

Texas African American Museum opens doors in Tyler



By J. Edward Moreno, emoreno@tylerpaper.com Jul 18, 2018 Updated Jul 18, 2018



Gloria Washington and Clarence Shackelford, cofounders of the Texas African American Museum, in front of their display at Unique Shopping Mall on July 13, 2018. (J. Edward Moreno/Tyler Morning Telegraph)



If You Go
2822 W. Erwin St.
Open Thursday through Saturday from 11:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Tucked behind aisles of antiques and artisan goods in the back right corner of Unique Shopping Mall on 2822 W. Erwin St. is the temporary home of the Texas African American Museum.

The museum showcases successes and milestones within the African-American community in Texas and East Texas specifically. African art and poll tax receipts from Smith County can be found in the quaint, one-room facility.

Clarence Shackelford, co-founder of the museum, said he was inspired to open it after realizing that he never saw any cultural memorabilia that reminded him of his ancestors.



Gloria Washington and Clarence Shackelford, cofounders of the Texas African American Museum, in front of their display at Unique Shopping Mall on July 13, 2018. (J. Edward Moreno/Tyler Morning Telegraph)

“A lot of our history wasn’t documented, just because that’s the way things were,” he said.

Shackelford remembers growing up and seeing primarily African-Americans working in the rose fields — an industry with which the city strongly identifies.

“If you think about roses in Tyler, black people did most of that work,” he said, remembering the piles of roses he’d see people remove the thorns from.

On one side of the display are several photos of an Emmett J. Scott High School reunion that Shackelford attended in 2003. Emmett Scott was the African-American high school in Tyler until integration. In one of those photos is Marilyn Brown, who was visiting the museum.

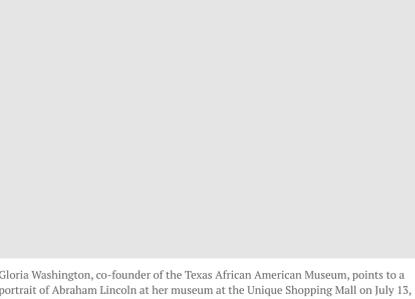
Brown, who said she was one of the first black sales associates at the Sears, Roebuck and Co. in downtown Tyler, worked there for 30 years.

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“People would come in and say ‘You’re Hispanic, aren’t you?’” she said, laughing. “They couldn’t believe a black person was working downtown. ... It was a job, but it was a fun job...”



Gloria Washington, co-founder of the Texas African American Museum, points to a portrait of Abraham Lincoln at her museum at the Unique Shopping Mall on July 13, 2018. (J. Edward Moreno/Tyler Morning Telegraph)

Gloria Washington, co-founder of the museum, said a lot has changed in Tyler over the years. One example she cited is the community’s interest in changing the name of Tyler ISD’s high schools, and Tyler ISD discussing changing the name of Robert E. Lee High School.

“It would be fruitful if the name did change, but the name of a school doesn’t define who I am,” she said.

“I mean, look at Earl Campbell,” she said, pointing to the display about the football great in the front of the museum. “He went to John Tyler High School, and the name of the school didn’t stop him from pursuing his career.”

The museum is open Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 11:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Those wishing to contribute to the museum can email texasevents365@gmail.com.

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