



MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, TEXAS

January 9, 2024

2023 ANNUAL REPORT TO **MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMISSIONER'S COURT**

WHAT IS THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION?

The Texas Historical Commission (THC), the official state agency for historical preservation, was originally created in 1953 by the Texas Legislature as the Texas State Historical Survey Committee. It retained that title until the 63rd legislature changed its name to the Texas Historical Commission.

The Montgomery County Historical Commission (CHC) is a duly constituted organization of Montgomery County government. It is duly 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. As a county department, our Commission also publishes notice of our public meetings as required by the Texas Open Meetings Act.

The Montgomery County Historical Commission pursues the Texas Historical Commission's ongoing 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. It is funded by the generous support of the Montgomery County Commissioners Court.

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.*

1. MEMBERSHIP: The County Historical Commission (CHC) currently has 38 members who are appointed for two-year terms by the County Commissioners Court. The CHC is composed of individual volunteers from various backgrounds who bring special expertise, skills and perspectives to the mission of the County Historical Commission.

Over the year, we added five new members but three of our Commission members passed away: **Sharon Russell**, our Marker Committee Chair; **David Frame**, our Webmaster; and **Elijah Easley**, cemetery committee member. We also lost our beloved Magnolia *member emeritus*, **Celeste Graves**, who served on our Commission for decades and was the recognized historian of the Magnolia area.

2. MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS: The Commission schedules six regular meetings every other month during the year beginning in January. (The Texas Historical Commission asks that each county historical commission meet at least four times each year.) Our meetings are held in person at the Greater Conroe-Lake Conroe Chamber of Commerce. Our meeting attendance has been excellent.
3. COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION WEBSITE: The Commission is pleased that a new Commission website has been created by our member **Joy Montgomery**: <https://www.montgomerycountyhistoricalcommission.org>. It is a robust site to serve as an internet archive for reports on Historical Commission activities, provide State and County references, historical articles and photos, slideshows and videos of Montgomery County's people and places, and events. The new website offers an interactive map of historical marker sites throughout the County. The map displays each historic location with an individual "pin" that links to a historic narrative providing the reader with detailed information about each historical site, building and cemetery. It even provides a Google map to lead the reader to the location of each marker.

Joy Montgomery has also been adding historic photos provided by local residents who have an opportunity to participate in the development of our website. Plus, Joy is adding to the website rare historic photos and documents, scanned and produced by the members of the *Montgomery County History Taskforce*, from the archives of former **county historians Bessie Owens and William Harley Gandy**. These will provide valuable research information for future generations.

The CHC website is also available as a clearinghouse for many other county and state historical organizations and museums. It offers a calendar of events for county-wide historical organizations, county residents and tourists. Ongoing improvements to our Commission website include more flexibility for daily updates and blogs; a more attractive home page; mobile friendly upgrades for smart phones; links to Facebook,

Instagram, and other social media so that we can more effectively reach a larger audience.

In addition to the new Commission website, our member **Brittany Wallace Knauer** and other Commission members have been contributing updates to our Commission's *Facebook* on events of our Commission and other history organizations in the County. These updates promote for viewers our CHC website as well as our events and projects.

4. HISTORICAL RESOURCE SURVEY: For many years the CHC has been interested in updating and digitalizing the CHC's *Historical Resource Survey* to identify all historically significant sites and buildings in Montgomery County. The only such survey, conducted in 1980 and found in two large three-ring binders, is out of date. Our Commission members **Frank and Merlynn Hersom**, along with other local Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints volunteers, have been working on the digital update of the Survey. Beginning in late November 2020 and through 2023, these teams have methodically identified and researched over 130 Conroe commercial and residential structures, thereby providing an excellent narrative of each along with current photographs of their condition.

When the surveys of Conroe are completed in 2024, the team will move on from city to city throughout Montgomery County to digitally catalog historical structures. 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. The surveys will also assist us in our ongoing efforts to recognize structures with historical markers and for possible designation by the National Registry of Historic Places.

5. HISTORICAL PRESERVATION: **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 across Texas to prioritize the preservation of historic buildings and other structures across the State that are threatened by disrepair or new development. As these are identified, our CHC is constantly looking at ways to restore and repurpose these structures consistent with our mission statement.

CHC chairman **Larry Foerster** serves as a member of the Conroe Main Street Advisory Board that assists the city of Conroe, which is designated as a "**Main Street City**" by the Texas Historical Commission. This will assist the City in its effort to preserve and revitalize the downtown business district and the charming nearby historic residential areas.

One of the most important undertold sites is the campus of the old *Conroe College*, originally known as the Conroe Normal and Industrial College when it was established in 1903. This 20-acre tract is the remnant of what was once a 100+ acre tract that served as a school campus for African American students during the time of segregation and the Jim Crow era. It was the first private school that focused on the educational and vocational needs of black youth in Montgomery County. Commission members **Victor Uher, Steve Muir, Ron Saikowski and Larry Foerster** are part of a local *ad hoc* committee of Conroe citizens and community leaders who are focused on restoring and repurposing the campus to preserve the legacy of this old college. With the assistance of **John Meredith, Rita Wiltz, B J Plattenburg, Dr. Craig Follins**, and other interested community leaders, we continue to solicit funding to purchase the campus so that it will qualify for private grants for community educational or recreational purposes.



*Conroe College,
formerly Conroe Normal and Industrial College*

We continue to promote the preservation of the *one-lane old iron truss bridge* spanning the San Jacinto River at FM 2854. County records show that this bridge was constructed by El Paso Iron and Bridge Company for the County in 1910 and served for many decades as the State Highway 105 bridge from Conroe to Montgomery. Outlaws Bonnie and Clyde were reported to have met his relatives under the bridge in the early 1930s. Regrettably, the bridge was damaged by the San Jacinto River flood waters during Hurricane Harvey in 2017 and its condition is fragile. The Texas Highway Department and the Texas Historical Commission are urging local authorities to save and repurpose these historic structures. The CHC continues to promote the preservation of the bridge. Unfortunately, the bridge is in fragile condition and the cost of moving it and restoring it is significant.



San Jacinto River 1910 Truss Bridge

In 2020 the City of Conroe hired Frank Robinson as the downtown manager to promote its plans to redevelop a large area on both sides of the Union Pacific railroad tracks. Before he retired earlier this year, Frank brought a new energy to our efforts to restore and repurpose old buildings. Frank’s replacement **Michael Corbett** has continued to promote the downtown Conroe area.

Before his retirement, Frank worked with urban designers on ways to incorporate the older buildings into new downtown businesses, applying upscale development concepts. Frank also had several meetings with members of the Commission to incorporate our ideas into downtown plans. These discussions have included new uses for old structures and the creation of one or more historic residential districts near the downtown. **Ron Saikowski** and his committee are also researching the necessary steps to procure recognition for downtown Conroe as a *National Register for Commercial Historic District*.

Our Commission also wants to add many new county markers for historic structures in downtown Conroe, and there is growing interest among other owners in applying for these historical markers. Several other historic Conroe downtown buildings have recently been converted into a new brewery, a local wine tasting room, a St Thomas University mini campus, a meadery tasting room, and assorted restaurants and retail stores.

The interior of the historic 1935 *Crighton Theatre* has been remodeled and the theatre lobby has been expanded into adjacent space next door. Commission member **Chad Crowl** has been working with the Theatre board of directors for a county or state historical marker for the Theatre in 2024. There is also an interest in getting the Theatre designated on the National Register of Historic Places.



Crighton Theatre in Conroe

Work continues on the *Thomas Chapel Methodist Church* in Willis. Built in 1899, this African American Church is the oldest church in continuous use in Montgomery County.

The Commission continues to provide funds to the History Taskforce for the project that has been supervised by Commission members **Ron Saikowski and Ann Meador.**



Repairs to 1889 Thomas Chapel Church in Willis

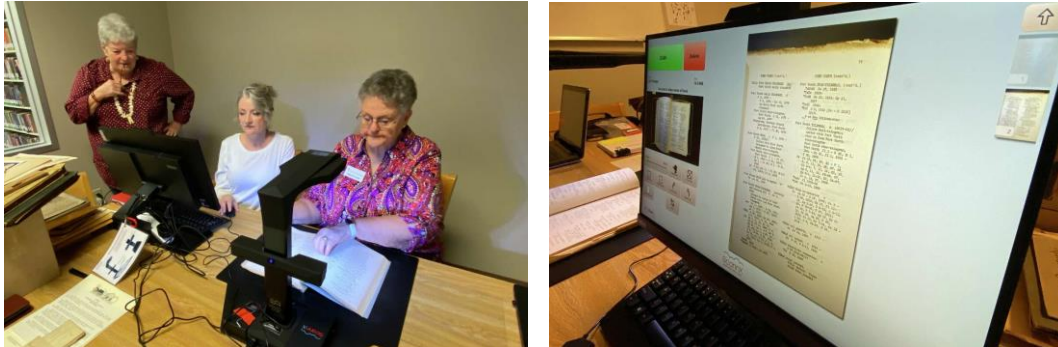
The *Conroe Community Cemetery* has also been targeted by our Commission for preservation and recognition. The Cemetery has been designated for a Texas historical marker which we expect will be dedicated in 2024. This previously overgrown cemetery is the burial site of Sgt Luther James Dorsey of the 10th US Calvary, the only known Buffalo Soldier buried in Montgomery County. It is also the final resting place of other notable African American leaders from our community. Our Commission has donated the necessary funds to provide markers for the unknown graves and to install a fence along two sides of the cemetery to protect the tombstones from vandals. Several members have participated in the ongoing restoration of this cemetery.

Before he passed away this spring, CHC member **Elijah Easley** fervently worked to restore the Sweet Rest Cemetery in Tamina. Members **Ron Saikowski, Ryan Londeen, Maria Banos Jordan, and Annette Kerr** have been engaged in plans for the restoration of the *Sweet Rest Cemetery in Tamina*, which is one of the earliest African American cemeteries in the County. With the death of Elijah Easley, new member **Deborah Williams**, whose family members are buried in the cemetery, has been committed to getting recognition for the cemetery. For years it was covered in standing water. Former **Precinct Commissioner James Metts** has also assisted with the flood mitigation plans for this historic cemetery. In November, our CHC approved a county historical marker application for the cemetery prepared by **Annette Kerr and Deborah Williams**.

In addition, **Maria Banos Jordan** and Marker Committee chairperson **Annette Kerr** have worked on an application for an Undertold Story Texas Historical Marker for the *Tamina Freedmen Town*. The application was submitted by our CHC to the Texas Historical Commission in November.

Commission members **Ann Meador, Kirsten Beard** and **Annette Kerr** lead volunteers of the local nonprofit *History Taskforce* in digitally preserving and cataloging historic records of local historians such as **Bessie Owen** and museum records that must be

digitally saved. Taskforce members also digitally preserved the massive historical records of **William Harley Gandy**, the first chair of the Montgomery County Historical Commission and a highly respected county historian and author. The History Taskforce also is focused on preserving historic but forgotten African American cemeteries.



Ann Meador and Kirsten Beard working with volunteer Debra Haws on scanning historical documents with volunteer as a History Taskforce project

6. **YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD.** Regrettably our *CHC Youth Advisory Board* was inactive this year. Originally it was composed of high school juniors and senior students selected by their teachers and administrators from high schools throughout Montgomery County. This Youth Advisory Board, or “YAB” as we affectionately call it, provided 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 was the first of its kind in the State of Texas. YAB students were able to assist us with our annual history road rallies and participated in historic cemetery cleaning projects.

YAB Committee members are **Brenda Beaven, Carolyn Carrol, Kim Hignett, Missy Ringo and Grant Neal.** Currently the Youth Advisory Board is not active but the Committee plans to reorganize the YAB program in the spring of 2024 by engaging 7th and 8th grade students.

7. **VOICES FROM THE PAST CEMETERY TOURS:** Several members of our Historical Commission organized and participated in the 4th annual Montgomery Historical Society’s *Voices in the Past* cemetery tours in Montgomery. Various individuals from the Historical Commission reenacted historic individuals from over 100 years ago. Contributing CHC members included **Brenda Beaven, Ann Meador, Robin Montgomery, Joy Montgomery, Kirsten Beard and Bernie Sargent** and his wife **Melissa Sargent.**



Kirsten Beard as Martha Davis Addison



Joy and Robin Montgomery as Owen and Margaret Shannon



Bernie Sargent as Thomas Peel



Melissa Sargent as Mrs. Peel

8. **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 Pandey and County Judge Keough’s administrative assistant Jamie Meinkowsky, the CHC *Grants Committee* (composed of **Anna Shepard, Dell Wise and Victor Uher**) have developed guidelines and procedures for the CHC and Commissioner’s Court approval of such grants.

Grants in 2023 were given to the *Conroe Community Cemetery Restoration Project* for repairs to and signage at this old African American cemetery. These funds will assist with the application for a state historical cemetery marker. As mentioned above, the Commission provided grant funds to the nonprofit *History Taskforce* for the ongoing

repairs of the **Thomas Chapel in Willis**. Grant funds were also provided to the **Magnolia Historical Society** to contribute to the repairs at the **Magnolia Depot Museum** complex; and the **Magnolia Cemetery Association** for fence replacement at the historic **Magnolia Cemetery**. These grant funds totaled over \$20,000.

With the approaching 100th anniversary of our *Montgomery County Courthouse*, CHC Vice-Chair **Victor Uher** has been engaged in promoting the restoration of the 1936 courthouse using Texas Historical Commission funding for that purpose. **County Judge Mark Keough** and his chief of staff **Jason Millsaps** have expressed a sincere interest in restoring this important edifice using planning consultants who have been engaged by the County in future buildings to serve the rapid growth of our County.

9. STATE HISTORICAL MARKERS: A state historical marker application for the Undertold Story of the *Tamina Freedmen Town* was submitted by our CHC in November and it is pending approval by the THC. The application is the work of CHC members **Maria Banos Jordan** and **Annette Kerr**.

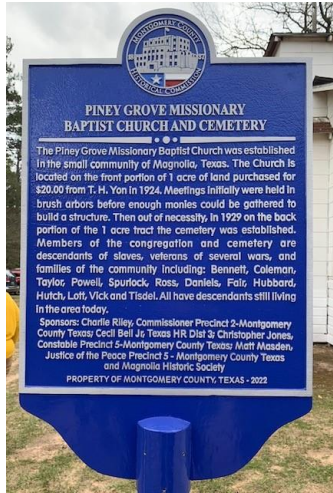
Last year CHC member **Ryan Londeen** researched and submitted a State marker application for the *Chilton-Dean Home* in Montgomery. The house has been approved by the THC for a state marker and dedication should be sometime in 2024.

CHC members **Andy Rapoza** and **Annette Kerr** collaborated with John Meredith from the nonprofit Conroe Community Cemetery Restoration Project (CCCRP) for a Texas state historical marker for the *Conroe Community Cemetery* that has been approved by THC. The marker should be dedicated by May 2024.

There are plans to pursue designation of state historical markers for the burial site of Isaac Conroe at the Glenwood Cemetery in Houston; the Charles B Stewart burial site in Montgomery; the Crighton Theatre in Conroe; the abandoned towns of Danville and Fostoria; and the communities of Grangerland, Splendora, and New Caney.

10. COUNTY HISTORICAL MARKERS: The publicity from the dedication of county historical markers has generated more interest by other property owners across the County in having their buildings recognized with a state or county historical marker.

Marker Committee **Annette Kerr** researched and prepared an application for a county historical marker for the *Pineygrove Missionary Baptist Church and Cemetery* near Magnolia. The site serves as the oldest African American church still in use in that area. The marker was dedicated in a ceremony on January 15, 2023. Marker sponsors included Precinct 2 Commissioner Charlie Riley, House Representative Cecil Bell, Justice of the Peace Matt Masden, Constable Christopher Jones and the Magnolia Historical Society.



*Piney Grove Missionary Baptist Church
County marker*

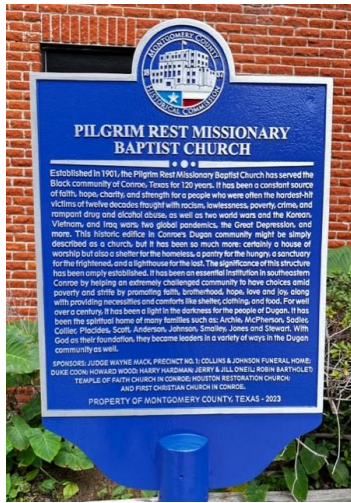


Annetter Kerr with members of the Church at the county marker dedication



Piney Grove Missionary Baptist Church in Magnolia

On November 12 the ***Pilgrim Rest Missionary Baptist Church*** dedicated its new county historical marker. This historic African American church is located in the Dugan community of Conroe. For over 122 years, the church and its members have served the citizens of the Dugan community as a spiritual and civic anchor. Over these years numerous pastors have served the congregation. Since 1989 **Pastor B. J. Plattenburg and his wife Rosie** have been the pastors of the congregation. The county marker application was researched and written by CHC member **Andy Rapoza** with assistance from **Annette Kerr** and several members of the church. Marker sponsors were Justice of the Peace Wayne Mack, City council members Harry Hardman and Howard Wood, Duke Coon, CHC member Robin Bartholet, Collins and Johnson Funeral Home, Jerry and Jill ONeil, Temple of Faith Church in Conroe, Houston Restoration Church and First Christian Church in Conroe. Also recognized for their support was the West Tabernacle Church in Conroe and council member Todd Yancy.



County historical marker



Marker sponsors with Rev B J and Rosie Plattenburg



Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church members with the marker



Andy Rapoza, Annette Kerr and the Plattenburgs



Attending members of the Montgomery County Historical Commission with the Plattenburgs at the marker

The **Presswood Cemetery** in New Caney has been approved for a county marker which should be dedicated in 2024. The marker is sponsored by Precinct #4 Commissioner **Matt Gray**.

Marker Committee and Cemetery Committee chairperson **Annette Kerr** is currently working on county historical marker applications for the Yell Pine Grove Cemetery and Gary’s Chapel (Spring Branch) Cemetery near Montgomery. She and other members of our Commission have been asked to assist with marker applications for the Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Conroe, the 1948 Girl Scout Camp Robinwood, the St Matthew Church in Conroe, the Grogan Sawmill site and the Henry Dean General Store in Magnolia, the Crawford Cemetery in Conroe, the Memorial Hills Cemetery and Vick Cemetery in New Caney, the Decker Prairie School, the old Magnolia High School, and Arnold-Dean Cemetery near Magnolia.

11. **HISTORY ROAD RALLY:** The Commission sponsored its *10th annual History Road Rally* in East Montgomery County on January 28. Promoted as “Driving in the *Past Lane*,” each year the event features the local history of a different area of Montgomery County. This is a fun family-friendly event. Participating teams represented Texas communities in and beyond Montgomery County. The teams enjoyed following clues and finding their answers to county and state historical events, sites and individuals as they drove their vehicles along the Highway 69/59 corridor from Splendora to Porter for two hours. The clues also took them to city halls and parks, cemeteries and historic homes. The teams returned for free pizza and drinks while their answer sheets were judged.



Chad Crowl and Victor Uher welcoming teams



Team 1 enjoying pizza as they wait for the winning teams to be announced



Registration Table with Sue Ann Powell, Dell Wise and Anna Shepard



Perkins team ready to start



Team 4 Legacy Collective Ladies are ready



Team 2 couples waiting for instructions before starting

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. **Precinct No. 4 Constable Rowdy Hayden's** team with his mother Jerry won the third place trophy. History Road Rally participants each receive a souvenir "History Road Warrior" button. This year the button featured the Houston East & West Texas Railway, the railroad that was instrumental in the early growth of East Montgomery County.



Team 6 Family wins first place trophy



Rowdy Hayden's Team 3 win third place trophy



Commission photographer Mark Canada



Souvenir button to each participant



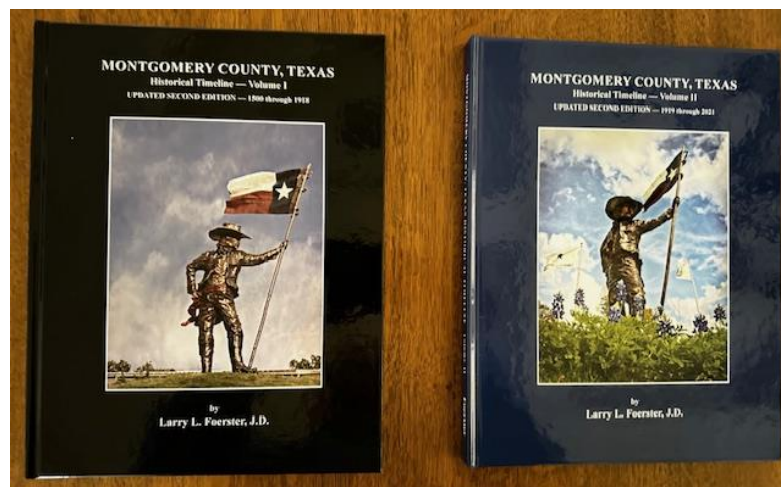
Jack Carrel team with 2nd place trophy



Rally judges reviewing clue sheets

The 2024 History Road Rally will be in South Montgomery County on February 17.

12. COUNTY HISTORICAL TIMELINE: With the support of County Judge Mark Keough and the County Commissioners, CHC Chairman **Larry Foerster** completed his extensive updated second edition of his *Montgomery County, Texas Historical Timeline* which was published and available in December. The first edition of the book was published in January 2013. The second edition has been expanded from 239 pages in the first edition to two volumes totaling 500 pages. The first volume of this updated edition covers Montgomery County history from the years 1500 to 1918. The second volume covers years 1919 through 2021. These volumes offer a detailed chronology of notable and interesting historic events in Montgomery County from the time of the Native Americans to the present. These new books are complete with more historic photos, old drawings and newspaper ads, and more maps. The two-volume publication will be provided for free to all county libraries and will again be made available for sale to the public as a fundraising project for the CHC. Over \$22,000 was raised from 2014 through 2022 from the sales of the first edition to support ongoing preservation projects of the Historical Commission.



Two volume Montgomery County Historical Timeline

13. SUPPORTING COUNTY HISTORICAL NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS. In addition to the *Voices of the Past* cemetery tour in October and the **History Taskforce** archive programs, CHC members support other nonprofit historical societies and organizations. Our members are on the boards of the **Heritage Museum of Montgomery County**, the **Magnolia Historical Society**, the **Mongomery Historical Society** and the **Ferland Historical Park**. Our CHC members participated in tours of the **Nat Hart Davis Pioneer Museum** in Montgomery in March and gave a history bus tour of *downtown Conroe* in September for Conroe Hyatt Hotel staff members.



Nat Hart Davis Museum Open House



Montgomery mayor Byron Sanford at Museum open house

In July CHC members toured the new **Montomery County Sheriff’s Office Museum** in Conroe and the **Sam Houston Memorial Museum** in Huntsville in August. We continue to promote these museums to our county residents.



CHC Members at the Sheriff’s Office Museum



CHC Members at the Sam Houston Memorial Museum

CHC members also supported and attended the September 9th unveiling of the second Lynn Peverill bronze statue in Cedar Brake Park in Montgomery, simply entitled *the Rancher*. Standing next to the Peveril’s statue of Charles B. Stewart, the Rancher honors early ranchers in Montgomery County. Our Commission continues to support and promote this local project devoted to honoring the legacy of early Montgomery County pioneers.



*Lynn Peverill and Mayor Byron Sanford
with "the Rancher" statue*

Also CHC member and Montgomery ISD history teacher **Brenda Beaven** was recognized by the county veterans organization for her dedicated work in organizing and facilitating the ***Lone Star Honor Flights*** that flew WWII veterans to Washington D. C. to visit the World War Two memorial.



Brenda Beaven and her Certificate

History Taskforce and CHC members **Ann Meador** and **Annette Kerr** have been actively engaged in the preservation of the ***Rest Haven Cemetery***, a historic African American cemetery in Willis. Working with Family Search and based on the research of the Greenwood Plantation in old Danville, the History Taskforce has developed the model used for researching slaves on plantations. The data base now is the model used nationwide by the Church of Latter-Day Saints in its international genealogy website, [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org).



Rest Haven Cemetery in Willis

14. PROMOTING MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORY: Over the past ten years, CHC 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 event, building, individual or residence. In 2023, Commission members **Dr. Robin Montgomery and Larry Foerster** have contributed history articles for the newspaper. With our input, historical features have also been produced in the *Community Impact* and *Montgomery News* newspapers and the *Conroe Lifestyle* magazine. These articles are designed to generate interest and renew community pride in the history of Montgomery County.



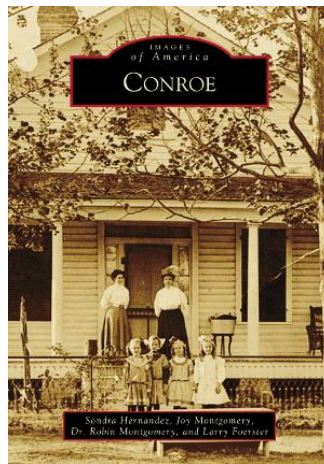
CHC Members Larry Foerster, Robin Montgomery, Joy Montgomery with historian Pat Spackey at Nat Hart Davis Museum

15. PROMOTING TEXAS HISTORY: In addition to being a co-sponsor of the annual Texas Flag Ceremony at the Lone Star Monument and Historic Flag Park in Conroe, the CHC also funds the purchase of copies of the *Texas Revolution Activity Books*. These books provide a fun way for children to learn more about the history of the Texas War for Independence and the Texas Flag Park outdoor museum in Conroe. Several CHC members have been promoting the Activity Books at local 4th grade classes. A PDF copy of the book is now available at the CHC website so that children across the county, state and nation have an opportunity to enjoy the book.



CHC member **Robin Bartholet** distributing the *Texas Revolution* activity books at Sacred Heart Catholic School

16. CONROE PICTORIAL HISTORY: The new pictorial history book of **Conroe** was published and distributed beginning in February, 2021. Commission members promote the sale of the book to generate more interest in Conroe’s history. Produced as part of the *Images of America* series by Arcadia Publishing, the book is a collaboration of several local historians: Conroe Courier news editor **Sondra Hernandez** and MCHC members **Joy Montgomery, Dr. Robin Montgomery and 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. Many of our members actively serve on the boards of other historical societies and museums in the County.

18. WALKING TOUR OF CONROE: Through a collaborative effort of the **Conroe Convention and Visitors Bureau**, the nonprofit **Conroe Live, Inc.**, and Commission chairman **Larry Foerster**, a tri-fold self-guided historic walking tour brochure of Downtown Conroe has been published and is available to visitors in Conroe.

The brochure features 11 historic buildings with photos provided by the Heritage Museum. It is complemented by a longer online narrative version available to visitors who go to the www.visitconroe.com website.

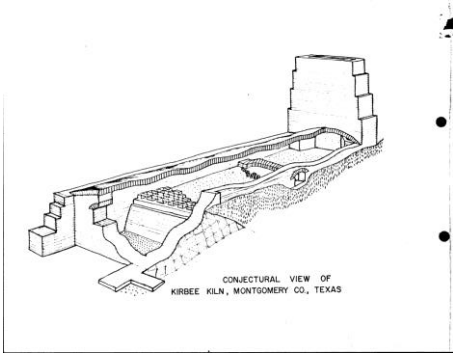
In addition, there are current plans to develop an online video walking tour of historic Conroe with narratives of each important structure downtown. An interview of local Conroe historian **Larry Foerster** has been videoed by Gary Parker of Quannah Productions. There are plans to produce short video clips that can be used by the City and the Commission to promote Conroe's history. Much of the material for these narratives will come from the *History Resource Surveys* that are being compiled by **Frank and Merlynn Hersom** and their volunteers.

19. SAVING THE CONROE COLLEGE LEGACY: As previously mentioned above, the 20-acre campus of Conroe Normal and Industrial College (commonly known today as Conroe College) was closed over 10 years ago. When founded in 1903 by African American Christian educators, it was the first formal school for African American youth in Montgomery County. For over 100 years Conroe College provided classical and vocational education for black youth during the Jim Crow era when their education was segregated and underfunded. In the last decades of its operation, it served as a Christian theological school and provided vocational and musical training. Members of the County Historical Commission—**Victor Uher, Ron Saikowski, Steve Muir, and Larry Foerster**—are actively engaged in a community effort to save the campus and its legacy to inspire future generations. The task is monetarily challenging, but the vision for saving the Conroe College legacy is priceless.
20. AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY: Our Commission member **Annette Kerr** has collaborated with the local nonprofit History Taskforce and our Historical Commission to publish a 248-page booklet detailing the African American cemeteries located in Montgomery County. It serves as an important source of information for African American genealogy researchers.



*Annette Kerr presenting cemetery book to
Conroe county librarian Jenn Wigle*

21. HISTORICAL PRESERVATION DISTRICTS: Members of the County Historical Commission are engaged with other organizations in generating community interest in the development of *residential historical preservation districts* around downtown Conroe and other older communities in Montgomery County. Collaboration with members of the Conroe City Council and its downtown manager Michael Corbett has generated interest in restoring historic portions of downtown Conroe from IH-45 to 10th Street on both the west and east side of the railroad tracks in downtown Conroe. The result is a new *Conroe Development Plan* that recognizes the historic “Old Town” section of Conroe from the railroad tracks east to 10th Street. A renewed interest in the business district of Conroe has led to investments in its historic buildings, with an interest in preserving and promoting these old structures. Using the historic resource surveys of buildings in downtown Conroe, **Ron Saikowski** is chairing a CHC committee to research the process for the designation of downtown Conroe as a “National Register of Historic Commercial District.”
22. SHARING COUNTY HISTORY WITH LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS: Several times during the year CHC Chairman **Larry Foerster, Brenda Beaven, Dr. Robin Montgomery** and other CHC members are invited to give presentations on Montgomery County history to numerous civic and youth 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.
23. REAL PLACES CONFERENCE: Each year the Texas Historical Commission sponsors a conference in Austin to educate members of county historical commissions and Texas tourism bureaus on ideas that can enhance their local history programs and promote tourism. CHC members **Victor Uher, Bernie Sargent, and Larry Foerster** attended this conference in Austin.
24. KIRBEE KILN ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE: The *Kirbee Kiln*, located near the Cook’s Branch Conservatory south of Montgomery, is one of the largest and earliest preserved historic pottery kilns in Texas. It represents a nineteenth-century stoneware pottery manufacturing industry that commercially produced unique alkaline glazed jugs, storage jars, bowls, and important materials used by early settlers. A rare and unique reminder of the region’s past, the kiln with all its associated historic features, most certainly deserves wider recognition and protection from future damages. In addition to placing the area of the kiln within a protected area on the property, archeologists **Dr. Meredith Mitchell Driess and Dr. David Brown** hope to secure a state historic marker for the site. In April, Commission members **Robin Montgomery, Joy Montgomery and Larry Foerster** had an opportunity to inspect the expansive site excavations as guests. Our County Historical Commission has been invited to assist them with their historic research of the kiln and the individuals who were associated with the kiln during its operation in the mid-1800s.



Drawing of Kirby Kiln



Kirby Kiln Pottery



Meredith Mitchell Driess explaining the kiln excavation



Kirby Kiln excavation site



Archeologists working



Archeologists digging

25. COUNTY CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT DESIGNATION: **Bernie Sargent** and his *ad hoc* MCHC committee members are conducting research in preparation for requesting Commissioners Court approval for a designation by the Texas Historical Commission as Certified Local Government (CLG). The Certified Local Government (CLG) Program is a local, state, and federal government partnership to empower local communities to better protect historic resources by identifying local priorities, meeting recognized historic preservation standards and providing access to financial and technical services to further the identification, evaluation, designation and protection of buildings, sites, districts, structures, and objects. Local governments that participate in the CLG Program act independently to develop and maintain a successful preservation program. The Texas Historical Commission administers the program at the state level and the National Park Service is the responsible federal agency.

The benefits of becoming a CLG include access to technical assistance from the CLG Program staff, a network of local preservation commissioners and historic preservation officers from around the state, workshops and other trainings specific to local preservation challenges, and the annual CLG Grant Program.

26. TEXAS 2022 DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD: Finally, we are very honored that your Montgomery County Historical Commission was recognized for the 10th consecutive year by the Texas Historical Commission with the 2022 “*Distinguished Service Award*.” This is 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.”



Seven Commission members with county judge Mark Keough receiving award at Commissioners Court



Respectfully submitted,

Larry L. Foerster, Chairman
Montgomery County Historical Commission