



FRANKLIN COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Volume 24, Number 6, November/December 2019

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

Date: Monday, November 4, 2019 - Refreshments Provided by Hosts

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Program: Our Artists and Their Work

Place: Cotton Belt Depot, 200 N. Kaufman St., Mount Vernon

Hosts:

Pat and Sid Hudson, BF Hicks, Gail Reed, Jason and Alyssa Burton

FCHA Art Collection

Robert Sterling Long, Curator for the Franklin County Historical Association's Art Collection, will provide information about the works and artists in the FCHA Collection at the Monday, November 4, 2019 regular meeting, to be held at the Cotton Belt Depot Museum.

Donated over the years, the collection showcases artists who have lived and worked in Mount Vernon and Franklin County or have Franklin County ties.

Beginning in the 1860s and 1870s, an art community was planted in Mount Vernon. New generations of teachers trained artists who added to the life of the community over the next 100 years.

Long represents the FCHA in CASETA, the Center for the Appreciation and Study of Early Texas Art, and is also a member of HETAG - the Houston Early Texas Art Group.

Through these organizations, the FCHA Collection has been recognized, with this collection being the only County Association in the CASETA organization.



A director of the FCHA, Long has also served as the Librarian for the Wilkinson Texana Library at the Fire Station Museum in Mount Vernon.

The program will be held in the Cotton Belt Depot Museum, starting at 6 pm. Sandwiches and cookies will be provided in lieu of the usual potluck dinner.

Flappy and the Snakes

Bob and Donna McFarland

We have 7 wood duck boxes on our six acre lake. Each year we have about 15 wood duck hatches, and over 200 baby wood ducks jump out of their box when they are 1 day old. We also get 1-2 hooded merganser hatches at the beginning of the nesting season and 1-2 black bellied whistling duck hatches at the end of the season. 2019 was an unusual year -- it will be remembered as “the year of the snake”.



Wood Duck



Whistler



Hooded Merganser

On our lake we installed a video camera in one of our duck boxes and laid wire from the camera to TV in our house. We see mama duck in the box moving the wood chips around until they suit her. We see her lay her eggs one per day until she has 10 – 15. If more than one duck lays eggs in the box, we may have as many as 30 eggs. We watch her incubate her eggs for 28 – 35 long days and nights.

A few days before hatch day mama starts talking to her babies. When we turn up the volume, we can hear the baby ducks talking back to mama from inside their shell. The babies are imprinting on mama’s voice even before they hatch.

Hatch day is exciting. Even though each of the eggs was laid on a different day, they will all hatch within a few hours. The babies hatch with part of the egg yolk attached to their stomach. Over the next 24 hours they will absorb much of the egg yolk, and that will make them strong enough to climb up the ladder on the inside of the box.

The day after hatch day is jump day. On the morning of jump day mama duck will fly down to the water and call to her babies. They will climb the ladder and jump out into the world.



Mama duck will lead them to a safe place on the lake and hide them to keep them safe from the owls and the hawks.



One of our grandchildren is Holly (14). She designed the DNA Disaster escape room in the old jail as a girl scout project. She was here with a friend as mama duck was incubating her eggs in our camera box. Our grandchildren name all of our mama ducks, and they named this one “Flappy”. Flappy was in for a memorable hatch day.

We have snakes on our lake -- water moccasins and diamond back water snakes. The diamond backs are the bigger threat to the ducks. They get into the boxes and swallow the eggs and the babies. They are not poisonous snakes, but they are aggressive. They don't run away from you, they come toward you. And they are BIG.



Flappy's hatch day arrived, and all was going well. Of the 21 eggs in the box, 17 had hatched. We turned away from the TV, and when we looked again, there was a big diamond back snake coming into the box. Flappy had flown down to the water in great distress and was doing her wounded duck act to try and distract the snake.

Donna and I grabbed the .22 and ran to the box. By the time we got there, the snake had already swallowed 3 of the babies. I shot the snake. The shooting spooked Flappy, so she flew. There were 13 babies that were still alive and a few unhatched eggs. The babies were very quiet as though they were playing dead. We cleaned up the snake blood and put everything in order, shut the door on the box, and hoped for the best.

About 15 minutes later Flappy came back to the nest. Flappy started talking to them with an urgent tone to her voice, and the babies came back to life and started crawling up on mama's back.

And then, unbelievably, another snake started crawling up the post to get into the box. By the time we got there the snake had its head inside the box and had his mouth firmly on Flappy's wing. I held the door of the box open while Donna shot the snake. Flappy was in total panic mode and flew off the lake.

We were thinking that we were going to be reluctantly raising 13 baby wood ducks and started gathering our baby duck gear. Then a miracle happened. Brave Flappy came back to the box, but she didn't come into the box. She sat in the water and called for her babies to jump.

The babies were only a few hours old, and only a few were strong enough to climb the ladder and jump out. Flappy had apparently decided to take the ones that could jump and leave the others behind.

Donna and I could see what was going to happen. After several minutes of discussion about what to do, we ran back down to the box. Donna carefully took each of the babies still in the box and dropped them into the lake. Though they weren't strong enough to climb the ladder, they were able to swim.

When the babies hit the water, they started chirping which is their way of saying "Mama, I'm here. Come get me". Mama duck was watching all of this from the other side of the lake. When we turned and walked away, mama duck immediately came and gathered up all of her babies and took them across the lake to some heavy cover.

The story of Flappy and her babies was almost over, but not quite. When we went back to clean out the box, there were 3 unhatched eggs, and one of them was hatching. We found our incubator and put the partially hatched egg in there. Fifteen minutes later we had a new baby duck. We named him "Tiny".

The next day when Tiny was strong enough to join his family, we took Tiny and did a thorough search for Flappy and her babies, but she was nowhere to be found. She was somewhere on the lake, but there are lots of places where she could put her babies, and it would be nearly impossible to find them.

So.....we are now in the process of raising Tiny. He has turned out to be a very strong, independent baby wood duck that has imprinted on Donna and her voice. He follows her everywhere she goes and responds immediately to her voice. This photo of Tiny was taken when he was 3 days old.



Tiny is now 5 weeks old. When he is 8 weeks old, he will start flying. Each day he will fly farther and higher. Then he will be gone over night, but he will come back for some good home cooking. Then one day he won't come back. We don't know yet if Tiny is a male or a female. If Tiny is a female, she will come back here next Spring looking for a place to nest. If Tiny is a male, he will pair up with a female and go with her to her home lake.

Postscript: We shot 8 big snakes (7 diamond back water snakes and 1 water moccasin) in our duck boxes this year which is way more than the 1-2 that we typically shoot. Since Donna shot that last snake getting into Flappy's box, we haven't seen another snake on our lake. Maybe Donna shot the last snake in Franklin County.

A Story – When I Got Some Real Game Experience

I was in my 2nd year of high school in 1954 and had only played one “down” of high school football at the time. But, one afternoon after football practice our head coach called me and a friend up front in our dressing room and announced that we would be playing that night for the School junior high team. This was real news since normally only 7th, 8th and 9th grade boys played on the junior high school team, but since they were short of boys and talent to play on the team at the time, apparently my high school coach wanted to help the junior high team out and give me and another sophomore boy some game experience.

The head coach instructed that my friend and I get going downtown and have a sandwich at the “local hang-out” café, and report back to board a school bus with the rest of the junior high team for the game. So, we did with “game bags” being packed with our uniforms and gear while we were gone, and was that burger with all the “fixins”, good. So, as we rode through town we joined the “pep-squad” bus, with our two busses forming a small convoy, north, toward the “out of town site” of the game.

There are many wide, flat, prairie areas north of our little town, and being the fall of the year, the cotton-gathering season was well underway. So, as we rode along in the school bus, one cotton-gin was hardly out sight before we could see another, with its plume of white smoke visible for miles. By this time in the era, each cotton-gin site had its own facility for burning the cotton-burrs and other such trash picked up during the raw cotton gathering process.

EPILOGUE: Our Junior High School Team was the Mount Vernon Tigers with the head high school coach at the time being Wayne Pierce, and the Junior High School coach being Troy Pittman. Later that year our head high school coach resigned from Mount Vernon and joined the Dallas Independent School District where he had a career as a high school basketball coach and administrator.

The Junior High team played against on that occasion was the Clarksville (Texas) Tigers.

The route taken by the school busses to the game was State Highway 37, north of Mount Vernon across White Oak Creek and Sulphur River, and through the little cotton producing communities of Bogata and Fulbright, Texas.

The other sophomore player with me on that trip was Kenneth Raley, and the operator of the “pep squad” bus was the grade (elementary) school principal, Jack D. Henry.

And, I do not remember much about the game except that the Clarksville team consisted of all 9th graders with the team being “real good”. And, I played in the defensive line for our team during most of the game, with the Clarksville team defeating us by several touchdowns.

And, I also remember that due to crowding on the team bus, my friend and I were assigned to ride the pep-squad bus from Clarksville, back to Mount Vernon. And, since most of the riders on this pep-squad bus were 9th grade girls that we knew from School, Kenneth and I did not mind this at all. In fact, on the ride home that night one of the 9th grade girls who was one of my favorites, anyway, whispered in my ear that I had done some “pretty-good playing” that night, such compliment that I have never forgotten.

Ralph K. Banks

Austin, Texas (formerly of Mount Vernon and Franklin County, Texas)

THE STANDARD
October 27, 1860

Mt. Vernon Ratification And Demonstration Meeting
from the Mt. Pleasant Union

Pursuant to previous notice in "The Union," on the 10th inst., a Breckinridge and Lane ratification meeting took place.

Early in the morning of that day, the patriotic, the unterrified democracy, began pouring in from all directions their faces beaming with joy, and their actions exhibiting a consciousness of the rectitude of the principles they adhered to. Hour after hour the assembly continued to increase till eleven o'clock, such a numerous concourse of people been seen in the peaceful and retired village of Mt. Vernon-never such a political pageantry in the county of Titus. But one voice seemed to animate and pervade the whole assembly: an unbounded enthusiasm for the Constitutional Democracy and its standard bearers, Breckinridge and Lane.

A liberty pole having been previously erected the grand and imposing spectacle of running up the "star spangled banner" with the names of Breckinridge, Lane, and the Constitution amid loud and prolonged huzzas, for the noble standard-bearer, and peal after peal of fire arms. The men, drawn up in a compact square, under the shade of forest trees, a band of music in the distance gave notice that a procession of the fair ones was approaching, for the purpose of presenting a Breckinridge and Lane Banner. Arrived on the spot, the presentation was made by Miss Laura Rutherford, accompanied with a feeling and patriotic address. Joshua Stephens received the banner, replying to Miss R. in a manner happy and highly creditable. It was a delightful and animating scene.

A procession was then formed, and the long columns marched to the tune of the "Star Spangled Banner," to the large and commodious Christian church. Arrived, Dr. G.L. Rutherford, the marshall of the day waited for the order. On motion, he was elected Chairman, and Wm. C. Lovins was requested to act as Secretary.

Dr. Rutherford then stated that the object of the meeting was then plain to enumerate and he proceeded with a few brief remarks. The motion was made and seconded for that purpose of endorsing the ticket and a committee was appointed to draft a preamble and resolutions expressive of the official sense of the meeting.

Mr. Fanning, Geo. Levins, John D. Stephens, John D. Graham, Wm. C. Holbrook, William C. Wright, Rufus Mann, Geo. F. Yates, Geo. B. Conly and Wm. C. Loving, were appointed said committee, and after a short delay, reported the following preamble and resolutions, which were unanimously adopted.

WHEREAS, Democratic principles, from the inception of our Federal Constitution have ever been promotive of the Union of the States: and the adherents of such principles have neither known nor acknowledged any criterion, other than the Federal Constitution, which guarantees equal rights and protection to person and property, wheresoever its powers extend: That the only power conferred by that instrument on the general government over slave and other private and...property in the Territories, the common property of the States, "is a power coupled with duty of guarding and protecting such property." That in the present condition of the party, there being no nominee, according to the time honored usage, we give our adherence to that candidate, who is the representative of principles in harmony with former expressions of the Democracy, and in unison with the Constitution, and the decision of the Supreme Court of the Dred Scott case. Therefore,

Resolved, That we recognize John C. Breckinridge as the only true candidate of the National Democracy, for the office of the President of the United States and Joseph Lane as the only true candidate for the office

of Vice President; and that we hereby approve, endorse and ratify these nominees, and will sustain them in the present campaign, and at the ballot box.

Resolved, That we heartily endorse and approve the administration of our Chief Magistrate, James Buchanan; and that the able and statesmanlike manner in which the government under his administration has been administered, entitles him not only to the gratitude of the Democracy, but of the whole American people.

Resolved, That the declaration, from whatever source, that the recent excitement in our State, from the burning of towns and the attempts at wholesale poisoning and bloodshed,...upon deep laid abolition schemes, is a humbug and gotten up for political effect, is an extravagance as false as monstrous-exhibit but little sympathy for our suffering citizens, and much with the authors and agents of the irrepressible conflict doctrine.

Resolved, That the editor of The Union be requested to publish the proceedings of this meeting, and the editor of the Standard be requested to copy the same.

J.L. Rutherford, Chairman

Wm. C. Loving, Secretary

Joshua Stephens being called on responded in an eloquent and telling speech of two hours length reviewing the whole course of political parties from the Whigs and Tories of the revolution up to the formation of the present new party, which is so devoted to the Union and Constitution, their great efforts to impress this great idea seems their whole political capital in the present canvass, if we omit the disunion hobby.

It being late, W.C. Loving was next called upon, who answered in a few brief and desultory remarks, when the meeting adjourned. Upon the whole it was a glorious day for the Democracy, in Titus, which will go for Breckinridge eight to one.

Advertisement from The Standard, published in Clarksville, Texas, weekly, 1860 – winter
(the notice appears for many issues; as late as Saturday, Feb. 9, 1861)

Mt. Vernon Female Academy

The second term of the 4th annual session of this Institute conducted by Miss Maggie Fanning will be the First Monday in January. The course of Instruction will be general and thorough, embracing all the branches usually taught in first class Female Schools with the French language and ornamental branches. Due attention will be paid by Miss Fanning concerning the health and deportment of all pupils entrusted to her care.

The Musical Department will be supervised by Miss E.J. Patton, a competent and experienced teacher whose pupils will enjoy superior advantages.

Terms of Board & Tuition – Reasonable as elsewhere. Mt. Vernon, Titus County, December 29, 1860.

Additional notes from issues of The Standard concerning Mt. Vernon:

June 29, 1861 – report of Mt. Vernon group of men organizing company for war. In fact, in September 1861, the Mt. Vernon Grays are one of the first groups to march.

July 13, 1861 – notice that the Mt. Vernon Male and Mt. Vernon Female Academies have merged.

Refer also to the 1904 brochure of the Franklin Institute (successor to the Academies). The institute

Changing Lifestyles

Prepared by Martha Hare and presented by her to annual membership meeting of Franklin County Historical Association, 1996.

In 1940, in Franklin County, 80% of the population still lived in the countryside. Then World War II came and the world was turned upside down. Young men went to war. Men above 35 went to work in defense plants – to Big D, and elsewhere. And they began making real money instead of barely subsisting on a failing corn crop. And after they had lived with indoor plumbing and electricity and picture shows and grocery stores... “How you gonna keep ‘em down on the farm?” –became reality.

The population of Franklin County dropped back to its 1900 level in 1950 and would not show an increase again until 1980 with the coming of the lake. Farms were consolidated and the transition went from small farms to cattle land. And we again have wild game: deer and turkey. Panthers are back. And now we have had a bear – the first reported since 1877.

We may not see the return of the prairie chicken – the last of which was killed off at Daphne Prairie about 1890.

The march of progress that brought about the desertion as much as the war – was the Texas farm-to-market road program. The program began in the early 1940’s under Governor W. Lee O’Daniel. It was postponed during the war and finalized with the Colson Briscoe Act of 1949. It established a state program for paving roads and provided the money to get Texas farmers “out of the mud.” The purpose of the FM program was to provide paved roads for school buses and rural mail and milk routes. But it did more: it allowed people to move easily from their farms to the town and continue working the farm. Farmers could live in town and still be farmers.

One result of the FM program was the consolidation of school systems and the bussing of children into the towns. The children attended school in town; parents could drive into town to attend church. The communities moved into the towns.

Luckily Mt. Vernon was a county seat; had we not been carved out, we might not be much more than a Saltillo or Winfield. East Texas and Franklin County saw the demise of the rural school system and the one room frame schoolhouse, and the demise of the villages – the communities – that were built around these rural schools.

Look also at the communities which had post offices: even population sufficient in an area to warrant a post office; our small county has had 16 different communities with post offices, including Etna, Francis, Lavada, Laws, Musgrove, Wren and Yale.

With better roads, AND the advent of the automobile, people could drive a bit further and post offices were centralized. About 1906 you see a great number of closings. When that happened, one more aspect of community was lost; people were no longer going into the community / the village center. In the next two decades, with free rural mail delivery on the much improved roads, the necessity for these rural post offices was lost almost totally and today we see only two post offices in all of Franklin County – in Mt. Vernon and at Scroggins.

The farming picture changed during the 1940’s. Sid Hicks has written of the mechanization of farming practices. The shift began after WWII when the average farmer was no longer a subsistence farmer living mostly off his land and barely getting by, but was a farming business man who looked to make money out

of his agricultural practice. The move was away from cotton farming to ranching and dairying and poultry farming and truck farming. The crossroads village was not a part of this farming practice.

We in Mt. Vernon look at our town. We have a problem with downtown and now we have State Highway 37 developing the same series of tasteless treeless fast food strips and stores like every other town in America. The town was once the center of civic life where everybody came to buy, sell; to “do business” - the business that keeps a community alive.

There were theatres, cafes, drug stores, barber shops, 5& dimes, grocery stores, hardware stores, all sorts of clothing stores. The Galt livery stable, lumber yard, courts (as in motel), and feed stores. Lawyers, doctors and other professionals. Men and women stopped on the sidewalk to talk. On Saturdays everybody went to town. And we kids went to the drug stores and consumed milkshakes and malts and cherry cokes or limeades. Mt. Vernon had a thriving downtown that was the heartbeat of the town and county. I can't fault the Bypass of the town which was invited by our city fathers at the time; it was just the final nail on the coffin of that way of life.

We now have to appeal to some tourist traffic. Wal-Mart has just about gobbled up the markets for all the downtown stores that once furnished the necessities for our daily lives.

The villages now being deserted are the downtown main streets all over America. The 7-11 stores made the move early and found that setting up shop in the midst of a suburban neighborhood was good business. They provided services relieving neighbors of a trip downtown. Business followed. And then Wal-Marts and malls were built to house this “stuff” that society needs and wants.

It is natural that we look back to simpler times; where folks learned the proper moral values and loyalty to God, country and man. We still had a continuing connection to the old home place – to a real hometown – where everybody knew and visited with everybody else – where people had an easily identified place and purpose. We have left that behind and we will not go back. Our mission as historians and preservationists is to insure the continuing sense of place.

Prominent legal historian Joe McKnight says we must teach Texas history. That it cannot be dropped from the school curriculum. That if we do not teach it, there is no sense of pride or place. We have little vandalism here because of that sense of pride. Pride in this place. We are the guardians of that heritage; of our shared or adopted heritage for those of you who now come to live with us. We welcome you and appreciate your efforts and insuring a better quality of life for all of us.

A history of communities in Franklin County allows for ample documentary evidence but often the only remaining physical evidence is a cemetery and sometimes also a church. Look to Macon, Hopewell, and Majors, and Flora Bluff, and Fairview and some 35 other communities in Franklin County and across all of the rural south.

Different economic factors have played various roles in the loss of our rural communities. We could step further back in history when the Hamilton Community was the home of the Caddo Indians. The Caddos either died off from Smallpox or were forced out under the Anti-Indian policies of Mirabeau Lamar starting about 1839. Those Caddos may have looked back with romantic nostalgia on their deserted village of Hamilton – which would be excavated as the Galt Site in 1937 yielding a wealth of burial goods – hauled off to the University of Texas campus.

Our earliest communities are on the Cherokee Trace running north-south along the eastern edge of our county – a much earlier Indian trail dating back hundreds of years and used by the Cherokees as they

trekked in at Sam Houston's invitation and trudged back when expelled by the next president of the Texas Republic. Then communities developed along the east-west Choctaw trail. Then at springs such as those south of downtown Mt. Vernon and south and east of Purley.

Think back to Huckelberry which had a gin, two churches, a store, a school. As late as 1934 Minnie Birdsong attends her first year of school there.

Franklin County farmers plowed and planted in five and ten and twenty acre plots; a field of corn, a planting of the money crop – cotton; several rows of ribbon cane – syrup was a staple; a vegetable garden.

The center of the farms – a community – a church that could also serve as the school. A store, sometimes a gin, a grist mill, a blacksmith shop. Mt. Vernon's grist mill was on the creek at the northeast corner of Holbrook and Majors Street; remnants of machines still lie in the creekbed.

Communities have proven as transitory as life. But they had their time of importance – as a necessary part of commerce and human settlement.

We had no water transportation; but there was a ferry across both White Oak and across Sulphur. The Ringo Ferry was operated until the 1940's. We had the Indian trails which were expanded into the series of roads serving the county. In 1875 Mt. Vernon becomes the county seat.

We had the rail lines – across the south; through the middle; and going north to Paris.

Jabez Galt conducted oral interviews back in the 1960's which tell a great deal of life here in the 1800's. We also have diaries written by quite a few early settlers. Most notably – a Stewart living on the Ury Place – later to be known as the Haynes Place – just east of town. And a Carson memoir of the years after the Civil War. And the 1925 articles by Dan Bolin.

Steamboat traffic was important to us. Most early families here have at least one piece of furniture brought up from New Orleans to Jefferson and then packed by mule or ox drawn wagon to Franklin County. By the 1870's the railroads started reaching into East Texas. The right of way is purchased here in 1882 and the first train comes through in 1887.

The communities didn't just have churches and schools. Purley had a Masonic lodge. So did Gray Rock. On the 1850 and 1860 census Gray Rock is larger than the village of Mt. Vernon. As late as 1917, the Gray Rock basketball team is still competing in Titus County tournaments.

The average farm in 1900 was under 40 acres; all that a family could work with a mule and a Georgia stock or a team and cultivator. William Humphrey of Clarksville wrote in *THE ORDWAYS* that these farmers – who made the real sacrifice and died for the Confederate Cause – weren't slave owners at all – the great majority of whites in the south didn't have slaves; they fought because they wanted no one telling them what they could do on that 40 acres which included the right to have that slave if they could ever just "get ahead."

The small subsistence farms that clustered around these villages were much the same as they had been for generations. Rural people lived mostly off the land. They raised cotton and some corn for a money crop. For themselves and their stock and as barter they raised corn and maize, ribbon cane, a yard full of chickens, guineas, some hogs and a few cows and a vegetable garden. They made jelly out of wild plums, berries and canned whatever was cannable. They had smokehouses. They stored milk and butter in lard cans that floated in a spring house or a milkhouse. They ate clabber and drank buttermilk and bluejohn.

They had lambs quarters and poke salet. They kept trotlines in the rivers, hunted squirrels, coons, and possums, and ambushed quails, doves and any unwary ducks and geese that came their way. They ate whatever was at hand. Peas or squash, corn. Not much beef. Pork. Yes. They didn't eat what they wanted; they ate what they had.

Their granddaddies had supplemented diets with deer and bear but by 1900, the bear were gone and by the 1930's so were the deer.

Bill Holmes talked about being at Hagansport and seeing the oil derricks at Talco. The land cleared of trees across miles of country; today reverted to woodland. Dosia Hefner said the biggest change for her at the end of a life spanning 103 years was the change from cleared farmland back to green forest.

One church might serve several denominations. Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians.

As late as 1920 – 88% of the American population lived in rural communities – like Hopewell – home to Dr. Byron Bennett, first assistant to Dr. Jonas Salk in the discovery of the polio vaccine; or Panther's Chapel – home to Dan Dodson who went on to national prominence – and Daphne and Gray Rock whose native sons went on to lead state government just north of us when Oklahoma moved from territorial status to statehood.

The roads were unpaved; water was drawn from wells. Cisterns and outhouses were parts of all homescapes and electricity stopped at the city limits of the county seat. The town gets no public water service until after 1910; no electric service until the 1920's; and gas lines come into homes in 1928. Dan Bolin says in 1925 that the town was filled with the clatter of axes as men and boys chopped wood on Saturday mornings to provide for cookstoves (and heating in season) for the coming week.

Don Easterling, our museum mainstay in giving frequent tours of the Indian collection he has donated, speaks of a logging community – the Ogletree sawmill community north of White Oak Creek. These communities too were common across the forestland of the south.

We have preserved what we can. Be mindful of our heritage on display in the facilities operated by the historical association; real places telling real stories. Thanks for your support of our organization.

Memorials & Honorariums

Donated By:

Darwin & Connie McGill
John Bradberry-Cynthia Loftis
Vivian Monzingo
Jaime Bennett

Donated By:

Jaime Bennett
Jaime Bennett

In Memory Of:

Mary Ellen Cowser
Mary Ellen Cowser
Mary Ellen Cowser
Mary Hicks

In Honor Of:

BF Hicks
BF Hicks

Donna Page Art Reception

FCHA hosted an artist reception for Donna Page and Women's Art Force on Friday, October 11th from 5-7 p.m. at the Fire Station Museum with approximately 125 guests in attendance. The show featured Donna's large impressionistic abstract paintings, some small works paintings and the illustrated pages from her children's book, *Katrina Dogs*, which she wrote and illustrated. Donna's talent is in a variety of mediums ranging from traditional impressionistic fine art pieces to a technique called negative painting which creates a more abstract form of fine art.

Sandra St. John was on hand autographing House No. 5 Paradise in Paros. The last work by Sandy's late husband, Bob St. John, the memoir tells of the couple's love of Greece, its people and the island of Paros.

Other works of art included pieces on exhibit were from Marilyn Arnaud, Nancy Beauchamp, Collette Bowling, Teresa Garrett, Mary Geisler, Hal and Georgia Gibson, Ann Glaess, Valerie Guignon, Tracy Hopkins, Margit Iguchi, Gabrielle Mattox, Nancy Pool, Dianna Powrie, Marianne Reavis, Amy Spence, Mary Spencer, Sandy St. John, Jane St. Romain, Dolores Wright, and Denise Zasowski.

The artists used a variety of mediums, including acrylic and oil paintings, mosaics, pottery and fabric art. We hope you'll come by the Fire Station Museum to see this colorful exhibition which will be on display through January 3, 2020.



Above: Collaborative painting by Women's Art Force

Top Right: LtoR: Lisa Lowry, Sheryl Divin, Glen Shelton, Diana Shelton, Kelly Briley, John Hicks

Right: Visitors enjoy the many styles of art on display



The Family Hero

By Kay Howell

It was unusual for my grandfather to come to our house in the middle of the day. He parked his car in the driveway and strode into the house without knocking. I followed him and watched as he handed Mother a piece of paper. She read it and gave it back to him with a look on her face I did not understand.

That was the only time I ever saw Papa cry. Mother took his arm and guided him toward the couch in the living room. She saw me watching them and in a shaky voice commanded, "Go outside and play."

I turned and ran, but I didn't play. I picked up my doll and went to my favorite hiding place behind a large shrub in the flowerbed. There was an open window above my head. I could hear what was being said, but it made no sense to me.

During the next few days I eavesdropped a lot and finally saw an opportunity to ask Mother to explain what I had heard. She was busy at her sewing machine. "What's a prisoner of war?" I asked.

"Where did you hear that?"

I ignored her question and asked another of my own. "Is Uncle Bill a prisoner of war?"

Mother dropped her sewing in her lap and looked at me for what seemed to be a long time before she answered, "Yes, Uncle Bill is a prisoner of war."

"What's that mean?"

Again there was a long pause. "That means the German soldiers locked him up so he couldn't fight them anymore."

"Then they must be scared of him," I declared.

"I imagine they are," she answered. "He's very strong and very brave."

Uncle Bill was indeed a Nazi Germany prisoner of war. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, he was captured while serving in Tunisia and sent to Stalag 3B where 4,222 American POW's were held. He was imprisoned at least from March 28, 1943, to June 12, 1945, a total of 807 days or two years and three months. The average duration of imprisonment was 363 days. (The Red Cross says "at least" because sometimes notification to them was delayed.) Uncle Bill weighed 98 pounds when he was liberated. He was hospitalized for a length of time—I don't know how long—and then returned home to live on the farm with Mama and Papa.

Uncle Bill was not a handsome man. He was just sort of average: not very tall, but strong and muscular from hard work in the fields; a high school graduate, but not an A student; a gentle way of handling animals, but not a brilliant conversationalist. It was his eyes I always admired. Bright blue, peering at me from a face tanned by the sun, sparkling with love of the land. Salt of the earth. A farmer.

A different Uncle Bill came home from Stalag. He was thin and weak and bald. He looked at me with eyes that were pale and dull, like faded blue wallpaper slowly peeling away from the wall. They seemed to say, "I've seen too much, and I won't look anymore."

Uncle Bill never talked about his imprisonment. He had difficulty sitting still, particularly in a room with several people. When the family came for a visit, he would become more and more restless and eventually leave the grownups and join my cousins and me under the Shady Oak, where we usually played. There were six of us by then, three girls and three boys. I was the oldest girl; one boy was older than me.

Using his pocket knife, Uncle Bill would make whimsical animals from acorns and sticks and bits of flexible wire. While he worked, he would tell us about the piewinkles. They were little animals about two and a half feet high with long necks and big yellow eyes. They would stretch their long necks to peek around corners or through the bushes to watch us and then jerk back and hide when we turned to look at them. Uncle Bill said they only lived on the farm, and he could see them. We spent a lot of time looking for the piewinkles but never saw one.

Uncle Bill remained on the farm and slowly recovered. He married and had one daughter. Then many years later during a holiday visit, my father asked me to go with him to the grocery store. As soon as he pulled the car away from the curb Dad said, "Your Uncle Bill came to see me the other day."

"How is he?" I asked.

"About the same. Those Germans really messed him up good. He told me all about it."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Uncle Bill had never ever talked about his ordeal. "What did he tell you?"

"It's terrible. I can't tell you. It's just awful."

"I wonder why he told you," I mused.

Dad pulled into a parking space. "Maybe because we're the only veterans in the family still alive," he said as he shut off the motor. "We need some bread," a signal to me the conversation was over.

A few months later Uncle Bill died; of course I attended the funeral. I sat next to my cousin Linda who, when we were children, played under the Shady Oak with me and looked for piewinkles. Her husband was an ordained minister and gave the eulogy. In spite of a long, event-filled life, he told us, Uncle Bill's proudest accomplishment was serving in the United States Army.

Through my tears I saw a little animal stretch its long neck around the corner of the casket and peer at me with big yellow eyes. This time it didn't jerk back. It just looked at me and winked, and I winked back. I had a new friend.

Rest easy, Uncle Bill. We won't forget.

My dad, Sheriff Junior Tittle, Coaches Mark Boatright and Don Jones – Three Heroes!

Jerry Tittle

We probably all have at least one hero in our lives. I have three who stand head and shoulders above all the others in my life: my dad, former Franklin County Sheriff Junior Tittle, and my junior high football coaches, Mark Boatright and Don Jones. Their paths crossed directly on a dark stretch of Highway 19, north of Sulphur Springs, Sept. 29, 1959, and what I witnessed from the three of them still resonates with me 60 years later.

Head Coach Boatright and Assistant Coach Jones coached everything, all levels, junior high through high school, and we were heading to Cooper for a junior high football match-up with the Bulldogs. It promised to be a good one, and just minutes ahead of our bus was a Mount Vernon student support bus loaded with a bunch of high energy junior high and high school kids and two highly respected and well-loved adults to drive and chaperon. The night held great potential, but with one heartbeat and a blink of an eye, it ended in tragedy, one that brought Mount Vernon to its knees for months to come.

Boatright had me by him on the front seat, talking game strategy; Don Jones was driving our junior high football bus. The three of us must have spotted it at the same time, a wrecked school bus up ahead where the highway banked to the left and curved down and away to the right, just at the turn-off to Cooper. Jones eased our bus to the shoulder and stopped, some distance behind the wreck. A disappearing sun had started to produce soft shadows around the wrecked bus, balanced at an odd angle on the roadway embankment, facing down into the ditch. There was not a sound, yet the eerie silence was deafening, and we couldn't see much, but I remember one motorist on the scene, walking on the roadway behind the wreck. It had just happened!

With a plan of action in place, Boatright faced us calmly and with authority, he said, "Fellows, something bad has happened here, and Coach Jones and I are going in there to help. I want you all to file off this bus and sit there in that ditch, together, along that barbed wire fence. I better not hear of or see anyone trying to get to that bus! Am I clear?" Of course, we were clear and we complied quickly.

With that, these two heroes grabbed a roll of paper towels from our bus and charged through the open rear door, the only available entrance to the wrecked bus. They saved lives in there; we've been told that many times since, while allowing their instinct and training to take over, as all heroes do. These guys knew how to coach, but they also knew how to mold young lives. I have to be a better person for having known them.

Darkness lay over the entire area soon enough, broken only by the headlights and flashing red and blue lights from emergency responders flooding to the scene. We huddled in that ditch forever, it seemed, like young soldiers sitting in a foxhole. Sirens screamed, and echoes pierced the night from every direction. Silence had suddenly been replaced with tools and equipment buzzing and working and voices yelling commands to "do this," or for someone to "get over here and give us a hand, will you?" Metaphorically speaking, the wrecked bus started to wake up, slipping into and out of consciousness, and mixed sounds from the inside are with me to this day. The earth underneath us smelled damp and cool, while a sharp and pungent odor, like exhaust fumes, hung in the air. Surely we were in some kind of war zone and something incoming was about to explode in the ditch beside us.

Some along the fence row began to cry, a group of 13-14 year olds, suddenly caught up in one of life's hard lessons: any given moment is often fragile and fleeting and hard to hold.

Some time went by while the entire process of responding to the scene became very loud and intense. I wanted to cry also, when suddenly, a flashlight high-beam swept over us and a deep voice yelled, "Is the Tittle kid there? Is Tittle there?" I remember an officer in uniform grabbing my hand and pulling me up to the roadway.

There, running down the center stripe toward me, a silhouette in his car headlights, was my dad, arms outstretched and unmistakable in his hat and boots. Only when he bear-hugged me, on that dark highway in those very unfamiliar surroundings, with all the madness and chaos unfolding behind me, did I allow myself to cry. Until that second, neither he nor my mother knew which bus was involved. On their way to the game, he had radioed ahead and his fellow officers along the way took the search over to look for me.

In shock, I rode back to Mount Vernon with my parents in my dad's patrol car. Townspeople were getting news by then, and they were beginning to trickle into town, to the square and the courthouse, to support, to just be near someone, anyone, to be available throughout the night. My dad used the Sheriff's Office in the courthouse basement, and he and my mother took to the telephone and the two-way radio to receive and process information for the families affected. This lasted all night and all the next day. Six of my fellow students and the two cherished adults died in the crash, a collision with a big-rig salt hauler from Grand Saline. The injured were carried everywhere, from Dallas to Greenville, Cooper, Paris, Sulphur Springs and elsewhere.

School was canceled for the week and sporting events were stopped for the year. In many ways, Mount Vernon is still recovering from that fall night in 1959. It's odd: I can't remember when Mark Boatright or Don Jones left Mount Vernon, but I remember they were heroes that night. And, of course, Sheriff John Ennis (Junior) Tittle has always been a hero to me.

Sixty years later, when I drive by the Cooper turn off, my chest tightens and my breathing is shallow, and for a few seconds a handful of 13-14 year old boys are huddled with me in that ditch, along that barbed wire fence, staring into a black night with fear and uncertainty in our eyes. We've all moved on with our lives, but I am forever troubled by grief telling me to turn loose before I move on. I will die one day knowing in my heart that I was never able to completely let go of September 29, 1959, just another ordinary Tuesday in Mount Vernon – until it wasn't.

Pineapple Congealed Salad

By Karen Smith

- 1 can (20 oz.) crushed pineapple in natural juice
- 1 pkg. (6 oz.) lemon gelatin
- 1 small (4 oz.) pkg. Philly cream cheese, room temperature
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- ½ cup chopped celery
- ½ cup chopped pecans



Boil pineapple with juice in medium saucepan and add lemon gelatin. Stir until gelatin is dissolved and remove from heat. While gelatin is still warm, add softened cream cheese and stir until fully melted. Stir in mayonnaise until fully mixed. Add chopped celery and pecans. Pour into a large dish and refrigerate until congealed, about four hours. Serve with saltine crackers.

Karen Smith is originally from Mt. Pleasant, but has lived in Mt. Vernon most of her life. Karen has a daughter, Lydia Carrascosa, who is on staff at Texas A&M Commerce, and a son, Marty, who resides in Houston. Karen's late husband, Dennis, was an amateur archeologist and spent many hours outdoors in search of Indian artifacts. Karen now spends her time serving our community and playing out her role as a grandmother.

Project Pollination

Special thanks to
Cher Megasko for
donating
pollinating plants
to FCHA to bring
awareness to our
beautiful butterfly
collection at the
Fire Station
Musuem! The
children loved
taking a "butterfly"
plant home!



Notes From The Office Manager

It's hard to believe 2019 is coming to a close. We have had a record number of visitors to see our exhibits this year and it would not have been possible without our loyal docents who kept the Fire Station Museum and Cotton Belt Depot doors open. FCHA is so appreciative of your time and service to our organization.

Special thanks to Ken Greer, Frankie Cooper, Kathy Shelton, Don Easterling, Johanna Deal, Paul and Victoria Fletcher, Greg Carr, Chock & Marcy Yates, Sandy Tower, Sheryl Divin, Kelly Briley, Cindy Stutts, Elaine Thomas, Jerald and Mary Lou Mowery, John Bradberry, Cynthia Loftis, Tommie Smith, Bill & Lauren Herman, Ruby Neeley, Steve and Pat Wright, and Pat Hudson, John Hicks, Robert Long, Joel and Laurie Dihle, and Micky Hunter.

There are various ways to get involved and volunteer at FCHA, whether you'd like to become a museum docent, help out at one of our many events or work a few hours at our office headquarters.

To learn more about each of our volunteer programs, call 903-537-4760. We would love to have you as part of our team!

Franklin County Historical Association
Announces

Our new Website has launched!

Visit us at
www.fchatx.com



Guy P. Hill Hardware Store ca. 1900. One of the many historical photos on our new website.
Visit www.fchatx.com to see more!

CountryFest a Success

CountryFest attendees could not have ordered better weather for this year's event. It was a record-breaking crowd who came out to buy stew, see entertainment, shop the vendor's booths and attend our museums.

The Cotton Belt Depot featured artisans giving live demonstrations which included painting, pottery, candle-making, sculpting, crocheting, balloon-making, and spinning, in addition to the model trains. At the Fire Station Museum, the new Donna Page and Women's Art Force had many mediums of art on display. Don Easterling was on hand to tell about the Indian artifacts. The butterfly and bird eggs as well as the Don Meredith exhibit are always popular attractions.

We appreciate all our volunteers who helped with this year's event: Jaime Bennett, Luiz SiFuentes, Robert Long, John Bradberry, Cynthia Loftis, Pat Hudson, Joel and Laurie Dihle, Bill Herman, Chock and Marcy Yates, Johanna Deal, and Karen Smith.



Above: Diana Shelton makes animal balloons for children

Left: Ruth Green demonstrates the spinning Wheel

Top Left: Nancy Beauchamp creates a chalk drawing

Preservation Texas Visits Mount Vernon

On September 23rd, a delegation from Preservation Texas presented a program to a packed house at the Cotton Belt Depot. Preservation Texas is part of the Texas Historical Commission and the team included County Historical Outreach Coordinator, Amy Hammons, Sue Lazara, Secretary, and Executive Director Evan Thompson, who discussed various ways residents and business owners of Franklin County can take advantage of State and local funding programs to preserve historical buildings and homes.

FCHA would like to thank our City and County officials who attended the event: County Judge Scott Lee, County Commissioners Larkin Jumper, Jerry Cooper, Charlie Emmerson, Sam Young, County Clerk Ellen Jagers, Mayor Teresia Wims, City Judge Kathy Lovier, City Administrator Tina Rose and City Councilman Jason Burton. (*"Photo courtesy of Mount Vernon Optic Herald."*)



Interested in a class
on knife-making?

Call Joel Dihle for details:
309-333-1817

MVISD Third Grade Paper Quilt Show

With seven entries in this year's paper quilt show, the judges had their work cut out for them. Each of the quilts was lovingly made by third grade students at Mount Vernon Elementary, and they really put their creativity out there!

Judges Cindy Kent, Jan Andrews and Jackie Stempel marveled at their work.

Ultimately, winners had to be selected, and this year's prizes were awarded to:

Mrs. Ring's class, 1st place and winner of \$150;

Mrs. Hollingsworth, 2nd place and People's Choice award winner, \$100 and \$50, consecutively;

Mrs. Blair, 3rd place, \$50.

Each class that didn't place received a \$50 participation prize. Congratulations to all!



2020
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION
Franklin County Historical Association
P. O. Box 289
Mount Vernon, TX 75457
903-537-4760

Memberships are based on the calendar year.
Members joining mid-year will receive all publications for that year.

Name _____ Class of Membership & Dues:

Address _____ Individual—\$15.00

City, State, Zip _____ Family—\$25.00

Phone: _____ Patron—\$50.00

Email: _____ Sponsor—\$100.00

I would like to receive my newsletter via email. Check here. _____

Indicate your membership class and mail your dues check to:

FCHA, P.O. Box 289, Mt. Vernon, TX 75457

2020 DUES

Please fill in the above contact information. Circle membership class.

Dues for 2020 (Includes subscription to bi-monthly newsletter) \$ _____

Special tax deductible contribution for operations and maintenance: \$ _____

Special contributions may be designated as memorials or honorariums. Please list the name of the person memorialized or honored, and the name and address of the receipt for notice of your donation:

In Memory/In Honor of: _____

Notice to: _____

Total Enclosed: \$ _____

We need volunteers! Could you work an occasional four-hour shift at one of our museums or a few hours in the office? _____ Yes, call me to schedule. Phone # _____