GALVESTON GOING STRONG
Island is Building Back its Historic Treasures
Dear Friends,

The rich heritage of our state is one of the reasons George and I are so happy to be home. Historic preservation has an important place in Texas, and all across America. As our nation ages, more and more places are at risk of falling into disuse or being cleared to make way for new construction. Progress is healthy, but it should be coupled with respect for the places of our past.

Restoring and protecting grand old buildings and storied homes is one component of historic preservation. But preservation goes beyond bricks and mortar. Preservation builds community partnerships, bringing together governments, citizens, and businesses to celebrate the rich heritage of a community. And preservation educates a new generation about how people lived and played and worshiped in the past.

The Texas Historical Commission plays a vital role in preserving and saving the vibrant history of the Lone Star State. I’m grateful for my fellow citizens of Texas and local leaders for sustaining THC and urge continued strong support.

Sincerely,

Laura Bush

Banking on the Bankhead
Classic Cross-Texas Roadway is Vehicle for Proposed Historic Highways Program

In the 1940s and ’50s, classic roadways such as Route 66 and the Bankhead Highway were major arteries through Texas, forever altering the development and cultural heritage of the Lone Star State. Decades later, Texas’ landscape changed with the introduction of interstates that bypassed Main Street communities. However, vestiges of the forgotten highways are still visible today, and efforts are currently underway to identify, designate, and promote these historically significant roads.

Rep. Carol Kent of Dallas authored two house bills during the 81st Texas Legislature that established a program for the identification, designation, interpretation, and marketing of Texas’ historic roads and highways (the Bankhead Highway, in particular). A partnership between the Texas Historical Commission (THC) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is expected to result in research, preservation, and economic development through heritage tourism dollars, providing a vehicle for new job creation in the state.

The Texas Historic Roads and Highways Program, dependent on matching funds from the 82nd Texas Legislature currently in session, would enable the THC to prepare a historic context for Texas highways, a survey of historic resources along the Bankhead Highway corridor, and a Bankhead Highway travel guide.

“This project would be a great benefit to Texas’ rural and economically disadvantaged areas and increase marketing opportunities for expanding tourism statewide,” says Terry Colley, the THC’s deputy executive director.

“We expect a positive impact on the urban and rural communities in the counties (almost 50) along the Bankhead Highway route.”

The Bankhead Highway—a transcontinental roadway running from Washington, D.C. to San Diego—had three routes in Texas, two of which connected Texarkana to El Paso and are roughly represented by current Interstates 20 and 30. The original routes played important roles in the development of Texas by providing corridors for transportation, commerce, and tourism.

The Bankhead’s legacy in Texas is immense, providing a scenic system for cross-country travelers to experience the real places and real stories of the Lone Star State. According to a report compiled by historical researcher Jerry Flook of the THC, “Identifying historic sites and structures along the corridor will benefit from a new appreciation of regional history, facilitated economic development planning, and resources to attract heritage travelers,” Colley says. “Identifying historic sites and structures along the corridor will also help preserve them for future generations and create an important link between the transportation corridors of prior generations and today’s modern highway systems.”

This article was written by Andy Rhodes, managing editor of The Medallion.
Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program Reinvests in Local Communities

Driving the highways of Texas, you can’t help but notice them. Their lofty gothic spires, classical copper domes, and stately silhouettes dominate the skylines of many counties, luring travelers to leave the interstate and explore the charm of downtown. Historic courthouses are a county’s personal brand, advertising the promise not only of a nostalgic return to the hometown of our childhood memories, but also the opportunity to visit a place defined by family-owned businesses, vibrant social gatherings, and a sense of community. In short, courthouses are the centerpiece of a growing economic boon to their counties.

The State of Texas, through the Texas Historical Commission (THC) Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program, is reinvesting in small towns across Texas at a time when they need it the most. The current economic recession has taken a heavy toll on small communities, and 92 counties have not yet restored their historic county courthouses. For many of those counties, the restoration of these historic buildings, as opposed to demolition or relocation, represents a tangible commitment by the state to both the community and sustainable development in Texas. This investment is represented in the 158 courthouse grants that have been awarded to 82 Texas counties over the past decade. To date, 42 courthouses have been fully restored and by the end of 2011, the redecoration of 10 more historic courthouses will be celebrated. According to Graves, a $20 million general revenue appropriation extended over two years (fiscal year 2012–13) would complete the restoration of approximately five additional courthouses. Of these projects, it is likely three would be second-phase interior projects to follow their exterior restorations and the other two selected would have previously received a planning grant.

“The preservation of Texas’ historic courthouses is an investment that offers immediate returns, yet continues to pay dividends. It plants the seed for recovery in communities across Texas.”

In the first six rounds of the program, the THC received 138 courthouse master plans, the first step required in the assistance process. Of those 138 plans, 127 were approved. At this time, 72 counties still need program funding. Twenty-seven of these have received either partial construction or planning grants, and 46 counties with approved master plans have yet to receive any program funding (many have applied in four or more rounds). A total of $227 million has been distributed between 2000–2010 through five biennial appropriations of as high as $62 million, with an average of $40 to $50 million per biennium.

“The estimated current need to restore all remaining courthouses that have approved master plans is approximately $250 million in state funds,” said Graves. “These funds would be matched, in part, by local dollars creating jobs and stimulating adjacent businesses.”

The THC plays a key role in the process through its Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. The agency submitted an exceptional item request to the 82nd regular session of the Texas Legislature for $20 million in funding for the program, the same amount appropriated in the preceding biennium. “The Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program makes even more sense in tough economic times,” said Program Director Stan Graves. “It plants the seed for recovery in communities across Texas.”

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The most recent funding for Round VI of the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program was included in the appropriations bill of the 81st Legislature in 2009, approving the sale of $20 million in bonds, the smallest amount appropriated for the program since its inception. Subsequently, a total of 44 applications were received requesting more than $173 million in state assistance. In January 2010, 20 projects were selected to receive grants. Three full restorations, three exterior phased projects, four emergency projects, and 10 planning grants were awarded.

“The Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program has experienced some challenges during the economic downturn, but we’re still trying to make the most of what we have,” Graves said. “We believe the program has not merely been an investment in our past, but is an investment in our future.”

Two groups of graduate students at Texas A&M University are currently researching the metrics of preservation economics in Lampasas and Wharton counties, both of which have restored their historic county courthouses through the THC program. Student teams are interviewing civic leaders and collecting data for research and analysis. A final report detailing the economic, environmental, social, and visual dividends accrued from the restoration projects in both counties will be made available to the public through the THC.

Preliminary findings indicate the courthouse restorations in both communities have served to stabilize and enhance tenant demand for real estate in the vicinity of the courthouses, and property values have increased not only of the courthouses, but also the restoration of these two historic buildings, as opposed to demolition or relocation, represents a tangible commitment by the state to both the community and sustainable development in Texas.

This investment is represented in the 158 courthouse grants that have been awarded to 82 Texas counties over the past decade. To date, 42 courthouses have been fully restored and by the end of 2011, the redecoration of 10 more historic courthouses will be celebrated. According to Graves, a $20 million general revenue appropriation extended over two years (fiscal year 2012–13) would complete the restoration of approximately five additional courthouses. Of these projects, it is likely three would be second-phase interior projects to follow their exterior restorations and the other two selected would have previously received a planning grant.

“This request is less than in our earlier rounds, but is the same amount we received last session,” said Graves. “Because of the state’s economic and budget woes we felt compelled to request no more than we received last time, knowing that it won’t address more than a fraction of the need, but it will certainly keep the program alive and viable into the future.”

Graves adds that courthouse preservation projects help create a business-friendly environment through improvements to infrastructure, such as enhanced parking and traffic flow, increased pedestrian accessibility, expanded event hosting capabilities, and the development of a unique and inviting historic context or “sense of place” centered upon the restored courthouse. They promote increased visitation to the downtown business community by hosting events and encouraging heritage tourism, in addition to creating a secure and inviting environment that entices courthouse visitors to stay and explore the square.

The Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program can be the catalyst that encourages additional public and private investment in the historic downtown. “There are often vacant buildings in the central commercial district when a courthouse project begins, but vacancies dwindle by the project’s completion.”

“The preservation of Texas’ historic courthouses is an investment that offers immediate returns, yet continues to pay generous dividends to the citizens of tomorrow,” Graves said.

This article was written by Mark Green and Sharon Fleming of the THC’s Architecture Division.

www.thc.state.tx.us

January/February 2011
Let Freedom Ring
Resounding Legacy of African Americans in Texas
Is the Subject of a New THC Booklet and Website


The 72-page booklet is the largest travel guide produced by the THC, with 79 entries on sites of cultural or historical importance, a chronological introduction to African American history, a timeline of key dates and figures, and nine thematic sidebars. Organized by the 10 heritage regions comprising the THC’s Texas Heritage Trails Program, the booklet highlights famous and lesser-known sites in urban and rural locales throughout the state. The concept development and content were guided by an advisory committee made up of esteemed scholars of African American history in Texas, as well as THC staff members.

In addition to the printed piece, the THC launched its first-ever online companion guide, www.africanamericansintexas.com or call 866.276.6219. The following excerpts from the THC’s new booklet feature approximately 100 more sites specifically for the project, and additional resources that encourage further exploration.

“We’re very excited to feature other sites that were considered for the print booklet but weren’t included due to space constraints,” said THC Deputy Executive Director Terry Colley. “Even with the additional sites on the new website, these resources provide only a glimpse into this intriguing and enduring history. We hope people will be inspired to delve deeper into this significant aspect of our state’s heritage.”

The booklet and website were launched on December 2 at a commemorative event at St. Paul United Methodist Church in Dallas, one of the publication’s featured sites. To request a free copy of the booklet, visit www.africanamericansintexas.com or call 866.276.6219.

The following excerpts from African Americans in Texas: A Lasting Legacy exemplify the statewide journey through this diverse and vibrant heritage.

A.C. McMillan African American Museum, Emory
Alfred Clifton McMillan was a notable teacher and administrator in Rains County for 36 years. He received degrees from Texas College and East Texas State University, spent much of his career as a teacher and principal of Sand Flat School (a Rosenwald school that the McMillian Museum is active in preserving) and, later, was principal of Rains County Junior High School. His family has been central to the effort to tell the story of African Americans in this part of northeast Texas. The museum has exhibits and artifacts on Reconstruction in Texas, Rosenwald schools, sports and art, and its collection is built largely from artifacts donated by the community.

Conner worked for the state’s Department of Health where, despite facing discrimination both as an African American and as a woman, she eventually rose to the position of Chief of the Bureau of Personal Health Services. Conner paid special attention to the problem of child and infant mortality in Texas, which she addressed through programs aimed at training midwives, providing prenatal care, and expanding child immunization.

STUBB’S MEMORIAL, LUBBOCK
Christopher B. Stubblefield was born in Navasota, and his family moved to Lubbock in the 1930s to pick cotton. “Stubb” learned to cook in local establishments and, later, oversaw daily meal preparations for as many as 10,000 soldiers as a staff sergeant during the Korean War. In 1968, he opened a barbecue restaurant that became a center of Lubbock’s music scene, attracting regular performers such as Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, and Stevie Ray Vaughan. The restaurant burned in the 1980s, and Stubb moved it to Austin, where it continues to be a mainstay of food and live music. Stubblefield died in 1995, and a memorial statue was erected in 1999 on the site of the original Stubb’s Bar-B-Que. The site still features concerts and musical fundraisers.

This article (minus excerpts) was written by Rob Hodges of the THC’s Marketing Communications Division.

This image (minus excerpts) was taken by a photographer at the THC’s Fort Ringgold in Rio Grande City, the Connelly-Yerwood House in Austin, and Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas.

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

www.thc.state.tx.us
GOING STRONG

Two Years after Hurricane Ike, Galveston Island is on the Road to Recovery

On September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike slammed into Galveston Island’s gulf shore, bringing images of destruction and devastation to the rest of Texas and the world. Thirteen feet of water submerged the historic downtown Strand District, hundreds of boats littered the island’s fractured roads, and nearby neighborhoods were decimated by the storm.

More than two years have passed since video footage and photographs of these scenes reached the public, yet their powerful imagery resonates. Visitors still ask about the status of Galveston’s abundant heritage attractions, and Hurricane Ike water-line markers have been placed throughout town to help guests gauge the severity of the storm’s impact. According to local preservationists, the news from Galveston is primarily positive these days. The city recovered from the storm sooner than expected and even came away with valuable lessons learned.

“People are usually surprised to find out how quickly we returned from Ike—they still have images in their heads of boats in the streets and flooded buildings,” says Dwayne Jones, executive director of the Galveston Historical Foundation (GHF). “Fortunately, there’s been a lot of reinvestment here, especially in our historic district properties. Since a lot of damage was on the interior of these structures, you can’t always tell what was affected. As soon as you step inside some of these buildings, though, you can see recovery is still occasionally ongoing.”

Indeed, a glance inside the 1859 Ashton Villa residence reveals water lines on the walls, damage to a historic mirror, and a floor restoration project in one of the stately rooms. Another area of the mansion is slated for a major floor replacement project. One of the island’s most notable losses was the gulfside Balinese Room, a 1940s-era nightclub on a pier that once hosted legendary performers such as Frank Sinatra, Bob Hope, and Duke Ellington. According to Jones, Hurricane Ike’s wrath was perhaps most significant in unexpected areas. He says the primary visible loss was the historic oak trees—most were planted after the 1900 storm—which added to the character of the island’s historic districts by providing a connecting canopy among the homes, sidewalks, and streets. The combination of the storm water (with its salt, petroleum, and sewage) and an existing drought resulted in weakened trees, which fell on homes, streets, and cars. Dozens of flat stumps now occupy yards where mighty oaks once stood.

Jones says another Ike-related loss was Galveston’s noteworthy historic ironwork. The city’s cast-iron architecture was recognized as a significant aspect of its National Register districts and was even placed on the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s 2009 list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. Jones says the iron has an especially strong impact on historic structures because it expands and contracts, affecting the integrity of the accompanying building material.

He adds that although Hurricane Ike had a significant impact on Galveston Island’s 20,000-plus historic properties, local preservationists have learned important lessons regarding future hurricane preparation. GHF’s plans will continue to emphasize boarding up windows, securing appropriate shutters, weatherproofing additional exterior elements, and prioritizing important files and furniture to be moved to upper floors. The group has also made adjustments to its plans by implementing appropriate preparation levels as soon as a storm enters the gulf instead of waiting to gauge its projected path.

According to Jones, GHF also learned valuable lessons from Ike about which elements of historic buildings were most affected by prolonged exposure to standing water and how they can be responsibly addressed in the future. For example, he points to the high percentage of damaged heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, most of which were located at ground level and rendered completely inoperable after several days of being submerged in seawater.

“We’re looking at ways to get those things off the ground and incorporate them into historic buildings in an environmentally responsible way,” Jones says, noting that GHF’s Green Revival Show House (an 1890 cottage at 3011 Avenue Q) showcases these types of plans. “Storms like Ike are always going to be a threat on the island, so we’re making evaluations now about how to make sustainable decisions for future occurrences.”

Other heritage-related businesses in Galveston are also making alterations to their future hurricane plans. One of the city’s most popular cultural attractions, the Lone Star Flight Museum, experienced significant losses, from historic aircraft to vintage vehicles to hall-of-fame memorabilia items. Museum Director Larry Gregory says the aircraft, most of which are operable and available for guest flights, will be flown off the island even earlier than before, and items under repair or not operable can be moved by truck with enough preparation time.

“There were several aircraft left behind that we couldn’t move and artifacts from our hall of fame that didn’t survive the storm—these were irreplaceable items,” Gregory says. “I can tell you that when we returned a few days later to all the wreckage, it was completely devastating for us. It felt like someone knocking you in the gut.”

He adds that spirits were raised after a strong initial clean-up and restoration response from the U.S. Navy and community volunteers. The key was re-opening the museum as soon as possible (January 31, 2009) and offering the museum’s signature flight experiences on World War II-era aircraft.

“The rides have picked up a bit (in 2010), but visitation is still down slightly from the pre-storm days,” Gregory says. “We’re just trying to make the best of it.”

GALLIVANTING IN GALVESTON

Museum staffers and preservationists claim the island’s cultural attractions re-opened much sooner than expected after Ike. Representatives from tourist destinations throughout town offer similar accounts, noting that they still receive frequent calls from people inquiring about storm damage and site accessibility.

The following brief overview of Galveston’s premier historical sites include storm-related reports, along with a summary of their significance as destinations for heritage travelers from across the country.

BISHOP’S PALACE

This stunning 1892 mansion—the most visited historic attraction in Galveston—sustained little damage from Hurricane Ike, much like it avoided the wrath of the island’s catastrophic 1900 hurricane. According to Jones, several windows were broken at the home when floodwater on the bottom floor, which affected the walls but did not cause permanent structural damage.
A National Historic Landmark, Bishop’s Palace is also listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is considered one of the country’s most significant examples of a Victorian residence. Boasting a dramatic turret on the southeast corner, the mansion features an exquisite interior, with marble columns, 14-foot ceilings, an octagonal mahogany stairwell, spectacular stained glass, woodcarvings, and decorative plaster ceilings and walls. Bishop’s Palace is open to the public for several tours throughout the week offering varying degrees of access to the rooms.

www.galvestonhistory.org or call 409.762.2475

THE ELISSA

Elissa’s remarkable 1877 tall ship emerged in remarkably good shape following Hurricane Ike. Anchored to the harbor floor with large steel pipes, the vessel lost several sails but otherwise was unharmed, prompting Jones to muse that he “may consider taking refuge in the Elissa next time there’s a big storm since she weathered like better than anything else in town.”

As a British cargo ship, Elissa specialized in voyages to smaller ports of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, and she twice loaded cotton at Galveston. This local connection prompted the GHF to purchase the ship and undertake a dramatic restoration in 1982. Elissa is considered one of the country’s most significant examples listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is remar- kably good shape 1877 tall ship emerged in Galveston’s remarkable National Historic Landmark District, Galveston’s downtown business center in the prosperous late-1800s and early 1900s. Some of the historic iron architecture was affected, and there was substantial flooding-related loss, including ground floor damage and inventory destruction. It continues to house shops, restaurants, and galleries and host annual events such as Dickens on the Strand and Mardi Gras.

THE STRAND

Standing water was the primary issue in the Strand Mechanic National Historic Landmark District, Galveston’s downtown business center in the prosperous late-1800s and early 1900s. Some of the historic iron architecture was affected, and there was substantial flooding-related loss, including ground floor damage and inventory destruction. It continues to house shops, restaurants, and galleries and host annual events such as Dickens on the Strand and Mardi Gras.

LONE STAR FLIGHT MUSEUM

Located on the island’s west end, the museum experienced significant damage and losses from Ike, but it has recovered thanks in large part to its flight program. Director Larry Gregory reports that new and returning visitors marvel at the collection of vintage warbirds in the museum’s impressive collection, including a rare operational SBD Dauntless, a popular AT-6/SNJ Texan trainer aircraft, and a mighty B-17 Flying Fortress. Gregory is especially grateful for the World War II veterans who continue to visit and fly the aircraft they once piloted more than 65 years ago. “They always tell me it feels the same, looks the same, smells the same—everything is exactly how they remember it, other than the fact they’re not getting shot at,” Gregory says. “I ask them afterward what it’s like to get back in the cockpit after 60-plus years, and the genuine smiles on their faces tell the whole story.”

www.lsfm.org or call 409.740.7722

For additional information about heritage tourism destinations in the area, order a free copy of the Texas Historical Commission’s Texas Independence Trail Region travel guide by calling 866.276.6219 or visiting www.thc.state.tx.us. ★

THE TEXAS SEAPORT MUSEUM

Ike caused fairly serious damage to Elissa’s home berth, destroying the wooden workshops used for ship maintenance and damaging the brick and wooden pier. However, the nearby building housing the museum was unharmed.

The museum tells the story of Elissa’s rescue from the scrap yard and her meticulous restoration through an engaging video documentary and intriguing artifacts.

Located at Pier 22 in the historic port of Galveston, the museum also showcases the legacy of maritime commerce and immigration. Another popular museum attraction is its database exhibit, allowing visitors to search the names of more than 135,000 immigrants who entered the country through Galveston, once known as the Ellis Island of the West.

www.galvestonhistory.org or call 409.763.1877

ASHTON VILLA

The famous 1859 Italianate mansion received fairly significant storm-related water and mold damage on its interior (floors and walls) as well as its exterior, particularly the historic ironwork. GHF is working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on replacing portions of the mansion’s flooring and HVAC system; as a result, it is closed for public tours yet offers facility rental in a limited capacity. Ashton Villa’s carriage house remains open as a visitor’s center, offering publications and personal advice about the island’s cultural attractions.

Known as the first of Galveston’s great Broadway Street mansions, Ashton Villa is also reported to be the legendary site of Union Gen. Gordon Granger’s reading of the Emancipation Proclamation on June 19, 1865. The elaborate residence was originally home to James Moreau Brown, who ran a successful Galveston hardware business, and was eventually sold to the Shirriffs before being acquired by GHF in 1974.

www.galvestonhistory.org or call 409.762.3933

MOODY MANSION

The massive 1895 mansion had several feet of standing water on its ground floor following Hurricane Ike. As a result, the exhibit area and the gift shop were destroyed, and the mansion’s reception room cornice over the fireplace was damaged.

Located on Broadway Street near Ashton Villa and Bishop’s Palace, this 28,000-square-foot, 32-room mansion was purchased by financial magnate William Moody immediately following the 1900 storm, reportedly for “ten cents on the dollar.” The limestone and brick structure features distinct styles in each room, many of which contain hand-carved woodwork, coffered ceilings, family heirlooms, opulent furnishings, and stained glass. The mansion is open for daily tours and is often rented for reunions, weddings, and special events.

www.moodymansion.org or call 409.762.7668

U.S. CUSTOM HOUSE

This stately 1861 building, which serves as GHF’s headquarters, was flooded by up to eight feet of water, causing extensive operational damage (HVAC system, mechanical equipment) and resulting in the loss of many permanent records.

The structure’s extensive use of cast iron was considered revolutionary at the time of construction, and the building went on to become a courthouse and offices for federal agencies throughout the 20th century. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the U.S. Custom House now provides public access to the city’s architectural history through GHF services such as historic property research and technical rehabilitation guidance.

www.galvestonhistory.org or call 409.765.7834

Above and left: The city’s Strand National Historic Landmark District fared relatively well following Hurricane Ike despite substantial flooding-related loss, including ground floor damage and inventory destruction. It continues to house shops, restaurants, and galleries and host annual events such as Dickens on the Strand and Mardi Gras.

Edward A. McCollum/ Courtesy of the Galveston Historical Foundation / Texas Historical Commission
Families, friends, and neighbors from across the state celebrated the dedication of Bull Hill Cemetery and the unveilng of its Official Texas Historical Marker last summer. Nearly 200 people attended the dedication to honor the long-forgotten African American cemetery in Falls County near Marlin and to reconnect with old acquaintances. Cousins William Broadus and Ray Hurd spent their childhood in Marlin but had not seen one another in 44 years. Both returned to pay homage but had not seen one another in 44 years. Both returned to pay homage to their common ancestors resting in Bull Hill. Hurd brought his daughter Jayda to experience family history, noting, “I want her to see where she came from, to know more about her great-great-grandmother Harriet Tubman.”

Christopher Jones and Courtney Jones, the great-great-great-grandchildren of the original land and slave owner Churchill Jones, echoed these sentiments. They discussed their childhood on the land encompassing Bull Hill, which is now owned by the Summerlee Foundation. Although the homecoming was bittersweet, the Jones descendants expressed confidence the property would be well preserved.

Many in the crowd were descended from the Jones, Tomlinson, and Stallworth slave-owning families and the enslaved African Americans who came with them from Alabama in the mid-1800s. It was virtually impossible for either group to tell their history without including the other, and for several hours both groups shared food and memories of bygone days.

Toni Anderson Kirk of Fort Worth said, “I thought that was big of them (the Jones descendants) to come and speak. Everyone seemed receptive of them.” Harrell Williams of Austin agreed, adding, “The more powerful story for me was the descendants of the slave owners who were there with the descendants of the slaves. That was a mark of how far we’ve come. Standing on the same ground under different circumstances and enjoying one another. That was a beautiful situation.”

Gary Bledsoe, president of the Texas chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, joined family and community members to recognize his deep familial roots to Bull Hill and the community, along with Nedra Lee, doctoral student of anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin, began planning the ceremony in February 2010. Many Marlin residents helped them throughout the process, including Hilda Blann and Trudie Lee Ashby of the Falls County Historical Commission, who worked with Styles and Lee for nearly four months to organize the ceremony.

The surviving kin of those who came with them from Alabama to Texas were there. That was a mark of how far we’ve come. Standing on the same ground under different circumstances and enjoying one another. That was a beautiful situation.”

Lee by saying, “I shall never forget their kindness, enthusiasm, and desire to shine a light on this forgotten burial ground that contains so many of my ancestors. They have been a blessing to me and my entire family for generations to come.”

The more powerful story for me was the descendants of the slave owners who were there with the descendants of the slaves. That was a mark of how far we’ve come. Standing on the same ground under different circumstances and enjoying one another. That was a beautiful situation.”

— Harrell Williams

Event Participant

This article was adapted from a report by Sharon Styles and Nedra Lee.

The program’s theme—to speak the names of the deceased so they could live again—was particularly meaningful to friends and family members who had been excluded from the cemetery for nearly half a century. With merely seven intact headstones remaining at Bull Hill, a marker lists the 106 known names and acknowledges the unknown.

Styles felt strongly that the names of all 106 identified people should be read aloud. She helped read these names as Calloway, Hawkins, and Mack sang softly alongside members of the Masons and Eastern Stars. "I am truly grateful to everyone at the THC, the citizens of Marlin, and everyone that took time from their busy schedules to attend the dedication ceremony," Styles said. "Most of all, I thank God for the opportunity to be a part of an event that brought so many people together. I believe God gave me this assignment, and I did my best to complete it in a way that would be pleasing to Him and those resting in Bull Hill."
Weeping Mary Carries On in East Texas

When he saw two elderly women descending their porch, shaking their fingers at him as he strolled into the small community, Norris White thought he must have done something wrong.

“I didn’t know what I had done,” said the Texas Historical Commission’s (THC) 2010 Preservation Fellow, “but I saw them coming at me and was sure I was in trouble.”

One month earlier—during his internship at Caddo Mounds State Historic Site in Alto—White had learned about the adjacent African American community of Weeping Mary. He had printed the THC’s 1998 brochure African Americans in Texas: Historical & Cultural Legacies, walked to the village after work, introduced himself to some residents, and distributed copies of the brochure. The visit went well, and he had looked forward to returning.

It was during his second visit to Weeping Mary that White thought he was being admonished. Vertie Martin and Ellie Mumphrey demanded to know where he obtained the brochure, and he sheepishly responded that it was from a state agency’s website. As it turned out, the women were not upset, but overjoyed—a photo of an unidentified woman on page 6 portrayed their “Aunt Mae,” a deceased community pillar of whom no other photo is known to exist. White instantly became a community hero.

Founded after the Civil War, Weeping Mary is tucked away in the woods about six miles southwest of Alto. The subject of a 2009 THC historical marker for untold stories, Weeping Mary has a mystique associated with its name and origins. It was founded by two sisters—Nancy (Ross) Lockhart and Emily (Ross) Skinner—on land purchased when they were freed from slavery. The matriarchal town could have been named after Mary Magdalene, though local legend says the name sake was a freed slave named Mary who was swindled of her land.

Today, Weeping Mary’s population is estimated at nearly 75, as young people have moved away in search of opportunity. But those remaining cling to tradition, a strong sense of community, and a proud, agrarian legacy. Weeping Mary Baptist Church continues to anchor the community, and the one-room schoolhouse (closed since World War II) still stands as testimony of the enduring communal spirit residents say was embodied in the woman they called “Aunt Mae.”

Grand nephew Cherry Jenkins remembers Eula Mae Ross, who died “around 10 years ago,” as tough. “She was 4’2”, but could outwork any man,” he contends. George W. Parker, or “Daddy Parker” as he is known locally, remembers meeting Aunt Mae when his family moved to town in 1937. “She asked her son (about me), ‘Who is this boy?’” Parker recalls. “Then she said to me, ‘Let me tell you something—I’m the boss!’

George is married to one of Weeping Mary’s current matriarchs—Aunt Mae’s second cousin once removed, Besie Mae Ross Parker. Besie Mae worked more than 40 years at a therapist for the Texas Forest Service at the former Indian Mounds Nursery, now part of Caddo Mounds State Historic Site.

George fondly recalls using the old well tapped from one of several springs in the area. The springs were a major factor in Caddo Indian settlement, and they testify to the area’s long history of sustenance.

“It’s been a good community,” says George Parker. “We take care of our own. I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else.”

Weeping Mary is featured in the THC’s new website, www.africanamericansintexas.com, an online companion to the new travel booklet, African Americans in Texas: A Lasting Legacy (see “Let Freedom Ring” on page 6).
Harris CHC Honors 19th-Century African American Leaders

The Harris County Historical Commission (CHC) recently held a marker dedication ceremony honoring two men who made significant contributions to Houston’s African American community. The legacies of Rev. John Hurty “Jack” Yates and John Sesums, Jr. were commemorated for future generations on a Texas Historical Commission (THC) marker and gravestone, respectively, in Houston’s College Memorial Park Cemetery. Randy Rieppe and Pastor Robert Robertson, members of the College Park Cemetery Association, officiated the ceremony. Yates descendant Jackie Bostic spoke about her great-grandfather, and Harris CHC member Ann Becker made remarks on Sesums. The men were further honored with official proclamations and resolutions from Texas Gov. Rick Perry, Sens. John Cornyn and Kay Bailey Hutchison, Congressman John Culberson, State Sen. Rodney Ellis, State Rep. Ellen Cohen, County Judge Ed Emmett, and Houston Mayor Annise Parker. Harris CHC Marker Dedication Chair Debra Robertson, members of the College Memorial Park Cemetery. Yates descendant Jackie Bostic spoke about her great-grandfather, and Harris CHC member Ann Becker made remarks on Sesums. The men were further honored with official proclamations and resolutions from Texas Gov. Rick Perry, Sens. John Cornyn and Kay Bailey Hutchison, Congressman John Culberson, State Sen. Rodney Ellis, State Rep. Ellen Cohen, County Judge Ed Emmett, and Houston Mayor Annise Parker. Harris CHC Marker Dedication Chair Debra Robertson, members of the College Memorial Park Cemetery.

Bailey has been instrumental in several THC courthouse restorations (Bee, Jefferson, and Wharton counties) and received the THC’s Award of Excellence in Historic Architecture. His wife Peggy is a trustee with the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission and the Bailey family is one of Texas’ Heroes with the Friends.

Westgate Tower—Austin, Travis Co.

The Westgate Tower—a 26-story mixed-use building containing commercial space, apartments, a parking garage, and originally a Mercantile and social club—is named for its location adjoining the west edge of the Capitol grounds in downtown Austin. At 261 feet in height, the Westgate Tower was the tallest building constructed in Austin during the 1960s, although it deferred in height to the Capitol (311 feet) and the tower of the Main Building of the University of Texas at Austin (307 feet). The Westgate Tower is listed in the National Register in the area of Community Planning and Development for its association with a wave of high-rise residential construction in Texas cities during the period 1962–66. Additionally, it is listed in the area of Architecture for its association with the architects Edward Durell Stone, of New York and Fehr & Granger of Austin. The building’s masonry solar screens embody the distinctive characteristics of Stone’s mid-20th century modern architecture.

Herrera Ranch—Von Ormy, Bexar Co.

The Blas Maria Herrera and Maria Antonia Ruiz Herrera Ranch is a rare early-19th century homestead in southern Bexar County, and has been in continuous ownership by Herrera family members since 1845. The complex represents early settlement by Tejano settlers. At the heart of the ranch stands a large jaca structure (pictured) that served as the family residence, a smaller jaca with an attached open-air pavilion, and three smaller wood-frame buildings. Historic built features throughout the ranch reflect the evolution and changing uses of the land, from active ranching, to scaled-back ranching activities, to social and community events, to the simple pasturing of horses today. The property is listed in the National Register at the state level of significance in the areas of Settlement and Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic.

Texas Society of Architects Receives Acclades

Ray Bailey of Houston with the 2010 Distinguished Architect Award. The Texas Society of Architects (TSA) recently awarded distinguished architect Ray Bailey in recognition of his 40 years of “leadership and dedication in architecture and community.”

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Harrell Ranch—Von Ormy, Bexar Co.

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The Levi Jordan Plantation’s origins date to 1848, when Jordan, a planter, acquired more than 2,200 acres of land west of the San Bernard River in Brazoria County and relocated his family and his agricultural operation to Texas. After years of moving across the southeast in search of more fertile soil, family lore claims the Georgia-born Jordan reported finding an ideal piece of land that would outlast them all in the heart of the Texas Gulf Coast region near present-day Brazoria.

Upon taking possession of his land, Jordan left about a dozen enslaved workers there to begin construction of residences while he relocated his family. The main plantation house was a two-story, four-room, wood-frame Greek Revival style home. It was completed in the mid-1850s. The workers also built several slave quarters and a sugar mill. Jordan raised sugarcane and cotton and made a shrewd investment in one of the largest sugar mill operations in the area. This mill processed his cane and the cane of several neighboring plantations. Over the 10-year period culminating with the end of the U.S. Civil War and Emancipation, Jordan owned as many as 140 enslaved workers, some Africans who were part of the illegal slave trade of the early 19th century.

Emancipation brought freedom to enslaved workers at the Jordan Plantation, but also many new challenges. The Freedmen’s Bureau office in Brazoria County reviewed several labor contract disputes between Jordan and his recently freed laborers. While the population of the former slave quarters area fluctuated during early Reconstruction, as many as 100 Africans and African Americans remained at the plantation. Jordan died in 1873 and management of his agricultural empire fractured as it transitioned to his grandchildren’s management. By the late 1880s, the quarters area of the plantation was abandoned and over the next few decades the structures deteriorated and were dismantled for salvage. With time the structure foundations, tools, and personal items left behind by the former plantation inhabitants would become an archeological treasure trove of artifacts related to the African American experience in 19th-century Texas.

From 1986 to 2002, Dr. Ken Brown of the University of Houston conducted extensive archeological investigations at the site. The investigations focused on the former slave quarters and areas around the plantation house. Numerous artifacts were recovered from the excavations that provided insights into the material culture, daily lives, and beliefs of the former slaves at the plantation. The site is currently an example of “preservation in progress,” with efforts underway to stabilize and restore the 1850s plantation home. Texas Historical Commission (THC) staff at the site have recently begun hosting public programs on the first Saturdays of each month.

“The complexities of preserving and developing facilities at the site will take time,” says Brett Cruse, sites supervisor at the THC’s Historic Sites Division. “For now, the community seems excited to be able to experience the site and learn about these efforts by seeing them first-hand.”

The Levi Jordan Plantation State Historic Site is undergoing stabilization and is the focus of public programs at the site on the first Saturday of each month.

The mid-1850s main house at Levi Jordan Plantation is undergoing stabilization and is the focus of public programs at the site on the first Saturday of each month.
WHERE ON EARTH...IN TEXAS

Where on Earth? You tell us! Write to the Texas Historical Commission, P.O. Box 12276, Austin, TX 78711-2276. You also may fax your answer to 512.463.6374 or email it to medallion@thc.state.tx.us. The first three people who correctly guess the site will be named with the answer in the March/April issue of The Medallion. The first correct mail answer will be counted, even if correct emails and faxes arrive first.

Want a clue? Located in a northern Texas community, this 1885 Renaissance Revival courthouse was rededicated in 2002 as part of the THC’s Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program.

Answer to the photo from the last issue: The recognizable tower pictured above is the famous Taj Mahal (Building 100) at Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio. A record number of readers (50 and counting) enthusiastically responded with the correct answer and shared many heartfelt memories of the traditions associated with the tower’s patriotic broadcasts.

Congratulations to the first three readers who quickly submitted the correct answer: Alfred Broden of San Augustine, Bro. Edward Loch of San Antonio, and Tresa West of Brownfield. They will receive prizes from our Texas Heritage Trails Program as a token of our appreciation for taking part in the fun. Thanks to all participants!★

www.thc.state.tx.us