

## **Sherman Riot of 1930 Historical Marker Saga**

The acknowledgement of the burning of the Grayson County Courthouse, the lynching of George Hughes, and the destruction of the city's black business district, as part of the Sherman Riot of 1930, has been a long time in the making. The idea of detailing this narrative with a Texas Historical Marker originally started back in the 1960's and has been attempted at least three prior times before Ms. Melissa Thiel commenced this current effort in the summer of 2018 while completing an internship at Eisenhower's birthplace in Denison. Her mentor asked Melissa what projects she could do as a public historian and Ms. Thiel instantly thought of the 1930 Sherman Riot and the fact that it was not well known, nor officially recognized, by Grayson County. Time passed and Ms. Thiel then witnessed the murder of George Floyd. She felt, in her heart, she needed to act because she wanted to comprehend racial equality more fully, while at the same time, also doing something positive for the local community. This is when Ms. Thiel decided to get off the sidelines. In June of 2020, her endeavor to get a Texas Historical Marker for the 1930 Sherman Riot, located where this tragedy originated on the County Courthouse grounds, began.

This 1 & 1/2 year journey has not been easy, and there has been many obstacles along the way.

- Jun 5, 2020: Ms. Thiel made her initial contact with the Grayson County Historical Commission (GCHC) beginning the marker process
- Sep 7, 2020: Ms. Thiel completed a required historical narrative and sent it to the GCHC marker chairperson
- Nov 16, 2020: The GCHC marker chairperson emailed County Judge Bill Magers informing him the application had been approved by the GCHC and it therefore only needed the Judge's, and the county commissioners, approval to place the marker at the courthouse as "landlords" of the Grayson County Courthouse grounds
- Dec 4, 2020: Judge Magers contacted the overall GCHC chairperson who subsequently relayed there were now concerns with the research; the marker application was no longer approved
- Dec 8, 2020: The original GCHC marker chairperson resigned
- Mar 6, 2021: The GCHC held a public meeting to agree with the historical significance and to meet Texas Open Meetings Act (no other marker has ever had this requirement)
- Mar 9, 2021: The new GCHC chairperson sent the results of this meeting to Judge Magers informing him all requirements had been met and that, once again, only the Judge's signature was necessary to place the marker on the courthouse grounds
- Mar 9 – Oct 12, 2021: A total of 22 weeks' worth of requests were sent to the Judge and Commissioners asking them to put the marker on the Commissioners Court agenda for approval of its placement at the courthouse; requests were never addressed
- May 8, 2021: The 91<sup>st</sup> anniversary commemoration was held at the courthouse
- May 9, 2021: A Petition/Open Letter effort began asking the Judge, and each Commissioner, to put the marker on the agenda (Final Numbers: 2,018 total names, 706 Grayson County residents, signed)
- Aug 5, 2021: An Informational Community Town Hall was held

- Aug – Oct 2021: Citizens from Grayson County began speaking every Tuesday at the Commissioner’s Court (34 total speakers) advocating for a historical marker
- Oct 5, 2021: Judge Magers appointed a new committee to determine the historical significance and placement location of the marker; he put himself on the committee and excluded any person from the Citizens Committee for the 1930 Sherman Riot Marker, as well as any member of the GCHC (Again, this is unprecedented as none of the other 8 historical markers currently on the courthouse grounds were approved in this fashion)
- Oct 12, 2021: After receiving the new committee’s unanimous recommendation, the historical marker was placed on the commissioner’s court agenda; the resulting Commissioners Court poll was 3 yes votes, and 2 Commissioners voting no. The marker was therefore approved to be placed on the courthouse grounds
- Oct 14, 2021: Judge Magers elected to submit an application to the state Texas Historical Commission (THC) seemingly making himself the sponsor of the historical marker effort
- Oct 18, 2021: Melissa Thiel sent in an application to the THC; in lieu of the Judge’s signature, a copy of the 12 Oct Commissioner’s Court meeting minutes was attached
- Feb 3, 2022: The application for the 1930 Sherman Riot Texas Historical Marker was chosen as a 2022 state of Texas “Undertold” Historical Marker by the THC

We therefore are happy to announce the Texas Historical Marker application for the 1930 Sherman Riot has been approved by the Texas Historical Commission. We are 1 of 15 Undertold markers selected out of 65 applicants. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final approval needed to receive a marker recording the outcomes of one of the most significant historical events in Grayson County.

What is next?

The THC Historical Marker application process became somewhat convoluted when Judge Magers elected to submit the application himself instead of merely signing Ms. Thiel’s application giving permission to place the marker on courthouse grounds. The Judge submitted Ms. Thiel’s work, without her permission, outlining the historical significance of this devastating event. This unprecedented usurpation has now resulted in two applications, and two marker sponsors—Ms. Thiel and Judge Magers.

Following the normal marker process, the Committee for the Sherman Riot of 1930 Historical Marker will be acting through the GCHC moving forward. Ms. Thiel, and the Sherman Riot of 1930 Committee, look forward to working with all interested parties for the marker inscription, placement, and an unveiling ceremony as part of the remaining aspects of the Texas Historical Marker process. As the new GCHC Chairperson, Mr. Dusty Williams, states, “The state will work on getting the wording written for the marker based on the research sent. Once they finish the wording, they will then send it to me (GCHC Chairperson) and the Grayson County Historical Commission. We will verify that everything is historically accurate and approve it. At that point, it will be ready to be engraved.”