



# MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## MONTGOMERY COUNTY, TEXAS

January 2018

### **2017 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 63<sup>rd</sup> 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. It also reports 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 2017

1. MEMBERSHIP: The Commissioners Court in 2017 appointed and reappointed 29 members to the County Historical Commission (CHC), composed of a variety of individuals who bring special expertise, skills and background to the County Historical Commission.
2. MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS: The Historical Commission met six (6) times in 2017. (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 for several years at the Greater Conroe-Lake Conroe Chamber and on a few occasions at the Heritage Museum of Montgomery County.
3. COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION WEBSITE: The Commission website is a “work in progress.” It is designed to 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 other social media 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 prioritize the preservation of historic buildings and other structures across the State that are threatened by new development. As these are identified, your CHC is constantly looking at ways to restore and repurpose these structures consistent with our mission statement.

Of particular importance at this time is the preservation of the old truss bridge spanning the San Jacinto River at FM 2854. Records show that this bridge was constructed by El Paso Iron Company for the County in 1910 and served for many years as the old state

highway 105 bridge from Conroe to Montgomery. The Texas Highway Department and the Texas Historical Commission are urging local authorities to save and repurpose these historic structures. Also, the CHC is exploring ways to save the old Stewart and Stewart law office in Conroe, originally the home of former Conroe mayor and downtown Conroe drug store owner, Robin Carter and his family. Constructed in 1935, it will need to be moved or it will be demolished to make room for a proposed county tax office. Also, steps have been taken to preserve the former administrative building of the Conroe College, the African American school founded in 1903.

5. YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD. This is the fifth 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 Magnolia in January 2017. They also participated in the cleaning of several historic tombstones in the Oakwood Cemetery in Conroe and in a historic tour of the original parts of the county pre-1870 from New Waverly, Anderson, Plantersville, and Bays Chapel. Using money from book sales and donations to the CHC, one \$1000 scholarship was awarded to a YAB graduating student in Montgomery County for his excellent support of our organization.



2016-2017 Youth Advisory Board at Oakwood Cemetery



*2017-2018 Youth Advisory Board with Sponsors at Fanthorpe Inn in Anderson*

6. **HISTORIC PRESERVATION GRANTS:** With the generous financial support of the Commissioners Court, CHC continues to offer grants to 501c(3) 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 Doyal'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 grants in 2017 were for repairs for historic buildings owned by Montgomery Historical Society and restoration of the Strake-Gray Oilfield house and roughneck bunkhouse owned by the Heritage Museum.
  
7. **STATE HISTORICAL MARKERS:** Several historical markers were dedicated in 2017. The first was a state historical marker of the "Lake Creek Settlement," the oldest settlement in Montgomery County, dedicated on February 25 in Montgomery. The research was provided by Kameron Searle, a noted Montgomery historian. Attending the ceremony were Judge Craig Doyal, Commissioner Mike Meador, State Representative Will Metcalf, and City of Montgomery officials, along with members of the Sons of the Republic of Texas and Daughters of the Republic of Texas. Additional state historical markers have been approved for the Cartwright Family Cemetery and Conroe College. There are plans to pursue designation of state historical markers for the Houston burial site of Isaac Conroe, the Crighton Theatre, 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.



*Kameron Searle and Judge Doyal*



*Kameron Searle with Commissioner Meador and Billy Ray Duncan*

8. COUNTY HISTORICAL MARKERS: Four new county historical markers were dedicated in 2017: the J. L. Hicks Building in downtown Conroe, the Grogan-Cochran House at the Heritage Museum complex, the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church in Willis, and the Sanders Cemetery in Magnolia.

On January 10, the fourth county historical marker was dedicated for the J L Hicks Building in downtown Conroe. This historic two-story brick building was built after the fire of February 1911 destroyed much of downtown Conroe. County and city officials participated in the dedication ceremony.



*City and County Officials at J L Hicks Building marker*

On June 3, the fifth county historical marker was dedicated to the Grogan-Cochran House, which is the home of the Heritage Museum of Montgomery County. County

Judge Craig Doyal was in attendance along with Conroe mayor Toby Powell and numerous members of the Grogan and Cochran families.



*Judge Doyal and Mayor Powell at Grogan-Cochran House marker dedication*



*Dedication ceremony at Heritage Museum*

On November 19, the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church's county historical marker was dedicated. The church was organized in 1883 and is one of the oldest African-American churches in Montgomery County. Attending the worship service and dedication ceremony were Willis ISD trustee Sue Ann Powell, Justice of the Peace Wayne Mack

and City Mayor Willis Reed. This made the sixth county historical marker dedicated and the first one in Willis.



*Rev Oliphant, Judge Mack, Sue Ann Powell and Larry Foerster*

Finally, on November 30, the Sanders Cemetery county historical marker was dedicated near Magnolia. Attending were Commissioner Charlie Riley, Constable David Hill and Magnolia city councilman John Bramlett. The Sanders Cemetery dates back to 1875. This is the seventh county historical marker.



*Commissioner Riley with Historical Commission members*



9. TEXIAN HERITAGE FESTIVAL: The County Historical Commission was a co-sponsor of the annual October 8 *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.



*Sons of the Texas Republic at Texian Heritage Festival*

10. COUNTY HISTORICAL TIMELINE: With the support of former County 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 \$20,000 has been raised from 2014 through 2017 from the sales 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.
11. HISTORY ROAD RALLY: The Commission sponsored its fourth annual *History Road Rally*. Each year the event features the local history of a different area of Montgomery County. The 2017 *History Road Rally* was held in the city of Magnolia on January 28. Participating teams represented Texas communities as far north as McKinney, Texas, and enjoyed following clues and finding their answers to county and state historical events and persons, as they drove their vehicles around Magnolia and west Montgomery County 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.



*First place winners of the History Road Rally*

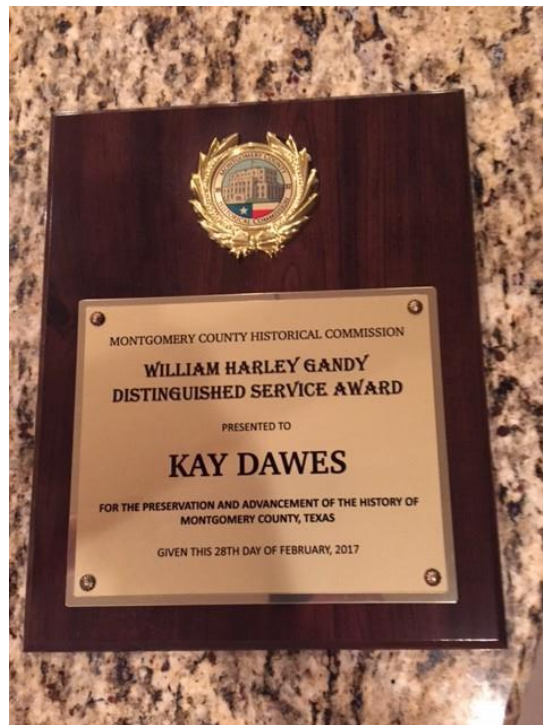
**12. COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION REGIONAL CONFERENCE:** On October 13, the Montgomery County Historical Commission sponsored a regional county historical commission conference. The event was a great success as members of over 13 county historical commissions met at the First Baptist Church in Conroe for training and networking. Speakers included Amy Hammons, who is the Texas Historical Commission’s state-wide county historical commission coordinator, and Marty Prince, State Texas Forest Trails Coordinator.



*Regional training conference*

13. WILLIAM HARLEY GANDY DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD. This past spring, the CHC presented Kay Dawes with the first *William Harley Gandy Distinguished Service Award*. This award is presented at the discretion of the County Historical Commission to individuals, corporations or organizations who exhibit distinguished leadership, initiative and dedication to the preservation of the history of Montgomery County. The winner of the award must have shown significant accomplishment in the field of historical preservation and research. Such achievements must be notable and have made an important contribution to the preservation and/or advancement of the history of Montgomery County. The award is named in honor of William Harley Gandy, the first chairman of the Montgomery County Historical Commission, a distinguished history teacher, and the author of the definitive 1952 treatise on the history of Montgomery County.

Kay Dawes was honored because of her exemplary efforts to preserve the history of East Montgomery County. From her painstaking research have come books on Splendora and Fostoria. She is presently working on books for New Caney, Porter and Grangerland. Kay has done extensive research on White Oak and Enloe Cemeteries which were made into books. Books on Presswood and Skinner cemeteries are presently in the works. Kay has an extensive collection of photographs of East County which she has obtained from descendants of the area. Using these photographs, she has developed numerous power point presentations to inform the public of the local history of East County.





*Kay Dawes receiving the award at Commissioners Court*

14. PROMOTING MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORY: Over the past five 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.
  
15. 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.
  
16. 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. The draft has been completed and the tour guide should be produced early in 2018.

17. HISTORIC BUILDING GRANTS SEMINAR: A Historic Building Grants Seminar led by Amanda Thorin from the Houston-Galveston Area Council (HGAC) was sponsored by our Historical Commission on February 13 at the Conroe/Greater Conroe Chamber of Commerce. The purpose of the meeting was to make developers and building owners aware of potential grants and loans to save the structural shells of historic buildings. The seminar also informed area historical organizations on resources available that can assist in the preservation of historic structures.
18. 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 and other older communities in Montgomery County. Discussions with members of the City of Conroe council and consultants have been initiated with the hope that portions of the business district along Main and Simonton Streets in downtown Conroe can be designated for a “National Register of Historic Places.”
19. SHARING COUNTY HISTORY WITH LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS: Several times during the year CHC Chairman Larry Foerster and other CHC members are 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.
20. TEXAS 2016 DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD: Finally, we are honored that your Montgomery County Historical Commission was recognized for the fifth consecutive year by the Texas Historical Commission with its 2016 “*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