family cemetery on the corner of Conflans and Compton and properly maintain the grounds in keeping with the dream of Sam Morton, Sam Sweat, and Clarence Trigg!



Sam Sweat (left) and Clarence Trigg (right), two of the three founding members, along with Sam Morton, of the Shady Oak cemetery.

County Marker Funding

Dallas County has a funding program to help pay for State Marker application and marker costs for Historical Markers addressing under-told aspects of the County's history. Originally operated for two years on a pilot basis, the program was permanently authorized in 2018 and can provide about one-half of the cost of a small historical marker.

In 2016 the Dallas County Court of Commissioners adopted a pilot project to help fund the cost of certain historical markers that addressed under-represented aspects of Dallas history or culture. In August of 2018, Court Order 2018-0982 made the "Under-Told Historical Marker funding program" an on-going program. This program provides funding to assist applicants with marker applications and the equivalent to half the cost (\$550) of the small version of a subject marker, a cemetery marker, or a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark marker. These markers should address under-told subjects associated with the diversity of the County's history and culture. In other words, the funding helps tell a more complete history of Dallas County. The Historical Commission uses evaluation criteria such as if the proposed marker:

- Relates to an under-told facet of Dallas County history
- Is not currently represented by previous markers for the topic, geographic area, and / or population
- Is of historical significance to the County
- Is located in a highly visible location or area of change

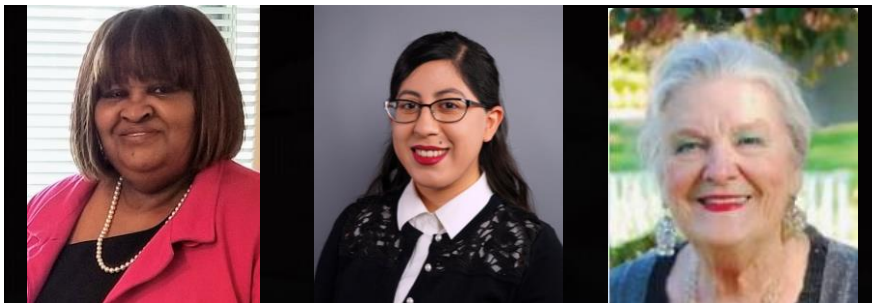
Each year the Commission, with support from existing Planning & Development staff, uses the program's adopted rules and criteria to evaluate submitted proposals to select up to two eligible markers from the applications.

One source of confusion has been the existing, similarly-named, marker program available at the State. Using funding from the \$100 marker application fee, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) established the "Undertold Program" to address gaps in the marker program and underrepresented topics. Funded topics receive a free 27" x 42" marker or the equivalent in historical research. There is also no application fee for Markers accepted through their Undertold program. Typically, the THC accepts nominations for these markers in the fall, and this year the applications for the THC's Undertold program will be taken from November 1 to December 15. Regardless if a marker is later nominated to the THC Undertold Program, the County may wish to support a marker application with the County's Under-told marker funding program. This is important as the State's program is highly competitive and not all applicants to the State Undertold marker program receive funding.

Dallas County Historical Commission Notes

This Quarter has been a highly productive one, and one of change for the Dallas County Historical Commission. The Commission welcomed three new members, Jearlene Miller, Priscilla Escobedo, and Mary Rose Rumbley.

This Quarter the Commission also adopted its 2021-22 Mission Statement which reads: The mission of the Dallas County Historical Commission is to preserve, protect, and promote the historic resources of Dallas County for the education, enjoyment, and economic benefit of its residents and for the enhancement of the area's quality of life.



Jearlene Miller, Priscilla Escobedo, and Rose Mary Rumbley

To accomplish this mission, the Historical Commission will encourage and assist in the development of State historical markers, advise the Dallas County Commissioners Court on historical matters, communicate and work with other local historical organizations, and make the history of Dallas County accessible to the public through such activities as the Commission's website, the regular publication of an electronic newsletter, and the sponsorship and the holding of conferences and special events.

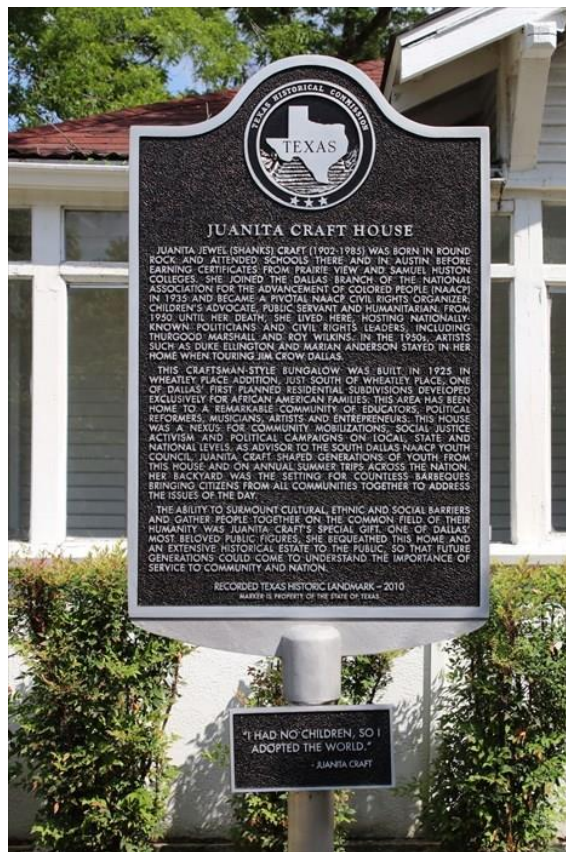


Image Courtesy of waymarking.com