



MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, TEXAS

February 2015

2014 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 2014

1. MEMBERSHIP: The Commissioners Court in 2014 appointed ten (10) 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. Two of the new members are professors in the History Department at Sam Houston State.
2. MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS: The Historical Commission met six (6) times in 2014. (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 serves as an internet archive for historical articles and photos of Montgomery County and provides 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: 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 an *Endangered Building 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. 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 second year for our new *CHC 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, helped organize the new *Youth Advisory Board* in 2013. 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 Montgomery “Candlelight Tour of Homes” in December; actively engaged in helping plan and conduct the inaugural History Road Rally in Montgomery in January 2014; and assisted us with our State Historical Marker dedication in Conroe in February 2014.



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 former County

Judge Sadler’s staff, the CHC Finance Committee (composed of Gertie Spencer and Anna Sheppard) developed guidelines and procedures for the CHC and Commissioners Court approval of such grants. The largest grant in 2014 was provided for restoration of the roof of the old post office building in Montgomery preserved by the Montgomery Historical Society. Funds were also provided for the Heritage Museum’s engineering plans to move old Conroe oil field houses to the museum grounds in Candy Cane Park and for various historical furnishings for the Magnolia Depot Museum.

7. STATE HISTORICAL MARKERS: Two new Texas state historical markers sponsored by the County Historical Commission were installed this year on the Montgomery County Courthouse square. The first Texas historical marker, commemorating the Great Conroe Fire of 1911, was dedicated on February 21—the anniversary of the Great Fire—on the east side of the Courthouse.



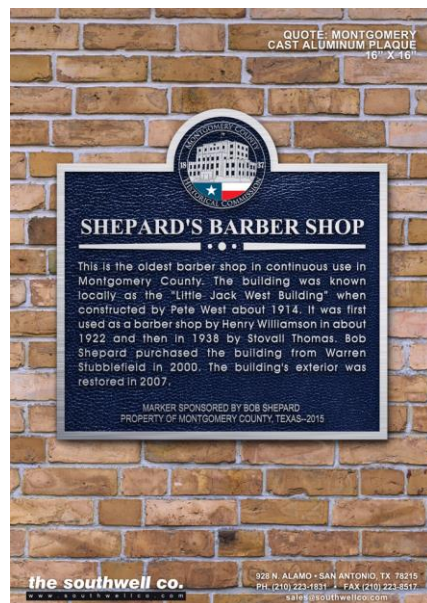
The second Texas state historical marker—memorializing the history of our five (5) county courthouses—was dedicated on December 8 at the west front entrance to the Courthouse with many current and former county officials attending.



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, 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. **HISTORICAL PRESERVATION SEMINAR:** On September 19, the County Historical Commission co-sponsored a regional Historical Preservation Seminar at the Conroe Tower conducted by the Texas Downtown Association and the Conroe Downtown Association. Several members of our Commission attended the seminar and then gave a walking tour of historic downtown Conroe to the out-of-town seminar attendees.

9. **COUNTY HISTORICAL MARKERS:** The Historical Commission has developed a *Montgomery County Historical Marker* program under the leadership of Commission member Sharon Russell and committee members Anna Sheppard, Barbara Holland and Jay Hrivnatz. These attractive blue aluminum metal markers will designate historic old buildings, sites and cemetery burial plots that have historical significance to Montgomery County but might not otherwise immediately qualify for state designation with a Texas Historical Marker. This will eventually complement our historical map on the CHC website and provide another means of promoting tourism and encouraging historical preservation. The Commissioners Court approved the program on November 17. Currently applications have been submitted for two historic buildings in downtown Conroe 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.



10. 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 \$10,000 has been raised in 2014 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 year, Larry Foerster is currently working on a revised and even more detailed second edition of the book.
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 with plans to publish it in 2016. These efforts are supported by the Heritage Museum of Montgomery County as well as the County Historical Commission.
12. HISTORY ROAD RALLY: The Commission organized its first annual *History Road Rally*. Each year the event will feature the local history of a different area of the County. The 2014 *History Road Rally* was held in the city of Montgomery on January 25th in conjunction with that city’s celebration of the 175th birthday of the Texas State Flag. Twelve 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 Montgomery 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.



13. CONROE KIDZ FEST HISTORY VILLAGE: On Saturday, April 26, members of the Commission, along with the non-profit Conroe Live, Inc., conducted the second 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 biscuits, watched Old West reenactments, and examined antique fire trucks and vehicles.



14. 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.

15. 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.
16. SHARING HISTORY OF OLD CONROE BUILDINGS: Over the past three 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. These articles are designed to generate interest and renew community pride in historic Downtown Conroe. In addition, CHC member Victoria Endsley organized and published a booklet of the history of the Montgomery County courthouses for the December courthouse marker dedication with the narrative written by CHC chair Larry Foerster.
17. 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.
18. 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.
19. DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD: Finally, we are honored that your Montgomery County Historical Commission was recognized for the second consecutive year by the Texas Historical Commission with its 2013 “*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