



# THE DALLAS COUNTY CHRONICLE

The Newsletter of the Dallas County Historical Commission

Volume XXXVI, No.1

May 2010

## DALLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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## Historic Sachse Marker Dedicated

On April 17, Sachse mayor Mike Felix unveiled a Texas Historical Commission marker at the city's 5th Street Water Pump House. This small cinder block structure served as Sachse's first city hall for ten years after the city's incorporation in 1956. The town, which is named for William Sachse (1820-1899), who donated land for the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railroad to build tracks and a train station in the 1800s, is one of the fastest growing cities in the county's northeastern corner.



Dallas County Historical Commission members (left to right) Don Baynham, Chairman Michael Lowenberg, Ann Spillman, Charles Powers and Nelda Gentsch attended the historical marker dedication in Sachse on April 17.

# Saving Dallas' Heritage

## The Founding of the Dallas County Heritage Society

By Mary Guthrie\*\*

It was 1964. Dallas was home to 120 oil businesses earning a million dollars or more. Interstate 30 was about to open along the southern rim of downtown. The population was growing, and change was crackling in the air. The horror of the John Kennedy assassination, just months earlier, still hung painfully in the air. People were anxious to get past the tragedy and move into a new, brighter future.

In its rush to build new roads, businesses, buildings and homes, Dallas was not particularly concerned about saving its landmarks. Mansions, such as the one owned by department store magnate Alexander Sanger in the Cedars part of town, were leveled to make way for factories. Monuments were moved, fields were paved. To those paying attention, it became apparent that Dallas was willingly bulldozing its past.

Sunset High School history teacher William Conger was one of those paying attention. Alarmed by the rate at which Dallas landmarks, businesses and homes were being torn down for new construction, Conger began sounding the alarm to various groups. Unless Dallas saved some of its historic buildings, he warned, Dallas' roots would be lost to dusty history. He became especially alarmed when he heard that the Millermore home in Oak Cliff, one of Dallas' last remaining Civil War-era homes, was slated for demolition to make way for a new sanctuary for the Good Street Baptist Church.

One group who heard Conger's warning in the springtime of 1964 was the Founders Garden Club. Club member Mary Lynn McEntire heard the message loud and clear. His appeal aroused "lots of enthusiasm" among the Garden Club members, according to McEntire, and many pledged financial support to save the home on the spot. McEntire's mother, Mary Batts Aldredge, also a member of the Founders Garden Club, emerged as a leader in the new movement to save Millermore. With

Mrs. DeWitt Ray and Mrs. Ward Gannon as part of her new troop of preservationists, the women plotted a strategy to save the home. First, they went to see Millermore owner Philip Miller and the clergy of the Good Street Baptist Church to ask if they could have the house. They won an early victory: the women would be allowed to



Millermore, originally located in Oak Cliff, was moved to what is known today as Dallas Heritage Village and opened to the public in 1969. Photo courtesy of Dallas Heritage Village.

take the home. But their first victory was also their first challenge: the home had to be moved before May 1, only weeks away.

The next two hurdles seemed overwhelming: One, the women had to move the enormous home to another site, but how, and where to? And two, they figured out pretty quickly that moving it was going to take a lot of money. How could they raise enough in time? If they couldn't move the house quickly, it would fall to the bulldozers.

Luckily, the clergy at Good Street Baptist Church allowed the women some time to muster support, and they extended the original May deadline, but the clock was ticking, and the women had to act.

They realized that success would require public support. The women next called on Ray Hubbard, then president of the Dallas Park Board. Was there space for the Civil War home in one of the city's parks? After much debate, focus was centered on City Park, Dallas' first municipal park estab-

lished in 1876. City Park was in need of some attention. After it was cut off from downtown by the arrival of Interstate 30 (several acres were sacrificed to the freeway), use of the park had declined. The neighborhood was in transition from a once stable residential area to an industrial area, and public interest in the park had dwindled. Might Millermore reignite interest in City Park? The women waited on the Park Board to make its decision.

One of the best pieces of advice the group of women received was from John Plath Green, a local attorney. The women soon realized that the scope of what they were trying to accomplish would soon exceed their abilities. Green recommended the women seek incorporation from the state as a nonprofit organization, and he put into motion the steps of securing a charter for the group.

Green also moved the efforts forward by suggesting that additional structures be rescued and brought to the City Park. *The Dallas Morning News* immediately came out in favor of Green's proposal.

Soon, however, the Good Street Baptist Church ran out of patience. It was anxious to begin construction on its new sanctuary and gave the women a new deadline, April 1966. A new urgency swept through the group, and the women began holding meetings. Membership to this new agency, which at first called itself the "Dallas County Heritage and Conservation Society," was \$10 a year and anyone could join. Mrs. Aldredge served as the group's first president. In February 1966, the group received its charter. The group settled on the name "Dallas County Heritage Society" to indicate that its efforts reached beyond the city limits of Dallas.

At about the same time the Society received its charter, it also received word that Philip Miller had sold demolition rights to Millermore to George Dawdy of the Texas Wrecking and Salvage Company. Un-

der pressure from the Good Street Baptist Church, Miller had apparently given up hope that the Heritage Society would be able to raise enough money to move Millermore in time. Dawdy announced that he would be willing to sell Millermore, but that if no buyer stepped forward immediately, he would begin wrecking the house in three or four days.

Alarmed and filled with dread, Heritage Society members believed that all hope was lost. They didn't have enough money to buy the home, and the Park Board had not given the green light to move it anywhere.

The fight, however, was not over. The threat served to galvanize all parties involved in the rescue effort. Both daily newspapers took strong stands on behalf of preservation. "Save Millermore," said *The Dallas Morning News*. "Dallas needs to preserve its past," wrote the editors of *The Dallas Times Herald*. The Park Board and the City Council soon found themselves in the heat of the spotlight, their wisdom and vision being questioned in a very public way.

Enter John Plath Green once again. On February 18, Green made a beeline to Judge Dee Brown Walker of the 162nd District Court and asked for and received a temporary restraining order to keep Dawdy from demolishing the building. The Judge allowed a ten-day reprieve, but in the newspaper that morning, it was announced that Dawdy was going to bulldoze Millermore at 2 p.m. that day. People rushed to Millermore; the front gates had already been knocked down. Seventy-five people soon

assembled; Mrs. DeWitt Ray described the atmosphere as "electric." With the crowd cheering, Constable Robie Love served Dawdy with the restraining order. Much to his chagrin, Dawdy was also served with a \$999 judgment suit he had incurred in a separate legal battle!



William Brown Miller and his family lived in this log house for 15 years while their home, Millermore, was being constructed. The log structure, built in 1847, now resides on the grounds of Dallas Heritage Village. Photo courtesy of Dallas Heritage Village.

Green spoke to the crowd. A meeting was scheduled for the following Monday, he announced, for Heritage Society members to continue negotiations with the Park Board for moving Millermore. He also pointed out to the group that they had only ten days to raise the money to move the house. Society leaders had their work cut out for them.

The following Monday, February 21, negotiations with the Park Board went well. Millermore would be allowed to move to City Park, and the Park Department would split financial responsibility with the Heritage Society. Although the problem of where to move Millermore was solved, the Heritage Society still did not have enough

money to secure the title to the house or enough to actually move it. They came prepared to Judge Walker's courtroom on February 28, ready to plead for more extensions – but, because Philip Miller did not show up for the hearing, the Judge postponed the hearing until March 9. But a series of legal delays followed, and it wasn't until May 18 that the Dawdy party and the Heritage Society came to an out-of-court settlement: The Heritage Society would pay \$1,800 in back taxes for Dawdy and would pay \$3,200 in his legal fees. With this settlement, the Heritage Society had undisputed title to Millermore and Dawdy would not be allowed to, wreck it.

The Heritage Society then turned its efforts toward raising as much cash as they could to bring the home to City Park. They set a goal of \$75,000 to move, refurbish, and operate Millermore at its new location. Pledges from the Hoblitzelle, McDermott and Dallas Foundations came in; the Dallas Junior League chipped in, too. Citizens of Dallas sent in money. The Society finally had enough money to begin moving the home – but even this long-awaited step had its own set of complications.

Millermore was a big, two-story jigsaw puzzle made entirely of logs. It was too big to move in one piece; if it was cut into sections, it would be destroyed. In order to move the massive structure, it would have to be disassembled, piece by historic piece. Contractor Walter McElroy tackled the job. He worked out a careful system to manage each board, photographing each step and marking each board in a special

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### DCHC Member Profile

Dallas County Historical Commission members are volunteers appointed by the Dallas County Commissioners Court for two-year terms. Members serve as the first level of review for state historical markers. They advise the Court on historical preservation topics and conduct activities to assist in the preservation of the County's historical heritage. The newest member of the Commission, Herb Weidinger, has served in a number of civic organizations.

Mr. Weidinger, appointed to the DCHC by Commissioner Maureen Dickey, served four terms on the Carrollton City Council. He is retired from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, for which he served as Site Environmental Coordinator in Chicago and Dallas. He received a BA in economics from Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa; an MLA from Southern Methodist University; and an MA in international management from the University of Texas at Dallas.

Weidinger served for seven years on the National League of Cities Energy, Environment and Natural Resources steering committee. He is a former member of both the DCHC and the City of Carrollton Historical Board.

Weidinger and his wife, Beverly, have three children.

# Join the Friends of the DCHC

The Friends of the Dallas County Historical Commission is a Section 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. The mission of the Friends is to provide private funding support for Texas historical markers and other educational programs sponsored by the DCHC and to raise awareness of the history of Dallas County and its cities, neighborhoods and communities.

Your membership contribution is tax deductible as allowed by law. The Friends has no paid staff. As a result, all of your contributions support DCHC activities except for out-of-pocket expenses incurred in operating the Friends. All members receive a copy of *The Dallas County Chronicle* and invitations to the Friends annual meeting and other events. To join, complete the following information, pick a membership level and send your check, payable to the Friends of the Dallas County Historical Commission, to:

Charlene Orr  
Historic Mesquite, Inc./City of Mesquite  
Box 850137  
Mesquite, Texas 75185-0137

## Charter memberships

(limited to contributors who joined by December 31, 2006) will be valid until December 31, 2010.

For information, call Charlene Orr at (972) 216-6468.

## Membership Levels

Basic \$35  
Big D \$100  
Pioneer \$500

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Level: \_\_\_\_\_

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code so that the house could be re-assembled at City Park. To his surprise, he and his crew discovered that Millermore had already been carefully marked with an assembly code using Roman numerals—by the original builders of the home, likely the Miller slaves. When the house was eventually reassembled, McElroy's crew ended up using the original code laid down in the mid-1800s.

Then, yet another challenge cropped up. While the Society had raised lots of pledges, cash in hand was another matter. Mill-

ermore was indeed disassembled, but due to lack of cash, the house was stored in a warehouse for a year before making its final journey to City Park. On March 10, 1967, after Mary Aldredge secured a loan from First National Bank, the Heritage Society broke ground for Millermore at City Park.

On May 6, 1969, Millermore was at long last opened to the public. It was a momentous occasion for Mary Aldredge, the Founders Garden Club, John Plath Green, and the public who supported this dramatic

new effort to honor Dallas' roots. It is not known if William Conger, the man who sounded the alarm three years earlier, was present at the grand opening, but the results of his efforts were certainly in evidence and remain so to this day.

\*Mary Guthrie is the former marketing director of Dallas Heritage Village.

+Based on *A Dream Come True: The Founding of the Dallas County Heritage Society*. Michael V. Hazel, *Heritage News*, Winter 1986-1987.

## ***THE DALLAS COUNTY CHRONICLE*** The Newsletter of the Dallas County Historical Commission

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