**Examples of 2011 projects from County Historical Commissions (CHC)**

For at least the last 11 years the **Bell County Historical Commission** has made small grants to non-profit Bell County agencies to assist them in preserving and promoting the history of Bell County. This year the commission approved four grants. These were to the Railroad and Heritage Museum, the Central Texas Area Museum, the 1874 Church Committee, and the Bell County Museum. The Railroad and Heritage Museum requested assistance to provide electricity to some of the railroad rolling stock so that the stock could be opened to the public. The Central Texas Area Museum was in need of archival supplies to complete an effort to preserve historical records, mementos, and artifacts gathered in a concerted effort over the past two years. The 1874 Church Committee is working with the city of Belton to save the oldest church building in Bell County and needed funds to provide safety and security lighting for the site. The Bell County Museum sponsored a 7-week long, county-wide Quilt Crawl with seven sites setting up displays of historic quilts and quilting equipment. The grant provided funds to advertise this effort along Interstate Highway 35 and Federal Highway 190 through the county. The selection of these grants is initiated with a grant application. The Grants Committee then sets up an on-site visit with each applicant. Applicants show and explain their project and so that the committee may learn and visualize the effort through the eyes of the applicants. In addition to partnering with each applicant, several of the applicants also partnered with other agencies and organizations in the county to give this project maximum visibility throughout the county.

The **Jeff Davis CHC** coordinated a huge event in Fort Davis on October 8, 2011. It involved the entire town of Fort Davis and Jeff Davis County. The event commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Jeff Davis County Courthouse, the 100th anniversary of the Jeff Davis County Jail, the 100th anniversary of the Fort Davis State Bank, and the 50th anniversary of the authorization of Fort Davis National Historic Site. The CHC was responsible for publicity, activities, program of events, invitations, arrangements, etc. The CHC was responsible for activities at the county jail and the courthouse. At the jail, Lonn Taylor, a JDCHC appointee, conveyed some of the colorful history and the many different uses of the building. THC Commissioner Pete Peterson from Alpine unveiled the Texas Historic Landmark Marker for the building. At the courthouse, Mary Williams, JDCHC chairman, related historical events and the many services the courthouse had provided over the past 100 years. Both buildings were open for the public to view by CHC members. Other events included were: speeches at the bank; a mock bank robbery in which the "robbers" were hauled off to the county jail; a BBQ lunch on the courthouse lawn; numerous activities (featuring the U.S. Army 1st Armored Division Band from Fort Bliss) in the afternoon at Fort Davis NHS; and a dance at the Union building sponsored by the Fort Davis Chamber of Commerce in the evening. Hundreds of people attended. It was a great educational, entertaining, community event that the JDCHC was proud to sponsor and coordinate.

The **Matagorda CHC** continues to provide educational material to schools in the county. In 2011, the second phase of *Matagorda County For Kids* was implemented. Seven additional PowerPoint presentations were created to add to Phase I (2010 - 6 presentations). CDs will be given to all of the school in Matagorda County during Spring 2012 and the presentations are posted on the CHC website. All of the towns and many of the communities are covered in the presentations. Partnerships include museums, newspapers and individuals who assisted in collecting the information and pictures. The catalyst for the project was to provide "virtual" fieldtrips for teachers and students since funds for fieldtrips have diminished. The project provides a way to educate students and adults on the history of Matagorda County. Presentations have also been used as programs for organization meetings. Visit <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/kids_county.htm> for more information.

There are only three swing bridges remaining in all of Texas and one of them is located in Newton County. **Newton CHC** appointee Ed Gallagher took on the challenge of getting the Deweyville Swing Bridge listed on the National Register for Historic Places. It took seven years and assistance from Newton CHC’s Historical Marker Committee Chair, Precinct 4 County Commissioner, County Judge, Historical Bridge Foundation, and Starks Historical Society. The dedication ceremony held in early 2012 included all those mentioned previously plus the Deweyville High School Band, two local pastors, DAR members, and Newton County Chamber of Commerce representatives. Newton CHC’s Public Relations Committee wrote before and after event articles for the newspaper. Newton CHC’s In-House Publishing Committee published and printed the invitations, posters and programs. The local TXDOT installed the marker and cleaned the site before the dedication. The celebration was attended by all of Newton County’s county commissioners, a State Representative, the county sheriff, as well as residents of Deweyville and nearby communities. This project clearly impacted the community’s perception and appreciation of their county’s history.

Early in 2011, the **Runnels CHC** was contacted by the Winters ISD about preservation of their earliest school records, dating back to 1914 and going to 1971. Later records had been preserved in another way. CHC appointees looked at the records and then arranged a meeting with the school board. They contacted the West Texas Collection (WTC) at ASU in San Angelo about the appropriate methods of preservation. In the meeting with the board, we recommended they get them digitized. The board unanimously voted to do that. The old records were deteriorating and this was a way to make them accessible for research. When anything about Runnels County comes up, the WTC makes the Runnels CHC copies. With this information, CHC appointees were able to locate some missing schools and also find how long they were in existence in the district. To date, the Runnels CHC has identified 102 schools that existed at some point in time in Runnels County. The CHC is also working to get pictures of each school. The Winters ISD, the West Texas Collection, some local residents and the Runnels CHC have all been involved in the work on this very interesting project.

The **Sabine CHC** during 2011 collected, cataloged and displayed over 600 African American funeral home obituaries reaching back into the 1950s.  In collecting these papers contact was made with more than 50 African Americans, mainly older women, who had collected these obituaries over 60 years. These obituaries provide an interesting history of the African American community since they provide much more information than the typical Anglo funeral home obituary. This project gave the participants a better feeling of ownership in the Sabine County Center. From dealing with these obituaries many families have become interested in searching their family history.

For many years, the **Travis County Historical Commission** conducted an essay program for elementary schools in Austin and Travis County that featured student work on cultural and family history. We have recently refocused this program on students attending Austin Community College campuses. We work with ACC staff members who supervise student projects and compile the resulting studies, and organize the final recognition ceremonies. This program creates a new awareness of county history by among ACC students by requiring them to develop projects on topics related to Travis County history and to present their work for review by other students and the public. The goal of this program is to develop new student interest in county history and to encourage them to share their discoveries with family and friends in the community.

The **Van Zandt County Historical Commission** holds meetings in the various towns in our county to get more involvement at the local level. At each of these meetings we involved not only the CHC but local historical groups and city officials. The purpose was to promote our county CHC as well as promoting history and preservation. By reminding citizens in the various towns of the importance of preserving their history, more locals have become involved with their Chamber of Commerce's efforts to improve the city, their museum's preservation efforts and have become aware of the importance of passing this history down to their children.