



## Mount Pisgah Historical Marker Dedicated



Standing with the new Mount Pisgah marker (from left to right): Jaynie Schultz, Juanita Nãñez, Elizabeth Gunby, Patricia Hicks, Coy Poitier, Robert Townsend, Theresa Daniel, Richard Stewart, John Roppolo, and J. J. Koch.

With a hint of fall in the air (the day's high was only supposed to be 90°), the new historical marker for Mount Pisgah Missionary Baptist Church, the oldest African American church in Dallas County, was dedicated on September 5 at the Preston Road site in north Dallas where the church existed from 1888-1981 (it is now located about four miles to the east in Richardson).

Although dedication ceremony attendance had to be limited because of the current pandemic, the congregation's enthusiasm was not. Pastor Robert Townsend said, "It is a proud day for Mount Pisgah, the church that is named after that mountain upon which Moses stood to view into the Promised Land."



Members of the Mount Pisgah congregation.

Mount Pisgah was formed on June 19, 1864 by a few slaves and Rev. Robert Fabius Butler, a white circuit preacher from Richardson, under a large elm tree in the White Rock area. Rev. Butler was present because the law at the time forbade slaves from meeting without the presence of a white man. Founding members and

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### DALLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEMBERS

- RICHARD G. STEWART, JR., Chair – Irving
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- ALBERT GONZALEZ – Dallas
- JERRY HAWKINS – Dallas
- DAN BARRIOS, JR. – Richardson

# In His Words:

## An Interview with Dr. George F. Porter

**By Beverly Davis and Jerrold Trice**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Dr. George F. Porter, who lived from 1876-1951, was an African American educator and Dallas civil rights leader. Remembering Black Dallas member Beverly Davis and local actor Jerrold Trice researched and created this one-act monologue for a play about Dr. Porter. In this "interview," Dr. Porter discusses what he did so that Blacks could serve on juries in Dallas County. His story should serve as an important reminder for all of us to not take for granted the rights that we presently possess.*



Hello, my name is George Francis Porter. I was born in the state of Georgia on December 17, 1876 and raised by my great-grandparents, Robert and Ruth Hunter. I was blessed to attend Atlanta University and graduated in 1899. I taught for a while at Paul Quinn College in Waco, Texas. In 1901, I moved to Dallas to teach at Colored High School which was originally located at Hall and Cochran. Colored High School later moved to its current location on Routh Street and was renamed Booker T. Washington High School. I also served as President of the Dallas campus of Wiley College which was headquartered in Marshall, Texas. It was my honor to help educate a population that was not far removed from enslavement.

Although I had a passion for education, I could see clearly that my people were being denied human and civil rights under the segregated system of Jim Crow that replaced slavery. In Dallas County, Black people were being denied the right to serve on juries. How many of you have gone out of your way to avoid serving on a jury? Let me see a show of hands. Shame on you!

I became a member of the NAACP because they fought for justice, and I wanted to be a part of bringing about positive change for my people. In 1938, we devised a plan that would open the door for Blacks to serve on juries in Dallas.

Prior to that time, if a Black person received a jury summons, he or she was expected to excuse himself and never actually serve on the jury. The plan that we developed with the Dallas NAACP is that we would show up for jury service and refuse to disqualify ourselves. When I received a jury summons, I reported for service along with some of my other NAACP members, including our Dallas NAACP President Benjamin Howell, Rev. Maynard Jackson (Pastor of New Hope Baptist Church), and Rev. E. C. Estell (President of the St. John Baptist Church). By the way, I was a member of the St. James A.M.E Church. Well, we executed the plan perfectly. When I received a jury summons, my colleagues accompanied me to the central jury room. When I went the first time, I was dismissed as a juror.

This went on until the third time that I showed up. The judge had some hoodlums violently remove me from the central jury room and throw me headfirst down the courthouse steps. As a result of this treatment, I sustained an injury which caused me to go blind.



*Thurgood Marshall was only 30 and was still 29 years away from becoming the first African American Supreme Court justice when he worked with George Porter in Dallas.*

The story about my treatment went national, and when Thurgood Marshall heard about it, he was furious. He was working at the time as an attorney for the NAACP in New York City. He filed a complaint with the United States Justice Department and word got out that he was coming to Dallas to investigate the incident. When the Dallas police chief heard that Thurgood Marshall was coming to town, he let it be known that Thurgood was not welcome. However, Thurgood was a smart man. This was not his first time dealing with power structures and law enforcement in the South.

Before coming to Dallas, Thurgood paid a visit to Texas Governor James Allred to let him know that he would be investigating my treatment and jury suppression in Dallas. Governor Allred assigned a Texas Ranger to provide protection to Thurgood. And you know it was a good thing, because as Thurgood was wrapping up his investigation here in Dallas, he was confronted by the Dallas police chief as he was leaving the Courthouse and returning to his car. The Dallas police chief pulled a gun on Thurgood and said "I've got you now you Black S.O.B." As Thurgood ran to the car, the Texas Ranger sitting on the hood of the

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## George Porter *(continued from page 2)*

of the car, pointed his gun at the police chief and said, “Fella, just stay right where you are.” Who would think that the Governor of Texas would provide protection to a colored lawyer from New York City?

There were some good things that came out of the whole incident. First, Dallas was embarrassed by the negative publicity received from the whole incident. They began to open jury service to Blacks within the county. This was also done with a little encouragement from the Governor. He sent Texas Rangers to provide some oversight of the jury selection process in the central jury room. Secondly, the Dallas NAACP and the Texas NAACP, headed by A. Maceo Smith, established a great relationship with Thurgood Marshall. It would be the first of many visits he would make to Dallas to coordinate civil rights work and litigation. Thurgood won some great victories in Texas, including the *Smith v. Allwright* decision, which struck down whites only primaries for the Democratic Party, and the *Sweat v. Painter* case, which struck down the discriminatory practice of “separate but equal” in the State of Texas for higher education.

You may ask if I have any regrets about what I did to stand up for justice since it resulted in me having a permanent disability. My answer to that question is no. Even though I paid a high price, it was worth it to me to sacrifice so that my people would have the rights guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution. I do have a favor to ask of you. Embrace your duty and opportunity to perform jury service and encourage your family and friends to do likewise.

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## All Seven Marker Applications Approved!

The Texas Historical Commission has informed Dallas County’s Historical Commission (DCHC) that all seven of the historical marker applications that the County recommended in June have been approved. That the DCHC recommended so many applications (this was the largest number of applications that the Commission submitted in over twenty years) and that all of them were approved is especially noteworthy—no other county commission in Texas had so many approved applications.



The approved markers acknowledge Dr. Marcellus Cooper (the first licensed Black dentist in Texas), the Benjamin Franklin Robinson Cemetery (which was established in 1879), Anderson Bonner Park (which was created by the City of Dallas in 1976 to honor Anderson Bonner, an ex-slave who had become a major landowner), the Bennett Family Gardens Cemetery in Mesquite (which was created in 1847), the 1910 lynching of Allen Brooks, the White Rock Cemetery of Garden of Memories in Dallas (which is believed to be one of the first integrated cemeteries in Dallas), and a Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Mesquite.

Tremendous credit goes to the individuals who so expertly researched and wrote these applications and to the County’s marker committee who so carefully reviewed the applications and identified how they might be strengthened before they were formally submitted to the State.

It is anticipated that much of 2021 will be spent preparing and finalizing the inscriptions for these markers and having them cast. Dedication ceremonies for these markers will thus likely occur in late 2021 and 2022.

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## Mount Pisgah *(continued from page 1)*

deacons were John Huffman, Dan Howard, Sam Fowler, William Phifer, Tobe Howard, and Jack Saunders. These men of vision blazed a trail for hundreds of Pisgahites to follow in the years to come.

Elaine Johnson led the effort to develop the application for the marker which was recommended for approval by the County’s Historical Commission in 2018 and which was then formally approved by the State in 2019.

Dallas County Commissioners J.J. Koch and Theresa Daniel attended the ceremony as did County Historical Commission members Richard Stewart, Elizabeth Gunby, Coy Poitier, Juanita Nández, John Roppolo, and Patricia Hicks and City of Dallas Planning Commission member Jaynie Schultz.

# 1623 Main Street and the Desegregation of Dallas

Walking past 1623 Main Street in downtown Dallas today, you would see an attractive eight-story, 115-year-old building that has been converted into residential housing and a corner restaurant that serves one of the best club sandwiches around. You would not know that sixty years ago, this building was where one of the most important events in the desegregation of Dallas took place.



1623 Main Street today.



1623 Main Street (and H.L. Green) in the 1940s.

For almost seventy years, until 1997, the building housed the H.L. Green department store and its administrative offices. H.L. Green was what was called “a dime store,” a store that carried a wide variety of common everyday items, from toys to cosmetics to inexpensive watches and earrings to fabrics, stationery, skillets, and household knick-knacks (such stores were called “dime stores” because, when they first started in the late 1800s and early 1900s, many of their items cost no more than ten cents). Before malls and big box retailers, this is where many people in downtowns and small towns across the U.S. shopped.

A key component of many dime stores was the lunch counter where locals would congregate and talk, where shoppers could get a sandwich or reward their patient children with a soda, and where people who worked in the area could grab a quick lunch. Unfortunately, in the south, these lunch counters were the exclusive domain of whites, and Blacks were not allowed to sit at them.



A typical 1950s-1960s lunch counter.

On February 1, 1960, a group of Black college students in Greensboro, NC decided to do something about that at the lunch counter of their local Woolworth’s (another popular dime store chain). In the face of relentless tormenting, verbal ridicule, spitting, and physical jostling, they quietly came each day and sat at the counter, hoping to only be served as a paying customer. Their efforts caused many whites to finally acknowledge the disparate treatment that Blacks often received in this country and inspired many other Black college students to take similar action elsewhere.

One of these other inspired Black students was Richard Stewart, a divinity student at SMU (who is not the same Richard Stewart that is currently the chairman of the County’s historical commission). Stewart, along with two white classmates, decided that the time had come for them to personally do something about the existence of Jim Crow at Dallas’ lunch counters. On April 25, 1960, the trio sought service at a number of places in Dallas, but were turned away. They then made their way to H.L. Green.

Stewart was apprehensive and said a prayer as he entered the store and sat down. “We were hoping against hope that what we were doing was going to be the beginning of integration in Dallas.”

At first, the waitress refused to serve Stewart. He remembers telling her and the store manager that the Supreme Court had ruled in 1954 that segregation was illegal. Stewart and his friends were surprisingly then served, making the H.L. Green lunch counter one of the first integrated counters in Dallas.

Unfortunately, the service that Stewart received that day did not last, and the store’s exclusionary practice immediately resumed. However, because of the Greensboro students, a more organized effort to abolish segregation in Dallas was underway, and it quickly built upon what Stewart and his friends had done by arranging for the picketing and boycotting of H.L. Green and other Dallas stores.



Picketing in front of H.L. Green.

This work did not go unrewarded. On July 26, 1961, H.L. Green, along with forty-eight other establishments, agreed to serve Blacks at their lunch counters. Three years later, Congress finally passed a law that made the segregation that had been practiced at these lunch counters for decades illegal.

# Dan Barrios Appointed to DCHC



Richardson resident Dan Barrios is the newest member of the Dallas County Historical Commission, having been appointed to the Commission by Dallas County Commissioner Theresa Daniel in July.

Mr. Barrios grew up in Brownsville where he developed an appreciation for the history and the culture of the area.

After a fifteen-year career in sales and marketing management, he has recently decided to become a teacher and now teaches business at Lake Highlands High School. He is also now working on an MBA in strategic management at the University of North Texas.

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## It's Not Too Early . . .

. . . to start working on applications for Texas historical markers and for the Dallas County Historical Commission's (DCHC) untold history marker funding program..

The Texas Historical Commission has announced that county historical commissions can begin submitting recommended marker applications on March 1.

Although the State won't have its instructions and forms finalized until January, it would be a good idea to begin conducting the research that will be needed for the application and assembling any needed documents and photographs—the State's application materials usually do not change much from year to year.

When finalized, it will be possible to access the State's application rules and materials at:

<https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/state-historical-markers>

The County's Historical Commission is also available to help answer questions about the marker program and the State's application process. Please contact either John Roppolo at [roppolo.john@tx.rr.com](mailto:roppolo.john@tx.rr.com) or Rachel Brown at [rachel.brown@dallascounty.org](mailto:rachel.brown@dallascounty.org) if you have any questions.

Also, for applications that involve subjects associated with an "untold" aspect of Dallas County history, funding to cover one-half of the cost of a small marker may be available from DCHC. The instructions and materials for this program will be finalized immediately after the State finalizes the information for its traditional marker program. The rules and forms for the County's untold history funding are not expected to change significantly. So that prospective applicants can begin to familiarize themselves with this program, the material for last year's funding is still available at: <https://www.dallascounty.org/departments/plandev/dchc/>. Interested individuals can also contact Ms. Brown for additional information and guidance about this funding.



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## Thank You.

**By Richard Stewart, DCHC Chairman**

This is the last issue of the *Chronicle* edited and compiled by Rick Loessberg, Dallas County's Director of Planning & Development. Rick is retiring from the County after almost thirty-seven years of service. He has always been there to provide the Commission with whatever direction and assistance we needed, and he has been a good friend. He will be greatly missed.



*Rick earlier this year at the NHL Winter Classic.*