

DALLAS COUNTY
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

THE DALLAS COUNTY CHRONICLE

VOLUME 16, ISSUE 4

Fall 2017

CLEO HEARN

A Real Cowboy Hero

by Liz Lawless

Once upon a time, for many boys, the cowboy was the ultimate American hero and was what they dreamed of becoming. However, unlike most of them, Cleo Hearn did become a cowboy, and what he accomplished unquestionably makes him a hero.



Hearn was born in Seminole, Oklahoma (which is about fifty miles southeast of Oklahoma City) in 1939; his mother was African American and his father was Native American. Originally, he planned to be a baseball star, but that all changed at the age of five when he met his first black cowboy, Marvel Rogers, at an all-black rodeo, and a new dream was born.

As a youngster Hearn would walk a mile or two to a local barn just to be near the horses. His family still

CONTENTS

Cleo Hearn	page 1
St. Paul UMC	page 2
DCHC Goals	page 3
Brenna Elliott	page 3
Ben Washington Baptist	page 5

DALLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP

- FRED DURHAM, Chairman – Dallas
- JESSE TAFALLA, Vice Chairman – Dallas
- MARIA ROMERO – Garland
- PATRICIA HICKS – Dallas
- COY L. POITIER – Dallas
- BRENNA ELLIOTT – Dallas
- JOHN ROPPOLO – Carrollton
- CHRISTOPHER L. SMITH – Rowlett
- JUANITA H. NAÑEZ – Dallas
- RICHARD G. STEWART, JR – Irving
- REINA GONZALEZ – Dallas
- ELIZABETH GUNBY – Dallas

COMMISSIONERS COURT LIAISON

Rick Loessberg
 Director of Planning and Development
 411 Elm Street, 3rd Floor
 Dallas, TX 75202-3301
 214.653.7601
rloessberg@dallascounty.org

doesn't know where he got his love of horses, but it might be from his father. Hearn is proud to represent two cultures and tell the stories of African Americans and Native Americans who both played a largely untold role in the settling of the American West.

When he didn't have a horse to ride, other rodeo competitors let Hearn ride their horses. A couple of white cowboys made a huge difference in his life by teaching him skills and allowing him to ride their

See **A Real Cowboy** on page 5

St. Paul United Methodist Church

A Truly Historic and Remarkable Church



St. Paul United Methodist Church is the sole survivor of what was, for over a century, a neighborhood of monumental black churches. The congregation that greets you today is the same community that has worshiped at the same location in Dallas (1816 Routh Street) since its establishment in a brush arbor by a visionary body of recently freed slaves in 1873.

At that time, a small, white frame house was moved to a small plot of land provided by Anthony B. Norton who was Dallas' postmaster. This building served as both a church and a school for African American children until 1901, and during the period of 1874-1884, it was one of the few schools available to black children in Dallas.

In 1901, construction of the present church began with the digging and the finishing of a concrete basement. Quickly called "Noah's Ark," the basement was where services were held until 1927 when the church was fully completed. Featuring a gothic revival style derived from a design by William Sydney Pittman, Dallas' first African American architect, tradition holds that the church's façade is comprised of five different shades of brown brick because, for many years, parishioners brought bricks for the offering.



St. Paul United Methodist Church was designated as a City of Dallas Landmark in 1982.

From its founding, the church has been a leader in the community on spiritual, educational, and social justice matters. It was at St. Paul in 1876 where Huston Tillotson College (now located in Austin) was founded, and as Dallas grew, it was St. Paul that helped create a number of other Methodist churches throughout the city, including Hamilton Park, Carver Heights, and Highland Hills. In 2014, St. Paul made history once again as it merged with Union Cathedral, and Richie Butler (who had been Union's founding pastor) became the church's senior pastor.

Recognizing its physical and cultural significance, the church has been designated as both a City of Dallas Landmark and a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, and it has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Although the area surrounding the church has changed significantly throughout the years—from being largely undeveloped; to becoming an active black neighborhood; to being almost obliterated by highway construction, land speculation, and a decline in downtown; to the re-emergence of the area as the Dallas Arts District—St. Paul has endured and continues to remain a major element of Dallas and the African American community.

DCHC Adopts Goals for 2017-2019

Recognizing that it helps to have a map to make sure that you get to where you want to go, the Dallas County Historical Commission recently adopted a series of goals and objectives to guide its efforts over the next two years.

Goals represent a long-term aim, like raising the awareness of the Commission and historic preservation within Dallas County, that the Commission wishes to accomplish. Objectives represent those specific activities the Commission will undertake, like publishing a newsletter every quarter, that will help it realize a stated goal.

In all, the Commission adopted two goals for the period of 2017-2019. These include, as was previously mentioned, raising the awareness of the Commission and historic preservation, as well as encouraging the acknowledgement of history that has generally been under-recognized. Both goals had been first adopted by the Commission in 2015, and after carefully reviewing them, the Commission unanimously agreed that they should continue to be pursued.



So that these goals might be accomplished, the Commission also adopted eleven specific objectives. Some of these objectives include continuing to review State historical marker applications and to provide funding for historical markers that address previously under-told elements of Dallas County history. They also include new activities like presenting a paper at the 2018 Dallas History Conference on the Old North Dallas and La Bajada neighborhoods and developing a proposal for the establishment of a history film category at a local film festival.

Commission members are pleased with the adopted goals and objectives, citing their pragmatic and concrete nature. Associated assignments have already been made and many activities, like developing a video for the Commission's website, are well-underway.

Additional information about the Commission's goals and objectives is available on the Commission's website at: www.dallascounty.org/dchc.

Brenna Elliott Appointed to DCHC

Brenna Elliott is one of the Dallas County Historical Commission's newest members, having been appointed by County Judge Clay Jenkins on June 20.

Born at Florence Nightingale Hospital (which was a part of Baylor Hospital), raised in the Park Cities and North Dallas, and a graduate of Thomas Jefferson High School, Brenna attended Stephen F. Austin University. She had the unforgettable experience of being a young teenager and seeing President Kennedy in his motorcade at the corner of Lemmon and Welborn on November 22, 1963.



After college, an opportunity arose for her to learn the art of edible nut brokerage, mentoring under a leading local expert. It was during this time that she learned the art of sales and marketing and that you could not learn this industry in a formal classroom. A relocation to Houston led her to join the "hot market" of the recruitment industry, and from there, she returned to Dallas to subsequently establish three corporations.

Utilizing her "corporate-creation" skills, Brenna formed the Dallas History Guild two years ago. With about 3500 members, the Guild operates on-line and "on the ground" and is comprised of individuals who share a passion for the history of Dallas. Its goal is to be the "pulse of the city" in historic preservation matters, and its Facebook page features interesting photographs and comments about Dallas' past from its pioneer days to the 1970s.

And if this is not enough, Brenna is currently writing a book on Dallas history with each chapter being dedicated to an individual or entity that had some impact on the city.

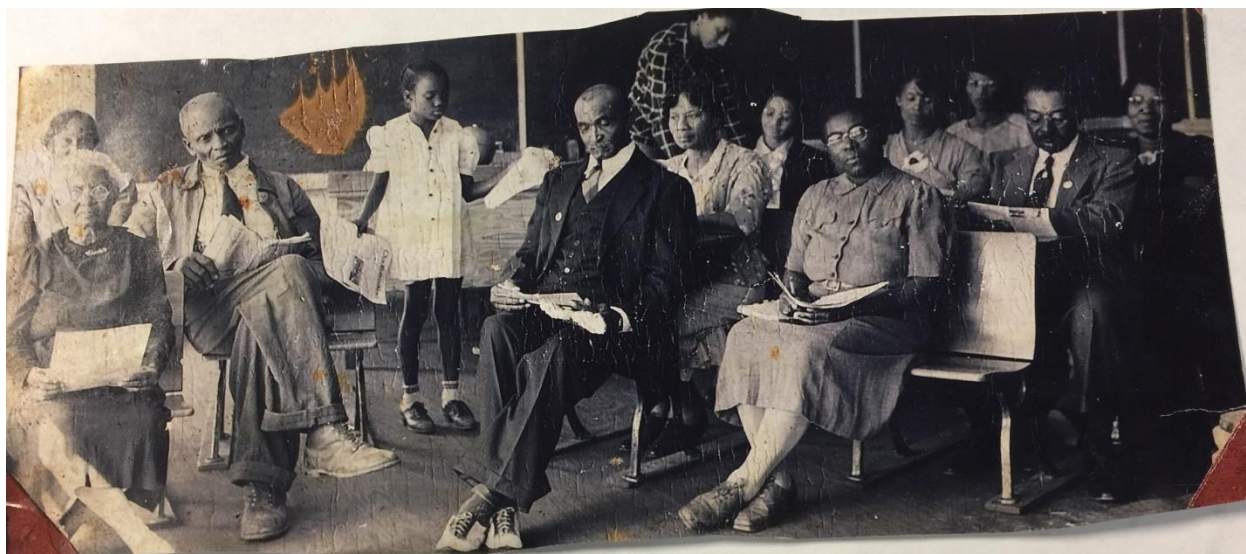
Praying Instead of Walking

The Founding of Ben Washington Baptist Church

Although the Bear Creek community in western Irving was one of the oldest settlements of freed slaves in North Texas, by the 1940s, the area still only had two churches—Allen Chapel A.M.E. and Shady Grove C.M.E. However, because of the dedication and faith of three women, this was about to change.

Mary Morton was Baptist, and since neither of the two churches in Bear Creek were Baptist, she, along with her grandchildren, would walk three miles to worship at Mt. Elam Baptist Church. One day, Mrs. Morton and two of her friends, Isye Holmes and Josey Davis (who were sisters), began discussing forming a church in their community. Working under the umbrella of the Busy Bee Mission, they soon had a vision for the first Negro Baptist Church in Irving. “I am not walking three miles to church anymore,” said Mrs. Morton. “The Lord is going to bless us with a church in Bear Creek.”

On October 16, 1941, their dream became a reality as more than sixty people came to fellowship in the Old Sowers School Building No. 2. The new Negro Baptist Church, which continued to meet in the school until its own home could be built, was officially named in January 1942, becoming the Ben Washington First Baptist Church in honor of Mrs. Morton’s father (who was named “Ben”) and Mrs. Holmes’ and Mrs. Davis’ father (who was named “Washington”). Later that year, J.L. Lott became the church’s first pastor, a position he held for the next nineteen years.



An early photograph of the Ben Washington congregation meeting in a school.

Just because they had been successful in creating their church, Mrs. Holmes, Mrs. Morton, and Mrs. Davis did not stop working. Through their involvement, the congregation grew, funds were raised, land was acquired, and a church structure was built. The foundation that these three women, the church’s original pastor, its second pastor—Joseph R. Sheppard—who served for over fifty years, and its members put in place have served the community well as the church has been physically expanded, remodeled, and expanded twice more, and ministries have been created and enlarged. While its founding members are now gone, the church is just as vibrant and engaged now as it was when that first schoolhouse service was held over seventy years ago.



Present-day Ben Washington Baptist Church.

A Real Cowboy *(continued from page 1)*

horses when he could not afford to buy his own. Today, he owns twelve horses, and honoring those who helped him, he does the same for young cowboys coming up the trail and learning the ropes.

As a soldier in the Army, he was one of the first African Americans to participate in an Army rodeo and on the Presidential National Honor Guard where he also had the privilege of assisting President John F. Kennedy at ceremonial events for two years.

He left the Army and the Honor Guard to go back to college on a rodeo scholarship, and he received a business degree from Langston University in Oklahoma. One day, while making a Ford Tractor commercial (he was the only black cowboy they could find), he was offered a management trainee position with the Ford Motor Company where he worked for 33 years. He and his wife moved to Lancaster, and throughout these years, he continued to rodeo on the weekends and during vacations.

In 1970, he was the first African American to win the calf roping event at a major rodeo, the Denver National Western. In 1971, Hearn and three men formed the American Black Rodeo Association. Twenty-four years later, Hearn changed the name of this organization to “the Cowboys of Color Association” so that it would be more inclusive of other cultures. This association is designed to educate and highlight the contributions all cultures have made to the settling of the west.



Cleo Hearn (second from right) serving as Honor Guard.

As a cowboy, he participated at all of the major stock shows throughout the United States (including Fort Worth, San Antonio, Houston, San Francisco, Tucson, Phoenix, Albuquerque) as well as in Canada, and for 37 consecutive years, he was a rodeo participant at the granddaddy of them all—the “Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo.”

He also later starred in commercials as a cowboy for Phillip Morris, Pepsi Cola, and Levi’s and was interviewed by *CNN* about his rodeo experiences and highlighted in a *Smithsonian* magazine article about black cowboys. The recipient of the Texas Trail of Fame Award, Hearn also has his own “Texas Star” in the street in front of the Fort Worth Stockyards and is an inductee to the Texas Black Sports Hall of Fame.

Hearn still competes today in calf roping events throughout the West and Southwest, produces the largest multicultural rodeo in the United States—the Cowboys of Color Rodeo Tour which runs from January to October and visits a number of cities in the Southwest, and again remembering those who helped him when he was younger, if he is not on a horse or in an arena, he can usually be found talking to students during career, black history, and western days and participating on panels at colleges and universities.

No doubt, Marvel Rogers, along with countless little boys, would be very proud.



The Dallas County Chronicle is the official newsletter of the Dallas County Historical Commission.

The Historical Commission serves as the primary advisory body on historic preservation matters for the County.

Its meetings are open to the public and are typically held on the second Thursday of every month at 11:30 a.m. For more information about the Commission and its meetings, please call 214.653.7601.