Focus on Historic Resources
Educate Your CHC on the Importance of Historic Bridges

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The last edition of CHC Corner addressed how the Texas Historical Commission (THC) provides technical advice, affirmation, and moral support. In addition to these general areas of assistance, THC staff educates individuals on the complexities of specific historic resource types.

The THC, Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), and Historic Bridge Foundation (HBF) recently identified the most significant bridges built in Texas in the decades following World War II. These partners held public meetings to discuss what educational materials could best tell the story of these important resources.

Together, THC, TxDOT, and HBF are producing guidance for local preservationists and engineers. TxDOT created a visual glossary of bridge components and the “Dos and Don’ts” of bridge repairs. HBF’s website includes key steps to promoting bridge awareness, and the THC’s website features a section with additional guidance and information to help the public understand historic bridges.

The THC website also features TxDOT’s maps of historic truss bridges and post-World War II bridges eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Determining the value of historic bridges is particularly important considering their replacement rate due to perceived cost-prohibitive repairs.

“Our preference is that bridges, like buildings, be left at the original location,” says Linda Henderson, a historian with the THC. “However, a bridge may be stored and reused, and the move may not lessen the bridge’s integrity if it’s historically significant for its engineering.”

Whether rehabilitated or repurposed, bridge use typically is limited to simple conveyance (crossing a natural feature), while buildings have a seemingly broader range of reuse (retail, office, residence, etc.) that enable reinvention and some degree of return on investment. For this reason, we challenge you to increase the value of historic bridges by highlighting their role in heritage tourism.

“Bridges and other infrastructure are key characters in stories of exploration, settlement, and industry, as much as, buildings,” Henderson says.

CHCs can promote local history by highlighting unique historic bridges. More information on saving bridges in your community can be found by searching “historic bridges” on the THC website (www.thc.state.tx.us).

Above and at right: The Piano Bridge in Fayette County was recently preserved thanks to support from county officials and preservationists.