

## **Galena Park, Texas: Houston's East Shadow**

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Jack Yates High School

### **INTRODUCTION**

Teaching at Jack Yates High School has been an experience and history lesson of a lifetime. The last four years at this historic institution play like a great symphony with multiple movements. The movements of the “Yates” symphony are filled with great instruments of the orchestra imitating great, good, bad, and some unforgettable memories.

The most exciting and spine chilling moments have been with the Mighty Jack Yates Lions District Championship football team. The most humbling and heart-wrenching memory was the campus-wide celebration of Ms. Hazel Hainesworth Young's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and the naming of the school library in her honor. Ms. Young is the only surviving faculty member of the very first faculty when Yates High School opened in 1926. Ms. Young was personally hired by James D. Ryan, the first Principal of Yates and the namesake of Ryan Middle School. The most difficult and eye-opening moment, which is fifty percent of the motivation behind this curriculum unit, was the reconstitution of Jack Yates High School. The reconstitution of a school is a state-ordered reorganization of a school from top to bottom. The news, or thought of, Jack Yates closing down sent a shock wave throughout the Third Ward community and around the United States. Jack Yates alumni from far and near, young and old, rallied to save their school and all of its history and memories. As a faculty member I felt that it was my duty to attend all of the meetings and gatherings of the “Save Jack Yates” operation. The personal information I gathered in these meetings became classroom lessons for my students in order to preserve and inspire those same feelings of love and devotion for Jack Yates High School.

The alumni of Jack Yates High School have a true, sincere, and honest love for their school and the Third Ward community as well. The overwhelming public support and love for this institution caused me to ask questions and reflect on the history and background of my alma mater and the community surrounding it. I immediately began my own personal search to tell of the history and pride of “Galena Park, Texas: Houston's East Shadow.”

My students will have an opportunity in “Galena Park, Texas: Houston's East Shadow” to learn how to preserve their family history and accomplishments, take pride in owning and preserving land, and discover the real concept of a community and how it operates. I want my students to learn how important they and their families are to their neighborhood. The students will also have an opportunity to perform interviews of specific community members to document the neighborhood's past and present existence. More importantly this curriculum will provide assistance for students in geography and improving map skills.

“Galena Park, Texas: Houston's East Shadow” is a curriculum designed for my music history and choral music classes. This six weeks curriculum will be taught in the fall semester to assist in TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) preparation for my students. It is imperative that all teachers on any campus regardless of the subject they teach contribute to the overall success of our students in passing state mandated exams. I am hopeful that my department members will also use this curriculum in their classrooms.

## **GALENA PARK, TEXAS**

Galena Park is located in Harris County, Texas. Today this small town east of the fourth largest city in the United States is an industrialized area off the Houston Ship Channel originally settled by Ezekiel Thomas. Mr. Thomas was granted this area of land from the Mexican government and moved his family there in the year 1824. Mr. Thomas died around 1835 at which time his land was then sold to Isaac Batterson. In 1836 Mr. Batterson along with his wife and two daughters built a settlement along the banks of Buffalo Bayou that he named Clinton after his former home in New York. During Clinton's inception the town's economy was based on farming and ranching (Ramírez). The farming aspect of Clinton, Texas, and its newness would be the drawing card for my grandparents to settle there.

Approximately forty years later the face of Clinton would change from the farming and ranching settlement of origin to a shipping and transportation port thanks to Captain Charles Morgan. Captain Morgan, the owner of the Morgan Steam Ship Company, ignited Clinton's growth by dredging and excavating a canal on Buffalo Bayou to open transportation on the bayou. Morgan also built a railroad from Houston to Buffalo and Sims Bayous to aid in Clinton's growth (Ramírez).

At the turn of the century the petroleum industry began to capitalize on Clinton's superb location. Galena Signal Oil of Texas, which later became part of the Texas Company, was the very first oil refinery built in Galena Park. Several refineries would later follow Galena Signal Oil. For almost 100 years the settlement was known as Clinton until in 1928 the U. S. Post Office Administration refused to grant Clinton a post office because another post office bearing the name of Clinton existed in the state. This incidence was the catalyst in the name change from Clinton to Galena Park after the Galena Signal Oil Company, which at the time was the town's most leading and productive industry (Ramírez).

The city of Galena Park was incorporated on September 21, 1935. The newly incorporated town also held its first council meeting on this same day. At Galena Park's inception the town was "General Law" city until April of 1946 when an election was held for the purpose for voting on adopting a home rule charter. The citizens of Galena Park unanimously voted for the proposition, and since that date Galena Park has been a city operating under a "Home Rule Charter." Under this charter Galena Park has its own Mayor and four Commissioners who are elected every four years. Galena Park citizens also have their own Police Chief, dispatchers, jail, and police force. In 1937 the Galena Park Fire Department was established (Leslie and Edwards).

The city of Galena Park's small but important and factual claim to fame is not found in the state history books used in public schools to teach Texas history. Historically, General Sam Houston stopped in Clinton on his way to defeat General Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana. On April 10, 1836, Sam Houston used the floor of Isaac Batterson's home to make rafts to get his men across the dangerously swollen Buffalo Bayou. General Houston had to leave behind over two hundred soldiers who were either wounded or ill in a camp near the Batterson home. After crossing Buffalo Bayou, General Houston heroically defeated Santa Ana at the battle of San Jacinto and won Texas her independence. The late Captain Sam Houston III lived and worked in Galena Park some years later (Leslie and Edwards).

## **GALENA PARK INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

I am a proud graduate of Galena Park High School better known as the "Home of the Fighting Yellow Jackets." There have been four generations of my family who are also graduates of Galena Park High School.

In 1917, the same year my grandmother arrived in Clinton, the Harris County School District built Clinton School. Clinton School was a one-room wooden building on the corner of Main and

Third Streets. This small building only housed primary classes while the older students caught a boat to Harrisburg and Broadway and then walked to Milby High School. Five years later the Clinton School added ninth and tenth grade classes.

In 1924 a primary school was established in the Fidelity Addition, later becoming Fidelity School for African-American students. The school later housed in an old barn on Bolden Street in the Galena Manor Addition which still stands vacant today. As the African-American population grew in Galena Park, so did the Fidelity School. The newly structured primary school then became Fidelity Manor Elementary School where I attended the first and second grades before the state passed a law that students had to attend the school in closest proximity to their residences. My family and twenty other families who lived in Galena Park proper were the first African-American families to integrate Galena Park Elementary, Junior High, and High Schools.

### **The Fidelity Schools: Panther Land**

Fidelity Elementary School was later expanded to Fidelity Jr. High for seventh, eighth and ninth grades. High school students then matriculated to the historic Phillis Wheatley High School in the Fifth Ward. The Fidelity Manor School system was unique in that ninety percent of the faculty and staff were graduates of Prairie View A&M University. The Fidelity School colors were purple and gold and their mascot was the panther, yes, the Fidelity Panthers same as the Prairie View Panthers.

Fidelity Elementary School was real neighborhood school where there existed closeness, sense of pride, and love of community among the teachers, faculty, parents, and students. Mrs. Levine, my first grade teacher, had the privilege of teaching not only me and my siblings but also my mother. Mrs. Levine and her family were pillars of the Fidelity community. Mrs. Levine also taught my Primary Sunday School class at St. Matthew's Baptist Church. She was a nurturing and caring soul, often taking me home with her on the days we had evening PTA meetings at which I performed regularly. I guess you can say that Mrs. Levine is partially responsible for my love of performing. I will never forget my first performance under Mrs. Levine's tutelage. Mrs. Levine gave me a speech that I had to memorize for Open House. I was dressed in my Sunday best with a huge petticoat and black patent leather shoes. My performance that night welcomed parents into Mrs. Levine's beautifully decorated and well-organized classroom. I had to stand at the door and deliver my speech every time parents arrived at her door. I strongly remember that those shoes, which I only wore on Sunday and special occasions, began to pinch my feet, and my performance then included a balancing act. I began to recite my welcoming speech rhythmically, shifting from one foot to the other. After what I remember to be a two-hour show, someone was thoughtful enough to place a chair outside the room for me to sit in between performances. The evening would not be lost in focusing on my aching feet but on my personal cast party consisting of a plate of goodies and punch Mrs. Levine had waiting for me while she visited with my parents. Even though I only spent two years at Fidelity Elementary, they were filled with so much love and caring that my eyes water just reliving those wonderful memories. I am thankful for Fidelity Elementary School and its caring teachers.

As I reminisce about my old elementary school, I remember the pride and joy my older cousins and siblings had for Fidelity High School as well as the community. Fidelity High had one of the best athletic, choral, band, science, and agricultural programs in the state. Fidelity could boast about their 98% graduation rate and that 85% of their graduates were also college graduates. The majority of Fidelity graduates in those days, of course, matriculated to Prairie View A& M University. When GPISD opened Fidelity High School, I waited patiently for a day that would never come. I waited for the day I would attend Fidelity High School and wear the purple and gold colors proudly. Again my family home was in closer proximity to Galena Park High, which I attended from the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Fidelity High School, elementary, and junior

high were closed in 1971 and stood vacant for years and fell into disrepair. The closing of the Fidelity schools in my opinion was cruel and unnecessary. The year Fidelity closed, the school administration had just ordered new band uniforms, choir robes, and other equipment that would never be used. When Galena Park ISD closed the Fidelity schools in 1971, the district still owed several hundred thousand dollars on the newer and more modern Fidelity schools. This was the largest waste of tax payer dollars in the history of Galena Park. The school district eventually tore the dilapidated buildings down. The land where this wonderful school once stood is currently a vacant lot. The old alumni of Fidelity High school still have their class reunions and relive the glory days of Fidelity Manor High School. The old Panther spirit is still evident in their school song.

### **Fidelity Manor High School Song:**

*Fidelity Manor High you're our pride and joy  
You're an inspiration to each girl and boy  
Purple is for loyalty, Gold is for purity  
Together they mean fight, fight, fight!!!  
For good old Fidelity  
(Spoken rhythmic chant) "For the purple fight! Fight! For the gold fight! Fight!  
For the purple and the gold FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!"*

In 1928 Clinton Schools were changed to Galena Park schools. Two years later in 1930 the town of Galena Park established its own independent school district. G. P. Smith was the first superintendent of Galena Park I. S. D. The town of Galena Park was bursting at the seams at this time and Superintendent Smith ordered a new high school to be built and the original school became the elementary school and William F. Becker became Principal and would remain as principal of Galena Park Elementary for at least thirty plus years.

### **My Elementary School Principal**

Mr. William (Bill) Becker was my Elementary school principal. Mr. Becker in the eyes of a child was somewhat intimidating with his height and small curl in his lip. Mr. Becker was faced with the task of receiving and accepting young, nervous, scared to death, innocent and shy children – African-American children – into his school. Mr. Becker was fair, honest, and kind beneath his tough-as-nails appearance. Mr. Becker's secretary was Mrs. Harrowing, whose husband, Frank T. Harrowing, was principal of Galena Park Junior High School.

### **Galena Park Elementary**

As I look back on my elementary school years with positive and loving thoughts, I thank God that we did not experience the racial hatred and outbursts that occurred in other states. It would be naïve of me at this time in my life to say that Galena Park schools were trouble free with the onset of integration, but the problems were small due to the fact that we were too young to know or focus on racial differences. The high school students naturally had more problems with the integration process because they were older, more opinionated, felt threatened, and were very open with their racism, therefore, not welcoming their new classmates as eagerly.

My foundational success at Galena Park Elementary had many factors. The first factor was that my grandmother, Mrs. Estella Todd, who was a highly respected member of the Galena Park community and who visited the school on a regular basis. My grandmother walked me to school every morning and afternoon. My grandmother's reputation in the community also established her positive rapport with my teachers. My grandmother also had walked to Galena Park Elementary and junior high regularly to bring my grandfather his lunch. My grandfather was a carpenter who helped build Galena Park Junior High School. Secondly, Mr. Becker was an excellent principal with great leadership skills and some of the most wonderful teachers at Galena

Park Elementary. Thirdly, Mrs. Ferguson, Mrs. Kay, Mrs. Koon, Mrs. Nooner, and Mrs. Laird were fair and honest teachers who treated their minority students with dignity and respect.

### **Galena Park Junior High**

Galena Park Junior High was located at the rear of the elementary school. The Galena Park Jr. High School was the old Clinton High School. My years at Galena Jr. High were extremely moving for my grandmother for she had lived long enough to see her grandchildren and great-grandchildren attend the school that her husband helped construct and their children could not attend.

In 1971 all the Fidelity schools were closed and new problems arose for all involved. The principals from the Fidelity schools were demoted and made assistant principals to the white counterparts at the elementary, junior, and senior high schools. This was not the only injustice born out of integration of these two schools. The counselors only counseled students of their ethnicity, the choir and band directors from Fidelity were made assistants to their counterparts and were given the beginning choir and band students; the coaches from Fidelity were made assistant coaches to their counterparts as well. Looking back on these decisions by GPISD, many were asinine because they were made according to the color of the person's skin and not the content of their character or by the fact that some of the teachers from Fidelity had more advanced degrees and years of experience.

By the ninth grade I was very comfortable and at home with my white classmates. I had been at Galena Park since the third grade was faced with new challenges when the Fidelity students arrived. The hidden or non-existent racism I had avoided in elementary school finally reared its ugly head in Junior High with the influx of additional African-American students. My most difficult decision was how to keep my friends since third grade and make friends with the Fidelity students and not have to take sides. My hero would be my first cousin, Señor Benjamin Jesse Todd, Galena Park Ind. School's first African-American Spanish teacher and department head. Señor Todd was the most popular teacher at Galena Park Junior High. Señor Todd also happened to be the eyes and ears of my mother and grandmother; therefore, I didn't stand a chance of getting out of line.

My fondest memories in junior high are of the Pan-American day programs that Señor Todd and the Spanish club held every year. I had to dance "La Cucaracha" every year along with singing all of the Mexican folk songs he would come to our home to rehearse. Señor Todd along with Mrs. Richie Dell Thomas, Mrs. Pat Travis, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Whatley, Mr. Mabry, Mrs. Smallwood, and Mr. Edward Cathy were the best Galena Park Junior High had to offer. Mrs. Richie Dell Thomas was a very popular local jazz musician in Houston and my choir teacher who solidified my musical foundation at Galena Park Junior High. Mrs. Thomas was the mother of none other than the famous Anita Moore, the vocalist of the Duke Ellington Orchestra. Anita Moore is a graduate of Jack Yates High School where I am the current choral music teacher. I will forever remember these great educators whenever I hum the Galena Park Junior High School song.

### **Galena Park Junior High School Song**

*Memories linger of the days when Junior High was young  
We hailed the school we dearly love where brotherhood prevails  
We----- love----- thee True to thee we'll always be from now and when we're gone  
We'll ne'er forget those happy days-----  
AT GALENA JUNIOR HIGH!!!!!! (yelled)*

## Miss Galena High

Some of the best days and times of my life occurred while I was a student at Galena Park Senior High School. These memories are filled with lifelong friends and classmates. Galena Park High was a vibrant and bustling high school full of pride, activities, and accomplishments. My God-given talent I received from my mother and grandmother opened many doors for me back then and still opens doors for me today. I joined every extra curricular club/organization that I possibly could. I was a member of the choir, “The Group,” Tri-Hi-Y, the German Club, the Spanish Club, the Jacketeers (drill team), the student council, and Youth for Christ (YFC) just to name a few.

It’s customary for all high schools to have their own campus queens, but Galena Park High School chose their queen with a full beauty pageant equivalent to a Ms. America or Ms. Texas pageants. The pageant used local television personalities and former beauty pageant contestants from other pageants for their panel of elite judges. The pageants included opening numbers with all of its contestants dressed alike in a choreographed routine which always had a specific theme. The pageant was divided into three categories: Swimsuit, Talent and Evening Gown competition. On opening night the girls would be divided down the middle and the first half would perform their individual talent routines and the other half would perform the swimsuit portion of the pageant. Each night a contestant would be chosen the winner of the talent portion of the pageant and the swimsuit portion as well. The contestants winning these titles in the preliminaries were automatically assured a place in the Top Twelve.

The second night of the pageant the contestants would simply switch places. If a contestant performed her talent routine the first night, she would perform the swimsuit portion of the competition the next night, hoping that she would have enough points to make the Top Twelve. On the second night of the pageant, there were actually only eight spaces available in the Top Twelve. The contestants in the Top Twelve had the interview portion of the pageant the following weekend beginning with a five o’clock tea with the judges.

The tea was crucial to the winner of the pageant because it was the first big opportunity to score well in the presence of the judges. The tea allowed the judges the opportunity to discover that we were not only beautiful but intelligent. Each of the Top Twelve contestants was required to be escorted to the tea by one of the members of the Hi-Y organization. The tea began with all of the contestants, escorts, and judges socializing and making polite conversation over cucumber and water cress sandwiches, beautifully decorated pastries, mints, tea, and punch. The judges would then interview each contestant individually, asking a series of questions on topics ranging from current events to one’s future goals. The interviews with the judges lasted from ten to twelve minutes after which each constant made her way to the auditorium to prepare for the final pageant to select the next Miss Galena Park High.

I am much honored to say that I am the **only** African-American in the history of the Galena Park High School to wear the crown and title of Miss Galena Park High (Leslie and Edwards). I am also proud of the fact that *I am the only Miss Galena Park High School Queen to win the talent competition three years in a row.* I entered the Miss Galena High pageant in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and finally won the pageant in the 12<sup>th</sup>. As a tenth grade student in the pageant, I sang Roberta Flack’s “Killing Me Softly,” in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade I sang Barbara Streisand’s hit “The Way We Were,” and the year I won I sang my own arrangement of Stevie Wonder’s “For Once in My Life.” In the eleventh and twelfth grades I represented the German Club of which I was a member. I am also grateful that Mrs. Karen Villarreal believed in me enough to allow me to represent our club two years in a row. I still have the red sash with the words “German Club” in silver glitter.

Miss Galena High pageant was as professional as any other beauty pageant. We started the rehearsals months in advance for a sold out crowd of at least 1,200 people. As the rehearsals for the pageant progressed, we had to learn how to walk in the 3 ½ " heels and try on numerous all-in-one swimsuits to see which suit looked the best with our complexions and shapes. The contestants would practice in the rehearsals when, where, and how to walk to the center of the stage if we were lucky enough to be a preliminary winner of a category. My first year as a neophyte in the pageant, I was not taken seriously by the pageant sponsor or my fellow contestants and was never chosen in the rehearsals as possible winner of the talent or swimsuit competition. There existed the "pageant favorites" who had the experience of being in the pageant before and were sure to win the prelims. The very first night of the pageant when even I waited to hear someone else's name called for the winner of the talent competition, I, upon hearing my name which sounded foreign to me, immediately froze from the shock and surprise of winning and had to be led to the center of the stage by the reigning Miss Galena High, Marie Bridges. This is just one of my many experiences in my journey to becoming Ms. Galena Park High.

The founder and organizer of the Miss Galena High pageant was none other than Mr. James (Jim) Trammel. Mr. Trammel produced the first Ms. Galena High Pageant in 1964. He personally orchestrated every facet of the entire pageant. Mr. Trammel was also my government teacher and one of the most popular teachers at Galena Park High School. Mr. Trammel's class was always such fun it's a wonder we ever learned any U.S. government at all. Mr. Trammel, affectionately known as "Jim" will be remembered in the annals of Galena Park High School for his creation of and lifelong work with the Miss Galena High beauty pageant.

### **GALENA PARK'S UNSUNG PIONEER**

Mrs. Estella (Gill) Perry Todd was born in Altair, Texas on November 10, 1893, to Elihue and Matilda (Gill) Perry. Elihue and Matilda Gill fled Louisiana and changed their last name to Perry after some trouble that my grandmother never divulged. After fleeing Louisiana, in 1880, they settled in Altair and later moved to Columbus, Texas. Upon completion of the eighth grade, my grandmother met and married her first husband, Mr. Brown. This union produced a daughter, Ms. Hazel Brown. Six years after Hazel's birth, this marriage would end in divorce. My grandmother's cousins invited her to Houston in 1916 to visit them in 5<sup>th</sup> Ward where she lived with them and attended Sloan Memorial United Methodist Church.

In 1917 my grandmother moved to Clinton, Texas where she and Hazel would live in a group of row houses on Main Street across the railroad track in the "colored addition." My grandmother loved to tell anyone who would listen that when she came to Clinton, the main street, Clinton Drive, was a dirt road, and when it rained, it was a muddy mess, and wagons would get stuck in the thick clay-like mud.

My grandmother joined the Sweet Home Baptist Church, one of only two churches in the colored neighborhood. My grandmother would then meet her second husband, Mr. Edmond Edgar Todd at a church meeting. My grandfather, Mr. Todd, would come to Clinton from Galveston to visit and assist his two brothers who both owned stores. My uncles Henry and Mack Todd owned stores only five blocks apart. My Uncle Henry's store sold breakfast, lunch, and dinner along with sugar, butter milk, fresh eggs, candy, soda, etc. My Uncle Henry and Aunt Ella lived on the opposite side of the store. When the school bus would come to take us to Fidelity, we would assemble on the corner in front of Uncle Henry's store where he would often bring us in and cook us breakfast on his huge stove and would later drive us to school in his car. My Uncle Mack Todd and my Aunt Mae Ella owned the second store which had a porch that stretched across the front from one end to the other with an old metal Rainbow Bread sign on the screen

door. It was because of these two men who lived in Clinton that my grandparents would meet and marry.

February 10, 1919, Mr. Edmond E. Todd and Ms. Estella Gill were joined in Holy Matrimony in Houston, Texas by the Reverend B. R. Booker, a Methodist Minister. My Uncle Mack and Aunt Mae Ella Todd along with E.B. Cebrun were witnesses. My grandparents would later purchase their first piece of land in Clinton and build their home.

Tragedy would strike soon in the lives of the newly wed couple in 1920 when their first born son, Edmond E. Todd, Jr., born January 18, 1920, would die in infancy. My grandparents' love, devotion, and faith would be tested and tried again when almost a year to the date their second son, Nathaniel Todd, would arrive on January 14, 1921, and also die in infancy. After the death of her second son in infancy, my grandmother went to a physician in Houston who performed a surgical procedure to enable her to bear more children. In 1922 my grandparents were again blessed with a son, Benjamin Jesse Todd, Sr., followed by Henry Louis Todd, Edmond Todd, and my mother, Edwina Janette Todd-Sloan.

My grandparents' difficult start in their lives together only strengthened their faith and belief in God. In the early days of this growing city on the banks of Buffalo Bayou, there was line drawn between the black and white populations. The small colored neighborhood had other families who also experienced the death of loved ones. Many of the African-American families would take their loved ones back to their native homes to be buried. As early as 1920 there did not exist one local cemetery that would bury citizens of color. I remember my grandmother telling me that they would dress and prepare the deceased for burial in the home, would hold the wake in the home, and then take the deceased by wagon the next day to their home town. As a child, I remembered our neighbor, Mrs. Mary Wilson, had her brothers' wake in their home with his body in their living room and family members keeping an all night vigil until the final services the next day.

The biggest problems would occur when the bayou would leave its banks and make travel anywhere impossible. Not only was the main road muddy and impassible, but also the family of the deceased was stuck with a decaying body in their home. My grandmother said that in a couple of instances families buried their loved ones on their property. This was the reason that my grandparents and their neighbors decided to form the Sweet Home Free Mission Christian Aid Society.

My grandmother and grandfather were true Christians who left their mark on their children and grandchildren. My grandmother, Estella "Big Mama" Todd, peacefully entered into eternal rest on January 1, 1990. Big Mama was surrounded by her two surviving children, Edwina and Henry, along with me and my siblings. We were summoned to Park Plaza hospital by her physician that New Year's Eve for the end of an era. I sent the rest of the family home and stayed with Big Mama until 2:00 a.m., only to be called by the hospital at 3:33 a.m. to announce her passing. Big Mama was lovingly memorialized in the local newspaper, and we received a proclamation from the mayor for her pioneering spirit and community service (Pierce). When I think of their selfless acts to lend a helping hand to family members and anyone in need, I am moved emotionally to honor their memory in the lyrics of this old traditional Negro hymn popularized by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King:

### **Then My Living Shall Not be in Vain**

*If I can help somebody as I pass along  
If I can cheer somebody with a word or song  
If I can show somebody that he's traveling wrong  
Then my living shall not be in vain.  
If I can do my duty as a Christian ought  
If I can bring back beauty to a world once wrought  
If I can spread love's message that the Master taught  
Then my living shall not be in vain.*

*(Chorus)*

*Then my living shall not be in vain  
Then my living shall not be in vain  
If I can help somebody as I pass along  
Then my living shall not be in vain.*

### **THE CHRISTIAN AID SOCIETY**

The Christian Aid Society of the Sweet Home Free Mission Baptist Church was organized in 1923 in Clinton, Texas. Their purpose was to purchase an acre and a half of land to be used as cemetery for the colored residents in Clinton, Texas. The members of Sweet Home Free Mission Baptist Church met informally in November of 1922. After many discussions and prayers the Christian Aid Society of the Sweet Home Free Mission Baptist Church had their first formal meeting on January 16, 1923, in the home of Brother and Sister James Maxey directly across the street from my grandparent's home. The members of the Christian Aid Society met regularly in the homes of their members, where they would meet and pay dues of fifty cents and a dollar to raise money to buy lumber, nails, and wire for the fence around the cemetery and other supplies needed to accomplish their goals.

Each meeting of the Christian Aid Society opened with the singing of a hymn and the reading of the scripture followed by a prayer and sometimes another song. The President would open the business portion of the meeting where the secretary would read the minutes from the last meeting and various committees would make their reports. Before the meeting of the CAS would close different members were allowed to stand and testify about Gods' goodness. My mother as a small child would sing at the meetings of the Society at the request of my Grandmother. The members of the CAS also used Roberts's Rules of Order.

### **The Constitution of the Christian Aid Society**

#### **Article One**

This body shall be called the Christian Aid Society of Sweet Home Free Mission Baptist Church.

#### **Article Two**

The officers shall consist of a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasure and various committees.

#### **Article Three**

This body shall carry a sick benefit department; its officers shall consist of a treasurer.

#### **Article Four**

No Applicant can become a member of this body except he be a member of this church and in good standing.

**Article Five**

No applicant can become a member of this body until they have fully paid their joining fees and the price of their badge.

**Article Six**

The joining fees of body will be .50 cents –Burial Dues; .10 cents for benefit dues and \$1.00 for badge.

**Article Seven**

The monthly dues shall be .50 cents burial dues; 10 cents sick benefit dues.

**Article Eight**

Any member becoming three months in arrears in monthly dues shall be put on the drop list and therefore lose all rights in this body until the said dues have been paid up.

**Article Nine**

This society shall provide at the death of a member a grave in the Christian Aid Cemetery and \$30.00 to buy or pay on coffin.

**Article Ten**

It shall be the duty of this body to provide refreshments for any member that is sick and needs assistance.

**Article Eleven**

No outside person shall be permitted a grave in our cemetery until price of the grave has been fully paid.

**Article Twelve**

Prices of graves shall be \$8.00 for grown people and \$4.00 for infants or small children up to 6years; over 6 years -\$8.00.

**Article Thirteen**

Each member must provide himself with a receipt book and bring the same book to the monthly meeting. Any member leaving their receipt book at home will be assessed a fine of 25 cents.

**Article Fourteen**

Any member in good standing becoming seriously ill is exempted until he has sufficiently recovered and can resume their employment

**Article Fifteen**

Amendment to the Constitution  
Burial fees are raised from \$30.00 to \$50.00.

**Article Sixteen**

The Christian Aid Society will pay to any one who becomes a member less than a year \$25.00 dollars until the year expires. They will then receive full benefit of \$50.00 dollars at death.

**Article Seventeen**

The Christian Aid Society by motion raises the death benefit from \$50.00 dollars to \$60.00 dollars.

**Article Eighteen**

August 12, 1929, the Christian Aid Society raises burial benefit from \$60.00 dollars to \$100.00 dollars.

**Article Nineteen**

October 12, 1931, any one becoming a member of the Christian Aid Society will receive \$50.00 and after a year they will receive the full amount of \$100.00 dollars at death.

## **Members of the Christian Aid Society**

The members of the Sweet Home Free Mission Baptist Christian Aid Society were:

Brother James Maxey.....	Sister Anna B. Maxey
Brother Hampton Maxey.....	Sister Ruth Maxey
Brother Isaiah Edwards .....	Sister Jeanette Edwards
Brother Edmond Todd*.....	Sister Estella Todd*
Brother William Jackson, Jr. ....	Sister Lucile Jackson
Brother Frank Bess.....	Sister Hettie Bess

(\* My grandparents)

The officers of the Sweet Home Free Mission Baptist Christian Aid Society were:

Brother James Maxey – President  
Brother Edmond E. Todd – Vice President and Treasurer  
Brother William Jackson – Secretary  
Sister Estella Perry Todd – Assistant Secretary (in 1924 became Secretary)

These six couples were the founding members of the S.H.F.M.B. Christian Aid Society who faithfully put their pennies, nickels, and dimes together for the success of this important organization. While reading the archival records of the CAS, the men are listed as “brother” and the women are called “sister.” In the early African-American Churches the members of the congregation always referred to each other as brother and sister, representing their relationships and oneness in Christ. Today in the “traditional” African-American Protestant churches these titles are still used.

The Christian Aid Society’s dual purpose of providing a final resting place for their loved ones was accompanied by the overall well being of their fellow man. The members paid ten cents for their “Sick benefit dues” to give assistance to members during illnesses and the birth of their children.

## **The Christian Aid Society’s First Loss**

The Christian Aid Society in the period of a year would have a total of \$350.00 and accrued interest of \$8.19 equaling a grand total of \$358.19 in their account at First National Bank. This was a very successful and lucratively financial organization in 1923 for people of color. The Christian Aid Society with their first taste of success would soon experience their first loss of founding member, Brother Frank Bess in March of the same year. The Sick Benefit committee treasurer paid \$5.00 to the Bess family at the onset of Brother Bess’s illness. The Christian Aid Society would then pay Sister Hettie Bess \$30.00 dollars after the death of her husband. My grandfather, Edmond Todd and James Maxey purchased the lumber, nails, and wire to build a coffin for Brother Frank Bess. The men of the Christian Aid Society as a team would dig the grave and provide a headstone for the deceased. Brother Bess would be the first person interred in the CAS Cemetery. A month later Brother Bess would be joined by the nine-day-old infant of Brother and Sister Joe Louis.

## **Songs, Ceremonies and Rituals**

The Christian Aid Society met regularly once or twice a month over the next twenty years. The members of the Christian Aid Society would rehearse spirituals and hymns to sing at funerals. The songs were categorized as: songs for eulogy, songs for dismissal and meeting songs. On April 13, 1923, the members decided that the “sisters” of the Christian Aid Society would wear white dresses and the “brothers” would wear black suits at member’s funerals with their Christian Aid Society badge. I still have in my possession my grandmother and grandfather’s CAS badges now approximately eighty-three years old. The ribbons are made of purple satin or a

deep wine in their original color. My grandmother's badge has a round satin flower at the top of the badge and my grandfather's badge is identical but without the extra added feminine touch. The badge is about eight or nine inches in length with the initials (upper case) C.A.S. and underneath these letters are two small squares, one on each end with a smaller font of the words OF THE (upper case) with the initials of S.H.F.B.C. with three lines beneath it followed by a partial wreath with a bow at each end.

The following songs are taken from the archives of the Sweet Home Free Mission Baptist Church. Some of the hymns and spirituals I recognize and can sing, while others I have no knowledge of their origins or melodies. In some of the records of the CAS the songs are also identified by their numerical order in the hymn book used. My grandparents were married in a Methodist Church and members of a Baptist Church so these hymns are likely from one or both of the aforementioned hymnals.

### Christian Aid Society Hymns and Spirituals

A Charge to Keep I Have	There is Rest for the Wearied
Ain't It a Shame How They Treated My Savior	The Hand of God on The Wall
At Last and Did My Savior Bleed	I'm A Child of the King
At The Cross	What A Wonderful Change In My Life Has Been Wrought
Be Thou Astonished of My Soul	What Did the Only Son Endure?
Beulah Land	Swing Low Sweet Chariot
Bless Be the Ties That Bind	Nearer My God to Thee
Come Ye That Love the Love the Lord	My Soul Be O Thy Guide
Did Christ for Sin Not Weep	Just A Few More Seasons to Come
Don't Let it be Said too Late to Enter the Golden Gate	Oh Where Shall I Be When that First Trumpet Sound?
Father I Stretch My Hand to Thee	Oh Think of that Home Over There
God's Going to Trouble the Water	Do You Think I'll Make a Soldier
Going to Watch, Fight and Pray	Oh For a Closer Walk with God
Guide Me O' Thou Great Jehovah	Oh That I Knew Some Secret Place
I Am Saved by the Blood	I Know His Blood Can Make Me Whole
I Heard the Voice of Jesus Saying	Surely Jesus is Able to Carry Me Through
I'll Meet in The City	In My Heart
I'll Meet You on the Kingdom Shore	Oh Lord Prepare for that Day
I'm Pressing On	When I'm Reading My Title Clear
I've Seen the Lightning Flashing	Oh Hallelujah it is Done
Jesus Paid it All	Tis' A Promise of God
Life's Railway to Heaven	A Few More Tears Shall Roll
Long As I Live I'll Hasten to His Throne	I'm Standing Right Here and Wait Till Jesus Comes
Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone	Lord Jesus I Want to be Whiter Than Snow
My Father is Rich in Houses and Land	I Pray Outside the Gate
My Soul is Bound for the Mountain	Jesus Blessed Jesus
Oh Christian Home in Glory	I'm a Soldier in the Army the Lord
Preach the Word	Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross
Rest Beyond the River	A Light to Shine Upon the Road
Shine On Me	Life Is Like a Mountain Railroad
There is a Little Wheel Rolling in my Heart	Come and Let's Go to That Land

There is No Rest For You	Pass Me Not Oh Gentle Savior
We Shall Be Like Him	What a Friend We Have in Jesus
We Will Understand it Better By and By	Bye and Bye When the Morning Comes
When they Bow Around the Throne	Walk in the Light

While studying the hand-written ledger of the Christian Aid Society, there were two music books or hymnals listed as sources for the songs they sang and perfected at every meeting. The sources unknown to me are the *Victory Song Book* and the *Gospel Voice*. This also explains why we always had a collection of hymnals kept in our piano bench so when we went to Mission with my grandmother, my sister and I had our own hymnal.

### **A Personal Tragedy**

My grandmother would once again in her life experience heartache and sorrow on November 15, 1933, just five days after her fortieth birthday and pregnant with my mother when my grandfather would pass away. The Christian Aid Society of the Sweet Home Free Mission Baptist Church and her family would see her through one of the toughest times of her life. My grandmother said, “Most of the ordeal is a blur but I do remember how Brother and Sister Maxey and the Jacksons handled most of the funeral arrangements along with my son Henry. Brother Maxey built Edmond’s coffin with special care for all of his hard work and years in the Christian Aid Society.”

My mother was born on February 25, 1934, and named Edwina which was as close as my grandmother could get to Edmond Edgar Todd. My grandmother faithfully and dutifully continued her work with the CAS involving my mother as soon as she could. My grandmother would raise my mother alone, and she would live another fifth-three years. As time grew on all of the original members of the Christian Aid Society would pass away except for my grandmother and Sister Ruth Maxey, the wife of Hampton Maxey. When Mrs. Maxey was sick, my grandmother would visit her taking her famous chicken soup and her bible. My grandmother never missed an opportunity to read scripture, sing a song, pray a prayer, and feed someone. Before Sister Maxey died, her children came to move her to California with them, leaving my grandmother the only soul survivor in Galena Park.

After many years of faithful service to the Galena Park and Fidelity Additions, most of the men in the Christian Aid Society were too old and the Christian Aid Cemetery fell in to disrepair and was forgotten. It would be several years later when the state decided to build a bridge over the ship channel that the silent cemetery would spring to life again.

My mother and father would meet at Phillis Wheatley High School and later marry. The old Sweet Home Free Mission Baptist Church’s congregation was dying with many of its old members. My parents would then leave the church of my mother’s youth and join St. Matthew’s Baptist Church. They eventually convinced my grandmother to leave her old church, the memories where she met and had worked side by side with her husband, the no longer functioning Christian Aid Society that also was not embraced by the new pastor of the now Sweet Home Missionary Baptist Church. My grandmother joined St. Matthew’s Baptist Church and jumped right in again feet first working out her soul’s salvation. My grandmother joined the choir, the Mission, taught Sunday school classes, and eventually became the “Mother of the Church.” By the time the sun began to set in her life, she had been the General President of the Mission for 65 years, taught the Women’s Bible class for 45 years, assisted my mother in rearing all of my siblings, remained a pillar of respect in Galena Park and a role model for me especially, and buried five of her seven children and healed the sick.

Estella “Big Mama” Todd may be the unsung African-American pioneer and heroine of Galena Park, but my memories of “Big Mama” will continue to play like a Stradivarius violin on

the strings of my heart. I am sure that there are many more unsung heroes of color in large and small towns around the world. It is my desire that they will one day find a voice through their descendants. I have only begun chip away small pieces of a great iceberg which are the untold stories of the African-American contributions great and small to Clinton, Texas, Galena Park, Texas, and the Fidelity neighborhood.

### **The Christian Aid Society Cemetery Rediscovered**

My grandmother was one of the strongest people I had the privilege of knowing. In 1972 I remember answering our front door for two very well dressed Caucasian men in suits seeking Mrs. Estella Todd. These men were lawyers representing the law firm of Austin Northrop, Kirkpatrick & Steeber. These attorneys represented the company in charge of constructing the new 610 bridge over the ship channel. After another great rain in Houston one weekend, a crew of men returned the following Monday to find parts of coffins, pieces of bones, and headstones floating in the standing water left from the rain. The work on this portion of the freeway was stopped immediately. The construction crew had disturbed sacred, consecrated ground.

The Christian Aid Society Cemetery was approximately 40,000 square feet running 200 feet east and west and 200 feet north and south, the burial area located in the northeast quarter of the tracts described in the CAS deed, #6339 page 61, and Volume 216, page 239, of the Real Property Records of Harris County, Texas. My grandmother accompanied by her children and her two eldest grand children and one daughter-in-law would have to go to court and relive the desecration of the resting place in which her husband and friends once rested in peace. I remember listening to my relatives discussing the court case and my grandmother weeping about the pain this situation was causing her.

The outcome of the case was that the title searches had not been thoroughly executed and, therefore, created a problem. The Strickland Construction company was, therefore, in violation of the Vernon's Annotated Civil Statutes, Article 912(a) and Article 920a-1, thereby directing Strickland Construction to "cause the remains of those buried in the aforesaid private burial ground disinterred and reburied in a proper manner in keeping with all the respect due the dead and in a active, duly operated cemetery in Houston, Harris County, Texas; including coffins and headstones for all names listed in the record book provided by Mrs. Estella Todd, wife of Edmond Todd and last surviving and founding member of the Christian Aid Society Cemetery." The Christian Aid Cemetery had approximately 75 to 80 persons interred. My grandmother, I was told, was so convincing in the delivery of her testimony that she moved the judge and the jury with her strong Christian beliefs and her story of how and why the Christian Aid Society was established. My grandmother and other family members had the opportunity to oversee the relocation of the CAS Cemetery and its inhabitants.

### **CONCLUSION**

"Galena Park, Texas: Houston's East Shadow" has been a bittersweet experience for me partially because it has in someway exposed my vulnerability because it's so personal. I am grateful for Stephen Fox and his insight and wisdom to direct me to tell the story of my family's triumphs and tragedies living in Galena Park, Texas. My mother never knew her father due to his untimely demise months before her birth, but she spoke of him often because my grandmother made it her duty for my mother to know what a wonderful man he truly was. My grandparents were not college-educated people, but their amazingly wonderful lives speak volumes to who they were and how they lived. They were simple down-to-earth people who believed in God, family, community, and the country they lived in. The greatest lesson I have learned from my grandparents that when life tasted of lemons, they made lemon pies and had a party. The two of them together faced so many tragedies in their lives that couples today would have given up,

divorced, and lived the rest of their lives with bitter resentment. My mother taught this lesson to me, and I have passed it on to my students.

I really hope this curriculum will inspire all people of color whose history is often overlooked and left untold to “tell the story.” I am also thankful to my Jack Yates family for reminding me of how important the love of community and school is too powerful to be ignored. The love of family, community, and schools are where our greatest contributions to society begin and are nurtured. I am always excited for the chance to teach a new curriculum to explore the undiscovered territory in the minds of my students.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Lesson Plan One**

#### ***Objectives***

The students will:

- Choose two or three locations of interest in the city of Houston and surrounding suburbs and discover what other buildings have been in the exact same location.
- Create a list of the addresses that you and your family have resided in at one time or another.
- Interview maternal and paternal grandparents on family history and relocating from one state or town to another.

#### ***Materials Needed***

The students will need access to the computer lab, maps of their neighborhoods, maps of the city of Houston, and of their hometowns. The students will also need paper, pen, and pencil.

#### ***Activities of Implementation***

The students will begin class with a discussion of the places and venues in the city they like to attend. The students will take turns going to the chalk board creating a master list of their selected locations.

Next the students will compile a list of cities that their ancestors may have originated from. This activity will require homework for each student to have a dialogue with their grandparents and great grandparents (if applicable) to gather and document their family’s history.

The students will select the Toyota Center, Minute Maid Park, or the Reliant Center to perform a title search of the land on which each of these Houston landmarks sits. The students may work individually or in groups. They will also take pictures of these present day buildings to compare with photos of the past of what was previously there.

#### ***Evaluation***

The students will make classroom presentations in front of their peers.

- 25 points – quality of research
- 25 points – strong and well organized presentation
- 25 points – quality photos of locations past and present
- 25 points – for participation in more than one presentation

## Lesson Plan Two

### *Objectives*

The students will:

- Create a chart of the birthplaces of their first, second, and third generations of their family's matriarch.
- Prepare a poster using pictures to illustrate their generational matriarchs.

### *Materials Needed*

The students will need paper, pen, pencil, and a poster. The students will also need pictures of their family members.

### *Activities of Implementation*

The students will begin class with a discussion about family reunions. The students will give the name of their family's reunion naming their matriarchs. The students are expected to carry out the assignment whether their matriarch is alive or dead. The students will also document where their family reunions are held often indicating the origin of their families.

The students must give the full names of the relatives to see if some of the names repeat from one generation to another. **Example:** Elizabeth Marie (1<sup>st</sup> generation), Faye Marie (2<sup>nd</sup> generation), Shalin Marie (3<sup>rd</sup> generation) and Zakeia Marie (4<sup>th</sup> generation).

### *Evaluation*

- Oral group evaluation (90% or better for mastery)
- Oral presentation of material (90% or better for mastery)
- Quality of documented material(s) (95% or better for mastery)

## Lesson Plan Three

### *Objectives*

The students will:

- Create a chart of the birthplaces of their first, second and third generation patriarchs in their family.
- Create a collage using pictures of their family patriarchs.

### *Materials Needed*

The students will need paper, pen and pencil, and a poster. The students will also need pictures of their family members.

### *Activities of Implementation*

The students will begin class with a discussion about family reunions. The students will give the name of their family's reunion naming the patriarch. All students are expected to carry /participate in the assignment whether the patriarch is alive or dead. The students will also document where their family reunions are held often indicating the origin or hometown of the patriarch.

The students must use the full name of their relative(s) to see if some of the names repeat from one generation to another. **Example:** Robert McKinley, Sr. (1<sup>st</sup> generation), Robert McKinley, Jr. (2<sup>nd</sup> generation) and Mason McKinley (3<sup>rd</sup> generation)

### ***Evaluation***

- Oral group presentation (80% or better for mastery)
- Oral presentation of material (80% or better for mastery)
- Quality of documented material (90% or better for mastery)

### **Lesson Plan Four**

#### ***Objectives***

##### The students will:

- Research the composers of the songs the Christian Aid Society members sang at their monthly meetings.
- Research the lyrics of the songs in various denominational hymnals.
- Research Baptist and Methodist hymnals published from 1920 to 1950.
- Perform at least two of the songs listed in the chart of the CAS song selections.
- Research Protestant hymnals from 1980 to the present day to see how many of these songs are still in publication.
- Research for the two sources, the *Victory Song Book* and the *Gospel Voice*.
- Research the CAS songs by the title and the first line of the songs.

#### ***Materials Needed***

The students will need paper, pen, and pencil. The students will need access to the Internet and the computer lab. The students will also need various denominational hymnals with different copyrights. The students will also need access to a piano/keyboard to learn the melodies of the selected pieces of music.

#### ***Activities of Implementation***

The students will begin class with a discussion of metered and non metered hymns. The students make a list of hymns sung at their individual churches. Each student will receive a list of the hymns and spirituals from the Christian Aid Society archives. The students will put a check by the songs on the list they sing at their churches or have heard.

The students will select two songs to learn from the CAS song list to perform in class. The students may also wish to perform in a group such as SSA, SAT, SATB or TTBB.

The students will also research the list for songs by the same composer(s). The students will have an opportunity to research the hymnal “the Gospel Pearl” to see if its prerequisite is the Gospel Voice.

The students must also present the information about their songs orally for their classmates.

#### ***Evaluation***

- Oral performances solo or in an ensemble (85% or better for mastery)
- Oral class presentation of historical backgrounds found on hymns and spirituals(80% or better for mastery)
- To perform one of the CAS songs on the African American History program (90% or better for mastery).
- To teach the choir one of the songs off the CAS song list

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