

DALLAS COUNTY
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Ready, Set, Go!



State Announces New Marker Schedule



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On January 31, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) announced its new schedule for accepting applications for state historical markers. Under this schedule, applications recommended for approval by county historical commissions must be submitted to THC during the period of April 1, 2020-June 15, 2020.

This new spring schedule replaces the traditional fall schedule that the state had previously used for about a decade and reactivates THC's marker program. THC had to temporarily postpone taking applications in 2019 while it selected a new company for the manufacturing of its markers. With a new firm, Eagle Sign & Design, having been selected, this new schedule allows the state to immediately begin resuming its marker program rather than waiting another four or five months for its customary fall cycle.

The state anticipates maintaining the spring schedule for the next several years. Application materials and instructions are available on the THC website at www.thc.texas.gov.

To be eligible for the state's program, local applications must first be reviewed and recommended by the Dallas County Historical Commission. So that there will be adequate time to review and, if necessary, revise an application, interested individuals and entities must electronically submit their applications to the County's Historical Commission (through Rick Loessberg, the County's Director of Planning & Development, at rloessberg@dallascounty.org) by June 1, 2020.

Dr. Edgar Ward and Johnny Graham Honored with Historical Markers

On January 29, the Texas Historical Commission approved two markers from its untold history program to commemorate the lives and contributions of Dr. Edgar Ward and Johnny Graham, two African American Dallasites.

Born in 1892, Edgar Ward was a physician who was very active in the Dallas black community. He was a member of the NAACP, he helped raise funds for the landmark *Sweatt v. Painter* Supreme Court case that desegregated the University of Texas Law School, he hosted the first two black football players to play in the New Year's Day Cotton Bowl game, he was president of the then Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce, and in 1947, he was named the "Most Outstanding Negro Leader in Texas" by the State Fair Association. Dr. Ward, who lived on the corner of Oakland Avenue (today's Malcom X Boulevard) and Dathe Street, died in 1950.



Dr. Edgar Ward



Johnny Graham

Johnny Graham was a barber at a time when skilled occupations for African Americans were scarce. Born in 1918, Graham opened his first Dallas barbershop in 1951 at 2804 Southland Street. Eighteen years later, he was the owner of seven barbershops. Recognizing the importance of the local barbershop and the career path that barbering offered, he established a barber college in 1965. Fifty-five years later, Graham's Barber College is still in operation, having trained several generations of barbers. Graham died in 1990.

THC began its untold history program about ten years ago in an effort to acknowledge and document aspects of Texas history, especially those associated with people of color or people with different cultures and religions, that had previously gone underreported or unrecognized. Each year, the competition for untold markers is very intense—THC received 54 applications during its recent application cycle, and only had enough funding to approve fifteen. Reflecting the significance of both men's contributions, Dallas County was the only county to receive more than one untold marker.

The Dallas Municipal Building ("Old City Hall") *Continuing to be Historic, Continuing to be Important*

By Victor McGlothlin

Many know the Dallas Municipal Building on the east side of downtown on Harwood because that is where Lee Harvey Oswald was held as a suspect by the Dallas police and where he was shot by Jack Ruby. However, even if the events of November 22-24, 1963 had never occurred, this building would still have been historic and important. First constructed in 1914 when Dallas did not yet have paved streets or electric lights, the Beaux Arts-style building was the center of Dallas city government for over sixty years.



The Dallas Municipal Building/Old City Hall, 106 S. Harwood.

Now, following a \$70 million renovation that has restored features from its 1914 origins and its 1963 events and enabled it to become the home of the University of North Texas-Dallas Law School, the limestone and granite building is prepared to enter its third important historic phase.

Aldredge House Portrayals: *What Life Was Like*

By Henry Tatum

Most of us have driven through the Swiss Avenue Historic District to admire the stately mansions that line this scenic boulevard and wondered what it was like to have lived there 100 years ago when the homes were first built.

While no one has yet built a time machine that will actually allow us to return to that era, the Friends of Aldredge House and a group of dedicated actors in period costumes clearly provide us with the next best thing.



The Aldredge House at 5500 Swiss Avenue was built in 1917.

Each month, on the first Saturday at 11:00 a.m., people can “meet” Will and Willie Lewis, the original owners of 5500 Swiss Avenue, along with their chauffeur, doctor, and maid and architect Hal Thomson who designed the house for them.



(From left to right) architect Hal Thomson, the cook, Willie Lewis, the chauffeur, Rena Munger Aldredge, Will Lewis, the maid, and suffragist Leticia Morgan.

“Guests” will gather around in the Lewis living room and hear quite a tale about the colorful West Texas rancher who spent years wooing a young Dallas debutante. Sadly, his desire to build a palace for his new bride backfired. She thought it was too ostentatious, and it was sold a few years later to George and Rena Aldredge, and it is for them, rather than the Lewises, that the home is known as the Aldredge family owned the house for the next fifty years.

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment and a woman’s right to vote, the Aldredge House Players have recently added two new members to their program. One of the characters is Leticia Morgan, an African American, and the other is Nona Mahoney, the first President of Dallas League of Woman’s Voters. These women give a compelling account of what it took to get the vote and who was left out of the process.

Marianne Howells, who is the coordinator of this living history presentation, says, “These talented actors give the audience an exciting visual of early Dallas and Texas life through their performance. You’ll see love, regret, ambition and anger while building a home and a life in early Dallas.”

The presentations are sponsored by the Friends of Aldredge House, an organization formed to provide support and educational programs for the Aldredge House as a historic museum home. Admission to the Aldredge House and the portrayals is free, but registration is requested (please RSVP at www.eventbrite.com/e/aldredge-house-living-history-tour-guest-speaker-series-tickets-93856743045).

The Aldredge House was obtained by the Dallas County Medical Society Alliance Foundation from Rena Munger Aldredge and has been faithfully preserved as the *grande dame* of Swiss Avenue. The home played a major role in the Dallas City Council’s decision to declare the neighborhood as the city’s first historic district in 1973.

Old City Hall *(continued from page 2)*

As part of this renovation, the building's grand staircase has been restored as have its corridors, marble flooring, ceilings, trim, council chambers, and WPA-era floor mosaic. In many instances, when new marble needed to be installed, it was done with stone that had been mined from the same quarries that had provided the building's original material over 100 years ago.



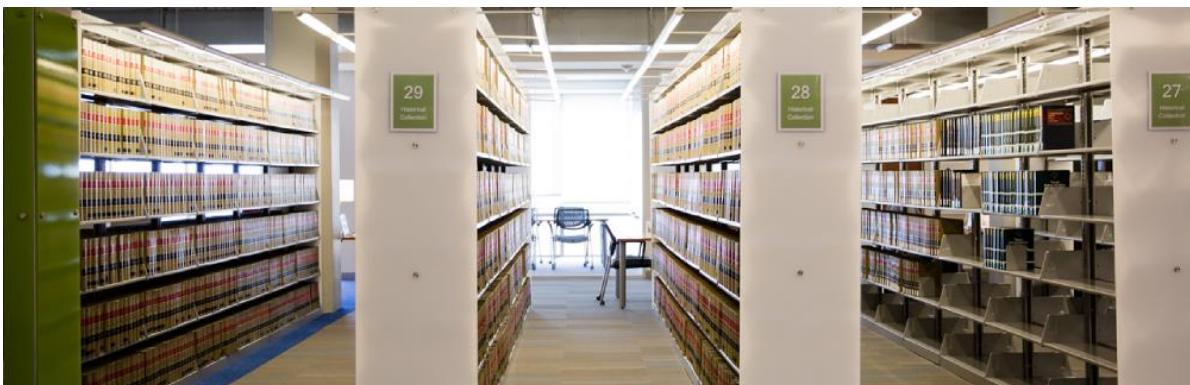
The building's restored grand staircase, the uncovered WPA-era mosaic tile, and the restored council chambers.

Many important items associated with November 1963 have also been preserved, including the row of jails cells that once held Oswald and Ruby, the mugshot wall where both men's police photos were taken, the prisoner elevator, and the captain's office where Oswald was interrogated.



Lee Harvey Oswald's jail cell.

To support what is now the first public law school in Dallas, classrooms were created, the building's entire sixth floor was transformed into a modern law library, and the two basement-level floors were redesigned with a large state-of-the-art courtroom, law commons, and lounging areas for students.



The new law library inside the Dallas Municipal Building.

With the completion of this work, the future of what was once known as "Old City Hall" appears to be as promising as its past.



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.