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Methods of Historical Research Paper

Homer L. Rodgers: The Commerce Street Tailor

Robert Grey Miller

HIST 4301

Philis Barragán Goetz, PhD

May 10, 2020

The common heroes of our time are often overlooked. Doctors and nurses get recognition for helping the sick in times of need. Farmers working in the fields grow our food. Cowboys round up the cattle to bring to market. Teachers help students learn and prosper in society. However, the bus drivers, janitors, food service industry workers, and retail shop owners are usually passed by as insignificant. Not much has been said or recorded about the ordinary workers of our society, let alone African Americans in Texas. San Antonio provides a wealth of untapped knowledge to examine the average worker and the surrounding social interconnectivity of society. This paper is about a person's ability, to build purpose in society, and contribute to their community, using individual action despite the effects of racial prejudice and injustice.

The end of the Civil War brought freedom to many former slaves. Reconstruction failed to bring equality to African Americans. Individuals had to fight to earn a living despite the growing set of laws promoting segregation in the South. African Americans who failed to provide income for their families would starve. Despite the enormous odds against poor Southern families some not only survived but excelled in life. Sharecroppers saw the urgency of advancing their own place in society. Workers' joined the railroad and traveled for the first time. Workers families grew larger and the importance of earnings increased. By examining the events that surrounded a local businessman, Homer Laval Rodgers, and his surrounding family, we can determine the changing social factors that impacted African Americans living in San Antonio. Today in the city of San Antonio, racial inequalities and division continue to exist, however, learning about our past can bring us closer together as a society while helping to maintain the cultural heritage that makes us each unique.

Homer Rodgers' great grandparents were Bill Curtis and Susan Classy Hutchinson. The 1870 census for Fayette Texas, located between Hallettsville and Buckners Creek, showed a

family of nine children living with their parents.¹ Bill Curtis was a tenant farmer and wife Susan Classy Hutchinson kept house. Mary the youngest daughter of 4, helped her mother in the house. The rest of the children were all field hands: Austin 17, Sallie 15, Alley 12, Lizzie 11, Texana 10, Caroline 9, and Susan 8. Hanna J. Curtis, Rodgers' great grandmother, was 14 at the time and worked in the fields to help her Dad. Neither of Hanna J. Curtis' parents learned to read or write. The real estate value of the family farm was listed as \$300. The nearby post office was located at Black Jack Springs. Bill Curtis' place of birth is listed as North Carolina, Susan's birthplace is listed as Virginia.²

On July 12, 1867, Bill Curtis registered to vote in Fayette County, Texas.³ Bill Curtis had registered to vote only two years after the Civil War ended. By then he had spent 14 years in Texas.⁴ Curtis lived in Oso, "an unincorporated rural community located on the divide between Haw and Rocky creeks three miles northeast of Flatonia in southwestern Fayette County."⁵ The town had a "mill, a cotton gin, a tannery, and a blacksmith shop."⁶ Bill Curtis had been born in Marengo, Alabama. He was most likely born into bondage. He might have worked on the plantation of slave owners Thomas Roe Curtis and wife Nancy Curtis. Thomas Roe Curtis was a Captain in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. When Bill Curtis gained his freedom, he continued to use the last name of Curtis for social mobility. Bill Curtis registered to vote exactly 4 months and 10 days after Tomas Roe Curtis died on March 2, 1867.⁷

¹ 1870 United States Federal Census, Fayette County, Texas, digital image s.v. "Bill Curtis," *Ancestry.com*.

² *Ibid.*

³ "Texas, Voter Registration Lists, 1867-1869" digital image s.v. "Bill Curtis"(1867), *Ancestry.com*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Texas State Historical Association, Online Handbook Articles, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hvo38>
Lotto, Frank. *Fayette County: Her History and Her People*. Schulenburg, Texas: Sticker Steam Press, 1902; rpt., Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Leon County, Texas, Wills and Probate Records 1833-1974, Last Will and Testament, 18 May 1866, digital image s.v. "Thomas Roe Curtis"(2015), *Ancestry.com*.

According to the 1830 census Thomas Roe Curtis is listed as having 5 slaves.⁸ Thomas Roe Curtis' occupation is listed as a farmer.⁹ On the 1850 census for Schedule 2 Enslaved Inhabitants of Marengo, Alabama, Thomas Roe Curtis is listed as having once owned 29 slaves, 13 males, and 16 females.¹⁰ By this time, Homer Rodgers' great grandfather Bill Curtis was probably a slave on the Curtis' farm. The 1860 census shows Thomas Roe Curtis' property value at \$3,693. The acreage of land he had amassed totaled to 22,713 acres. Sometime after the 1860 Alabama census, but prior to the Civil War, Thomas Roe Curtis moved to Leon, Texas. He took Bill Curtis with him, along with his other slaves. Thomas Roe Curtis would die in Leon, Texas. Years later Thomas Roe Curtis' a visitor to the Curtis Cemetery would remark that his headstone had been run over accidentally by a "bulldozer when clearing a fence."¹¹ The headstone had shown so much wear that it was almost unrecognizable.

Homer Rodgers' maternal grandmother Hanna J. Curtis eventually married Sam Burleson. Burleson, Rodgers grandfather, was born in 1850 Gonzales County, Texas. In the 1880 census, his ethnicity is listed as Mulatto. His occupation is a farm worker.¹² Hanna J. Curtis' ethnicity is listed as a Black. Her occupation is a housewife.¹³ On December 20, 1877, Hanna J. Curtis and Sam Burleson were married in Fayette, Texas. The 1880 census for Gonzales County, shows that Hanna and Sam Burleson had four children, Texanna, George G., Roberta, and Olivia. Sam worked on the farm while Hanna, with failing eyesight, tended to the house. Sam's dad was born in Mississippi, his mother was born in Virginia. It is unclear what happened to Sam

⁸ 1830 United States Federal Census, Schedule 1, Marengo, Alabama, digital image s.v. "Thomas Roe Curtis," *Ancestry.com*.

⁹ 1850 United States Federal Census, Schedule 1, Marengo, Alabama, digital image s.v. "Thomas Roe Curtis," *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁰ 1850 United States Federal Census, Schedule 2, Marengo, Alabama, digital image s.v. "Thomas Roe Curtis," *Ancestry.com*.

¹¹ Picture of the Curtis Cemetery, May 9, 2003, <https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/166665075/person/432165189671/media/344c1758-097d-403d-b9ec-cdc8bf9571b3?usePUBJs=true>

¹² 1880 United States Federal Census, Gonzales County, Texas, digital image s.v. "Sam Burleson," *Ancestry.com*.

¹³ *Ibid*.

Burleson, but in 1895, Hanna remarried. Her new husband's name was Sam Neil.¹⁴ Hanna Burleson died on July 25, 1930. She died from complications caused by a stroke. The examiner at Santa Rosa Hospital said the primary cause of death was apoplexy, and secondarily was carcinoma of the breast. She was buried in Waelder Texas. Bill Curtis was shown as the father, but the mother was listed as unknown.¹⁵

Homer Rodgers' mother Gertrude Agnes Burleson-Pendergraph died in 1973. She had lived at 430 Nevada Street. Pendergraph had her own business. In 1960, the San Antonio city directory states, "Minnies Place Gertrude Pendergraph Recreation Club Unique Barber Shop," was located at 518 East Commerce.¹⁶ A newspaper article from the San Antonio Register states that Pendergraph was a "native of Waelder and a member of a pioneer Texas family."¹⁷ The article goes on to mention, "As a young woman she was married to the late Will Rodgers, with a son, Homer, being born into the union. In 1936 she married Hays Pendergraph. She was once again widowed in 1959. Gertrude Agnes Burleson-Pendergraph was laid to rest in Eastview cemetery.¹⁸ On March 30, 1973, Mrs. Pendergraph's family issued a card of thanks in the paper "expressing their appreciation to their many friends for the sympathy shown at her death."¹⁹ The Sutton-Sutton mortuary was also thanked for "its stately service which was rendered in such a professional matter."²⁰

¹⁴ "Texas, County Marriage Records, 1817-1965," digital image s.v. "Sam Neil and Hanna Burleson" *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁵ "Texas, Death Certificates, 1903-1982," digital image s.v. "Hanna Curtis" (1856-1930), *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁶ "U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995" digital image s.v. "Gertrude Recreation Pendergraph"(1960), *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁷ *San Antonio Register*, "Pendergraph Rites Held Wednesday," Friday, March 16, 1973.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ *San Antonio Register*, "Card of Thanks: Mrs. G. Pendergraph," Friday, March 30, 1973.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

Homer Rodgers' step-father Hays Pendergraph died on August 26, 1959.²¹ Details for Pendergraph's Funeral Rites were put into the San Antonio Register. When he died, his house was located at 430 Nevada Street. Mr. Pendergraph was born on July 4, 1878.²² He went to school in Smithville. Pendergraph later opened many businesses there and in San Antonio. Among Pendergraph's enterprises were a "movie theatre, café," and "barbershop" owner. For a time he was even a "licensed bondsman."²³ His parents were William and Elizabeth Pendergraph. In the newspaper article, it states that Pendergraph, "June 4, 1902... was married to," his first wife, "Miss Ada Brown of LaGrange."²⁴ In 1916, Hays Pendergraph moved to San Antonio. On June 6, 1936, Hays Pendergraph married his second wife Gertrude Rodgers at the Second Baptist Church in San Antonio. Hays Pendergraph, "twice was the owner of the San Antonio Indians baseball club," a baseball team that played night games.²⁵ Many of the Black teams played on the fields that Whites used during the day.

In Bruce A. Glasrud's book, *The African American Experience in Texas: An Anthology*, the author states "In Texas, several businessmen who sponsored different African American baseball teams from around the state tried to create a semiprofessional league of their own."²⁶ In the sports section of the San Antonio Register from Friday, May 29, 1931, the section headline says "Black Indians Under New Ownership."²⁷ The article stated "Mr. Cullen E. Taylor, local business man, and sport enthusiast has purchased the controlling interest in the team, formerly

²¹ *San Antonio Register*, "Hays Pendergraph Funeral Rites Held Saturday," Friday, September 4, 1959.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Glasrud, Bruce A. and James M. Smallwood. *The African American Experience in Texas: An Anthology*. Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 2007. (221)

²⁷ *San Antonio Register*, "Black Indians and Players," Friday, May 29, 1931.

held by Mr. Hays Pendergraph.”²⁸ The nearby ad stated that that team was playing at “Baseball League Park Houston,” with the “Black Buffs vs. Black Indians.” The same ad stated that the game would take place on “Friday and Saturday nights, May 29 and 30, 8:30 o’clock.”²⁹ The San Antonio Black Indians were occasionally matched up with the Fort Worth Black Panthers baseball team.³⁰



Sports Column highlighting the change in ownership of the San Antonio Black Indians Baseball Team. Photo Courtesy of the San Antonio Register. (*San Antonio Register*, “Black Indians and Players,” Friday, May 29, 1931.)

In addition to his many business ventures, Rodgers’ step-dad also rented out part of his house to provide extra income. On December 16, 1955, Hays Pendergraph listed a classified advertisement. The furnished apartment rental at 430 Nevada Street with phone number 3-9418 was listed.³¹ Pendergraph continued to earn money from the occasional renter. Earlier in November 1949, one of Pendergraph’s renters ended up stealing a good sum of money from the

²⁸ *San Antonio Register*, “Black Indians and Players,” Friday, May 29, 1931.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *San Antonio Register*, “On The Boulevard” Friday, May 29, 1931.

³¹ *San Antonio Register*, “Classified Advertisements: Houses for Rent, Rooms, Apartments,” Friday, December 16, 1955.

family. The renter and another man stole \$18. The title of the article states "Two Jailed as Theft Suspects". The article mentioned that "Pendergraph said that he had returned home Tuesday evening to find a padlock on the kitchen closet door broken." His son's statement read, "Tuesday evening, by Vastene Pendergraph, 423 Nevada Street, that \$18 had been taken from his home."³²

Mr. Pendergraph also used the family home for club meetings. Friday, June 30, 1933, the local newspaper stated that the Modernique Study Club Met at 430 Nevada Street. The club was listed in the Society, Clubs, and Personals section. The paper states that the club "will study conventional rules of etiquette" and "Negro history in general." Miss Grace Pendergraph hosted the party.

Hays Pendergraph was also an entrepreneur. He owned his own barbershop. He first learned the trade while stationed at Camp Travis in the army.³³ Hays Pendergraph married Gertrude Rodgers on June 16, 1936.³⁴ At age 63, Pendergraph's Draft Card states he is self-employed.³⁵ However, the new address for employment was a café at 524 East Commerce.³⁶ The barbershop business later moved to 518 East Commerce, with Gertrude being the sole proprietor of the business after Hays' death.³⁷ This fact implies that the business was strong enough for Gertrude Pendergraph to take over.

On September 15, 1910, Homer Rodgers was born in San Antonio. His parents were Will Rodgers and Gertrude Burleson-Pendergraph. On the 1920 census, the family lived in the sixth ward of Bexar County.³⁸ The family lived in a house off of 247 Potomac Street. Will Rodgers'

³² *San Antonio Register*, "Two Jailed as Theft Suspects," Friday, November 4, 1949.

³³ "U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918" digital image s.v. "Hays Pendergraph"(2005), *Ancestry.com*.

³⁴ "Missouri, Jackson County Marriage Records, 1840-1985," digital image s.v. "Hays Pendergraph and Gertrude Rodgers" *Ancestry.com*.

³⁵ "U.S., World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942" digital image s.v. "Hays Pendergraph"(2010), *Ancestry.com*.

³⁶ *Ibid*.

³⁷ "U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995" digital image s.v. "Hays Pendergraph"(2011), *Ancestry.com*.

³⁸ 1920 United States Federal Census, Bexar County, Texas, digital image s.v. "Homer L. Rodgers," *Ancestry.com*.

mother is listed as Maria Rodgers. Homer's father, Will Rodgers, was born in December 21, 1891.³⁹ On the 1910 census for Navarro County Texas, William Rogers[sic] is listed as a coal presser for his occupation.⁴⁰ The Texas State Historical Association states "In 1874 the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio Railway extended its line through Flatonia, and all business interests moved there. The post office closed in 1874, and by 1900 only the place name remained."⁴¹

Will Rodgers and his wife Gertrude relocated to San Antonio because of the railway. It is no coincidence that Homer Rodgers' family would become attached to East San Antonio. Author Lawrence D. Rice states, "Train excursions from one city to another were popular. Their popularity was, no doubt, the result of limited opportunity for travel as slaves, and even after emancipation most freedman never traveled far from home."⁴² Sunset Depot was a public train station built in 1903.⁴³ White and Black passengers traveled in separate cars from New Orleans on the Southern Pacific Railway, first stopping in San Antonio, and then on to Los Angeles. The train was used for both leisure and commerce. The train also provided transportation to and from the Alamo Iron Works built in 1876.⁴⁴ Later the Alamo Dome sports arena opened in 1993.⁴⁵

The train would also help aid local businesses. Homer Rodgers' business benefited from the commerce of San Antonio. Military service members, ironworkers, and other business people headed downtown, would have stopped by Rodgers' shop in the 1940s. Rodgers was making enough money to donate to the community. On Friday, February 9, 1945, Rodgers business,

³⁹ "U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918" digital image s.v. "Will Rodgers,"(2005), *Ancestry.com*.

⁴⁰ 1910 United States Federal Census, Navarro County, Texas, digital image s.v. "William Rodgers,"(2010), *Ancestry.com*.

⁴¹ Handbook of Texas Online, Jeff Carroll, "OSO, TX," accessed May 09, 2020, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hvo38>.

⁴² Rice, Lawrence D, and DRT Collection. 1971. *The Negro in Texas, 1874-1900*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. (266)

⁴³ Allen, Paula. 2005. *San Antonio: Then and Now*. San Diego: Thunder Bay Press. (58)

⁴⁴ Allen, Paula. 2005. *San Antonio: Then and Now*. San Diego: Thunder Bay Press. (56)

⁴⁵ Allen, Paula. 2005. *San Antonio: Then and Now*. San Diego: Thunder Bay Press. (57)

Four-Hour Cleaners made a donation of \$2 for Cemetery Beautification. That same night the San Antonio Civic Cemetery Club met at the YWCA of Pine Branch Street. The San Antonio Register article says that the “club's financial effort to raise funds to be used in beautifying City cemetery No. 3, at Wyoming street and New Braunfels avenue.” It also mentions, “With warm weather setting in, the organization is anxious to begin cleaning and beautifying before grass and weeds overrun the cemetery.”⁴⁶

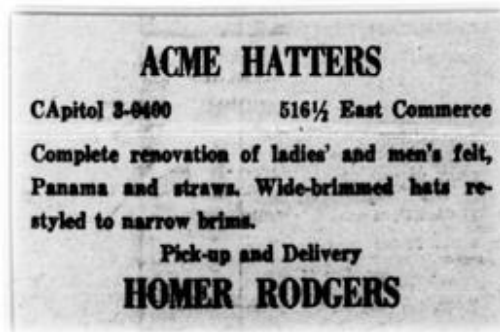
In 1946, a weekly ad started appearing in the *San Antonio Register* for Four Hour Cleaners. The ad stated, “Pick Up and Deliver Dial Belmont 3-0932.”⁴⁷ As Homer Rodgers’ business grew, so did the ads. The larger ad stated, “Will pick up your garments and deliver them thoroughly cleaned and pressed in four hours.”⁴⁸ The newspaper ad changed in 1961. The business was still run by Rodgers, but the name had now changed to ACME Hatters. The address changed from 520 East Commerce to 516 ½ East Commerce. Even the phone number changed to Capitol 3-0400. The newspaper ad stated “Complete renovation of ladies’ and men’s felt, Panama and straws. Wide-brimmed hats re-styled to narrow brims.” The newspaper ad now proudly displayed the local business owner's name.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *San Antonio Register*, “\$170 in Cash, \$275 Pledged For Cemetery Beautification,” Friday, February 16, 1945.

⁴⁷ *San Antonio Register*, “Advertisement: Four Hour Cleaners,” Friday, August 23, 1946.

⁴⁸ *San Antonio Register*, “Advertisement: Four Hour Cleaners,” Friday, July 12, 1946.

⁴⁹ *San Antonio Register*, “Advertisement, ACME Hatters,” Friday, June 16, 1961.



Advertisements from Homer L. Rodgers tailoring businesses. Photos courtesy of the San Antonio Register. (*San Antonio Register*, "Advertisement: Four Hour Cleaners," Friday, August 23, 1946.) (*San Antonio Register*, "Advertisement, ACME Hatters," Friday, June 16, 1961.)

However, the business was not always perfect. Most business owners experienced trials and hardships. Wednesday, April 23, 1947, Four Hour Cleaners off 520 East Commerce was broken into. A 17-year-old teenager named Elliot Watkins was the presumed suspect. *The San Antonio Register* states that the person who broke into the store, "gained entrance by breaking a panel in the rear door."⁵⁰ The following day, Watkins was found near "Center and Chestnut streets, with an armful of clothing."⁵¹

Rodgers suffered from many lawsuits throughout the years. However, the lawsuits show us that local African American business owners were able to gain contracts from both national companies and the local school system. This shows us the connection that Rodgers had to the larger city. Three of the lawsuits involve San Antonio Independent School District and two involve the Stetson Hat Company. In 1949, Rodgers was sued by Southwestern Specialty Co. Inc.⁵² In 1954, 1959, and 1963, Rodgers was sued by San Antonio Independent School District.⁵³

⁵⁰ *San Antonio Register*, "Men's Clothing Stolen from Shop," Friday, April 25, 1947.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Southwestern Specialty Co. Inc., a corporation v. William Bureson and Homer L. Rodgers*, 587548, 88, 485(Bexar County Ct. 1949).

⁵³ *City of San Antonio and San Antonio Independent School District v. Homer L. Rodgers, IND and DBA Four Hour Cleaners* 979021, 48, 235(Bexar County Ct. 1954).

In 1968, Rodgers was sued by Hutt & Wassorman, Inc. d/b/a Stephen L. Stetson Co. LTD.⁵⁴ In 1969, Rodgers was sued by the American Hat & Cap Company.⁵⁵ In 1977, Marvel's Dstbr. Inc. sued Rodgers.⁵⁶ Despite the many incidences of lawsuits, Homer remained loyal to the St. Paul/Commerce St area. The court cases give precedence to how important Mr. Rodgers was as a business owner, not just in the St. Paul Commerce St. area. He remained active as a participating community member for most of his life. It is unknown why Rodgers became tangled up in these lawsuits. However, somehow Rodgers got caught in the web of a legal battle between the Nephew of the Stetson Hat company and it's founders. Evidently, the Nephew had been making fraudulent hats and selling them with labels that resembled the famed hat maker.

In addition to the many legal battles, Rodgers also fought injustice based on race. Rodgers knew that to make his community better, he needed to change the minds of law enforcement. On August 4, 1968, Homer Rodgers appeared on page 40 of the *San Antonio Light Newspaper*. This early Republican newspaper was instrumental in national as well as local political affairs.⁵⁷ The headline that day read in the paper read "Police 'Racial' Image Improves."⁵⁸ The image shows Captain Joe Neaves, Joseph Pollard, and Homer Rodgers, preparing for a public town hall meeting. The topic was the police force and racism. Joseph Pollard, and Homer Rodgers, were both "regular" members of the Eastside community. Both men had local businesses, were active politically but were not trying to be necessarily politically

City of San Antonio and San Antonio Independent School District v. Homer L. Rodgers, IND and DBA Four Hour Cleaners 202810, 53, 575(Bexar County Ct. 1959).

City of San Antonio and San Antonio Independent School District v. Homer L. Rodgers, IND and DBA Four Hour Cleaners 524711, 63, 366(Bexar County Ct. 1963).

⁵⁴ Hutt & Wassorman, Inc. d/b/a Stephen L. Stetson Co. LTD. v. Homer Rodgers, IND and DBA Acme Hatters Cleaners 939842, 80, 481(Dist. Ct. 1968).

⁵⁵ American Hat & Cap Company v. Homer Rodgers, IND and DBA Acme Hatters 973019, 88, 539(J.P. Ct. 1969).

⁵⁶ Marvel's Dstbr. Inc. v. Homer L. Rodgers, IND and DBA Four Hour Cleaners 837268, 155, 209(Bexar County Ct. 1977).

⁵⁷ Rice, Lawrence D, and DRT Collection. 1971. *The Negro in Texas, 1874-1900*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. (41)

⁵⁸ *San Antonio Light*, "Police 'Racial' Image Improves," August 4, 1968.

correct. Neaves was part of the “Community Relations Bureau as part of a program to improve relations between police and minorities.”⁵⁹ The police department was trying to change the racial dialog involving community members on San Antonio’s Eastside, and wanted to talk to common people that were influential in society, but had not been overtly outspoken leaders. Pollard and Rodgers fit the bill perfectly. In the newspaper article, Captain Neaves stated, “We don’t want G.J. Sutton or Rev. C.W. Black on the discussions, because they’ve never had any trouble with police directly.”⁶⁰ Despite the many problems encountered, Rodgers remained part of the community on the Eastside.

THE SAN ANTONIO LIGHT Classified West Ad—CA 6-1231

Don Politico

Police ‘Racial’ Image Improves

By DON POLITICO

to the month since police Capt. Joe Neaves took over the newly formed Community Relations Bureau, he has surprised himself in the program the bureau has made in improving relations between police and minority groups.

“At first I thought I’d be some sort of a complaint broker, just trying to pacify someone after they had reason to complain,” Neaves said.

Instead he has been allowed to launch constructive programs to improve both the image and the actions of cops who deal with ethnic groups—particularly Negroes.

SEEN CHANGES

“Some East Side citizens have told me they’ve noticed a change in how policemen act,” he said. “Much of the change can be attributed to Neaves himself.

A liberal-leaning cop, Neaves distinguished himself by remaining closer to the rank and file—gentler than in the eyes to which much of police work belong.

He has persuaded Police Officer Michael to let the department embark on programs that other brass might not have even considered.

Likely to be the most controversial program is a planned



—the ones likely to throw a Molotov cocktail at a building,” Neaves said.

“We might even include some police characters — guys who have been arrested by police and can tell us how it feels.”

Neaves uses the same reasoning in his speaking engagements.

Although he has and will speak before such groups as the Rotary Club, he prefers to speak to Negro organizations like the Gheto Improvement Association, whose members are young militants and whose the police image is the worst.

So far Neaves has been “in” with the militant blacks because he is willing to meet with them and has kept an open mind on subjects such as police brutality.

TROUBLE SPOTS

Part of this weekend he is spending touring East Side trouble spots at night with Negroes.

Neaves doesn’t use a hard-sell approach to try to convince Negroes that cops are on their side too.

And he uses the same long-pitch approach in convincing cops they’re not perfect.

NO LEADERS

“We don’t want G. J. Sutton or Rev. C. W. Black on the discussions, because they’ve never had any trouble with police di-

JOSEPH POLLARD (L) and Homer Rodgers (R) meet with Capt. Joe Neaves of the Community Relations Bureau as part of a program to improve relations between police and minorities. (Staff Photo.)

and cops working East Side difficulty when one of the discussions was broadcast over radio and the cops will tell the Negroes how much it hurts and gives the problems they have in keeping order in all parts of San Antonio.

If tempers become heated, much the better, said Neaves. The theory behind the meeting had any trouble with police di-

James Pollard on the left, Police Captain Joe Neaves center, and Homer L. Rodgers on the right. Photo courtesy of the San Antonio Light. (*San Antonio Light*, “Police ‘Racial’ Image Improves,” August 4, 1968.)

⁵⁹ *San Antonio Light*, “Police ‘Racial’ Image Improves,” August 4, 1968.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

The Commerce Street Tailor, Homer Rodgers, died on May 4, 1980, age 69. He was pronounced dead at Robert B. Green Hospital. The official cause of death was listed as Metatastatic[*sic*] Carcinoma of the lung. The document list City Cemetery #3 as his final resting place.⁶¹ The cemetery was the same one he had contributed time and money restoring. The cemetery was first “established in 1889.”⁶² In 1867, San Antonio designated land for African Americans “west of the San Antonio National Cemetery,” which later expanded after the government took it over for military use.⁶³

An obituary in the *San Antonio Register* states that Homer Rodgers was a civil rights activist. Rodgers worked with his surrounding community and the police department, not because he had to, but because he choose to improve Eastside San Antonio. He benefited from having a safer community. He knew that initiating some kind of conversation might help racial relations. The article in the paper states "Rodgers entered the tailoring business in the mid-1930s when he opened a cleaner in the vicinity which is now called St. Paul Square."⁶⁴ The paper states that “Rodgers worked closely with the late State Rep. G.J. Sutton for civil rights in San Antonio during the late 1950s. He was involved in marches and demonstrations for equality.”⁶⁵ His family had moved to San Antonio from Waelder Texas.⁶⁶

All the agency that Rodgers tried to instill in his own family is evident in his relatives. They each became successful in their own right. Each of his relatives expressed emotional ties to Rodgers. When Homer Rodgers passed away, a formal card of thanks from the family was

⁶¹ "Texas, Death Certificates, 1903-1982," digital image s.v. "Homer Rodgers" (1910-1980), Ancestry.com.

⁶² Hinton, Marks. *Historic Houston Streets*. Houston, Texas: Bright Sky Press, 2011. Accessed May 10, 2020, <http://historichouston1836.com/san-antonio-historic-cemeteries/>

⁶³ Hinton, Marks. *Historic Houston Streets*. Houston, Texas: Bright Sky Press, 2011. Accessed May 10, 2020, <http://historichouston1836.com/san-antonio-historic-cemeteries/>

⁶⁴ *San Antonio Register*, “Final rites for Homer Laval Rodgers,” Thursday, May 8, 1980.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

displayed in the San Antonio Register on May 22, showing thanks to “Rev. Charles T Langhum, Rev. C.W. Black and Father Joseph de la Garza.”⁶⁷ The “In Memoriam” section of the newspaper stated “Four years have passed but time nor death can erase the beautiful memories you left behind.”⁶⁸ In another card of thanks his grandson Wilmire Jones III had these kind words to say “If anyone ever asks me if I knew Homer L. Rodgers Sr. I would hold my head up high and proudly say yes, he was and always will be my grandfather.”⁶⁹

Homer Rodgers’ wife was Flossie Mae Lowery. When Rodgers’ wife passed away, Rev. Claud Black Junior officiated Laura Flossye Mae Lowery-Rodgers' funeral at the Lewis Memorial Chapel. She had passed away on October 10, 2000. When she was younger, she had attended Phillis Wheatley High School, an all-black high school in Houston, Texas.⁷⁰ The school was named after an African American woman that was a former slave. She was the first to publish poems of her own in the United States. San Antonio Independent School District had become integrated in the 1950s. The Houston school had remained an all-black school until the very early 1970s.⁷¹ Remaining culturally segregated was a fact of life for some African American schools. The emergence of private schools sometimes pulled funds from desegregated public schools, as more and more whites left the school districts.

Flossie Mae Lowery’s parents were Thomas Levi Lowery Sr. and Minnie Louise Mead. In 1991, the remaining Mead family members honored their ancestors with a Centennial Commemoration in the San Antonio Register. The family had moved to their home in 1891. The location was 914 West French Place. Before their location off French Place, the family had lived

⁶⁷ *San Antonio Register*, “Card of Thanks: Homer Rodgers,” 1 Thursday, May 22, 1980.

⁶⁸ *San Antonio Register*, “In Memoriam: Homer L. Rodgers,” Thursday, May 3, 1984.

⁶⁹ *San Antonio Register*, “Card of Thanks: Homer L. Rodgers Sr.,” Thursday, May 15, 1980.

⁷⁰ *San Antonio Register*, “Final rites held for well known San Antonian, Laura Flossye Rodgers,” Thursday, October 19, 2000.

⁷¹ *San Antonio Express-News*, “Wheatley was 'as good as anybody',” March 16, 2015.

off Dallas Street near “Elmira Street, the Expressway, and McCullough street.” The paper says that “Johnny Mead, was born after the move to French place, the first of three generations to be born in that location.”⁷² A picture of Flossye Mae Rodgers appears in the 1989 issue of the San Antonio Register. There she honors her family members as part of a Fellowship Breakfast. Flossye Mae Rodgers’ sister, Sarah Elizabeth Davis, is shown being named “Woman of the Year,” by the “Artemisia Bowden Chapter Business and Professional Women.” The article says that Davis was “an Educator and Librarian,” who taught at, “ Jourdanton, Trinity, Hondo, and Wilcox Texas.”⁷³

Rodgers wasn’t the only one interested in community involvement. His half-brother Andrew Vastine Pendergraph used poetry to express the sentiments that his community faced during segregation. On Friday, May 29, 1931, the San Antonio Register displayed a poem on page 2. “A Gem for Life,” was written by Andrew Vastine Pendergraph, Homer Rodgers’ Half-Brother. To the right of the poem is an article about the Scottsboro 9 from Alabama. The article states that in order to find out who will represent the young boys, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has been battling the International Labor Defense for rights to take over the defense. Pendergraph’s poem was an eloquent ode to the African American civil rights movement and persistence to overcome injustice.⁷⁴ In February of 1944, the San Antonio Register posted an event announcing the birth of “a boy, Vastine Andrew, Jr. to Mr. and Mrs. Vastine Andrew Pendergraph, 455 Micklejohn, February 1st.”⁷⁵ On May 10, 1955, Andrew Vastine Pendergraph married his second wife Irene Johnson.⁷⁶

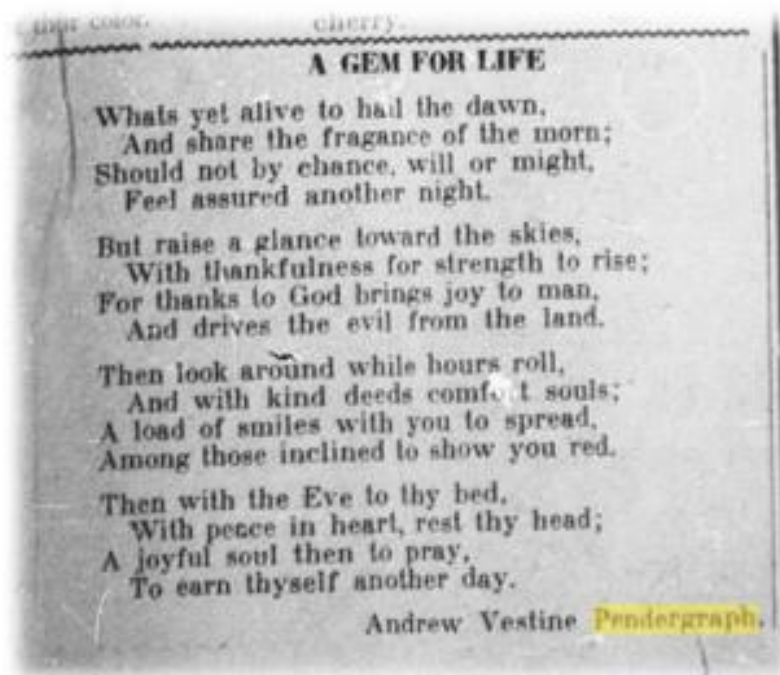
⁷² *San Antonio Register*, “Descendants celebrate Centennial commemoration of Homestead,” Thursday, July 25, 1991.

⁷³ *San Antonio Register*, “Bowden Chapter honors Woman Of The Year,” Thursday, October 26, 1989.

⁷⁴ *San Antonio Register*, “A Gem for Life,” Friday, May 29, 1931.

⁷⁵ *San Antonio Register*, “Events: Announcing the Addition of,” Friday, February 11, 1944.

⁷⁶ *San Antonio Register*, “Marriage Licenses: May 10,” Friday, May 20, 1955.



Poem by Andrew Vestine Pendergraph. Photo courtesy of The San Antonio Register.
(*San Antonio Register*, "A Gem for Life," Friday, May 29, 1931.)

Rodgers' legacy continues with his children. Homer Rodgers' daughter, Sheilah Ann "Sunni" Rodgers, was mentioned as a local San Antonio writer in the Register newspaper.⁷⁷ She was published in *The Artemisian Literary Review*. Shielah Rodgers states that her Grandmother Minnie L. Mead Lowery was "one of the six founding students and first graduates of St. Philip's College".⁷⁸ The same newspaper has an ad for Sunni Rodgers' business specializing in crocheted hair styling.⁷⁹ Social historian Ruthe Winegarten states "The cultural life of San Antonio's black community was highlighted for many years by Josephine Bellinger in her regular column 'Jo's Jottings' in the *San Antonio Register*."⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *San Antonio Register*, "People and Community: Pain Brings Accolade to Local San Antonian," December 4, 1997.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Winegarten, Ruthe Lewin. *Black Texas Women: 150 Years of Trial and Triumph*. First ed. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1996.

In 1955 Sheilah Ann Rodgers traveled to Ohio with her relatives T.L. Lowery Sr. and Mrs. Sarah Elizabeth Davis to meet up with her mother, Flossye Mae Rodgers.⁸¹ In 1966, Flossye Mae Rodgers took a car trip with her daughter Sheilah Ann to Washington D.C. to visit family. In Washington, they saw “the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Arlington cemetery, where they saw the changing of the guards at the Tomb of The Unknown Soldier; and John F. Kennedy’s grave.”⁸² In 1972, in reference to another trip, an article in the San Antonio Register stated, “While in D.C., she was the house guest of her brother and his family Mr. and Mrs. T.L. Lowery, Jr. Having once lived there while employed at the Pentagon, Flossye's return was, as always, a happy instance with old friends.” The family partook in "picnics, yachting, home parties, horse races, cocktail dinners, splash parties, barbeque, theatre parties and other entertainment.”⁸³

Later in 1984, The Register newspaper would welcome back Sheilah Ann Rodgers. She was in town visiting friends and family. She traveled from her home in Los Angeles. Rodgers said she assembled a book of poetry called “Soul Searching”. Some of her writing was also in the 1984 edition of the American Poetry Anthology. She also said that she was writing a novel called “Undisputed Truths”. Rodgers notes that “I visited my father’s old place on Commerce, next to the old Cameo Theatre.”⁸⁴

Homer Rodgers’ daughter Jean Rodgers-Clack became campaign manager to James Myart’s campaign for the City Council seat in 1984. Jean Rodgers-Clack headed an advertising firm. Clack said that her father Homer Rodgers, “was a community worker and operated a

⁸¹ *San Antonio Register*, “Jo’s Jottings: Here and There,” September 16, 1955.

⁸² *San Antonio Register*, “Mrs. Rodgers Motors to Visit Relatives In Federal District,” Friday, September 16, 1966.

⁸³ *San Antonio Register*, “Jo’s Jottings: Homecoming,” Friday, September 15, 1972.

⁸⁴ *San Antonio Register*, “Welcome back Sheilah,” Thursday, February 9, 1984.

business in the Black community for over 40 years.”⁸⁵ Jean Rodgers-Clack was also noted as part of the magazine “Notable Women of Texas.”⁸⁶ Clack was incredibly active within the Eastside community of San Antonio. She is listed as having worked with the “Texas Teenage Crime Commission and the United Negro College Fund,” as well as the “State Department of Transportation Engineers, League of Women Voters, Eastside Voter Registration Committee and Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce Speaker’s Bureau on Energy Conservation.”⁸⁷ Clack graduated from Brackenridge High School. By the fall of 1980 Clack began to work on a master’s degree. She had already received a degree in business administration from Southwest Texas State, San Marcos.⁸⁸

Historian Lawrence D. Rice once said that “Any culture, to maintain a real community, must place real value on what preceding generations bequeath to its children; it must, in reality, be receptive to its own past, or at least largely acquiescent to it.”⁸⁹ I believe that to understand where we are at the present, requires us to look in-depth at our past. Homer Rodgers' family history remains a perfect example of the interconnectedness of individuals within our society. Each of Rodgers’ children continued his legacy of education and community involvement. In only a few generations, the family went from slavery, to sharecropping, to business, and finally civic leadership.

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⁸⁵ *San Antonio Register*, “Jean Clack to head Myart campaign,” Thursday, December 20, 1984.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *San Antonio Register*, “Caroyln’s Corner,” Thursday, August 14, 1980.

⁸⁹ Rice, Lawrence D, and DRT Collection. 1971. *The Negro in Texas, 1874-1900*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. (258)

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Note of Thanks:

Special thanks to David C. Carlson, Ph.D., and Liliana Villanueva, of the Bexar County Spanish Archives. Thank you for providing your time and resources to help an undergraduate student complete his research project. I appreciate all your help in finding me primary sources to use in my paper. Also special thanks to Jeremy Zuni and the rest of the staff at Texas A&M Archives and Special Collections. Thank you for making accommodations for me under the time constraints of a busy student. I also appreciate all the hard work that my University Librarian Emily Bliss-Zaks did to help me find secondary sources. To my teachers at A&M University, I am forever grateful. Special thanks to Dr. Philis M. Barragán Goetz, for helping me take charge of my future in education and helping me believe that I can change the world. Please note that all mistakes and errors are the sole responsibility of the author.