

# THE *County Chronicle*

NEWSLETTER OF THE DALLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION



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## **Fair Park Gains Dubious Distinction**

**Kay Tiller**

The good news is that the Texas Legislature has budgeted \$2 million for the renovation of the buildings in the agricultural area in Fair Park!

The bad news is what is going to happen to the other fabulous Art Deco buildings that many of us marveled at when we were kids and visited the 1936 Texas Centennial!

At a news conference, held in the Sheep Barn at the State Fair Grounds on Tuesday, June 6th, Dallas Mayor Ron Kirk and the Friends of Fair Park made the announcement that the funds had been allocated for restoration of the barns that house the sheep, hogs, cattle, and horses that are shown at the State Fair of Texas every year.

Mayor Kirk explained how important Fair Park was to the city as a historical site and the economic impact the area had on the city. "We will soon have a soccer league in the city that will play its games at Fair Park, and SMU has also announced that it will again be playing football in the Cotton Bowl," he said.

At the news conference the mayor also thanked the members of the Texas Legislature that were present: Senators Royce West and

David Cain; and State Representatives, Helen Giddings, Jesse Jones, and Sam Hudson.

One of the reasons why this appropriation made so much sense at this time is that fact that the Fair Park National Historic Landmark was recently named "one of the 11 most vulnerable sites in the country" by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. That means that it is in danger of disappearing due to neglect. We all see the cracks in the walls and other signs of this whenever we go out there, and we must join the Friends of Fair Park and other groups interested in the history of Dallas and, for that matter, all of Texas, in doing whatever we can to preserve this Texas treasure.

It might be interesting to note some of the other sites that have been named by the Trust. They include the Colorado Plateau in Southwestern Colorado, "one of the world's largest concentrations of prehistoric ruins" [including those of the Anasazi, Navajo, and Hopi]. The approximately 130 million acres are threatened by looters, vandals, and developers. Other endangered properties include Ossabaw Island, Georgia, a 25,000 acre island off the Georgia coast, where evidence of centuries of human habitation can be found; South Pass, Wyoming, a site where the old wagon ruts of the Oregon Trail can still be seen; and the tugboat *Hoga*,

**FAIR PARK, CON'T.**

the only U.S. Navy vessel that survived the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and is still floating (it is scheduled to be scrapped). The locations of the properties span the country, from the northeast to Hawaii.

There are many reasons why these sites are threatened, and possibly there is nothing we can do about something in Boston or East Aurora, New York or Charleston, South Carolina or Jackson, Mississippi or even "the world's first modern highway", the Bronx River Parkway, but we really must do whatever we can and exert any influence we have to make sure that Fair Park is restored to its original glory—somehow!!!

That's what the Dallas County Historical Commission is all about...the preservation of history...and Fair Park is history for millions of Texans!

**Preserving the Past: Memories, Nostalgia, and Stories of Fair Park**

**Suzie Sweeton**

Mary Ellen Bendtson not only loves Fair Park, but she is...literally a part of Fair Park. "I was just a teenager in 1935, when I was hired as a model for some statues being built for some big celebration," recounts Mary Ellen. "I didn't realize how important this job was. I was just a teenager at the time, beginning to do some modeling around Dallas. I would go to Fair Park and pose wearing shorts or a bathing suit. It was just fun for me. And yes, I did get paid, but I don't remember how much. It was so

long ago."

The statues Mary Ellen refers to are the six stone sculptures gracing the Esplanade, each one towering 31 feet high, and symbolizing one of Texas' sovereignties: France, Spain, Mexico, Republic of Texas, the Confederacy, and the United States. They are frozen in time, looking just as they did in 1936. The majestic "flag ladies" were designed by artists Raoul Josset and Lawrence Tenney Stevens, under the direction of architect George Dahl. All design and construction was accomplished in just 18 months.

"I didn't have any idea Fair Park would become a National Historic Landmark and the collection of heroic statues would become legends. I'm proud I was a part of it. Fair Park really is a 'Texas jewel' and definitely must be preserved. I believe it can be."

Mary Ellen lives just a few blocks away from Fair Park. She still returns to stroll around the Esplanade—usually with her grandson, telling him the way things used to be.

Thank you, Mary Ellen, for preserving the past.

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## Chair's Message

### Jean Reeves

Those of us who have an appreciation for history and preservation have an immense challenge. Our charge is to identify, protect, and interpret the valuable historical resources of Dallas County. We face increasing competition for land use. Uncertain economies in rural and urban areas of the state leave the survival of many historical and cultural resources in serious doubt. However, without the preservation of history, the past would only exist in our imaginations and that would be a tragedy.

We are encouraged by events such as the allocation of monies by the State Legislature to renovate some areas of Fair Park. Our Legislators should be commended. Fair Park is on the list of the 11 most endangered historical buildings in the nation. The city will also provide some funds through its recently approved bond proposals for the project.

We will have a tremendous opportunity to highlight the importance of preservation, when we celebrate the Sesquicentennial of Dallas County. We can make vivid to the citizens of Dallas County those things which need to be remembered. Let's grab this moment and use it as a springboard for a new appreciation of the treasures of the past which link us to the present and the future.

## The Former Chair Speaks!

### John Crain

Hurray for Jean Reeves! Hurray for Dallas! Hurray for Dallas County! Hurray for the Dallas County Historical Commission!

Earlier this year, Commissioners Court appointed Jean Reeves to the position of Chair of the Dallas County Historical Commission. [Ed. note: Jean replaces John Crain who served for two years as Chairman.]

Those of us who have had the pleasure of working with Jean can speak with authority on her commitment to history and preservation in Dallas County. As the County's 150th birthday approaches, we are most fortunate to benefit from Jean Reeves' enthusiasm and vision.

In order for Jean to be successful in her new position, those of us interested in local history and preservation must give Jean our full support. This is especially true for Commission members who are appointed to serve the people of Dallas County.

With respect to my recent term, let me thank Judge Lee Jackson and his colleagues on Commissioners Court—particularly former Commissioner Chris Semos—for permitting me to chair this prestigious Commission. In addition, I wish to thank Rick Loessberg and his staff for handling the affairs of the Commission. Let me also pay tribute to former and present Commission members for their outstanding service to the County.

KAY TILLER'S COMMISSION MEMBER PROFILE

**Stephen M. Matthews**

"I've always loved history! Even as a kid, I enjoyed reading history or hearing stories about times past. I've always been interested in why things are the way they are and history teaches us a lot about that," Stephen Matthews noted in discussing his appointment to the Dallas County Historical Commission.

Although he minored in history at SMU, (with special emphasis on United States history) and took several courses in Texas history, Matthews says that he didn't really appreciate it until he went to work for Governor Bill Clements during his second term as Governor of Texas.

"Working in the State Capitol every day, and being in the heart of the state and the Texas Hill Country gave me a much greater appreciation for local history," he commented.

He continued, "As a member of the Governor's staff, I sat through many meetings of the State Preservation Board, the group that was charged with the restoration of the General Land Office and the Texas State Capitol buildings. That experience gave me a first-hand understanding of the many intricacies of historical building preservation."

Armed with this much increased interest in history and things historical, Matthews returned to Dallas in 1990 and went to work for Lone Star Gas Company.

"Since my return to Dallas in 1990, I have sought as many sources as I could find to gain more information about Dallas County

history. A particular favorite source is the *WPA Guide to Dallas*. [Ed. note: This book was written during the Great Depression of the 1930s but not published until 1993.] The description in the book pointed to Dallas as a vibrant, enthusiastic city on the rise. Driving through central Dallas today—particularly in the portion of the city that was developed in the first half of this century—I wonder how we strayed from that and what has to be done to preserve such a significant portion of our past."

Stephen Matthews concluded, "as the newest member of the Dallas County Historical Commission, I view the Commission as an important vehicle in preserving the buildings, neighborhoods, and human interest stories that tell us who we are and remind us of our common past. I have a special fondness for that era of the 1930s through the 1950s and have chosen to live in a neighborhood built during that period. During my term on the Commission, I hope to work to secure protection for places and buildings that need it and also to encourage economic and financial incentives to both redevelop and protect the central business districts of Dallas County cities."

**What's Happening on the Historical Scene?**

NEWS FROM **Jackie Deaton**

The Farmers Branch Education Committee, under the able direction of Frances Glancy, is in the process of publishing a pictorial history book depicting the development of

Farmers Branch. This extremely well-researched book will contain old photography of buildings, houses, street scenes, and special events from early times to the present and will be used in conjunction with the Heritage Education Program available to third grade classrooms in the Metrocrest schools.

A citizens committee is currently serving on a special project commissioned by Mayor Dave Blair and the City Council of Farmers Branch to research the biography of persons for whom the Farmers Branch city parks are named. This information will be published in pamphlet form when the research is completed to be used by the public.

**NEWS FROM Lloyd Henderson**

A big crowd of "oldtimers and newtimers" turned out to participate in the marker dedication at the Pleasant Valley Cemetery in Cedar Hill on Saturday, May 20th. Congratulations to Brenda Taylor and Judy Richards, the ladies who took leadership roles and carried out the project in such fine fashion.

The Pleasant Valley Cemetery was first started in 1848. The families of James Holland, Jacob and Drusilla Boydstrun, Issac Lowe, and Robert Ground had just immigrated to the Cedar Hill area when the Boydstrun's son died. He was buried at this site on the family farm.

In 1870, the Boydstrun family deeded 3.5 acres surrounding their son's gravesite for a cemetery, school, and church. The cemetery was enlarged in 1907 with the purchase of an additional 1.5 acres from A.T. Baggett and, since that time numerous area pioneers and

their descendents have been interred in the cemetery.

The Texas Historical Marker was presented to Chris Rose, Mayor of Cedar Hill, by Judy Richards, Pleasant Valley Cemetery Historian. Ms. Richards pointed out that the historical marker and its dedication was due to the combined efforts of many people who contributed physical labor and spent hours cleaning the grounds and restoring the grave markers. The purchase of the Texas Historical Marker was made possible by donations by several families in the area.

Jean Reeves, Chair of the Dallas County Historical Commission, was joined by Lloyd Henderson, Vice Chair, and Frances James, President of the Dallas County Pioneer Association.

Again, congratulations to the fine folks in Cedar Hill for a great job of historical preservation.

**DCHC Calendar**

- July 29            Marker Dedication at Keenan Cemetery, Farmers Branch
- Aug. 3            DCHC Monthly Meeting
- Aug. 19           Annual Granny Penn Ice Cream Social at Penn Farm
- Sept. 7            DCHC Monthly Meeting
- Oct. 5            DCHC Monthly Meeting
- Oct. 11-17       National Trust for Historic Preservation Annual Meeting, Ft. Worth
- Oct. 13           Preservation Action Auction, Ft. Worth

The Dallas Historical Commission  
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