

DALLAS COUNTY
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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The Almost Forgotten Community of Cemento Grande

It is difficult to get to, locked behind the gates of the large AT&T facility on Cockrell Hill Road, but a request at the gate will, after a few minutes to find someone who knows what you are asking about, gain you admission to the hallowed ground of a cemetery which is the last physical vestige of an Hispanic community that thrived nearby for over forty years. The community, Cemento Grande, was the company town for Mexican immigrant laborers of Trinity Portland Cement. The cemetery commemorates the life of that community, and the hundreds of people who lived and worked there.



Cement company employees and community residents in 1929. Photo courtesy of Dallas Public Library.

In 1907, William Foster Cowan and Associates acquired the land in this area for its rich deposits of limestone and schist. They founded the Southwestern States Portland Cement Company, built a plant, and began supplying the cement for the fast expanding city of Dallas. By 1915, the company had become Trinity Cement and had plants in Dallas, Ft. Worth and Houston. Its products were sold in every adjoining state as well as in Mississippi.

Needing workers, but remote from Dallas (which was about four miles to the east) and cut off from public transportation, the company built two villages for its laborers, one for Anglo workers and one for Hispanic workers (almost all of which were immigrants from

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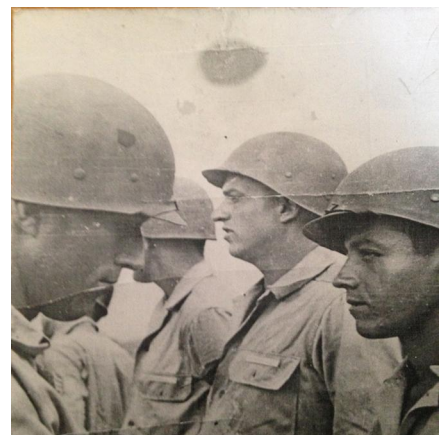
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Eladio Martinez, far right, was killed in the Philippines during WWII. He is the last person to have been buried in the community's cemetery.

Marker Dedicated for Charles Dilbeck Homes



Two Cochran Heights homes showing the varied architectural style of Charles Dilbeck.

A Texas Historical Marker honoring Dallas' Cochran Heights neighborhood and the work of famed architect Charles Dilbeck was unveiled and dedicated on April 3. Dilbeck, who designed sixty homes that were built in the neighborhood east of Central Expressway and south of Henderson between 1936 and 1940, was the son of a builder and lumberman. He legendarily designed and built his first project, a church in Tulsa, at the age of eleven.

Dilbeck moved to Dallas in 1932 and designed at least 630 houses in the city, with most of them being located in Lakewood, Preston Hollow, North Oak Cliff, and the Park Cities. His eclectic work also locally included the Belmont Hotel (in 1936) and El Ranchito Restaurant (in 1946).

Dilbeck's architecture exhibits dramatic spatial sequencing and exaggerated scale. He designed asymmetrical facades, chimney details, dovecotes, turrets, and complex combinations of roof forms and heights, and he developed techniques for aging brick and wood and often used salvaged materials. Demonstrating his close ties with local craftsmen, he specified bricks from the Palmer Brick factory and ornamental iron from Potter Ironworks.

The Cochran Heights neighborhood, which features small bungalows with attached garages, was built on a former pecan orchard. Over seventy years later, most of these homes remain--the greatest concentration of Dilbeck's work in Dallas. All five of his architectural styles are found in the Cochran Heights homes: French eclectic, traditional, ranch house, moderne, and colonial revival. These unique houses exhibit Dilbeck's quote that a house "should say something and make you happy . . . it should say welcome in a friendly way. Sit down and enjoy yourself."

Taking his own advice, Dilbeck retired in 1970, but only after designing a home for himself. He died in 1990.

Sunset High School Designated as Recorded Texas Historic Landmark and City of Dallas Landmark



Sunset High School

Now over ninety years old—and the sixth-oldest high school in Dallas, Sunset High School has recently been designated as both a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark by the State of Texas and as a City Landmark by the City of Dallas.

The school, which is named for the Oak Cliff residential district in which it is located, first opened on September 21, 1925. It was built utilizing some of the area's finest talent, including architects Roscoe Plimpton DeWitt and Mark Lemmon and the J.A. Rife Construction Company. During the Great Depression, this work was further supplemented by the New Deal's Federal Art Project when it hired Granville Bruce to paint two murals in the school's library to depict major moments in Texas settlement history.

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Cemento Grande Not Forgotten *continued from page 1*

Mexico). The Hispanic company town, Cemento Grande, only had dirt roads and frame houses with outdoor plumbing. The houses, of various sizes, rented for two dollars a month per room. Many of the first residents came fleeing the horrors of the Mexican Revolution. Others followed for jobs and to be with family. One area of Mexico, in particular, the state of Guanajuato (and for many, the city of San Felipe within that state), was the starting point for many of the community's new residents.

Around 1918, the company donated land to be used for a cemetery by its Hispanic employees. In all probability the first people buried there were victims of the devastating 1918 influenza epidemic. Through the years, it is estimated that over 200 individuals are buried here. The last burial occurred in 1946 when Eladio R. Martinez was reinterred in the cemetery. Martinez, a native of Cemento Grande, was killed in action in the Pacific during World War II and was originally buried in the Philippines.

Mr. Martinez's brother, Henry, is perhaps one of the last living natives of Cemento Grande. Now eighty-eight-years-old, he has dedicated the past fifty years to preserving the cemetery and the memory of the community in which he was born. His family's history is surely representative of that of many others: His father, Jose, came from San Felipe Guanajuato in 1910 and worked and lived in the community for fifty years. In the cemetery are the graves of his mother, his sister, his uncle, and his brother Eladio.

Henry has outlived them all—including the community itself which was closed and demolished by the company around 1959 with many of its residents relocating a mile or so farther north to the Eagle Ford area of Dallas. Now he alone in his family is left to ensure that neither the community nor the sacred field of the cemetery are lost and forgotten.

Today, a walk through the cemetery reveals faded tombstones, cement crosses askew, and rusty fences. Many of the headstones and crosses were made using materials from the cement company with the names and dates often being etched by hand into the cement while it was still wet.

There is also a Texas Historical Marker and a striking stone memorial to those from the community, almost all of Mexican birth or Hispanic descent, who served this country in war, particularly World War II. While Cemento Grande itself is no more, El Camposanto de Cemento Grande remains as a reminder of the community that once was and serves as a tribute to the lives that were lived there.



A tombstone in El Camposanto de Cemento Grande

Sunset Marker Dedication *continued from page 2*

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There have been milestones and achievements in every decade of its history: in the 1930s, it had the largest high school orchestra in Dallas; in 1944, Sunset won the state basketball championship; in 1950, it won the state football championship; and today, it boasts one of the best fine arts dance companies in the country.

Of course, Sunset's true legacy is the thousands of students who have passed through its doors and the impact it has made on their lives. When the school celebrated its 90th birthday last year, there were graduates from almost every class dating back to the 1930s. There were certainly prominent graduates attending, including current DISD Superintendent Michael Hinojosa, college and pro football star Jerry Rhome, and Bill Melton, the former voice of the Dallas Cowboys. However, there was no one more admired that day than the earliest graduate in attendance, La Von Thorp Thompson, class of 1934.

State Marker Application Process Underway



Time is counting down for marker applications. Are you ready?

The clock is now ticking for those individuals and organizations interested in applying for a Texas historical marker. Applications must electronically be submitted to the Dallas County Historical Commission no later than October 31 for them to be considered during the State's current application cycle.

Markers can be sought to commemorate events, people, cemeteries, subjects, and structures. In trying to determine whether a particular topic or structure is historic, it is important to remember two general principles:

- The structure, event, subject, etc. usually must be at least fifty years old or must have occurred at least fifty years ago; and
- Just because something (or someone) is old does not mean that it is historic.

Marker applications and instructions are available at the Texas Historical Commission's website: www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/state-historical-markers.

Rick Loessberg, the Director of Planning & Development for Dallas County, is also available to answer questions about the application process. His phone number is 214.653.7601.

Once a marker is completed, it should be electronically submitted to Mr. Loessberg at: rloessberg@dallascounty.org.



Photo courtesy of DMAHL



Funding Available for Under-Told Markers

The Dallas County that exists today is the result of the many different populations, cultures, guilds, ethnicities, languages, clubs, neighborhoods, institutions, and faiths that preceded us. With the County being as large as it is both numerically and geographically, recording and acknowledging the contributions that all of these groups, individuals, and organizations have made is always going to be challenging. However, a quick review of the State historical markers that presently exist in the County indicate that the contributions made by some have not been yet been recognized with such markers.

Because the cost of a marker is not inexpensive (the least costly marker has a price of \$1100), the Dallas County Historical Commission has agreed to provide 50%, up to \$550, of the cost of a Texas Historical Marker if the selected marker deals with a cultural aspect of Dallas County history that has previously been under-recognized.

Information pertaining to the County's under-told marker funding can be found under the "Projects" listing on the Historical Commission's website at: www.dallascounty.org/dchc.

The County has budgeted money so that it can assist up to two markers during the State's current marker application cycle. Individuals and organizations interested in applying for this funding must do so by November 1.