

THE DALLAS COUNTY CHRONICLE

HISTORICAL JOURNEY OF CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH: A TESTAMENT TO FAITH AND CHANGE IN DALLAS

By Dr. Rene Schmidt

The Founding Years

Christ Church, one of the oldest Episcopal parishes in Dallas County, Texas, boasts a rich history dating back to 1890. In that year, the church received its charter as a mission from Bishop Alexander C. Garrett. The cornerstone of the first church was laid in 1893 and consecrated on May 13, 1894.

The original church was constructed on the southeast corner of Ninth Street and Marsalis Avenue in Oak Cliff, overlooking the Trinity River. The church was conveniently located near the streetcar line providing easy transportation for parishioners.



The original Christ Church

Building a New Church

The arrival of Reverend John Wallis Ohl in 1920 marked the beginning of a new chapter for Christ Church. Inspired by the Episcopal Church of St. Martin of Tours in South Omaha, Nebraska, where he had previously served, Father Ohl brought plans for a new church building.

Construction on the new location at Tenth Street and Llewellyn began on January 20, 1921. On May 15, 1921, the first service was held in the new church. The structure was designed in a cruciform plan and resembled an overturned ark. The interior incorporated elements of the contemporary popular Arts and Crafts movement.

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DALLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEMBERS

- Elizabeth Gunby, Chair, *Dallas*
- Patricia Hicks, Vice Chair, *Dallas*
- Joan E. Jackson Bouldin, *Dallas*
- Anthony Cornell, *Dallas*
- Elizabeth De Leon, *Dallas*
- Priscilla Escobedo, *Irving*
- Cheryl Jackson, *Lancaster*
- Jearlene Miller, *Irving*
- Roosevelt Nichols, *Lancaster*
- Coy L. Poitier, *Dallas*
- John Roppolo, *Carrollton*

UPCOMING DCHC MEETINGS

- July - No Meeting
- Wednesday, August 16, 2023
- Wednesday, September 20, 2023



IT'S A WRAP: DCHC AT DIFF

By Coy Poitier

The 2023 Dallas International Film Festival (DIFF) concluded on May 5, 2023, after a week of screenings, engaging Q&As, and special events. The festival showcased an impressive lineup of films from across the world, including narrative features, documentaries, short films, and student films.

A standout of the festival was the *The Wild Man*, directed by Austin native Riley Cusick. The film follows a son who is navigating how to care for his father with a deteriorating mental condition where he believes he's a wild animal.

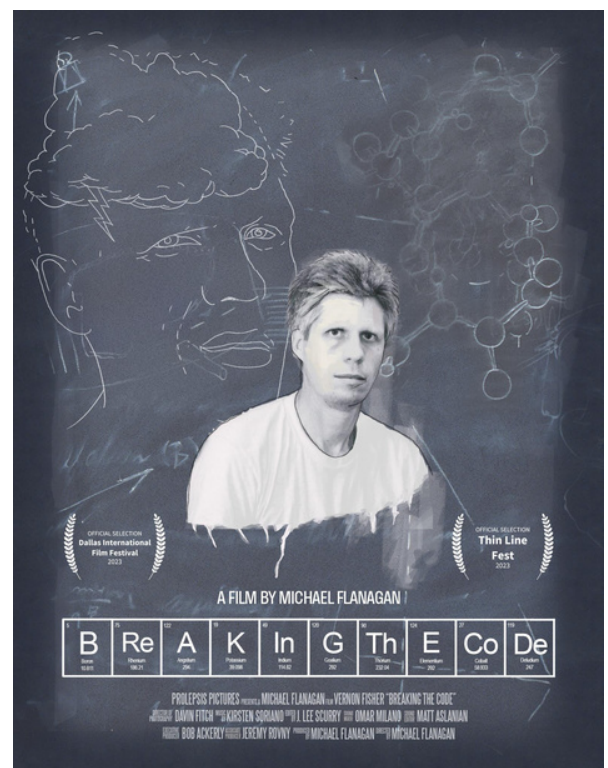


DIFF Artistic Director James Faust (center) with Elizabeth Gunby, DCHC Chair (left) and Patricia Hicks, DCHC Co-Chair (right)

Another noteworthy film was the documentary *If Not Me, Then Who?* This film chronicles the journey of a group of individuals in Pottsboro, Texas striving to effect positive change within their community.

The Dallas County Historical Commission (DCHC) awarded *Breaking the Code* Best Historical Film. This remarkable documentary, directed by Michael Flanagan, made its debut at DIFF. The film sheds light on the extraordinary life of Fort Worth artist Vernon Fisher. Born to rural Texas farmers in 1943, Fisher's childhood exposure to painting was only "something you did to houses." However, by the 1980s he was exhibiting alongside renowned artists such as Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat, establishing himself as one of the most important artists of the 20th century. Mr. Fisher died just two days before the movie about his life was announced as the 2023 DIFF Historical Film Award recipient by the DCHC. He was 80 years old.

Committee members Elizabeth Gunby, Patricia Hicks, and Coy Poitier attended DIFF, which remains dedicated to celebrating the art of cinema. The DCHC is proud to sponsor and participate in the festival so that DIFF can continue to be a place for storytellers and audiences to connect and experience film as a community.



REMEMBERING JESSE TAFALLA, JR

By Priscilla Escobedo

Jesse Tafalla, Jr., a prominent leader and activist in the Dallas community, died on June 6, 2023. He was appointed to the Dallas County Historical Commission in 2013 by the Honorable Theresa Daniel and served on the commission through 2019. During his time on the commission, he oversaw the first marker to receive DCHC Untold History funds, The Crossroads. This marker commemorates an intersection known as 'the crossroads', which was and still remains

a major center for the LGBTQ+ community of Dallas. Jesse took great pride in this marker, and often invited groups to visit the marker. Both before and after his tenure in the DCHC, he worked closely with major historical preservation organizations, nonprofits centered around the arts, political groups, and civil rights organizations. These included the Dallas Mexican American Historical League, which his parents Jesse Tafalla, Sr., and Nellie Tafalla helped found, Rainbow LULAC Council #4871 (LULAC's first LGBTQ+ chapter), Cara Mia Theater, Tejano Democrats, Somos Tejas, and others. He was a lifelong Dallasite, growing up in Far East Dallas and graduating from Bryan Adams High School in 1981, and worked for IBM and DART throughout his life.



THE VALLE FAMILY MARKER CEREMONY

By Elizabeth Gunby

In Garland, a Dallas suburb, Latinos now make up 42.5% of the population. But nearly a century ago, the Valles were the first and only inhabitants with Latin American heritage. Manuel Jesús Valle and María Martínez Valle settled in a tract of land west of the Santa Fe railroad tracks. They raised eight children all of whom graduated from Garland High School and became outstanding citizens, distinguishing themselves in the military, athletics, and service to town and nation. The Valle family blazed a trail as Garland's first Latinos, serving as role models for future generations. The Valle home place site represents a storied past, a locus for a new start in America's land of promise, and a spot where taking the high road in service to community and country set the pace for others to follow.



Photo submitted by Don Baynham from the Valle Family Marker Ceremony on May 20, 2023 -- what a family affair!

JUNETEENTH AT THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM

By Joan Jackson Bouldin

Member of DCHC and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History

The African American Museum, located in Dallas Fair Park, hosted six days of events to commemorate Juneteenth 2023. Starting on June 10, with a workshop on preserving family documents presented by Priscilla Escobedo, archivist and a member of the Dallas County Historical Commission and the Dr. W. Marvin Dulaney Branch of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH).

Events continued June 16 with a presentation by Dr. W. Marvin Dulaney and Robert Edison. “Juneteenth and Freedman’s Cemetery”. This gallery talk focused on early Juneteenth celebrations throughout the first African American neighborhoods in Dallas County. The flyer below advertises the Juneteenth Celebration of 1920.



A documentary film, “Freedman’s Memorial”, produced by students at the University of North Texas, recounted the history of the thriving Freedman’s Town that was located near the intersection of what is now Central Expressway (I-45) and Lemon Avenue.

On June 18, families gathered for City Men Cook, a delicious food competition. This event, which is in its 23rd year, has become a Juneteenth favorite. Each year tickets are donated to three non-profit organizations, according to Terry Allen, the founder and organizer. The community organizations sale tickets as a fund raiser and receive 100% of the proceeds. Over 600 people came to the museum to sample the meals prepared by 38 cooks.

Lectures and other presentations continued through June 19. The Museum is committed to supporting various groups so Black owned small businesses were invited to participate in “Vendors Under the Dome” on June 19.

The African American Museum offers year around activities for a wide variety of audiences. National exhibits, art exhibits and youth activities have found a home at the museum.



Regina Taylor, actress and playwright, was one of the judges at the City Men Cook food competition.

CHRIST CHURCH

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Noteworthy examples of stained glass, crafted in the Arts and Crafts style, can be found within the church. These magnificent pieces were created by John Kebrle, Jacoby Arts Glass Company of Saint Louis, and Payne Studios of Patterson, New Jersey. Of particular importance is the Nativity Window, considered a masterpiece of this style, which dominates the Church Nave. The Nave also showcases stunning Arts and Crafts style-stained glass windows depicting six of Christ's Apostles.



Highlights from Christ Church's stained glass art.

Challenges and Adaptation

The years following World War II brought significant changes to Oak Cliff, impacting both the local community and Christ Church. The introduction of liquor sales, zoning regulations, and the rise of automobile culture reshaped the area. In 1944, Dallas County voted to allow alcohol sales, resulting in a backlash in Oak Cliff. This led to a subsequent vote in 1956 to become a "dry" area. These decisions, combined with the development of infrastructure and amenities in other parts of Dallas, gradually led to the migration of businesses and residents from Oak Cliff, including members of Christ Church.

CHRIST CHURCH

(continued)

The rise of automobile culture further transformed Oak Cliff as streetcars ceased operations in 1956. The expansion of roads to accommodate increased traffic changed the once-quiet residential areas into bustling thoroughfares. Zoning changes enacted in 1947 replaced single-family homes with apartments. Jefferson Avenue, previously featuring a mix of residential and commercial properties, became entirely commercial. Furthermore, the construction of the R.L. Thornton Freeway (Interstate 35) in the 1960s isolated eastern Oak Cliff, exacerbating the decline of the community and challenging the fabric of its neighborhoods.

Renewal and Renaissance

Despite these challenges, Christ Church has remained dedicated to serving the community for over a century. In recent years, the church has experienced a spiritual renaissance, driven by the growth of the Spanish-speaking community within its congregation. Reflecting the multicultural tapestry of Dallas, Right Rev. Paul Lambert blessed the stained-glass window of Our Lady of Guadalupe on August 15, 2015. This beautiful artwork stands as a testament to the diverse individuals who have found a sense of community and belonging within the walls of Christ Church throughout its 130-year history.

Last May, Christ Church held a dedication ceremony to commemorate its newly acquired subject marker from the Texas Historical Commission. The event was attended by members of the Dallas County Historical Commission, including Elizabeth Gunby and Patricia Hicks. As one of the few remaining ecclesiastical interpretations of the Arts and Crafts movement in Dallas, Christ Church stands as a testament to the enduring architectural legacy of the era. Furthermore, Christ Church remains committed to adapting and finding innovative ways to continue to serve its ever-changing community.

