

DALLAS COUNTY  
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

# THE DALLAS COUNTY CHRONICLE

VOLUME 18, ISSUE 4

Fall 2019

## Lindalyn Adams Named “Dallas County’s First Lady of Historic Preservation”

Seven local historical organizations, the vice chairman of the Texas Historical Commission, a county commissioner, and the former chancellor of the University of North Texas all joined together on September 11 at the Old Red Museum to honor Lindalyn Adams for her many contributions to Dallas area history, with Dallas County officially naming Ms. Adams “Dallas County’s First Lady of Historic Preservation.”



A Dallas area resident since she was three months old, Lindalyn’s accomplishments are as legendary as her irrepressible charm, perpetual grace, and selflessness. She is a combination of the aunt you wished you’d had, your favorite teacher, and the best next door neighbor imaginable, and she always finds whatever it is that you are talking about to be the most fascinating thing she’s ever heard.

She was instrumental in not only the preservation of both the Dallas County Administration Building and the Old Red Courthouse, but in the creation of the Sixth Floor Museum and the Old Red Museum as well. She is also the only person to have served in a leadership position for virtually all of the area’s major historic preservation organizations.

Former Dallas County Judge and UNT Chancellor Lee Jackson described “the tectonic shift” in attitude towards establishing a President Kennedy-related museum that Lindalyn was personally responsible for creating. Dallas County Commissioner John Wiley Price said that she has showed us how one can make history by preserving it. Texas Historical Commission Vice Chairman John Crain credited Lindalyn with helping “to

create a village”—the Dallas Heritage Village, and master of ceremony Pierce Allman said the evening was truly about celebrating the human spirit.

A specially commissioned portrait of Lindalyn, created by local artist Shannon Kincaid, was unveiled at the ceremony. It will fittingly be permanently displayed in the Old Red Courthouse.

See **Lindalyn Adams** on page 4

### CONTENTS

<u>Lindalyn Adams</u>	<u>page 1</u>
<u>Jackie Townsell</u>	<u>page 2</u>
<u>Markers On-Hold</u>	<u>page 2</u>
<u>Professor Gray</u>	<u>page 3</u>
<u>Irving Markers</u>	<u>page 5</u>

### DALLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEMBERS

RICHARD G. STEWART, JR., Chairman	JOHN ROPPOLO
JUANITA H. NAÑEZ, Vice Chairman	ROOSEVELT NICHOLS
PATRICIA HICKS	ELIZABETH DeLEON
CHRISTOPHER L. SMITH	JIM GASPARD
COY L. POITIER	ELIZABETH GUNBY
ALBERT GONZALEZ	

# The Lasting Legacy of “Miss Jackie”

*By Jearlene Miller*

When one reflects on the life of the late Jackie Mae Howard Townsell, Irving’s first African American council member, words like “trailblazer,” “change agent,” “visionary,” “peacemaker,” and “bridge builder” quickly come to mind. Yet, even these powerful descriptions do not come close to explaining how and why she was so different and so important.

Young Jackie Mae Howard spent her early childhood years in Dallas, but, in 1949, when she was thirteen, her family moved to a two-room house in the unincorporated Bear Creek community that was immediately west of the city of Irving. Bear Creek was one of the oldest documented settlements for freed slaves in North Texas, and Jackie continued her education at Sowers Colored School No. 2. In those days, the close-knit rural neighborhood did not have city services like in-door plumbing, paved roads, or electricity.

In 1952, Jackie Mae married Jimmy Townsell, and in 1959, they opened Townsell Grocery in Bear Creek. They also served lunch, including Jackie’s famous banana pudding and Kool-Aide in a Mason jar, to a diverse customer base, and they used their store to minister to the needs of others by providing free meals during Thanksgiving and Christmas. The store’s building, which has subsequently been remodeled, still stands at the corner of Gilbert Road and Carver Place.



*The former home of Townsell Grocery.*

Jackie knew that the segregation-era line which divided Bear Creek from Irving would someday disappear, and she was committed to ensuring that this happened. In 1960, she was at the forefront of efforts to have Bear Creek become a part of Irving so that the community’s standard of living could be improved, and in 1969, this monumental achievement was accomplished.

In 1977, she again made history, becoming the first African American to serve on the Irving city council. She was not only the city’s first African American council member, but she was also only

the second woman to have ever been on the council, and when she retired from the council in 1995, she had become its longest-serving member ever.

See **Miss Jackie** on page 4

---

## Marker Applications On-Hold!

The Texas Historical Commission has temporarily postponed its annual September 1-November 15 historical marker application period until it has hired a new firm to make its markers. It is not yet known when the State will begin taking applications.

So that interested individuals and organizations will be able to immediately take advantage of whatever new schedule emerges, people are encouraged to continue with their research, use last year’s instructions and forms, and electronically submit drafts of applications to the Dallas County Historical Commission at [rloessberg@dallascounty.org](mailto:rloessberg@dallascounty.org) for preliminary review.

People are also encouraged to frequently visit either the Dallas County Historical Commission’s website ([www.dallascounty.org/dchc](http://www.dallascounty.org/dchc)) or the State’s website ([www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/state-historical-markers](http://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/state-historical-markers)) for the latest information about the application schedule.



# Professor Gray of Mesquite

How Mesquite school teacher W.O. Gray taught school and viewed life is best described in *A Stake in the Prairie*, a 1984 publication of the Mesquite Historical Committee about that city's history:



*Gray was using the piano as a teaching aid and implored a fellow teacher to play a simple gospel hymn using the limited notes of only the white keys followed by a demonstration of the broken melodies that result when only the black keys are played in a musical composition.*

*After a short but piercing pause, Gray proceeded to have the teacher play a beautifully complex piece, integrating all the keys of the piano, both white and black. He concluded the lesson with these remarks: "The music is much sweeter with blacks and whites together. So is life. Even in the midst of trials and tribulations, keep this principle in mind."*

Wilmer Oscar Gray was born in 1903 in the unincorporated town of Yard which is about 100 miles southeast of Dallas. He began his teaching career in Crandall in 1930. Following World War II, he was hired by the Mesquite school district in 1946 to not only teach at George Washington Carver School, which was the district's school for blacks, but to also be its principal and bus driver.

Carver was built in 1939 for about \$15,000 and contained three large classrooms. It was located near what is now I-635 and Scyene Road and became an important focal point for the city's black population.

Affectionately known as "Professor Gray" because of his dedication and the importance he placed on education (the nine children that he and his wife—who was also a school teacher—had grew up to obtain a total of eighteen college degrees), Gray was responsible for teaching the school's eighth through twelfth grade students.

In 1964, as part of Mesquite's effort to become one of the first local school systems to fully integrate, Carver was closed, and its students began attending previously all-white schools. Professor Gray became the school district's director of special services, and school district superintendent Ralph Poteet said Gray's role in guiding his former students through their new schools was critical. "It was devastating to the families to lose Carver because it was a community center," said Poteet. "Professor Gray helped us through that difficult period of transition where the students were thrown into a totally new environment."

Professor Gray retired in 1970 and died in 1993. In 1999, the Mesquite school district named a new elementary school after him in recognition for the many contributions that he had made.



## **Lindalyn Adams** *(continued from page 1)*

The event honoring Ms. Adams was graciously sponsored by the many historical organizations that Lindalyn was fortunate enough to be a part of over the past forty years—the Dallas County Historical Commission, the Old Red Museum, the Sixth Floor Museum, Dallas Heritage Village, the Dallas Historical Society, the Park Cities Historic and Preservation Society, and Preservation Dallas.



*Dallas County Commissioner John Wiley Price presenting Lindalyn Adams with the resolution from Dallas County designating her as the County's "First Lady of Historic Preservation."*



*The specially commissioned portrait of Lindalyn Adams that has been placed in the Old Red Courthouse.*

---

## **Miss Jackie** *(continued from page 2)*

While Bear Creek was now a part of Irving, she worked to ensure that its history was not forgotten. Focusing on the void in the Irving community regarding African American artistic contributions, she explored the idea of creating an organization that would expose the city's residents to the visual, performing, and literary art of individuals of African descent. To this end, the West Irving Black Arts Council was formed in 1989. This organization, which is now known as the Irving Black Arts Council, continues to promote her vision of encouraging cultural enrichment and activities for individuals and families.

In 1995, the city created a heritage center that would preserve and tell the story of the Bear Creek community and the civil rights movement. Consisting of artifacts, photographs, and three structures from the community (the Bear Creek Masonic Lodge, the home of community leader Sam Green, and the home of local school teacher J.O. Davis), the center is fittingly named after both Jackie and the Bear Creek community.

Miss Jackie died in 2002. In 2003, the Irving Independent School District built a new elementary school which serves approximately 900 students. Its name—the Jackie Mae Townsell Elementary School.

The Irving Convention and Visitors Bureau annually recognizes those that have helped make Irving home to significant meetings, conventions, or events, just as Jackie made a home for Bear Creek residents. The name of this honor? The Townsell Award.

One does not accomplish such results or receive such recognition by accident. To accomplish what she did, when she did it, and where is truly extraordinary and is a testament to her ability to inspire, to build bridges, and to develop meaningful relationships. That we might be able to emulate how she went about her life could be her greatest legacy.

# SCAVENGER HUNTING FOR HISTORICAL MARKERS IN IRVING: *WHERE ARE THEY?*

By Gary L. Schepf

History begins at home, and that was exactly what was discovered while I was preparing an upcoming presentation for the Irving Heritage Society. Whenever anyone travels the highways across the United States, there are signs for upcoming historical markers everywhere . . . even in Irving, Texas. But, once you see these signs, where exactly are these markers?

Recently, I set out to visit every historical marker in Irving. I initially thought this would be a relatively easy task. After all, I had a brochure, “Irving Texas Historical Markers: A Tour of Irving’s Historical Marker Sites,” that showed the location of forty-four markers.



With camera in hand and using my brochure as a guide, I began a walking tour of downtown Irving, which according to the brochure, had twenty-five markers. Having lived in Irving since 1965, I particularly enjoyed visiting the city’s historic downtown and remembering how it used to be and what it is now. While walking, I encountered what became the first of many surprises—the discovery of two markers (for the Otis Brown house and the First United Methodist Church) that were not included in the brochure, and the discovery that the Irving Heritage Society marker for the Heritage Park Depot was different from the Society’s other markers (it didn’t have a logo on it).

Realizing that my brochure was incomplete, I made an online search that led me to another list of markers within the city. This list, which is on the City of Irving’s website, showed ten more markers than my original brochure. Thinking I now had all of the world’s relevant knowledge in my possession, I embarked upon a driving tour of the entire city. However, my driving tour was soon interrupted with the discovery of yet another marker (for Dr. Franklin Monroe Gilbert) that was not listed anywhere.



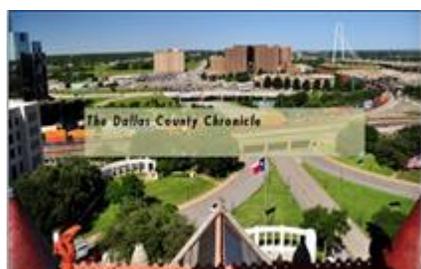
Markers—for the Joffre-Gilbert House—being where they were supposed to be.

Shady Grove Bridge) was supposed to have been at the beginning of a bridge; however, that bridge has been replaced. The relocated marker (which commemorated a low-water spot where people crossed the Trinity River on their way to the California gold rush) has been moved from a parking lot to a portion of Irving’s Champion Trail which is near the river.

At this point, I thought I had completed my scavenger hunt, but . . . SURPRISE! A local church inquired about a marker (for Belt Line Road Church of Christ) on their property. This marker was not listed anywhere, but it exists—I’ve seen it—so we now know that there are at least sixty historical markers in Irving.

Is the search over? Probably not. Both time and history wait for no one. Irving is an increasingly growing and changing city, and just as soon as one list is completed, something can happen to make it outdated. But you know, that’s o.k. I can’t wait to start looking again.

As I continued my journey, I encountered even more surprises. Three markers could not be found, and one had been relocated. One of the missing markers (for South MacArthur Church of Christ) was supposed to have been at a church that had been sold to a private school. After walking the campus with a school representative, no marker could be found; however, I eventually found a photo of it on the internet. The next missing marker (for the Twin Wells community) should have been by a baseball field near the entrance to a park; however, the street and area had been renovated, and there was no sign of any marker. The third missing marker (for the



The Dallas County Chronicle is the quarterly newsletter of the Dallas County Historical Commission. People can subscribe to the Chronicle by sending an email to: [rlouessberg@dallascounty.org](mailto:rlouessberg@dallascounty.org).

The Historical Commission serves as the 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.