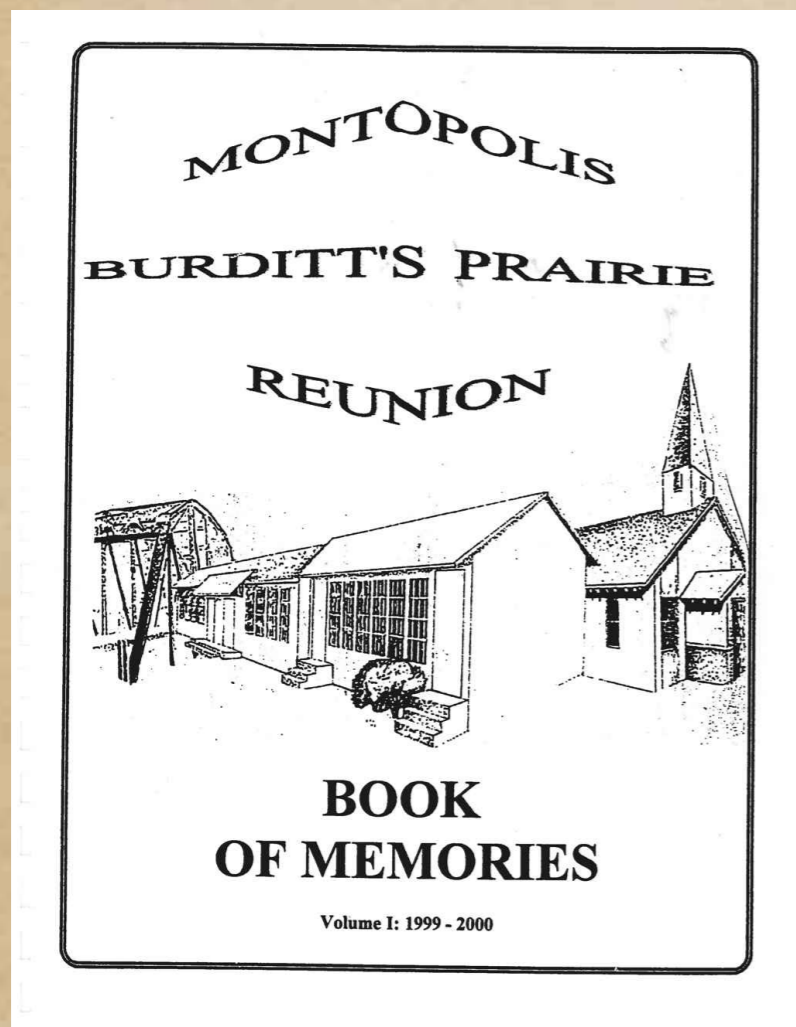


Montopolis Negro School

Austin Neighborhoods Council, 23 August 2017

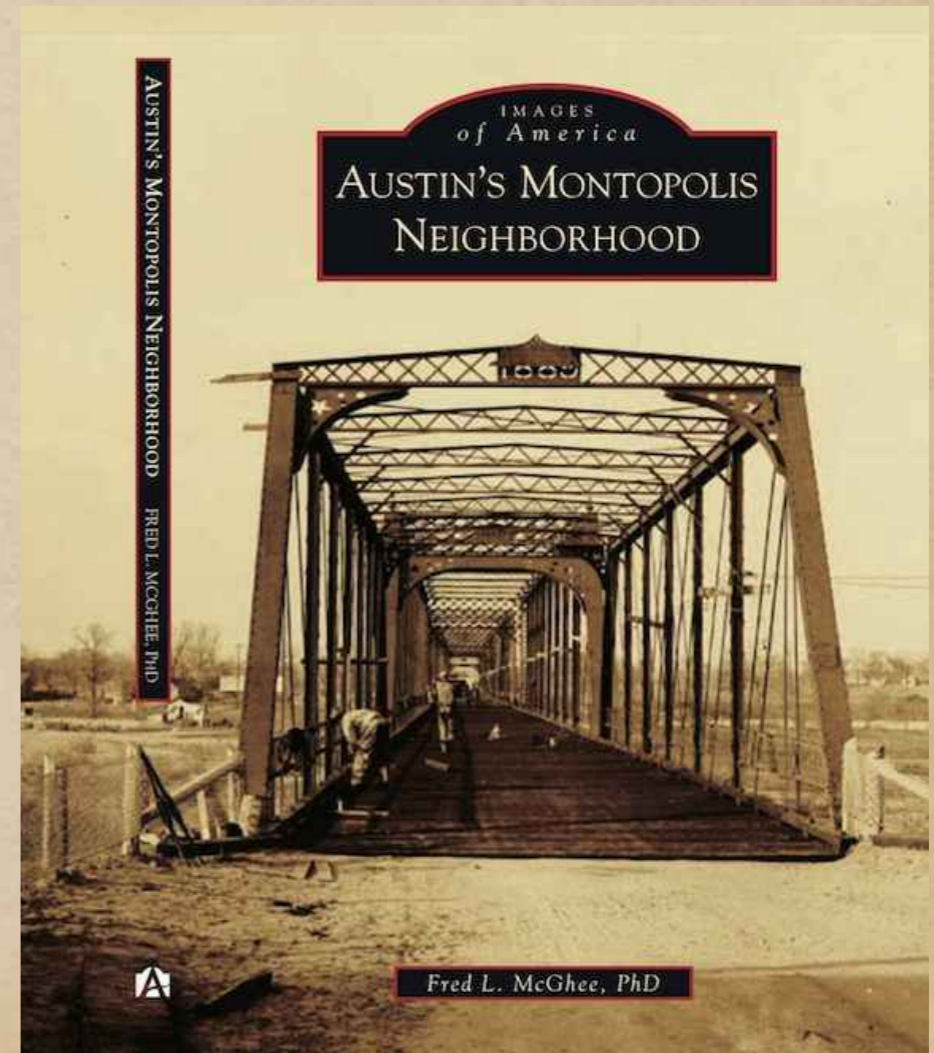


Fred L. McGhee, Ph.D.

Author, "Austin's
Montopolis
Neighborhood"

Vice President
Burditt Prairie
Preservation Association

www.burdittprairie.org



The Montopolis School for Negro Children



Montopolis Negro School



Montopolis Negro School

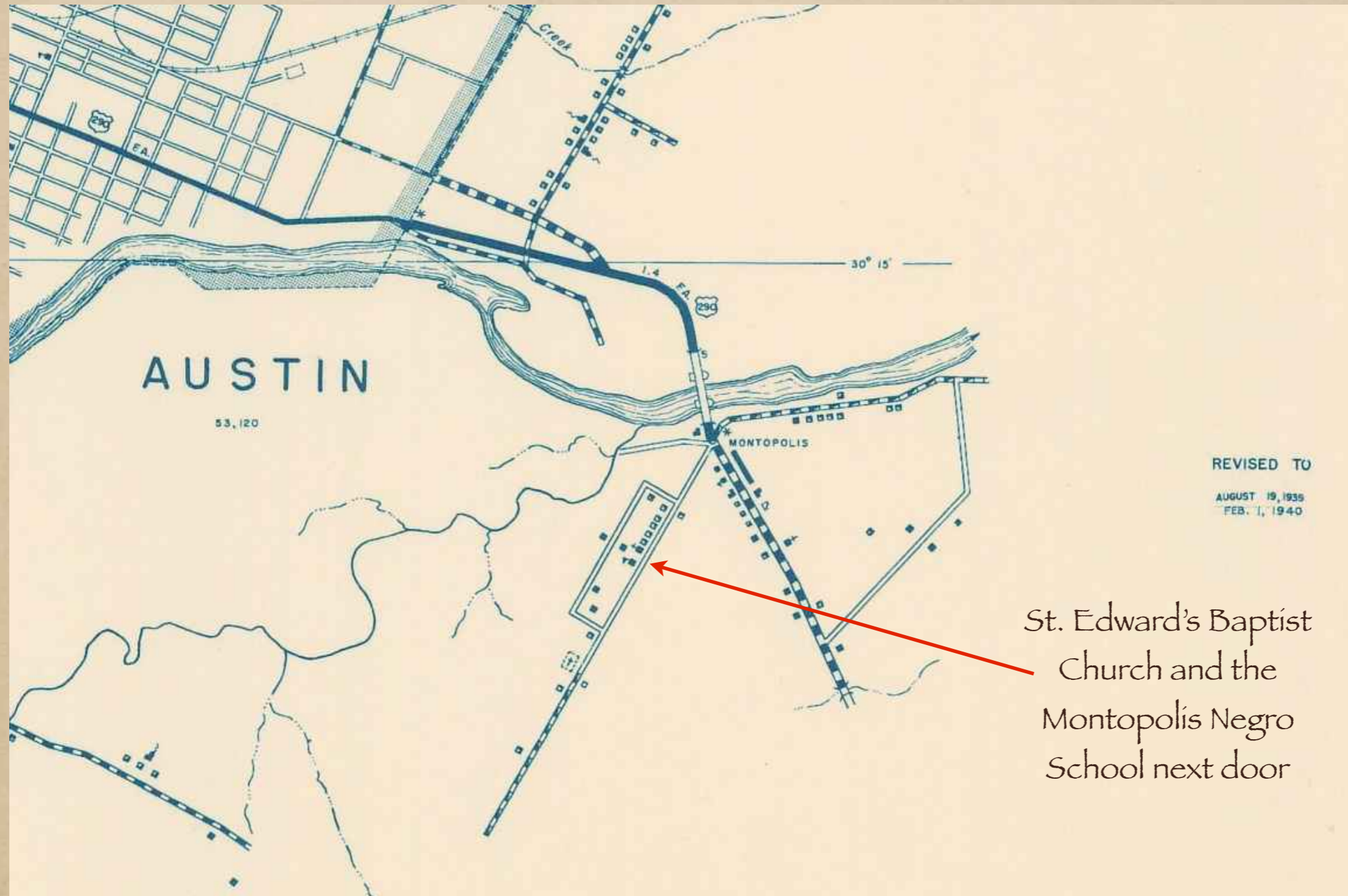


School/Church Timeline

Year	Milestone	Source
circa 1891	School is established as Colorado School No. 34	Montopolis School Reunion Book, 1999
1903	St. Edwards Baptist Church moves to donated land at what was 408 Montopolis Drive	Montopolis School Reunion Book
ca 1891-1935	As with most black schools it serves as more than just a school. The school and its pastoral surroundings also serve as an important community center and are used for civic functions such as annual Juneteenth celebrations, baseball games and BBQ's.	Travis County Historical Society, 2014
1935	The original one room school building is destroyed by a storm. St. Edward's Baptist Church donates 1.82 acres of land at the school's present location on Montopolis Drive. An old Army barracks building from Camp Swift is procured to serve as a replacement school.	Montopolis School Reunion Book, 1999, Travis County Deed Records Vol. 520, p. 280
1952	City of Austin begins annexing Montopolis	<i>Austin's Montopolis Neighborhood</i> , p. 7-8
November 1952	Colorado School District No. 36 transfers the school to the Austin Free Public Schools	Travis County Deed Records Vol. 1297, p. 401
1952-1955	The school building is renovated and supplied with new equipment and a new room is added to the building that serves as a classroom and lunchroom. The new room also has toilets and showers obviating the need for an outhouse.	Montopolis School Reunion Book, 1999
1955	The Austin Free Public Schools open Allison Elementary School	<i>Austin's Montopolis Neighborhood</i> , p. 48
March 1962	Austin ISD officially ceases operating the Montopolis School	Montopolis School Reunion Book, 1999
1963-1964	Austin ISD places the Montopolis School up for auction and starts receiving bids	May 11, 1964 Austin ISD minutes
August 1967	Austin ISD accepts the bid of O.A. Willhoite for the school property. The winning bid was \$5,102.	July 26, 1967 Austin ISD minutes
December 1968	David Willhoite deeds the property to the Montopolis Church of Christ with Ross and David Willhoite as Trustees	Travis County Deed Records Vol. 3604, p. 1244
November 1970	The City of Austin secures road easements through the property	Travis County Deed Records Vol. 3953, p. 725
August 1987	Ross and David Willhoite deed .740 acres of the original 1.82 acre tract to the City of Austin	Travis County Deed Records Vol. 10395, p. 414
1990	City of Austin condemns part of the church property for a new road. The church moves to its present location at 702 Montopolis Drive. The property, addressed as 400 Montopolis is now owned by David Willhoite with portions owned by Marion Sanchez.	Montopolis School Reunion Book, Travis County Deed Records
March 2015	David Willhoite sells the property to the KEEP Investment Group, Austin Stovell, President	Travis County Deed Records 2015037818

Cartographic History of the School

Prelude to annexation: 1940 Map of Austin

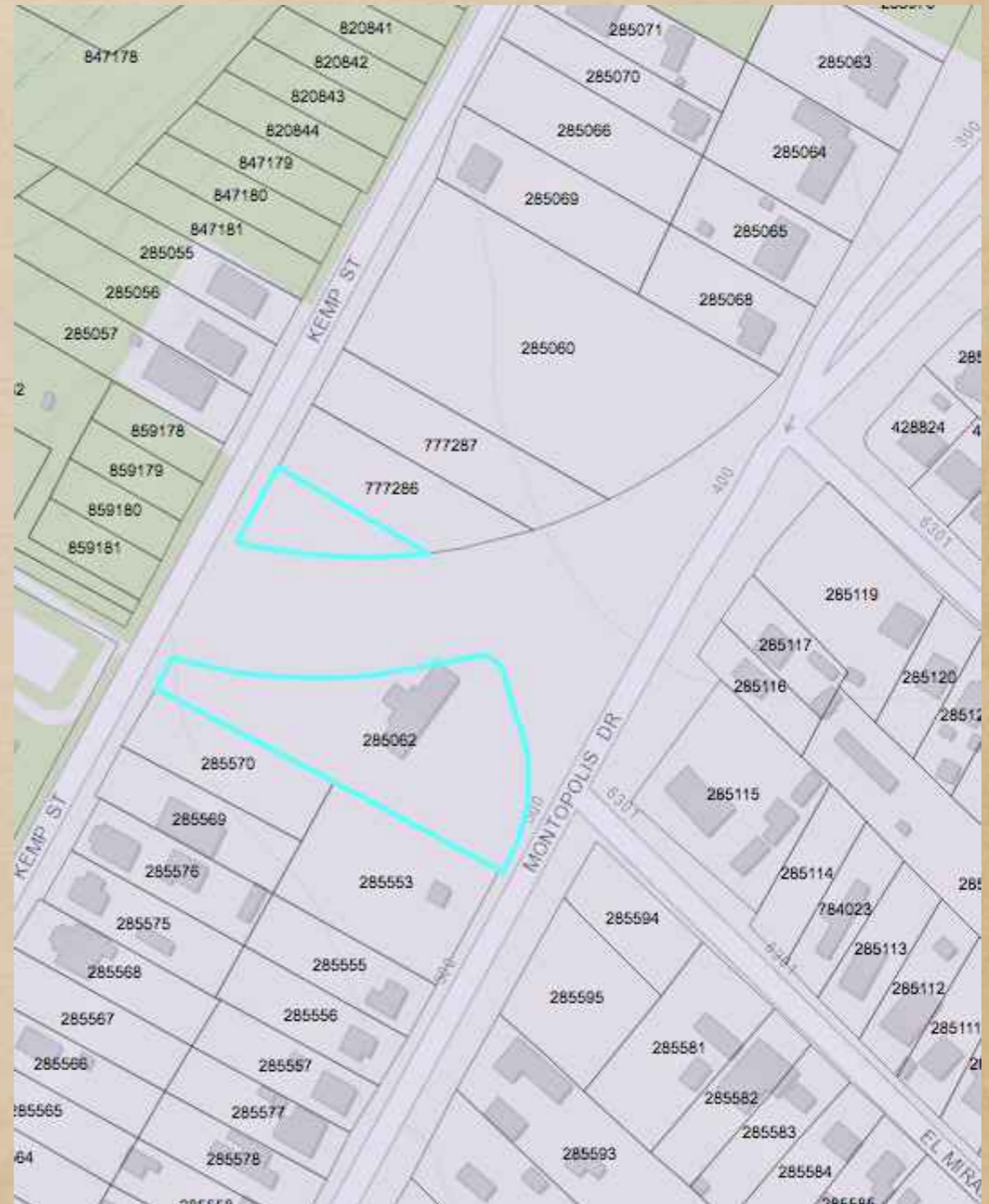


Historical Taking of African-American Church Property

Appraisal Roll of Subject/Adjacent Property

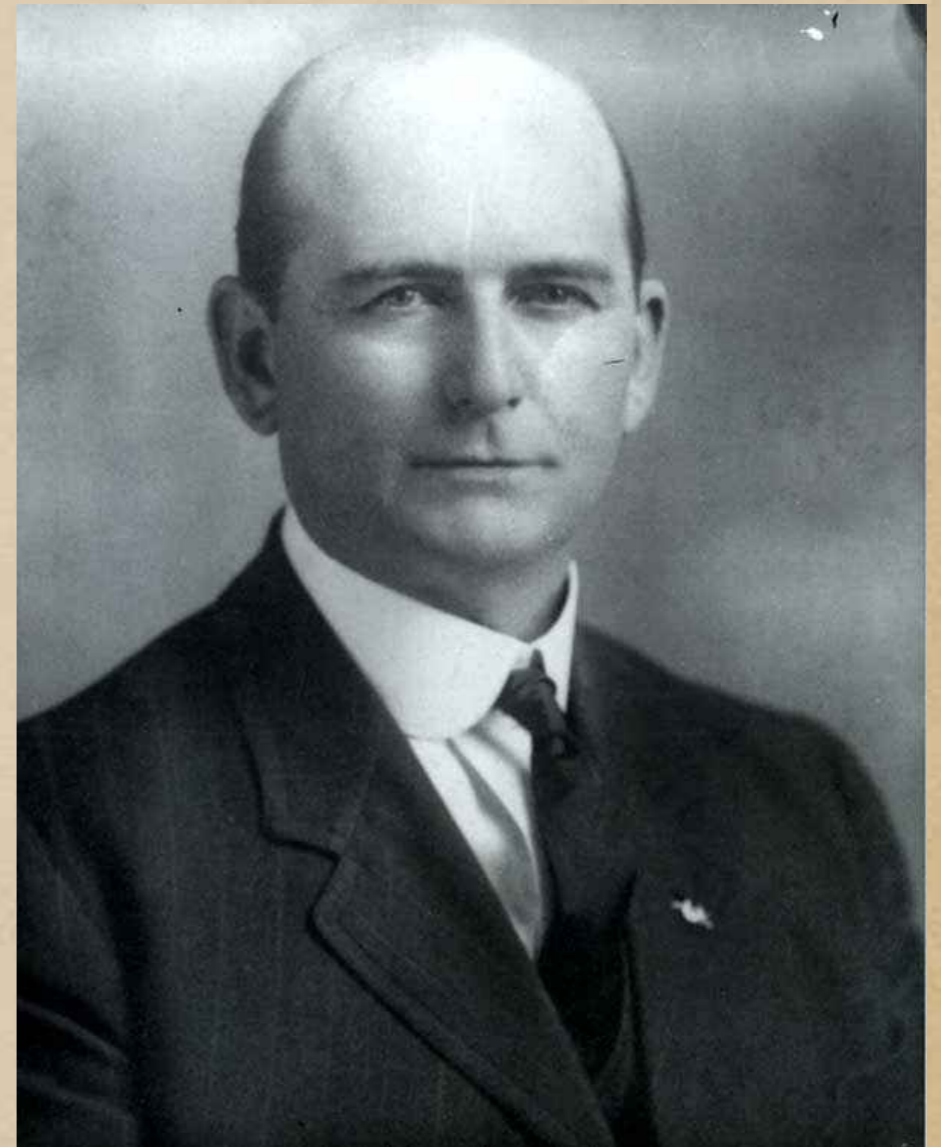
TCAD Number	Owner	2016 Appraised Value
285062	Keep Investment Group. LLC	\$292,761
777286	Marion Sanchez	\$31,875
777827	Marion Sanchez	\$34,000
285060	David Willhoite	\$100,000

- ◆ What do advocates want?
- ◆ The city and county have a moral obligation to right a historical wrong.
- ◆ City and/or county funds should be utilized to historically preserve this cultural landscape as a park and museum.



Travis County and Negro Education

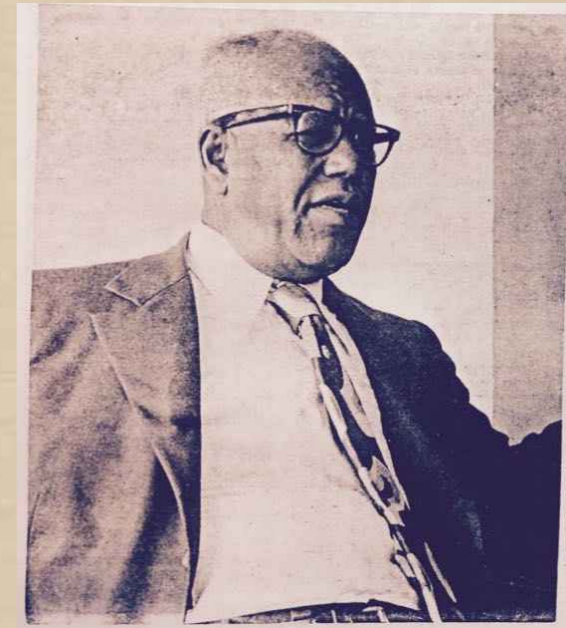
- ◆ 1935 proved to be a difficult year in Austin and Travis County. Not only were the city and county deep in the throes of the Great Depression, a series of storms and floods washed away homes and bridges, including the original Montopolis Bridge, constructed in 1888.
- ◆ It also destroyed the Montopolis Negro School as well as Black homes and other institutions.
- ◆ In a sign of the characteristic “first fired, last hired” practices typical of the Great Depression, the Travis County Judge segregated disaster recovery. There would be no replacement school for African-American children in Montopolis.
- ◆ As a result, the St. Edward’s Baptist Church donated land to Travis County for school purposes in 1935.
- ◆ Travis County transferred ownership of the school to Austin ISD in 1952. The Austin school district did not re-gift the school; it closed the school in 1962 and sold it in 1967.



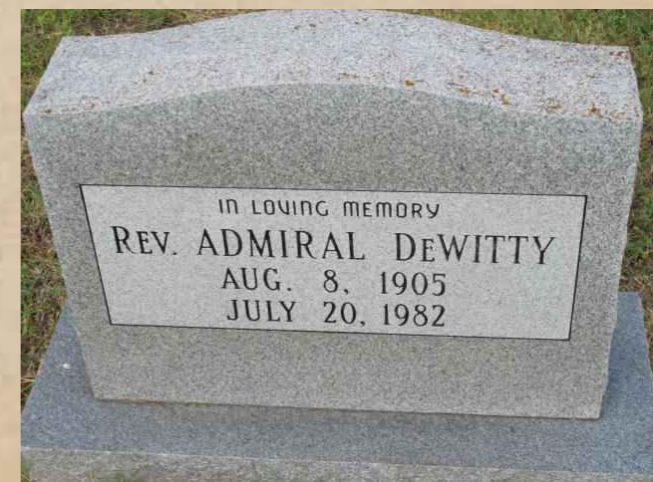
George Saunders Matthews (1867-1960)
Travis County Sheriff (1903-1920)
Travis County Judge (1921-1948)

Church Condemnation

- ◆ In 1987 the City of Austin condemned the St. Edward's Baptist Church property located at 408 Montopolis Drive. The city's stated purpose for the eminent domain action was for road construction.
- ◆ St. Edward's Baptist Church is a very historic church. It is the oldest African-American Baptist congregation in Travis County and was founded by the Burditt's Prairie Freedmen's Community in the early 1860's.
- ◆ The city never built the road.
- ◆ The current owner of the Montopolis Negro School lot located at 500 Montopolis Drive developed the 12 Waller project (luxury homes priced well north of \$500,000) in conjunction with city urban renewal authorities and similarly expects the city to partner with him regarding his current proposal.
- ◆ There is but one problem: the school stands in the way.

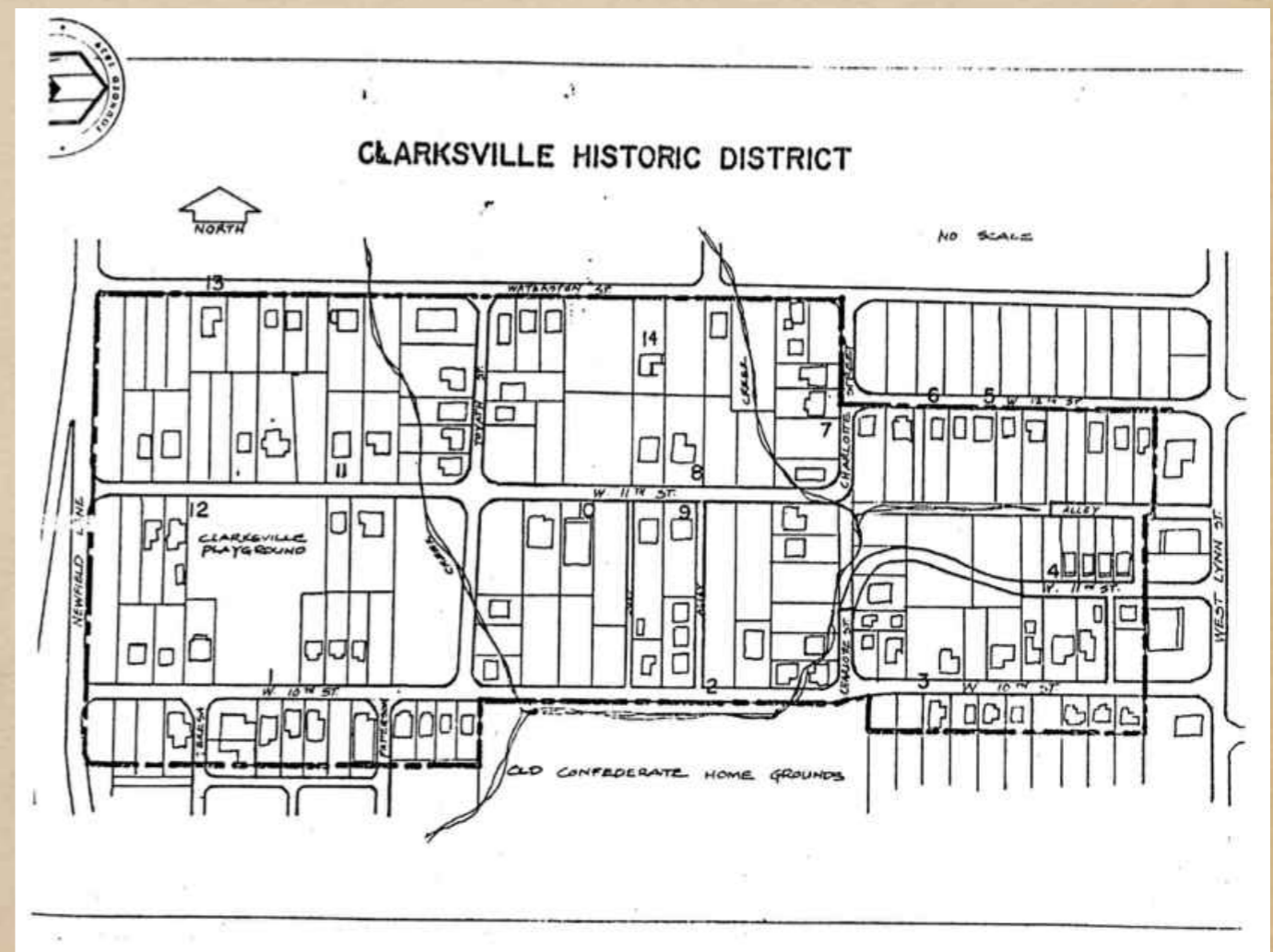


Rev. Admiral DeWitty's Grave, Evergreen Cemetery. Rev. DeWitty served as Senior Pastor at St. Edward's Baptist Church for many years.



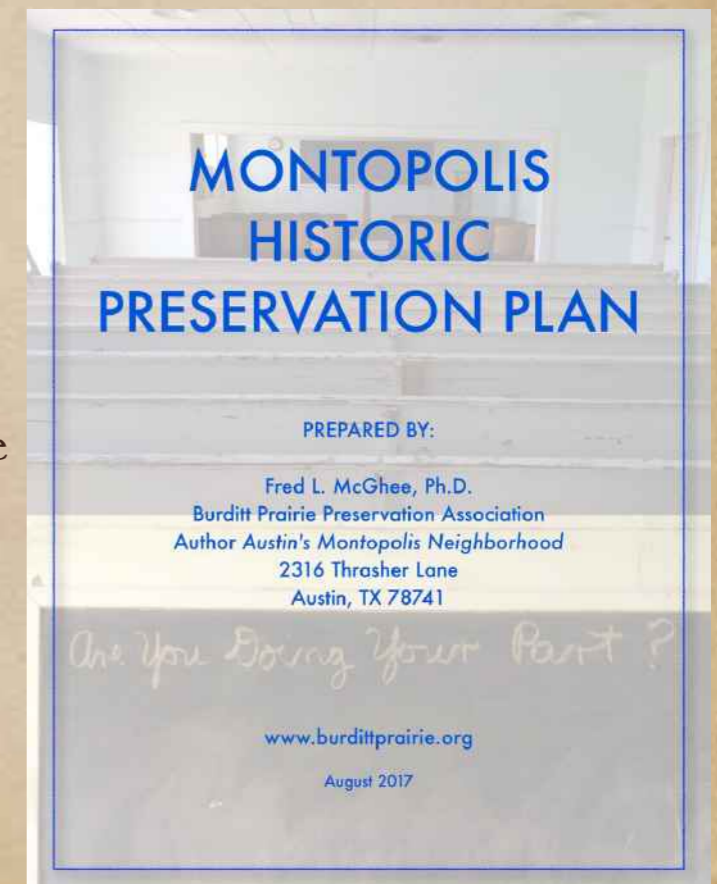
Destruction of Historic Black Communities is an Old Austin Tradition

- ◆ Masontown (now known as Plaza Saltillo)
- ◆ Wheatsville
- ◆ Barton Springs
- ◆ Kincheonville
- ◆ Most notably: Clarksville
- ◆ The Clarksville Historic District was entered into the National Register of Historic Places in December, 1976. While still extant, the district's integrity has been decimated.
- ◆ Gentrification is not inevitable. Burditt's Prairie is older than Clarksville; let us learn from history and not make the same mistakes.



Next Steps

- Advocate for funding from the Hotel and Occupancy Tax to be set aside for purchase of this property to commemorate it as a park and museum. It is much more important to the civil rights history of America than the Lions Municipal Golf Course. It is also what the community and neighborhood groups desire.
- The Community Development Commission unanimously voted to support preserving the property as a park and museum, and the Travis County Historical Commission has also written a letter of support.
- Federal grant funding from the National Park Service's African-American Civil Rights History (\$75,000) and Preservation (\$500,000) program is being sought and a state marker for the Burditt Prairie Cemetery has been applied for.
- An indigenously drafted Montopolis Historic Preservation Plan is in development that will identify important historic properties that can serve as the basis for a National Register District as well as a local historic district.
- Advocate for fundamental reforms to Austin's historic preservation practices and programs. As currently operated, they mainly benefit developers, not the public interest or citizens.



Thank You

Georgia Steen,
Montopolis Negro
School Student,
1954-55

