



FRANKLIN COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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OUR MISSION:

*"To Preserve our Natural
and Cultural Heritage"*

UPCOMING EVENTS



**Deborah Burkett receiving honors from the
Daughters of the Republic of Texas Tyler
Chapter**

FCHA MEETING

Place: Mount Vernon Music Hall
402 Leftwich Street

Date & Time: Monday July 7, 2025 6:30 PM

Program: From the Alamo to the Present day
Texans Speak by Dr. Deborah Burkett

Dr. Deborah L. Burkett is a retired educator, author and former site visitor for the American Medical Association, a graduate of Sam Houston State University, the University of Alaska and also has a doctorate in education from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

As a member of the Cherokee County Historical Commission, Daughters of the American Revolution and Daughters of the Republic of Texas, Burkett's roots are deep in the state. Her ancestor, Mary Moore Dickson Long, traveled by covered wagon from Tennessee to the Republic of Texas in 1836. Initially Mary stayed with her cousin, James P. Henderson, who became the first governor of the State of Texas.

Books by Burkett include: 1) Quilts and Their Stories Binding Generations Together (2010). 2) East Texas Piney Woods Spunky Women 1830s-1950s (2016). 3) Remembering Those Buried Beneath the Ce-

dars (2020). 4) From the Alamo to Present Day, Texans Speak (2024) Burkett's presentation will include stories from her recent book while highlighting individuals with connections to Mt. Vernon. She will also discuss the importance of oral history interviews. Utilizing videos and still photographs Burkett offers recommendations on how to conduct interviews.

Testimonial by Dr. Mary Alice Bone Adamson regarding Burkett's latest book—From the Alamo to Present Day, Texans Speak—"Once again from the inquisitive mind, caring heart, trusty camera and faithful pen of Burkett comes another milestone in the historical trail she continues to travel. With Texans Speak, she has given us a most intriguing book in which the subjects speak for themselves. Reading these vignettes of Texas history engenders the strong feeling of wanting to know more!"



REFLECTIONS ON A CLOTHESPIN PULL

John Hicks

Maps showing downtown businesses from 1910 to 1950, printed in the FCHA publication “A Walk through Mt. Vernon,” locate variety stores in multiple buildings on the west side of South Kaufman, going south from the square. One long-lived variety store sat for years where the bank is now, on the corner at West Main. Although other names appeared over its door through its lifetime, it may have best been known as Hightower’s, the name given it by Richard Mercer on his 1938 map.

Some of us locals do remember the stores. When I posted a draft of this piece on Facebook last year, Linda Tinsley recalled Elliott’s Variety at the fourth door south of the corner; and Minnie Birdsong added that the Elliotts, her cousins, made their home upstairs.

The Mercer map shows, on that west side of one block, three variety stores and five groceries. We must remember that these buildings were small and that the businesses which occupied them were yet, at this time, flourishing. Small-town and community leaders who want to encourage retail development today might benefit from a study of downtown shops and services in the mid-1900s.

Willingham’s Variety Store, which plays a role in the following vignette, is not named on the maps but was probably located in the second building from the corner. I can recall Mother taking my brothers and me to a store there in the 1950s. Seventy-five years later, shoppers who once would have visited downtown variety stores seem satisfied by dollar stores on the outskirts of town, if not by drives to out-of-town department stores. But I’ll never confuse one of those with that creaky-wooden-floored store where everyone, clerks and shoppers alike, greeted this little boy with a big smile and called him by name.

Miss Ivey’s Shopping Spree

At Willingham’s Variety Store in 1928, one might find an assortment in almost any category of merchandise desired. Innovations of the late 1800s had paved the way for an ever-increasing number of items to appear in new retail venues around the country. When I once asked my aunt, Ivey Hicks Smith, to help me build a setting for stories of Franklin County in the 1920s, she described, among other things, some of those items she herself had found on display at the variety store.

At Willingham’s that spring, she had searched for a gift to send a former Mary Hardin Baylor classmate, an expectant mother. Ivey found herself confronted with an unexpectedly copious array of baby toys. Never herself to be confused, she slowly considered her selection. Would her friend want a whistle-rattle or whistle-pacifier combination, a simple rattle or pacifier, or a teething ring?

Then Ivey saw it, that green rubber frog that croaked and jumped when you squeezed a rubber bulb attached by a tube. Of course, you couldn’t let a baby itself grab it, but the sight and sound might well suspend a colicky baby’s cry. It would make a nice surprise in the mail; and Ivey would send her friend one of those beautifully written letters such as I myself have treasured throughout the years, though I long ago lost my own rubber frog.

In what little was left of the Pre-Depression Roaring Twenties, Ivey had school-teaching money, not only for a toy but also for a lamp to help with work and study at night. On display at Willingham’s she found night lamps to carry in the house after dark, banquet lamps to set around a fancy parlor or a big dining room, wall-hung library lamps in ornate brackets for offices and public spaces, ceiling-hung store lamps for brightness, and glass stand lamps for semi-permanent tople-free locations.

Coal-Oil Essentials

Aunt Ivey, her sisters, and my father always called the variety-store light fixtures with glass bottoms “coal-oil lamps,” because they originally burned the hydrocarbon oil distilled from bituminous coal. Later, for lamps at the



Seen from the water tower in 1953, cars are parked at stores along South Kaufman, lower left.

farm, my father would instead buy kerosene, a low-grade derivative of crude petroleum or shale oil sold at service stations. And he adopted the term “kerosene lantern” to designate, apart from the indoor variety, the red metal lamp used out of doors. Into the early 1960s, you carried one of those on a nighttime walk to the chicken coop, corncrib, smokehouse, or some other outbuilding at the farm. They went with us, too, for fishing and frog-gigging after dark.

One Christmas at the farm, my brothers and I received, along with our stockings full of treats, three small red kerosene lanterns. We carried them everywhere and somehow never set alight anything but their wicks. I recall the pungent smell of burning oil and cotton, wafting up with ebony smoke from a hot glass chimney.

Occasionally my brothers and I tore fingers on rusty barbed wire and stepped on nails while playing around the farm’s outbuildings. Aunt Ivey and her sister Pauline “Nooney” Hicks, both of whom then lived at the Hicks farm, would make us soak the affected appendages in proven-antiseptic coal oil. And, as we endured the soaking, Aunt Nooney would regale us with cautionary tales like that of a man dying of lockjaw while biting spoons in two. She and Aunt Ivey had seen the neck and jaw muscles of a man lock up with tetanus. After the testing of an effective vaccine on soldiers in World War II, we baby boomers and our progeny were spared that horror show. But Aunt Nooney never spared us tales of now-rare illness, primitive methods of treatment, and grisly surgical procedures performed under the light of a coal-oil lamp.

Rural Electricity and Lighting



The author’s Aunt Ivey, in the background, and his Great-Aunt Mattie Kate prepare a family meal in 1960.

By 1900 even small towns were benefitting from service provided by privately owned companies producing electricity by steam and water-driven generators. Electric lighting came to downtown businesses in Mt. Vernon by 1906. Natural gas was provided later; along with it at the same time, electricity came to the city’s homes in 1928.

In 1935 the Rural Electrification Administration would spur the formation of electric cooperatives and bring wiring and power to farms and ranches in many places. Rural areas of Northeast Texas experienced this development slowly; long after Aunt Ivey’s shopping trip, coal-oil and kerosene, as well as the lamps and lanterns burning them, remained essential in many homes outside towns with wiring already in place. Only in 1946 would the areas outside Mt. Vernon begin to have light bulbs hung by cloth-wrapped copper wire from the twelve-foot ceilings in homes like those at the Hicks farm.

An interesting Hicks family photograph shows a clothespin oddly suspended midair above a kitchen table. The wooden clip served as a pull for the switch of an out-of-sight socket, hung three or four feet below the ceiling. From there one incandescent bulb lighted the whole room. My brother B.F. says that our Aunt Ivey, in the background of that picture, is helping to prepare a nice

meal in the Choudrant, Louisiana, home of our Great-Aunt Mattie Kate (Mary Kathryn Hicks Veazey, youngest sister of our grandfather, John M. Hicks). In the summer of 1960, B.F. spent several days there with our father and the Hicks aunts. Although the clothespin pull didn’t impress him, he does recall, as any child might, a trip to the Monroe zoo.



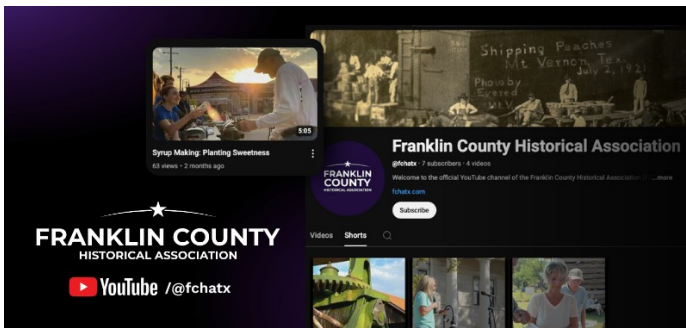
MUSEUM HOURS

The Fire Station Museum is **OPEN** Tuesday-Friday: **9:00 AM to 1:00 PM** AND other times by appointment.

Call **903-537-9300** or **903-537-2264** and let us know how we can accommodate you or your group. You can also email our office: **fchaoffice@gmail.com**

This is a free service in our community; we hope to see you!

If you would like to join our team of docents to volunteer for a few hours at the museums each month or on any of our ongoing projects, please call **903-537-9300** to let us know. We’d love to have you as part of our team.



FCHA's YOUTUBE CHANNEL!

We might be historical, but we are definitely not history! Behind the scenes, we've been working on providing new ways to keep our rich history alive and easily accessible to our community. Luiz Sifuentes, our webmaster, recently launched our very own YouTube channel (link below) which will house a new format of historical storytelling like never before. Leveraging YouTube's network and short format video (known as Shorts), will allow us to further extend the reach of our local efforts in keeping

Franklin County on the cutting edge of writing history. We invite you to take a few seconds to subscribe and share our YouTube channel with your friends and family and keep an eye out for new videos! Scan the QR code on the back of this newsletter or visit www.youtube.com/@fchatx



REMEMBERING THE OPEN ROAD

Rev. Dan Hoke

A month of Tuesday evenings ago, I was walking under the overhang along the south side of the town square. My stroll was really a nosy way of meandering along, so I could peak inside the window to see who was dining. I'd like to think my intent was inquisitive. I did see someone I knew dining in the Chop House. My imagination went active. Maybe they were using a dinner setting to plan some fantastic journey. Possibly they were suddenly rich and wanted to make a hefty donation to the Franklin County Historical Association. Creative yes; but truthfully I was just being nosy.

Past two more store windows, my imagination went active again. In the window of the Franklin County Genealogical Society building is a photo that captivated me. It's a pictorial scene of a 50s Chevy convertible and two happy travelers waving their invitation to jump-in and tag along. Perhaps you know who they are. Remember those ancient days when two door cars were bigger. Even a backseat driver had room to sit there!

For some reason one of the car riders in the showroom photo reminded me of a long forgotten TV star, Dinah Shore. In 1951 Dinah Shore opened one of the first American TV Variety Music Shows broadcasted by NBC. It was a triumph in simplicity. She was the first vocalist breakaway from the big band era. She became a singing star on her own for that day. It was a hit program lasting six years. The show was sponsored by General Motors, Chevrolet.

At the end of each show Dinah Shore was before a view of an open road. She would talk of the fun of traveling and then break-out in singing: "See the USA in your Chevrolet." And throw a big kiss at the TV audience. Once, as an impressible 10 year old, I'd tried to catch it. Surely Dinah was throwing to me. Plus I had enough lawn mowing money saved to fill-up the gas tank at 23 cents-per-gallon and let the highway pilot our carefree course. I guess an open road is a compelling image we all seek. It beckons us to go somewhere.

Editor's Note: Dinah Shore and our own Don Meredith were neighbors and friends in Palm Springs. Don was even a regular co-host of her program Dinah! The two golfed and painted together. One of Dinah Shore's paintings, "Hong Kong School Bus" is archived in our Don Meredith Art Collection.

The Open Road

Native Americans opened the first roads around here. Their thoroughfares gave access to explore and populate North East Texas. Caddo Indians blazed trails north and south. Anglos later named these trails referring to Indians who arrived here from regions in West Texas.

The Cherokee Trace runs north and south along our County's east boundary. It roams from the Caddo Confederacy near Nacogdoches north into Oklahoma. French travelers, in the 1700's report the trail wide enough that four horsemen could ride abreast through the forest.

The Choctaw Trail was an east/west route passing through the county approximately parallel to present U. S.



Dinah Shore singing "See the USA in your Chevrolet" in a 1954 Chevrolet Corvette Corvair.



Mollie Mann
1839-1893

Highway 67. In Mount Vernon we know it as Main Street. West of Mt. Vernon, the Trail became a route known as the Mt. Vernon to Sulphur Springs road.

The Choctaw Trail was later incorporated into an open road named "The Bankhead Highway Route." In 1919 it was the second transcontinental automobile route. Heading East from town, the Bankhead Route followed the Old Choctaw Trail toward Mr. Pleasant along what is now Holbrook Street.

Trials of Getting There

An open road may beckon us to explore. But what gets lost in our infatuation to go somewhere? It's a caution that the road may be open to travel, but not without dilemmas and difficulties.

Mary (Mollie) Fanning Mann provided a description of early time travel and trials. She and her husband Rufus were teachers at the Mt. Vernon Academy from 1858 to 1861. They had been married only a year when he joined the Confederate army in 1861. He served until General Lee's surrender when Rufus returned to teaching. Many years later Mary wrote an account for her children of how she, her mother and siblings came to be in Mt. Vernon.

Mary's grandfather, William Fanning, had a 321 acre plantation with 100 acres in cultivation near and along what is now Holbrook Street. In 1857 (eighteen years before Franklin County) he wrote to Mary's mother, Margaret Fanning, an invitation to bring her children to Texas and live at the plantation.

On the 22nd of April, 1857, we left Bloomington about 10am. It was about 100 miles to New Albany where we were to take a steamer.

My best guess is they traveled down the Mississippi river.

We landed at New Orleans on May 5th . We changed boats for Shreveport and when up the Red River some distance we took a very small boat where we were very much crowded and very uncomfortable. I shall never forget the name of that boat. It was "Effort." We said it was an effort.

We were so worn out and starved on poor fare when we reached Jefferson, Texas we greatly rejoiced. It was Saturday and the stage had gone at 3 o'clock a.m. So, we had to wait over until Monday. That morning at 3 o'clock we took the stage for Mt. Pleasant, where we landed at five in the evening at a distance of 60 miles. Next morning we took a hack for Mt. Vernon 17 miles and that evening, which was the 19th day of May, we reached Grandfathers.

Mary didn't mention the full travel time to Mt. Vernon. She just referred to the fourteen days it took to get here from New Orleans. Our families have similar stories. We may have forgotten where they were going. But we remember their trials in getting there: muddy roads, changing flats in heavy rain, washed-out bridges, overheated motors, and bad storms. I'll bet you have an arduous journey or a few close calls to tell.

History teaches that an open road may have a beckoning power urging one to go somewhere. But getting there is not without travel trials and tales. I guess that lesson explains the traffic congestion waiting on I30 near

WARRIOR SPIRIT PROJECT— HONOR PROGRAM

Locals David & Charla Truesdale are founders of the Warrior Spirit Project based in Franklin County. Their mission is to honor and strengthen the Warrior Spirit of veterans, first responders, and their families through opportunities for healing, resilience, growth, and community. They have a wide range of programs including yoga, yoga teacher trainer, gardening, and their Honor program. The WSP Honor program brings together Warriors and civilians in meaningful ways that recognize, acknowledge, and HONOR the reality of the Warrior Ethos and Warrior Experiences past, present, and future, offering intergenerational support for "finding home" with new purpose. When we come together as a community, we also learn more about our own history through the eyes and stories of those who lived it. This storytelling within supportive communities and settings fosters healing and growth, while still acknowledging past experiences and difficult memories as an important part of the Warrior's life. In January of 2025 the organization commenced a monthly Honor Flag Tribute on Mount Vernon Town Square held the first Saturday of

each month. We're including the text and few photographs from the most recent presentations honoring Colonel Donald Rex Yates and Calvin D. Adams. It is a very moving ceremony and only lasts about 20 minutes. We strongly encourage you to attend!

Colonel Donald Rex Yates

Colonel Donald Rex Yates, USAF Ret. was born on September 2, 1933, in Mount Vernon to the late Charles



Summerfield "CS" and Ruth Gilbert Yates. He played varsity football under the late, great Catfish Smith at Mount Vernon High School. After graduation, he followed Coach Smith to East Texas State Teachers College, where they went on to play in two Tangerine Bowls. He graduated with his Bachelor of Science degree, majoring in teaching.

While in college, Colonel Yates was in the United States Air Force ROTC program. After graduation, he went into primary pilot training, then basic pilot training and finished with advanced jet pilot training. During his military career, Colonel Yates served two combat tours of 180 missions over North Vietnam from Korat Air Force Base in Thailand. He was promoted to Colonel at George Air Force Base in California and was the Commander of the 561st Tactical Fighter Squadron. He then went to Seoul, Korea as Joint Senior Staff Operations Officer, United Nations Command. Colonel Yates finished his career with Air Force Safety Command at Norton Air Force Base in California on May 1, 1980 after 25 years of dedicated service to his country.

Over his career, Colonel Yates earned numerous decorations and medals including the following: the Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross with 2 Oak Leaf Clusters, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal with 1 Oak Leaf Cluster, Air Medal with 19 Oak Leaf Clusters, Air Force Commendation Medal, Small Arms Expert Marksmanship ribbon, Legion of Merit, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Combat Readiness Medal with 2 devices, Air Force

Longevity Service Medal with 5 devices, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Air Force Presidential Unit Citation with 1 device, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with 2 devices, Air Force Outstanding Award with Valor, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, and the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with 2 devices.

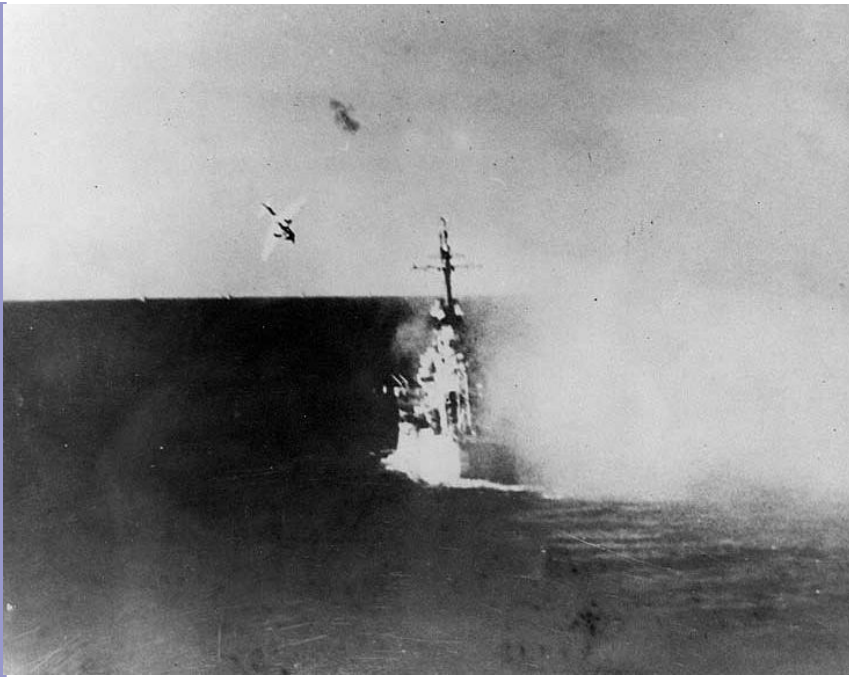
Colonel Yates married his childhood sweetheart and his lifelong best friend Frances "Fran" Gay Mills on August 4, 1951. Together they spent the next 65 years traveling the world as a military family, raising two sons - Chock and Dace - and living a lifetime of memories. Colonel Yates retired to Mount Vernon where he went to work for the City of Mount Vernon. He was a teacher, a real estate agent, and a longtime member of First United Methodist Church. In his free time, Colonel Yates found pleasure in ranching. He proudly served his country and was a man of honor, valor and strength. Colonel Yates was a member of the greatest generation to ever live and leaves behind a legacy for all to follow.

Seaman First Class Calvin Dewitt Adams

Seaman First Class Calvin Dewitt Adams was born in Sulphur Springs on September 2, 1925. When he filled out his Registration Card at age 18, he lived in Leesburg and listed his occupation as "Farm laborer for different people". He also listed his wife Hattie as the person who would always know his address.



After Calvin entered the U.S. Navy, he was stationed aboard the USS Columbia. On January 1st, 1945, the USS Columbia sailed to Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines to support landings on Luzon. On January 6th, as pre-invasion bombardments were getting underway, Japanese kamikaze attacks began. Columbia suffered a near miss by a kamikaze and was then struck on her port quarter by a second. The plane and its bomb penetrated two decks before exploding, killing 13 (including 3 survivors of the USS Ommaney Bay (CVE-79) who had been rescued two days earlier after their ship was sunk following a kamikaze attack). Forty-four men were wounded. The explosion put the ship's aft turrets out of action and set the ship afire. Prompt flooding of two magazines prevented further explosions, and impressive damage control measures enabled Columbia to complete her bombardment with her two operative forward turrets, and remain in action to give close



**Columbia is attacked by a kamikaze off Lingayen Gulf
January 6, 1945**

bombardment with her two operative forward turrets, and remain in action to give close support to underwater demolition teams. Ammunition was removed from the after magazines to refill the forward magazines; much of this was done by hand. On the morning of the landings, 9 January, as Columbia lay close inshore and so surrounded by landing craft that she was handicapped in maneuver, she was again struck by a kamikaze, knocking out six gun directors and a gun mount. Twenty-four men were killed and 97 wounded, but short-handed as she was, Columbia again put out fires, repaired damage, and continued her bombardment and fire support. Columbia sailed that night, guarding a group of unloaded transports. When the cruiser returned to port for repairs, the remains of crew members killed in the attacks were removed from the ship, but several men were unable to be located or identified.

Seaman First Class Calvin Dewitt

Adams was reported missing in action, and he remains unaccounted-for. The USS Columbia crew's accomplishments in saving their ship and carrying out their mission without interruption were recognized with the Navy Unit Commendation for this operation.

Today, Seaman First Class Adams is memorialized on the Walls of the Missing at the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines, and is a Purple Heart recipient from the Battle of Luzon.



STORIES FROM GRAY ROCK

Ralph K. Banks

Editor's Note: Ralph Banks has given the FCHA his entire collection of 71 stories. Ralph has been sending stories for publication over the past decade. They are delightful musings reflecting on his life growing up in Franklin County. We've run a few of his stories but, in order to maintain some control over the process, we are going to print the stories sequentially and you'll see them all. In some quarters, we will be able to print two or three and so you'll have the complete set in about four years time. Ralph has set them out as "chapters" in his compilation called "Stories from Gray Rock." There is an introduction and a conclusion as well as the stories. In the last issue of the newsletter we printed chapter four. We'll continue along with chapter five.

Chapter 5— James William (Jim) and Ida Savanna (Hays) Mattingly

James William (Jim) Mattingly was the fourth-born, and second eldest son of Paulina Francis (Laws) and Thomas A. Mattingly. He was born October 24, 1886 in the Glade Springs Community, Franklin County, Texas.

When Jim was about 6 years old the family moved to the Fairview Community, Franklin County which is north of Mount Vernon and near the Hopkins County-line, where Jim and his brothers and sisters grew up. The family enterprise was primarily cotton-raising. Jim's schooling is not thought to have progressed past the fourth grade. However, his handwriting was always remarkably good, even though he often had trouble with spelling.

In the spring of 1909 Jim and a friend named Dennis Dawson were working on the farm of Dennis's father in the Fairview Community. Dennis had spent the previous summer working on a cattle ranch up in Wyoming, and was planning to do this again during the coming summer. Dennis suggested that Jim come along with the assurance that jobs would be waiting. Dennis and Jim were both single at the time; Dennis being separated from his wife and Jim not yet married. So, Jim did go with Dennis that summer, leaving Mount Vernon in April and riding by train to Buford, Wyoming out between Cheyenne and Laramie.

Jim had some misfortune on the trip. Typically, he carried his bankroll in his watch pocket, and along the way the money was either lost or stolen. But, until payday Dennis helped Jim with finances; perhaps feeling responsibility, since it was at his suggestion that Jim had come along.

On reaching the cattle ranch, Jim was put to work as the horse wrangler in charge of the remuda. Jim mentioned many times over the years afterward, that he was referred to by the other ranch hands all during that summer as "Jim The Wrangler".

The summer of 1909 on the cattle ranch in Wyoming wore on for Jim. But, with winter coming on, Jim had a decision to make. Would he stay in Wyoming, which would require him to spend most of his wages in outfitting himself with the necessary winter coat and clothing, and perhaps the saddle he also needed; or, would he return to Texas? Jim did return to Texas by train arriving back in Mount Vernon in October 1909. Dennis stayed the winter in Wyoming, returning to Texas the next year and lasting reconciliation with this wife.

In the early spring of 1907 Jim had started going with young fourteen year old Ida Savannah Hays. Typically, their dates consisted of riding in a horse-drawn wagon with Ida's brother, Louis and fiancée, Virgie Allen, to church or a singing, and occasionally to a party at some other young person's home. This relationship of Jim and Ida's lasted until September 1908 when on the day of Louis and Virgie's wedding, they had a quarrel. Later that fall of 1908, Mrs. Hays, Ida's mother and who was widowed, moved her family to Wichita Falls, Texas to find work. Ida worked in a laundry there until September 1910 when the Hays family moved back to Franklin County, Texas to raise cotton on the Galt Ranch in the Hamilton Community. They lived in a large house with Ida's sister, Betty and her husband Joe Glaze. In November 1910 Jim then came to work for Joe Glaze, and Jim and Ida became reacquainted shortly thereafter.

Jim and Ida's rekindled romance thrived, and they were married at the Stouts Creek Baptist Church between Sulphur Springs and Mount Vernon, Texas on February 5, 1911. It happened on an unseasonably warm cloudy day for February in northeast Texas, about noon after Sunday morning church. After the service, Jim walked Ida out to his buggy where he had her to wait, while he fetched the preacher to say the words. While Ida was waiting in the buggy, another young man, John King, happened by and struck up a conversation. As Ida and John were talking, Jim and the Reverend R. W. Lowery walked up, and John was asked to be a witness. John readily agreed, and Jim then stepped up into the buggy to sit beside Ida while the ceremony was said. (Getting married in a buggy was common practice at the time!)

So began the almost fifty-year marriage of Jim and Ida (Jim commonly affectionately called Ida "Ider"). Their children were Florine, Lois, Lelia, James Leslie, Gertrude, Betty and Robert Lawrence. Their firstborn and oldest daughter, Florine, passed away in September 1991, and their fourth oldest and older son, James Leslie, passed away in October 1982. Two other children deceased at birth.

Jim and Ida were cotton and corn farmers primarily, and through the years rented land to farm on until about 1948 when they purchased a small farm in the Brushy Community southwest of Mount Vernon. On this farm they usually had a milk cow or two, and a team of plow horses or mules to work a corn crop and a large vegetable garden. They also usually raised one or two hogs for slaughter each year.



John M. Hicks crushing ribbon cane ca. 1930 from the FCHA website

During several of these years Jim used his team of horses in working for Roy Parchman, his sister Dovie's husband, in Roy's production of ribbon cane syrup. Roy raised the cane on Denton Creek bottom land west of Mount Vernon.

In the late fall the cane stalks were cut at the ground line, and the juice pressed out. The juice was then slowly cooked down to the desired syrup product. Wood fire was used for cooking and great skill was required to keep the fire just right so the proper rate of cooking was maintained without the syrup being scorched which would result in a less than desirable product.

One type press for squeezing the cane juice out was an upright, twin steel roller device that was horse or mule powered. Radiating out from the press was a long pole some feet in

length, and the draft animal would be hitched to the end of this pole and walked in a circle around the press, pulling the pole and turning the rollers. As the cane stalks were pressed, juice flowed downward into buckets underneath. As the bucket filled with juice, it was replaced with an empty one and the filled bucket carried over and emptied into the cooking pan. In the years before Roy converted to motor-power, Jim and his horses or mules usually operated the press or towed wagon loads of the cut cane from the field to the press site.

Eventually though, Roy replaced the horse/mule drawn press with a motorized one uphill from the cooking pan, and installed a pipeline so that the fresh-pressed juice could flow downhill through a pipe from the press to the cooking pan. But even after these "modernizations" Jim was still a key to the operation by feeding the cane stalks into the press.

During Jim's last years, the plow horses were sold and the farm was turned into pasture for a few cattle and a saddle horse. Jim prized the horse very much, having acquired it when it was quite young and training it to the saddle.

Jim was a lifelong player of the harmonica, often entertaining the grandchildren (without ever too much encourage-

ment!) with such tunes as “Red Wing”, “Turkey in The Straw” and “Sally Goodun”. He borrowed a violin when the children were young and tried his best to learn to play, but finally gave it up. He was also an avid “42” domino player. Anytime he was ever invited to a “42” party in the community, he could always be depended upon to be there with his dominoes and table.

Jim loved to fish. When he and Ida first moved to the Brushy Community he fished a lot on Big Creek about a mile away from their house. However, in his last years he did a lot of his fishing in the large stock pond he hired dug on his farm. This pond also served as a supply of wash water with drinking water coming from an above-ground rainwater cistern. Prior to having the large stock pond dug, he had dug a small one himself using his mule team towing first a turning plow to loosen the soil, then a scoop or fresno to move the excavated material to a berm.

Jim and Ida’s family was always close. Even after the children were grown and married, with families of their own, there were always several large get-together dinners every year at Jim and Ida’s house. These get-togethers dinners included one on Christmas Day, or on the Sunday before or after Christmas. These Christmas reunions were particularly enjoyable to the grandchildren, that always included an exchange of gifts and often included firecracker shooting, horseback riding and ball games.



**Thomas A. Mattingly (1852-1926) & wife
Paulina F. Laws (1858-1914)**

Another reunion that Jim, Ida and their descendants always enjoyed, and which survives to this day, was the Thomas A. and Paulina Francis Laws Mattingly Reunion held in Mount Vernon each October. It actually really started as a reunion back in the 1940’s when the families of Jim and his older brother, Gus, desired to have a get-together to celebrate the birthdays of both Jim and Gus. Jim’s birthday was in October with Gus’s being in September. Of course, all the rest of the brothers and sisters of Jim and Gus, were invited as well. This annual Mattingly Reunion was enjoyable as well to the grandchildren of Jim and Ida, who not only got to see all their “first cousins” again, but also got to meet and get to know “second cousins” too.

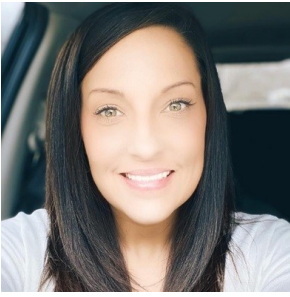
Jim remained active and in good health all his life up until he suffered a stroke in the spring of 1960. Initially, he only had one stroke, and he rallied from it to the point of being mentally alert and well enough to be driven into town to vote in the June 1960 election primary. Later in the summer, however, he sustained other strokes and became progressively weaker. He passed away at his beloved little Brushy Community farm in the morning of October 7, 1960.

Jim’s funeral was held at the First Baptist Church in Mount Vernon, and he was buried in the City Cemetery there. His ten grandsons served as pallbearers. They were: Richard Louis Simms, Ralph Keith and Harold Zack Banks, Billy Morris and Robby Jack Jordan, Michael Jim Banks, James Leslie Mattingly II, and Sammy Joe, Thomas Bennett and Charles South. Granddaughters are: Virginia Sue and Geraldine Simms,

Lelia Frances Jordan, Linda Marian and Patti Gay Banks, Judy Lynn Mattingly, Bennie Ruth South, and Patsy Mattingly (adopted daughter of Robert L. Mattingly).

The grandchildren commonly addressed Jim as “Granddaddy” or “Daddy Jim”, and they called Ida “Grandmother” or “Ma Ida”. Ida also lived a long and an active life until her last months; living by herself, working in her yard, and visiting with her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren at ever opportunity. Then, in the summer of 1984, Ida began to grow weaker with heart disease which culminated in her decease on September 28, 1984. As with Jim’s funeral back in 1960, pallbearers were grandsons and she was laid to rest beside Jim in City Cemetery, Mount Vernon, Texas.

It seemed as though Grandmother (Hays) Mattingly had willed that her decease occur on a Friday with her funeral on a Sunday during the fall of the year. This way it perhaps fulfilled a wish by her that her decease, first cause minimum disruption in the busy lives of her children and grandchildren and then, simply be recognized by the gathering and remembrances of all them one last time on a beautiful, sunny autumn Sunday afternoon in northeast Texas.



MOUNT VERNON MAIN STREET UPDATE

Kassidy Wesson

I recently had the pleasure of attending the Real Places Conference (annual Texas Historical Commission conference) in person, and it was truly an inspiring experience. I connected with some incredible folks—both new faces and longtime partners—and strengthened friendships within the Main Street community and the Texas Historical Commission. It was also heartwarming to hear how many organizations are familiar with our very own Franklin County Historical Association. So many had kind words to share about the work we're doing—and about this very newsletter!

New Faces (and Spaces) on the Square

We're excited to welcome some new businesses—and celebrate a familiar one in a brand-new location: Lashing Out Beauty Studio – Located on Houston Street, this new addition offers a full range of aesthetic services including lash extensions, sodium LED therapy, sinus relief, facials, microdermabrasion, acne treatment, and teeth whitening. A fantastic asset to our downtown!

The Vintage Vault – Nestled on Jackson Street, this shop is filled with antiques and thrifted treasures. Their grand opening ribbon-cutting ceremony, hosted by the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, will take place June 14, 2025 at 10:00 AM. Come out and show your support!

Big Dawg Sports Shop – Don't forget, Big Dawgs has moved! They're now located on Dallas Street, still right on the Square but now in a larger building. Swing by and check out their new space!

Honoring Heroes

Our May Memorial event was a touching success. The community came together to honor our first responders, veterans, fallen soldiers, and Gold Star families. It was a powerful moment of reflection, and we're already looking forward to next year's event.

Spreading the Word

The City and the Economic Development Corporation are working together on a contract to place billboards in Greenville and Texarkana—a wonderful opportunity to showcase the special charm of Mount Vernon to more visitors.

Summertime Fun

With school out and the summer heat setting in, be sure to enjoy the splash pad at Little Creek Park, open all season long!

Farmers' Market

Join us at Little Creek Park for the Farmers Market on the first and third Saturdays of each month through September! Shop local produce, handmade goods, and more from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM.

That's it for now—stay cool, stay involved, and we'll see you downtown!



FRANKLIN COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE UPDATE

April Bardwell

Hello Franklin County!

My name is April Bardwell, & I'm excited to introduce myself as the Administrative Assistant at the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. Nearly two years ago, I moved to Mount Vernon after purchasing a beautiful 1904 historic home— & I've been in love with this community ever since!

Mount Vernon has such a rich history & a deep sense of pride! One of my greatest passions outside of being a mother to my 2 children, 2 bonus children & my 2 giant schnauzers, is supporting & helping local businesses thrive! It's been incredibly rewarding to connect with so many people who share that same commitment to community growth.

I look forward to learning even more about the history that makes this place so special & continuing to support the organizations & businesses that make Franklin County shine.

Follow the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce Facebook page for Events & Updates.

Please stop by the Chamber anytime Monday-Friday 8:30-3:30, I'd love to meet you!



Left to right of FCCC Admin & Executive Board: Ronnie Barnard- Ex Officio, April Bardwell- Chamber Admin, Theresa Brown- Treasurer, Christina Brown- President, Andrew Cox- Vice President

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Lauren Lewis

This spring, the Franklin County Historical Association had the joy of welcoming both Mt. Pleasant ISD's Annie Simms 2nd graders and Paris ISD Aikin's 3rd grade students for two memorable field trips filled with hands-on learning and local history. Hosting young learners on our campuses is always a highlight of the year, and this season's two trips were no exception.

In April, we hosted Annie Simms, and in May, third-grade students from Aikin Elementary arrived. Sandy Tower, with husband Tom, once again worked tirelessly behind the scenes—calling volunteers, coordinating schedules, and fine-tuning logistics. Thanks to their leadership and the support of our amazing volunteers, both trips were a memorable success.

Each field trip day was met with warm, sunny weather and eager young faces. Students were divided into small groups and rotated through a variety of educational stations across the Cotton Belt Depot, the Fire Station Museum, and our historic outbuildings. In total, over 360 students participated across the two spring field trips bringing the total number of students for the 2024-2025 school year to over 500.

Highlights from Both Field Trips Included: Depot Tours: Jerald Mowery had the model trains running as he shared stories of 1950s Mt. Vernon. Marilyn Elbert and Randy Cates explained telegraph technology, and Minnie Birdsong brought early train travel to life.

Cotton & Agriculture: Mary Lou Mowery shared the realities of cotton farming, passing around raw cotton stalks and demonstrating how children worked in the fields. Jo Lynn Harper and Jan Ritter highlighted pioneer life with the Ivey family's 1896 Studebaker wagon. Phylis Neal demonstrated our pre-Civil War spinning wheel, spinning cotton into thread.

Art & Artifacts: Johanna Deal and Nancy Bolduc introduced our local artistic legacy and butterfly collection as well as the Harry Smith woodcarving and violin collections. John Hicks amazed students with his flint-knapping demonstration of Native American tools.

Blacksmith & Cabin Life: Gary and Kathy Boren demonstrated log cabin chinking at the Seay Cabin, while Joel Dihle ran the blacksmith shop—stoking the furnace and shaping metal. Jack Rutledge and Mike Stone shared farming equipment and answered questions about early agricultural practices.

Fire Station Fun: Dan Hoke captivated students with stories of Don Meredith's football feats.

Birds & Nature: Alicia Daberkow and Rita Long, guided students through our bird egg collection, pairing bird calls with matching specimens to spark interest in ornithology.

Campus Coordination: Group leaders Scott Harvey, Kassidy Wesson, April Bardwell, Laurie Dihle, Zarinska Morton, Mike Millender, Pat Hudson, Gail Reed, Lauren Lewis, B.F. Hicks, Mike Rambin, and Kathy Johnson kept all groups on schedule and assisted our docents at every turn. Ken Greer was at the ready with camera to capture it all on film.

A Special Finale at the Thruston House: After touring the FCHA downtown campuses, both grade levels took a short trip across town to explore the Henry Clay Thruston House. B.F. Hicks led the tours, sharing Civil War-era stories. Connie McGill, dressed in period costume, showcased antique quilting techniques. Randy Cates and Randy Ritter demonstrated how water was pulled from a cistern using an antique pulley system—giving students a fascinating look at how families accessed water before modern plumbing. Finally students enjoyed a pizza lunch—hundreds of slices pepperoni and cheese pizzas across both events!

As a parting souvenir, every student received crayons and a Dupree Park Nature Trail Guide & Coloring Book. They ended their afternoons coloring, playing lawn games, and exploring the world of early Texas life in a fun and meaningful way.

A Heartfelt Thank You: We want to extend our deepest appreciation to the many volunteers, teachers, and parents who made these two field trips possible. Your passion for history and dedication to our students helped make Spring 2025 an unforgettable season of learning at the Franklin County Historical Association.



Rita Long



Nancy Bolduc and Laurie Dihle



Dan Hoke



Kassidy Wesson



Marilyn Elbert



Joel Dihle



Kathy Boren



Minnie Birdsong



Tom & Sandy Tower, Mike Stone



Randy Ritter



Pizza Party



Fun & Games at Dupree



MANAGER'S REPORT—SPRING 2025

Lauren Lewis

Spring 2025 was truly one for the books! The Franklin County Historical Association had a packed calendar filled with exciting programs, community engagement, and meaningful progress on key projects.

In addition to coordinating two successful field trips this season, we hosted a range of events and initiatives that brought people together around shared history, culture, and local heritage. One of the highlights of April was welcoming Kimberly Hinson from the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma's Archaeology Program. Her talk on cultural resource management and preservation best practices drew a strong crowd, including a group of enthusiastic local Scouts. It was an engaging and thought-provoking evening that emphasized the importance of respectful stewardship of historical sites.



Kimberly Hinson



Dupree Park

On the grounds, in addition to the usual upkeep and maintenance of all of our facilities, we've been hard at work improving Dupree Park, one of Franklin County's hidden gems. With the help of board member Randy Ritter we were fortunate to bring on Chris Johnson, to clear overgrown areas, open up scenic vistas, and maintain access to the ponds and trails. Thanks to his efforts, the park's trails are now in excellent condition—just in time for spring and summer strolls. If you haven't visited recently, we encourage you to explore this beautiful space. The park is open daily from dawn to dusk year-round and is a wonderful place to enjoy nature, birdwatch, or simply relax.

In May, we were proud to host the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce's monthly meeting at the Historic Cotton Belt Depot. It was a fantastic opportunity to showcase our ongoing work and engage with local business leaders. We served lunch in the freight room, and several FCHA board members were on hand to greet guests and answer questions about our exhibits. To top it off, Jerald Mowery delighted attendees with a live run of the model trains, which are always a crowd favorite.

As we look ahead to summer, we're excited to continue building momentum. Whether you're a longtime supporter or new to the area, we invite you to join us for upcoming programs, explore our historic sites, and take part in preserving Franklin County's rich history. Thank you for being part of our story!



**Franklin County Chamber of Commerce
May 2025 Monthly Meeting**

DON MEREDITH AND THE CREATION OF THE MODERN ATHLETE

By Christina Jensen—reprinted from *Legacies Spring 2025 Newsletter* with permission from the author

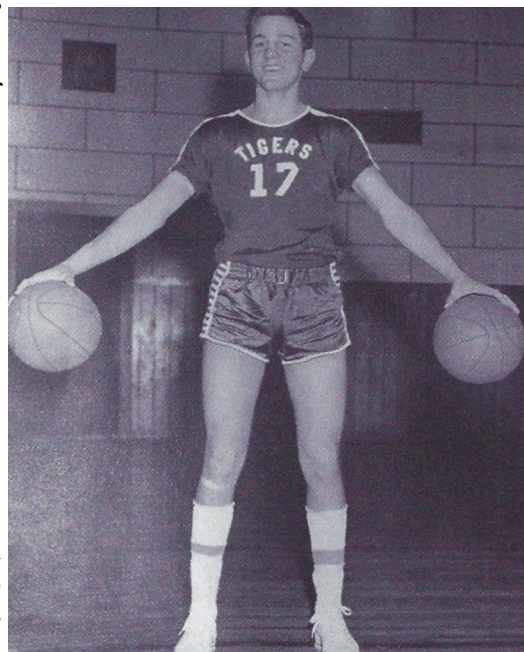
On September 24, 1975, Don Meredith signed an affidavit declaring, “I hereby depose and state that I do not use hot tea made with Lipton tea bags.” (1) Joseph Donald Meredith, better known as Don, also known as Dandy Don, was an athlete, actor, broadcaster, and spokesman. He was also a husband, father, Texan and artist. Don Meredith was many things (including a tea drinker), and in being so, he helped craft a blueprint for celebrity athletes still seen today.

In interviews and TV broadcasts, Meredith would introduce himself as “Jeff and Hazel’s baby boy and Billy Jack’s little brother from Mount Vernon, Texas.” (2) It was a catchphrase that served as a character introduction. It let viewers know that the handsome, witty man with a drawl on TV was also just a small-town boy made good, who loved his family. It can be hard to separate Don Meredith from Dandy Don. They were not one and the same, and in that time, Don would distance himself from “Dandy” – but there’s no denying that Don Meredith, Dandy or no, became a significant pop culture figure.

Don’s life sounds cinematic from the start. Jeff and Hazel owned a dry goods store in their small town, located roughly 100 miles northeast of Dallas. When he was a young boy, his father would sit him on the store counter and instruct him to greet customers by name. (3) As a baby, he was struck with polio and was kept in his crib until he was eight months old, his legs having been temporarily paralyzed. He recovered, but his calves remained thin and prone to injury for the rest of his life. (4)

Hazel hung a swinging tire in the yard for her sons to use as a throwing target, and it worked – Don succeeded his older brother Billy as quarterback for their high school team, playing in the stadium that now bears his name. He was named All-State. He excelled in basketball, earning All-State honors as well, graduated second in his class, served as class president, and starred in school plays. (5) By all accounts, he was a charming kid who lived a charmed smalltown life, where his hard work, charisma, and kindness were noted by contemporaries.

Older brother Billy played football for TCU, and Don attended SMU – often saying how he chose the school because it was “close to home and easy to spell.” (6) He’d received a full scholarship, but for basketball, which is said to be the sport he preferred. But he broke his ankle playing football during his freshman year and was turned down by the basketball team when their season started. (7) Opportunity coming out of the setbacks would become a sort of theme of his life. The football team took him on sophomore year, but as a linebacker. After multiple QBs fell off



Don Meredith played basketball for the Mount Vernon High School Tigers in 1954 wearing #17, which he continued to wear while playing football for SMU and the Dallas Cowboys.



Don shakes hands with Texas Hall of Fame member and SMU alumnus Gerald Mann after signing his letter of intent and visiting SMU for the first time, circa 1955. SMU coach Herman “Sleepy” Morgan is at right.

the roster, he became starting quarterback. Once there, he was a success, with a 69 percent pass completion rate. (8)

In his junior and senior years, he was named an All-American. As he did in high school, and would as a Cowboy, Don wore number 17, which SMU retired in his honor. (9) In his senior year, he married his college sweetheart, cheerleader Alma Lynne Shamburger, the daughter of an oil millionaire. (10) According to then SMU Photographer Brad Bradley, SMU President Willis Tate would joke that SMU stood for “Southern Meredith University.” (11)

The Don Meredith papers in the SMU Archives include photos from his college days, mostly taken when he was on the football field, but also included is his Phi Delta Theta fraternity class photo. Among the dozens of young men captured, at first glance, Don wouldn’t rank among the best looking of the bunch; he looked much older



Tom Landry and Don Meredith

than his 20 years. But he already had the deep-set eyes and aquiline nose that were striking on camera and in photographs, conveying character and authority.

And it would seem that his dynamic charisma was already established. The student newspaper noted that he had “a sense of poise which matches men twice his age.” (12) Don was accepted to SMU Law School and later said that if he had followed that path, he would have become the Governor of Texas. (13) It’s a bold statement, but it doesn’t stretch credulity. However, it wasn’t meant to be. Clint Murchison Jr. had other plans.

Murchison, who like the new Mrs. Meredith, was the son of an oil millionaire, intended to launch an NFL expansion team in Dallas. His first play in making this happen was hiring Don. Before the team was a sure thing, before Tom Landry was hired, before he could make draft picks, Murchison signed 21-year-old Don Meredith to a five-year personal services contract for \$150,000 (14) and gave the Chicago Bears future draft picks in return for the team drafting Don and promising to trade him to the future Cowboys once the team was established. (15)

The Cowboys weren’t a forgone conclusion, and Murchison needed to get other NFL owners on board, as well as compete with Lamar Hunt’s rival American Football League team, the Dallas Texans, and disprove a belief held by many that Texas football fans were more interested in high school and college ball.

Part of his plan relied on his first player. Writer Joe Patoski noted, Don was more than just a local football hero. “Meredith wasn’t just football. The handsome kid with the eagle’s beak...oozed charm and charisma like a movie star with skills or silver-tongued politician, not like some good ol’ boy football player.” (16) Murchison saw the star power in Don, and he knew he could use it to his

advantage, powered by his “brain trust” of head coach Tom Landry, General Manager Tex Schramm, and scouting director Gil Brandt.

But the Cowboys had an ignoble start. The team was made up of undrafted and retired players, ticket sales were pitiful, and Don experienced being booed for the first time in his career. (17) The team didn’t win a single game its first season. Don is a bit of a tricky trivia question – Who was the first Dallas Cowboys quarterback? – because Eddie LeBaron was the starting quarterback in the team’s first three seasons. It deeply frustrated Don that he wasn’t starting right out the gate, despite his big contract. But Tom Landry felt a good quarterback needed five years of seasoning, and Tex Schramm thought LeBaron, a retired QB and future Atlanta Falcons General Manager, could mentor Don.

Much has been written about the relationship between Don Meredith and Tom Landry. The two were, by every telling, men of fundamentally different characters. Don was famously laid back and fun-loving, while Landry was notoriously sober and serious. Later in life, they would both rebuke some of the narratives written about them, especially regarding their perceived animosity, but there was always professional tension between the two, which they did acknowledge. Don felt slighted and ignored by Landry, who frequently benched him and prevented him from calling plays. Landry did not appreciate Don’s theatrics and humor – shouting jokes on the field, breaking into song during huddles. According to Tex Schramm, “Don had problems understanding Landry, and Tom couldn’t figure (Don) out.” Schramm thought the core issue was that, unlike many men of the NFL, especially Landry, football was not Don’s whole life. (18) In his autobiography, Landry also acknowledged this core conflict and plainly stated that he liked, respected, and often felt aggravated by Don, but felt that they shared an equal passion for the sport, which they expressed differently. (19) It’s worth noting that there are multiple accounts of both men being moved to tears, and sometimes weeping together, over the game.

It’s a testament to Don’s charisma and celebrity that he is not broadly seen as the bad actor in this relationship. His actions are interpreted as playful, humorous, and a sign of his fun team leadership style. It’s almost as if he’s a proto-Ferris Bueller. A less generous reading might see a party boy, who would on occasion show up to the games hungover, didn’t study plays with Landry, and didn’t take the sport seriously. And this would be made worse by the

fact that Landry was a widely respected, quiet and studious war hero who is considered one of the greatest coaches of all time. A different player could have come off quite poorly, but in the many articles and books written about the two men and the first decade of America's team, their relationship is typically presented as two men who couldn't see eye-to-eye.

As different as they were, the two men endured the shared pain of a bruising first four years with the Cowboys. Each season was a losing one, and by the end of the '64 season, both men had good reason to believe they'd be fired. But Landry stuck with Don (20), and Murchison stuck with Landry. (21) The start of the decade was not good for Don, who got divorced in 1963 and saw his first wife and daughter move out of state. (22) It wasn't good for the Cowboys, who couldn't get their team to gel – particularly when it came to their weak offensive line, which led to endless sacks and injuries for Don.



Fans at Lambeau Field December 31, 1967—The temperature was 13 degrees. (Associated Press)

But by 1965, things started to turn around. Don married his second wife, Cheryl King, with whom he had two children (23), and the Cowboys finally had a winning roster of players. The team was on the verge of success – they made it to the post season for the first time in 1966, the youngest NFL team to ever do so. They lost at home to Green Bay in the NFL championship and missed a chance to play in the first Super Bowl. But the following season looked bright – the Cowboys were seen as being on the verge of greatness, and Don was finally leading the team. In 1967 they made it to the championship again, against Green Bay and coach Vince Lombardi again. But this time, they were set to play at Lambeau Field in Wisconsin. Don and the Cowboys had made it to the “Ice Bowl,” a game that would put into motion the

next chapter of Don's life and celebrity.

In 1999, ESPN ranked the “Ice Bowl” as the third greatest football game of all time. (24) It was a widely anticipated rematch game, coached by two legends in the making. The forecast called for temperatures in the teens – cold but not unusual. But the game day temp was 13 degrees below zero, with a wind chill of 48 degrees. (25) Lombardi had promised the press that the field would be game-day ready, thanks to a newly installed \$80,000 warming system under the turf. (26) But the system failed (and was rumored to have been sabotaged by Lombardi) and moisture built up under a tarp laid over the field, which then froze into a field of ice once the tarp was removed. (27)

Today, the game would have almost certainly been rescheduled, but the players hit the field that day. Several marching band musicians set to perform at halftime were sent to the hospital with hypothermia before the game even started. The ref who blew the metal whistle to start the game ripped the frozen skin of his lips when doing so. And tragically, a fan watching the game from the stands passed away from exposure. (28)

Frank Gifford, who had played under Landry and Lombardi when they were all with the New York Giants, was giving color commentary for CBS, and viewers saw him quipping, “I'm going to take a bite of my coffee” – the contents of his mug having frozen in the cold. (29) They also watched an absolutely brutal game that day. Getting tackled by a linebacker onto dirt hurts enough. But being tackled onto a frozen field and broken ice is punishing.

The Packers had a 14-0 lead over the Cowboys early in the game, yet Dallas clawed back until the team was up 17-14 in the 4th quarter. But with sixteen seconds left on the clock, Green Bay got the ball to the endzone and won the game. (30) In the locker room after the game, both teams were described as looking like “men who'd survived a brush with death.” (31) Don and the Cowboys were emotionally and physically broken. Frank Gifford called on his friendship with Don and got special permission from CBS to interview him, even though the losing team was not interviewed post-game at that time. Viewers saw a Don they'd never seen before. As Gifford recounted, Don looked like he'd been mugged, and poured his heart out in the interview. (32) TV viewers saw the capacity for great emotional depth within the fun-loving cowboy, and they liked what they saw.

Don had been a celebrity heading into the game, but the “Ice Bowl” was a pivotal turning point in his life, and in his stardom.

It was after that game that Landry recalled Don's telling him that he was thinking of retiring for the first time, and the feeling grew through 1968. (33) Even though he was only 31, a prime age for many quarterbacks, years of sacks thanks to the early Cowboys' weak offensive line were catching up with him. As was the frequent booing of fans. Meredith had been loved and celebrated for most of his life. But his sense of humor hid from many the reality that he was a sensitive man with a deep emotional reservoir. The jeers and boos, which occurred even when the team was

winning, wore him down. His second marriage would end soon. By his telling, he had stopped enjoying the game of football. Plus, a new career was calling.

The 1970s were when Don's full celebrity was cemented, and that's for two reasons. The first is that he became part of the celebrated hosting team of Monday Night Football, which through the charm and chemistry of its stars, became an iconic piece of American media.

Following the "Ice Bowl," Don had received multiple TV offers (34), and when legendary ABC sports producer Boone Arledge approached Frank Gifford about hosting his new Monday Night Football program for his network, Gifford recommended Don as a cohost. (35) Arledge envisioned Monday Night Football as something different from Sunday broadcasts. It was prime time TV. It had to be entertainment. It had to be cast. And his eventual star cast would include All-American nice guy Frank Gifford, the brilliant and abrasive and acerbic Howard Cosell, and to play against that, the good ol' boy from Texas, Dandy Don Meredith. Cosell and Don played off each other brilliantly. They weren't close friends the way Don and Frank were. Fans would ask if they hated each other, and the relationship

wasn't easy. But they testified that they knew they had great TV chemistry, and they leaned into the tension the camera captured between the two characters. (36)

Don was part of the Monday Night Football team from 1970 to 1974, and after an NBC hiatus, again from 1977 til 1985. During his broadcasting career, he won an Emmy and became famous for a number of jokes that became his calling card – such as proclaiming "Welcome to Mile High Stadium – and I really am," or

when the camera panned to a fan who flipped the bird, telling Cosell, "Howard, he says we're number one!" Don got in trouble for referring to President Nixon as Tricky Dick on air and introducing Cleveland Brown's player Fair Hooker by riffing, "Fair Hooker...I haven't met one." And most famous of all, he would sing a line from Willie Nelson, "Turn out the lights, the party's over" when it was clear a blowout win was in process. (37)

The second reason the 70s saw the cementing of Don's full celebrity was his marriage to Susan Lessons Dullea. Susan was Don's third and final wife. The Dullea in her name comes from her brief marriage to actor Keir Dullea, known for playing David in 2001: A Space Odyssey. (38) A year after her divorce from the actor, at the end of Don's first year with Monday Night Football, Don spotted her walking down Third Avenue in Manhattan. She literally turned his head, he chatted her up, and the two spent the afternoon flying kites in Central Park with third wheel Frank Gifford. (39) From that day on, they were a team, and what's clear when reading up on Don is that he and Susan loved each other deeply and shared a strong bond. Susan traveled city to city with the Monday Night Football broadcast crew. She became Don's business manager and negotiator, and she handled press relations. (40) She closely protected Don's relationship with the media while also encouraging Don to follow his interests and passions. Together, the two cofounded Don Meredith Productions, which operated out of the LTV Tower on Elm Street in downtown Dallas. (41)

When Don left ABC for NBC in 1974, it came as a surprise to many, but it fit a pattern in Don's life. Don had a number of competing personal interests, which conveniently created a media full-court press of sorts that bolstered his celebrity. But there seemed to be nothing he loved so much, professionally, that he wanted to do it forever. And despite being a stupendous example of the all-American jock, the truth is that Don Meredith always held artistic inclinations and interests, and he experimented with writing prose and poetry, as well as pottery and painting. (42) He had acted in high school. He's been performing the character of Dandy Don for years. And in 1974 he gave in to the acting bug. NBC promised that if he joined their football broadcasting team, he could cover fewer games and perform in NBC productions like Police Story. He could even guest host The Tonight Show, which he did in 1975 with guest Burt Reynolds. (43)

In total his acting career consisted of twenty screen credits (44), and he turned down offers to lead his own series because he didn't want to be tied to a long-term commitment. (45) He also appeared in a number of unscripted



Don Meredith, Howard Cosell, and Frank Gifford—ABC's Monday Night Football

programs, from game shows to hosting the Country Music Awards. He wasn't the first NFL player to do so, but he helped establish a model of using mainstream film and TV appearances to bolster celebrity.

When NFL players like J.J. Watt and Travis Kelce appear in sitcoms and host SNL and game shows, it may be because they've always dreamed of performing. But I'd wager the decision to pursue these opportunities is strategic. Yet for Don, while they enhanced his celebrity, they represented a true passion of his. In fact, when he and Susan retired to Santa Fe, he continued to perform in local theater.

The Dandy Don character served him best when it came to his numerous sponsorships and commercials. Known primarily for selling Lipton Tea in a fleece-lined coat, he also advertised Nabisco, Kmart, Cessna Airplanes, Budweiser, and more. For years, movie stars would famously film ads in Japan - they knew as Don did that the money was great. But it could hurt the image of a certain type of celebrity. Yet Don's Dandy persona was perfectly calibrated to TV Advertising.

In this way, he once again embodied a type of celebrity widely seen today. Turn on a football game, and you'll see George Clooney selling Nespresso - it's not *déclassé* if it's Swiss coffee. Matthew McConaughey plays up his Longview drawl in ads for Lincoln cars and SUVs. And then there's Travis Kelce, often featured in multiple commercials, during each NFL ad break, selling State Farm, Campbell's Soup, Cheerios, and more, while performing the character he's known for - the good-natured goof. But before them, Don showed that advertisements and endorsements could fatten your retirement account while keeping you in the public eye and putting an exclamation point on your public persona.

When he joined NBC, Don asked that he not be referred to as "Dandy Don," saying that Dandy "charms everybody. He's a heck of a guy. But that's not me." (46) Frank Gifford described Dandy as a character Don had become shackled with, something he grew to resent - it was a role, it wasn't Don. Dandy Don was a charming guy with rugged good looks and a quick joke. Laid back and a little devilish - but just a little. Cool and charismatic, with a drawl and a slogan - Jeff and Hazel's baby boy and Billy Jack's little brother from Mount Vernon, Texas. The first Cowboy, so in step with Texas iconography.

Don Meredith possessed these traits, but Dandy Don was the performance of celebrity, and when Don Meredith was done playing the role, that was it. Frank Gifford contended that while Don was a star, he could have been a superstar, but he liked to follow his passions, and when he stopped enjoying a path he was on, he pursued other opportunities.

He retired from Monday Night Football in 1985 and spent his later years painting and playing golf and tennis with Susan in Santa Fe and Palm Springs. Some described Don in later life as a recluse, an often-repeated claim that is easily disproven. He maintained friendships, did many media and public appearances, gave interviews - but he also turned many journalists down. He was so omnipresent for so many years that when he returned to private life, the choice felt more dramatic than a simpler answer - he wanted a normal retirement, spending time with his friends, family and hobbies.

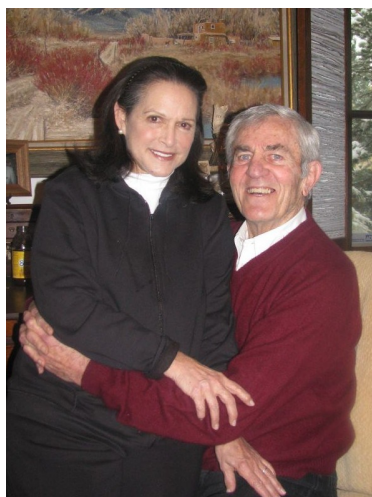
He hung up the celebrity character of Dandy Don and in his 1999 spot playing himself - just Don - in the cartoon *King of the Hill*, he reflected, "I wanted to go to the Super Bowl. Came close. But it never happened. Never will, and that's all right. I've never looked back." (48)

Don's model of modern sports celebrity - transitioning from athlete to multimedia public figure through acting, broadcasting, and advertisements- has been taken on by many - from Terry Bradshaw and Don's onetime Monday Night Football cohost O.J. Simpson, to Howie Long and more.

The Don Meredith papers in the SMU archives hold many family scrapbooks put together by Don and Susan. (49) They provide a stark contrast to the life one imagines these celebrity athletes living. The homes in the Meredith scrapbooks are nice, and the holidays look fun, but there are no mansions, yachts, or famous friends pictured. Instead, the albums that document Don's life feature his immediate family. If you didn't recognize the tall man with the



Don Meredith in a print ad for Lipton Iced Tea



**Susan and Don Meredith
At home in Santa Fe,
New Mexico**

winning smile, you'd never know he was famous. Reading accounts of how loved Don was in Mount Vernon growing up, how celebrated he was as an All-American at SMU, it feels like he was a celebrity all his life, even before the calls from Clint Murchison and Roone Arledge. When he was done performing celebrity, he stopped.

Turn off the lights, the party's over...

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6—Sportsday Staff, "No One Could Make Merry like Meredith" *The Dallas Morning News*, May 1, 2010. <https://dallasnews.com/2010/05/01/no-one-could-make-merry-like-meredith/>.

7—Dave Lieber, *Dandy Don Meredith* (Yankee Cowboy Publishing 2024), 33.

8—Ibid., 34-35

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12—Lieber, *Dandy Don Meredith*, 36.

13—KTVT, *Cowboys Game Day*, "Tales from a Group of the Most Notable Names in Cowboys History." 12 min, 2 secs, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GnA4VgTYKw>.

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16. Ibid., 50.

17—Ibid., 101.

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22—Lieber, *Dandy Don Meredith*, 67.

23-Ibid., 175

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26- Ibid., 176

27-Bud Lea, "Ice Bowl: The Day Vince Lombardi's Electric Blanket Failed," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Dec. 22, 2014. <https://archive.jsonline.com/sports/packers/ice-bowl-the-day-vince-lombardis-electric-blanket-failed-b99422098z1-288171931.html>.

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32 -Frank Gifford, *The Whole Ten Yards* (Ivy Books, 1994), 243.

33—Landy and Lewis, *Tom Landry*, 170.

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Jabez on a break outside of one of the hospital tents. 1945.

OUR WORLD WAR II REVIEW –From the War Zone to the Home Front

Dr. Jabez Galt

For several months now, we've been able to report on events during WWII through letters the young Dr. Jabez Galt sent to his parents during the 4-year course of the War.

Here we have several letters written during May 1945. Dr. Galt's unit has made it into northern Italy. He reaches the end of the month still thinking he will be sent to the Pacific Theatre. The letters take us to August when his ship's course is set for New York City. For now, step back to May 1945; to this evacuation hospital following the frontal assault in the closing days of the war.

Jabez was an avid photographer and we've include several of his personal snapshots and photographs that he took during his deployment.

2 May 1945

To: Sister Gene and husband

V-Mail

I will abbreviate this. It tells of the Germans bringing their own ambulances and finally buses into the 56th Evacuation. I then said, all nationalities and races of enemies and of allies, come to us. The question is "Why" that all wounded men frame in the same way in any language. The tragedy has been great and neither side will admit guilt or responsibility. As patient Fritz Reinerd said in despair "Ach,

krieg, imer krieg, varum?"

14 May 1945

Bologna, Italy

To: Parents

V-Mail

The European war ended with us in Bologna. Nothing happened then, nothing has happened yet. That day was just a little more quiet than most regular working days. In fact it was rather solemn and less than ordinary conversation. No drinks, no dance, no celebration. We are grateful that it is over and that's about all. Now with no patients, I have found so much to do. I spent day before yesterday in Venice. Did just the things tourists usually do in Venice. It's a grand place. But folks, travel doesn't hold the old thrill right now. I want to come home.

19 May 1945

To: Parents

V-Mail

I am too tired to be sleepy. I am just a little shaky and given to jerky starts. In Bologna, we got sudden orders to move to Trieste, the nearest city is Udine. Some of us loaded up last night, made the two hundred mile drive and have worked hard all day – setting up the hospital is a stupendous task. Then I will omit the part that I was concerned about – we were there to control Marshal Tito in opposition to the Italians.

28 May 1945

Udine, Italy

V-Mail

Dear Mom & Dad

This is being written with the new Parker "51" of the set that arrived from Little Gene today.

Things are bad, and are going to get worse before they get better. Only moderately busy – no battle casualties. We have a new colonel who adheres strictly to the written word and army regulations. From all the new stuff that has gone into effect you wonder how we ever got any of our 70,000 patients well. Even had us out, standing in formal ceremonies. Will probably do close-order drill regularly. I have gladly done everything necessary for the good of the patients and the army, but this administrative huddle rankles me, and all others who have any fight back left after such long regimentation. No news as to where or when or by what. Write, please.

Love,
Jabez



Aerial view of hospital camp. Photograph taken by Jabez on a plane tour of the area.

31 May 1945

Udine, Italy

V-Mail

Dear Mom & Dad –

Current happenings lead me to make my first predictions – I believe I will be home by early winter of this year. It's hard to make logical deductions, and I won't engage in wishful thinking, but it does look better now.

Our condition is much as I last wrote you – sitting up here between Trieste and Udine, no clashes to date. It's an amusing situation in many ways. ----- troops and ours fully armed – circulating about turns and bars. We put a guard on a bridge, so he puts on two, so we put on 3, so he puts on 4! Six of his planes started tearing around so we hurriedly put close to a hundred in the air.

The aggression of the French in Lebanon seems so contrary to what I have long thought of them. What, pray tell me, is the difference in German occupancy of France and French occupancy of Africa and Syria?

Love,

Jabez



Small boy walking outside of hospital camp. Italy, 1945.

1 June 1945

To: Parents

V-Mail

Just had a rather nice dinner of turkey and dumplings. Sidney is enjoying them also. Last night had my third meal of fresh turnip greens since being overseas. Ms. Nancy Jefferson of Kentucky picked and washed them. They were extremely good but no cornbread. I am now waiting for our second session with Col. Barker regarding hepatitis; it is such a problem to us. He is the best informed man I have met. Naturally, he is not regular army. He was from Northwestern University.

Three cheers for our noble government! They'll show those nurses who's running things. Draft 'em! Yes Mr. Lewis and Mr. Petrillo and similar ilk repeatedly defy the government. The threatened draft of nurses is the lowest, most cowardly act I have yet to hear of. A woman would be a fool to join when she can make more and shorter hours as an apprentice aircraft worker. And three cheers for Montgomery Ward.

Love,
Jabez



Soldiers, hospital staff, and patients enjoying picnic outside. Italy 19450



View from inside one of the tents in the field hospital camp.



Unit pooling together provisions for a meal at hospital camp. Italy, 1945.



Sallie Green Hill with daughter Geraldine

SALLIE GREEN HILL'S YEAST ROLLS (1879-1968)

The youngest daughter and tenth child of Dr. Roland and Sarah Holbrook Green, Sallie was the child of a pioneer family among the earliest settlers of Mt. Vernon. Her brother, James Adkins Barkley Green, married Polly Taylor Thruston, widow of Edward Thruston and daughter-in-law of Col. Henry Clay Thruston. In 1899, Sallie married Guy Payne Hill, a local merchant. They had one child, Geraldine, who married S. Farrow Styles. Sallie was a graduate of Carr-Burdette College, artist and founder of the Mt. Vernon Shakespeare Club in 1902. She is buried in the Mt. Vernon City Cemetery with her husband and daughter. Guy Payne Hill was the son of John P. Hill, a Virginian who immigrated to Mt. Pleasant; met Mary Elizabeth Holbrook; organized the first troops to march north to war on the square in Mt. Vernon; convinced Mary Elizabeth to marry him and took up residence in their Holbrook home, Shady-Side. J.W. Terry married a Green. Guy P. Hill and Green Hughes (grandfather of Christine Hughes Hicks) were among the pall bearers at the Terry funeral in 1934 and Guy P. Hill dropped dead while assisting in moving the Terry Coffin. Miss Sallie lived on with her daughter Geraldine in Houston .

Sallie was an avid painter and we have four of her paintings currently on exhibit in our Artistic Legacies collection upstairs at the Fire Stations Museum. To view them swing by the museum Tuesday through Friday 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM or email fchaoffice@gmail.com to arrange a tour outside of those hours.

Yeast Rolls

- 1 yeast cake; (2 T. yeast)
- 1 C scalded and cooled whole sweet milk
- 1 T sugar
- 1 T butter
- 1 T lard
- 1 whole egg – beaten
- 3 C sifted flour
- ½ t salt

1. Dissolve the yeast, sugar and fats (butter and lard) in warm milk
2. Add beaten egg
3. Add salt and flour
4. Mix/knead; keep dough soft; place in a well greased bowl; cover and set to rise for 4 hours.
5. Place in greased pans and let rise about 1 hour. Bake in hot oven (450) about 10 minutes. Makes 20 rolls.



Still Life with Fruit 1896, oil. Sallie Green Hill

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Franklin County Farmers Market—Every 1st & 3rd Saturday 8-12 at Little Creek Park May through September.

FCHA Quarterly Program—Deborah Burkett speaks about her new book, From the Alamo to the Present day Texans Speak. Monday July 7, 2025 at 6:30 at Mount Veron Music Hall (402 Leftwich). Program is free and open to the public. For more information see the first page of this newsletter.

Dupree Park Nature Trail— Open year round dawn to dusk at 175 CR NW 1010. This 57 acre nature preserve features a clearly marked 1 mile hiking trail that will take you through the woods, open vistas, a creek, and several ponds. It is a great place for a family stroll, picnic, or to birdwatch.

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2025 CURRENT FCHA MEMBERS & SUPPORTERS

Our 2025 membership drive has been a success. Thank you to everyone who has renewed their membership or joined our organization for the first time. We appreciate your support!

Below is a list of everyone who has joined or renewed since publication of our 2nd quarter newsletter on March 19, 2025 through publication of this issue in mid-June 2025.

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Franklin County Historical Association
P. O. Box 289
Mount Vernon, TX 75457
903-537-9300

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

Name: _____

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Class of Membership & Dues:

Individuals & Family—\$25.00

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Indicate your membership class and mail your dues check to:
FCCHA, P.O. Box 289, Mt. Vernon, TX 75457

2025 DUES

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

Dues for 2025 (Includes subscription to quarterly newsletter) \$ _____

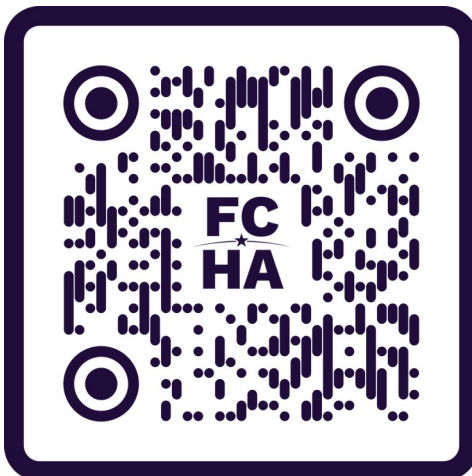
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We need volunteers! Could you work an occasional four-hour shift at one of our museums or a few hours in the office? _____ Yes, call me to schedule. Phone # _____

Scan and follow the QR to code to link to our Facebook page, website, and new YouTube channel!

Memberships can also be renewed on the website. Simply follow the link "How to Join" and fill out a membership form, select your membership level, or make an honorarium or memorial donation.

We appreciate your ongoing support and could not do the work of preserving Franklin County history without our membership base!