



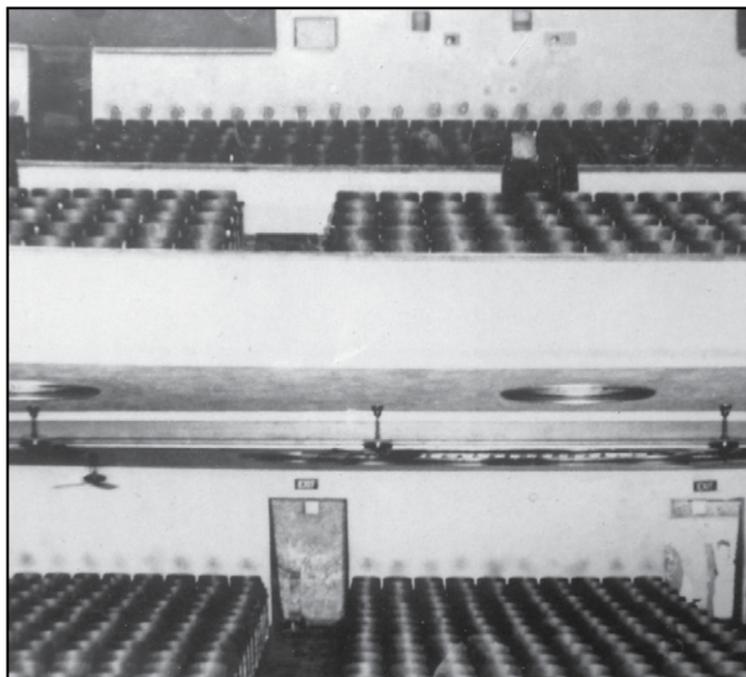
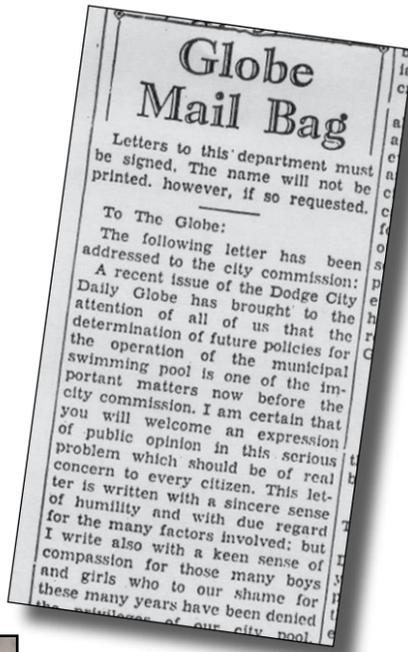
I would give my life to make his small world true and equal'
**Locals recall oft-forgotten
 battle for equal rights**

"May God grant all of us in Dodge City the courage to come face to face with every issue that divides our people, and to build a stronger and holier city by his might."

-- Rev. Rudy Treder



Ruth Martinez, left, was outraged when a local swimming pool finally allowed people of color to swim. Hispanics were allowed to swim one day, African Americans the next, and on the third day the pool would be cleaned before again being opened only to whites. The letter above was written by Rev. Rudy Treder. Martinez also wrote to the *Globe*, expressing her outrage.



This photograph, provided by Louis Sanchez, shows the oil stains on the back wall of the Dodge City Theater. According to Sanchez, Hispanics were made to sit in the back of the theater. The stains came from the oil that they put in their hair, he said.

Mexican American men experienced equal treatment. Their participation in the war effort was visible as proud parents displayed photographs of sons in uniform." Yet, their contribution to the war effort "did not alter the Anglo community's discriminatory practices. ... Mexican Americans became highly resentful."

Upon the death of Rev. Treder, Louis Sanchez, former mayor of Dodge City, described the clergyman's encounter with the commission in a memorial: "Rev. Treder told the commissioners that if these boys were patriotic enough to sacrifice their lives for

this country, they should be entitled to be treated as first class citizens and all the rights thereof. He pointed out the fact that [while in the military], these boys and men had shared not only food, but shelter, showers, and swimming pools. While being in the service, in many instances the Hispanic servicemen had exposed themselves in battle to rescue their fallen service buddies from certain death."

Eventually, the commission relented and agreed to let Hispanics swim one day, and African Americans the next, followed by a thorough cleaning of the pool.

Far from being abated, Ruth Martinez was enraged.

"That's when I wrote that letter," she said from her home in Montezuma.

"...If our friends and neighbors don't consider us good enough to allow us the small privilege of letting our children swim whenever they feel like, instead of freaks, then I don't think it would do anyone any good," she wrote to the *Globe*. "I guess mine can keep splashing water in an old tin tub."

Dodge City resident Fred Rodriguez remembers well the hot summer days of his childhood: "As children, we would watch the American kids swim in the pool through the fence and think, 'Gosh, it would be nice to be able to dive in the water.' To add to my sadness at the pool, as I was touching the fence, one of the young swimmers came over and yelled, 'Get your dirty hands off the fence!'"

"We were not allowed to go into a restaurant," explained Sanchez. "You could go through the kitchen and the dish-washer would say, 'Can I help you?' You'd tell them what you wanted and they'd bring it to you in a paper sack."

"In the theaters we'd have to sit in the balcony. Back then, everybody used hair oil. You can see the spots on the back wall where our heads would touch the wall," he said, laughing.

Three days after Ruth Martinez' 1951 letter appeared in the *Globe*, another letter appeared in the newspaper, this time written by Rev. Treder.

"...I write ... with a keen sense of compassion for those many boys and girls who to our shame for these many years have been denied the privileges of our city pool."

"... May God grant all of us in Dodge City the courage to come face to face with every issue that divides our people, and to build a stronger and holier city by his might. Surely a way can be found to operate this pool for all, just as in Garden City and other towns; and I should prefer to see it a 'free pool' if this were possible. At any rate, let's not evade the issue nor adopt any half-way measures. Determine to rectify a grave social evil and God will give you the way."

"After that came out in the paper," Ruth Martinez recalled, "they relented and said they'd let everyone go swimming in there. Other people, I don't know who all, said they were going to take bats when they opened that pool and take care of them. The minister said he would go down with the kids. Nobody took a bat to anybody."

Today, children, parents and grandparents of all races can recall the fun they had at the pool at some time over the past 60 years. Perhaps it was where they met a spouse, or simply enjoyed hot summer days playing in the cool water. And thanks to the efforts of people such as Ruth Martinez, a multitude of people don't have to include in their recollection the ugly memory of racial intolerance.

By DAVID MYERS

Southwest Kansas Register

Nearly 60 years ago -- a few years after the end of World War II -- a small but highly significant battle was being waged in Dodge City.

And it had to do with a swimming pool.

In July 1951, a proposal was put before the city that would have allowed Hispanics and African Americans to finally be able swim at the municipal swimming pool, which to that point had been opened only to whites.

At first unrelenting, the city finally agreed to open the pool to Hispanics for one day, and to African Americans the next. On the third day the pool would be drained and cleaned before it would again be opened only to Anglo-Americans.

The "concession" was designed in part to quell the growing disquiet over the refusal to allow anyone who wasn't white to swim in the public pool.

The notion of cleaning the pool only after the Hispanics and African Americans swam raised the ire of Ruth Martinez, who, in a July 21, 1951 letter to the *Dodge City Daily Globe*, wrote, in part, "I guess we aren't supposed to mind not being white or clean enough to swim with the rest of the population.... We're not supposed to mind everyone else's dirty water because I notice nothing was said about providing clean water for us."

Ruth Martinez had moved to Dodge City from Copeland after her husband, Jay, a semi-pro baseball player, joined the Dodge City Cowboys baseball team. Once settled in to their new home, the young parents learned the sad truth, that their four children were not allowed to swim in the city pool because of the color of their skin.

"When my six-year-old boy says, 'Mommy, let's go watch them swim,' I would give my life to make his small world true and equal," her letter to the *Globe* read. "But I know my poor life would settle nothing, so I say, 'Let's not, honey. It's too hot to watch and maybe some day I'll take you swimming.'"

"Misery is when you find out your bosom buddy can go in the swimming pool but you can't."

-- Langston Hughes, *Black Misery*, 1969

Several people answered the call to try to convince the commissioners to change their minds. Martinez' husband, Jay, Frank Martinez, John Lara, Matt Pina, and Episcopal Rev. Rudolph "Rudy" Treder, were among those who approached the commission in regard to the volatile issue.

In the late 1940s the notion of civil rights was slowly creeping into the forefront. Mexican Americans and African Americans who had fought in World War II to end fascism came back to a country where they couldn't drink at the same water fountain as a white person.

According to Henry J. Avila's, "The History of Mexican American Migration in Southwest Kansas," "The military was the first place many young