DALLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Pearl C. Anderson

"Most people think I'm rich. I guess I would be if I didn't keep giving it all away."

By Jerry Hawkins

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DALLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEMBERS

Merriam Webster Dictionary defines philanthropy as the "goodwill to fellow members of the human race," an "active effort to promote human welfare," and "an act or gift done or made for humanitarian purposes." If being philanthropic is tied to the idea of the welfare of humanity, what does philanthropy mean to a Black person and woman who is not considered fully human?

Pearl Carina Bowden Anderson, a Black woman who, at times, existed as a white one, determined to answer this question with her life's work. Anderson became one of the wealthiest Black women in the history of Dallas and did her best to give it all away in service of a more equal world than the one in which she lived. Her vision for a better world, and her determination for others to see it, was propagated by the legacy of Southern philanthropy for Black children as she herself had once been.

This legacy is part of the unlikely collaboration of Booker T. Washington, the influential Black intellectual, educator, and founder of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, and Julius Rosenwald, Chicago-based Jewish philanthropist and the president of Sears, Roebuck and Company. From a small gift via Rosenwald and an idea engendered by Washington to educate impoverished Black children in rural Alabama, they built six segregated schools from 1912 to 1913. This pilot program became the Julius Rosenwald Fund in 1917 and would eventually create more than 5000 schools for Black children in fifteen states (including 464 schools in 52 Texas counties) and provide more than $28 million in funding. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, "by 1928, one-third of the South's rural black school children and teachers were served by Rosenwald Schools."

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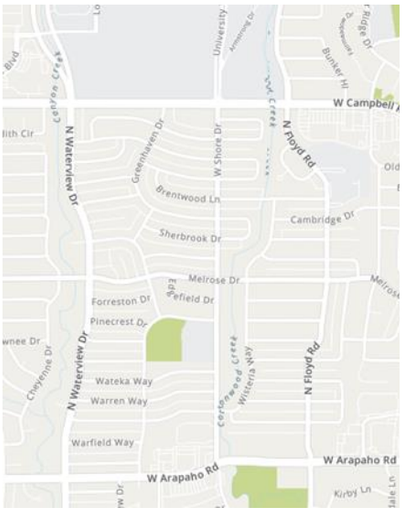
Greenwood Hills

A Suburban Historic Neighborhood

At first glance, Greenwood Hills doesn't seem like it would be an historic neighborhood. Located in Richardson north of Arapaho Road, east of Waterview Drive, west of Floyd Road, and south of Campbell Road, it doesn't consist of row houses or townhouses like you sometimes expect in an historic neighborhood. Nor were its homes designed by someone who later became famous. John Neely Bryan didn't grow up there, and there are no fancy mansions or quaint cottages. It's just a nice suburban neighborhood that was built during the 1960s.

However, when you begin to think a little about what makes a neighborhood historic, you suddenly realize that it is.



City planners and preservationists typically use a number of criteria to determine whether a neighborhood is historic. Besides the more common ones like whether someone famous built its structures, there are others, like whether the area is geographically definable, whether its buildings are at least fifty years old and consistent with one another in design, and whether the area and its structures represent the historical development of a city.

Greenwood Hills was created in 1959 when Richardson had less than 17,000 people. At that time, the 470-acre subdivision only had a couple of farmhouses and one road—everything else was undeveloped. Construction began just north of Arapaho, and the first homes were completed in 1960 on brand-new streets like Wisteria and Warren Way. Development continued northward at such an uninterrupted pace that, by 1968, over 1500 homes had been constructed (the entire city only had 5300 houses at the beginning of the decade), and the subdivision was largely built-out.

Although from an architectural perspective, most of these homes were primarily "mass produced" one-story structures that often visually differed from one another only on the basis of whether the garage was on the left or the right side of the house, they were still significant as they were representative of a new type of housing that characterized 1960s residential development not only in Richardson, but in much of the southwest. While in today's world, the amenities and the features that these homes offered are rather pedestrian, in the southwest of the 1960s, they were very bold and exciting—they had fireplaces, sliding glass patio doors, central air conditioning, two bathrooms, dishwashers, and garages that were big enough for not one car, but two.

Built to appeal to the many young families that were being formed at the time—ads for the homes emphasized that VA and GI loans were available and according to the 1970 census, the average household did indeed include the stereotypical family with two parents and two children—the neighborhood accounted for twenty percent of Richardson's population growth from 1960-1970.

The neighborhood also provided the foundation for the city's continued growth. Being closely located to Texas Instruments and then-Collins Radio (which subsequently was acquired by Rockwell International and is now known as Collins Avionics), many of the community's first residents worked there as engineers, draftsmen, mathematicians, and programmers. Not surprisingly, forty percent of Greenwood Hills' 1970 adult population was college-educated which was twice the national rate at the time (today, the percentage of the neighborhood that has a college degree is even higher at sixty percent).

The first homes initially sold for about $15,000-$18,000 which was higher than the average Dallas County home which sold for about $12,000. Even though all of these homes are now over fifty years old, they have aged well and held their value—they presently sell at about $250,000 (in comparison, the County median home value is about $200,000)—and while almost all of the original families have moved on, the present families have continued the neighborhood's tradition of well-maintained homes and lawns. In many instances, the homes have been updated, and new landscaping has been added to complement the now seventy-foot-tall trees that the developer originally planted as saplings.

(See **Greenwood Hills** *on page 3)*

Pearl C. Anderson *(continued from page 1)*

Born in 1898 in Winn Parish, Louisiana, where she was raised on a sugar cane and peanut farm, Anderson attended one of these segregated "Rosenwald Schools" and that opportunity changed her life and served as a guiding light for her aspirations. She recalled a plaque in her school with Julius Rosenwald's name on it, saying, "I looked at that plaque every day, and I vowed that I would do something to pay back my debt to this dedicated philanthropist who made my schooling possible. I promised to do this without regard to race, creed, or religion."

After saving money teaching and picking cotton, Anderson moved to Dallas when she was twenty-one, settled in the southern part of the city, and bought a lot. She built a grocery store there (in what was and still is a food desert) and met and married Dr. John Wesley Anderson, one of the first Black doctors in Dallas and the first to perform a Cesarean-section surgery. Dr. Anderson, who was almost twice her age when they married, had become wealthy through his medical practice and had acquired real estate throughout the County, from downtown garages to a twenty-acre farm near modern-day Forest Avenue called "Casita del Campo," and in several states. After his death in 1947, Pearl C. Anderson became one of the wealthiest women in Dallas and would soon become one of its most generous philanthropists.

Before it was known as the Communities Foundation of Texas, a small fledgling reserve called the Dallas Community Chest Trust Fund began its work in 1953. Without hyperbole, the Communities Foundation of Texas would not be what it is today without its first major gift—from a Black woman who lived in South Dallas. In 1955, Anderson placed a downtown Dallas property valued at $350,000 in a charitable trust and donated it to the Dallas Community Chest Trust Fund (that same property is today worth many millions of dollars). This became the Pearl C. Anderson Fund at the Communities Foundation of Texas, and this fund still exists today. Inspired by Rosenwald's benefaction, Anderson would go on to volunteer for and provide gifts to numerous charities, organizations and causes, including the American Red Cross, Terrell State Mental Hospital, Hexter Memorial Lighthouse, and Bishop College.

Pearl C. Anderson (second from right) in 1955 as part of the announcement of her major gift to the Dallas Community Chest Trust Fund.

In a country that is currently wrestling with its past transgressions and the toppling of monuments and memorials to the Confederacy and in a community that is struggling to acknowledge the achievements of communities of color, Pearl C. Anderson's historic and philanthropic legacy is one to be extremely proud of and one that should be elevated by everyone.

A dorm at Bishop College and the Anderson Auditorium at Meharry Medical School in Nashville were named after her as are the Pearl C. Anderson Day Nursery in Garland and the Pearl C. Anderson Middle School Learning Center in South Dallas. Anderson died in 1990 at the age of 91 in her South Dallas home and was buried amongst her "people" in Lincoln Memorial Cemetery in far southeastern Dallas. In her words, "Negroes are my people. I am Black. I may look Indian, or French or Italian. I am some of all that, but in my heart and soul, I am a Black woman."

Greenwood Hills *(continued from page 2)*

While the value and the popularity of the neighborhood have not changed, the composition of its residents has. Reflecting what has happened elsewhere, today's Greenwood Hills is much more diverse than it was fifty years ago. While there were no residents of color in 1970, 43 percent of its current residents are African-American, Hispanic, or Asian. It is also not as young—in 1970, 42 percent of the neighborhood was no older than fifteen. Today, only twelve percent of it is that young. Not surprisingly, the neighborhood's elementary school, which once had an enrollment of about 900 students, now has an enrollment of about 500.

One of the fifth grade classes at Greenwood Hills Elementary in 1968.

The 1960s were a time of incredible growth in the Dallas area. Over 376,000 people—the equivalent of a St. Louis or a Pittsburgh—moved into Dallas County during that decade—the largest single decade of growth ever in the area's history.

At that time, Greenwood Hills represented what much of the Dallas area would become. Now, sixty years later, it continues to represent something new and important—a part of the first suburban wave of newly-historic neighborhoods.

Historical Commission Recommends Seven State Historical Markers

On June 9, the Dallas County Historical Commission (DCHC) recommended that the applications for seven State historical markers be approved by the Texas Historical Commission. This is the largest number of applications that the DCHC has recommended in over twenty years.

The recommended markers would acknowledge Dr. Marcellus Cooper, the Benjamin Franklin Robinson Cemetery in Dallas, Anderson Bonner Park in Dallas, Bennett Family Gardens Cemetery in Mesquite, the 1910 lynching of Allen Brooks, the White Rock Cemetery of Garden of Memories in Dallas, and a Mesquite Civilian Conservation Corps camp.

Dr. Marcellus Cooper

Dr. Cooper was born in 1862 and became the first licensed black dentist in Texas in 1896. He was also one of the founders of the first black-owned bank in Dallas and an investor in the first black-owned downtown Dallas department store. Cooper died in 1929.

The Benjamin Franklin Robinson family moved to Dallas from Missouri sometime after the Civil War and acquired property near Sylvan and Ft. Worth Avenue. The first member of their family was buried on what became the family's cemetery in 1879. There are now a total of nine graves on this property.

Anderson Bonner Park was created by the City of Dallas in 1976 to honor the contributions of Anderson Bonner. Bonner, who had been a slave that was brought to Dallas during the 1850s, subsequently became one of the area's major African-American property owners after slavery was abolished. The park that now bears his name is located on land in present-day North Dallas that he once owned.

Hiram Bennett, his adult son Hardy, and their families came to the Dallas area from Arkansas in 1845. It is thought that the family helped establish the first school in Mesquite. The first person to be buried in the family cemetery, which subsequently became the center of the Laurel Oaks Memorial Park, was a daughter in 1847.

In 1910, Allen Brooks, an African-American, was awaiting trial in Old Red. A crowd overwhelmed the sheriff's deputies who were present and threw Brooks out of a second-story building. He was then dragged one-half-mile and publicly hung from an archway on Main Street. No one was ever arrested for his death.

The White Rock Cemetery Garden of Memories is believed to be one of the first integrated cemeteries in Dallas. The first recorded burial is of a white infant in 1852. Following the Civil War, the property was acquired by former slaves and for a while was the only black cemetery in Dallas. Many notable black individuals from Dallas' past, including Anderson Bonner and Henry Keller (for whom Keller Springs Road is named), are buried in this cemetery.

Anderson Bonner's grave (on the left) at the White Rock Cemetery Garden of Memories.

Mesquite's CCC Camp in 1936.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was a New Deal program that was created to reduce unemployment during the Great Depression. Young men who participated in the program built dams, planted trees, cut trails, and terraced land. From 1935-1941, Mesquite had a CCC camp that regularly employed 250 people who terraced and undertook other soil conservation projects on 40,000 nearby acres.

County historical commissions serve as the first level of review for most State historical marker applications. Without their recommendation, an application will generally not be approved by the Texas Historical Commission (THC). Final approval decisions for these seven applications are expected to be made by THC this Fall.

Jerry Hawkins Appointed to DCHC

Jerry Hawkins is one of the newest members to the Dallas County Historical Commission. Appointed by County Judge Clay Jenkins, Hawkins is currently the Executive Director of Dallas Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation. DTRHT was established in 2016 by the W.W. Kellogg Foundation as part of a fourteen-city effort to address the historic and contemporary effects of racism so that truly inclusive communities can be created.

Hawkins was born in and raised on the Southside of Chicago which is where he gained his interest in history, particularly the intersection of race, education, and the development of cities. A collector of Dallas County-related memorabilia about Freedman's towns, the cotton industry, and segregated schools, he is also an artist who studied at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He has a B.S. with a double major in Early Childhood Education and Child and Family Services from Southern Illinois and a master's degree in education from Northeastern Illinois, and he is presently a 2020-21 Presidential Leadership Scholar.

What is this thing?

Anyone who has ever looked up at the Old Red Courthouse and seen the crouching winged figure on the edge of the roof has probably asked, "what is that thing?" Most of us would say it's a "gargoyle," but others might call it a "wyvern," a "griffin," a "chimera," or an "acroterion." So what is it exactly?

Like most things in life, there is no easy answer, and while there may not be a correct answer, some are more correct than others.

So here goes . . .

It's technically not a gargoyle because these ornamental features are actually cleverly-designed drainage spouts, and the Old Red figure does not serve this purpose. It doesn't appear to be a true wyvern either because those have tails with arrow-shaped tips, and the Old Red figure has a tail that resembles that of a lion.

If, then, it has a tail like a lion, doesn't that mean it's a griffin since griffins have the tail, body and back legs of a lion and that's also what Old Red's occupant possesses? Almost, but not quite—griffins also have the head of an eagle and that is not what we have standing guard on the roof's edge (his head is more mammal-like).

Can it be a chimera? Most definitely not. Chimera don't have wings, and their tails are serpent-like. They also have the body of a goat.

So that the leaves the acroterion. Originally, this was the architectural term for the *pedestal* that an ornamental figure would be set upon. However, over time, it has also come to mean the actual ornamental figure.

Dallas County records show that in 1892 the County considered these figures to be acroterions when it accepted a bid for $1895 to construct them, and subsequent records from the 1930s and the 1940s also refer to them in that manner. In addition, the Dallas County Historical Commission created an award over thirty years ago, "The Order of the Acroterion," that features a picture of the figure, to honor those who assisted in the preservation of Old Red.

So now you know. Now, we just need to figure out how to easily pronounce it.

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, please call 214.653.7601.