



Arlington Historical Society

**NEWSLETTER**  
**FEBRUARY-MARCH 2020**

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***Davis Hall Antics, part 2 of 2***  
**by Bunky Garonzik**

*(continued from the December/January issue)*

I have to leave the names out of this one because this caper is still open on the books with the FBI. Gus's room was not the first to fall victim of an explosive device between the walls of Davis Hall. A few years prior, the same technique was used, but this time, the device was a 105 Simulator. You military types know this is a BIG explosion! Lucifer Smith was shaving at 3 am when the explosion occurred. His instinct caused him to hit the deck as he heard the distinctive whistle just prior to the explosion. His medicine cabinet set sail—along with about half of the plaster from his wall. Most of the rooms of two adjoining ramps incurred the same damage. When the FBI arrived (the 105 is a military device), one cadet was still laying motionless in his bunk covered with dust and plaster. They thought he was a goner, but actually, he just went back to sleep. This little prank was clearly over the line. It took many years for me to realize that this stunt, along with taking out an airplane with a 2 x 4 through the propeller (reported in a prior issue) are examples of pranks that simply shouldn't have taken place.

In the old days, many of the Davis Hall residents were fresh off the farm. They came with some valuable 4H knowledge not often

*(continued on p. 4)*

***In This Issue***

***Davis Hall Antics (part 2), p. 1***  
***From the (New) Editor, p. 1***  
***AHS Member Spotlight: Tom Dodson, p.2***  
***Book Reviews on Texas History, p.3***  
***Fake or Fact? p.6***  
***Texas Declaration of Independence, p.7***  
***Books In Brief, p.9***  
***Upcoming Events, p.10***

***From the (New) Editor***  
***Denise Youngblood***

The December 2019/January 2020 issue of the Arlington Historical Society's newsletter marked the end of Tom Dodson's decade-long tenure as editor. Succeeding him is a daunting task.

Unlike Tom, I am not a native Texan—nor have I lived here very long. But since I moved to Arlington in August 2017, I have thrown myself into the pleasurable task of learning Texas history, joining the AHS in spring 2018 and the Texas State Historical Association a few months later. At that time, Tom was thinking about transitioning out of the role of newsletter editor, and given my background as an academic historian, he suggested that I might consider taking it on. I began my apprenticeship by contributing book reviews and a two-part article on Arlington WWII veterans.

*(continued on p. 6)*

**AHS MEMBER SPOTLIGHT**  
Tom Dodson



**This is the first of a series of interviews showcasing long-time AHS supporters, starting with Tom Dodson, who edited the newsletter for the last decade, and transformed it into an important resource for the study of local history.**

How long has your family lived in Texas? Where did they come from?

**My mother's maternal ancestors arrived from Kentucky in what is now Texas c. 1825 (in the Mexican "District of Tenahaw" – an area west of the Sabine River claimed by both the U.S. and Spain, and then Mexico). My father's maternal ancestors came to Texas from Michigan in 1845, the year Texas joined the U.S., and his paternal ancestors arrived in Texas in the 1860s and 70s. (The Dodsons trace their ancestry to the settlement of Jamestown in 1620.)**

Where did you grow up? What are a few favorite memories from your childhood and youth?

**I was born in and grew up in Dallas and later, Grand Prairie. I remember riding the trolley to downtown Dallas to see the doctor who had fitted me with braces and a favorite homeroom and English teacher in the 8th grade who read Longfellow's Evangeline to us. In all four years of high school I delivered the Dallas Morning News in Grand Prairie. Because of the population growth there, I was able to increase my subscribers from just under 100 to 350, and as a result, won a trip to New Orleans with other newspaper boys and our escorts.**

Where did you go to college? How did you meet your wife Jean?

**After graduation from Grand Prairie High School in 1951, I attended Arlington State College (now UTA), when it was a junior college. After those two years, I finished my college career at UT Austin, where I received a Bachelor's degree in accounting in 1955 and an MBA, in 1956.**

**I met my wife, Jean, in the summer of 1951, in Grand Prairie. Some of us boys were "cruising" one Sunday afternoon in a Model A Ford. We met a carload of girls from Arlington who were in a family car, looking for some boys they had seen the week before. Three marriages resulted from that meeting! Jean and I were married in Arlington's First Methodist Church September 7, 1954. (Jean, the daughter of a college chemistry professor, moved to Arlington in 1944 when she was 8; at that time Arlington was a small town of some 5,000.)**

You lived for many years in the NYC area until Exxon moved its HQ to DFW. What were some of the most striking changes when you returned to Texas?

**Arlington had grown from 90k in 1970 (we left Houston, Texas in 1969) to 261k in 1990 (when we moved from the NYC area to Arlington).**

*(continued on p. 5)*

## BOOK REVIEWS ON TEXAS HISTORY

by Denise Youngblood

Stephen Harrigan, *Big Wonderful Thing: A History of Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019).



Stephen Harrigan's gargantuan new history of Texas is 925 pages long, weighing in at more than 3 pounds. Carefully researched and fact-checked by an army of assistants, beautifully produced with lavish illustrations and newly drawn maps, written with the novelist's flair for narrative and local color, this book is itself a "big wonderful thing" that outdoes all its predecessors and raises the bar for popular history. Harrigan, a life-long Texan and best-selling historical novelist, brings the state's long and complicated history to life so skillfully that the book comes close to being a "page-turner," once the reader finds a comfortable position to manage its bulk.

Harrigan begins at the beginning, sketching what is known about the indigenous peoples of the region, like the Karankawas, before moving on to the adventures of the first Spanish explorers, who were never really sure that the territory was worth the costs of keeping it—had it not been for the proximity of the French in Louisiana. Harrigan is adept at reminding readers that Texas was not, of course, "discovered" by European explorers and settlers; it was inhabited by native tribes that had been in conflict with each other over territory for centuries before the newcomers arrived, a problem that grew worse with the arrival of the Comanches from the northern plains. Harrigan is very good at charting the escalation of hostilities; while he doesn't shy away from describing

the brutality of Europeans (especially Anglos) toward the natives, he also emphasizes the brutality of the natives toward each other as well as toward the outsiders. It's a much more nuanced picture than typical in a popular history.

The best part of the book is the more than 350 pages devoted to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, starting with the arrival of Anglo settlers from the U.S., many of whom were slave-owners. The events and heroes of this period are well-known to anyone who knows anything about Texas history, and Harrigan doesn't pretend to offer many new details about the Texas Revolution, the Texas Republic, or the founders, but he tells the story very well and takes care to present the men and women who made the revolution and the republic as fully human, that is, both heroic and flawed.

Harrigan works hard to include groups from traditional accounts (like women, Tejanos, and enslaved African Texans) but doesn't force the issue. Texas statehood, the Civil War, and the terrors of Reconstruction are likewise thoughtfully explored, as are the efforts of the state to attract settlers and rebuild the economy after Reconstruction, even as relations with newly freed African Texans and the Tejano population worsened.

The narrative momentum slows in the book's second half, as it does in every other Texas history that I've read. The

*(continued on p.6)*

*(Davis Hall Antics, from p.1)*

found in the Park Cities. For instance, I'll bet most folks don't know that you can get a full-grown cow to walk up to the fourth floor of D ramp with only a slight tug of the rope. Hell will freeze over before the cow will walk down those same stairs. There are two sure fire methods to get the cow down. One requires a butcher, and the other requires a harness and a crane. A collection was required to come up with the necessary funds for the crane.

Another frivolous, fun-filled fact found first and foremost around the farm, is that chickens will survive quite nicely throughout the two week Christmas Holliday in Dave (Possum) Murray's room if you leave them plenty of feed spread throughout the room. The random pattern of their droppings has kind of an artistic appeal after 14 days. Dave signed up for C ramp commander, and became fair game. Speaking of game, Ron Watson gets credit for bringing the road kill possum from Lake Arlington and hiding it in Murray's room for a few days. I was assigned the task of bringing the ripe Possum to the dumpster with a pair of pliers, but the stream of Jody young men who got to climb in the dumpster got the worse end of the deal.

The question of what to do with old issues of the Shorthorn (the college newspaper) comes to mind. The obvious solution seemed to be to wad up the paper, and see how many loads it would take to fill up the fourth floor of A ramp. Now, the burning question was of how to get rid of the paper. Eddie Osburn decided to do just that. The fire department was not very happy about that caper.

One may ask, how on Earth are all these pranks part of the college learning experience. What possible benefit could be achieved? I can answer that. For instance, if you place a stiff piece of cardboard on an

angle towards Ray Jollisant and Terry Moore's dorm room and pour five gallons of used crankcase oil down the cardboard, at least 97% will run into the room. This is a law of physics. If the granite floor is level, and depending on the temperature and viscosity of the oil, a near perfect circle of approximately 12 feet can be achieved.

Joe Billy Swift and Henry Aerioga were roommates, and both were members of the Rifle Team. Joe Billy could shoot a group of 12 at 300 yards and cover it with a dime. The only guy who could do better was Lanny Bassham (*see endnote*) who got a street named after him after he won the Gold at the Olympics. In association with their studies, Joe and Henry wanted to determine the penetrating power of an arrow through the solid doors of the crapper of two adjoining dorm rooms. In the interest of safety, a volunteer was picked to witness the arrow's flight through the doors from inside the crapper—out of the line of fire, of course. To further reduce the risk of an errant arrow, one of the bunk beds was placed vertical behind the second door with the government issued mattress safely duct taped into position. They couldn't use Rendleman's bed because it had a 35 horsepower Evinrude outboard motor attached to the bed frame. Yet another practical application to what may, at first, seem a little on the crazy side. Joe later served a few tours in Viet Nam—both as an Infantry office and later as a helicopter pilot.

Possibly one of the most practical physics experiments in Davis Hall's history took place in the Spring of 1963. The plan incorporated all the elements of a military exercise and academic skills needed to train Army leaders. This caper required intense planning, a precise list of materials, training, coordination, and a worthy target, with minimal collateral damage. The goal was to

*(continued on p. 8)*

*(AHS Member Spotlight Tom Dodson, from p. 2)*

How did you become interested in history? Do you have a favorite period of Texas history?

**I suppose I developed an interest in history growing up during the WWII days. Favorite period of Texas history: The story of the Texans' decision to declare their independence from Mexico (when Santa Anna gained control of Mexico and abolished the Mexican Constitution) and the war for independence that followed.**

You've devoted an enormous amount of time to the AHS over many years. Why do you feel local history is important?

**A knowledge of local history develops an appreciation of those who came before us and helped make our community what it is today. This then adds to a feeling of pride, fellowship, and common loyalty.**

What else would you like readers to know about you?

**For 20 years after retirement I was a volunteer mentor and English tutor at Venture High School in Arlington, a relatively small school (in AISD) offering an alternative way to get a high school diploma. This was a very rewarding experience as I worked mostly one-on-one helping high school students.**

**Jean and I have travelled extensively all over the world, first as part of my responsibilities with Exxon (Jean was with me on many trips), and then, in retirement, on our own. Jean had been a travel agent when we were living in suburban New Jersey. Our family lived in London 1972-77, and we all loved that experience. Our oldest daughter graduated from the American School in London in 1975 and then attended and received two degrees from TCU. Jean collected many antique pieces during those days. During our stay in London, we traveled rather extensively, including a very memorable British Airways tour of the Soviet Union in 1976 with two of our children (the oldest was at TCU in the States). We returned in 2007 – what a difference from 1975, with freedom from oppressive communism.**

**I had two hobbies:**

**•1<sup>st</sup> - antique automobiles - I had a 1941 Chevrolet and Jean and I had period clothing that we would wear to meet guests to tours of the old Top O' Hill illegal casino on the west side of Arlington – [see photo on p. 9](#)).**

**•2<sup>nd</sup> – old Lionel electric trains – I had quite a large collection and had a layout over our two-car garage in Arlington.**

**Sadly, both the antique car and the train collection were sold before we moved to our retirement community in Fort Worth (in 2015).**

**Jean and I have three children, each with two children, and now three great-grandchildren (all boys). Until recently all were living in Texas. But now two grandsons have moved – one in Anchorage, Alaska, and another in Seattle.**

**I have been a member of the Kiwanis Club of Arlington since 1993, and twice its President. Jean and I were both very active in church throughout our marriage.**

**(Book review, from p.3)**

economic boom that accompanied the discovery of oil in southeast Texas in 1901 isn't as intrinsically exciting as revolution and war, and larger-than-life heroes are pretty scarce until the 1940s. James and Miriam Ferguson simply weren't cut from the same cloth as Stephen Austin or Sam Houston. Harrigan does a great service, however, in retrieving the histories of the Tejano and African American struggle for civil rights; while he does look for positive figures of all races to extol, he doesn't shrink from describing the lynchings, riots, and massacres of Texans of color in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The contributions of Texas and Texans to the US victory in World War II can hardly be overstated nor can the impact of the war on the Texas economy, culture, and society. The last chapters focus on Texas finding its "place in the sun" as a political and economic powerhouse that fulfilled the dreams of the state's founders and put three Texans in the White House. Harrigan ends his book quite fittingly with a Texas road

trip, a loving tribute to the state's vast and varied landscape and quirky iconoclasm. The book concludes with an invaluable bibliography of everything written about Texas's past that is worth reading.

The peculiar title *Big Wonderful Thing* requires an explanation. It's a fragment from a Georgia O'Keefe quote about Texas, written during her brief sojourn teaching art in Canyon in 1912. Given that Harrigan (and the UT Press) invested so much to produce this excellent book, I wish they had invested a little more effort in coming up with a better title. Highly recommended.

**To Be Reviewed in the Next Issue:**

Brian Kilmeade, *Sam Houston and the Alamo Avengers: The Texas Victory that Changed American History*, which sounds like the title of a Marvel comic book but actually provides a solid survey of the battles of the Texas Revolution, from the co-host of the television program "Fox and Friends".

**(New Editor's Comments, from p.1)**

Tom has given me a number of story ideas for this year, and I know I can count on his counsel. I am hoping for your help as well. With this issue, we are launching a series of interviews with long-time members, starting, appropriately, with Tom Dodson (see p. 2). We are also launching a new look for the newsletter using a different word processor. Please feel free to contact me at [denise.youngblood@uvm.edu](mailto:denise.youngblood@uvm.edu).

**Fake or fact? - Arlington sports trivia**

1. The Boomstick is a foot-long hot dog at Texans Rangers Stadium, weighs a hefty 3/4 pounds and can easily feed 2 people.
2. Ballpark nachos, now a favorite snack at stadiums around the country, were invented at the Arlington Stadium, former home of the Texas Rangers.
3. The Statue of Liberty can be lowered into AT&T stadium and then close the retractable roof with a few feet to spare.

(Answers on p. 10)

## MARCH 2, 1836

### TEXAS DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

*by Jannette Workman*

The weather in the small southeastern Coahuila y Tejas town on March 1, 1836, was near freezing, and there were bone-chilling winds in the air when 59 delegates met in a small, unfinished rented wooden building with no coverings on the windows. The name of this town was Washington-on-the-Brazos, which became the first capital of the Republic of Texas. This meeting became known as the Convention of 1836, and three items were on the agenda: 1) to declare independence from Mexico and its dictator-president Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, who wanted complete control over Texas and its settlers; 2) to develop a Texas Constitution patterned after the United States Constitution; and 3) to establish an ad interim government known as the Republic of Texas. The delegates chose David G. Burnet as the republic's ad interim president and Sam Houston as the Commander-in-Chief of the military forces of the republic.

The Texas Declaration of Independence was adopted on March 2, 1836, and during the next several days, all 59 delegates signed the declaration that George C. Childress had written.

Three important events were occurring simultaneously in February and March of 1836: the just-described Convention of 1836, the Battle of the Alamo, and the Runaway Scrape. The Battle of the Alamo began on February 23, 1836, when Santa Anna's army arrived in San Antonio. He immediately started the bombardment of the Alamo compound, defended by fewer than 200 volunteer soldiers. The volunteer army was flying the Mexican flag of 1824 above the Alamo, indicating that they were fighting to re-implement the Mexican Constitution of 1824 and to separate from the Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas—not to separate from Mexico. The Battle of the Alamo lasted 13 days, falling to Santa Anna and his thousands of Mexican soldiers on March 6, 1836. These Alamo defenders never knew that the purpose of the war had changed on March 2—that Coahuila y Tejas had now become the Republic of Texas.

On March 6, 1836, Santa Anna and his soldiers headed east to capture Sam Houston, the Texas army, and the leaders of the Republic of Texas. The Convention ended quickly in the early morning hours of March 17, when the delegates got word that Santa Anna was only 60 miles away and headed eastward. The owners of the building, businessmen Noah T. Byers and Peter M. Mercer, never got their rent because Sam Houston ordered the government and the settlers to retreat eastward to escape capture by Santa Anna, who vowed to destroy everything and everyone in his path, including the government and the army. This became known as the Runaway Scrape, a mass exodus of Texans from the Anglo settlements.

President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna finally caught up with Commander-in-Chief Sam Houston at the San Jacinto River near present-day Houston on April 21, 1836. You will read about this encounter in the April/May issue of the *AHS Newsletter*.

*(Davis Hall Antics, from p.4)*

determine how long it would take to fill a dorm room with 4 inches of water. (This was the height of the granite dam between the room and the crapper.) Adding to the challenge were several additional elements; the occupants of the room would need to be there but not know what was going on, it had to be done at night with no lights, and we didn't want to destroy any personal belongings.

Picking the target was the easy part. Anyone who knew Carl Joe Weatherby would fully understand. His red hair alone was sufficient cause to make him a target, not to mention his attitude in general. Unfortunately, his roommate was Al Ellis—the Jody Commander, the Corps Commander, good student, mister clean, etc. Oh well, casualties of war happen. We entered the room at 02:15 hours by a passkey. (For those who went into the Air Force, that is 2:15 in the morning) While I caulked the pipes that penetrated the granite floors between the rooms below, Lamkin attached the hoses to the two lavatory faucets, and secured them with clamps. These hoses were cut to a length that allowed them to run across the floor for about a foot. The trash can was placed on the hoses to insure they would not flop around. The faucets were the type that had internal springs to insure that the water would not remain on. Pitz, Ellis, Leidolf and Herr silently started removing every piece of furniture as well as books and clothing. These were stacked in the hallway. Garrett sealed the space between the front door and the floor. With the room now empty except for a trash can, a steel bunk bed, and two sleeping cadets, Watson installed the pre-cut wedges to insure the proper amount of water would flow. The patrol exited through the crapper and adjoining room on schedule at 02:22. The goal was to obtain the calculated 4 inch water level by 07:30

hours—the time the cadets would wake up to go to their 8 o'clock class. I accept full responsibility for the flawed plan. The alarm clock was in the hall with everything else. As the morning sun awoke Al at 08:15, he glanced at his watch. (Expletive deleted). They hit the floor with a splash and a splat. By now, the water had breached the 4" mark where the door was sealed and was headed down the stairway. As their good buddies, and fellow Jodies we all pitched in with brooms and mops and helped clean up the mess. Who would do such a thing?

And the times, they are a changin'. Today, these types of stunts would land you out of college and likely in jail, but I'm not so sure that these exploits and capers put such a negative spin on how our lives have turned out. We all graduated from college. Lamkin, Garrett, Rendleman, Swift, Al Ellis, Pitz, Moore, Jollisant, Osburn, Lucifer Smith, Lee Wilson and Murray were all commissioned officers. Most were decorated. Pitz went on to the FBI, Herr became a doctor, Al became the president of the Dallas Bar Association. Scott and Mike Ellis have been successful in business. Heck, I even went to Graduate School at Tulane, started a few businesses and retired at 50. I now spend my time volunteering for the leukemia society and supporting several other charities and writing crap like this. I take full responsibility for any errors, fabrications, and embellishments.

These recollections originally appeared in "Stories and Legends" on the UTA Cadet Corps Alumni Council, [www.utaccac.org](http://www.utaccac.org).

**Editor's note:** Lanny Bassham graduated from UTA in 1969 and was a highly decorated sharpshooter, who held 22 world titles and set 4 world records in 50-m three-position competitions, capped by a gold medal in the 1976 Olympics, an event in which he tied with Margaret Murdock. When he was awarded sole first-place according to a convoluted tie-breaking procedure, he insisted on sharing the winner's podium with Murdock.



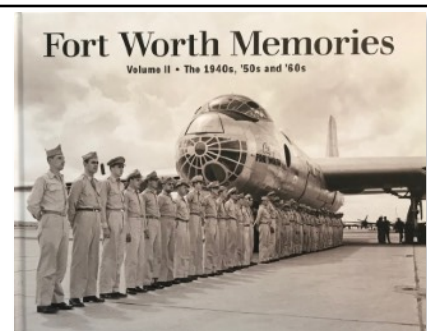


**Tom and Jean Dodson with the 1941 Chevy.**

### **BOOKS IN BRIEF**

*Fort Worth Memories*, vol. 2, *The 1940s, '50s, and '60s*  
(Fort Worth Star-Telegram/Pediment Press, 2019).

The first volume of the *Star-Telegram's* photographic history of Fort Worth, subtitled *The Early Years*, appeared in late 2018 and received a full review in the February/March 2019 issue of this newsletter. The new volume is organized in strict chronological order (rather than thematically, like its predecessor); given the absence of any contextualizing information, apart from brief captions, this wasn't necessarily a wise choice. Readers who already know the history of the dramatic changes in Tarrant County in the postwar period (which is almost every AHS member) can supply their own context. The photo curator Bob Reitz scoured local archives to find pictures that reflect the diversity of our region much better than did the first volume, and his selections are more visually interesting this time around. The book's emphasis is on community and family (no disturbing images or events are recorded), so leafing through its pages is likely to evoke pleasant memories for everyone who grew up here.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### BLACK HISTORY MONTH FESTIVAL

Sunday, February 23, 2-6 pm

Southeast Branch Library, 900 SE Green Oaks Blvd.

A full afternoon of events celebrating African-American History and Culture, starting at 2 pm with a presentation by the Arlington Historical Society, "Speak Their Name and They Shall Live Again," on the African American Cemetery at the Arlington Heritage Memorial Grounds. This will be followed by the Tarrant County College SE Jazz Combo at 3 pm, and "Celebration Time!" at 3:30. Enjoy the AHS displays in the Southeast Branch Library throughout the month of February.

The Black History Month Festival is co-sponsored by the Arlington Public Library and Tarrant County College Southeast Campus.

### ARLINGTON ON TAP

February 11, 6-8 pm

Urban Alchemy, 401 E Main St

Patti Diou, who directed the Levitt Pavilion for a decade until her retirement at the end of 2019, promises to share her most entertaining experiences with the performers in this informal "happy hour with a talk" event.

March 2, 6-8 pm

J Gilligan's Bar & Grill, 400 E Abram St

Mayor Jeff Williams returns to Arlington on Tap to talk about the city's achievements during his tenure and his expectations for an equally successful future in "Arlington in the 2020s."

Arlington on Tap is co-sponsored by Downtown Arlington Management, the Arlington Historical Society, and Arlington Today Magazine.

#### **Fake or Fact?** (From page 6)

1. FAKE. The Boomstick is 2 feet long, weighs more than a pound and can feed a family of 4.
2. FACT. A version of the dish, with cheese sauce and prepared tortilla chips, was marketed in 1976 by Frank Liberto during Texas Rangers baseball games at Arlington Stadium.
3. FACT. AT&T stadium is 320 feet from the blue star at midfield all the way up to the closure of the retractable roof. New York's Statue of Liberty (without the pedestal) is a mere 305 feet in height.

Source: <http://mediaroom.arlington.org/trivia>