

DALLAS COUNTY
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

THE DALLAS COUNTY CHRONICLE

VOLUME 20, ISSUE 1

Winter 2021

Joppa – State of Texas Historical Marker Community

Patricia Hicks



Entryway sign into the Joppa Community where the very first Juneteenth celebrations in Dallas were held.

Tucked along the banks of the Trinity River near the terrain of the Great Forest lays the historic African American, "Freedman" town, Joppa. The community is six miles, southeast of Dallas, off interstate 45, near highway 310 and Loop 12.

Joppa is a State of Texas, Historical marker community, established in 1872 by Henry Critz Hines, a former slave from the Miller Plantation. According to Donald Payton, senior historian, and also a descendant of the Miller Plantation, Henry Critz Hines was brought to this area from Alabama by his owner and given to plantation owner William Brown Miller. "He probably brought him down for safe keeping and meant to come back after the war was over," said Mr. Payton. (DMN 1991, Print). Instead, of returning to Alabama, William Brown Miller selected Henry Critz Hines to oversee his ferry operation. This allowed Hines to become one of the first African American entrepreneurs after the Civil War in the area.

This Emancipation Proclamation order paved the way for the establishment of this community. Many believe that the community's name "Joppa", pronounced by locals "Joppee", originates from a biblical reference and translates to "beautiful" or "the beginning" in Hebrew. The attraction of the area before the turn of the century was the safety of living near a large town like Dallas while maintaining the agrarian lifestyle most knew from slavery. Many of the original Joppa residents were freedmen who came from the piney East Texas plantations. Since Joppa borders the banks of the Trinity River, the community had access to streams, ponds and the river's waters. They could fish and hunt for their meals. In addition, the river was a great source for work and commerce - with its ferryboats and steamboats carrying people, livestock, produce, and textiles. With access to water and land there was the opportunity to grow food and cotton, and the nearby Trinity Forest was a natural source of wood for industry.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| <u>Joppa Community</u> | <u>page 1</u> |
| <u>The Sowers School</u> | <u>page 2</u> |
| <u>Marker Applications</u> | <u>page 4</u> |
| <u>Chair Juanita H. Nañez</u> | <u>page 5</u> |
| <u>Thank You, Richard</u> | <u>page 6</u> |
| <u>Editor's Note</u> | <u>page 6</u> |

DALLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEMBERS

RICHARD G. STEWART, JR., Chair – Irving
 JUANITA H. NAÑEZ, Vice Chair – Dallas
 PATRICIA HICKS – Dallas
 CHRISTOPHER L. SMITH – Rowlett
 COY L. POITIER – Dallas
 JOHN ROPPOLO – Carrollton
 ROOSEVELT NICHOLS – Lancaster
 ELIZABETH DeLEON – Dallas
 JIM GASPARD – Dallas
 ELIZABETH GUNBY – University Park
 ALBERT GONZALEZ – Dallas
 JERRY HAWKINS – Dallas
 DAN BARRIOS, JR. – Richardson

(See **Joppa** on page 4)

The Sowers School

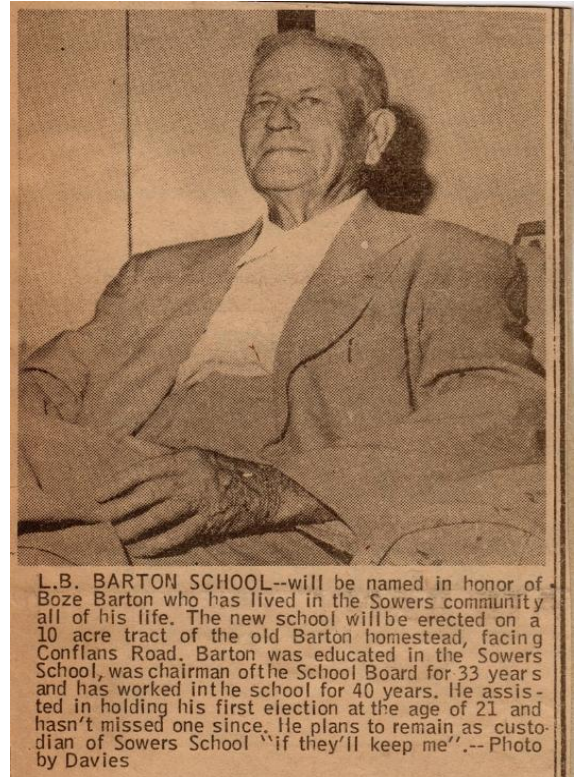
An Historic School in West Irving

Betsy and Gerald Farris

When Edmund D. Sowers opened a store on his property in the late 1850's a small business district developed around it as did eventually a school. His store was at the northeast corner of Belt Line Road and Sowers Road. Edmund Sowers came from Illinois in 1856 with his wife, stepdaughter, and mother to settle 32 acres of land in what is now West Irving. On August 14, 1874 Mr. Sowers donated a plot of land for school, church, and cemetery purposes on his property. In 1881, Mr. Sowers built a schoolhouse for local children on the west half of that land. The present-day address of the school site is 3207 W Pioneer Drive and was less than a ¼ mile east of the Sowers store. While a church was never built, it was common for schools to be used by church groups.

The school had only one or two teachers through the 1920's, including the notable John Roberts (later Dr. John Roberts), who is buried in the Sowers cemetery. Eventually the school would grow to a five-teacher school. The original log cabin structure was enlarged into a two-story building in 1903 with the lower floor being used as the school and church and the upper floor used as a hall for the Woodmen of the World. That two-story structure was replaced by a larger one-story frame school building.

In 1956, the Sowers School would be replaced by the L.B. Barton elementary school. The school was named in honor of Lee Bose (L.B.) Barton (1884-1966) who was born and raised in the Sowers community - and educated in the Sowers school. Moreover, Barton was chairman of the Sowers School board for 33 years and worked in the Sowers school for 40 years, in his later years as a custodian. Barton Elementary was erected on a 10-acre tract of the old Barton homestead facing Conflans Road, less than one mile from Sowers School.



Through the eyes of students

Ray Ramsey was a student at Sowers School, attending from the third through eighth grades, from approximately 1939 through 1944. When Ray attended the Sowers School there were three teachers. Mrs. Ashley was the principal and taught first and second grades; Mrs. Easter taught third, fourth, and fifth grades; and Mrs. Calhoun taught sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Mrs. Grace Calhoun was a teacher for 50 years and became the principal of the Sowers School. Ray's father, Sam Ramsey, was the school's bus driver.



Ray recalls L. B. Barton as a member of the Sowers School board and as the school custodian - and that everyone called him 'Uncle Bose'. Barton was also the grandfather of his school mate Robert Story, who lived at his grandfather's home across the street from Sowers Cemetery.

Ray remembers entering the wooden frame building from the front door to the sixth through eighth grade classroom on the left. The third and fourth grade classrooms were to the right and behind the first and second grade classroom.

(Story continues on the next page)

The 1940 class picture for the 3rd, 4th, & 5th grades was taken at the Sowers School building. In the picture are:

First row (kneeling): Paul Gamble, Loran May, unknown boy, J W Burkhalter, Robert Story, Don Looper (?), J D Robbins (?), Tommy Walker, unknown boy, and an unknown boy

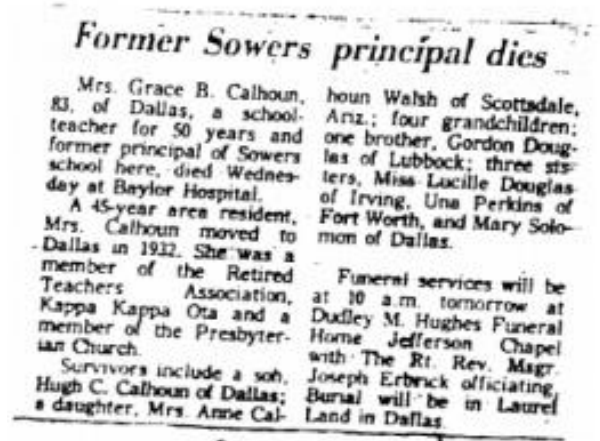
Second row: Janelle Price, unknown girl, Billy Mitchell, unknown boy, Lois Hawkins (?), unknown girl, Billy Crouch, Melba(?), Huffman, Shirley Robinson, and Jeanine Bailey

Third row: Raymond Price, Doyle Nelson, Vergie Hamilton, Billy Jean Price, Mrs. Flora Easter (teacher), Bobby (?), Johnny Massey, Jack Pannel, and Ray Ramsey

Sowers School *(continued from previous page)*

Folding doors between two of the classrooms could be opened to create an auditorium. Immediately to the left of the front door was a hallway that led to the cloak room and a drinking fountain. If the wind was blowing, there was a windmill behind the school that pumped running water. Otherwise, Uncle Bose hauled water to the school. The restrooms were outhouses. By the 1950's the restrooms would be separate cinder block buildings.

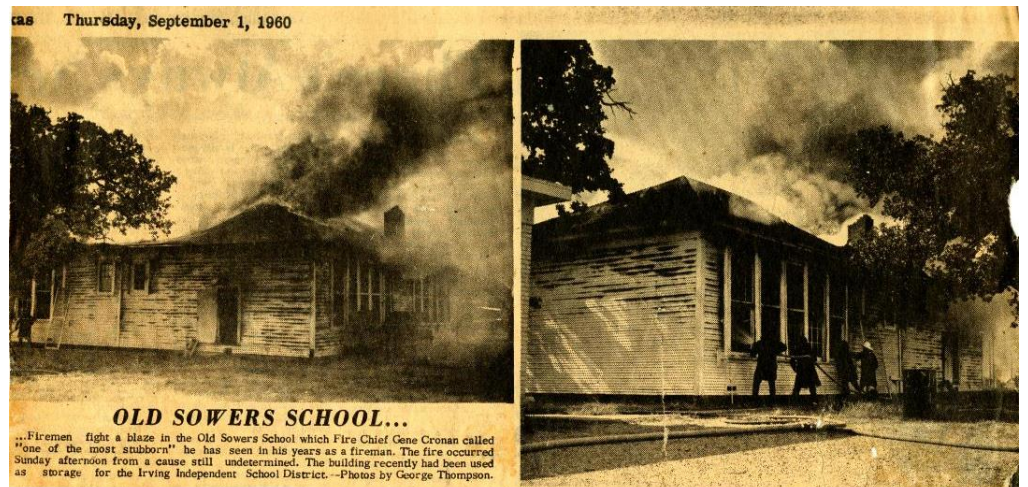
Evelyn Jeanne Story attended Sowers school from 1941 through 1949, for 1st through 8th grade. Evelyn's grandfather, L.B. Barton, began each morning at 4am getting coal from the coal house and starting the stove to warm the school. He was there when the first child was brought to the school and stayed until school had started. Evelyn, now Jeanne Carter, remembers all her teachers - Mrs. Ashley (1st and 2nd grade teacher), Mrs. Bailey (3rd, 4th, and 5th) and Mrs. Calhoun (6th, 7th, and 8th). Other teachers were Mrs. Ahern and Mrs. Fowler. She remembers the teachers rode the State bus and payed the fare out of their own pockets.



January 21, 1977 obituary for Grace Calhoun, Teacher and principal of the Sowers School.

Fate and Fire – the destruction of the Sowers School

On the afternoon of Sunday August 28, 1960 the Sowers school was destroyed by a fire of an unknown cause. The buildings had not been used as a school since the opening of L.B. Barton elementary school in 1956. The buildings were used as storage for the Irving Independent School District and mostly contained spare desks. Fire Chief Gene Cronan called it 'one of the most stubborn' fires he had seen in his years as a fireman.



September 1, 1960 newspaper account of the Sowers School fire.



Tyson Farris took numerous pictures of the Sowers School buildings before their demolition after the fire. He would salvage architectural elements.

After the fire, Sowers resident Tyson Farris was given the approval to use any salvage items from the burned school. Mr. Farris used lumber and doors to add on 2 bedrooms, a laundry room, bathroom, and back patio onto his home NW of the school at 1549 Luke Street. The family also obtained several metal and wood chairs and desks from the school. In the 1990's Tyson told one of his sons, Gerald Farris, that much of the west wall of the house had been built using the doors from the school. In 2005, when the Farris home was for sale, a residential inspector thought the house had been in a fire. They were seeing the burned 2x4's from the Sowers school inside of an unfinished closet. In 2020, a more recent owner was remodeling the house and uncovered the Sowers School doors on a west wall. With black smoke marks and charring, undoubtedly these were the folding doors between the schools classrooms. The new owner has indicated that they will be keeping the doors.



Sowers School doors were uncovered by the owner of the old Farris home in 2020.

For 80 years a school building of some type had occupied the two-acre Sowers School site, starting with a log cabin housing the first school in the 1880's. The original 2 acre site of Sowers School is now the location of Irving's Secondary Reassignment School and IISD school bus parking.

Historic Marker Application Process Opening!

The Texas Historical Commission (TCH) has announced that applications for new markers this year will be accepted from:

March 1st - May 15th, 2021

Last year, the TCH approved all seven of the historical marker applications that the County recommended. That number of applications was a record, and no other county commission in Texas had so many approved applications. For these approved markers the process continues to move forward with finalizing the casting and then dedication ceremonies this year and into next.



Calendar photograph by Dafne Cholet



The Historical Marker application process will open on March 1st and the Texas Historical Commission website (<https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/state-historical-markers/apply-historical-marker>) has all the details! The first step in the historical marker process is contacting the Dallas County Historical Commission. The marker application process begins at the County level with a review and comments for all applications. Once approved by the County Commission, completed marker applications are submitted to the THC for consideration at the state level. If you are interested in submitting a marker application, please get in touch with the County's Historical Commission. The County's Historical Commission is also available to help answer questions about the marker program and the State's application process.

Please contact either John Roppolo (roppolo.john@tx.rr.com) or Rachel Brown (rachel.brown@dallascounty.org) if you have any questions.

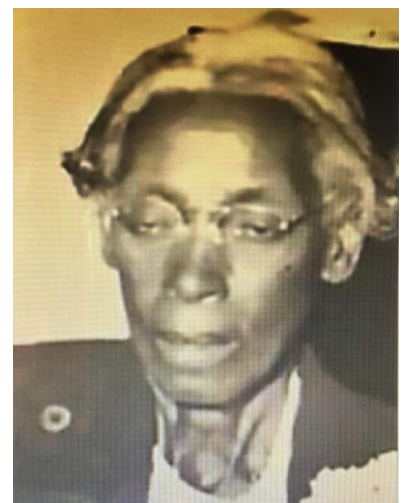
Joppa *(continued from page 1)*

Phenomenal People of Joppa

Phenomenal people have been instrumental in the history and development of Dallas and Joppa. Melissa Pierce, a freed slave, donated land to the New Zion Church and the school that carried her name (Pierce Elementary School in the Wilmer-Hutchins School District) until the 1960s. While the church sanctuary (after standing 130 years) has been rebuilt, the original white steeple, built in 1888, has withstood the test of time. The buildings serve the community for multiple venues such as educational, medical, and voting purposes.

In 1948, Laurabelle Foster, under the leadership of the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce, chartered the South Central Civic League. Understanding the importance of education Mrs. Foster became the first president of the Melissa Pierce Elementary School's Parent Teacher Association.

The family of Mrs. Rosa Lee Bosh Jackson recounts Mrs. Jackson's work in the 1940s to build homes in Joppa. She walked to the lumber yards herself and was successful in building 6 homes. She understood the value of generativity, passing on a legacy of home ownership to her family and others. Five generations of her family have lived in Joppa with three generations still calling the community home. Mrs. Jackson is the great-grandmother of Joppa's Shalondria Galimore, the current Precinct Chair and President of the South Central Neighborhood Association. She is an influential community leader with passion and love for her community; and continues embracing the legacy and heritage of her great-grandmother.



Melissa Pierce, namesake of the first school built in Joppa.

(Story continues on the next page)

Joppa present and future



Above - Picture of five generations of Joppa taken at the home of Rosa Lee Bosch Jackson in 1991:
top row: Shalondria Galimore, Gwen Jackson Crawford
seated: Rosa Lee Bosh Jackson, Sarah Jackson, (being held - Raven Ariel Jackson)

Right - Mrs. Laure Belle Foster and Mr. P.H. Foster



With young parents and college graduates returning back to their roots, Joppa, is on an upsurge. New homes being built through the efforts of Habitat for Humanity is bringing in a diversity of new homeowners. The South Central Civic League engages these new, and existing residents through social and culture, political and civic, and excursions and fieldtrips.

The City of Dallas is investing in Joppa's infrastructure in a major way. A multi-million dollar bridge and numerous street improvements will create better access to and within the community. The South Central Park, built in 1960, has received substantial renovations. New amenities include a pavilion with cookout grill equipment, enhanced lighting, a spray water area for children, and a walking trail into the Great Trinity Forest. Finally, plans for a business and resource center to facilitate curriculum-based learning for children and adults is planned.

All this progress in the community is attracting local, state, and national recognition in the media. While the progress and attention is welcome, the community still feels like a hidden jewel, and dedicated to fulfilling their purpose to remain intact as a "Freedman" town.

Juanita H. Nañez Appointed DCHC Chair



Juanita H. Nañez, newly appointed Dallas County Historical Commission Chair, 2021.

The Dallas Historical Commission is proud to welcome Juanita H. Nañez, SPHR, to her new role as Chair. Ms. Nañez has been a member of the Dallas County Historical Commission since the Spring of 2017, appointed by Dallas County Commissioner Dr. Elba Garcia. She is a native of Dallas and works as a human resources and diversity consultant with The Hopkins Group. She has brought her strong leadership background in community, cultural, and historic affairs to bear on her work on the Commission.

Nañez notes that as a native Dallasite, it is very meaningful to her to memorialize the people, places, and events that have shaped our city. She adds that, it is especially important to tell the stories of the people of all backgrounds who have molded our great city with their minds, hearts, and hands.

"My appointment to Chair of the Dallas County Historical Commission is a great honor. My vision as Chair is to be a facilitator for our

accomplished, dedicated, and competent DCHC members", Nañez notes. Chair Nañez takes the helm from Richard Stewart, who served the Dallas County Historical Commission Member from 2013 to 2021, serving as chair from 2019 to 2021.

Thank you, Richard Stewart

Longtime Chair steps down



In 2015 Commissioner Garcia asked Richard Stewart to join the Historical Commission. She could not have picked a better appointee. Richard's background of service and love of history made him an ideal choice. Prior to his service on the Historical Commission, Richard was already giving back to the community. He served as president of The Patrick E. Higginbotham American Inn of Court and as vice-chair of the Las Colinas Medical Center Board. Additionally, as Life Patron Fellow of the Dallas Bar Foundation, Stewart was recognized for outstanding service as the Foundation's 2006 Fellows Chair. Richard is also a Fellow of the Texas Bar Foundation and has served as chair of the Irving Convention and Visitors Bureau Board of Directors, Legal Aid of Northwest Texas and Irving's Planning and Irving's Zoning Commission. He served as the chair of the Irving Arts Board and is a member of the University of North Texas Dallas, College of Law Board of Visitors.

Richard Stewart. Dallas County Historical Commission Member 2013-2021. Chair from 2019-2021.

When he started his chairmanship of the Dallas County Historical Commission, meetings would sometimes last an hour. In fact, there had been serious discussions about extending meeting time to an hour and a half. Richard, a retired Navy Captain, knows a thing or two about efficiency. Using the skills honed by extensive service on boards and commissions, he ensured that the business of the Commission was priority number one. Typical meetings run by this experienced leader were trimmed to run in half the time.

Under Richard's leadership, everything was on track: The Chronicle (which you're enjoying now) was published consistently each quarter with an increased circulation. Every Historical Marker from his last session, a record number for the County, was approved by the State of Texas Historical Commission. He instituted the process and training, involving the whole board, to provide review of each Historical Marker application. Richard expanded the impact of the Commission through outreach at marker installation ceremonies, providing remarks at, and attending meetings of Dallas area historical organizations.

Recently, Richard received the Dallas Bar Association's Martin Luther King Justice Award, and as a result was recognized by the County Commissioners. At that meeting, Commissioners complemented his leadership as board chair. More than just striving to be inclusive and preside over meetings in a business-like manner, Richard understood the chair as the board's face to the community. An appreciative community thanks you, Richard, for your dedication to Dallas County, and for helping preserve its history.

Editor's Note

Hello. I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Luis Tamayo and I am the new Director for Dallas County Planning and Development. As a part of that role, I am honored and have the privilege of compiling and editing the Chronicle. I know I am stepping into a large role – one led for over 20 years by Rick Loessberg. I'll start by saying that I am in awe of the body of work – the history – he left for us in the previous editions of the Chronicle. I will strive to maintain the high standard set by Rick Loessberg and Rachel Brown who served as interim liason to the board. I will continuously work to ensure the stories of Dallas County are told in the pages of the Chronicle.



Luis Tamayo, editor.