



MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, TEXAS

January 2014

2013 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 HISTORICAL COMMISSION ACTIVITIES IN 2013

1. MEMBERSHIP: The Commissioners Court in 2013 appointed seven (7) new members to the County Historical Commission (CHC) to complement the members who have faithfully served on the Commission for many years. These new members represent historical organizations around the County or have particular expertise that makes them valuable to the Commission's efforts to preserve and promote our County's rich history. Sadly, long-time Commission member Nevaire Richardson passed away in 2013.
2. MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS: The Historical Commission met six (6) times in 2013. (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, the Magnolia Depot Museum, and the historic "Hodge Podge Lodge"—the 1854 Richard Willis home in Montgomery.
3. COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION WEBSITE: In June, a five-member Website Committee chaired by CHC member David Frame completed an upscale CHC 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. There are plans to offer paid sponsorships of each historic site link on the CHC website for local businesses and civic organizations to support the Historical Commission and its website through an advertising banner at the bottom of each historical site web link.
4. HISTORICAL RESOURCE SURVEY: An updated *Historical Resource Survey* has been underway to identify all historic sites and buildings in our county with the volunteer expertise of our CHC member David "Jay" Hrivnatz, a historical preservation architect from Willis. 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. Jay Hrivnatz has also proposed the formation of a *Historical Preservation Committee* under the direction of the CHC that will identify threatened old historic buildings that may be subject to demolition or need repair, or be qualified for designation with a historical marker.

5. YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD. CHC member Brenda Beaven, a Texas history teacher and an active member of the Montgomery Historical Society and the Fernland Historical Park board of directors, has helped organize a new *CHC Youth Advisory Board*, composed of high school students selected by their teachers and administrators from high schools throughout Montgomery County. This *Youth Advisory Board* will provide 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—perhaps the first of its kind in the State of Texas—has met monthly since last spring, formulating a mission statement, goals, and by-laws, and electing officers. They served as hosts for the Montgomery “Candlelight Tour of Homes” in December and have been actively engaged in helping plan the inaugural History Road Rally in Montgomery.



6. HISTORIC PRESERVATION GRANTS: With the annual 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 County Judge Sadler's staff, the CHC Finance Committee (composed of Gertie Spencer and Anna Sheppard) has developed new guidelines and procedures for CHC and Commissioners Court approval of such grants. The largest grant in 2013 was provided to restore the historic Thomas Chapel UM in Willis, the oldest Afro-American church in our county.

7. STATE HISTORICAL MARKERS: The Texas Historical Commission has approved two new Texas historical markers in Conroe. One Texas historical marker sponsored by the County Historical Commission will be installed this year on the Montgomery County Courthouse square memorializing the history of our five (5) county courthouses while the second Texas historical marker will commemorate the Great Conroe Fire of 1911. There are plans to pursue designation of state historical markers for 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.
8. STATE HISTORICAL MARKER WORKSHOP: On May 22, the County Historical Commission sponsored a regional Texas historical marker workshop conducted by the Texas Historical Commission at the Greater Conroe-Lake Conroe Chamber of Commerce.
9. COUNTY HISTORICAL MARKERS: The Commission is considering the development of a *Montgomery County Historical Landmark* plaque program. These special medal markers would designate historic old buildings, sites and cemetery burial plots that have historical significance to our County but might not otherwise immediately qualify for state designation with a Texas Historical Marker. This would complement our historical map on the CHC website and provide another means of promoting tourism and encouraging historical preservation.
10. COUNTY HISTORICAL TIMELINE: With the support of Judge Sadler and the County Commissioners, CHC Chairman Larry Foerster has completed an extensive *Montgomery County, Texas Historical Timeline* that was published this month (January). This 239-page bound book—replete with old photos, drawings and maps—offers a detailed chronology of notable historic events in Montgomery County from the time of the Native Americans to the present. Plans call for offering this book free to all county libraries and to make it available for sale to the public as a fundraising project for the CHC.
11. 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 to be published in 2015. These efforts are supported by the Heritage Museum of Montgomery County as well as the County Historical Commission.
12. 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.

13. HISTORY ROAD RALLY: The Commission has organized its first annual *History Road Rally* which each year will feature the local history of a different area of the County. This year's *History Road Rally* will be in the town of Montgomery on January 25th in conjunction with that city's celebration of the 175th birthday of the Texas State Flag. Each participating team will have fun chasing clues and finding their answers to county and state historical events and persons, as they drive their vehicles about for two hours.
14. TEXAS LEGACY FEST: Members of the Commission participated in the unique *Texas Legacy Fest* at the Conroe Heritage Park in April, sponsored by Dr. Robin Montgomery and his Texas Center for Regional Studies.
15. CONROE KIDZ FEST HISTORY VILLAGE: On Saturday, April 27, members of the Commission, along with the non-profit Conroe Live, Inc., organized the first *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 what Conroe and the surrounding area was like 100 years ago.
16. HISTORY OF CONROE BUILDINGS: Over the past two years, Commission Chairman Larry Foerster has collaborated with the Conroe *Courier* writer Brad Meyer and others in a monthly Sunday article in the *Courier* featuring a historic building or residence in Conroe.
17. 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.
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. DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD: Finally, we are honored that the Montgomery County Historical Commission was recognized last year by the Texas Historical Commission with its 2012 "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, Chairman
Montgomery County Historical Commission