

Historical Context Committee January Report

When did we last meet? Friday, November 22, 2019 from 12:00pm – 1:00pm

Share Your Story – Online and Phone-In/E-mail/Meeting Submissions Monthly Read

We welcome any submissions pertaining the investigation sites, any oral histories, articles, photographs, or other items that will help fill in gaps around the events of the 1921 Race Massacre.

Oral History Account: Jerry Pope

Taken By: Hannibal B. Johnson, Chair – Historical Context Committee

Topic: Oral history accounts from Mr. Pope's deceased grandmother, Ruby Mae Graves

Date: January 14, 2020

Story #1

Ruby Mae Graves was born in Indian Territory on a Kickapoo reservation. Her father was a doctor. She attended school in Tahlequah.

In 1921, she lived near where modern-day Hillcrest is located and worked as a secretary at the Cogsden Refinery on the west side of the Arkansas River. She took a jitney (perhaps a multi-person station wagon) to work.

On the day of the massacre, her driver told her, "You don't want to go downtown because there's trouble." The driver was black.

She did not go to work for a few days.

Ms. Graves was a Christian lady.

Story #2

When workers were building the original Arkansas River park (now, RiverParks), circa 1970, Ms. Graves recalled having seen trucks full of bodies being dumped into the Arkansas River back in 1921.

NOTES:

(1) Mr. Pope may have a cassette recording of an interview with his grandmother from the mid-1970s in which these stories are recounted. He will look for it.

(2) Mr. Pope's other grandfather worked for Shell Oil in Tulsa. His co-workers were black, but he was a racist, at least in terms of the language he used.

Hannibal B. Johnson: Meeting with Eric Cullen and Jerry Dillon (November 20, 2019)

- Mr. Cullen is a private investigator who grew up in East Tulsa near Hale High School and graduated in 1993 from Union High School.
- One of Mr. Cullen's clients, a white male with white supremacists connections, contact him a few months ago after the announcement that the City would use ground-penetrating radar to search select sites for mass graves.
- The client's grandfather, a Ku Klux Klan member, disclosed information about a mass grave site in the early 1990s. At the time, the grandfather was nearing death.
- The grandfather recounted seeing two or three boxcars full of black men, then still living, guarded by white men with long guns, during the massacre.
- The grandfather further recalled that the box cars traveled southeast to the site of a mine shaft and returned without the human cargo.
- The client claims to know where the mine shaft is located, a site some 30 miles southeast of Tulsa.
- There were in fact coal mines at or near this site at the time.
- Mr. Cullen has known this witness for more than ten years, and the witness has been a source of accurate information.
- The witness had a felony conviction which he would like to have expunged.
- Mr. Cullen believes the witness would be willing to be interviewed about this matter so long as his identity remains concealed.

Hannibal B. Johnson: Meeting with John Monnet

Subject: oral histories of 1921 Race Massacre

Message: My mother was a volunteer at Gilcrease and Philbrook Museums in the 70's and 80's. She participated in the taking of oral histories of people who were alive during early days of Tulsa including the time of the Race Massacre. I believe it was a project of Gilcrease Museum. I recall her stating that one of the people she interviewed told of bodies being dumped in abandoned mine shafts near the Sears Store.

(Sent via 1921 TULSA RACE MASSACRE CENTENNIAL COMMISSION)

Additional information taken by Hannibal B. Johnson via phone on November 5, 2019:

- John Monnet is originally from Tulsa. He still has relatives here.
- The Sears store was at 21st/Yale.
- The referenced oral history should be at Gilcrease Museum (i.e., the catalogued interviews his mother conducted).
- Mr. Monnet believes there may be an Oklahoma mining agency that may have maps that could help pinpoint the location of the referenced spot where bodies were reportedly dumped.

ONLINE RESOURCE:

Computations as to the Deaths from the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot By Richard "Dick" Warner January 10, 2000

"The following report lists the names of individuals for which death certificates were issued, funeral home lists of the dead, dead listed in legal claims, and lists of dead in newspapers.

Also included is a list of 148 telephone calls made by individuals in response to 1999 Tulsa World newspaper articles asking for information about the Race Massacre from the public. Warner includes the callers' names, their telephone numbers, and a brief summary of the conversation. Warner also includes a list of locations where bodies were seen following the 1921 Race Massacre, as well as a tally and location of graves listed by race. This report contains a list of 128 individuals that Warner has identified as dying during the Race Massacre and a list of known newspaper and magazine articles concerning the event."

See more online at Tulsa Historical Society: https://www.tulsaohistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2006.126.001Redacted_Watermarked.pdf

Our committee reviewed this document to examine instances of callers mentioning the sites detailed at the January meeting along with other purported graves and other testimonies from the Race Massacre. We noticed a significant mention of sites currently under investigation along with mines, conflicting accounts of bodies being dumped in the river – there was flooding reported at the time but there are also reports citing how low the river was during the days surrounding the massacre. This information is public and can be found online at TulsaHistory.org. The Historical Context Committee has also put in a request to have this information linked at the city's 1921 graves investigation landing page. We are interested in working with the Public Oversight and Technical Committees on any follow-up to the calls made in 1999. Tulsa Historical Society can help with follow up, though timing may be delayed given staff capacity.

Historical Context Committee Phase 1 Priorities

1. Meaningfully/responsibly preserving and sharing the oral histories. (ex. Digital preservation, sharing at meetings, posting online as relevant). **FEBRUARY UPDATE: Both the Greenwood Cultural Center and the Tulsa Historical Society will serve as repositories for oral histories and other artifacts people may share throughout this investigation.**
2. Preliminary genealogical research (leveraging our affiliate institutions and other area experts) will commence over the next few months.
3. Working with the Public Oversight and Technical Committees to share information as it is shared with our committee.