



FRANKLIN COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Volume 25, Number 3, May/June 2020

Website: <https://www.fchatx.com>

**ALL LOCATIONS
TEMPORARILY
CLOSED**



Coronavirus (COVID-19)

From Gail Reed, FCHA Director:

As many of you know, FCHA was compliant with Governor Abbott's orders to close our museums at the end of March due to the COVID-19 coronavirus. So far as I know, that is the first time in the history of our organization this has happened. Our museums will remain closed through the end of May, and FCHA board will reassess our situation at that time and make a decision on re-opening and having meetings going forward. Until further notice, office hours at the Parchman House Visitor's Center are 8 a.m. until 12 noon, on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

We always look forward to our spring activities such as Night at the Museum, where 5th and 6th grade students portray former citizens in Franklin County. The end-of-school-year field trips where we tour 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade students through our museums, and end the day with a pizza lunch at Dupree Park is a such a treat. This year, 7th grade students were unable to compete in the Civil War Journals contest which is normally the focus of our May membership meeting.

Pat Hudson, who is an FCHA board member and liaison to Mount Vernon ISD, works diligently each year to coordinate dates and volunteers for these special occasions. This year, her hard work was in vain, but we do appreciate her efforts.

As always, special thanks to our Saturday docents who volunteered before the museums closed: Ken Greer, Frankie Cooper, Kathy Shelton, Johanna Deal, Sheryl Divin and Kelly Briley.



The Emporium building, corner of Main and Holbrook Streets, circa 1926.
Congratulations to Jeff and Amy Briscoe for restoring the structure so closely to the original look.

The Fanning Family Legacy in Franklin County

This handwritten letter takes up six sheets and was folded into a "Memory Book" – a scrapbook of sorts – kept by Mary Eudora Fanning Mann, granddaughter of William Fanning. Fanning came to Mt. Vernon – as he reports in his letter – in 1853; he purchased land on the south side of town; his farm would lie where Andrew Street intersects Holbrook.

The handwriting in the letter is legible. Some punctuation has been added but otherwise, the spelling and abbreviations are preserved intact. The letter is one continuous narrative spanning six pages in small script. Paragraphs were added in our printed version. Cindy Stutts transcribed the document and typeset it for our use. It is a wonderful letter providing insight into life 150 years ago. The author (William Fanning) will live on another decade. He did not live to see Franklin County created out of Titus County; 1875.

A number of Fanning graves are in the Mt. Vernon City Cemetery. Family members did follow William Fanning to Mt. Vernon. The granddaughter, Mary, marries Rufus Mann, who is a school teacher in Mt. Vernon – at least by the time of the Civil War. Marble tombstones marking the graves of the early Fanning family members lie broken and in small pieces beside a tree on the south side of Andrew Street, a sad legacy for this pioneer family.

A Grandfather's Legacy written in the form of a letter to his granddaughter:

March the 10th 1858 - Titus County, Texas

Mary Fanning My Grand Daughter:

I will try and give you a small sketch of my life from my boyhood to the present time. I was born in the State of Virginia, Withe County, July the 24th - 1785 soon after the close of the revolutionary war. My Father was pore. I was used to hard labor an with out education. My father's name was David Fanning, his father's name was Akilus Fanning; his wife's name Rosanna. I well recollect them both.

When I was five years old my father left With County and moved to Bussel Co. Virginia. There I was rased. At 18 years of age I left my father being pore and with out education and then went to Kentucky. The 7th of June 1805 I Married Nancy Bromley.

October 1807 I moved to Tennessee Warren Co. Being pore I made severl moves in Tennessee.

In December 1816 I moved to North Allabama Lauderdale Co where I made three good plantations. No one to work but myself. I began now to acumalate some property. My children was now all home and the most of them rased. Fore sons and fore daughters. One son died in infancy. We rased seven to be men and wimman all by Nancy my first wife.

In 1824 my eldest Daughter left me and in '30 Tolbert Fanning left; in '31 James M. Fanning left.

In 1832 I sold out and moved to Mississippi the same year my second daughter Mary Married and left me. I settld on North Tilletoba in the wilderness which plase became the County of Tallahatcha. There I found the promist land for soil and buty but helth was not there. There I went to work with all my strenth and mind to make a fortune. I went ahead.

In '33 my daughter Matildah married and left. In '34 my stock all died of. In a few weakes 16 milch cows among them.

I bought at twenty dollars a cow and calf and went ahead as tho I should never die.

In January '36 Tolbert Fanning came to see me. I sent Jackson Fanning with him to Nashvill to school. Then we had but one Child left with us, the youngest daughter Nancy. A few days after Tolbert left about the 18th of February myself, wife, and daughter went to here a man preach. When we came home we found all in ashes. The close on our backs was all the clothing left. God had blest me with good helth. I went to work every day and night. I bore up under all my trials till the 16th day of September following when my wife Nancy died. The mother of all my children, she was but 51 years old. Tthere was sorrow and greef and me left alone to mourn my loss all these privations in '36.

I tride to compose myself and trust to God for mersy for all my joys of this world was gon when my dear Nancy was nomore tho I took curage and went ahead bought a few more negroes. Stade in the farm with the negroes and worked myself till '38 when I was sude for a security debt for a large amount. Now my distresses returned. I pade out thousands of money and my plantation which is now worth ten thousand dollars after all my toyl and labors go to make security for debt.

I moved from '38 to '40 leaveing all my distresses untold. The 19th day of February 1840 I married Sarah Scindel from North Carolina; forty fiv years of age, this her first marriage.

I felt consold onst more. Lived in hapaness with her till the 4th of October '43 and she died.

I then beleaved my trials was harder then I cold beare. I red Jobe and found my affliction was not to be compared with Jobe's. He bore it all and now has hapaness will last for ever after all his misery and woe on earth. I consoled myself. After all my trials and afflictions on earth I wold try and obtain a rest for ever after death.

After my Sarahs death I devided part of my property among my Children; reserved a small portion for myself and on the 4th day of February '44 left Mississippi and went to Franklin College Tenessee.

When I landed and looked around I saw my folley and was the most distrest man in mind ever lived beleaving if I stay here I will come to abject poverty and be a charge on my childrens hands for suport in my old age. My distres continude till the 17th of September. I rose with all the energy and power that was in me and started for the fare west with this resolution: That if God wold spair me I wol go to Texas and turn in and try to make a living for my own suport and on the 12th day of October '44 I Crost the Tex line. Then I was out of the United States.

I traveld on west ward to the Trinadad River threw a perfect wild wilderness, no roades for a guide, and found many famlays living in Camps made of Buffalo hides and living on the wild game.

The further west I went the more savage appeares i saw. I returned back to the country now cauld Hopkins Co, no county then. I struck camp neare the white oake aboute the 15th of December '44. I saved some land and went to work. Had one servant boy with me. Bought some stock and begun the world as tho I was young. And now I must have a wife.

I heard of a lady visenting her friends in Texas from North Carolina and was recommended to me by my frends to be the lady that would sute me: her age and no incumberens of a famley.

I made severl attempts in passing over the country to see her but faled. On the 8th day of May '45 I left my camp in the praries for the United States. On the 9th I stopt at a house for dinner. The land lady knew me. She gave me an introduction to Miss Elisabeth Bigellow. Her appearns pleased me well. I spent that evening and next morning with her and told her if I lived to return I wold hunt her up. She replide you may find me at Washington, Arcances. On the 10th in the morning I bid her good by and continued my journey. Took water at Serevesport and landed at Vicksburgh Miss.

I went threw Mississippi, Alabama, Tenessee and to Collumbia in old Kentucky by the 4th of July following. Returned back by way of Franklin College Tenessee and bid them all a kind farwell as to this world and persude my corse west for Texas with Betssy in my mind.

Continued my jorney day after day till I crost the Mississippi; there I was take sick with hard chils and high fevers. Out of my sences the first 24 ours tho with help I got on my horse and rode on. The fever wold rise and I wold throw my blanket on the ground. I wold tie my horse and lie down til dawn. I wold ride on from day to day till I came to Lanes Port on the red river.

I began to see mend and persude my corse threw Clarkesvill Texas to my camp. I landed on the 8th of September '45 which I left on the 8th of May before and found my boy and littel stock doing well after 4 monts abstens and 25 hundred miles travel. I rested till the 15th of October when I started to hunt for my Betssy. I went to Bowie Co Texas and heard of her.

I persewd my journey too hundred miles and found her near Washington Arcances. I spent a few days with her with a good deal of pleasher and found my toyls and travels would not be vain.

I took my leave of Betsy and her friends and left for Texas and came home to prepare my house to bring her home the next time. About the 26th of December I left for Washington and landed there the second day of January '46. Stade too days. Took Betsy in a carage and started for Texas on the 8th day of the month. We landed in Boston, Bowie Co. Texas. There I got our licens and we went 15 miles to her friends and married on the 9th. We left for home on the 11th and landed home on 15th in good helth.

I had not a bed to lay our boddays on. My beding was at Franklin College, Tenessee and hers in North Carolina. I borrowed one bed. We boath went to work as tho we were young; made comferts and mattresses and soon had summer beds. With all our poverty and hard ships she never grumbled.

In the summer and fall of '46 boath our beds and equipage landed. Now we had plenty. We went ahead and injoyed our selves well for too or three years. Her health became much impared.

I found she was on the decline I imployed Dr. Dunken, an old practitioner, to attend her care for three or fore years. I found her helth grew wors every year. She thaught it was living in the prairies that caused her sickness. I sold out in Hopkins Co and bought and moved here in June 1853. She still grew worse and for the last too years I found her mind sinking with the boddy.

I left her alone but sildum by day or by night. She grew wors. On the 15th day of December 1856 she died in the 56th year of her age and now I am left to morn her loss along by myself as I have been left to morn the loss of too wives before her.

God blest me with three as good wives as any man on earth ever lived with and now I am in the seventy third year of my age.

I have the confidencess in God that when He calls for me and I am taken home, there I trust to meet with my three wives, too sons, and daughter that went before me where parting will be no more. Time on this earth is nere a close. I put all my trust in God for the Salvation of my sole.

Fair well to all I leave behind. Be faithful to God. ~ ~ William Fanning

March the 10th 1858^{1/2} Mary Fanning My grand
Titus County Texas Daughter I will try and give
you a small sketch of my life from my boy hood to the
pres ant time I was born in the state of Virginia with county
^{the part} July 1795 soon after the close of the revolutionay war my
father was pore I was raised to hard labor an with out edu
cation my fathers name was David Fanning his fathers name
was Akilus Fanning his wifes name Rosaria I will recollect
them boath when I was five years old my father left with Co
in 91 and moved to Russel Co Va there I was raised at 18 years of
age I left my father being pore and with out education and then
went to Kentucky the 17th of June 1805 I Married Nancy Bro
in less October 1809 I moved to Tennessee wacron Co being pore
in 1810 I moved to 1811

Excerpt from original letter

Memorials & Honorariums

Donated By:

Robert Cowser
Janie Esclavon
Charles & Annette Rutherford
Johanna Deal
Jaime Bennett
George & Reba Lunsford

Donated By:

Wayne & Debby Helton
George & Reba Lunsford
Gary & Karla Haynes
Nancy Bolduc
Paul & Victoria Fletcher

In Memory Of:

Juanita Cowser
Mary J. Esclavon
Joseph Mosier
Jan Bland Bolin
Jan Bland Bolin
Dorothy Long

In Honor Of:

Robert Long
Robert Long
B. F. Hicks
B. F. Hicks
B. F. Hicks

Living in the Past

By Gail Reed

“Epidemic Sweeps the Country!” –*The Los Angeles Times*

“Churches, Schools, Movies, Ordered Closed” –*The New York Times*

“Public Health Officials Warn to Wash Your Hands” –*The Miami Herald*

These are not newspaper headlines from the latest COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. They’re from the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic that killed 675,000 Americans and 50 million people worldwide.

Hundreds of thousands of American troops headed to Europe for the closing offensives of World War I amid this global pandemic. Meanwhile, back home, quarantined schoolgirls jumped rope to a new chant:

“I had a little bird, And his name was Enza
I opened the window, And in-flew-Enza.”

Pharmaceutical companies worked around the clock to come up with a vaccine to fight the microscopic killer, but they were too late. The virus disappeared before they could even isolate it.

Diphtheria peaked in 1921 with 206,000 cases, causing swelling of the mucous membranes, including the throat that could obstruct breathing and swallowing. The bacterial toxin could even cause fatal heart and nerve damage. By the end of the 1920s, researchers found a vaccine that worked, virtually eradicating the illness.

But few diseases frightened parents more in the early part of the 20th century than polio. In the 1950s, the virus terrified American families and parents tried “social distancing” but it was ineffective. Polio struck in the warm summer months, sweeping through towns in epidemics every few years. Most people recovered quickly from polio, but others suffered temporary or permanent paralysis, and even death. Many polio survivors were disabled for life.

Dr. Byron Bennett, who was a graduate of Mount Vernon High School and is buried in the Mount Vernon Cemetery, joined the Virus Research Laboratory’s poliomyelitis program staff in 1953. He shouldered much of the lab work after Jonas Salk recruited him from Walter Reed Medical Center. He was essential in the development of the polio vaccine. Through the dedication of medical researchers such as Dr. Bennett, the Salk vaccine put an end to the polio epidemic in 1955. It has been said, “Apart from the atomic bomb, America’s greatest fear was polio.”

Fast-forward six-and-a-half decades and a new disease has struck fear into the hearts of Americans—Covid-19 coronavirus. As was done over 100 years ago with the Spanish flu, businesses, churches, schools, and museums are closed while we shelter in place in the wake of yet another worldwide pandemic. Varying symptoms of this airborne disease, along with the lack of testing supplies have made it impossible to determine exactly how many people have been infected. Some experience no symptoms at all, while others become extremely ill and even lose their lives.

In the past several years, we have endured Ebola and other types of coronaviruses such as SARS and MERS, and there’s no doubt a vaccine will eventually be developed for COVID-19. In the meantime, this debilitating and sometimes deadly disease continues to take its toll.

Now that the lockdown has been lifted and businesses are beginning to reopen, no one really knows what to expect. Some are relieved to be going back to work while others worry that lack of social distancing will cause another surge in cases. With a cure possibly as far as a year away, it is imperative that we remain vigilant, regardless of how we move forward with our daily lives. History does repeat itself and who knows how soon it will be before we see yet another deadly pandemic?



Dr. Jonas Salk (left)
with Dr. Byron Bennett

Forging Into the Future

FCHA is moving into the 21st Century with the latest technology in our Fire Station and Cotton Belt Depot museums! On the Saturday before the museums closed, Sheryl Divin, Kelly Briley and FCHA website manager, Luis Sifuentes installed a TV/monitor on the counter of the Fire Station Museum as you enter. It will display greeting and informational slides that immediately greet patrons. These slides can be updated as needed.

We are replacing the old Vizio TV with a beautiful, state-of-the-art Samsung 4K UHD Smart TV. It will run a continual loop of the Ice Bowl video. No more restarting the DVD player all day! That TV is purchased, and the plan is to have it installed soon.

The first week of May saw the installation of a 46-inch touch screen TV in the Fire Station, providing an interactive and informative experience for all. Then we head over to the Depot and begin modernizing there with kiosks and another Samsung. Before year's end we will have interactive kiosks available in both museums.

These interactive screens allow visitors to engage with our exhibits. At many museums, there are reasons certain things are off limits in terms of touching and handling, but through technology there are other ways to create tangible, hands-on experiences without disrupting valuable and oftentimes, irreplaceable exhibit items.

These new touch screen TVs will be ideal for visitors of all ages, especially children and student groups such as our elementary field trips because it keeps them entertained and allows them to learn by doing. We're ready to take our exhibits out of the glass and into our guests' eager hands!



An example of the interactive televisions being installed in the museums.

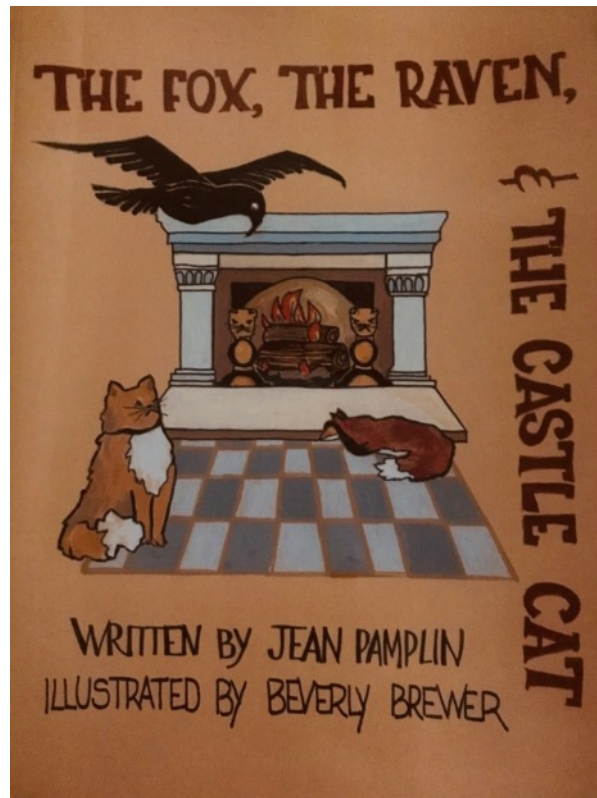
What's New at the Cotton Belt Depot

This beautiful Cotton Belt dining car carving set, donated by Dr. Kenneth Copeland; son of Jerry Newsom and Bill Copeland, is now on display in the Station Master's office at the Cotton Belt Depot. Dr. Copeland and wife, Lucia, live in Edmond, Oklahoma. His father was superintendent of schools in Mt. Vernon. From there, Dr. Bill Copeland went on to become administrator of Methodist Orphans Home in Waco for the next twenty years.

Thank you, Dr. Copeland, for this rare addition to our train exhibit!



Upcoming Publications



The Fox, The Raven & The Castle Cat

This beautiful story is written by local author, Jean Pamplin and illustrated by the late Beverly Brewer, whose paintings are on display at the Fire Station Museum. A reception is planned for later in the year. Cost of this publication was underwritten by Jerald and Mary Lou Mowery.



Bluebonnet, the character made famous by author Mary Brook Casad, made a visit to Mount Vernon a few months back and a book detailing her adventures will be published and available by Christmas. This project was made possible by the Harris and Irene St. Clair Endowment.

Poetry Reading at The Cotton Belt Depot

The Historical Association hosted poet, Sam Renken, of Atlanta, Georgia, for a reception and reading on Thursday night, February 20, 2020, in our 1894 Railroad Depot.

Trampas and Dani Smith of Sulphur Springs had known Sam and Maggie Renken when the couples were in graduate school at the University of Wyoming in Laramie some 20 years ago. Since that time, they have remained in touch and visit regularly.

Sam and his family (wife and 3 children) came for spring break and Trampas offered to assist in setting up a reading by the poet Renken. Trampas is no stranger to Mt. Vernon. He and his childhood friend Allen Phillips have used the Old Jail in Mt. Vernon for film production and participated in the Arts Alliance video festivals over the last several years. In another example of cultural exchange, Mark and Ute Miller, principal musicians with the Mt. Vernon Music Association, provided background music during the opening reception honoring Renken and then gave a 10-minute introduction to the February 22 program which was upcoming in the town's music hall.

The poet was to read for a half hour. Renken read many of his published works for the assemblage of 40 members of our association. At the end of the program, there was considerable sustained applause with cries of "encore" to which Renken acceded and delivered 5 more of his works.

Renken has one published volume and a second volume of his collected works was released in February of this year. His poems appear in anthologies of American poetry used in college and university classes as well as in the independently published collections of his work.

The poems were set in both contemporary and historic time-frames; all in the United States. All of the poems had themes rooted in history; that is: a poem about the pleasures of the here and now in the basement of his 120 year old home dug out of a stone foundation and hearing the sounds of the house and the breathing of the new baby; with other poems set from the perspective of the young boys riding for the Pony Express turned loose to ride west across the mountains; or the joys of the horses and their riders as they rode above the tree line in the Rockies. Renken would give an explanation of the poem; what inspired the work; and then would read. He was truly another artist performing in Mt. Vernon. He described the art of crafting poetry as requiring time to allow the thoughts and words to gel – to have marinated – creating the visual imagery.

The musical entertainment by Mark and Ute Miller of Mt. Vernon Music: duets of ballads, jigs, and more classical pieces during the entire reception added to the festive nature of the reception. Hosts were Robert Long, Julia LaBella and Gail Reed. Trampas Smith promises a return visit for his friend and we will welcome another opportunity to hear this historian in verse.



Mark and Ute Miller of Mt. Vernon Music perform.



Sam Renken entertains audience with his poetry.

Cheesecake
By Debbie Tom Norman

Crust:

1 cup of all-purpose flour
2 tablespoon sugar
½ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon salt
1/3 cup butter or margarine
2-3 tablespoons milk

Filling:

1-1/2 lbs. cream cheese
1-1/4 cups sugar
5 eggs
1-1/2 teaspoons vanilla
¾ teaspoon lemon rind

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. For crust: In a large bowl combine first 5 ingredients; blend together until crumbly. Sprinkle milk over mixture; stir until dough is just moist enough to hold together. Form dough into ball. Press mixture evenly over bottom and 2-1/2 inches up sides of ungreased 9-inch springform pan. For filling: In a large mixing bowl, beat together cream cheese and sugar until light and fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time; beat thoroughly after each addition. Add vanilla and lemon rind. Blend until mixed. Pour mixture into prepared crust and bake for about 55-60 minutes, just until center is firm to the touch. Remove cake from oven and cool to room temperature. Chill until serving time. Add fruit topping if desired. Release sides of pan and leave on bottom to serve.



Deborah Tom Norman is the daughter of the late Dr. Calvin Tom and Teny Gothard Tom. The Tom family moved to Mt. Vernon in 1956 and took over the practice of Dr. Henry Stanford who had moved to Galveston. She is descended from one of the soldiers who fought at the Battle of San Jacinto; buried in the State Cemetery in Austin. She married David Lee Norman on August 2, 1975. David is the son of Paul Norman and Ruth Lee Norman. They have two daughters: Lauren Lewis and Audrey Norman, who also reside in Mt. Vernon. Lauren is general manager at M.L. Edwards and Audrey teaches art at Mt. Vernon high school.



Pinkeye Purple Hull bloom

Nothing says summertime like purple hull pinkeye peas, watermelons, peaches and taking a dip in your favorite swimming hole. Enjoy the season!



Peas at full ripeness

2020 Harris and Irene St. Clair Endowment Awards

The Harris and Irene St. Clair Endowment awards were presented at the Fire Station Museum on Tuesday, March 24th, 2020, by committee chairperson, Mary Lou Mowery. Other committee members included representatives from First United Methodist Church, Mount Vernon, First Baptist Church, Mount Vernon, Mount Vernon Music, City of Mount Vernon, Franklin County Commissioners Court, Mount Vernon Rotary, and Franklin County Historical Association.

The Endowment was established in 2008 by Jimmy St. Clair in honor of his parents. Since then, over \$200,000 has been awarded to help fund various non-profit organizations in Franklin County.

Per endowment guidelines, distribution must go to support the following needs and causes in Mount Vernon and Franklin County: children's causes, humanitarian adult needs, cultural support of the quality of life (art and music), and enhancement of the general quality of life in Franklin County.

This year, a total of \$25,000 was divided among eight non-profit organizations which included Alamo Mission Museum, Franklin County Arts Alliance, Franklin County Genealogy Society, Franklin County Historical Association, Lunches of Love, Friends of the Library, Mount Vernon Cares, and Mount Vernon Music. Representatives from each of these groups expressed their earnest appreciation for the awards.

Our deepest gratitude to Mr. Jimmy St. Clair for continuing to support Mount Vernon!



Pictured left to right, Mary Lou Mowery, FCHA Committee Chair; Randy Buchanan, Alamo Mission Museum; Jana Capps, Franklin County Genealogical Society; Jerald Mowery, FCHA; Linda Hammond, Franklin County Arts Alliance; Susan Bass, Friends of the Library; Jill Lowry, Mt. Vernon Cares; Robert Long, Mt. Vernon Music Association. Not available, Susan Sample, Lunches of Love.

Nature is in full bloom at

DUPREE PARK

The weather is perfect for a family walk along the 57-acre nature trail.

The park is open dawn to dusk daily.

Foot traffic only.

Dogs on a leash are allowed.



A Murder of Crows

By: Matt White



A few days ago I decided to see if Natalie and Ellie – my two oldest daughters who are aged six and four – wanted to go on a walk to try out the new nature trail I had mowed with the tractor. The weather was exceptional for mid-January, being a balmy 70 degrees. It was the kind of day that begged for an outdoor adventure. I grabbed the binoculars and pitched it to them as going birdwatching with dad. As usual, they were game for just about anything I wanted to do with them.

Piling into my old pickup truck we set off down the lane toward the back acres and the wilder parts of our place where I had made the trail. We hadn't gone very far when we heard the raucous sounds of several dozen crows mobbing some as yet unseen enemy. Stopping momentarily, I explained that the crows had probably discovered a sleeping owl and were determined to harass the poor creature until it grew weary of being disturbed and flew away.

Yet, from where we were, we could not see what was happening. From the sound of it, and from the crows rushing to get in on the action, it appeared that whatever was going on was taking place just beyond a nearby row of cedars that had grown up along an old fence.

"Come on!" I whispered to the girls, "Let's go see what all the fuss is about."

As anyone who has spent any time at all outdoors will tell you, crows are the watchdogs of the woods and this is very typical behavior. Yet in the bird world this is still high drama, something probably akin to the latest color-coded warnings meant to heighten our sense of nervousness if not our awareness. The crows apparently engage in these antics to alert everything within earshot of the presence of a dangerous predator that would love nothing more than to make a meal out of a tiny morsel of feathers.

Nervous that the owl would fly off before we got there, I slipped off the trail a bit to peer around the tall cedars. A couple hundred yards away I spied a tall elm tree decorated with a veritable murder of crows – at least fifty or sixty of them – all calling vociferously.

But there wasn't an owl in the leaf-bare tree. All I could see out of the ordinary was a strangely contorted dark blob that appeared that didn't resemble anything at all. Studying it carefully for a few seconds, I saw some movement and realized that it was a bobcat and the crows were all fired up about it. I was expecting to see an owl roosting in the tree, yet here was a big cat whose hiding place had been discovered by the birds – a first for me.

Calling for Natalie and Ellie, but careful to stay a safe distance away, I wedged my binoculars in the fork of a young sapling about their eye level and then focused them on the big cat perched precariously in the tall tree. Occasionally I have been lucky enough to see a bobcat trotting down a road or walking through a field. They always seem more afraid of me than I am of them, but with my young daughters along, I was more than a bit concerned. Still I wanted the girls to see the creature for themselves and not only to learn about them from a book.

DID YOU KNOW? Crows have been ranked by scientists among the most intelligent of birds. They can be found all over the world in a variety of habitats. American crows congregate in large numbers of a few hundred to several thousand to live and sleep in communal roosts.

Crows and Ravens belong to the same genus, and over 40 species have been identified. Crows have more than 20 calls. The most common call has several qualities and lengths that serve different purposes, such as warnings, assembly, or distress.

The Gaudiest Bird

By: Matt White

Not long ago B.F. Hicks and I paid a visit to the Franklin County Historical Association's Dupree Park to go birdwatching on the nature trail designed by Mount Vernon college student Ryan Dillard. Ryan has done a wonderful job laying out the trail, which is over a mile long and winds through an old field providing excellent habitat for a variety of birds. As we were walking back to the pavilion we spotted a Painted Bunting taking a dust bath beside an ash pile where some brush had been burned. The bird didn't seem to notice our presence, allowing us to observe its beautiful yellow, red, orange, blue and green feathers.

The Painted Bunting is our gaudiest bird, and one that stops people in their tracks. Many times I have shown this bird to someone only to hear, "I didn't know we had anything so beautiful around here!"

In fact, the males are probably responsible for making more people into birdwatchers than any other species in Texas. Many years ago a friend of mine showed me a brightly colored male as it sang in the top of a tree and the rest is history. I became hooked on birding and had to see what other unique and interesting birds I could find. To be fair, it is only the males that are so colorful. In the bird world it is usually the males that are brightly colored while the females are drab by comparison. Female Painted Buntings are solid green – just like a leaf – helping them to avoid predators while they sit very still on the nest.

Painted Buntings spend the winter in Mexico and points farther south. In spring they migrate northward to our area in search of brushy fields and fence rows. When they arrive they immediately begin singing and defending their territories against rival males. Throughout the summer the males will sing all day, even during the hottest weather, until the first week of August. Then suddenly without warning the males disappear. In a few days the females follow suit. It may seem incredible that these birds would leave Texas during the hottest part of August to fly south for the winter to Mexico (where it is even hotter) but that is exactly what happens. Even more incredible is the fact that the young birds are left behind and must find their way with no one to guide them. It is truly one of the marvels of the natural world.

Sadly, many will not survive the winter without being killed accidentally or trapped and then sold as cage birds in Mexico, unlike the United States, where strict laws protect migratory birds, seven thousand Painted Buntings are taken from the wild legally and sold for a few dollars apiece. One wonders how many more are taken illegally without permits. Most will die soon after in their cages and so to feed the demand more must be taken. This practice is cause for alarm because the numbers of Painted Buntings have been declining in the United States over the past several decades and some scientists think that caging may be part of the reason.

If they survive until spring they may seek out the same tree (if it hasn't been cut down or bulldozed) in which they were raised, or have raised young before. More than likely the adult male we observed dust bathing in Dupree Park had been raised there several years before. The park is large enough to allow for several pairs to breed and raise young. Hopefully, the birds that nest there this year will survive and return again next year.



Matt White spoke on "The Natural History of Northeast Texas" for our March membership meeting. He lives in Campbell, Texas, on a parcel of prairie passed through his family and teaches at Paris Junior College. His books *Prairie Time* and *The Birds of Northeast Texas* are published by Texas A&M University Press. White teaches history on the faculty of Paris Junior College and is a regular and frequent "birder" in Franklin County.

Spotlight on Members

Paul Fletcher was born in Dallas, Texas, and after graduating from high school he attended and graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University (Bachelor of Science) and later from Abeline Christian University where he received his Master's Degree. Upon graduation from Stephen F. Austin State University, he joined the Dallas Police Department and retired after 29 years of service as a lieutenant.

In 2003, his wife, Victoria, and he moved to Franklin County and established a cattle ranch. In 2007, he went back to work as a parole officer where he supervised parolees. In 2009, he was elected sheriff of Franklin County. Now, they work and manage around 70 cows, several horses, and a donkey.

Paul enjoys ranching, hunting, fishing, travel and Bible study. He volunteers and serves on various boards in our community.

Victoria Fletcher was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and after graduating from high school she received a registered nurse degree and moved to the Dallas area where she worked in hospitals and nursing homes until she became a Dallas police officer. While serving as a police officer, she was promoted to senior corporal where she trained recruits. Due to her vast police knowledge and nursing experience, she was selected to be the Parkland Memorial Hospital Officer where she was the coordinator of all police services for law enforcement in Dallas County.

After retirement from the Dallas Police Department, she moved to Franklin County in 2003, where she and her husband, Paul, established a cattle ranch. She has volunteered as a reserve police officer for the City of Mount Vernon. She has also volunteered as a Stephen Ministry care giver and was chief of security at the First United Methodist Church Family Life Center during hurricanes Rita and Katrina when evacuees from New Orleans were housed in our community. She is currently on the Whately Advisory Board. Victoria enjoys horseback riding, fishing, camping and traveling.

Paul and Victoria are regular Saturday docents at the Fire Station Museum and we appreciate their service to our community.



Please consider joining FCHA to help us meet our goals as outlined by our Mission Statement:

- To preserve our heritage
- To strive through education to further the appreciation of our natural and cultural heritage
- To promote the economy of our county and community through a special emphasis on heritage tourism
- To acquire, maintain and preserve artifacts and records of historic significance, as well as provide museums and exhibit areas to display and promote education and heritage tourism in Franklin County.

WELCOME NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS (RECEIVED SINCE LAST NEWSLETTER)

Sponsor Level

Nancy Bolduc	Sally Thomas Burnett
Paul & Victoria Fletcher	Gary & Karla Haynes
Wayne & Debby Helton	Mike & Janet Jordan
George & Reba Lunsford	Amy McGrady
Cher Megasko & Greg Todd	Scott & Sandra Riddle
Charles & Annette Rutherford	John & Diane Scovell
Paul & Kelly Gittemeier	

Patron Level

James & Christine Ballard	Greg Carr
Joe & Janet Coe	Larry & Nancy Coleman
Mike & Lamanda Griffith	Robert & Nancy Mowrey
Rex & Barbara Norris	Bill & Charlene Wilson

Membership

Debra Adams	Joe & Jan Andrews
James & Christine Ballard	Paul & Pam Benson
Warren & Sue Benoy	Sarah Birdsong
Charles Black	Kelly Briley & Sheryl Divin
Michael Breard	Jason & Alyssa Burton
Randy Cates	Robert Cowser
Dan Caudle	Kenneth Copeland
Gary & Mary Ann Davis	Joel & Laurie Dihle
Alexandra Eggen	Janie Esclavon
Anne Evetts	Aaron Favors
Keitron & Tina Fountain	Carolyn Franks
Hal & Georgia Gibson	Jeff & Dusty Goodman
Gary & Daphne Hatcher	Richard & Ginny Hamrick
Emily Greer Henderson	Sue Ann Harper
Daniel Hicks	Dan & Myrna Hoke
Randy & Jenny Hope	Bob Houtz
Kim Kirk Howard	Kelly Kirk Hursh
Ellen Jagers	Don & Elva Jumper
Beverly Kelley	Earl Kirk
Kendal & Stephanie Kirk	Kenneth & Linda Kirk
Kyle & Kelli Kirk	Yolanda Kraynick
Harold & Betty Lightfoot	Samantha Hamrick Lilley
Jim & Sara Long	Jim & Betty Meek
Lacy McMillan	Jacque Miller
Bennie & Avery Moore	Hudson & Susan Old
Mike Parnell	Novelle Pennal
Debbi Plemmons	Mike & Susan Radar
Nathan & Lillie Reves	Ann Reynolds
Larry & Yvonne Scott	Karen Smith
Martha Smith	Kelly Stretcher
Gary Stretcher	Ozella Stinson
Mike & Linda Swanson	Jeanne Templeton
Amy Greer Thompson	Richard Williams & David Hadlock
Tim & Teresia Wims	Alan & Gaye Wylie
Chock & Marcy Yates	