

The Bandera PROPHECY

June 8, 2023

Juneteenth celebration planned at the Bertha Tryon/Hendrick Arnold Black Cemetery

Contributed

A celebration to recognize Juneteenth will be held in Bandera at the Bertha Tryon/ Hendrick Arnold Black Cemetery on Monday, June 19, at 11 a.m.

The cemetery is located on old Medina Highway right off of Hwy. 16. This year's celebration in Bandera is being hosted by the Bandera County Historical Commission, the Frontier Times Museum and the Arthur Nagel Community Clinic. A wreath will be placed at the cemetery's gate and there will be a traditional reading of the Emancipation Proclamation.

A popular addition from last year's celebration, the San Antonio Mass Gospel Choir, under the direction of Dr. James Wilcox, will again join the festivities. Poet, DaRe'll Pittman, will grace the ceremony with a special recitation of the poem, The Old African Who Came to Dinner. Traditionally a Texas holiday, Juneteenth became a federal holiday in 2021 when President Joseph Biden signed the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act into law, making it the first new federal holiday since Martin Luther King Jr. Day was adopted in 1983.

President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, issued on Jan. 1, 1863, had freed enslaved people but the enforcement of the proclamation relied upon the advancement of Union troops into the Confederate states.

Texas, as the most remote state of the former Confederacy, did not have a large presence of Union troops when the Civil War ended so there was no enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation for Texas slaves. On June 19, 1865, Union Army general Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston and announced General Order No. 3, which notified the

public that all enslaved people were now free in Texas, the last state of the Confederacy with institutional slavery.

The first Juneteenth celebrations were held in Texas in 1866, the first anniversary of General Granger's announcement. As African-Americans moved out of the South, many carried their celebrations to other parts of the country.

This is Bandera's second annual Juneteenth celebration to be held at the Bertha Tryon/Hendrick Arnold Cemetery. Formerly known as the Black Cemetery, the cemetery was established in 1922 when the Montague family donated land for the county's black community to bury their dead, since they were not allowed to be buried in the city cemetery. The site had all but disappeared until 1993, when local resident Buddy Tryon requested permission to bury his wife Bertha in the cemetery. Following this request, a massive multi-year restoration project was undertaken by the Bandera County Historical Commission to clear the land overgrown with cedar, poison ivy and weeds.

While the original markers have long since disappeared, small stone markers have been placed on the graves that historical commission members could locate. Member Cecil LeSturgeon built a rock and iron gate to mark the entrance to the cemetery and former historical commission Chairperson Roy Dugosh was instrumental in placing a flag pole at the site.

Everyone is invited to attend this day of recognition and celebration. Keeping with traditional Juneteenth celebrations, a free community picnic will be held after the ceremony. The public is welcome to bring a dessert and stay for good food and fellowship.