

Geyer Commons Landmark Site Dedication - We Are Mansfield: Uniting People
Speech given by Tom Leach, President, Mansfield Historical Society
August 30, 2026

Today, August 30, 2026, we are dedicating this site at Geyer Commons as a Mansfield, Texas Historical Landmark. Seventy years ago today was the first attempt to desegregate the Mansfield, Texas Schools. That day, August 30, 1956 turned into a dark day dividing our community, gaining worldwide attention, and appearing as news headlines in Paris, France newspapers. We are not here to pay homage to that day; we are not here to memorialize that event or any individual that perpetuated the actions of that day. It is a day, an event, a simple moment in the timeline that defines this site, that defines our community on that day and is an historical event that pivoted our community to redefine who we are. We cannot critique, we cannot criticize, we cannot hope to understand the events of that day or the happenings prior to, or immediately after August 30, 1956. It is impossible to put ourselves as adults into the emotions and decisions of the adults of that time. There are people still alive who remember what they experienced as a child, who were victimized as a child and bring unique perspectives of what they experienced as a child. This was an event that affected the Black, White, and Hispanic races within our community. No one was left untouched.

History is often difficult and messy. It leaves a path for analysis, speculation, and assumptions that never have answers and never ends. It plays a role in who we are today but it never defines us. We have the power and freedom to define who we are individually and as a community. This site's historical significance is not totally about August 30, 1956. It is far beyond that day and event. This property is part of the 540 acres Julian Feild purchased in 1856. This site from day one has been a part of controversy and progression, challenging the norm and playing a role in the journey of defining Mansfield as a community UNITED. In 1870, Julian Feild brought John Collier to Mansfield and established the Mansfield Male and Female College on land that would become known as the "Mansfield School Land" and plotted as Block 17 of the original town. A two-story building from Fort Belknap was dismantled and reassembled on the site to be used for classes, church services, and housing for the male students only. In

1871, the Texas Legislature incorporated the Mansfield Male and Female College, and granted it the authority to issue degrees in the arts and sciences. It was advertised as Mansfield Male and Female College & Texas Normal Institute. This predates the earliest chartered state and private teachers colleges in Texas. In its seventeen years of existence, Mansfield Male and Female College graduates three future U.S. Congressmen, many educators, and several future medical doctors, lawyers, and prominent judges.

Understand that the existence of both a male and female college together was extremely controversial at the time. Especially in the conservative South. Especially when it was NOT associated with an organized religious organization. This was at the end of the Civil War during the reconstruction years when the roles and acceptability of what women could do are changing rapidly. You do NOT put men and women together in a higher educational setting. You do NOT educate women to a higher education unless they come from a family of higher financial and social means. You do NOT expose men and especially women to an educational program that was NOT rooted in your spiritual belief system. The existence of Mansfield Male and Female College was praised for its progressive approach and would have been highly controversial for the time.

In 1873, Julian Feild gives the Mansfield School Land to John Collier and stipulated that the “grounds are deeded for school purposes and never shall be diverted from school purposes”. In 1874, Julian Feild gives the one-acre church tract to the Mansfield Congregation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, which he had retained from the southeast corner of the School Land. The congregation chooses to defer building and purchases the chapel of the Mansfield Male and Female College to use for its services. It will not construct a large modern building on the church tract until 1892. In 1907, the Mansfield Academy Association was organized and in 1909 the Mansfield Independent School District was organized. In 1924, the Mansfield High School building was built on this site. In 1940, the Rock Gym was constructed as a WPA project giving Mansfield its first indoor basketball court. This property has been the location of the Mansfield educational system for 154 years, until the Mansfield ISD conveyed the property to the City of Mansfield in 2024.

There is no dispute that this land is historic to the city of Mansfield. There is no dispute that this land has been the site of controversy and progression. There is no dispute that this soil we stand upon has seen fierce debate, anger, hate, and also happiness along with fond memories from the Mansfield school, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and of course the Geyer Baseball Field. So WHY dedicate this site today on the seventieth anniversary of a dark day in Mansfield history? It's because that day doesn't define us and ignoring that event diminishes the recognition of who we are today. A community UNITED together regardless of race, religion, or economic position. We are not perfect and the journey will always continue. We are a proud community that embraces what we stand for and the journey getting there. Our churches and the clergy in Mansfield have led the way in that journey from 1870 to today.

The landmark will be located on the site of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. It will be a Community Project designed and paid for by the citizens of Mansfield. The Historical Society has led the challenge with the mission of reflecting where we are today. The landmark will focus on a bronze statue of four children of different races holding hands by a flagpole. The large gazebo is reflecting the center of community involvement as in the past when gazebos were prevalent in all communities around 1900. I will speak at the end of the program on who you can be a part of this community landmark. This is NOT a City of Mansfield project. This is a Mansfield Community Project celebrating our journey and who we are today, Mansfield United. Will you be a part of the celebration and ownership of this Historic Landmark?