

THE MEDALLION



DANCE ACROSS SOUTH TEXAS

Historic Mexican American
Dance Halls Strive to Keep the Beat Alive

THC's Preservation Fellows Pursue Passion for Texas History

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) introduced its newest Preservation Fellows—Texas State University-San Marcos student Katherine Koebbe and University of Texas-Tyler graduate Norris White, Jr.—on April 24 at the agency's Annual Historic Preservation Conference in Houston.

Koebbe and White will spend much of the summer working with THC staff on projects related to their fields of study. Both are anticipating the opportunity to experience day-to-day tasks of working in a professional preservation environment.

Koebbe, who earned three bachelor's degrees from the University of Connecticut (anthropology, history, and English), claims her propensity for variety will be well suited for her THC internship.

"I'm really looking forward to experiencing many different aspects of what the THC does," she says. "I can't wait to see what it's like to work with different people in different positions, from federal law issues to developing state policies to helping with projects at the local level."

Koebbe believes her demonstrated dedication to historic preservation will be an important asset at the THC. She has devoted efforts to her Native American heritage as a member of the Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut and as president of Texas State's Native American Student Association.

Koebbe's experience at Texas State has also helped her sharpen focus on academic areas of interest, including public policy and the pre-Colonial history of Native American

and Hispanic relations in the Southwestern U.S.

"My (German) ancestors helped found Lee County, so I have an extensive family background in Texas," she explains. "I've made some important contacts with Texas tribes through my work with the Native American Student Association, and I feel I've built a sense of community with people across the state. I'm hoping I can use my experiences in Texas and at the THC to make significant contributions to my tribe."

Looking to the future, Koebbe's primary goal is completing her thesis, which documents strategies for community survival used by members of the Mohegan Tribe from the contact period to the 19th century. In the long term, she expects to pursue a doctorate degree

and write a book documenting the history of her tribe.

In the meantime, however, she is focused on her responsibilities this summer as a Preservation Fellow.

"I think this program will give me a leg up in terms of professional experience," Koebbe says. "I've been a student for about seven years now, so I'm really looking forward to being immersed in a professional environment to develop the skills I'll need in the working world."

White shares many of Koebbe's aspirations; however, at age 43, he admits to taking a nontraditional path to achieving his educational and professional goals. A San Antonio native, White has lived in Palestine, Texas, for 18 years and is a proud husband and father of two boys.

His interest in cultural heritage and community service dates to

“I'm hoping I can use my experiences in Texas and at the THC to make significant contributions to my tribe.”

— Katherine Koebbe,
2010 Preservation Fellow



Right: Katherine Koebbe is commended by (from left) Brian Shivers, board chair of the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission, and Mark Wolfe, THC executive director.

his high school experience with the Upward Bound program, part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society initiative.

"Upward Bound instilled in me the importance of an education and also gave me an opportunity to meet, befriend, and learn about various people, cultures, and their heritage," he says.

Upon learning of the Preservation Fellows program, White pursued the opportunity because he felt he embodied the qualities—faith, diligence, desire, and eagerness to learn—that would enable him to achieve his career goals.

"Ultimately, I realized that becoming a Preservation Fellow would be a great opportunity for me as well as an honor and privilege," he adds.

With a special interest in Texas' prehistory era, White is eager to spend his fellowship at the THC's Caddo Mounds State Historic Site in Alto. He hopes to explore the indigenous cultures of his adopted region of Texas and experience the professional side of overseeing a heritage site.

White is also enthusiastic about sharing his skills and knowledge with students. He claims his strong interest in Texas' historic cultures,

The THC's Preservation Fellows Program, now in its fourth year, was created to build interest in and awareness of historic preservation among college students from underrepresented ethnic groups. The program targets talented undergraduate and graduate students to encourage their interest in pursuing fields of study in history, preservation, architecture, archeology, landscape architecture, downtown revitalization, and heritage tourism. To learn more about the program contact the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission at 512.936.2189 or visit www.thc.state.tx.us.

people, myths, and legacies has prompted him to explore and impart his collected wisdom about the state's richly diverse heritage.

"I hope to pass some of these things along to kids who have experienced similar environmental hardships and conditions as I have," he says. "I plan to create teaching and interpretive programs about Caddo culture to help better serve our youth. After all, they are our future."

White believes his previous academic and volunteer experiences fostered his appreciation for the professional aspects of preservation. Through his studies and his work with the Texas Archeological Society, he has learned valuable lessons about the skills and methods used in the field.

Looking ahead, White expects to use his role as a Preservation Fellow to further his objective to present history and anthropology in a manner that is more appealing and inclusive to minority youth. As a result, he hopes to encourage and inspire students to seek careers and personal involvement in preservation organizations.

"I will work tirelessly to encourage minority youth to discover their history and culture," says White. "The ultimate goal is to motivate them so that one day they will also have the passion to preserve it."

Koebbe shares White's enthusiasm for promoting and advocating historical issues, and is looking forward to dedicating her efforts to research and collaboration among preservation organizations and governmental entities.

"I'd like to make contributions in as many areas as I can," Koebbe says. "I feel so happy and blessed that the THC has provided this opportunity for me to get a leg up in the world." ★

This article was written by Andy Rhodes, managing editor of The Medallion.

“I will work tirelessly to encourage minority youth to discover their history and culture.”

*— Norris White, Jr.,
2010 Preservation Fellow*

Norris White, Jr. (far right) receives an award certificate from THC Chairman Jon Hansen and Shivers.



A Tale of Two Courthouses

Rededication Ceremonies Celebrate Alfred Giles Designs in Different Regions

Few buildings reflect a community as broadly and accurately as its county courthouse. The circumstances of the initial construction tell the real stories of a community's history, and these stories represent the genuine character of these places.

Two Texas communities recently celebrated the rededication of their courthouses after substantial restoration projects with major funding provided by the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. Though they are in different regions of the state, both buildings—Brooks and Kendall County courthouses—were designed by Alfred Giles, a noted San Antonio architect.

According to the Handbook of Texas Online, Giles was born in England in 1853 and initially aspired to enter the ministry before an architectural firm apprenticeship led to a change in his career ambitions. In 1873, Giles immigrated to the U.S. and eventually settled in San Antonio, which, according to the book *Alfred Giles: An English Architect in Texas and Mexico*, lured him with its European and cosmopolitan charm.

After learning the skill of working with locally available building materials, Giles established his own firm in 1876. The subsequent arrival of the railroad expanded Giles' architectural palette and his clients' exposure to new styles. In the following decades, he incorporated these diverse influences in his work, including the two recently rededicated courthouses in distinctly different regions of Texas.

Brooks County, home to a portion of South Texas' legendary

King Ranch, is one of the state's newest counties. In 1906, the community of Falfurrias was considered cattle country with fewer than 200 residents; by 1920, however, it boasted a population of nearly 2,500. Former Texas Ranger Captain J.A. Brooks called a meeting of Falfurrias citizens in 1911, where he secured 63 signatures in support of establishing a new county.

After Falfurrias was selected as the county seat in September, a bond election for a \$65,000 courthouse was held, passing with 344 citizens voting for it and nine against. Giles, who

also operated an office in Monterrey, Mexico, and regularly traversed South Texas, designed the courthouse of substantial materials, including high-quality brick and ornamental terra cotta and slate roofing.

"Brooks County strategically invested in its future by constructing a noble building that reflected its lofty aspirations," explains Stan Graves, director of the THC's Architecture Division. "The attention to detail truly reflects the community's commitment to creating a structure that's equal to any in Texas and beyond."



*Above and right: Kendall County Courthouse (interior photos courtesy JC Stoddard Construction).
Opposite page: Brooks County Courthouse.*





sprinkler system, new electrical distribution system, new slate roof and flashing system matching the original, new accessible elevator and restrooms, balcony restoration, fire alarms, new audio/visual equipment, reproduction wood windows, and new wood doors to match the originals.



The courthouse contains two cornerstones, one laid by the Masonic Lodge and another by Brooks County. The Masonic cornerstone references “the Great Architect of the universe” preserving the structure from decay as well as “the corn of nourishment, the wine of refreshment, and the oil of joy,” denoting plenty, health, and peace. The county cornerstone contains several Mexican and U.S. coins along with copies of the local newspaper from 1914.

Brooks County representatives began preparing a plan for application to the THC’s courthouse program in the first funding cycle in 1999–2000. The project received a grant for architectural plan development in 2002 and received a construction grant award in 2006. State funding provided in Round II and Round IV totals \$3.16 million.

The courthouse is now updated with new air conditioning, a full

Held against a backdrop of campaign signs, the January 28, 2010 rededication of the Brooks County Courthouse was a day-long fiesta that began with a formal ceremony. Engaging the younger generation, County Judge Raul Ramirez foretold a future when the students in attendance would be caretakers of the building and would look back to the day it was restored and rededicated. High school students led tours of the stately building they studied, and the high school band played mariachi music throughout the afternoon.

The second Giles courthouse rededication was in Kendall County, located in Texas’ Hill Country region. The modesty of the original 1870 structure—a simple one-story building, two bays deep and four bays wide—attests to the poor economic conditions left by the Civil War. Within 15 years, a second-story courtroom and exterior gallery were added.

By 1909, the county sought again to expand the building and commissioned Giles, who was perceived to express a sense of “sobriety, simplicity, and conservatism” in his buildings. In contrast to the brick and terra cotta of Brooks County’s new courthouse, Giles extended the use of Kendall County’s native limestone for the two-story addition, taking the design of the courthouse to a more-refined level.

After completing a successful exterior restoration in 1998 using federal grant funds, Kendall County prepared a master plan outlining the remaining work in March 2004. Hopeful that they would qualify to receive construction funding, the county prepared construction documents to earn additional incentives. The project was awarded a \$1.28 million grant in January 2008 and was nearly complete within a year and a half.

The Kendall County Courthouse rededication, held on April 10, 2010, featured a German band and a series of speeches by state and local officials. The Kendall County Historical Commission (CHC) distributed an impressive brochure including minutes from century-old meetings of the commissioners court concerning the historic building, a copy of the 1859 petition to form the county, and noteworthy information on the history of the county, its courthouse, and previous judges. The rededication ended with a tour of the building led by CHC members.

“It’s certainly interesting that both of our recent rededication ceremonies involved Alfred Giles designs, and that both had distinctly different qualities,” Graves said. “It was also really fulfilling to see each community’s genuine display of dedication to its past, present, and future.” ★

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

A Lifelong Quest For Knowledge: A Tribute to Dr. Kathleen Gilmore

Archeologists throughout the world are mourning the loss of Dr. Kathleen Kirk Gilmore, a scholar, professor, philanthropist, and mentor. Dr. Gilmore passed away on March 18, 2010, at the age of 95, still actively engaged in her lifelong passion for learning about the past.

Gilmore's connections with the Texas Historical Commission (THC) were strong and meaningful. Her archeological work in Texas spanned more than 40 years and her contribution to the discovery and interpretation of La Salle's Fort St. Louis Colony near Victoria was a career highlight that also established deep professional and personal ties with THC archeologists. In fact, Gilmore had been planning to meet with agency staff members on March 19, 2010, regarding a book she was writing about Felipe de Rábago y Terán, the colorful commander of presidios San Sabá and San Xavier.

In Texas, the word "mission" and the name "Gilmore" are irrevocably linked. Gilmore was enamored with the Spanish Colonial period and wrote her master's thesis at Southern Methodist University (SMU) on the San Xavier missions. She also worked on Missions Rosario, Dolores de los Ais, and San Sabá. In March 2009, she was part of a survey team seeking the sites of Missions Candelaria, San Ildefonso, and San Francisco Xavier near Rockdale. She had been searching for those three sites for four decades and to her delight, the team found possible evidence of the perimeter of the Candelaria mission.

Gilmore was born Kathleen Kirk and raised in Oklahoma. Although she had been fascinated

with archeology since childhood, she was discouraged from seeking a career in that field. She studied geology instead, but could not find employment in the male-dominated petrochemical field until she went to Houston. There she met Bob Gilmore and they married on Christmas Day, 1940. She became a homemaker and raised four daughters, but she never forgot her passion for archeology.

At the age of 49 she decided to go back to school. She received a master's and doctorate degree from SMU and launched a second career that would change the face of Texas archeology forever.

She performed exceptional work in historical archeology and her efforts were crucial in finding the sites of several missions. Her extensive excavations produced thousands of artifacts that assisted other scholars with interpretation. One of her greatest discoveries was that the distinctive green-glazed pottery fragments from the Keeran Ranch near Victoria were French in origin (not Spanish), eventually leading to the verification of the site as La Salle's "lost colony," Fort St. Louis.

"One of my fondest memories of working with Kathleen was when we excavated Fort St. Louis," says Jim Bruseth, director of the THC's Archeology Division. "We did this from 1999 till 2002, and Kathleen was a constant source of knowledge and encouragement."

Bruseth added that Fort St. Louis was Gilmore's "great archeological love" and she felt it was important to reside near the site due to her high level of involvement with the project. He recalled fond

memories of gathering at her Victoria apartment to discuss the results of the field investigations.

"We also went to France together to research the project, and Kathleen was able to see the actual kilns in the Saintonge region where the 17th-century Fort St. Louis artifacts came from," Bruseth said.

THC archeologist Jeff Durst, who worked closely with Gilmore as a senior advisor on the Fort St. Louis project, said, "Kathleen continually amazed us with her vast knowledge of both the archeology of the site as well as the related history. She was a sheer delight to work with and an inspiration to us all."

Pat Mercado-Allinger, Texas state archeologist, also benefited greatly from working with Gilmore.

"Kathleen was a remarkable woman in so many respects—she was a pioneer, pursuing a career in archeology when women were the decided minority in the profession," Mercado-Allinger said. "We should all be so lucky to have the kind of courage she had in midlife to follow a passion for learning and discovery."

Gilmore received numerous accolades and honors during her career. She served as president of the Texas Archeological Society and the Council of Texas Archeologists, and in 2003 she became the first recipient of the THC's Curtis D. Tunnell Lifetime Achievement Award in Archeology. Five years later, on her 40th anniversary of conducting archeological excavations in Texas, she was honored by Gov. Rick Perry with the THC's Governor's Award for Historic Preservation. She also served as the first woman president

Right: Dr. Kathleen Gilmore received the THC's Governor's Award for Historic Preservation from Gov. Rick Perry in 2008. Far right: Dr. Gilmore in the field; below: (from left) archeologists Edward Jelks, Kay Hindes, and Gilmore in 1997.



of the international Society for Historical Archaeology and later received the Society's highest honor, the J. C. Harrington Award.

Gilmore's passion for archeology also inspired her to become a major philanthropist. Through the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission, she established The Bob and Kathleen Gilmore Endowment in Spanish and French Colonial Archeology and the Texas Presidio Project Fund. Using monies from the latter fund, in December 2007, at age 92, she led a team of scholars to Seville, Spain, to conduct archival research on Spanish presidios in Texas.

"Throughout her long life, Kathleen spearheaded and collaborated on archival and field research projects to shed important light on French and Spanish colonial settlement in Texas," Mercado-Allinger said. "She clearly delighted in this and encouraged archeological colleagues to contribute to our

knowledge of this early period of Texas history."

Bruseth acknowledged that Gilmore's absence will be felt professionally and personally.

"I'll miss being able to seek Kathleen's advice on how best to excavate a site, share with her the thrill of my archeological discoveries, or gain her reassurance when things in the field don't go quite as expected," Bruseth said. "She was always inspiring, supportive, cheerful, and generous. Her family, friends, and colleagues will always remember her brilliance, dedication, friendship, and sense of humor."

He added that Gilmore's love of archeology and her vision for expanding research on Texas' colonial period will live on in perpetuity through the Gilmore Endowment and in the hearts of those who knew her. ★

This article was written by Toni Turner, the THC's Development Officer.

Memorial gifts in Gilmore's honor may be made to The Bob and Kathleen Gilmore Endowment in Spanish and French Colonial Archeology through the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission (call 512.936.2189). Donations will be added to the endowment to underwrite new research on the Spanish and French colonial occupations in Texas.

SWINGIN' SALONES

Endangered Mexican American Dance Halls Hold Noteworthy History

Tucked behind rolling hills in a grassy pasture just west of Floresville is a modest structure barely visible from FM 536. Drivers who catch a glimpse of the low-slung building might mistake it for a barn or storage shed. They wouldn't suspect it once raised a community's collective spirit with vivacious music, passionate dancing, and memories that endured for decades.

This popular *salón* (dance hall) was known as Yndo Park, a family-oriented facility that hosted dances and celebrations. Like hundreds of other *salónes* in the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) Texas Tropical Trail and Independence Trail Regions, it peaked in popularity during the 1940s and '50s. Others fell into disrepair or, in many cases, were razed from the landscape.

Fortunately, several high-profile Mexican American dance halls are still operating in South Texas (see sidebar, p. 9), offering heritage tourists a glimpse of a colorful past that once thrived throughout the region. Step inside one of these buildings on a Saturday night, and it's easy to conjure up a simpler time when dancing, music, and socializing inspired people to endure another work week in anticipation of the dance halls' lively weekend fiestas.



Yndo Park (top) and El Monterey dance halls southeast of San Antonio thrived in the 1950s.

Floresville natives Fred Gonzales and Jesse Perez, who both currently serve as officials with the Floresville Economic Development

Corporation, recall spending many memorable weekends listening to *conjunto* bands and attempting new dance styles at Yndo Park and other halls in neighboring communities. Gonzales has particularly fond memories of the youthful energy and customs associated with the dances and *salónes*.

"All of these places had wide-open dance floors with benches around the perimeter—that's where the girls would sit, usually with their mothers," he says. "The men would stand outside all huddled together and eventually move their way inside to try to catch the eye of a young woman. You can only imagine the fun in getting someone to dance with you or, on the other hand, the embarrassment of rejection."

Perez nods in agreement, adding that although he did not share Gonzales' reputable dancing skills, he had an intense appreciation for the music. Perez explains that the two main styles of music at this time—*conjunto* and *orquesta*—impacted the approach to dancing.

Conjunto, the primary style at rural dance halls, encompassed the region's multicultural spectrum,

with German and Czech influences in the accordion-based polkas and waltzes, Mexican-inspired *bajo sextos* (12-string guitars), European-based string instruments, and Spanish-influenced Bolero, slow-tempo traditions. *Orquestas* were slightly more formal, with the notable addition of horns incorporated from the big band sounds introduced to many Mexican American soldiers during their European experiences in World War II.

“These dances were a lot of fun for the whole community,” Gonzales recalls. “We’re a happy people—we like music, and some of us, myself included, really love to dance. Obviously we had to do these things somewhere, so dance halls started popping up all over to accommodate these activities.”

According to Gonzales and Perez, the area’s original gatherings, known as farm dances, were held outdoors on ranches near Floresville. Community members would find a level patch of land and sweep everything off it to

create a makeshift dance floor. The bands consisted of local residents who enjoyed playing music, typically including a fiddle, stand-up bass, and guitar.

“Even those practices would draw a crowd—people would come out and burn piles of grass and straw to keep the mosquitoes away,” Perez says. “Later, if a spot became a regular gathering place, they’d build a platform for dancing if they couldn’t afford to construct an entire dance hall.”

Floresville’s music scene was especially robust, with shows by popular acts such as Conjunto Corona, Ruco Villareal, Los Caminantes (featuring a teenaged Flaco Jimenez), and Los Aguilares. Gonzales and Perez cite more than a dozen Mexican American dance halls that once thrived in the area, including La Agupacion Nacional, El Jacalito, Gonzales Salón, Pan American Dance Hall, El Ranchito, and La Plataforma. In the nearby community of Kenedy, the *salón*



South Texas Dance Card

Several of the historic Mexican American dance halls in the THC’s Texas Tropical Trail and Independence Trail Regions remain open for dances and community events. On Saturday nights, these *salónes* come alive with the sounds of traditional *conjunto* music or modern variations of the style. Dancing is always an important accompaniment.

Texas Dance Hall Preservation, Inc. co-founder Steve Dean recommends several South Texas *salónes* for travelers who want to experience this colorful Mexican American cultural tradition. Although many of the following are closed for regular business (but still worth visiting for an exterior tour), they represent a diverse sampling of significant historical dance halls in the region:

Alice

La Villita

3050 Old Kingsville Rd.

According to Dean, this is “the mother of all *conjunto* halls.” La Villita is associated with bands on Alice’s Ideal Records, which recorded notable acts (Beto Villa, Narciso Martinez, Tony de la Rosa) after small labels closed during World War II to conserve shellac and other record-related materials.

– Continued on page 10

Above photo courtesy Texas Dance Hall Preservation, Inc.

Floresville natives (from left) Jesse Perez and Fred Gonzales recall dancing at the local salónes; they are now trying to preserve them.



– Continued from page 9

Corpus Christi

Galvan Ballroom

1632 Agnes St.

Rafael Galvan, Sr., a respected businessman, civic leader, and Corpus Christi's first Mexican-American police officer, constructed and opened the Galvan Ballroom in 1950. It became a popular dance hall, particularly for the more-upscale *orquesta* and jazz acts.

Victoria

Club Westerner

1005 W. Constitution St.

361.575.9109

www.clubwesterner.com

Known in its early days (1940s–50s) for hosting *orquesta* bands, the Westerner became associated with popular *conjunto* bands in the 1960s and continues to stage Mexican American bands such as Little Joe y La Familia most weekends.

El Monterey hosted high-profile touring acts such as Little Joe y La Familia, Alfonso Ramos, and Isidro Lopez.

“This hall was pretty famous back in the day—it was the popular place for Mexican people to get together every Saturday night,” says Carlos Zuniga, who built the facility with his father and grandfather in 1949. “The music here was different than other places. It was a more high-class spot with *orquestas*, not *conjunto*. The bands had big horn sections, and the music would just blow you away.”

As he surveys the now-neglected property, Zuniga remembers Monterey's prime years (1950s and '60s) with a smile, recalling events that drew up to 400 attendees, turning away men who violated the dress code by not wearing collared shirts, and paying a then-unknown Little Joe y La Familia \$175 to play a show (Zuniga notes Little Joe would later ask \$12,000 per appearance).

“This place was a gold mine for me—it was the only place to be on Saturday nights,” Zuniga says, adding that in 1969 he sold the hall to the American G.I. Forum.

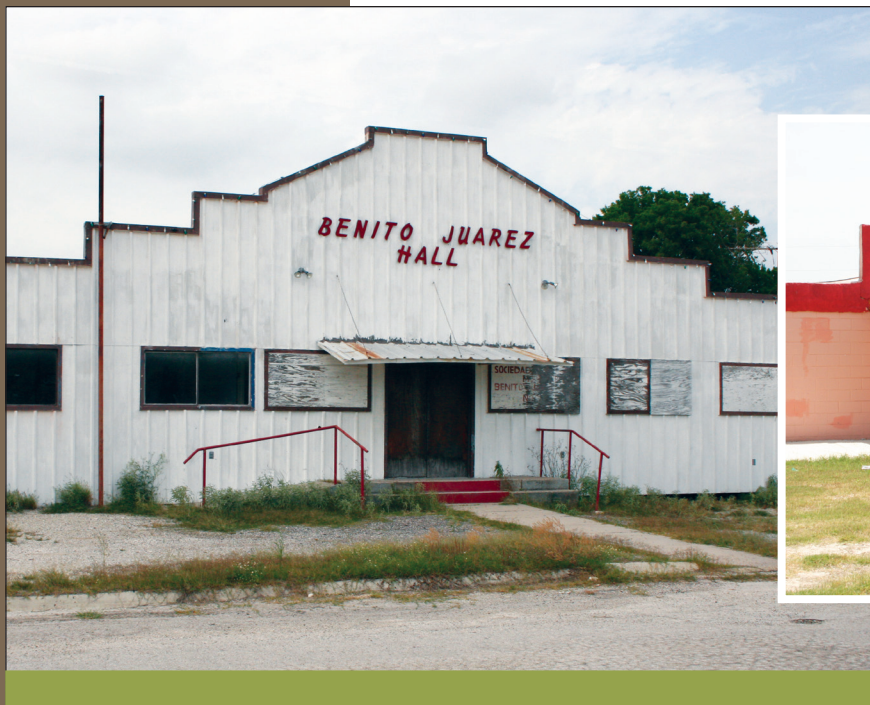
Salónes like the Monterey and Benito Juarez Hall in adjacent Karnes City also drew families and visitors

for cultural celebrations. *Fiestas Patrias* (annual patriotic holidays such as Cinco de Mayo and 16 de Septiembre) were major events at these facilities, drawing hundreds of attendees and featuring elaborate decorations and colorful programs.

“Everyone would get all gussied up for the *Fiestas Patrias*,” Perez recalls. “The dance halls here were not unlike the traditional Mexican plazas, which served as community gathering places back in the olden days.”

By the 1960s, however, cultural shifts trended away from the dance halls, as the younger population became more mobile and people remained in their homes with the increased availability of television. Many residents moved to cities for jobs, leaving the dance halls to be transformed to bingo parlors, community event centers, or often abandoned.

“Things started changing pretty rapidly by the end of the '60s, but there was a lot of that going on—it's just the nature of society and culture,” Gonzales says. “Even though many of these dance halls are gone or in disrepair, there are still some great stories out there. We're hopeful that the younger generations will appreciate that part of their heritage and make the effort to keep these places alive.”



(From left) Benito Juarez Hall in Karnes City; the former Farmer's Place dance hall near Floresville.

Preservación de Salones

Ensuring the continued livelihood of Mexican American *salones* is increasingly becoming a priority for Texas Dance Hall Preservation, Inc., a Houston-based nonprofit organization dedicated to saving the state's historic halls and their cultural attributes. According to group co-founder Steve Dean, these dance halls are often underappreciated by Texans and are considered highly endangered by preservationists.

"These venues tend to go with the flow of the music base, so the historic Mexican American dance halls are being left behind as younger people turn their backs on them and go to the bigger cities for newer, brighter, air-conditioned clubs," Dean explains. "So many of the wonderful small places in rural areas across South Texas are being forgotten and neglected."

Dean acknowledges that the Mexican American facilities tend to be overshadowed by the higher-profile German dance halls of Central Texas. He claims this inequity is often tied to economic issues, such as limited funding in Mexican American communities during initial construction and for ongoing maintenance in subsequent decades.

"Architecturally, they're not as grand as the German halls, but they have a strong cultural identity that's very significant to our state's history," he says.

Dean, who is working on a book documenting Texas' historic dance halls, is concerned that members of the generation involved with the origins of the *salones* are passing away before their memories are recorded for posterity. He hopes Spanish-speaking community members make the effort to research and record the stories and facts associated with these culturally significant structures.

"I'm somewhat shocked and dismayed that there isn't more official research on this subject," Dean says. "We need to get a Latin American studies professor to take this on as a major research topic for a

comprehensive book so we don't lose any more of this history."

On a positive note, Dean is encouraged by several emerging trends that could help keep Mexican American dance halls in the public consciousness. For example, he notes that festivals in some Mexican American communities are increasingly appealing to a wider audience, thereby exposing the traditions associated with the *salones* to other cultural groups. Also,

several historic halls are hosting younger bands, allowing a new generation to enjoy dancing on the same floors their ancestors once graced half a century ago. ★

Article and photos by Andy Rhodes, managing editor of The Medallion.

On the cover: The historic La Villita dance hall in San Benito still hosts events.



Posters like this one for Corpus Christi's Galvan Ballroom announced dancing events. Photo courtesy Texas Dance Hall Preservation, Inc.

Other notable South Texas dance halls:

Corpus Christi
El Teraza Ballroom
1108 Leopard St.

Karnes City
Benito Juarez Hall
410 W. Buchel Ave.

Laredo
Casa Blanca Ballroom
5302 East Saunders St.
956.724.9800

San Antonio
Blanco Ballroom
3719 Blanco Rd.
210.732.3510

San Benito
La Villita
200 block of W. Robertson St.



Museums featuring conjunto heritage:

San Benito
Texas Conjunto Music Hall of Fame and Museum
210 E. Heywood St.
956.245.1666
www.texasconjuntomusic.org

Alice
The Tejano R.O.O.T.S. Museum
213 N. Wright St.
361.668.6666
www.tejanorootshalloffame.org

San Antonio
Museo Alameda
101 North Santa Rosa St.
210.299.4300
www.thealameda.org

To help preserve Mexican American dance halls across the state, share your stories and photos at www.texasdancehall.org.

Take the Right StEPs

New Program Guides Texas Museums and Sites to Success

Nearly 40 people gathered at the THC's Annual Historic Preservation Conference in April to learn how a new program can help create stronger museums, historic sites, and history organizations. Three recognized leaders in the field discussed the value of participating in the Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations (StEPs), a new initiative offered through the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH).

Cherie Cook, senior program coordinator for AASLH, began the session by providing an overview of StEPs (www.aaslh.org/steps), a self-study program that assists history organizations with assessing their current operations using performance indicators (basic, good, and better) and rewarding them with certificates for progress. Lest museums be ashamed to admit to their shortcomings, Cook promised, "This entire program is about encouragement, not judgment. We want to encourage history organizations to move closer to meeting national standards."

She went on to explain that standards have long remained an enigma for those in the local history field. When it comes to collections care, for example, museums have traditionally been told they must provide a professional standard of care for the objects. Cook asked the audience, "But what does that mean exactly? How do you know if you're doing it?" A sea of shaking heads and shrugging shoulders signaled that it hasn't always been clear.

With StEPs, history organizations now have a clearly defined framework for recognizing, understanding, and achieving national standards in six key areas of operations—mission, vision, and governance; audience; interpretation; stewardship of collections; stewardship of historic structures and landscapes; and management. The program's workbook offers a series of self-assessment questions, along with three levels of specific performance indicators, to help organizations measure the degree to which they are currently meeting the standards. After identifying areas for improvement, participants can then choose a recommended project to get one step closer to meeting that standard.

"StEPs is really about projects," Cook said. "Projects can be accomplished in increments big or small, but even the smallest of projects can lead to great accomplishments."

It is this sense of accomplishment that has small organizations singing StEPs' praises. Cook explained that many of the participants in the program's pilot phase were amazed at how their organizations were finally able to see themselves moving forward. "It gave them confidence and helped them realize that they



Right: Cherie Cook speaks at the popular StEPs session at the 2010 Annual Historic Preservation Conference. Inset: Dr. Paul Katz leads a tour of Amarillo's Texas Pharmacy Museum.

aren't too small to achieve success," she beamed.

One of those small organizations is the Texas Pharmacy Museum, curated by the second session presenter, Dr. Paul Katz. The museum helped pilot test StEPs in 2008, and was one of the first enrollees when the program officially launched late last year.

Katz, who recently agreed to serve on the StEPs national advisory board, took great care to outline the aspects he values most about the program. The self-study nature of StEPs, along with



the workbook format, allows for flexibility that is missing from other assessment programs, he noted. In particular, the matrix feature of the workbook, which permits organizations to work horizontally (approaching all six standard areas one performance level at a time) or vertically (approaching all three performance levels one standard area at a time) lets organizations customize a system that best fits their organizational capacities and resources.

The workbook's inclusion of suggested projects, case studies, and group discussion questions are noteworthy, said Katz, but he claimed one of its most valuable features is the list of unacceptable practices included in each of the six standards areas. He found this approach easier to digest than a similar list that might be created by an outside observer pointing out the museum's errors or shortcomings. He added that access to printed and online resources, as well as web-based networks, provided a sense of comfort, in that he never felt like he had to start from scratch.

Katz, the sole staff member at his museum, firmly believes that even the smallest history organizations will benefit from participation in StEPs. Although he has yet to determine whether he'll take a vertical or horizontal approach to the program, he confidently stated, "The Texas Pharmacy Museum will be a stronger, better-run institution because of StEPs."

The final speaker was Texas Association of Museums (TAM) executive director Ruth Ann Rugg. As head of the statewide membership organization for

museums, she is in a unique position to receive input from a variety of cultural organizations about their specific needs. According to Rugg, museum representatives report that one of their greatest needs is a method to identify their current set of circumstances and how to use that information to plan for the future.

Rugg added that her primary responsibility is to help the staff, volunteers, and trustees at Texas museums do their jobs more effectively. As such, she and TAM staff are devoted to evaluating the myriad resources available to museums and other cultural institutions. Acting as a filter of sorts, they then provide information exclusively related to the resources that best serve the community.

"Only the good stuff makes it through the filter," she said. "StEPs is out there, and it's good."

In fact, Rugg views the program as beneficial not just for history organizations, but for all museums and cultural organizations. She believes the key to success, however, is open and honest evaluation.

"Denial is often our greatest challenge," she cautioned. "We're in denial about what it is that really keeps us from achieving success."

Rugg added that museums have many options available for learning about standards and creating plans to achieve them; however, remaining unaware of the standards or choosing to ignore them is not one of them.

"We will not budge on high standards in Texas museums," Rugg concluded. ★

This article was written by Carlyn Hammons of the THC's History Programs Division.

The Main Street Experience

Preserving Texas' Historic Downtowns Involves More Than Physical Revitalization

Throughout the state, the Texas Main Street Program's (TMSP) visible benefits—revitalized facades, spruced-up signage, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes—are on display much like the appealing wares showcased in the historic windows of small towns and urban centers. Sometimes lost in the improvement process, however, are the abstract concepts of support and effort carried out by the people involved with bringing a Main Street project to fruition.

Over the previous several decades, this collective sense of community pride often took a detour, from a downtown focus to outside the city limits. At one time, a community's commercial center represented a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly, relevant environment. When sprawl appeared, everything changed. Most goods and services relocated to strip centers, malls, and large industrial parks. Main Street became bereft of activity and prosperity. People moved to

the suburbs. Cars became essential for access to education, goods, and services.

and the town squares, once the heart of downtown, were ignored. “Things started to change in the late 1970s when downtown revitalization began to be recognized as an activity worth pursuing,” says Debra Farst, TMSP coordinator. “This initial effort, which was a pilot project undertaken by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, brought forth an understanding that historic downtowns represent not only a community's collective memories, but they also provide viable economic uses for today.”

Eventually, a large number of these buildings were disfigured by misguided rehabilitation or lost to thoughtless demolition. The meaning of downtown

was forgotten, leaving us with empty storefronts and barren parking lots. Vacant buildings came to be seen as eyesores instead of opportunities. Gone was the “public living room” of Main Street. The window displays that had once enticed customers were neglected, the art deco theater marquee went unlit,

According to Howard Langner, a TMSP architect, participants in the downtown revitalization process have learned many valuable lessons over previous decades that are increasingly taking hold of the public consciousness. He suggests the following to make preservation's intangible concepts more discernible: ■ Old buildings provide a strong sense of place and should be viewed as primary resources in historic downtowns. Many architects have been trained to identify architectural styles, but they have not been educated in classical design techniques. Many of the skills involved in physically repairing and maintaining historic buildings have been lost. Whenever possible, employ qualified designers and tradespeople who understand and appreciate the quality craftsmanship in historic downtown buildings.

■ It is important to ensure downtown building owners view their properties as valuable assets and not as costly burdens. No building owner should be expected to invest in his or her building if there is no hope of return on the investment.



Greenville's Saturday Market Days draws residents to the downtown Market Square.

From Main Street managers to local merchants to THC staff, these participants share a common passion for bringing Texas' historic downtowns back to life. At the heart of these individuals' efforts is a respect and concern for their hometowns, native or adopted, short-term or long-term.

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Bastrop's Main Street program fosters community pride with annual festivals and public events.

A community must support its merchants through direct patronage or promotion.

■ Think twice when downtown development decisions are made on behalf of traffic and not pedestrians. Efficient movement of vehicles around a town means less time spent in the community. This is the opposite of what should be achieved.

■ Enticing people downtown on a day-to-day basis requires making it a desirable place to be. A few park benches placed in a circle around a water fountain does not qualify. People need shade when it is hot and sun when it is cold; they need food and drink when they are hungry, a place to take the kids to play, entertainment, and a variety of goods and services. Without these, they will get in a vehicle and go find them elsewhere.

Farst adds that these approaches are enhanced and supported by the TMSP, which has helped communities across Texas benefit from an economic reinvestment of more than \$2 billion, the creation of nearly 25,000 local jobs, and the

expansion or creation of almost 6,400 businesses in their Main Street districts.

“These reinvestments show that significant economic development impact can be realized through historic preservation,” Farst says. “As we move toward the future, we’ll continue to provide encouragement, hope, and technical services for communities that have just begun their downtown revitalization journeys and for those that are maintaining existing programs.”

For more information about existing TMSP communities or how to get involved with the program, call 512.463.6092 or visit www.thc.state.tx.us. ★

This article was written by TMSP staff.

Right: Youth volunteer to pick up trash around downtown Mineola.



Fostering Community Pride through Main Street

Howard Langner, a veteran architect with the Texas Main Street Program, has participated in hundreds of downtown revitalization projects. He offers the following suggestions about establishing the conceptually abstract value of community pride.

■ Each of our towns is worth living in and worth visiting. We need to look at our communities with fresh eyes and ask ourselves, “Why would someone visit here? Why would someone want to live here?” We need to mine the history of our towns and recreate quality of life.

■ We need to instill increased pride in our downtowns. Schools, post offices, retail establishments, professional offices, recreational destinations, and residences need to be located near the town center to create round-the-clock vitality.

■ It’s important to foster awareness of history in our towns. Not just the “Elvis slept here” variety, but the most significant aspects of a community’s heritage. The sense of “roots” creates pride and purpose for a community.

■ We should make our towns living classrooms for our students. Not on an occasional field-trip basis, but on a day-to-day “here is how the county courthouse works, here is how city hall works, here is how business is transacted” basis. Having our schools placed in isolated campuses miles from the downtown is contrary to a sense of community.

■ We need to get people downtown throughout the entire year, not just for the annual Christmas Pageant, Shoppers Days, or Farm Festival. We need to make downtown the obvious choice for all things every day. The less downtown is seen as a relic and the more alive it seems, the more chance it has for success.

How to Bake a Memorable Marker Ceremony

The Lubbock County Historical Commission (CHC) held a memorable and tasteful historical marker dedication on April 10 in Slaton. Community representatives and CHC members appropriately celebrated the new marker for Slaton Bakery with a full-sized cake and medallion cookies.

"The cake was a very tasty replica of the marker, with the seal, lettering, the whole bit!" reported Sally Abbe of Lubbock.

The marker (and cake) commemorated Slaton Bakery, one of Texas' oldest still-operating bakeries. The business traces its origins to 1923, when Slaton's Blue Ribbon and City Bakeries consolidated. In 1943, the Wilson family purchased the bakery, and they continue to operate the popular business.

Among the bakery's notable morsels are its introduction of sliced hamburger and hot dog buns to the area, as well as an early offering of flour tortillas on its menu. The Wilson family has baked thousands of cakes—for births, graduations, weddings, anniversaries, and other occasions—over a 60-year span for many of its regular customers.

THC History Museum Grant Application Period Begins August 2

Each year, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) helps small history museums preserve our state's heritage by awarding up to \$10,000 in grant money for collections care projects. This year, in an effort to allow museums more time to

complete their projects, the grant program timeline is moving up by one month.

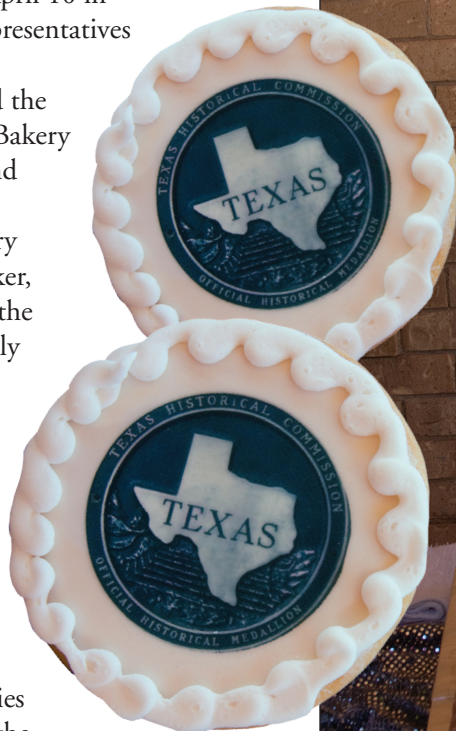
Applications will be available on the THC website beginning August 2 and are due on September 8. Applicants can expect award notifications directly following the THC's fall quarterly commission meeting at the end of October, and successful applicants can begin their projects immediately. Projects must be completed by July 1, 2011.

Popular uses of the funds include purchasing acid-free storage supplies, environmental monitoring equipment, collections management software, storage units, and

conservation treatments. Museums that focus primarily on history, have a budget of less than \$350,000, use a written collections management policy, and meet other minimum requirements are eligible to apply.

To learn more about the eligibility requirements, or to discuss a possible project proposal, contact the THC's Museum Services Program staff at history@thc.state.tx.us.

San Antonio Golf Tournament to Benefit Hispanic Heritage Center
San Antonio's inaugural Hispanic Heritage Golf Cup Invitational



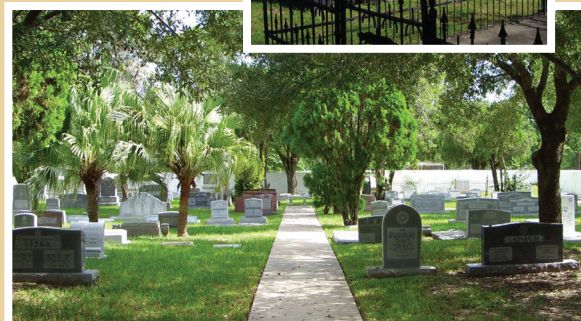
Slaton Bakery owner Robin Wilson displays the replica THC marker cake made especially for the bakery's recent marker dedication ceremony. Photo by Sandy Fortenberry.

National Register News

The National Register of Historic Places is the country's official list of cultural resources deemed worthy of preservation, including more than 3,000 listings in Texas. Listing affords properties a measure of protection from the impact of federally funded projects, as well as access to technical expertise, tax credits, and grant funds to facilitate preservation. The following recently listed historic properties represent the real stories reflecting Texas' dynamic cultural heritage.

Brownsville City Cemetery and Hebrew Cemetery—Brownsville, Cameron County

The Brownsville City Cemetery and the Cemetery of the Hebrew Benevolent Society of Brownsville and Matamoros reflect the evolving physical and social structure in this city on the U.S./Mexico border during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Occupying three city blocks, the cemeteries represent the confluence of Mexican, Anglo American, Jewish, and Creole funerary practices. The cemeteries were listed in the National Register because they reflect critical planning decisions made during the city's early development in the 19th century and represent the historic ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity of Brownsville. The cemeteries were also listed at the statewide level of significance as outstanding examples of cemetery design and for their vast and distinct collection of funerary structures and objects. The cemeteries feature notable works of accomplished sculptors and examples of regional folk design, retaining an exceptional array of decorative fences, mausoleums, grave markers, and plantings.



Faison House—La Grange, Fayette County

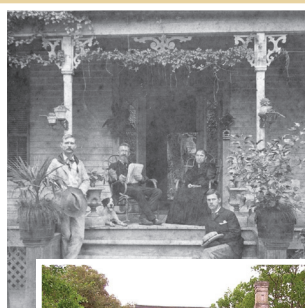


Photo courtesy Aparna Surte

The Nathaniel W. Faison House was listed at the local level of significance as an example of vernacular domestic architecture reflecting different periods of 19th-century settlement in Texas. The property consists of three separate volumes joined together by a rear U-shaped porch and courtyard. The period of significance begins with the purchase of the property by Faison in 1866 and ends with the 1920 death of Susan Faison, widow of Peter Faison, whose family constructed the central and last section of the home in 1884 and filled it with the fine furnishings that remain today. Another significant date is 1870, the year in which freedwoman Louisiana "Lou Faison" Brown became owner of the residence. Although it is possible other freedwomen in Texas owned homes earlier than Brown, no other examples are currently known. The Faison House is nominated at the state level of significance for its association with Brown as well as Faison, an early Texas settler who fought for the Republic and found success in land, cotton, and merchandising.

Tournament will be held July 24 at the prestigious La Cantera Resort Golf Course.

The event will feature entertainment, celebrities, sports figures, and golfers from San Antonio, Mexico, and Spain. The tournament will begin with a breakfast, and the

"shotgun start" takes place at 8 a.m. Contests include "closest to the pin" and "longest drive" awards, and a Traveling Heritage Cup will be assigned to one of the winning teams from Texas, Mexico, or Spain.

The tournament, co-chaired by San Antonio City Councilman Ray

Lopez and Tony Cherone, general manager of the Westin La Cantera Resort, will benefit the planned Hispanic Heritage Center of Texas. For more information or to sign up, contact Ron Botello at 210.241.5767. ★

Starr Family Home to Shine Even Brighter After Restoration

Part of the Marshall community for more than a century, the Starr Family Home State Historic Site is a remarkable example of 19th-century architecture and family heritage. Visitors to the home can see family portraits, hand-carved furnishings, and delicate collections of glassware and china. The site's collection is composed of original pieces from the Starr family and is now part of the authentic experience of viewing the elegant lifestyle of a bygone era. Each room of this real place is filled with memories that evoke real stories of Texas history.

The Starr family played an important role in the state's history from the formative years of the Republic of Texas through the state's growth in the late 1800s. Dr. James Harper Starr was president of the board of land commissioners and receiver of the land dues for Nacogdoches County, secretary of the treasury for the Republic of Texas, a local banker, and a prominent land agent. Starr County was named after him.

Dr. Starr bought 52 acres on the edge of Marshall in 1870, establishing this site as the family's home. He resided there with his wife Harriet and their granddaughters, and provided property for his children to create homes for their own families.

Preservation design work is now underway at the property's architectural centerpiece, Maplecroft, which housed four Starr family generations. Though the conservation effort will require the structure to be temporarily closed to the public, it is vital for extending its life and use.

A number of factors contribute to the deterioration of old houses including years of weathering, wear and tear by inhabitants and visitors,

foundation shifts, and material breakdown. Architectural repairs and accessibility enhancements are scheduled to be completed this year with a primary focus on exterior restoration including replacement of rotten wood, fresh paint, complete window restoration, and storm water drainage system repairs.

"The beauty of historic buildings is that they were put together by hand with individual components that, with proper care, can be sustained virtually forever," said Glenn Reed, chief architect for the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) 20 historic sites. "Preserving an old structure requires an intense analysis of the building to determine the cause of each problem so we can stop further deterioration. While there may be many correct treatments, there is only one correct diagnosis."

The THC is responsible for ensuring the preservation work is authentic, especially when there is a need for replacing or repairing materials. Accurate recordings of a building's creation and maintenance are important for conservation and interpretation.

The Starr Family Home has become a community cornerstone where a variety of events take place such as weddings and family get-togethers. Major activities at the site include the annual croquet tournament in June, the Victorian Fair for school children in the fall, and the holiday candlelight dinner and tour of the house from Thanksgiving through Christmas.

Due to the site's ongoing preservation projects, visitors are encouraged to call ahead to ensure tours and events remain available. ★

This article was written by Sarah Tober of the THC's Marketing Communications Division.



Background: Four generations of Starr family members lived at Maplecroft, the family mansion built in the 1870s. Inset: Portrait of James Franklin Starr.



Starr Family Home State Historic Site
 407 W. Travis St., Marshall, TX
 903.935.3044
www.visitstarrfamilyhome.com
 Open: Tues.–Sun., 10 a.m.–4 p.m.



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Our Mission

To protect and preserve the state's historic and prehistoric resources for the use, education, enjoyment and economic benefit of present and future generations.

County Historical Commission TIPS & TOOLS



CHC workshop registrants worked together in regional groups during this year's Annual Historic Preservation Conference to address shared challenges.

With the conclusion of another successful Annual Historic Preservation Conference, the County Historical Commission (CHC) Outreach team would like to thank CHC members for attending the conference, especially those who participated in the CHC workshop. After a brief overview of annual reporting results, workshop attendees separated into regional groups to discuss common issues and to share possible solutions. Participants also had the opportunity to ask questions about their roles as CHC appointees and about preservation in general. This and future editions of *Tips & Tools* will address the questions posed.

Several CHC members asked for recommendations on how to deal with difficult people. Since the THC relies on CHCs to be the local face of preservation, it is important that a positive impression be made on community members and to bring others into the preservation fold. To this end, here are familiar but effective ways to approach any situation:

- **Listen before you leap.** Take time to speak with the individual and give them a chance to explain why they continue to pursue an issue. Showing interest in their concerns may help put both of you at ease.
- **Take a backseat.** Try to put your personal feelings (on the issue or person) aside to address the matters at hand. Regardless of whether or not you agree with the individual, you can acknowledge their interest and try to understand their position.
- **Be slow to speak.** As a CHC member, you are not expected to have all the answers all the time. It is perfectly appropriate when confronted with a difficult issue (or person) to take time to gather your thoughts, research some options, and provide a well-worded response.
- **Take the high road.** Whether the issues are on the level or if they spiral down to personal attacks, the priority is to maintain respect for each person and to do whatever you can to show stewardship of your role and responsibilities. ★

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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 September/October issue of *The Medallion*. The first correct mail answer will be counted, even if correct emails and faxes arrive first. Limit one prize annually per contestant.

Want a clue? This Queen Anne style, 7,100 square-foot structure (1904) was the only facility of its kind in this primarily rural region of the Texas Brazos Trail Region.



Answer to the photo from the last issue: The building pictured at left is La Lomita chapel, located four miles south of Mission. Standing on a small hill (*la lomita* in Spanish), it is located on property awarded as Spanish land grants in

1767. Congratulations to the first readers who submitted the correct answer: Larry Hunt of Carthage, Carolyn Nelson of Austin, Sharon Richard of Sour Lake, and Annette Sotelo of San Antonio. They will receive prizes from our Texas Heritage Trails Program, the THC's regional tourism initiative, as a token of our appreciation for taking part in the fun. Thanks to all participants! ★

