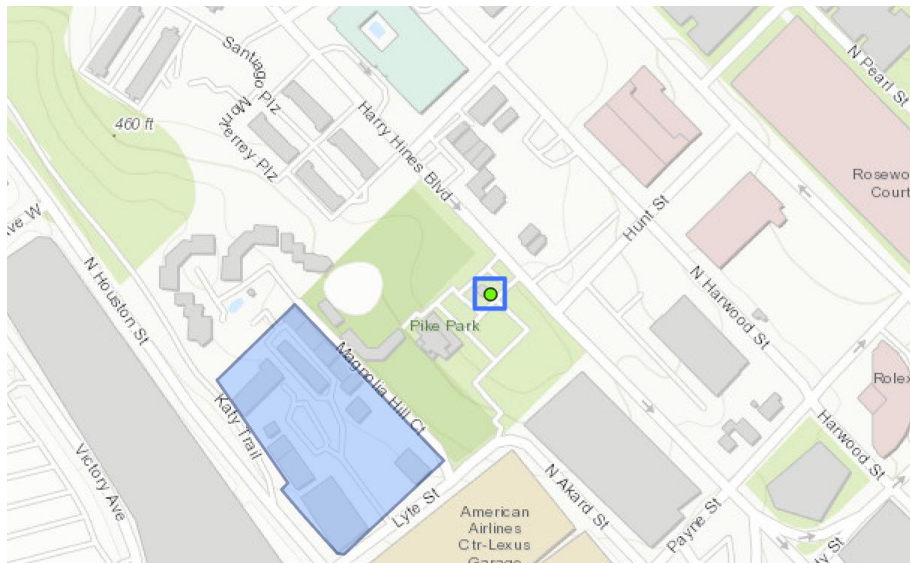


A Preservation Win: Pike Park in Dallas, TX

As the hot Texas Sun arose over the looming towers of steel, twirling colors, and cadent *zapatas* filled the plaza surrounding the Pike Park gazebo below.¹ Established in 1914 in a predominantly immigrant Jewish community that had settled West of the City of Dallas, Little Mexico became inhabited by a growing Mexican population that fled the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The demographic shift continued between 1910-1920.² Located in the southwest corner of Little Mexico, stands a park and recreational center once called Summit Park before it was renamed after city board member Edgar L. Pike who passed away in 1927.³ Before the park was renamed, the recreational area opened in 1914. The recreational center had one feature that most barrio residents did not have in their homes—clean running water.⁴ The park had a swimming pool and showers, but due to anti-Mexican sentiment, the barrio was prohibited from using the facilities while White residents enjoyed them. “In 1931, Pike Park was the first in Dallas to establish joint-use rules for whites and Hispanics, a significant milestone for the city’s integration efforts.”⁵



¹ Ruben Arellano, "Radicals and Reformers in the "Big D": The Rise of Ethnic Mexican Politics in Dallas, Texas; 1969-1980." *Journal of South Texas* vol 35 no 1 (Spring 2021), 25.

²Sol Villasana, *Images of America: Dallas's Little Mexico*. (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2011), 7.

³Sol Villasana, *Images of America: Dallas's Little Mexico*. (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2011), 14.

⁴Villasana, 14.

⁵Geoff Montes, "Preserving Latino History at Pike Park in Dallas," National Trust for Historic Preservation. <https://savingplaces.org/stories/preserving-latino-history-pike-park-dallas/> accessed August 7, 2023.

Texas Historical Commission Map of Pike Park⁶

Festivities for the community took place in Pike Park which consisted of Music, dancing, and food to go around. Oftentimes these celebrations included Mexican Independence Day, Fourth of July, Cinco de Mayo, birthday day parties and religious celebrations. The recreational center at Pike Park is a mission styled building that grew in popularity across southwest Dallas by the beginning of the 20th century. Once a three-story building, developers removed the upper floor of the building in 1950 and the public used it as a club and recreational center.⁷

Between 1950 and 1970s, Little Mexico was not the vibrant community it once was as many folks left due to urban renewal; the construction of tollways decimated the barrio. Urban renewal is the redevelopment or the rehabilitation of buildings or neighborhoods that need modifications; however, the renewal of these areas leads to displacement, since residents can no longer afford to live in their neighborhoods.⁸ In Post-World War II years, many Little Mexico residents left the barrio for a better living situation for their families and their children's future. By the 1960s, the barrio continued to decrease in residents and the Dallas North Tollway and the North Central Expressway divided the barrio and razed many homes to make way for “progress.”⁹ History master’s student at the University of North Texas, Katherine Reguero Cloer notes, “Anita Martínez was the first woman to serve on the Dallas City Council and the first Mexican American woman to be elected to the city council in any major U.S. city. She served on the council from 1969 to 1973 and remained active on various state and local boards until 1984.”¹⁰ During her time on the Dallas city council, Martinez was able to fundraise money to

⁶Map of Pike Park location in Dallas, Texas Historical Commission, <https://atlas.thc.texas.gov/> atlas number 5113006817.

⁷Dallas Landmark Commission Landmark Nomination Form for Pike Park <https://dallascityhall.com/departments/sustainabledevelopment/historicpreservation/HP%20Documents/Landmark%20Structures/Pike%20Park%20Landmark%20Nomination.pdf>.

⁸ George Lefcoe and Charles W. Swenson. “Redevelopment in California: The Demise of TIF- Funded Redevelopment in California and its Aftermath.” *National Tax Journal* 67, no. 3 (2014): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24369922>, 719-20.

⁹ Villasana, 99.

¹⁰Katherine Reguero Cloer, “A Champion For the Chicano Community: Anita N. Martinez and Her Contributions To The City of Dallas, 1969-1973” (master’s thesis, University of North Texas, 2011), 2.

help create more parks and recreational facilities to accommodate the Latino community in the city.¹¹



PA83-41/1973-7-25.BA1/12
Dallas Times Herald

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However, tragedy struck the community on July 24, 1973 when 12-year-old Santos Rodriguez was murdered by a Dallas police officer in an empty lot next to Fina Station located along Cedar Springs Road.¹² A Dallas police officer suspected Rodriguez and his brother, David Rodriguez, of robbing a vending machine. Though Santos denied any involvement, the officer attempted to scare Santos into confessing by playing Russian Roulette. The officer thought he had emptied the gun barrel but was mistaken and shot Santos in the head in front of his brother. Santos was declared dead moments later. The officer was released after paying a \$5,000 bond and was convicted of murder and sentenced to five years. However, he served less than three years.¹³ On

¹¹Villasana, 116.

¹²Donna M. Gosbee, "The 1973 Murder of 12-Year-Old Santos Rodriguez," *Human Rights Dallas Maps*, accessed July 31, 2023, <http://humanrightsdallasmaps.com/items/show/9>.

¹³Hashimoto, Mike. "Remembering a boy murdered by a Dallas police officer a long time ago." *Dallas Morning News, The (TX)*, July 24, 2015. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.proxy.libraries.smu.edu/apps/news/document->

September 21, 2013, then Dallas mayor Mike Rawling issued a formal apology to Santos' family after forty years of silence.¹⁴

Podcaster and activist, Eva Arreguin in her show called *De Colores Radio* tackles various topics about Latinidad, anti-blackness, queer identities and many more subjects.¹⁵ As a Texas born Latina, Arreguin created a GoFundMe account to financially help Santos' family.¹⁶ Barrio community members found ways to memorialize Santos through a public art project at Pike Park and a documentary.¹⁷ In 2018, the recreation center was renamed the Santos Rodriguez Center.¹⁸

The City of Dallas designated Pike Park as a protected site on May 10, 2000; however, the community that once hosted cultural celebrations has moved away and the park mostly remains empty.¹⁹ Pike Park has been home to generations of Mexican Americans and is a site that continues to bring Mexican Americans together for Cinco de Mayo, Mexican Celebrations, and has been a site for grassroots organizing and protest.

Founded in 2008 and established as a nonprofit in 2013, the Dallas Mexican American Historical League (DMAHL), has committed to preserving and collecting the history of Mexican Americans and their barrios throughout the Dallas area.²⁰ DMHAL stewards the park, since the city does not tend to it frequently. Efforts by DMHAL have thought of new ways to welcome visitors, community members, and other businesses to use the facilities in the park, in fear that

[view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/156CDCEF96154648](https://www.wbap.com/news/156CDCEF96154648); WBAP-TV (Television station : Fort Worth, Tex.). [News Script: Shooting protest], item, July 25, 1973, 12:00 p.m.; (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1904563/>; accessed August 4, 2023), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting UNT Libraries Special Collections.

¹⁴ Dianne Solis, "Death of 12-year-old Santos Rodriguez to be remembered this Friday in Dallas cemetery." *Dallas Morning News, The (TX)*, July 23, 2015. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.proxy.libraries.smu.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/156C88ABB0AE6700>.

¹⁵ Link to her podcast to find out more about the various topics she covers: <https://decoloresco.com/podcast>.

¹⁶ Alex Temblador, "Bilingual in Sarcasm y Solidaridad," March 29, 2022, <https://scalawagmagazine.org/2022/03/de-colores-radio/>. Accessed August 16, 2023.

¹⁷ Stella M. Chaves, "Film, Art project Aim For honest Reflection On 12 Year Old's Murder in Dallas' Little Mexico," *KERA News*, July 23, 2018, <https://www.keranews.org/arts-culture/2018-07-23/film-art-project-aim-for-honest-reflection-on-12-year-olds-murder-in-dallas-little-mexico>.

¹⁸ Robert Wilonsky, "It took far too long, but Dallas finally honors Santos Rodriguez the Slain Son of Little Mexico," *The Dallas Morning News*, October 18, 2018, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/2018/10/18/it-took-far-too-long-but-dallas-finally-honors-santos-rodriguez-the-slain-son-of-little-mexico/>.

¹⁹ Ordinance no 24252

<https://dallascityhall.com/departments/sustainabledevelopment/historicpreservation/HP%20Documents/Landmark%20Structures/Pike%20Park%20Ordinance%2024252.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.dmahl.org/about-us>.

the city may find loopholes to demolish the most prominent remnant of Little Mexico. Today, a sea of high-rise buildings and condos surround most of Little Mexico. The City of Dallas shut down the recreational center due to plumbing and HVAC issues, leading to even more infrequent use of Pike Park, especially during the extremely hot summer months.

Saving Historic Parks

LHC's Latinx Preservation Advocacy Toolkit demystifies historic preservation and makes it accessible to anyone who wants to protect places of historic and cultural importance. Certain sections of the Toolkit are directed towards community members and other sections are directed toward youth. There are many people and organizations within Texas working to preserve important historic and cultural spaces, but it is important that the next generation of preservationists/ community activists continue to protect and advocate for Latinx spaces. Historic preservation has often followed many White Supremist and elitist practices and methods. This has limited the field's reach and deterred community members from being involved. However, anyone can be involved in preserving a historic site, place, or cultural landscape. To participate, you do not need to have a college education or be a preservationist. Throughout the Toolkit, you will be given tools to support your advocacy efforts. If you are interested in becoming a preservationist there are degree programs for you.

Rosemary Hinojosa is a board member of the Dallas Mexican American Historical League and a member of the city of Dallas landmark Commission. She believes that Pike Park has been the "cultural heart of the Mexican Community."²¹ For community members and youth alike, Hinojosa recommends that learning your history is most important. Some of the ways to engage with local history, besides reading books and articles, is to take historical tours, visit local museums, visit designated Spaces, and talk to community members about the town's history. If you feel nervous about asking someone you are unfamiliar with begin with asking your family members about where they grew up or why they moved to your town. Lastly, Hinojosa advises

²¹ Rosemary Hinojosa, interviewed by Christella Maldonado, July 12, 2023, Dallas, Texas, transcript, Latinos in Heritage Conservation.

that, if possible, become a “decision maker.” Become a voice for your community and learn to sit on commission boards in your city or local governments.²²

Community parks bring people together, much like Pike Park did in the early 20th century. Do you have a park, or outdoor space, where you can get together with friends and play basketball or frisbee? What would happen if that space was taken away? Would you act and save your local park?

Link to Jen’s Lesson plans:

²² Rosemary Hinjosa, interviewed by Christella Maldonado, July 12, 2023, Dallas, Texas, transcript, Latinos in Heritage Conservation.