

DALLAS COUNTY
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Big Tex – An Integral Part of the Texas State Fair History

By Jim Gaspard

For the first time in two years a towering Big Tex welcomed guests to the exhibits, livestock, rides and foods of the State Fair of Texas. Last month the State Fair opened its gates for the first time since October 2019. The Fair was cancelled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Big Tex, official greeter and icon of the State Fair of Texas, is known around the globe as the world's tallest cowboy. The gentle giant has welcomed millions of guests to the annual exposition in Fair Park, but many don't know his history – who he used to be and how he wound up in Dallas.

It's no surprise most people know Big Tex as the State Fair of Texas' host-with-the-most – after all, he's had the job for 69 years – but before coming to Big D in 1952, Tex played the role of another well-known character in a small Texas town due east of Corsicana. In the free-wheeling years after World War II, merchants in Kerens, Texas, had a problem.

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Photos of Big Tex at the State Fair of Texas.

Left: Big Tex photo courtesy of the Dallas Morning News September 22, 2012 "Big Tex, the folksy, happy cowboy at the State Fair of Texas, turns 60"

Above: Big Tex, October 2021

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Residents of the tiny town drove to nearby Corsicana (or even made the 75-mile journey to Dallas) for their annual Christmas shopping sprees. Looking for a gimmick that might encourage people to spend money at local stores, the wise folks at the Kerens Chamber of Commerce built what they claimed was the world's largest Santa Claus, a 49-ft. tall figure made of iron-pipe drill casing, papier-mâché, cloth (outfit), and seven-foot lengths of unraveled rope (for the beard, of course).

Unsurprisingly, the unique promotion was a success during the '49 holiday season, but just as

The "Worlds Largest Santa Clause" (sic) courtesy photo published in the Corsicana Daily Sun, Deanna Kirk Daily Sun Jan 13, 2018

fads and viral videos fade today, the novelty of Kerens' Santa faded the following year and community support waned. Ah, but as the saying goes, "one small town's giant Santa is another city's big Texan."

Big Tex has seen a lot in his 69 years of service, but some events stick out. Co-starring with the likes of Pat Boone, Bobby Darin and Pamela Tiffin, Tex made his silver screen debut in the 1962 remake of "State Fair." The film was shot in Fair Park one month before the 1961 Fair and included a celebrity swine appearance by an 800-lb. California hog playing the role of "Blue Boy."

After a hot October day in 2012 a fire broke out at Big Tex's location and the statue was irreparably damaged. After a year of planning and development, a new 55-foot Big Tex showed up to work for the 2013 State Fair.

In 1986, the State Fair of Texas was one of many events held in the State to celebrate 150 years of Texas' existence. Big Tex welcomed 3,959,058 visitors to Fair Park during the exposition, the largest attendance ever for an American state fair and the longest fair in American history. On the final day of the '86 show, the State Fair of Texas celebrated its 100th birthday (FYI: The Texas State Fair birthday is October 26, 1886.)



Still from the 1961 movie "State Fair" Source: State Fair of Texas – bigtex.com



Texas Woofus, photo Steve Rainwater /CC SA 2.0

A Texas Original – The Woofus

With all the flashing lights of the Texas State Fair one can be forgiven for not spotting the strange 9-foot tall chimera made up of an amalgam of State Fair prize livestock – the body of a hog, the head of a sheep, the tail of a turkey, the neck of a horse, a duck's wings, and topped with Texas-sized longhorns. Typing "The Woofus" into your favorite online map will show its location in front of the Swine Building on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard within Fair Park between the Pan American Arena and the Briscoe Carpenter Livestock Center.

This is not, however the original Woofus. That statue's disappearance is wrapped in mystery. The statue you can see anytime at Fair Park is a faithful reproduction

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of the original created by sculptor Lawrence Tenney Stevens (1896-1972). Stevens created every sculpture for the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition in Dallas, including the six massive masterpieces facing the reflecting pool. The original Woofus sculpture was created alongside these better-known sculptures in 1936 for the Texas Exposition. In 1941, however, the Woofus statue was damaged and lost when it was taken for repair.



Watercolor painting for Texas Woofus by Lawrence Tenney Stevens

Thanks in great part to the efforts of Texas Representative Terri Hodge, a past president of The Friends of Fair Park, the Woofus graces Fair Park. She helped raise millions of dollars to renovate and restore the renowned structures in Fair Park, including the whimsical Woofus. Starting in 1989 and erected in time for the 2002 State Fair, sculptor David Newton used an original model lent to the project by Jon Faubion, director of the trust of sculptor Lawrence Tenney Stevens. This model was used to make molds faithful to original Woofus sculpture.

Interestingly, the first Woofus could have been polychrome as seen in an original watercolor by Lawrence Tenney Stevens. This concept was presented to the Fair's architect, George Dahl. Ultimately the Woofus, along with the other Stephens sculptures at Fair Park, did not take on the splash of color.

Walnut Hill Elementary School

Juanita Nañez

The story of Walnut Hill Elementary School is one of on-going academic excellence and relevance that can be attributed to its quality educational programs and its ability to meet the needs of the ever-changing size and demographics of its student population.

The story begins around 1914 as a one-room schoolhouse with a handful of students in a sparsely populated area of woods and farmland. Being outside of Dallas proper, and part of Farmers Branch, it later consolidated with three other schoolhouses to form its own school district with about 20 students, the Walnut Hill Common School District #79. The original trustees were farmers and businessmen, and at the suggestion of one of them, Joe Cox, the school was named after a road lined with walnut trees planted by Albert Latham from Merrell Road to Six Mile Lane. The name of Six Mile Lane changed to Walnut Hill Lane after the construction of the first building that had four rooms upstairs and an auditorium downstairs. The rocks excavated when the well was dug were used for the driveway.

Current School Address:	10115 Midway Rd., Dallas, TX 75229 Building currently closed, students temporarily attending at 2151 Royal Lane, Dallas, TX 75229 (old Tom Field School)
Cross Streets:	Midway Rd. and Killion Dr.
Neighborhood:	Walnut Hill (NW Dallas) aka Preston Hollow West
Completion Date:	Completed 1936; Dedicated 1937
Architect/Contractor	1936 Architect and Contractor, Unknown; April 1952: Owner: Walnut Hill Dad's Club; Contractor: Owner April 1955: Owner: Dallas ISD; Contractor Muncey Engineering August 1955: Owner: Dallas ISD; Contractor: J.E. Biggs Current (2020/2021) Rebuild Architect, VAI Architects Current (2020/2021) Rebuild Contractor, The Beck Group
Addition Dates:	1952; 1955
Historic Names:	1915-1946, Walnut Hill Common School District #79
Historic Designations:	N/A

In 1936 a new one-story building was completed and dedicated in 1937 with a student body that consisted of eight grades. It is believed that the auditorium portion of the old building was included in the new structure. While research did not find the architect for this building, a Dallas Morning News ad of November 30, 1935, shows Arthur A. Brews, officed in the Mercantile Building in downtown Dallas, as the architect providing plans, specifications, and instructions to contract bidders for the construction of a cement foundation for the new Walnut Hill Elementary School. With changes to school district boundaries, in 1946 the school became part of

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the Dallas ISD. As Dallas was beginning to expand further north in the early 1950s, realtors for the new Walnut Hill Addition residential development promoted the school to attract families. They described it as, “Completely modern in all of its facilities and equipment.” The consequential growth in student population led to two additions in 1952 and 1955. The former included the visual aide room, lunchroom, and upper grade classrooms, and the 1955 addition included the gymnasium and more classrooms. When the school reached its peak enrollment of about 1,200 students, portable classes were placed at the South end of the parking lot.

With the school aging and families continuing to move farther North, the enrollment in the 1990’s saw a decrease to 700 students and seven grades. Today’s enrollment is about 400 students with a faculty of 60. More than half of its student population is disadvantaged economically and English Language Learners. The school has risen to the occasion and today boasts a dual-language Talented and Gifted program, with Mandarin being one of the languages taught. In the 21st century, it has received an array of distinguished academic achievement awards, including being awarded the coveted National Blue Ribbon School designation twice by the U.S. Department of Labor; first in 2004-2005 and most recently in 2019-2020.



Walnut Hill school was irreparably damaged in the October 20, 2019 tornado that struck Dallas. Image: Lori Brown, FOX 4 News



Walnut Hill school was irreparably damaged in the October 20, 2019 tornado that struck Dallas. Image: Lori Brown, FOX 4 News

The school was in the path of the October 20, 2019, tornado that struck Dallas, along with neighboring Cary Middle School and Thomas Jefferson High School. The buildings suffered devastating damages and Cary was demolished. The Walnut Hill students were moved quickly to the vacated Tom Field School at 2151 Royal Lane, Dallas, 75229. In January 2020, the school was part of a plan approved by the district board of trustees of more

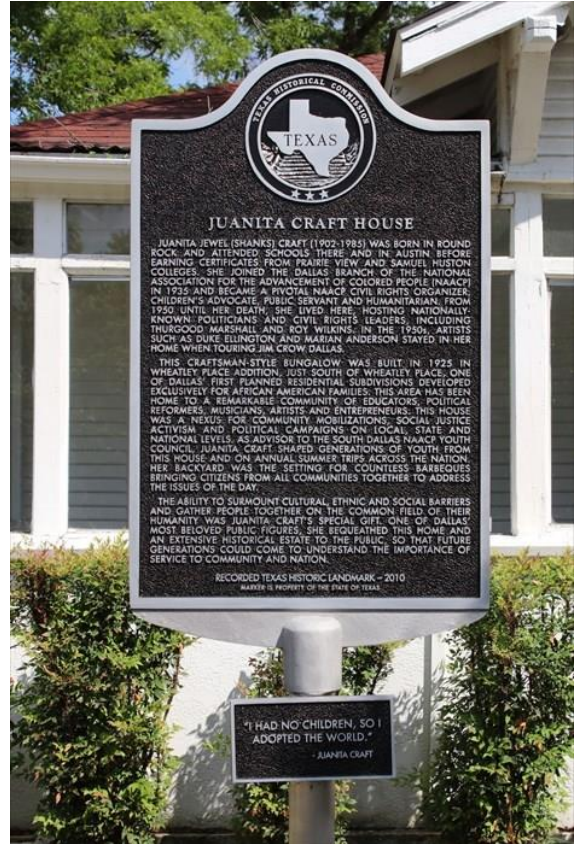
than \$130 million to start the rebuild process; however, plans were delayed in August 2020 by the abruptly severed relationship with the original contractor. Dallas ISD is now working with VAI Architects and The Beck Group contractors, and the rebuild and redesign plans are in progress with plans to complete the Walnut Hill pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade international languages school following the completion of the Thomas Jefferson High School renovation scheduled for the fall of 2021. With its rich history of commitment to academic excellence, dedicated educators, parent involvement, and the ability to remain relevant to the changing needs of its student population, there should be no doubt that Walnut Hill Elementary School will continue to flourish.

State of Texas Undertold Marker Applications

In 2006, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) established the Undertold Program to address gaps in the State Marker program and underrepresented topics. The application process is now open for 2021 and runs from October 1st to November 15th, 2021.

The THC uses a two-page application form available on their website (<https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/state-historical-markers/undertold-markers>) to intake and review requests to make its determination based on their adopted rules, procedures and scoring criteria. The final determination of eligibility and approval for a state marker is made by the THC. While applications go directly to the State, the Dallas County Historical Commission can serve as a source of knowledge and advice on how best to complete the form.

Funded topics receive a free 27" x 42" marker or the equivalent in historical research. There is also no application fee for Markers accepted through their Undertold program. The State's program is highly competitive and not all applicants to the State Undertold marker program receive funding.



Texas Historical Marker at the Juanita Craft House through the Undertold Program
Image Courtesy of waymarking.com

Passing Of Note

Passing of Mrs. Lindalyn Bennett Adams.

The Chronicle would like to note the passing of Mrs. Lindalyn Adams on September 8th, 2021, whose contributions to the preservation of Dallas County history are immeasurable.

In 2019, Dallas County officially recognized Lindalyn Adams as "Dallas County's First Lady of Historic Preservation" for her tireless work with virtually every local historical institution. Her accomplishments in the fight to preserve Dallas' history are too numerous to list in this short space. Three accomplishments, however, stand out as Dallas touchstones that would not exist without her:

1. *The Sixth Floor Museum in the Texas School Book Depository at Dealey Plaza* – Lindalyn partnered with and worked for years with Conover Hunt after the County purchased the Book Depository building to create the Sixth Floor Museum.
2. *Dallas Heritage Village* – Along with Mary Lynn McEntire, Ruth Ann Montgomery, and Lynn Vogt, Lindalyn was the founding generation of the Dallas Heritage Village, one of the few places where the history of Dallas and North Central Texas comes alive through a collection of historic buildings and period recreation events.
3. *Restoration and preservation of the Old Red Courthouse in Downtown Dallas* – In September 2019 Lindalyn Adams' portrait was unveiled to hang in the Old Red Courthouse. Lindalyn chaired the Friends of the Old Red Courthouse and was a member of the board which established the Old Red Museum of Dallas County History and Culture, and worked for the restoration of Dallas County's 1893 Courthouse.



Lindalyn Adams.
Photo: Sparkman/Hillcrest Funeral Home & Hillcrest Mausoleum & Memorial Park