This is the first time the AHS newsletter has featured an article about The Hill.

Background and history
"The Hill" is a historic, five-block area of Arlington. It was the only area designated for the city's African American residents when racially segregated neighborhoods were the norm. Located northwest of the town's original boundaries, its area included Sanford, West, Prairie, and Taylor streets.

For much of its history, The Hill was segregated from the rest of Arlington – both socially and physically. In the 1880 census records, only three African American families lived within the Arlington townsite. Although there aren't official records available for 1890, some of the same family names also appeared in the 1900 census, which indicates their continual presence in the area.

As Arlington's population began to grow, so did the African American community. During the period 1890-1950, The Hill experienced its most significant growth and prosperity. In 1907, Arlington resident Edward F. Wilkerson subdivided land that became a major part of The Hill, and known as the Wilkerson Addition.

A vibrant community emerged in the years to 

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follow. Homes, schools, and churches led to grocery stores, clubs, and restaurants in the 1920s. By this time, the neighborhood contained 28 homes with 100 residents, although less than 25% of the adults could read and write. By the 1930s, it shed its rural character becoming more densely populated and urban as Arlington expanded.

Yet as the town began to change, so did The Hill. The area began to dissolve after World War II. There were fewer job opportunities available for African American men and fewer places for their families to live. This began to change when the General Motors plant opened in 1953 and employed many African Americans. Farmland near the site was subdivided for housing, enticing some residents of The Hill to pursue other housing opportunities. Desegregation also led residents to other areas, both in and out of Arlington, as African Americans could live in more places.

**Schools**

Arlington’s first African American school existed by the 1890s. The Arlington Independent School District (AISD) formed in 1902, and the school joined the district. Prominent educators included George Stevens and Gloria Echols. Both lived and worked in The Hill and had an impact on education in the community.

The last segregated school in The Hill was built in 1953 and opened the following year. The school was named for Booker T. Washington and evolved from Arlington's previous African American schools. It initially had eight classrooms, an administrative office, and a cafeteria, with a gymnasium added later.

In 1954, the monumental "Brown v. Board of Education" Supreme Court case reached a verdict. The case determined that "racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional." It was a pivotal moment in the civil rights movement, although desegregation and equality would not come easily – or quickly.

It wasn't until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that desegregation would hasten, especially in the South. Notably, the Booker T. Washington School stayed segregated for another decade after Brown v. Board of Education, closing in 1965 when Arlington began to desegregate its schools. AISD did not provide secondary education for its African American students until laws made it mandatory. This resulted in fewer African American students continuing their education past the 8th grade. However, some students went to Terrell High School in Fort Worth to finish their studies.

Today, the former Booker T. Washington School building still stands at 500 Houston Street, although it's undergone a few name changes over the years. There is a Texas Historical Marker for the school and its impact.

**Churches**

Churches were fixtures of The Hill and its community. Three churches that started in the 1890s are still active today.
The Emmanuel Church of God in Christ dates back to 1895. It's known today as the Arlington Church of God in Christ. A Texas Historical Marker at this site explains, “The congregation grew in The Hill's commercial district alongside neighborhood grocery stores, restaurants, and night clubs, as well as schools, residences, and other churches.”

Mount Olive Baptist Church started in 1897 on Indiana Street. It later moved to West Street in 1966 during a period of growth for Arlington. (The year 1966 would also coincide with Reverend Norman L. Robinson's arrival; more on him in a moment.) The church would continue to grow and move to larger facilities. The church
has had steady growth and prided itself on an active outreach program in the community. Both churches have Texas Historical Markers onsite to help illustrate their significance.

A third church in the area is smaller, and its history was more challenging to uncover. It began as the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church but is known today as Armstrong Chapel AME. It dates back to 1898 and seems to be associated with the Masonic Lodge. While there isn’t a Texas Historical Marker onsite, there is a cornerstone on the building engraved with names of prominent people and the year 1898. Surrounding the cornerstone is a plaque referencing F & AM (Free and Accepted Masons) and "Pride of the South Lodge No. 324."

Notable people

While the community had many worthy citizens throughout its history, three deserve special recognition for their impact and service.

George Stevens served as Principal of Booker T. Washington School (and its precursors) for more than 20 years. The school tripled in size during his tenure. As a tribute to his impact, George Stevens Park opened in 1957. A Texas Historical Marker stands there today for The Hill, along with information about George Stevens.

Gloria Echols taught school in The Hill community for almost 20 years. She was one of the few women professionals who lived and worked in The Hill. Her contributions and teaching had a profound effect on the community. She lived on Watson Street, but the street was later renamed Echols Street in her honor.

Reverend Dr. Norman L. Robinson (1921-2017) served the Mount Olive Baptist Church for more than 50 years. While he became pastor after The Hill’s main period of prosperity, his impact is no less significant. His leadership after desegregation and through the Civil Rights movement cannot be understated. He became pastor of the church in 1966, serving its 16

(continued on next page)
Under this leadership, the congregation grew to more than 10,000 people in 30 years. The church grew—not only in numbers but also in the services it offered the community. A section of West Street near the church property was renamed N.L. Robinson Drive by the city in 1992. It’s a testament to his impact on the African American community and Arlington.

Significance and impact
The neighborhood’s legacy is complicated and bittersweet. On the one hand, it serves as a proud example for the city’s African American residents. On the other, it is also a reminder of the nation’s racism and segregation.

Today, the community memorializes The Hill in Texas Historical Markers, street names, churches, and a park. The Hill has a prominent place in Arlington’s history.

Final thoughts and looking to the future
The research for this article was challenging. Readily available information was incomplete and sometimes contradictory. It’s a reminder that we have much to learn and document about Arlington’s African American history. As Arlington’s Historical Society, it’s up to us to locate this information, preserve it, and make it available for current and future generations. It doesn’t begin and end with The Hill, though. Many other prominent people, events, places, and stories need to be remembered.

We’d like to invite comments, feedback, and input from the community, especially from folks outside of the historical society. What does The Hill mean to you? What other African American topics would you want to see in the newsletter or on display at the Fielder House Museum?

Contact: JasonSSullivan@gmail.com

For more information
The Fielder House Museum currently has an exhibit about The Hill. Photos and stories are on display about some of the residents and other African Americans throughout Arlington’s history.

Links to additional reading:
- [Preserving Arlington: Past Visions, Future Realities](#)
- [The Hill - Arlington’s Historic African American Community](#)
- [Story Map by the Arlington Landmark Preservation Commission](#)
- [Mount Olive Baptist Church](#) - Dr. Norman Lee Robinson
- [George Stevens Park](#) - park signage
- [The Hill](#) - Historical Marker text
- [Booker T. Washington School](#) - Historical Marker text
- [Emmanuel Church of God in Christ](#) - Historical Marker text
- [Mount Olive Baptist Church](#) - Historical Marker text
In Memoriam: Larry McMurtry (1936-2021)

By O.K. Carter

On the first hour of the first day of my first college course—the mandatory English literature—a rookie instructor teaching the first class of his first day as a lecturer ambled into the TCU classroom only a few minutes tardy. It was the fall of 1961, an 8 a.m. class. He was a trifle late because, like the freshmen seeking higher education enlightenment, his campus navigation skills lacked honing.

He squinted at the class through glasses, walked to the front side of the desk, slid his posterior into reverse and then, comfortably centered and seated atop the desk, crossed his legs as if anointing himself a literary Buddha.

“I’m Larry McMurtry,” he said. “As you know, I am an author.”

Frosh student O.K. Carter’s first thought: “What a nimrod.” First impressions often lack accuracy. How could I know the innocuous man in front of me would eventually win a Pulitzer Prize for fiction? And an Academy Award for screen writing. That he would author more than 30 books, most of them best sellers, and more than 30 screenplays, the resulting movies winning numerous Academy Awards themselves in an assortment of categories. A future legend-to-be right in front of me.

McMurtry, 84, died in March at his hometown of Archer City.

Back then, in 1961, he showed up as a young man with a newly inked master’s degree from Rice. He clearly believed the registration catalog contained his name, which should have been sufficient for literary-aware students to look him up. He had, after all, just been named the recipient of a Best First Novel by a Texas Writer award (for years he was tagged as a “minor regional novelist”). Trouble was, the registration catalog contained a full page of English 101 classes. Most of the classes would be taught by someone namelessly anonymous called “Staff.” Including McMurtry. Worse, the university shuffled registration alphabetically every semester, in this semester those students with surnames beginning with A-B-C-D signing up dead last. The only class the late registrants could get was the dreaded Monday-Wednesday-Friday 8 a.m. Larry McMurtry. To us, just another of the nameless Staff.

That first day he wore a wrinkled white sport coat blazer that seemed identical to one I owned, and which might have been. I bought mine in a Wichita Falls department store, not far from where McMurtry grew up.

“You’ll see a lot of this sports coat,” he said. “It’s the only one I own.” The coat did show up frequently in tandem with what evolved as his lifetime uniform: blue jeans, blue Oxford button down shirt.

His speech pattern sounded peculiar, slow and more Southern than Texan. With a trace of what I believed must have been an almost-corrected childhood lisp. Rarely showing up with lecture notes, he talked about Hemingway and Doby, Salinger and Webb, Faulkner, and Bedichek, and a host of unfamiliar screenwriters. He was not my mentor—he was never particularly close to students or fond of teaching—but at the same time he was not that much older than me. We played a bit of pool and ping pong after classes on occasion, the recreation facility being in the same building. He usually won at table tennis, lost at pool. Some class members, myself included, went with him to the New Isis (continued on next page)
in north Fort Worth, not to see the movie but to dissect the screenplay, a new way of looking at literature. He gave us lists of rare books he wanted, asking us to scout book sales. He’d financed his way through college collecting and selling books, a habit he continued his whole life.

Somewhere in the middle of that first semester it became evident, in a gradual attitudinal shift, that I was in the presence of something special. Something extraordinary. I signed up for the second semester, searching through the list of staffs in the registration catalog until I found the name I wanted: McMurtry, Larry. That second semester, his first novel, *Horseman Pass By*, was purchased by the movies, coming out as *Hud*. The book’s demythologization of the American West, both historic and modern day, remained a lifelong theme. *Hud* was nominated for seven Academy Awards winning three. McMurtry was on his way and out of teaching by the end of that semester. *The Last Picture Show*, *Leaving Cheyenne*, *Cadillac Jack*, *Somebody’s Darling*, *Desert Rose*, *Terms of Endearment* and others followed. His co-written screenplay *Brokeback Mountain* won an Academy Award. Movies stemming from his books were nominated for 34 Oscars, winning 13.

Though his literary focus was different, McMurtry was, in my opinionated view, what Hemingway could have been but was not.

The Metroplex was not McMurtry’s turf, but Arlington did not escape his attention. One of his fictional characters, Danny Deck, ended up in the grips of a migraine and stayed overnight. The Deck character described Arlington as “a vast labyrinth of cul-de-sacs surrounding a giant amusement park. Once in, only a native can find their way back out.”

It’s an annoying (and untrue) passage that reappears every time the topic of mass transportation in Arlington comes up.

One day I read *Lonesome Dove*, just released, a book that began as a hundred-page screenplay (the stars were to be John Wayne, Henry Fonda and Jimmy Stewart), and which, the film not being made, morphed into an astonishing book. I took it to one of the *Star-Telegram*’s more literary-inclined members, telling him *Lonesome Dove* was going to be monumental.

He scoffed. “It’s a Western,” he said.

“*Lonesome Dove* will be to the Western as *Gone with the Wind* is to the South,” I predicted (It’s good to be right about something now and then).

He laughed and handed the book back. It was with considerable pleasure sometime later that I dropped an A.P. story on the friend’s desk, announcing the Pulitzer Prize in fiction: *Lonesome Dove*.

Did McMurtry and I stay in touch, the master giving me writing tips? Regretfully, no. His confidantes and writing associates tended to be women. After college I ran into McMurtry only three times, all at assorted literary events. At one of those in Fort Worth he signed my copy of his latest book. He showed no recognition whatsoever, not at my face, not at my name. Not an issue. In time I taught college classes myself, and most assuredly there are many freshmen former students I will never recognize and who I would prefer to forget.

“You’ve done well,” I told him when he autographed and returned my copy of the book.

“Thanks,” he said, looking behind me at the line of people with books to sign. “Next!”

Glen Sample Ely’s *Murder in Montague* details the brutal 1876 murders of the England family on their farm six miles south of Montague, Texas. A “whodunit” murder mystery, it won the 2020 Al Lowman Memorial Prize of the Texas State Historical Association for the best book in local history. Ely begins by replaying what happened on that August night in 1876, when William England, his wife Selena, and her children Isaiah Taylor and Susie Taylor were murdered, with only Selena’s son Harvey Taylor surviving the attack. On her deathbed, Selena allegedly accused Ben Krebs, a neighbor with whom the Englands were on bad terms. Eventually two others were arrested. What ensues is a melodramatic tale of two men and a boy being charged, convicted, and sentenced for the murders, as well as the efforts of politicians and judges to re-evaluate the case over the course of 18 years.

The Englands had moved into Montague County from Whitesboro less than a year before the murders, in contrast to Krebs and his family, who were established and respected members of the community. Krebs had worked for the Overland Mail Company, was a captain in the Texas State Troops, served as a juror on the County Police Court, and was the Montague County District Clerk throughout his career. Why did the Montague community turn against him?

Ben Krebs, his neighbor James Preston, and 16-year-old Aaron Taylor, Kreb’s brother-in-law, were charged with first-degree murder and convicted mostly on Selena’s purported deathbed testimony and the fleeting eyewitness testimony of her son Harvey, along with a bit of circumstantial evidence. Krebs and Preston were sentenced to death, which was commuted to life in prison just days before their hanging. The juvenile Aaron Taylor also received a life sentence but didn’t last long in the terrible prison conditions, dying in 1880. Ely outlines the continuous pleas from Krebs and Preston for their cases to be re-evaluated, as well as the conditions of the prisons in which they were incarcerated, telling a bleak story of corruption, abuse, overcrowding, and illness.

Ely does a great job of piecing together the trials, convictions, and prison sentences of Krebs and Preston, as well as keeping the reader on their toes about whether the men were actually guilty of the crimes. The author also details the violent conditions in northeastern Texas in the late 1800s, with raids from local Native American tribes, a floundering justice system, and little military and police support to protect its citizens from vigilantes. These sensational murders were well publicized in Texas newspapers, which put pressure on judges and politicians, including multiple state governors, to hold these men accountable for the murders that they likely did not commit.

While this well-researched book has the strengths noted above, some sections drag a little, due to overly detailed discussions of the prison system and the correspondence between the governors and judges, which is not always relevant to the overarching story. It will appeal most to readers interested in crime, the justice system (including trials, trial coverage in the press, sentencing, appeals, and prison conditions), and the struggles ordinary Texans faced on the frontier after the Civil War. There is also the mystery: were the right men punished? In the end, Ely provides a case study of a terrible murder that shook an isolated north Texas community, with lasting effects for years after.

*Whitney Russell is the Metadata Projects Librarian at UTA and has recently entered UTA’s master’s program in history. This is her first contribution to the AHS newsletter.*
This Month in Texas History

**June.** On June 3, 1936, Larry Jeff McMurtry was born in Archer City and raised on his parents’ ranch a few miles outside the town. McMurtry grew up to be Texas’s most famous postwar writer and is remembered by one of his former students, O.K. Carter, in a befittingly unorthodox obituary on p. 6 of this issue of the newsletter.

**July.** In July 1861, three months after the beginning of the Civil War, Federal gunboats began the blockade of the important port city of Galveston, eventually leading to the Battle of Galveston the following year.
Wanda Marshall Day
May 4, 2021

At its May 4, 2021 meeting, the Arlington City Council presented longtime AHS treasurer Wanda Marshall with a proclamation honoring her extraordinary service in preserving the memory of our city’s World War II heritage. For more details about Wanda’s life story, see her “Member Spotlight” interview in the April/May 2020 issue of the AHS newsletter, p. 6.
More than 100 people attended the Dedication Ceremony for the Arlington World War II Memorial. Several World War II veterans attended, along with others having ties to our armed forces. There were even relatives of a few of the men being honored on the plaques. It was a special day for veterans, the Arlington Historical Society, and the City of Arlington.

The World War II Memorial consists of:

- Colonel Neel E. Kearby’s Texas Historical Marker and a life-sized bronze statue.
- A plaque honoring the Arlington heroes who gave the ultimate sacrifice in World War II.
- A plaque explaining the wartime contributions of North Texas Agricultural College.
- A plaque, "In Memoriam – Lest We Forget," celebrating the service and sacrifice of the men and women of Arlington who entered the armed forces (see the text, below).

The program included an invocation, ROTC flag ceremony, guest speakers, dedication of the memorials, and a benediction. We also recited the Pledge of Allegiance, sang “God Bless America,” and heard a rendition of “Taps.”

Mayor Jeff Williams spoke and praised the patriotism and spirit of Arlington (please see text, below). Stephen Barnes, AHS President, read the names of the Arlington service members who gave their lives to the war effort (please see the roster, below). A moment of silence followed.

Rev. Michael Glaspie, a decorated Army veteran, captured the moment in his closing benediction: "Let us remember how precious freedom is."

The event was infused with a spirit of gratitude, recognition, and remembrance. It was a sincere and meaningful tribute to our World War II generation and their sacrifice.

A reception followed at the Fielder House Museum, with folks enjoying refreshments and admiring our World War II exhibit.
The text of the plaque, with the names of the heroes.

**In Memoriam**  
The World War II Casualties of Arlington, Texas

Dedicated by  
The City of Arlington and the Arlington Historical Society

In eternal gratitude for the heroes of this community who served in the Armed Forces of the United States during World War II (1941-1945).

And in honor of our native sons who fell in every quarter of the earth in defense of liberty, and whose names are here recorded.

This monument stands in sacred memory of those who gave their lives to save our nation from the forces of unspeakable tyranny.

"The names of those who in their lives fought for life,  
Who wore at their hearts the fire's centre.  
Born of the sun, they travelled a short while toward the sun  
And left the vivid air signed with their honor."

-- Stephen Spender

Here we remember the price of freedom.

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### ARMY AIR FORCES

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### Mayor’s Proclamation

Whereas, a remarkable generation of Americans rose to defend our country during World War II; and
Whereas, hundreds of residents from the rural community of Arlington, Texas were among those who answered the call to arms, serving in every corn of the earth during the war years; and
Whereas, more than 5,000 students from the North Texas Agricultural College readily joined the sacred cause, pledging their very lives in the global battle for freedom; and
Whereas, countless members of this community, residents, and students alike, served in harm’s way during World War II, enduring great hardship and suffering heavy casualties on battlefields across Europe, North Africa, Asia and the Pacific Islands; and
Whereas, we are gathered here today to dedicate two monuments in memory of their immeasurable sacrifice and the great debt we owe them and their comrades-in-arms; and
Whereas, these monuments, including the Colonel Neel Kearby Statue and the area they now encompass, represent a long overdue and heartfelt tribute to our World War II generation and their priceless gift of freedom.

Now, therefore, I, W. Jeff Williams, Mayor of the City of Arlington, Texas, and on behalf of the Arlington City Council, do hereby proclaim this site to be known as:

**THE ARLINGTON WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL**

If you were unable to attend the ceremony or would like to experience it again, the Fielder House Museum Facebook page has a video of the entire ceremony:

Scenes before, during and after the dedication ceremony for the Arlington World War II memorial

Copy of the program