

DALLAS COUNTY
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

THE DALLAS COUNTY CHRONICLE

VOLUME 16, ISSUE 2

Spring 2017

HAMILTON PARK

How the American Dream Was Fulfilled

At first glance, Hamilton Park looks like any of the other many middle-class neighborhoods that were built in the U.S. during the 1950s—one-story homes with 1300-1500 square feet, attached garages, three-bedrooms, a front yard and a backyard. It is by many accounts, the embodiment of both the American Dream—owning one’s home—and the 1950s. Even now, over sixty years later, one can walk through the neighborhood and imagine what it was back then with kids playing in the yard, moms hanging the wash, and people going to work carrying a lunchbox or driving a Chevrolet.



But Hamilton Park’s story is quite different because it was built as an African American neighborhood at a time when new housing for Dallas African Americans generally did not exist and because of its location—it was not located, like many black neighborhoods, in “the river bottom” where it flooded, south of the Trinity River which frequently served as a boundary between blacks and whites, or adjacent to another existing black neighborhood. Instead, Hamilton Park was located on the city’s northern edge—an area which was soon in the path of a massive wave of white suburbanization.

How Hamilton Park came to be is the result of a combination of unique situations and personalities. As the decade of the 1950s began, much of the housing in Dallas for African Americans was dilapidated and overcrowded. A number of local

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community leaders and civic organizations and a few builders had been working for a number of years to remedy the situation. Some of these people were doing so because they were truly concerned with the state of housing for Dallas African Americans while others were more concerned about the image of the city.

Two events then occurred which intensified and illustrated the need for a solution. In 1950, several black residences in an area that had previously been all-white were bombed. Three years later, city voters approved funding for the expansion of Love Field which would necessitate the demolition of an African American neighborhood. Responding

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to this worsening situation, local oilman Jerome Crossman suggested that a nonprofit buy land that could be sold to developers who would build housing for African Americans. Shortly, thereafter, the Hoblitzelle Foundation came forward and provided a loan of \$216,873 so that 233 acres that was located immediately east of Central Expressway and north of Forest Lane could be purchased for that purpose.



A February 1963 school day.

By the end of the year (1953), the area had been named “Hamilton Park” after Dr. Richard Theodore Hamilton, a Dallas African American physician who had actively been involved in the Dallas equality movement and who had helped raise funds for the Moreland YMCA. Streets were laid out and named after prominent African American athletes, entertainers, and spokespersons (“Campanella,” “Bellafonte,” and “Bunche”); a college with a long history of teaching African American students (“Oberlin”); and the foundation that had provided the loan. Within two years, over 250 homes had been built, and by the end of the decade when the neighborhood was fully developed, it had over 700 homes and featured a park, a school, several churches, and a shopping center.

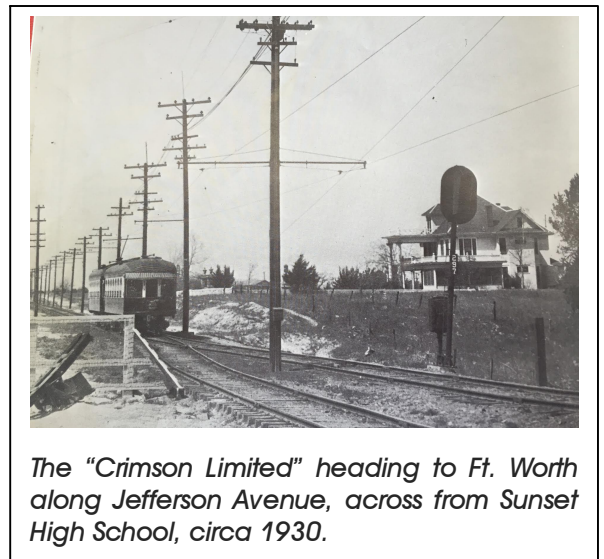
Couples interested in buying a home had to produce a copy of their marriage license. FHA and the VA, which helped to finance much of the white suburban residential activity of the 1950s and which did not always have a comparable African American record, did provide mortgage financing for Hamilton Park’s homebuyers who consisted of World War II veterans, teachers, ministers, chauffeurs, domestic workers, doctors, dentists, nurses, landscapers, musicians, and carpenters.

Without intention, every original homeowner was a trailblazer. They served as role models for future generations and sought opportunities that some dared not to tackle. Moreover, they created the foundation for a neighborhood and a community that continues today.

The Interurban Railway

By Michael Amonett

The electric Interurban Railway played a major, but short-lived, role in the development of intercity passenger transport in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area. From 1900-1948, three interurban railroads served Dallas: the Texas Interurban Railway, which connected Dallas to Terrell and Denton in the north; the Northern Texas Electric, which connected Dallas to Ft. Worth in the west; and the Texas Electric Railway, which further connected Dallas to the north to Sherman and Denison and which also connected the city to Corsicana and Waco in the south.



The “Crimson Limited” heading to Ft. Worth along Jefferson Avenue, across from Sunset High School, circa 1930.

The Interurban provided a critical transition from an almost exclusive reliance on the steam railroad for travel from one city to another to the age of the automobile and regular highway driving. In so doing, it helped facilitate the development of Dallas and the economic interrelationship that now exists through much of North Texas.

Interurban rail in Texas totaled nearly 500 miles. Most of this mileage was in place by 1913. About 350 miles of the Texas Interurban were in the Dallas-Fort Worth area with the area possessing at one time the largest electric Interurban railway west of the Mississippi River.

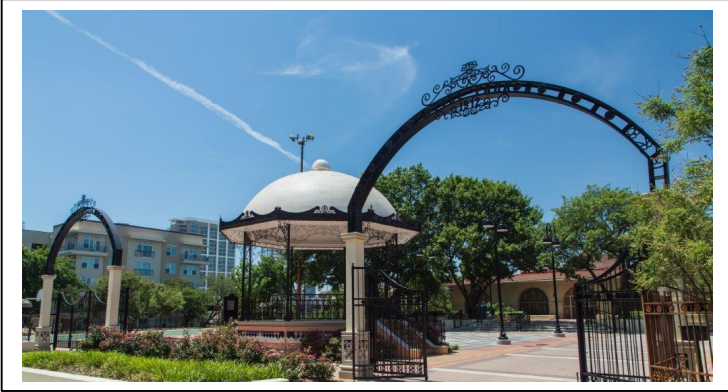
The Dallas-Ft. Worth line was the brainchild of George T. Bishop of Cleveland, who managed similar electric railroads in Washington, Baltimore, and Annapolis. Bishop’s plan began with the acquisition of the City Railway of Fort Worth in 1900. He next obtained permission from the Legislature to extend service east to Dallas, thirty-five miles from terminal to terminal. In 1902, his syndicate acquired the Dallas and Oak Cliff Electric Railway for entry into Dallas.

*See **Interurban** on page 5*

Pike Park: *A Place for Newcomers, A Place for Community*

By Juanita H. Nañez

Hundreds of cars pass by Pike Park everyday as they exit the North Dallas Tollway for downtown Dallas, but very few know its history. Some may be aware of its connection with Dallas' Hispanic past, but even fewer know of its role with other ethnic groups or that it has had several names.



The area surrounding the park was first settled in the late 1800s by Jewish immigrants who left Eastern Europe to escape new outbreaks of anti-Semitic violence and to find new opportunities in Texas. During this period, the neighborhood was known alternately as *Frogtown* (because of the abundance of said amphibians that would appear after flooding along the Trinity) or *Little Jerusalem*. Housing was inexpensive, few of the area's small shotgun houses had access to running water or electricity, and the streets were unpaved, dusty, and subject to frequent flooding.

The idea to create a park north of downtown Dallas originated in "The Kessler Plan," the master plan for the City that was commissioned in 1910. In 1913, the City purchased 4.39 acres for the park at a cost of \$18,085 from Nat G. and James H. Turney, and in 1914, Turney Play Park was established. This name was then changed in 1915 when the City sponsored a renaming contest as part of the park's formal dedication ceremony.

The winning entry, "Summit Play Park," spoke to the dramatic view of downtown Dallas that the park's hilltop site provided. It continued to be the park's name until 1927, when its name was once again changed to honor long-time Dallas Park Board member, Edgar L. Pike.

The park included a two-story field house that was designed by Dallas architects Lang and Witchell and built at a cost of \$25,000. It contained assembly rooms, showers, a reading room, a milk depot and other modern features of its time. With the addition of wading pools, tennis courts, and baseball field, Summit Play Park gained recognition as a state-of-the-art municipal park and immediately became a gathering site for immigrants of Irish, German, Scottish, Swiss, and Polish Jewish descent who settled in the neighborhood.

At about the same time, the prospering Jewish middle class began to relocate to larger homes in what was then considered South Dallas. Concurrently, Mexican migrants began moving to the area due to the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) and the employment opportunities that existed in Dallas for unskilled laborers. Thus, *Little Jerusalem* began its transition to *Little Mexico*. During this period, it became common to say, "You can walk all the way from Jerusalem to Mexico on Akard Street."



In the late 1920s, the newer residents began to celebrate *Cinco de Mayo* (May 5) and *Diez y Seis de Septiembre* (September 16) at the Park, commemorating, respectively, the Mexican Army's unlikely victory over French forces

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at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862, and Mexico's independence from Spain. However, prior to 1931, Mexicans were not allowed in the field house and had access to the park's amenities only at designated times. It was not until 1938, for instance, when Mexican Consul Adolfo Dominguez became involved, that children of Mexican descent could swim at the park, but even then, with segregation still in place, that was only from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.

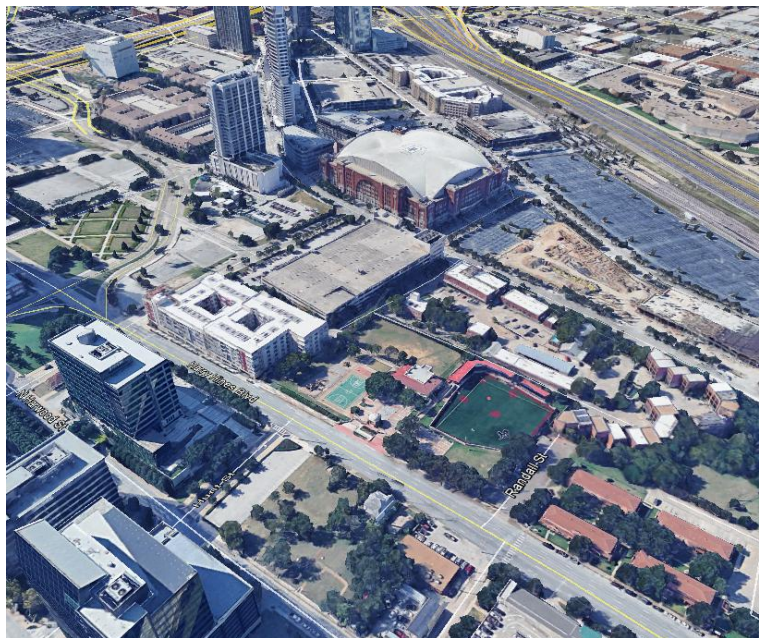


In 1956, the Dallas City Council approved federal funding for urban renewal in Little Mexico. Ironically, the renewal project also signaled the beginning of the destruction of this vibrant historical neighborhood. A decade later, the construction of the North Dallas Tollway literally erased the physical heart of the community and impeded neighborhood access to Pike Park. The increasing traffic on Harry Hines, which became the primary entrance to the park, made it dangerous for neighborhood children to cross the street to the playground, and the Tollway so altered the surrounding area that people no longer could or wanted to live nearby.

Park usership declined, and the once state-of-the-art park fell into disrepair. City officials considered closing it, but Anita N. Martinez, the first Mexican-American elected to the Dallas City Council, made the survival of Pike Park one of her first initiatives. She started by giving her 1969 acceptance speech at the park, which Martinez regarded as the psychological heart of the Mexican-American community in Dallas.

Her perception was borne out multiple times in the decades that followed. When twelve-year-old Santos Rodriguez was killed by a police officer in Dallas in 1973, Pike Park became the rallying site for the Mexican-American community. In 1978, the Pike Park recreation center was renovated, and the building was converted to a Mexican style with a red-tile roof, curved parapet, and restored stucco walls. The swimming pool was replaced by a brick-patterned plaza and a bandstand modeled after a gazebo in Monterrey, Mexico.

In 1981, the Texas Historical Commission approved a State marker acknowledging the historical importance of the Park; this marker was, at that time, one of only three in Dallas to commemorate some aspect of Mexican-American history. In 1988, local artist Juan Manuel created a mural for the Pike Park recreation center. In 2000, the City of Dallas designated the Park as a City Landmark. In 2013, the City financed a \$650,000 renovation of the Park, and Mark Cuban provided another \$1.5 million to rebuild the Park's baseball field.



Today, the individual dwellings once surrounding Pike Park have been replaced by apartments and condominiums that have been constructed in the last several years. Thanks to the dedication of many civic leaders, the charming park continues to remain, but it still needs additional attention.

Interestingly, as rich as its past has been, its future is just as intriguing. What possibilities await Pike Park? Can it be as dynamic as it once was as a new urban park while preserving its multicultural history? Can it be an impressive entrance to Uptown from the Tollway? Whatever may occur, one thing will undoubtedly be clear: Pike Park will always be a place for community and newcomers.

(The writer would like to acknowledge the gracious contribution that Dr. Janis Bergman-Carton made to this article.)

Interurban *(continued from page 2)*

The 35-mile line from Dallas to Fort Worth was one of the state's earliest lines, being completed and placed in operation on June 18, 1902. Service was of high frequency, with trains leaving on the hour.

A combination of factors—first, the Great Depression, which crippled the finances of the Northern Texas Electric Company, and then the emergence of the automobile, post-World War II prosperity, and improved highways—ended the run of the remaining Interurban lines in the Dallas area by 1948. However, while the trains are gone, reminders of this impressive system still exist: the route that the train once took in Richardson is now a street appropriately named “Interurban,” the headquarters for DART’s police force is the former repair and maintenance facility for the Texas Electric line, and the 45-foot-high, 400-foot-long trestle bridge of the Interurban line between Dallas and Ft. Worth along Jefferson Avenue continues to stand tall and will soon loom over the Chalk Hill pedestrian and bike trail that Dallas County and the City of Dallas are presently designing.



A reminder of what used to be in Richardson.



The Interurban Bridge along Jefferson Avenue.

And as yet another example of how the Interurban system is still with us and how the more things change, the more they stay the same, it presently takes the Trinity River Express—which, in 1977, resumed connecting Dallas and Ft. Worth by rail—one hour to travel between the two cities, the same amount of time that it took the Interurban over 100 years ago.

Patricia Hicks Appointed to DCHC

Patricia Hicks is one of the newest members of the County's Historical Commission. Appointed to the Commission on January 17 by County Commissioner Theresa Daniel, Pat is a second-generation descendant of original Hamilton Park homeowners, and the love for her home and her neighborhood led her to help conduct the research for the Texas Historical Marker that has recently been bestowed upon the area.

A retired Texas public schools educator, she has earned a Master's of Education from Prairie View A&M University and a Bachelor of Science from Texas Woman's University. Clearly believing that no one should ever stop learning, she has also earned certifications in Political Science and Sociology and elementary and early childhood from Southern Methodist University and the University of Texas at Arlington, respectively.



Her father, Dr. Robert E. Price, was a Texas Historical Association Recipient and was influential in the development of her passion for history. She is especially interested in and enthusiastic about the courageous men and women who fought for justice and blazed trails throughout the city, state, and nation.

Congresswoman Barbara Jordan was another individual who inspired and captivated Pat. Anyone who has met Pat or heard her speak will attest to the presence that she has and the effect that the Congresswoman obviously had upon her.

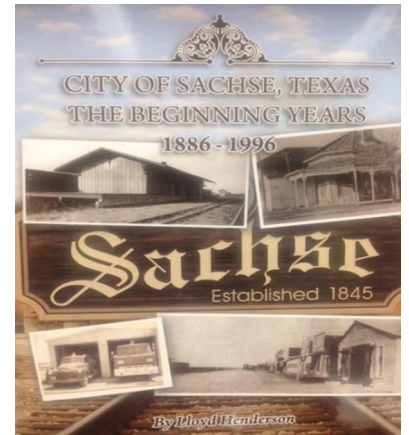
Something Old and Something New

A Book About Sachse's History

By Rick Loessberg

We often taken for granted how and why a city came to be and how it has changed through the years. In his new book, *City of Sachse, Texas: The Beginning Years, 1886-1996*, Lloyd Henderson has made sure that we will not do that for Sachse, a community of about 23,000 residents in the far northeastern corner of Dallas County.

Henderson said that when he began writing the book, he was hoping it he would be able to fill it with “stories of bank hold-ups, train robberies, stuff that happened at a house of ill-repute, the whisky still that someone’s grandpa had been operating down on Muddy Creek, the gossip about who was having an affair, maybe a gunfight, and a perhaps a murder that was never solved,” but, he wistfully adds, “none of this ever happened.”



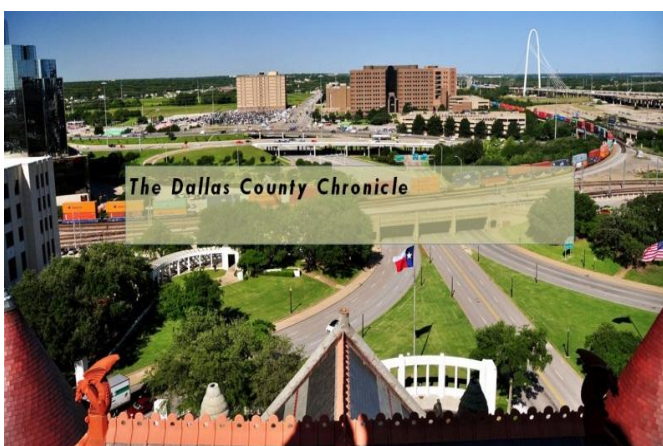
What did happen still makes for an interesting story. It is the story of how a man, William Sachse, parlayed the donation of a 100-foot right of way to the Gulf Colorado & Santa Fe Railroad in 1886 into a train station, the establishment of a town that was named after him, and a life-long pass on any of the railroad’s trains. It is also the story of how thirty-six people came together seventy years later, formally incorporated the town, and literally chipped in a total of \$170.33 so that the new city would have money with which to operate.



Author Lloyd Henderson, center, with Sachse Councilman Charles Smith, left, and Sachse Historical Society member Roger Brand, right.

Befitting Henderson’s previous career as a city manager, the book contains much information about the day-to-day building and workings of a city. He discusses two major controversies that arose during the 1970s and 1980s—a 1975 attempt by another city to establish a landfill within Sachse and a proposal in 1980 to build an airport on the eastern side of the city—that helped shaped the town’s sense of community. He also includes several photos from the town’s early days through its emergence as one of the fastest-growing cities in the County.

Copies of the *City of Sachse* can be purchased by sending a \$20 check to the Sachse Historical Society at 3303 Sixth Street, Sachse, TX, 75048. All proceeds from the sale of the book benefit the Society which also operates a museum at the same Sixth Street address and which is open to the public on Tuesdays from 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.



The Dallas County Chronicle is the official newsletter of the Dallas County Historical Commission.

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 noon. For more information about the Commission and its meetings, please call 214.653.7601.