

MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, TEXAS

February 2016

2015 ANNUAL REPORT TO **MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT**

WHAT IS THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION?

The official state agency for historical preservation, the Texas Historical Commission (THC), was created originally in 1953 as the Texas State Historical Survey Committee by the Texas Legislature. It retained that title until the 63rd Legislature changed it to the Texas Historical Commission.

The Montgomery County Historical Commission (CHC) is a duly constituted organization of Montgomery County government composed of citizen members who are appointed by the Commissioners Court and serve for two-year terms. The Commission reports to the County Judge and the Commissioners Court, and also to the Texas Historical Commission.

The County Historical Commission has followed the Texas Historical Commission's on-going purpose of surveying, recording and promoting the appreciation of local history as well as marking those historic sites and structures deemed worthy of preservation for either historical or architectural reasons.

The Commission works in various fields, including archeology, architecture, history, economic development and heritage tourism for the benefit of present and future generations. The agency helps identify and preserve historic sites and helps to preserve the heritage of Montgomery County. Historic preservation is a vital part of a promising future within our community.

MISSION

- *To discover, and as appropriate, circulate information pertinent to the historical identity of Montgomery County, Texas, such as the placement of historical markers.*
- *To cooperate with other persons, groups, organizations and agencies in preserving the history and heritage of Texas.*

RECAP OF COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION (CHC) ACTIVITIES IN 2015

1. MEMBERSHIP: The Commissioners Court in 2015 appointed one (1) new member—Patricia Easley of Montgomery—to the 25-member County Historical Commission (CHC) to complement the members who have faithfully served on the Commission for many years. Ms. Easley has a special interest in historical African American cemeteries as she has done extensive research on her ancestors going back to the Texas Republic. Her research expertise makes her valuable to the Commission’s efforts to preserve and promote our County’s rich history.
2. MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS: The Historical Commission met six (6) times in 2015. (The Texas Historical Commission asks that each county historical commission meet at least four times each year.) The Commission schedules regular meetings every other month during the year beginning in January. Meetings have been held at the Greater Conroe-Lake Conroe Chamber, and we thank Scott Harper and Gina Mitchell at the Chamber for hosting our meetings and those of our Youth Advisory Board.
3. COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION WEBSITE: The Commission website will serve as an internet archive for historical articles and photos of Montgomery County and provide an interactive map of historical sites around the County with individual “pins” where a link to a historic narrative will provide the reader with detailed information about each historical site, building and cemetery. The CHC website serves as a clearinghouse for many other county and state historical societies and museums. It also offers a calendar of events for local historical organizations, county residents and tourists. Plans call for improving our Commission website and Facebook so that we can more effectively reach a larger audience.
4. HISTORICAL RESOURCE SURVEY: The CHC has plans to continue updating the CHC’s *Historical Resource Survey* to identify all historic sites and buildings in our county. This information can be used for our website’s map of historical sites, buildings and cemeteries throughout the County. This project will also help the Commission identify and protect old historical structures that may be planned for demolition or otherwise damaged. Ron Saikowski chairs our *Endangered Building Committee* which will continue to identify threatened old historic buildings that may be subject to demolition or need repair, or be qualified for designation with a historical marker. The Texas Historical Commission has urged county historical commissions to make this a higher priority as more and more historic buildings across the State are being lost to new development. As these are identified, your CHC is constantly looking at ways to restore and reuse these structures for new purposes consistent with our mission statement.

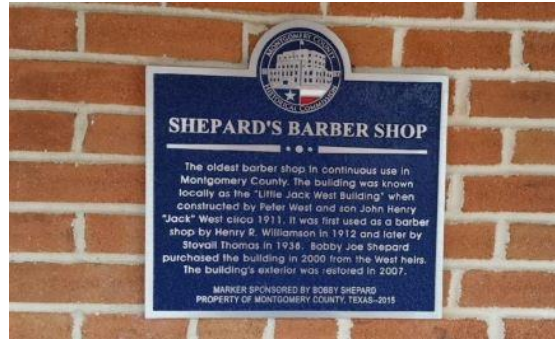
5. YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD. This is the third year for our *CHC Youth Advisory Board*. It is composed of high school students selected by their teachers and administrators from high schools throughout Montgomery County. This *Youth Advisory Board*, or “YAB” as we affectionately call it, provides suggestions to the Historical Commission for the promotion of historical activities that would engage students’ interest in our local and state history and recruit student volunteers to assist the CHC and other historical organizations in the preservation and promotion of historic buildings, sites and cemeteries throughout Montgomery County. This student organization—the first of its kind in the State of Texas—meets monthly during the school year. Members of the “YAB” have served as hosts for the “Christmas in Historic Montgomery” event in December and actively engaged in helping plan and conduct the annual History Road Rally in Conroe in January 2015. They also took a guided bus tour of historic old Montgomery sponsored by the Heritage Museum. In September, CHC member and YAB sponsor Brenda Beaven gave presentations at a State workshop on our YAB organization.



2014-2015 Youth Advisory Board

6. HISTORIC PRESERVATION GRANTS: With the generous financial support of the Commissioners Court, CHC continues to offer grants to non-profit historical organizations around the County as reimbursement for rehabilitation of old historic structures. Working closely with County Auditor Phyllis Martin and former County Judge Sadler’s staff, the CHC Finance Committee (composed of Gertie Spencer and Anna Sheppard) have developed guidelines and procedures for the CHC and Commissioners Court approval of such grants. The largest grant in 2015 was provided for electrical restoration of the Conroe oil field houses moved to the Heritage Museum.
7. COUNTY HISTORICAL MARKER: The first Montgomery County Historical Marker was dedicated on October 13 to commemorate the oldest barber shop in the county and possibly in the state: the *Shepard Barber Shop* in downtown Conroe. County Judge Craig Doyal and Conroe Mayor Webb Melder dedicated the marker at a special morning

ceremony. Currently applications have been submitted to Committee Chair Sharon Russell for historic buildings in downtown Conroe, the Cartwright Family Cemetery near Montgomery, and the burial site of noted internationally-acclaimed blues singer Alger “Texas” Alexander who is buried in the Long Street Cemetery near Bays Chapel in the far northwest corner of our county just south of Richards, Texas.



First County Historical Marker

8. SPRING CREEK HISTORICAL MARKER: County Commissioner Jim Clark and members of our County Historical Commission participated with Harris and Waller Counties in the November 17 dedication of the “*Spring Creek County*” state historical marker. Spring Creek County was created by the State legislature in 1842 as a special judicial county to serve residents of north Harris County and South Montgomery County. However, the Texas Supreme Court ruled that such specialized judicial counties were unconstitutional and thus Spring Creek County was never formally organized.



Commissioner Jim Clark

9. STATE HISTORICAL MARKERS: Your CHC approved a new state historical marker dedicated to the “*Lake Creek Settlement*,” the first Anglo-American settlement in Montgomery County located west of the San Jacinto River. The research was provided by Kameron Searle, a noted Montgomery historian. The marker will be installed in the City of Montgomery in 2016. There are plans to pursue designation of state historical markers for the Houston burial site of Isaac Conroe, the African-American campus of Conroe Industrial and Normal College, the abandoned towns of Danville and Fostoria,

and to sponsor state historical cemetery markers for certain post-Civil War Afro-American cemeteries in our county.

10. TEXIAN HERITAGE FESTIVAL: The County Historical Commission was a co-sponsor of the annual October 17 *Texian Heritage Festival* at the Fernland Historical Park in Montgomery. The event offers families an opportunity to step back in time to experience life during the period of colonial Texas and the Texas Republic. Members of the CHC and its Youth Advisory Board members manned a history information table at the event.

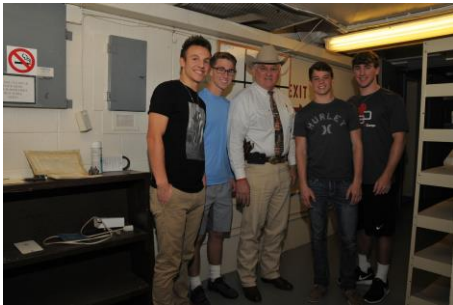


Sons of the Texas Republic at Texian Heritage Festival

11. COUNTY HISTORICAL TIMELINE: With the support of Judge Sadler and the County Commissioners, CHC Chairman Larry Foerster completed his extensive *Montgomery County, Texas Historical Timeline* which was published in January 2014. This 239-page bound book—complete with historic photos, old drawings and maps—offers a detailed chronology of notable historic events in Montgomery County from the time of the Native Americans to the present. The book was provided for free to all county libraries and has been made available for sale to the public as a fundraising project for the CHC. Over \$18,000 has been raised in 2014 and 2015 from the sale of the book to support future preservation projects of the Historical Commission. With additional information and photographs provided by county families over the past years, Larry Foerster is currently working on a revised and even more detailed second edition of the book.
12. WORLD WAR I VETERANS BOOK: Under the leadership of Commission member Dr. Jeremiah Dancy, professor of military history at Sam Houston State University, the CHC is excited about its new project to recognize World War I veterans from Montgomery County. The book will feature several Montgomery County citizens who served in the military during World War I, with their lives chronicled before, during and after the war. Written along the style of Tom Brokaw's *Greatest Generation*, our plans are to publish the book by the 100th anniversary of the World War I armistice—November 18, 2018. The book will include an appendix listing all the County's WWI veterans. As we partner

with graduate history students at SHSU, the book should provide a unique historical perspective of Montgomery County from 1900 to 1940.

13. HISTORY ROAD RALLY: The Commission sponsored its second annual *History Road Rally*. Each year the event features the local history of a different area of Montgomery County. The 2015 *History Road Rally* was held in the city of Conroe on January 24th. Nineteen participating teams representing three counties enjoyed following clues and finding their answers to county and state historical events and persons, as they drove their vehicles around the city of Conroe for two hours. Each participant received a souvenir “History Road Warrior” button. The teams returned for free pizza and drinks while their answer sheets were judged. The three winning teams received trophies and \$25 gift cards courtesy of our sponsor Gullo Ford, Gullo Toyota and Gullo Mazda automobile dealerships of Conroe.



Sheriff Tommy Gage giving old jail tours



Youth Advisory Board kids serving at Road Rally

14. WILLIAMS HISTORIC FAMILY CEMETERY CLEANUP: Youth Advisory Board members: Ross Ohendalski, John Taylor and Robert Lynch, worked several weekends with other helpers to clean up the historic Richard Williams Family Cemetery located east of Willis. This was an Eagle Scout project for Ross. This state-dedicated cemetery serves as the resting place of Richard Williams, a soldier in the Texas Republic army, signer of the petition creating Montgomery County, and a former County Commissioner in the 1840’s. The County Historical Commission financed the clean-up expense to restore this important part of Texas and Montgomery County history.



Ross, John and Robert



Richard Williams tombstone



Richard Williams Cemetery

15. CONROE KIDZ FEST HISTORY VILLAGE: On Saturday, April 25th, members of the Commission, along with the non-profit Conroe Live, Inc., conducted the third annual *History Village* as part of the City of Conroe Parks Department's annual CONROE KIDZ FEST. This family event provides a unique heritage venue which permits visitors of all ages to step back in time to experience what Conroe and the surrounding area was like 100 years ago. Children participated in old fashion crafts and blacksmithing demonstrations and pie eating contests, listened to period music, ate chuck wagon cobbler, watched Old West reenactments, and examined classic antique vehicles.



Wolf Creek Pistoreros



Quilting Demonstration



Pie Eating Contest for the kids



Blacksmith exhibit by Luther Collins

16. PICTORIAL HISTORY BOOK OF CONROE: Noted historical author Dr. Robin Montgomery and CHC Chairman Larry Foerster are also compiling material for a pictorial history book on Conroe with plans to publish it in 2017. These efforts are supported by the Heritage Museum of Montgomery County as well as the County Historical Commission.

17. SHARING MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORY: Over the past four years, Commission members have collaborated with the Conroe *Courier Trends* editor Sondra Hernandez in producing a monthly Sunday article in the *Courier* featuring a historic Montgomery County building, person or residence. Commission member Sharon Russell has been contributing history articles for the monthly issues of *The Woodlands Lifestyles and Homes* magazine. With our help, historical features have also been produced in the *Community Impact* newspaper. These articles are designed to generate interest and renew community pride in the history of Montgomery County.
18. INFORMATION CLEARINGHOUSE: The Historical Commission serves as a clearinghouse for the distribution of information and announcements among historical organizations and interested citizens in our County concerning upcoming events and projects of significant historical interest throughout Montgomery County and the State.
19. WALKING TOUR OF CONROE: Commission members are also involved in plans to develop a self-guided walking tour of historic Downtown Conroe in collaboration with the Conroe Convention and Visitors Bureau and Conroe Live, Inc., a non-profit organization.
20. HISTORICAL PRESERVATION DISTRICTS: Members of the County Historical Commission are engaged with other organizations in generating community interest in the development of a historical business district and residential historical preservation districts in and around downtown Conroe.
21. PROMOTING COUNTY HISTORY TO LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS: Several times during the year CHC Chairman Larry Foerster is invited to give presentations on Montgomery County history to numerous civic and church organizations throughout the county with the goal of increasing local interest in our history. PowerPoint slide shows of historic photographs and maps are frequently used for these presentations.
22. DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD: Finally, we are honored that your Montgomery County Historical Commission was recognized for the third consecutive year by the Texas Historical Commission with its 2014 “*Distinguished Service Award*,” a coveted award from the Texas Historical Commission to a select few county historical commissions that “...demonstrate exceptional service and dedication to preserve the heritage of Texas.”

Respectfully submitted,

Larry L. Foerster, County Historical Commission Chairman