



DALLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
**THE DALLAS
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History Conference Presenters to Speak on Dallas Spirit



Courtesy Dallas Historical Society. Used by permission.

Five scholars will present papers at the 13th Annual Legacies Dallas History Conference on Saturday, January 28, 2012, all related to the theme of Defining the Dallas Spirit. Jane Elder will speak on “Cokesbury Book Store, The Premiere Book Store in the Southwest.” Deborah Kilgore’s talk is entitled, “Fifteen Cents and Shoe Leather: The Rise of Clarence Miller, the Textile King of the Southwest.” Paula Lupkin will discuss “A Dallas Palimpsest: Uncovering Layers of St. Louis at Akard and Commerce.” Mark Rice will analyze the career of Dallas business leader and mayor R. L. Thornton, and Libby Willis will recount “The Life and Work of Judge Thomas Fletcher Nash (1850-1908).”

Ms. Willis’ paper will be of special interest to members and supporters of the Dallas County Historical Commission as Thomas Nash served as Dallas County Judge from 1893 to 1896, the period when the Old Red Courthouse opened for business. The musical ensemble The Merrie Olde Players will provide entertainment based on the theme of “Meet Me in Dallas”.

The Legacies conference will be held at the Hall of State at Fair Park. The Dallas County Historical Commission is one twelve historical organizations and libraries that jointly sponsor the annual conference. For more information, contact conference coordinator Michael V. Hazel at mvhazel@sbcglobal.net. Register online at www.dallasheritagevillage.org.

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The Trinity River Flood of 1908 and Its Aftermath

By Darwin Payne, Ph.D.



North Dallas near McKinney Street during the 1908 flood. Courtesy Dallas Historical Society. Used by permission.

The Trinity River Flood of 1908 was Dallas' greatest natural disaster. The city was isolated from the rest of the nation -- and the world -- for more than four days. In the days before FEMA, Dallas had to recover on its own, and a major result was that Dallas got its first city plan, the plan that gave it so many of the features recognizable and important today.

On May 25, 1908, after three days of heavy rain in the upper watershed of the Trinity, the river began to rise at Dallas, eventually cresting at a record 52.6 feet. As many as 4,000 people were left homeless, and property damage was more than \$2.5 million. Bridges connecting Dallas and Oak Cliff were washed away; telegraph and telephone lines to the outside world collapsed; rail service was cancelled because of high water and damage to tracks and trestles; and there was no water pressure. The electric plant was flooded, leaving the city

without power, water or fire protection, a condition that lasted for days.

Mayor Stephen Hay set up relief committees to distribute food, shelter, clothing, drugs and medical services. Tent cities were set up at several locations.



Interurban railroad tracks during the 1908 flood. Courtesy Dallas Historical Society. Used by permission.

Mayor Hay called a meeting of leading businessmen to seek private funding to deal with the disaster. Local banker Royal Ferris, who headed the finance relief committee, reported that they had raised about \$20,000, but this was far from enough. So he asked Col. C.C. Slaughter to attend a meeting. A Dallas resident who owned three huge West Texas ranches, Slaughter was once identified as the state's largest single taxpayer. "When you need money, you raise it," the 70-year-old Slaughter announced. "That is the way Dallas has done it heretofore." He pledged \$1,000 to the relief effort and went after his friends to get more. He saw C.A. Keating, a prominent farm implement manufacturer, who matched the Colonel's pledge.

Momentum built as more businessmen pledged \$1,000. (When G. B. Dealey announced that Colonel A. H. Belo wished to give \$100, Mayor Hay quickly responded, "Mr. Dealey, we are in the \$1,000 list." Dealey immedi-

ately promised that *The Dallas Morning News* would add to Colonel Belo's gift to bring it to \$1,000.) Within a week, the relief fund totaled nearly \$50,000.

Dealey then published a series of articles and photographs to build public support for a new bridge to Oak Cliff. In August of 1909 voters approved \$600,000 in bonds to build what became the Houston Street Viaduct. Construction began November 18, 1910, and the bridge formally opened February 22, 1912. It was an engineering marvel of the time, stretching some 6,562 feet.

The need to control the Trinity River was of paramount importance. But instead of addressing only that need, the Chamber of Commerce and the City Plan and Improvement League hired George Kessler and charged him with developing a master plan for the city.

Kessler completed the plan in 1910,

and suggested creating a system of parks and boulevards (including Central Boulevard) to beautify the city and eliminate the narrow, crooked streets; building the Union Depot to remove train tracks from middle of Pacific Avenue, ease traffic congestion, and eliminate dangerous intersections; and moving the bed of the Trinity River away from downtown and confining it between levees.

The plan was not implemented immediately as it was deemed impractical. But it became increasingly clear that changes were needed, and over time, many were made. Union Station was completed in 1916, the Trinity River project in the 1930s, and Central Expressway ("Central Boulevard") in the 1950s.

Thus, the flood of 1908, Dallas' single worst natural disaster, was the catalyst for many positive changes that contributed to the city's growth into one of the most prominent and successful cities in

Texas.

Darwin Payne, a life-long resident of Dallas, is professor emeritus of communications at Southern Methodist University, where he taught journalism for 30 years. He holds a bachelor of journalism degree from the University of Texas at Austin, a master of arts degree from Southern Methodist University, and a PhD in American Civilization from the University of Texas at Austin. He has written extensively on Dallas history, notably his well-received *Big D: Triumphs and Troubles of an American Supercity in the 20th Century* (now out of print, but being revised for a third edition). His other books include *From Prairie to Planes: How Dallas and Fort Worth Overcame Politics and Personalities to Build One of the World's Biggest and Busiest Airports* (with Kathy Fitzpatrick as co-author) and *Dallas: An Illustrated History*.

DCHC Member

Profile

Dallas County Historical Commission members are volunteers appointed by the Dallas County Commissioners Court for two year terms. They serve as the first level of review for state historical markers, advise the Court on historical preservation topics and conduct activities to assist in the preservation of the County's historical heritage.

Regina Story was appointed by Dallas County Commissioner Dr. Elba Garcia. Her early interest in historical organizations came through her involvement as a member of the Delta County Patterson Memorial Museum board of directors, where she continues to serve as secretary. She is a past president of the Irving Heritage Society and currently edits the organization's newsletter. Story earned an undergraduate degree from East Texas State University and a master's degree from Southern Methodist University. She is also a member of the Lyric Stage League and serves as organist at First Christian Church in Irving.

**Featured
Landmark**

*Lawrence
Farmstead*



Photo: Don Baynham

The Lawrence Farmstead in Mesquite includes such Victorian features as a central tower, a steeply pitched overhanging roof and prominent porches. The farmstead complex, established in 1874 by Stephen Decatur Lawrence, is representative of the evolution of domestic buildings from the 1870s to the late 20th century on North Texas plains and prairies.



Irving Heritage Society president Mary Moorman (right), past president Mary Higbie (left) and DCHC member Regina Story attended the Society's Heritage House 100th Anniversary Kick-off Sunday, December 4. The event, at the CP Schulze House, included a reception, home tour and proclamations by State Representatives Linda Harper Brown and Rodney Anderson. The House was designated as a Recorded Texas Historical Landmark in 1986.



DCHC chair Ann Spillman (left), vice chair Don Baynham and former member Clare Buie Chaney attended the 2011 Awards for Excellence in Community Service luncheon of the Dallas Historical Society on November 8. Baynham is a former chair of the Society and Chaney serves on its board of trustees.



The Dallas County Chronicle

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