



East Texas

Historical Association

Pine Cone Profiles – April 2022

Kimberly Hill

Some would say that it doesn't take much to excite a historian. Anyone who hangs around with us soon realizes that discovering an old diary, unearthing a buried hotel ledger, or finding a tattered deed in a moldering satchel of papers can send us into raptures. And among ourselves we joke about living so much of our present in the past. Yet, if anyone can demonstrate the dynamic impact of yesterday's artifacts, it is Kimberly Hill.

Graduating from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with both a Master of Arts and a Ph.D. in history, Kimberly has spent years delving into the influence of late 19th and early 20th century African American Christians as they converted, educated, and motivated people both in the States and abroad. Vital to her research were the documents she found, tangible expressions of drive and devotion. These she's incorporated in her articles and talks, in her classes, in her conference work, and in her book *A Higher Mission: The Careers of Alonzo and Althea Brown Edmiston in Central Africa*. So it was an almost mystical irony, a true serendipitous moment, when she came upon an artifact of even more personal impact—but let the Pine Cone Profile Kimberly Hill tell about that, in her own words.

Where do you live?

I've lived in Dallas, TX since 2014.

How long have you been in East Texas Historical Association?

The Fall 2019 conference was my first ETHA event.

What convinced you to join?

Christine Reiser Robbins invited me to present in a panel with Cecilia Gutierrez Venable and Bernadette Pruitt. I enjoyed the collaborative style of the conference, and the Black History Breakfast was so welcoming and inspiring.

What is there within ETHA that has kept you a member?

I enjoy the collaboration opportunities that come with being a member. The conference schedule format makes it easy to network with accomplished scholars and learn about new Texas scholarship. And the ideas that were shared at the Black History Breakfast have already proven helpful for how I plan relevant courses.

What is there about Texas that attracts you?

Austin is my childhood home – the place that instilled my love of live music, theater, and natural beauty. Corpus Christi is where I started my career. That city motivated me to research Mexican American civil rights history. And Dallas appeals to me because reinvention is celebrated here; it's a good home base for my professional life.

What is there about history that attracts you?

Devoting most of my working hours to finding more details about topics that interest me and then having substantive conversations about those topics – I know this lifestyle is a privilege, especially since it also prepares me to help others explore important issues.

How do you usually pursue history?

The writing process and archival research are my favorite parts of the historical profession. I write scholarly book chapters, articles, and news essays from a historical perspective, see my website <https://www.ahighermission.com/>. My first book, *A Higher Mission: The Careers of Alonzo and Althea Brown Edmiston in Central Africa*, was published in 2020 by the University Press of Kentucky. It is the product of about 10 years of research about the ways that American educational policies, civil rights movements, and Belgian colonialism were influenced by

African American missionaries to Congo. I also teach undergrad and graduate courses at the University of Texas at Dallas. The range of courses includes African American History, the African Diaspora, race and religion, the Long Civil Rights Movement, and the social history of migration.

Most recently, I've joined the editing team for a new book series through [Texas Tech University Press](#). It's called [Afro-Texans](#), and we expect to publish one or two books per year analyzing the history, cultures, and identities of Africans and African Americans in our state. I met co-editor [Will Guzmán](#) at the 2019 ETHA conference, and we look forward to talking with other ETHA members about publishing new biographies, monographs, and edited volumes through this series.

Why do you love history? Has there been anything in your personal life that led to this? What was it?

Curiosity about my relatives inspired my love of history. Because I never met my grandparents, I enjoyed learning more about other family lineages while I acquired the skills to research my own people. The 1940 Census records helped me find some of those details and a few surprises, too.

What is your favorite historical period or historical movement? Why?

The Harlem Renaissance has always been my favorite historical period, and now I love teaching an Arts and Humanities course about it. It's my only course designed to teach historical context through the art, music, drama, literature, architecture, and fashion of one era. When students come away recognizing how at least one artist or one composition inspired them, I feel like I've shared the symbolic power of Harlem. When students email later and tell me they visited Harlem, I know they've found a life experience that can stay with them as it stays with me.

Who is your favorite historical person? Why?

The day I found a signed letter from Mary McLeod Bethune in the Smith College YWCA collection, I almost cried for joy. Bethune was my childhood role model, and it feels life-affirming to see how my research trajectory keeps leading me to more details about her career. I always admired her clear vision of how higher

education and women’s leadership contributed to social justice. Only later did I learn about her goal to become a Presbyterian missionary and her contributions to Black internationalism.

If there is one event in history at which you could be present, what would it be? Why?

One event that keeps coming to mind is the 1921 Broadway run of the original “Shuffle Along” musical. It ushered in the Jazz Age and helped inspire the careers of Josephine Baker, Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson, and George Gershwin. The 2015-2016 revival was so amazing that it made me wonder how thrilling it must have felt for the original audience.