

Hays County Historical Commission

Minutes of February 4, 2021

The meeting of the Hays County Historical Commission was held February 4th virtually on ZOOM. Kate Johnson, chair, called the meeting to order at 6:04.

Roll Call

A quorum was present at roll call.

Present: Cynthia Allison, Delbert Bassett, Marie Bassett, Eric Beckers, Linda Coker, Anthony Davis, Jeremy Garrett, Patrick Gibson, Cindy Hunter, Kate Johnson, Lila Knight, Jo Landon, Cindy Meyer, Ralph Meyer, Sally Ramirez, Trish Randow, Daphne Tenorio, Willie Tenorio, Alison Tudor, Rosina Valle, Vanessa Westbrook

Absent: Robert Frizzell, Jenny Pack, Ryan Patrick Perkins (who joined the meeting later). Secretary Lila Knight moved to excuse all absences as this meeting was not held on the regularly scheduled 4th Thursday. Motion seconded by Daphne Tenorio and passed unanimously.

[Note: The regularly scheduled meeting on January 28th was cancelled at the last meeting due to the Hays County Clerk failing to post the agenda as required under the Open Meetings Act. The January meeting was re-scheduled to February 4th and some members had previously scheduled meetings or events.]

Citizens Comments

There were no Citizens Comments.

Daphne Tenorio made a motion to accept the minutes from October 22, 2020. The motion was seconded by Kate Johnson and passed unanimously.

Announcements

Chair Kate Johnson thanked Luanne Cullen for her many years of dedicated service as the HCHC Secretary. She also thanked Linda Coker for working diligently as our Vice-Chair over the years.

The Texas State Historical Association will hold its annual conference (online) from February 17 through March 6. They usually offer concurrent sessions, but because it is virtual this year, you will be able to view all the sessions. If you are interested in attending, please contact Kate Johnson and she will sign you up. The fee will be paid by the HCHC as part of our training. She asked the Secretary to send out the email on the conference to all of the members.

Chair Johnson explained for new members that Texas State Law for county historical commissions requires our meetings of the commission to comply with the Texas Open Meetings Act. The Texas Attorney General has a short online training available on their website and she encouraged all members to complete this training and download the certificate for the completion of the training.

Chair Johnson requested the secretary to send out the information on where to find the website to this training. Secretary Knight suggested waiting until after the current legislative session since they may make changes in the law. She will send out the information later this year when any updates have been made.

If anyone would like something included in a future agenda, please send the request to Chair Johnson by email.

Chair Johnson stated that we will be working on recommendations for revisions to our Bylaws to be voted on at a future meeting. We review our bylaws every 2 years to make certain we are in compliance with any changes in Texas State Law or the Rules and Regulations of the Texas Historical Commission. Following the action of this commission, the bylaws will be submitted to the Hays County Commissioners Court for their formal approval.

Introduction of HCHC Members for the 2021-2022 Term

Chair Johnson welcomed all the new and re-appointed members to the new term of the Hays County Historical Commission. She asked everyone to tell the rest something about their background and their interests in Hays County history. Each of the members present responded.

Committee Reports

Chair Johnson explained that most of the work we do is accomplished in the various committees. The Chair of the HCHC appoints both the committee chairs and the officers. She reminded each of the chairs to send her a Plan of Work for 2021. It can be as brief or as detailed as appropriate. She then introduced the current officers: Trisha Randow, vice-chair; Daphne Tenorio, treasurer; and Lila Knight, secretary.

Secretary Knight asked that everyone keep track of their volunteer hours each month and to report them to her. We submit the total number of hours worked to the Texas Historical Commission at the end of the year. We reported 6,801.5 volunteer hours in 2020. Delbert Bassett added that this is not just a bureaucratic exercise, but that THC uses this information in their appropriation requests to the Texas Legislature. Knight also requested the members to keep her informed of any changes in phone numbers or email addresses.

African-American Heritage Committee

Chair Johnson introduced Vanessa Westbrook, the chair of this new committee. She mentioned that we had a Calaboose Committee in the past for the restoration of the building that now houses the Calaboose African-American Museum in San Marcos. But it was time to expand our efforts to documenting the African-American history of all of Hays County.

Vanessa welcomed all the members of her committee and thanked them for signing up. She discussed all of the events underway for Black History Month. Those are listed on our website, as well as the county's website. She will be working with committee members to establish a regularly scheduled date for our meetings.

Cemetery Committee

Chair Johnson introduced Jo Landon, chair. Landon explained that the committee primarily works on Historic Texas Cemeteries designations. In order for a cemetery to receive a subject marker, it must first be designated. The Historical Markers Committee is responsible for the marker applications for cemeteries, but the Cemetery Committee works closely with them.

Presently, the Cemetery Committee is working on documenting the San Vicente Cemetery on Old Stagecoach Road. In addition to the designation application, the cemetery needs a more complete inventory of the gravestone inscriptions. In order to do this safely during the pandemic, she will assign 1-2 people to different sections of the cemetery and they can work on it when appropriate.

One of the more popular activities is to tour little-known cemeteries, many of which are on private lands. We will return to doing this as soon as it is safe. We get many queries regarding cemeteries, and the most interesting one lately was from a wedding planner looking for a place to hold a wedding (at the request of the bride).

Certified Local Government Committee

Chair Lila Knight explained the name and the history of this program since 1991. Hays County was only the second county in Texas to qualify for this program. There are now 17 counties participating. Among the activities required by the THC of this committee are monitoring the status of state and federally designated historic properties and the historic courthouse. In addition, each National register nomination submitted to THC from Hays County is viewed by the committee. The City of San Marcos is also designated a CLG (through their Historic Preservation Commission). The San Marcos CLG works on issues inside the city limits and the Hays County CLG focuses on the rest of the county. She invited anyone wanting to attend committee meetings, which are open to the public, to just contact her.

Courthouse Committee

Linda Coker, chair of the committee, explained the type of activities with which the committee is involved. The committee oversees the Courthouse Museum and gives tours of the courthouse building. Each year, the 5th graders tour the courthouse and the LBJ Museum on the square. She also gets many requests for bus tours through the Visitors' Bureau. There are 2 display cases in the rotunda, one of which is owned by the Veteran's Affairs Office. The Committee will be

refurbishing their exhibit and adding an exhibit on Hispanic history. The Committee also works with the maintenance department on the upkeep of the courthouse grounds and minor repairs around the courthouse.

Chair Coker invited everyone to visit the HCHC offices across the hall from the museum once the building is open again. There is also a meeting room which this committee schedules for use by various community groups.

Hispanic Heritage Committee

Kate introduced the new chair, Willie Tenorio. Chair Tenorio said he planned to create a catalog or inventory of projects that need to be accomplished. He will seek contributions from the committee members on compiling this list. Once compiled, the committee will begin to prioritize the list.

Historical Marker Committee

Chair Marie Bassett welcomed the new members of her committee. All of them are new to the committee, except for Eric Beckers. The committee will be holding a Zoom meeting soon.

She explained that the committee reviews marker applications (regular markers cost money to erect and Undertold markers are free). The Committee members make certain the documentation is correct before submitting to the THC which actually writes the marker text. Then, they make certain the actual marker text is correct and free of errors. The committee also cleans markers and maintains an inventory of markers in Hays County.

The THC announced the new Undertold Markers last week and Hays County did not receive any. Only 15 are approved state-wide. These applications are due in the fall. Regular applications are being received between March 1 and May 15.

There have been delays in the marker program for quite some time. The THC lost their foundry contract and it took a year to get a contract with a new one. We recently received two markers: Jacob's Well is now in place, and; Riverhead Farms has been delivered (it's erection is delayed due to road construction).

The committee also works with the Cemetery Committee in processing subject markers. Chair Bassett remarked that Jo Landon is most fun and a very pleasant person with which to work. The committee will be working with the Cemetery Committee on a future marker for San Vicente, which they visited recently.

Kyle Railroad Depot and Heritage Center

Chair Trisha Randow explained that the Depot has been closed during the pandemic but we are looking forward to its reopening. She reported that we did have one, socially-distanced tour for students from the San Marcos Baptist Academy in October. She also thanked everyone who volunteered to decorate the exterior of the Depot for the Christmas holidays.

Natural Heritage Committee

Chair Delbert Bassett noted that the Hays County Historical Commission is on the only one in the state with a Natural Heritage Committee. The committee planned to check on the heritage trees in Hays County to document their current health last year, but it was postponed because of the pandemic. This will be accomplished in the current year. In 2020, the committee worked at the Stagecoach Park in Buda to identify over 100 plants. We work extensively with the Hays County Master Gardeners and Naturalists.

The committee plans to try and find a unique plant that only grows in four counties, and it is reported there are several areas in Hays County where it is located. In addition, the committee will have a workshop on identifying wildflowers. Eric Beckers and a representative from the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center will lead this workshop. The committee will also learn how to locate and mount specimens for the S. M. Tracy Herbarium at Texas A&M University. There are over 1,000 species they do not have in their extensive collection of Texas plants. In addition, the committee will continue to work at the Stagecoach Park in Buda to identify plants.

Old County Jail Committee

Chair Kate Johnson thanked everyone who signed up for the committee. The historic Hays County Jail, built in 1884, is the second jail for Hays County. It is a rare example of the Italianate style and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and designated a State Antiquities Landmark. The HCHC has been restoring the building for many years in multiple states and the exterior is now complete.

Last year, a preservation architect was hired to prepare plans for the restoration of the interior. We lack about \$105,000 before we can go out to bid for contractors, but we are currently working on raising these funds. The interior restoration should be completed in 2022. Our priority is completing the restoration of the interior, then we will begin work on installing the exhibit

Oral History Committee

Chair Vanessa Westbrook is new to this position and gave an overview of last year's efforts. Due to the pandemic, it was not safe to interview people, but it may be possible to begin this year. Last year, several members participated in an extensive online training at Baylor University. We will continue to look for training opportunities for the committee members. Marie Bassett has volunteered to transcribe the interviews. She also pointed out that many past interviews are located on our website.

Vanessa was recently contacted by a gentleman in Colorado (formerly of San Marcos) who has an oral history with Charlie Williams, who was an African-American undertaker at Rogers Funeral Home. He is one of the first African-Americans to receive a license in Texas. This interview will be on our website soon. She also mentioned she received a nice letter from Ofelia Vasquez-Philo's great-grandson who had never met Ofelia. He was so happy to be able to see and hear her voice in our video interview.

Technology and Website

Chair Johnson explained that this is not really a committee, but introduced Vanessa Westbrook who does our website and Facebook. She said that if any committee chairs need to hold a Zoom meeting, they should contact Vanessa.

Vanessa reported that 26,911 people visited our website in 2020 and received over 300,000 hits. She believed that many students may have used it during virtual learning last year. Our Facebook page currently has 861 followers. The most popular Facebook post was one from Trisha at the Depot during the Christmas holidays. She will give a quarterly update on statistics throughout the year on usage of our social media and website.

Linda Coker reminded the new members that the HCHC had done many documentaries over the years that are listed on the website. She offered to loan members any of the DVDs to watch. Jo Landon also mentioned that many of these are available at your local library.

Adjourn

Chair Johnson thanked everyone for attending and announced the next meeting will be February 25th. Delbert Bassett moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Vanessa Westbrook. The meeting was adjourned at 7:43 pm.