

DALLAS COUNTY
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Marker for Mesquite's City Lake Park Dedicated

July 17 was a hot summer day. In fact, it was exactly the kind of day as to why you would want to have a park with a lake so it was only fitting that a crowd that included a mayor and a county commissioner gathered on that day to dedicate a Texas historical marker for Mesquite's City Lake Park.



Although Mesquite formally became a city in 1887, it was not until 1947 that it had its own park when N.E. Shands, Anson Holley, and Raymond Holley donated 12.5 acres near the city's downtown. With local volunteers helping to convert a surplus building from the U.S. Army's Camp Maxey into a community center and Dallas County creating the lake, City Lake Park was established, and it quickly became a popular gathering place for the city's residents.

As Mesquite grew (in 1950, the city's population was 1,696; it is now over 140,000), so did the park. Today, the park, which is just west of Galloway and south of Military Parkway, consists of twenty acres, scattered benches and picnic tables, a covered picnic shelter, a lighted tennis court, a lighted little league baseball field, and the city's only aquatics center. Not surprisingly, the park continues to remain a popular destination regardless of one's age.

See **City Lake Park** on page 3

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DALLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEMBERS

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Frances James *In Memoriam*

Frances James, the Dallas area's long-standing protector of cemeteries, died August 3. She was 96.

Her contributions to the preservation of Dallas area history were so great that if Dallas were to have a Mount Rushmore to commemorate its preservation leaders, Frances would unquestionably hold one of the monument's four places.

For over forty years, Frances tirelessly sought to honor and acknowledge those who, she said, could no longer speak for themselves—those who were now dead. Her persistence was relentless. No obstacle could not be overcome. It did not matter if those buried were early pioneers, Black, laborers, Hispanic, rich, poor, Anglo, or soldiers—they were all important to Frances.



She personally cleared overgrown cemeteries and mapped, photographed, and researched them. She fought for their survival and prevented them from being turned into freeways and housing developments. She straightened tombstones, and she gave tours. She wrote successful applications for over fifty State historical markers. She wrote a three-volume book on local history that was appropriately titled *Dallas County History: From the Ground Up*. She was a leader on the Dallas County Historical Commission, the Dallas Landmark Commission, and the Dallas County Pioneer Association. She simply helped us remember those who had been forgotten.

There was no one quite like her, and there probably never will be again.

DCHC Adopts Goals for 2019-2021

Following up on one of its most productive two-year terms in some time—a period that saw it begin sponsoring a “Best Historical Film” award at the Dallas International Film Festival, develop a website video, and present a history paper at the annual Dallas History Conference—the Dallas County Historical Commission recently adopted goals and objectives for 2019-2021.

Under these goals and objectives, which will provide the direction and the framework for what the Commission does over the next two years, the Commission will continue to have raising the awareness of both the Commission and historic preservation within the County and encouraging the acknowledgement of local history that has previously been under-recognized as its two major goals. The Commission will then pursue these goals by undertaking the following activities:



- Continue to publish a newsletter every quarter and increase its circulation.
- Regularly attend the meetings of other local historical organizations and provide updates to the Commission.
- Develop a slogan and a higher-resolution logo for the Commission.
- Utilize social media to publicize historic preservation and the Commission's activities.
- Continue to review State historical marker applications.
- Continue to sponsor annual Dallas History Conference and “Best Historic Film” award.
- Schedule and conduct a major event with other local historic preservation organizations.
- Increase the number of applications to the Commission's under-told marker funding program and develop a new name for the program.

See **DCHC Goals** on page 3

City Lake Park *(continued from page 1)*

The City Lake Park marker represents the fourteenth Texas historical marker in the city of Mesquite. Funding for the marker was provided by Historic Mesquite, the city's historic preservation organization.



County Commissioner Theresa Daniel (center) at City Lake Park marker dedication ceremony with DCHC members (left to right) Coy Poitier, Elizabeth Gunby, John Roppolo, and Richard Stewart.

DCHC Goals *(continued from page 2)*

Some of these activities, like reviewing State historical marker applications and producing a newsletter, are things the Commission has regularly done for some time. Others, like utilizing social media and developing a slogan, represent new endeavors for the Commission and have the potential to allow the Commission to reach an expanded audience.



These goals and objectives were unanimously adopted by the Commission on August 8 following a five-month process that involved reviewing existing goals and the results and the efforts of the past two years and then identifying, developing, and considering additional goals.

Elizabeth DeLeon Appointed to DCHC

Elizabeth DeLeon is one the newest members of the Dallas County Historical Commission, having been appointed by Dallas County Commissioner Theresa Daniel and confirmed by the Commissioners Court on May 7.

Elizabeth grew up in Dallas and went to Christ the King and Ursuline Academy. After attending the College of Charleston where she focused on Religious Studies, she moved to Washington, DC. She used to be a pastry chef, but now works in political fundraising.

Befitting someone who is now on the Historical Commission and its Marker Committee, she presently lives in a house that is over 80 years old.



Restoration Effort Underway at Warren Ferris Cemetery

By Susanne Starling

The Friends of the Warren Ferris Cemetery are restoring the neglected landscape of this historic cemetery. Located just five blocks east of the southern tip of White Rock Lake at St. Francis and San Leandro, the cemetery was established in the mid-1800s on the Warren Angus Ferris homestead.



Originally a mountain trapper, Ferris was among the first to chart the marvels of what became

Yellowstone National Park. As a Texas pioneer, he came to the Three Forks of the Trinity River as a surveyor in the late 1830s. Camping on the banks of White Rock Creek, he surveyed land that eventually became Dallas and Dallas County and then moved to what became his 640-acre homestead.

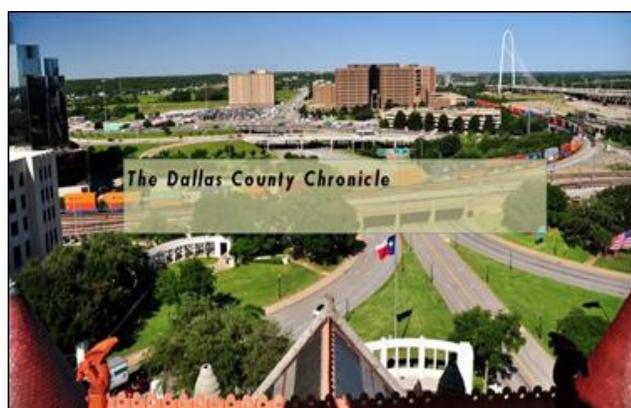
The Ferris Cemetery was used by the Ferris family and nearby neighbors from 1847-1906. There are about 100 graves on the approximately one-half-acre site that remains and includes those of Ferris himself and those of other early settlers from the Pemberton, Sage, Herndon, and Bell families. There is historical evidence that the cemetery also contains the graves of Freedmen with the last person being buried there being R. L. Taylor, an African American minister, who died in 1906.

Over the years, the cemetery fell into disrepair with all but one of the tombstones having been stolen or vandalized. In the 1980s, the surrounding neighborhood began reclaiming the cemetery and arranged for SMU to conduct an on-site archaeological investigation. Shortly thereafter, the cemetery received a Texas historical marker and later, the cemetery itself was designated as a Historic Texas Cemetery.

More recently, as part of its new restoration effort, the Friends Group has been skillfully removing the dense thicket of invasive vegetation that has overtaken the site. The group hopes to complement this clearing work with natural surface pathways, signage that identifies the types of plants that exist there, the installation of birdhouses and a water source, an educational program with Sanger Elementary School (which is diagonally across the street), the placement of a marker that contains the names of those who are interred in the cemetery, and the creation of a fund for an on-going maintenance program.

Cemeteries are important keys to Texas' past, serving as tangible reminders of settlement patterns and providing information about historic events, familial relationships, and culture. The effort presently being undertaken by the Friends will help ensure that the Ferris Cemetery will have a future as well.

Individuals and organizations hoping to assist the Friends of the Warren Ferris Cemetery in its restoration effort are encouraged to contact Susanne Starling at susstar@hotmail.com.



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: rloessberg@dallascounty.org.

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.