

Prairie View A&M University

**Digital Commons @PVAMU**

---

Marion Henry Collection

PVAMU Faculty and Administrator

---

1978

## **Waller County Historical Commission**

Prairie View A&M University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pvamu.edu/marion-henry-collections>

---

**PRAIRIE VIEW  
A&M UNIVERSITY**

**and the**

**WALLER COUNTY  
HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

**PRESENTS A PROGRAM ON THE OCCASSION OF THE  
UNVEILING OF A HISTORICAL MARKER  
AT THE BIRTH PLACE OF**

**NORRIS WRIGHT CUNEY**



**“Prairie View A&M University:  
Serving People Now And In The Future.”**

**Centennial Theme**



## **PARTICIPANTS IN THE PROGRAM**

Dr. Alvin I. Thomas, President of Prairie View A&M University

Dr. George Ruble Woolfolk, Chairman and Professor, History Department,  
Prairie View A&M University

Rev. Winfred Van Johnson, Dean of Chapel, Prairie View A&M University

Mr. Michael W. Stanley, Junior-History Major, Prairie View A&M University

Mr. A. S. Wier, Chairman of Marker Committee, Waller County Historical Commission

Mr. Joseph Sanford, Senior-History Major, Prairie View A&M University

Dr. Lucius Wyatt, Band Director, Prairie View A&M University

Rev. Eric Johnson, Prairie View A&M University

Mr. Raymond Carreathers, Vice President for Student Affairs, Prairie View A&M University

Col. Ernest Morgan, Professor-Army R.O.T.C., Prairie View A&M University

Capt. Fred Richardson, Commanding Officer-Naval Science, Prairie View A&M University

## **SPECIAL THANKS TO**

Dr. William Parker, Director-Teacher Center, Prairie View A&M University

Dr. Alvin I. Thomas, President of Prairie View A&M University

Mr. Raymond Carreathers, Vicepresident of Student Affairs, Prairie View A&M University

Judge Wells Stewart (Owner of land adjacent to Mr. Cuney's marker)

Mr. Truett Latimer, Executive Director of the Texas State Historical Commission

Ms. Mildred Abshier, Chairperson of the Waller County Historical Commission

Mr. Ed Marchman, Texas State Highway Commission

Mr. Jim Bowie, Leader of the Black State Republican Council

**A Program on the occasion of the  
unveiling of a Historical Marker at the  
Birth Place of Norris Wright Cuney**

- Presiding..... Michael Stanley, Member  
History Club
- Post Colors
- Invocation ..... Rev. W. Van Johnson,  
Dean of Chapel
- Brass Quartet..... Dr. Lucious Wyatt, Assoc Prof  
Department of Music
- Lucius R. Wyatt, Trumpet  
Robert Washington, Trumpet  
Nathaniel Brickens, Trombone  
Frederick Bowers, Trombone
- The Occasion ..... Mr. Joseph Sanford, President  
Phi Alpha Theta, International  
Honor Society in History
- The Waller County Historical Marker..... Mr. A. S. Weir,  
Historical Marker Chairperson  
Waller County Historical Commission
- Musical Selection..... Baptist Student Movement Choir  
Mr. Eric Johnson, Sponsor
- Introduction of Speaker ..... Mr. Jonathan Davis, Worshipful  
Master, Lone Star Lodge No 85  
Hempstead, Texas
- Speaker: ..... Mr. I. C. Clayborn, Most  
Worshipful Grand Master of  
the Grand Lodge of the State of  
Texas, Prince Hall Free and  
Accepted Mason A & FM
- Introduction of Speaker ..... Mr. Jim Bowie, Acting Leader  
of the Black State Republican  
Council of Texas
- Speaker: ..... Roy Barnhart,  
Leader of Republican Party of  
the State of Texas
- Introduction of Speaker..... Mr. Harris Bell, Graduate Student  
The Department of History
- Speaker:..... Mr. Ruben Wheatly, District  
Vice President South Atlantic  
and Gulf Coast District of  
of I. L. A.

Musical Selection ..... Baptist Student  
Movement Choir

Acknowledgements and Announcements ..... Dr. A. I. Thomas, President  
Prairie View A&M University

Benediction ..... Rev. Van Johnson

Retire Colors

## MARKER CEREMONY

Prayer ..... Rev. Eric Johnson, Sponsor  
Baptist Student Movement Choir

The Unveiling of the Cuney Marker.....Dr. Mildred Abshier, Presiding Chairperson

Closing Remarks..... Judge Wells Stewart,  
Judge of the 308th District Court of Harris County

Adjourn

### NORRIS WRIGHT CUNEY 1846-1898

The fourth of eight children born to Adeline Stuart and Philip Minor Cuney, Norris Wright Cuney was born May 12, 1846. One of the fifty-four richest planters in Texas, Philip, scion of an affluent immigrant Louisiana family, located his homestead ten miles from the Brazos River and twelve miles southeast of what later became Hempstead, Texas on the Jose Justo Liendo five-league grant bordering Iron Creek, and called it "Sunnyside." Adding Swiss to the Negro-Indian strains of his slave housekeeper, whom he eventually freed, Philip foreshadowed his son's greatness by his own forays into Texas constitutional and legislative politics, and his acumen for cotton and dairy enterprise.

Following a brother, Norris also attended George B. Bashon's Wylie Street Public School for Negroes in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania from 1859 into the war years. There followed some years of wandering on river boats and other uncertain occupation before he returned to Texas. In the process, he met James Lewis and P.B. S. Pinchback, and fortunately, on his Texas return, fell under the influence of George T. Ruby, President of the Texas Union League. From these men Cuney caught the vision of the potential of a freed people and the opportunities of inspired leadership in the post Civil War era. Preparing himself by reading law, Ruby's mantle in time was to fall on Cuney's shoulders. Cuney became the "Union League" leader in Galveston, and thus launched one of the most notable careers in political power the annals of Texas afford.

Cuney married Adelina Dowdie July 5, 1871, and to the union was born two children, Maud and Lloyd Garrison. His marriage fortuitously coincided with the beginning of his spectacular rise to eminence in Texas politics. A Davis man in Texas politics, Cuney's career in the 1870's and early 80's was mixed with success and failure. Elective office at the state and sometimes local level eluded him. He was defeated for Mayor of Galveston in 1875, and for the state House and Senate in '76 and '82 respectively. But at the level of appointive office and in the inner councils of power and patronage, Cuney was master of all he surveyed. From his appointment as the first assistant to the Sergeant-at-arms of the twelfth legislature, Cuney went on to be Alderman, Inspector of Customs, Revenue Inspector, Special Custom Inspector, and finally collector of the Port at Galveston. These appointments are only a mirror of the masterly genius that he brought to the art of politics. Having once copied in his notes the adage, "He who studies other men learns much, but he who studies himself may not learn a great deal," he put the wisdom to work by mastering the demands of every hierarchical level of Texas and National Republican politics. Whether he was secretary of a state convention, delegate to the National Republican conclaves, national committeeman, or member of the Board of Commissioners of Galveston Waterworks, he bore himself as a man of principles, astute, professional, and conscious of the power of his leadership of his people. And when the day came



that he stood on the high plateau of the leadership of the Republican Party in Texas, he born himself with the dignity and compassion the pinnacle demanded, deigning once to remove the daughter of Sam Houston, a Democrat, from the post-mistressship of Abilene, Texas on the grounds of the contributions of her father to the state.

A many-sided man, Cuney's natural leadership and race pride led him into every area of self-help which characterized much of the post reconstruction motivation of the Negro people. This interest in race cohesion and uplift expressed itself in Cuney's membership in the Masons, the Knights of Pythias, and the Odd Fellows. Like most Negro leaders of his time, to Cuney, education was a holy mission. This interest was shown not only in his 1871 appointment to the school directors of Galveston County, but also in his interest in the black state college at Prairie View. It was fitting the Whiteboro, Texas should give his name to a school, and that he be appointed a commissioner to the World Fair in Chicago in 1891.

As great as any of his accomplishments was his vision of what inspired leadership might do to lift the material standing of the black masses. The Galveston Docks gave him both a challenge and an opportunity. As a labor contractor he bought \$2,500 in tools and assembled a cadre of black dock workers which he eventually organized into "Benevolent Associations of Longshoremen" and "Screwmen's Benevolent Association." Though his fledgling

organizations appeared in the labor turbulence of 1877, Cuney carried them to open competition and remained their leader until 1894.

Much of the meaning of Cuney's life may be summed up in his concept of his mission. "I am of the South, it is my home. The home of my wife and babies...it is the home of my race. There lie our interest. I can elevate my people alone in the South. I am willing to dwell in their midst."

Cuney died March 4, 1898, in San Antonio, Texas and was buried in Lake View Cemetery in the family lot, Galveston, Texas.

END

#### Bibliography

Paul Douglas Casdorph. "Norris Wright Cuney and Texas Republican Politics, 1883-1896." Southwestern Historical Quarterly LXVII, pp. 455-464.

The Handbook of Texas.

Maude Cuney Hare. Norris Wright Cuney: Tribune of the Black People. New York, 1913.

Virginia Neal Hinze. "Norris Wright Cuney." Unpublished M. A. Thesis, Rice University.

MEMBERS OF THE FACULTY OF THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT  
PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY

Dr. George R. Woolfolk, Professor and Head  
Dr. Purvis M. Carter, Associate Professor  
Dr. Anasuya Rao, Associate Professor  
Dr. Jack Cross, Instructor  
Mr. James Harris, Instructor  
Dr. Howard J. Jones, Instructor  
Ms. Verna J. Gillum, Secretary  
Mr. Charles Roberson, Graduate Assistant  
Mr. Harris Bell, Graduate Assistant

OFFICERS OF THE HISTORY CLUB, PRAIRIE VIEW A&M  
UNIVERSITY

Ms. Regina Holden, President  
Mr. Joseph Sanford, Vice President  
Ms. Jacqueline DeLoach, Secretary  
Ms. Donna Bell, Treasurer  
Mr. James Harris, Advisor

OFFICERS OF THE WALLER COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Ms. Mildred Abshier, Chairperson  
Ms. Lil Kobs, Co-chairperson  
Ms. H.P. Donigan, Vice chairperson  
Ms. Jimmie Rene Ogg, Recording Secretary  
Ms. Minnie Bains, Treasurer  
Ms. Martha Davis, Membership chairperson  
Ms. Carrie B. Coss, Meeting Coordinator  
Dr. Anne Campbell, Parliamentarian  
Mr. A. S. Wier, Historical Marker Chairperson  
Dr. George Ruble Woolfolk, Advisor

OFFICERS OF PHI ALPHA THETA, the history honor society

Mr. Joseph Sanford, President  
Ms. Vivian Strauther, Secretary  
Ms. Debra See, Treasurer  
Dr. Purvis Carter, Advisor

# PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY

Prairie View, Texas

Celebrating One hundred years of  
"PRODUCING PRODUCTIVE PEOPLE!"

**DR. ALVIN I. THOMAS**  
President

**DR. GEORGE R. WOOLFOLK**  
Chairman, Department of History



1878

*The Second Oldest State Supported  
Institution for Higher Learning  
in Texas*

**1978 BLACK HISTORY MONTH THEME:**

***"Roots: Achievements and Projections"***

The members of the Department of History would like to express their thanks to Dr. William Parker and the Teacher Corp. for their generosity in financing the printing of this program.

Signed by-Dr. Howard J. Jones  
Coordinator of Black History Month