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FRIENDS WITH WORDS



Recently I
lived my history—
and came home
with cow manure
on my jeans.
My youngest
brother invited
me to his spring
cow working
even though my

cowhand skills lie dormant beneath 30 years of rust. He
assured me he had plenty of *real* help.

The sun rose bright. The blustery north wind put a
hump in the horses’ backs. Pushed by the hands, the
cows came to the barn as precisely as bovines with babies
can—or will. Cattle bawled. Gates slammed. Bullshit—the
verbal variety—flew thick and fast. Laughter. Family, three
generations of ours, and friends, three generations of one
bunch as well as a host of others gathered.

My brother didn’t need me, but he suspected I needed
it. Big-bodied tiger stripe cows pushed and shoved their
way down the chute, and I stood watching like so many
times before. This time, though, I was transported back to
my raising.

My mind replayed scenes as clearly as an IMAX movie.
My Papa Rufe, clad in khaki with his bandana shading
his neck, grinned down at me from the top of the cutting
chute. He found fun even in the hardest work. My Papa
Alph, a slight man whose large presence earned him the
nickname Big A, laughed from behind a bush as a black
heifer and a cutting horse taught me to hang on and adjust
to the unexpected. My Uncle Boy came rattling up late.
A bottle rolled out from under the tool box, and we kids

discovered a long pull of Scotch at sunrise is a bad idea.

And there were flashes of lessons delivered in a
moment’s heat. One day we had a mess of a cow working.
The cows had gotten scared out of the gate they normally
entered, so they were balling up, running off and doing
anything but going in the pens. Afraid of making a
mistake, I was tentative and in the way.

Daddy rode by in a blur and yelled,
“Ride or get off!”

In life that’s the choice we get to make every day. Then—
and since—I’ve chosen to ride.

Around here we ride with the best and are excited to
introduce you to a group of people who live history. Wiley
and Cynthia George are restoring the Seward Plantation
in Independence thus keeping the legacy of the Seward
family and early Texas alive. Laura Fisher and Jon Failor,
historical interpreters at Washington on the Brazos,
bring early Texas history to life every day. Gloria Hickey,
a lifelong resident of Round Top, shares memories of her
childhood in a small town.

We also stir the pot with Kathy and George Valtasaros,
the husband and wife chef team who helm the Wine Bar
At The Grand Fayette Hotel, a historic Texas landmark,
and shoot the breeze with Mary Louise Young , who owns
the Brazos Star, a place where the walls should talk, in
Chappell Hill.

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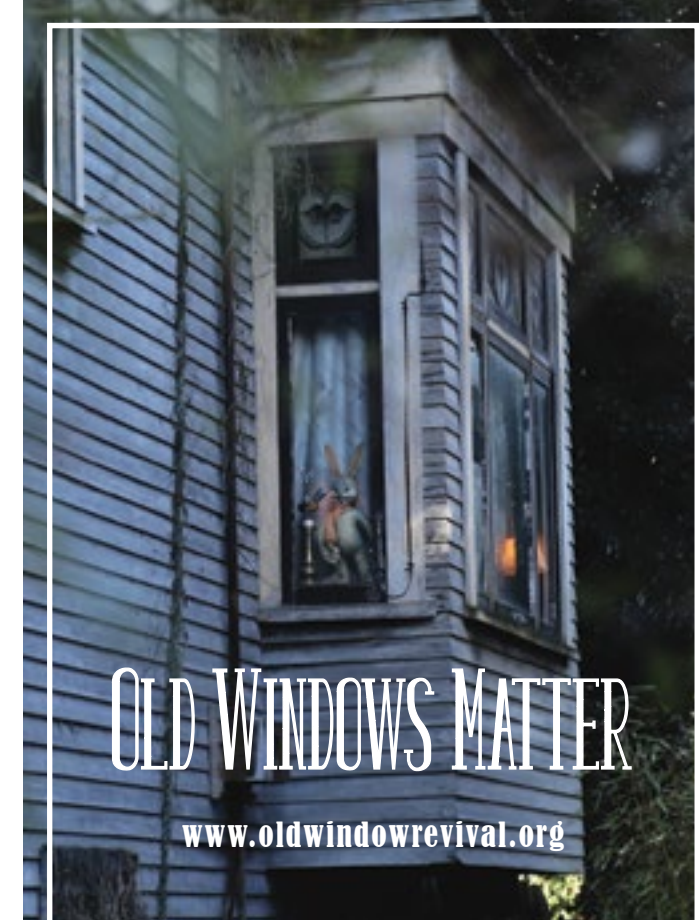
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SHOOTING THE BREEZE WITH MARY LOUISE YOUNG



Mary Louise Young is a moving target. The entrepreneur splits her time between her historic log home in Chappell Hill and Houston. She avoids Highway 290 whenever possible and scoots down the backroads in her Nissan 350z convertible. Fortunately, I caught her at the Brazos Star, the antiques and crafts store she owns and operates in Chappell Hill. It is housed in a circa 1860s former dance hall and saloon. It was Mary Louise’s weekend to work, so we visited in the midst of Saturday morning shoppers.

HOW DID YOU DISCOVER CHAPPELL HILL?

I drove past here with my family en route to see my grandparents in Lexington. [At this point, the conversation derailed as we held old home week.]

WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO MOVE HERE?

I worked for Brunswick and was a professional bowler. Then I owned bowling lanes and a sportswear store. In 1968, I decided I was going to retire, which is funny because I can’t even sit still. I told a man in Chappell Hill that I was looking for 50 acres and a one-room house.

He sent me a letter saying he’d found me a house, but it was in town. I took a look and was smitten. It was an historic house and I worked on it for 10 years. Then one Sunday I went for a drive. When I got back home, the fire department was pulling away. It burned to the ground.

I swore I wasn’t going to restore another old house, but the same man found me another historic house in Ellinger. I moved it over here. I slept in one of the sections when we stopped overnight en route, so nobody would throw a match in it and burn it down.

I finished that house and swore again I’d never restore another historic house.

Never say never. I went to Anderson and bought the log cabin where Tapley Holland—the first man at the Alamo to step over the line in the sand drawn by William Travis—was raised. I moved it here and with some help chinked the logs myself. That’s where I live now.

TELL ME ABOUT THE BRAZOS STAR.

I bought the building in 1969. The deal was too good to pass up, and somebody needed to save it. At one time, Chappell Hill had 14 saloons lining this street. People must’ve picked cotton all day and drank all night

Initially, I had antiques on one side and a saloon on the other. I may be the only saloon owner in history who doesn’t drink beer, but I do like a good frozen margarita.

AND THE BULLET IN THE WALL?

I don’t know the whole story, but supposedly the outlaw Bill Longley frequented here. I’ve still got the wooden panels that you can put over the glass in the front doors in case of a gun fight.

Some people accuse me of putting that bullet there myself, but I had a man in here once who said, “I know you didn’t put that bullet in there because it’s an 1880 Colt blah-blah-blah.” I should’ve written down what he said.

When I got here, Chappell Hill was still a little wild. One day I was working and a man came chasing his wife down the street with a gun. Fortunately, the sheriff got him before the man got her, but I thought, “Mary Louise, you may have made a mistake.”


WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT WE SAVE HISTORY?

In school, I didn’t like history because they made it boring. They just wanted us to memorize what date LaSalle went exploring. I started saving these buildings because I liked the challenge of it. Then I became intrigued by the history. Wouldn’t it be great if these walls could talk, so we’d really know what went on? ★




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JUST THE FACTS

MARY LOUISE YOUNG

OCCUPATION: Professional bowler (retired) and entrepreneur

DOB: March 3, 19xx*
**a lady never discloses her age.*

HOMETOWN: Houston, TX

EDUCATION: Sam Houston State University




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moment with ghosts answering, but fortunately it was Cynthia and Wiley. They broke away from sorting auction items alongside Ham and Teel to show me around their work-in-progress, labor of love.

The sorting, cataloging and choosing is indeed a Herculean labor. They opened the final closet the day before I arrived and discovered 26 lamps. At that time, the couple estimated they had already packed 25 boxes of books, 45 boxes of dishes and décor, rounded up 30 rugs and found at least 25 beds in storage around the property. They hadn't started going through the outbuildings yet.

Our walkabout was a blur of history, stories, antiques and laughter. In short order I learned the La Bahia Road, a much traveled route connecting east Texas to San Antonio, originally passed directly in front of the house. To accommodate random travelers, the Seward family home included a traveler's room that could be accessed from the outside but had no interior doors connecting it to the rest of house. It provided rudimentary security. The sick room, which was on the second floor and could only be accessed by an exterior staircase, served the same purpose against the spread of disease.

The artwork adorning the fireplace in the front parlor is the work of Florence Seward, an art student at nearby Baylor University in the late 19th century when it was in Independence. The family opened the upstairs ballroom frequently for student concerts and dances. Florence died in an equestrian accident at the age of 18, long before she graduated from college.

In the foyer an original framed sign touted the availability of Edison electricity. A string stretched from the upstairs fixture into the foyer, so family members could turn the light on or off from either level. It had hung so long that the well-used convenience had worn a groove in the banister.

A dresser in the traveler's room purportedly belonged to noted, radical prohibitionist Carrie Nation. Another room revealed a Civil War era rifle, a canteen marked with an "S" and a fireman's belt the family suspects belonged to Sam Seward, who was a veteran of the Battle of San Jacinto. The powder horn is his.

Military service was a common thread in Independence. Jerome Bonaparte Robertson, who rose to the rank of brigadier general in the

Confederate Army as part of the Fifth Texas Infantry and succeeded John Bell Hood as the commander of the famed Hood's Brigade, lived just down the road.

We descended into the basement where Ham and Teel began opening the World War I trunks belonging to Col. Oscar Seward, Jr., who was also an engineer of note. Some revealed the expected WWI issue: Red Cross medical gowns, army uniforms and equipment such as holsters, but others contained vintage women's fashions from the 1920s and the 1940s, and others contained assorted things that someone sometime deigned to store. The original bathtub, which was a huge zinc-lined, cypress tub, sat atop a pile of life's ephemera. A box of vintage shoes rested next to replacement slats for the original shutters. A discarded computer mouse peeked out from beneath the basement steps.

The grounds, with a smoke house, slave quarters, corn crib, blacksmith shop and the original log barn and hay mow, reiterate the estate's uniqueness. Plantations with surviving outbuilding are rare in Texas. The majority of these buildings are crafted from old-growth cedar logs measuring at least 12 feet long and with a girth that dwarfs the spindly cedars that serve as native Christmas trees. These massive timbers were hand hewn by slaves in an era where that was the norm.

In 1934, the plantation was the site of a Historic American Buildings Survey, which documented the homestead including the outbuildings. In the late 1990s, Hank Ward, a Seward descendant, restored the slave quarters. Texas A&M conducted a two-year study of the outbuildings in which experts documented the site. The Georges hope to work with the university again, in particular to help restore the historically significant barn.

Piles of split rails from earlier generations lie in wait to replace sagging fences. A 10-speed bicycle rests against a wagon frame. Oxen yolks hang haphazardly. Farm equipment from every era is evident including an old hand-crafted ax that purportedly was used to harvest the original timbers. The Georges found four hand plows under the front porch.

As I was preparing to leave, the sun broke through the clouds and burned off the smothering fog. The plantation shimmered in the promise of a bright new day.

A more poetic writer might say, "the mists of time shrouded the Seward Plantation as I made my approach in mid-February." I'm not poetic. It was fog. Dense, landmark-obliterating fog.

Despite repeated assurance from my hosts that I couldn't miss it, I did. Twice.

I was running late for my 10:00 a.m. appointment, and I was a bit panicked. The estate's new owners, Wiley and Cynthia George of Houston, were allowing me to witness antiques experts Charlie Ham and Jeremy Teel with Antique Rovers of Montalba, Texas, open a series of historic trunks while preparing the contents for auction.

It was the first time in the plantation's history anyone outside the Seward family, who built the house in 1855, was accessing the historic possessions. My inner geek was outing herself and going all *Antiques Road Show* on the prospect of cracking open a six-generation time capsule.

On top of that, I was looking for the stately house I had seen in photos. Somehow, I overlooked the fact that the grand dame already was undergoing a structurally necessary facelift. Scaffolding and raw wood collided with my mental picture.

So did oversized political signs flanking the front gate. Of course, they made perfect sense because Wiley is an attorney, and the signs supported a colleague who was running for the Court of Appeals. If the signs had touted Sam Houston, who lived in the neighborhood and was baptized in nearby Independence Creek, they would've fit into my preconceived idea.

Starting over in downtown Independence, the lady at the Independence General Store straightened me out. She also assured me I couldn't miss it. Either because I was paying attention or because the third time is indeed the charm, I pulled off FM 390 and parked at the intersection of past and present. A mounting block that allowed dress-wearing ladies to ascend to their sidesaddles or step gracefully into a carriage stands alongside the gate.

The front door was ajar, so I poked my head in and heard noise coming from upstairs. I yelled, "Hello, I'm here." I half expected a Scooby Doo

SEWARD PLANTATION

A Texas Legacy

BY LORIE A. WOODWARD
Photos by Cargile Photography



courtesy of Round Top Register



courtesy of Round Top Register

THE DISCOVERY

When Wiley and Cynthia George of Houston started looking for a country property, a listing on the National Register of Historic Places was not one of the criteria.

“We wanted something with easy access to Houston that was at least 50 acres, preferably a mix of woods and pastureland with a house,” Cynthia said. “We also wanted to be within a 45-minute radius of Bellville where my parents have had a place since 1966.”

As they looked off and on over a nine-month period, Washington County with its rolling hills and history struck a strong chord, but they weren’t able to close a deal on any of the properties that interested them. During the same period, the Seward Plantation, which sits on 244 acres, was off and on the market. Because of its size, the Georges never really considered it. Then one day they took a hard look at the listing on *Lands of Texas.com* and decided to see the property in person.

On a fateful spring day when the bluebonnets and Indian paintbrushes were in full marketing mode, the Georges arrived at Seward Plantation. They were surprised.

“We weren’t looking for a historic property, but this place was simply incredible,” Wiley said. “The biggest surprise was how livable it already was.”

Even though the current occupants and part-owners and sixth-generation Seward descendants Hank and Peggy Ward had done an exceptional job of modernizing things such as the kitchen and stabilizing several outbuildings such as one of the slave quarters and the corn crib, the property represented a massive project. It would require a significant investment of time, energy and resources.

“Frankly, the prospect was overwhelming, so we had to some do soul-searching about whether or not we wanted to take this on,” Cynthia said. “Our heads and hearts had to be all in.”



Because there was a considerable amount of interest in the property, the couple didn’t have the luxury of time. As history lovers they brought passion and knowledge to the table. Wiley has an insatiable appetite for reading and absorbing history while Cynthia’s expertise is in art and antiques. She completed the Sotheby’s Works of Art course in London as well as serving as a docent at Ima Hogg’s home, Bayou Bend. Instead of immobilizing them, the potential of research invigorated them.

Along with Cynthia’s parents, the Williamses, Cynthia and Wiley decided to make an offer. The Georges and Williamses were the only potential buyers who wanted to keep the property intact and conserve the house and buildings. There was at least one other who made an offer.

“For us there was never any thought of scrapping the house or sub-dividing the land,” Cynthia said. “The thought of anybody else doing it was too sad to bear.”

The family agreed, so in June 2017 the Seward family entrusted their estate—and their legacy—to the Georges.

The Georges immediately immersed themselves in local history—and hot, sweaty, hard work. Cynthia spent 10 days at a time sorting through drawers, trunks and cupboards and organizing and assessing her finds. Wiley, who still practices law full-time, joined her on Fridays or Mondays.

“I saved all the dark, scary places like the attic, the basement and the back corners for him,” Cynthia said noting that they’ve only suffered one scorpion sting so far. “The first step was simply knowing what was here.”

The Georges made it a point to enlist the help of Hank and Peggy Ward, so they could get the family’s version of the property’s history. The Wards had already donated the significant historical papers to the Texas Collection at Baylor University, but reams of family correspondence, farm records and the like remained as well



courtesy of Seward Plantation

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as a multitude of furniture and farm equipment—most of which had a story.

“Hank and Peggy have been fabulous to share what they know,” Wiley said. “We have become friends and are in very regular contact.”

One of Cynthia’s favorite finds has been the mid-19th century gilded, hand blocked wallpaper that she discovered beneath three layers of newer wallpaper in the upstairs ballroom. She sent remnants to the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York City to get expert opinion and is currently trying to salvage pieces large enough to frame and use as artwork.

“The Swards used to hold community dances and musical theatre performances in the ballroom,” Cynthia said. “I can just imagine the lights of candles and lanterns playing off the walls as people enjoyed the music. It’s a beautiful image.”

Another of the favorite finds has been the mid-19th century book that served as the inspiration for the Greek Revival style home. The house was built without an architect or plans.

“A child drew on the pages of the book,” Wiley said. “The figures have women in long dresses with bustles and men in frock coats. It’s doodling from a much earlier age.”

As they began to make sense of the contents, they began the process of stabilizing the house. The majestic porches were perilously close to falling off. The electrical and plumbing systems needed an upgrade. The exterior needed the protection of new paint. They hired Steve and Tohner Jackson, the father and son team from Industry and Brenham who work under the

name Artisan Builders. While the duo tackles new construction, they have extensive experience working with historic structures including some of those at nearby Winedale.

“From the beginning our contractors have said, ‘The house will tell you what to do,’” Cynthia said.

Wiley interrupted, “I just hope it says, ‘Don’t spend too much money on me.’”

Laughing, Cynthia continued, “It’s been sage advice because as we’ve lived in the house it’s shown us that some of our early, immediate ideas weren’t the best. Time is our friend. I would hate to make a mistake, so we’re moving slowly, deliberately and researching as we go.”

The current work is the first phase in the couple’s 10-year plan. As far as the interior goes, they have no plans to move walls or change the existing footprint with the exception of eventually adding another bathroom. The Georges plan to restore one room at a time until they’ve made their way through the house. They’ve also got plans to restore the outbuildings, hopefully with the help of historic organizations and universities, and install landscaping. Already portions of the land that have become overgrown are being cleared and fences repaired where necessary.

“We don’t want to live in a museum,” Wiley said. “Our goal is to preserve the essential history of the Swards and early Texas while creating a comfortable home for our family where we can create our own memories and family history.”

Cynthia added, “That’s our 100 year plan.”

Auction Action

BEHIND-THE-SCENES WITH THE ANTIQUE ROVERS

Charlie Ham and Jeremy Teel, co-owners of Antique Rovers based in Montalba, Texas, thought they were going to catch their breath when they took a break from photographing the contents of the Seward Plantation. Instead, I peppered them with questions about their business and the upcoming auction.

Seward Plantation Antiques Auction

SATURDAY, JUNE 2, 2018

10005 FM 390

BREHAM, TX 77833

(.7 MILES EAST OF INDEPENDENCE ON
THE PLANTATION GROUNDS)

10 A.M. – UNTIL THE FINAL GAVEL

PREVIEW

FRIDAY, JUNE 1 – 8 A.M. – 5 P.M.

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WELCOME. REFRESHMENTS WILL BE
AVAILABLE.

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Q: WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE TO TOUCH HISTORY?

JT: An honor. This is a one-of-a-kind experience and opportunity. We feel honored that the Georges chose us to help them thoughtfully deal with this estate. We pride ourselves on our research and knowledge. American primitives are our forte, and early Texas primitives, which are relatively rare, are our particular favorites. We've seen things here we've never seen before.

RTR: DO YOU STILL GET A RUSH WHEN YOU WALK ON A PROPERTY LIKE THIS?

CH: Absolutely. This is likely the biggest rush in my career—and I've been involved with antiques for most of my 65 years. Samuel Seward arrived with

Stephen F. Austin. His son John started the house in 1850, completed it in 1855 and it was in the family until June 2017.

Do you have any idea how incredibly rare it is to see an intact material history of a family that spans six generations? It appears that the Swards didn't throw much away, so it is a time capsule that each succeeding generation added to.

RTR: WHEN FACED WITH A TREASURE TROVE, HOW DO YOU HELP OWNERS DECIDE WHAT TO KEEP AND WHAT TO SELL?

CH: In a family estate we take into account emotional attachment. The Georges had no emotional attachment to anything here, but they have a deep respect for the property's

history and are intent on honoring the historical integrity. We've advised them to keep pieces that are unique to the plantation because they were made here, that are historically significant because the pieces are rare and things they simply like because this is their home and they should be surrounded by things they enjoy.

JT: We also tell clients not to throw anything away. Just because they don't see the value of a particular piece doesn't mean that someone else who attends the auction won't. A collector of vintage footwear could get very excited over that box of dusty, worn 1920s ladies shoes that someone else thinks should be tossed.

continued to page 20 >>



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CH: Exactly. We rescued eight corbels that had been tossed on the burn pile. Why did we save them? They were hand-made here on the plantation, likely soon after the Civil War. Cynthia is going to keep four to make a table, and we’re going to sell the other four.

RTR: THE TASK OF SORTING SEEMS OVERWHELMING. HOW DO YOU START?

JT: We pick a corner and work methodically from there. We don’t skip around and cherry pick because we don’t want to miss a single thing or have to backtrack.

RTR: HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT SOMETHING IS WORTH?

JT: We do research to establish baseline knowledge about what similar items have brought. It gives a potential range of prices. Of course, with one-of-a-kind things there is nothing to compare them to. The excitement of an auction is that you never know exactly what is going to happen. The price will be determined by the demand for that item by that crowd. We don’t ever know the exact value of an item until the gavel falls because that’s what it brought on that day.

RTR: WHY SHOULD PEOPLE—COLLECTORS OR NOT—COME TO THIS AUCTION?

CH: First, people should come to be transported to early Texas. This plantation is listed as one of the top historical sites in Washington County, which is the county where Texas was born. It’s a rare opportunity to get a glimpse of Texas before the Civil War. Second, people should come because an auction like this will not likely occur again in this century or the next. People almost never get the right to buy a whole quantity of pre-Civil War, Texas-made goods because it simply doesn’t come on the market. These items are virgin antiques, meaning that they’ve never passed through the hands of dealers—and the provenance is unquestionable. Spectacular architectural remnants. People rarely get the chance to own logs hand-hewn by slaves because they’re incredibly rare and usually incredibly expensive. We have a whole pile of them. In my career I’ve never seen a quadruple tree, a yolk that allows a farmer to put four horses abreast. We found four here. Three will be available for purchase along with innumerable triple trees, double trees and single trees. This truly is an opportunity of a lifetime for anyone who loves Texas—and wants to own a piece of her history.



Hands of Time
A WHO’S WHO OF SEWARDS

SAMUEL SEWARD, the original pioneer who arrived in Illinois in the 1830s and came to Texas with Stephen F. Austin. He settled about a mile from the site of the plantation. (A chair in the house marked “Seward 1833” is purportedly the chair Mrs. Seward sat in as their wagon made its way to Texas.)

Samuel’s son **JOHN HOBLETT SEWARD** built the plantation in the 1850s for his bride **LAURA ROBERTS** from Houston.

John’s son **OSCAR SEWARD SR.** married **ELIZABETH CLEMENT McCAY** from New Orleans. They lived in the house until 1889 when he was elected County Clerk and they moved to Brenham. They moved back to the plantation prior to World War I and spent the rest of their lives there.

Oscar’s son **COL. OSCAR SEWARD JR.** was an engineer and a military man. He and his wife **LERA** moved to the plantation full-time in the 1950s and restored it.

Oscar son **OSCAR SEWARD III** lived in Fort Worth and used it as a weekend home. Upon his death it passed to his sister Patricia Ward.

Patricia’s son **HANK WARD** and his wife **PEGGY** co-owned the property with Hank’s three sisters. Hank and Peggy moved to the plantation full-time in the 1990s and did extensive restoration work.

In June 2017, the Wards and their extended family sold the Seward Plantation to **WILEY AND CYNTHIA GEORGE.** ★

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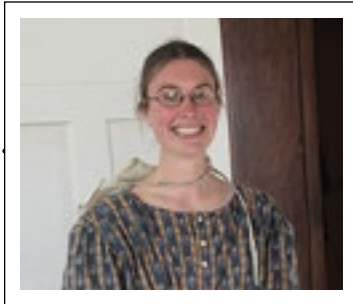
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Living the Dream by Living History

BY LORIE A. WOODWARD
Photos courtesy of the Texas Parks
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“Texans should visit Washington on the Brazos because it preserves the beginning and the end of the Republic of Texas. Here you can experience the signing of the Declaration of the Independence and explore the home of the Republic’s last president, the man who made it possible for Texas to become the best state in the nation.” —Laura Fisher

For interpreter Laura Fisher, living history every day is living the dream. “Not only do we preserve history by keeping traditions and techniques alive, but we get to pass it on,” said Fisher, who joined the staff at the Barrington Living History Farm at the Washington on the Brazos State Historic Site in 2017. “It’s everything I like to do rolled up into a dream job.”

Having a dream job makes her life “dreamy” as well. “I have the best of both worlds,” Fisher said. “I get to play in a garden all day, tend poultry and the farmstead like a pioneer woman and then go home, enjoy my air conditioner and microwave my dinner.”

Living with one foot in the 19th century and the other in the 21st century has given Fisher a unique perspective on a lot of things including fashion. “I hate current fashion trends, especially pants that are so tight that you can’t get your hands in your pockets,” said Fisher, who is 26 years old. “I prefer the long loose comfortable dresses I wear at work and would rather climb a tree or jump a fence in a long dress than in modern pants.”

She continued, “For the record, a corset provides exceptional back support and is surprisingly comfortable to drive in.”

Although she is a child of the state park system, Fisher never considered becoming a park ranger. “My father was the superintendent of the Fort Parker State Park, so I grew up there,” Fisher said. “There were no interpreters there. While I loved parks and Texas Parks and Wildlife, a career involving primarily facility and grounds maintenance held no interest for me.”

All that changed when her brother, Paul, got a summer internship at the Barrington Farm while he was in college. Fisher volunteered and fell in love with hands-on history. Her summer experience prompted her to major in history and

minor in museum studies at Baylor University. During college she was a student worker at the Mayborn Museum, a museum on the Baylor campus that includes a 1890s Texas village. This job enriched her education with historic knowledge and experience, especially in historic gardening.

“I came to Barrington and learned historical gardening practices,” Fisher said. “Then I went back to Baylor and included them a research paper that I turned into a manual on historic gardening for the Mayborn’s Historic Village.”

Upon graduation, Fisher began working full-time at the Mayborn Museum, but continued volunteering at Barrington Farm. She maintained this split schedule until February 2017 when she came to Washington on the Brazos full-time. These days Fisher handles the household chores of a 1850s farm wife at Barrington Farm, the homestead of Anson Jones who was the last president of the Republic of Texas.

“At a living history site, people are encouraged to participate,” Fisher said. “It’s all about doing and touching, not about sitting and shushing.”

To that end, the Anson house has a working garden, an outdoor laundry, a mixed flock of poultry, a kitchen with a fireplace for cooking, and a bedroom doing double-duty as a school room. The farm is filled with more things to do.

“Our curators have done an incredible job of collecting authentic reproductions that people, especially children, can touch and use to get a true sense of the time, as well as originals that we don’t encourage people to touch, but it will be okay if they do,” Fisher said. “We want memorable experiences to be their souvenirs.”

Enthusiastic interactivity complements her interpretative style. “All interpreters have their own style,” Fisher said. “Mine is ‘excitement.’ There’s nothing I like better than a group of young kids who are curious about the

world and excited to be at the farm. We feed off of each other—and learn a lot.”

One of her prized skills is recognizing teachable moments that other people dismiss as mere distractions. A case in point: two young boys in a school group were focusing on a wildflower and its seed head instead of looking at the hogs in the pen and listening to information about the role of pigs in pioneer life.

“Instead of fussing at them for not paying attention, I talked to them about the plant they were looking at,” Fisher said. “They now know we don’t pick wildflowers at state parks because each flower has hundreds of seeds that will never become flowers if it’s picked.”

Another valuable skill is turning a challenge into an opportunity. It takes creativity to protect the year’s potato crop from hornworms with a troop of Girl Scouts.

“Hornworms had attacked the potatoes,” Fisher said. “My group for the day was Girl Scouts, and a lot of girls get squeamish about touching worms, but I needed to take care of the infestation.”

Without saying a word, Fisher caught a hornworm and tossed it to a passing hen who fluttered her feathers and clucked her appreciation. Then Fisher asked, “Who else wants to feed the chickens?”

The girls flocked to the potato patch and plucked worms until the threat was gone and the hens were full.

“When children leave here and grow up, they might forget who Anson Jones was, but they will remember the place where they fed chickens and planted seeds,” Fisher said. “They will remember that history is ours to protect and share. They will know history is important—and fun.”

Another Interpretation

A QUICK CHAT WITH JON FAILOR



Ohio-born Jon Failor is the Historic Site Manager at the Barrington Living History Farm and Assistant Complex Superintendent at The Republic of Texas Complex, where he joined the staff as an agricultural interpreter in 2012. After a “life-changing encounter with history” as a child, teenage Failor

searched out opportunities to volunteer at historic sites. In 2002, after six years as a volunteer, he became a museum and historic site professional on a mule-drawn canal boat in Northwest Ohio. A career move in 2004 allowed him to learn circa 1840s farming practices at Historic Brattonville in South Carolina, become the site manager, along with his wife Danielle, of the 1840s Island Farm on North Carolina’s Outer Banks—and eventually answer the call of Texas.

RTR: WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO DEDICATE YOUR CAREER TO BRINGING HISTORY TO LIFE?

JF: It was 1990. I was 10-years-old. My family was vacationing on Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, and we went to Fort Michilimackinac, which was built by the French in the early 1700s. On this trip I encountered a Native American interpreter who took us into his darkened wigwam where the fire crackled and the smell of smoke filled the air. I still remember the way the bells on his bag jingled and the footfall of the soldiers marching around outside.

As he explained the customs of the Ojibwe and Chippewa people and their relations with British citizens, I became a time traveler. It was a real moment with real history that took me back 250 years. I knew right then that history was something that I wanted to be a part of my life.

Of course, I didn’t figure out that it was possible to make a living as an historical interpreter until much later in my life. I volunteered at historical sites as soon as I was old enough, but when I realized that somebody would pay me to share what I love with other people, it was an “Ah-ha! Let’s do this!” moment.

RTR: DO YOU EVER HAVE TROUBLE GOING BETWEEN THE MODERN WORLD AND THE MID-1800S?

JF: The hardest transition I ever had to make was the physical transformation that came from farming like they



did in the mid-1800s. I was learning to plow using horses and oxen in South Carolina in the summer. Summer in South Carolina is like summer in this part of Texas—hot, humid and generally oppressive.

In the beginning I would work in the fields in the morning and then go into the air-conditioned staff room to eat lunch. Once I sat down in that cool room and ate a heavy lunch, it was a monumental struggle to go back outside. It didn’t take me long to figure out that I needed a farmer’s lunch—a piece of cheese or an apple with some water—eaten under a shade tree if I was going to survive the rigors of the work. Once you get acclimated, the breeze under a shade tree feels really good.

RTR: HOW DO YOU GET INTO “CHARACTER?”

JF: I’m not a huge fan of first person interpretation because most people have trouble suspending their disbelief, and they have questions, such as: “What happened when the plantation sold?”

When interpreters are in first person, they have to maintain the character, so instead of being able to answer the question directly, they have to say something like, “Sold? Blasphemy. Can’t you see that we’re still working here?” Non-answers are frustrating for the visitors.

We use third person at Washington on the Brazos except for very specific scripted presentations when guests know they are watching a performance. In third person the interpreters may be dressed in period clothing, but they are themselves.

Here’s the best way I’ve found to explain it. In first person it’s as if the interpreter is in a house and the visitors are watching through the window. In third person the interpreter is outside looking through the window with the visitors and having an unlimited conversation about what they’re seeing and why it matters.

RTR: WHAT DO YOU SAY TO PEOPLE WHO MAINTAIN THAT “HISTORY IS BORING?”

JF: History is not boring because people are not boring. At the root of all history is people who eat, sleep, breathe and experience the intense range of human emotions that we all do. Love, sorrow, joy and pain were part of their lives too.

Unfortunately too many times history classes emphasize dates. If history educators could focus on the people who experienced what we do, then the dates and events would come because their students would remember the people and their stories.★



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Gloria Hickey's "Snapshots" of Round Top



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MEMORIES OF SMALL TOWN LIFE • By Lorie A. Woodward • Photos courtesy of Gloria Schwarz Hickey



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Gloria Schwarz Hickey was born in September, 1945 in El Paso while her father, Hilmer Schwarz, was stationed at Biggs Field. She remained in far West Texas until her mother Eunice and she were strong enough to travel to Round Top where both sides of her family had lived since the earliest waves of German immigration. As soon as Hilmer could get a furlough, he traversed the 650 miles separating his young family from their extended kin: the Schwarzes on his side and the Etzels on Eunice's side.

"I've lived in Round Top ever since Daddy dropped us off," Gloria said.

Hickey's maternal grandfather, Dennis Etzel, farmed on family land outside Round Top. Her paternal grandfather, Emil Schwarz, ran E. E. Schwarz Grocery & Feed, which was a single business with three parts: a grocery store, a feed store and a beer joint. The store was housed on the block that was the original Stone Cellar, which in the early days of Round Top was a brewery. Today, it is home to Lulu's restaurant and Sandy Reed Country Properties.

"The brewery was shut down before my grandpa purchased the building," Hickey said. "When my daddy returned home, he went to work with Grandpa Schwarz at the store—and ran it his whole life."

Her mother worked in the store alongside her father. Hickey helped and began working regularly in the 1950s. The store opened at 7:30 a.m. and closed at 9:30 p.m. It was a year-round, six-day-a-week family affair.

"We went deer hunting in Bulverde in the winter, but that was as close to a vacation as we got," Hickey said. "Nobody took vacations. I candled eggs and unpacked groceries in the summer while other kids picked cotton. I was lucky."

Her Schwarz grandparents lived across the street where the Copper Shade Tree is now. Hickey and her cousins grew up climbing in the oak grove right next to the current post office. In those days it was the family's sheep pen. The poultry holding pens were closer to the Schwarz house.

Round Top in the 1950s was a thriving ag community. Small acreage cotton still made money for the producers and the folks who ginned and stored it.

"There were gins all over scattered about 20 miles apart," Hickey said. "When farmers would get their six or seven bales, they'd bring them to us, and we'd store them. Grandpa Schwarz stored the cotton for Grandpa Etzel."

Then trucks would come from Brenham and beyond to pick up the cotton. The feed store was also the collection point for eggs, chickens and, near Thanksgiving, turkeys raised by local farm families and processed by out-of-town businesses.

"When the holidays got close, my grandparents' pens would fill up turkeys just waiting to be somebody's Thanksgiving dinner," Hickey said.

The grocery store couldn't have been confused with a supermarket.

"It was a country store," Hickey said. "We never had refrigeration. Everything that had to be kept cold was kept on ice delivered in big blocks."

Summer sausage, rat cheese and saltines were staples. Links of summer sausage hung in the doorway to catch the breeze.

"Grandpa Schwarz was a big coon hunter—and loved dogs," Hickey said. "He'd cut off a chunk of summer sausage and feed it to any dog that wandered in with somebody."

By the 1960s things were changing. Because of rising labor costs, cotton had gotten too expensive to harvest by hand. Farmers could either hire a custom harvester or buy a cotton stripper. Both were

continued to page 40 >>



cost prohibitive for small acreage. The trucks quit coming to pick up cotton and other ag commodities.

People had begun driving to La Grange for their groceries. The Schwarz family—and the owners of the six other local groceries—either had to spend money to modernize or re-think their businesses.

“We didn’t have a monopoly on the grocery business, and we couldn’t keep stuff fresh—it was the beginning of the end of the grocery business,” Hickey said. “But the feed store and the beer joint were still doing good though.”

Then the family lost its patriarchs. In December 1961, Grandpa Schwarz died, and in February 1962, Hilmer suffered a massive heart attack and died. Eunice and Hickey, who was a freshman in high school, were faced with the prospect of keeping the store going.

“It was just too much,” Hickey said, noting that Round Top was also in transition at the same time.

Farmers’ children answered the siren call of good-paying jobs in Austin, Houston and other metro areas. When their parents died, many of the children sold the property to Houstonians who were looking to escape the city on weekends. Many local residents became caretakers of weekend properties, which provided their families with additional income.

Hickey began working at Leona Kiel’s store. Hickey was attending Blinn College with plans to go to Texas A&M and become a veterinarian assistant when she first met Ima Hogg. Miss Hogg, daughter of Gov. Jim Hogg and a noted philanthropist, was one of the first Houstonians to discover Round Top.

“Grandpa Schwarz taught me that the customer was always right,” Hickey said. “My job wasn’t to wait on them but to take care of them.”

Miss Hogg, who was already working on her Winedale project thanks to the prompting of another “local Houstonian” Hazel Ledbetter, soon enlisted Hickey’s help on a part-time basis.

“She had a group of friends coming to look around one weekend,” Hickey said. “She asked me to open the doors before they got there and to lock them when they left.”

Miss Hogg, along with Wayne Bell who served as the project’s director from the University of Texas, continued to increase Hickey’s responsibilities. She became a part-time tour guide for \$.50 an hour. When the University of Texas sent someone to create an inventory of Winedale, Hickey was asked to help when she wasn’t in class. Over the summer she began working full-time, and Miss Hogg convinced her to stay full-time until the inventory was complete.

“I was going to have to work my way through college, but I thought I might be able to save enough with this job so I wouldn’t have to work when I was at A&M,” Hickey said. “I stayed.”

It was April 1967. The inventory was completed. Hickey stayed. A curator came and went. Hickey stayed. Another curator came and went. Hickey stayed. Then Bell and Ronald Brown, then-president of UT, came.

“When the university president and your boss leave their offices in Austin and come to you, it doesn’t bode well,” Hickey said. “I thought, ‘This is it. I’m getting fired.’”

Instead of getting fired, she got promoted and took over as Winedale’s manager, a job she held for 38 years.

“I was at the right place at the right time,” Hickey said. “I had the rare opportunity to do a job I loved in a place I love. Unlike so many of my school friends who had to leave to figure out what a special life we have here in Round Top, I knew all along. It’s a good place to be from, but it’s a very good place to be.”



Snapshot: Dances

“My family kept the store open on Saturday nights, so they didn’t go dancing very often. I went along with other people. The bands played a mix of polkas, waltzes and country music.

At the Rifle Hall there was a potbellied stove near the bathroom. In the wintertime everybody would bring quilts, and we little ones would sleep back there by the fire when we got tired. In the summer we slept back there too because we weren’t underfoot.

There were usually two dances every Saturday. They were held on regular schedule, and I don’t remember the exact one now, but for instance first Saturday might be a dance in Round Top and a dance in Warrenton.

When you got old enough to drive, you’d take yourself. If your friends weren’t at one place, then you’d drive to the other.

Before you got old enough to drive, parents would take us even if they weren’t going. There was a group of three or four moms who used to take turns driving us back and forth because we just couldn’t stand the thought of missing something.

When we got ready to dance, the girls would all dance with each other. Then the boys would come out and tap us on the shoulder. That way they never had to ask us to dance, and we never had to ask them to dance. We all just knew.”

Snapshot: Entertainment

“We made our own fun. Grandpa Schwarz was a hunter. My boy cousins and I would ride on the hood of his car with our legs wrapped around the fog lights hanging on best as we could while we chased jack rabbits. We’d all go coon hunting. My girl cousins seemed to think I needed to stay in the house and play dolls, but that was boring when I could be shooting a bb gun.

I loved to ride horses. I had to work to get mine because my parents thought it was just ‘a phase.’ There were four of girls who rode together. Two in Round Top and two in Carmine. None of us had trailers. If we wanted to ride together, we had to ride from home to Carmine or vice versa. Then we’d ride all day—and then ride back home.

We could go wherever we wanted. Nobody cared as long as we took care of the gates. If a gate was open, leave it open. If it was shut, close it behind you. Nobody told us that, we just knew it was expected.

At the beer joint people came in after work to have a cold beer and play games. They played Skat (pronounced Scott), a German card game, poker and dominoes, both straight and Shoot the Moon.

Sometimes on Saturdays there would be a big turkey shoot. The men would compete for live turkeys. If somebody won one—or several—they’d come back to the beer joint around 5 or 6 in the evening after they’d been drinking beer all afternoon. Then they’d butcher it...scald it, burn off the pin feathers...the whole things...only after a day of beer some feathers generally escaped. By about 10 o’clock they’d have a big pot of turkey stew.

The rhythm of life was different. People took time to know and enjoy each other, including a lot of pranks.

There was a great big man in town. When I was a youngster, he was one of the biggest men I’d ever seen. Anyway, the guys in the beer joint used to tease him and tell him that he couldn’t get his horse to come inside the bar.

In those days there were two doors separated by some wall space, not a double door like now.

One afternoon he showed up and led his horse in the door. Straight up to the bar. He stood there drinking his beer like nothing was going on, and the all the while my daddy was raising sand , ‘Get that horse out of here before it falls through the floor!’

When the man finished his beer, he grinned, waved and led his horse out the door.

You just never knew what might happen.”

Snapshot: Colorful Characters

“Growing up in a little town, you know people in a different way than you know people in a big city. You know their stories, and they know yours because life just overlaps.

Back in the days when I was working in the store, there was a retired fellow in town. He’d come in in the mornings to drink a little cold beer before lunch, which was pretty common then.

The Southern Select beer truck would come to town on the same day every week at the same time and run the route in the same order. Grandpa Schwarz and the store were in a Southern Select ad once. Anyway, in those days the distributors would give the drivers some money to buy customers a beer when they were delivering. In Round Top at that that time, there were 12 places that sold beer.

On delivery day that man would meet the driver at the first stop and get his free beer. He’d finish it, and by the time the driver got to the next stop, the man would be there waiting for his free beer. He met the driver at all of the stops until he’d had all of the beer he wanted.

Every once in a while, the driver would decide to have some fun, so he’d run the route backward. The retired man never figured out what was going on, and we all got a big laugh out of him waiting and wondering what was keeping the beer truck.

We had some colorful regulars in the beer joint. Willie Plumbeck was one. He wore a fancied up hard hat everywhere he

went. He’d catch a ride into town, and when he was ready to go home, he’d climb in someone’s car, and it was their responsibility to take him home.

He had a tendency to get a little loud every once in a while. One time I had to ask him to tone it down, but it made him mad. He flung his hard hat across the beer joint. He felt bad immediately and began apologizing; his outburst was witnessed by two fellows who were in town working for Miss Bybee.

These two fellows had been coming in for lunch and an occasional after work beer. We’d chatted back and forth. They were nice, but nobody else really knew them.

Several nights later, Willie and those men were in the beer joint after work. Everybody else had gone home. They’d all finished their beers, but they all just kept sitting there.

Finally, it was late, and I said, ‘Guys, y’all quit drinking beer hours ago. I’ve got to go home.’

Willie went out the front. The strangers went out the back. When I got in my car, all of them were sitting outside watching me leave. The strangers didn’t want to leave me alone with Willie, and Willie didn’t want to leave me alone with the strangers.

That’s the thing about a small town. It’s why my parents never worried about me being in the store by myself. People looked out for one another. It’s just what you did.”



Snapshot: Community Service

“Growing up here, we didn’t even think about community service. It was natural to us because it was the way we were raised. Our churches, the Rifle Association and the VFW were all big organizations.

The Do Your Duty Club, DYD for short, was founded in 1935 by six ladies who lived in town. They decided the men in town weren’t paying attention to the town square, and ‘it looked like a cow pasture.’ They undertook to give the center of town a woman’s touch, so they installed swept walks—bare dirt paths that they swept with brooms to keep clean—and flower beds. It was a matter of civic pride to them.

Back in the 60s, the DYD held a Bingo game every other Friday in the town hall to raise money for beautification. They were having trouble getting someone to call numbers, so they asked me.

I didn’t want to do it, but telling those women no wasn’t a possibility, so I started calling numbers.

Today, there are several teams of two who take care of the square. The teams each take a side of the square and keep that flower bed up. Somebody else mows the lawn these days.

As kids we were taught by example and by telling us that everybody has to do their part to make a town a good place to live. We learned to ask two things: How can I help? What’s good for Round Top?

Those things stuck with me and made me a person of compromise. I’ve always thought that, regardless of who is sitting at a decision-making table, the best answers come from people who are willing to help do what is best for the community.” ★

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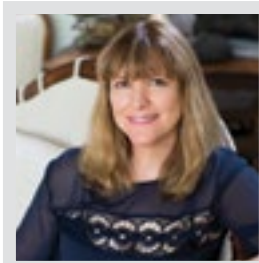
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On the Porch

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS
BY ANITA JOYCE
cedarhillfarmhouse.com



Anita Joyce has a city house in Houston, a country house near Shelby and a flair for French style. The former engineer is a

wife and mother as well as a self-taught photographer, interior designer, blogger and online entrepreneur who founded cedarhillfarmhouse.com in 2011. Today that site alone has 80,000 unique visitors per month.



**Some names were changed*

DECORATING FEARLESSLY



I tracked alongside the cougar as she paced back and forth in the cage and positioned the collar over her head just as I had been shown. My palms sweated, and my heart rate soared as I realized the gravity of being alone in a small room with a wild cougar. No protective gear. My life flashed before me as I contemplated the question: “How dumb are you?”

My journey into a cougar’s den started the weekend before my first semester of college. I had planned to attend Texas A&M, but my brother asked me to go to the university where he was enrolled. He seemed unhappy at the time, and so I agreed.

I moved in the Saturday afternoon before classes began, although my dad warned me that most students wouldn’t be there until Sunday afternoon. Indeed, the dorms were a ghost town. I was alone in the room until late afternoon when my suitemate Charlotte* arrived. Immediately she invited me to a party that evening. I accepted.

We left the city lights behind and headed into the deep woods. It occurred to me that I didn’t know Charlotte or her boyfriend well, and in this pre-cell phone era, my mind began conjuring visions of bodies thrown in the woods.

After at least an hour’s drive, we arrived at a solitary house where music was blaring and several beer kegs waited. I relaxed becoming fairly certain Charlotte and her boyfriend were not axe murders. They introduced me to everyone. Many of them belonged to the Cougar Guard, an organization that took care of the college mascot.

They all encouraged me to join the guard, and I thought, “Why not?” I had an instant group of friends.

Later, it was decided all guard members needed to be able to collar the cougar, so each of us had to enter the cage alone with the cougar and place the collar on her neck. Davy*, who kept a snake bite kit on him at all times, told me that a cougar bite stayed purple long after it healed. As proof, he nodded his head toward Sally,* who was on crutches. The purple bite scar was very visible. Sally offered “comforting” information: Her tendon was seriously damaged, but not severed, so it wasn’t as bad as it could’ve been.

It was around this time that my number came up. Putting the collar on the cougar was a tricky operation since it required hand placement right above her head. At just the right moment, you pivoted the collar down and over her mouth and around her neck. Then you could tighten the collar so it was snug.

My colleagues warned me the cougar usually tried to bite the hands that held the collar and advised me to anticipate the bites and swing the collar down quickly in between the snaps. As the cougar and I walked back and forth in the cage, I wished I had chosen Texas A&M with its fluffy, friendly collie mascot named Reveille.

The guard members watched me through the glass as I looked for my chance to slide on the collar. Many thoughts swirled in my head, but mainly I wondered, “How do I get out of here alive without severing any tendons?” At the time I wasn’t sure what a tendon was, but I was pretty certain I didn’t want any of mine severed.

Finally I found my courage, placed the collar on her neck and fastened it in place. I attached the two leads to her collar and opened the door. I was shaking, but I did it. I came out alive with tendons intact—and a taste of real fear in my mouth. ★



Tips for Decorating Fearlessly

Some people fear making decorating mistakes, but after surviving a trip to a cougar’s den, I know that fear isn’t justified. Most decorating mistakes don’t involve trips to the emergency room or permanent, purple scarring.

Mistakes are how we learn, and many decorating mistakes are reversible. When learning something new, it’s important to know when you get it right, but it’s also important to know when you get it wrong. Sometimes you learn more from making a mistake than getting it right from the beginning. When you make mistakes you learn from them because these lessons usually stick.

GO AHEAD AND TRY NEW THINGS. Move things from one room to another. Buy several pillows, try them all and keep the ones that work. If you adore an original piece of art, buy it. It might not work where you need artwork, but you’ll find a place for it.

BIG TICKET VS. SMALL TICKET ITEMS. When it comes to small ticket items such as pillows, throws and accessories that are easily returned, I have no problem making mistakes. I always learn something. My suggestion is to take a picture of your work each time you make a change to a room. People usually notice things in photos that they don’t in person.

Big ticket items such as appliances, flooring, countertops or lighting are a bit trickier. I like to be fairly certain they will work before I pay a professional to have them permanently installed in my home.

Now go have fun, but seriously, stay away from the big cats.

HORSES IN THE AMERICAN WEST: PORTRAYALS BY TWENTY-FOUR ARTISTS

Book Mark

BY CHRISTINE BROWN
Publicity and Advertising Manager
Texas A&M University Press

photos courtesy of
Texas A&M University Press

As one of the top 20 university presses in the nation, the Texas A&M University Press publishes up to 65 new titles annually. Subjects range from borderland studies, gardening and horticulture, military history, natural history and the environment, presidential studies and works on the history and culture of Texas and the Southwest. Knowing the Roundtopolis™ is a melting pot of people with far-ranging interests, the press staff provides a book review each quarter highlighting one of its titles.



BOOK INFORMATION

*Horses in the American West:
Portrayals by Twenty-Four Artists*

AUTHORS: Heidi Brady and Scott White

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153 color, 16 b&w photos.
Bibliography. Index.

Cloth: \$40.00

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Working cowhands and their horses are partners sharing a mutual trust and respect in one another's abilities. *Horses in the American West: Portrayals by Twenty-Four Artists* captures the beauty of this unique bond. The art within this lavishly illustrated book allows readers to be privy to this relationship and leaves them in awe of the horse's majestic power and elegance.

Twenty-four artists—including ranch owners, working hands, professional photographers, rodeo cowboys, art instructors, graphic designers, a saddle maker and a former predator hunter—have come together to share their paintings, sculptures, photographs and drawings of the American West. It celebrates the Western lifestyle as surely as it celebrates horses.

As authors Heidi Brady and Scott White note, these artists came to their art in a variety of ways; some are formally trained while others learned their craft through visual and tactile study of the horses they worked with each day. These award-winning artists share love and respect for our equine companions.

The artists' own words fill the book allowing readers exclusive access into their lives, experiences and creative processes. Brady and White have worked carefully to preserve the artists' words just as the artists have worked to create images of the Western way of life for generations to come.

As series editor Bonney MacDonald writes in the foreword, "One could call this an eclectic book about an eclectic West. Another might be rightly tempted to call it a book about an authentic West or perhaps a real West. I prefer to call it a book about the lived and the working West—told by those who paint, draw, photograph and sculpt its life; who lyricize and tell of its beauty and challenges; who preach its daily lessons; and who carve, braid and build the gear that gets the work done with dignity. Finally, it is a book that, through portraits of working relations between human and horse, portrays a timeless partnership of labor, love and communication."

Glenn Blodgett of the 6666 Ranch in Guthrie puts it best when he says, "Whether you are a rancher, a cowboy or just someone with a love of the Western lifestyle, you will be entertained by each piece throughout this book. Join me in celebrating the Western way of life one page at a time."

Horses in the American West will captivate horse owners, rodeo fans, art connoisseurs, students and horse lovers in general. No matter their level of equestrian expertise, readers will be touched by these remarkable images depicting the freedom and spirit of the American West. ★



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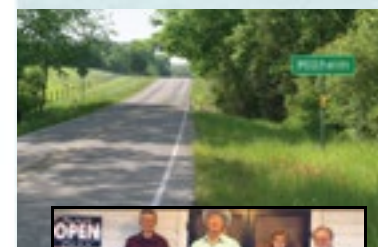


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Ag Attorney

BY TIFFANY DOWELL LASHMET
Ag Law Specialist
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

Tiffany Dowell Lashmet grew up on her family’s farm and ranch in northeastern New Mexico. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Agribusiness (Farm and Ranch Management) from Oklahoma State University and a law degree from the University of New Mexico. She is licensed to practice in Texas and New Mexico.

These questions are compiled on her blog, “Questions from Tiffany’s Desk.”

SUBMIT A QUESTION:
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How do I set a fair cash lease rate for my agricultural land in Texas?



specialist—people with the latest and best information about conditions in the area who can help evaluate factors such as the amount and quality of forage, fences and water.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA) NATIONAL AGRICULTURE STATISTICS SERVICE (NASS) REPORT: Each year NASS surveys landowners and producers about current lease rates and, in August, publishes a report of the average lease rates (price per acre per year) for irrigated cropland, nonirrigated cropland and pastureland for the United States and each state. In Texas the average lease rates were \$87 for irrigated cropland, \$28 for nonirrigated cropland and \$6.60 for pastureland. Additionally, every other year NASS breaks down this data further by reporting data by district within a state and by county. This report is available in September of even-numbered years.

Texas is divided into 15 districts, and average cash rent values are reported for each one. For the “South Central” region, which includes all *Round Top Register* counties, average rates for 2016 were \$62 for irrigated cropland, \$19.50 for nonirrigated cropland and \$13 for pastureland. NASS also maintains a database including data analyzed by county for each even-numbered year. These rates can be found in database form on the USDA-NASS website.

Texas Rural Land Value Trends: Each April the Texas Chapter of the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers publishes a report, the “Texas Rural Land Value Trends”, which includes an analysis of land prices throughout the state and reports on the average range for land lease rates. The report breaks Texas into seven regions (Region 5 includes many of the Round Top Register counties. This publication may be found on the Texas Chapter of the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers website.

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS BUDGETS: Each year the AgriLife Extension district economists prepare budgets for various districts across Texas based on a variety of crops. The Texas Crop and Livestock Budgets for each district are available on the AgriLife Extension website. For example, for District 11, which includes Austin, Colorado, Fayette and Washington counties, there are budgets for forage crops such as Bermuda grass, improved pasture, cotton, sorghum, wheat and canola. Within the cow-calf budget on improved pasture spreadsheet is a line item for “Pasture Cost,” which is the lease cost. These budgets are available on the Texas A&M Agricultural Economics website.

Parties looking to determine fair lease rates should consider the numbers reported by government agencies; however, the right lease rate for any property is the one the tenant and landowner can agree upon, regardless of what the statistics say. Finally, all leases should be put in writing to protect the rights of both parties. ★

The market price for leases varies depending on the specific circumstances and land’s condition, so the resources listed below can only serve as a general guide.

WORD OF MOUTH: The best first step is to visit with other landowners, livestock producers, the local County Extension Agent or a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service range

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Wildlife

BY KELLY NORRID

TPWD Urban Wildlife Biologist



photo courtesy Matt Keyser, KHOU



photo courtesy Esteban Cano

A STORY OF HOPE AFTER HURRICANE HARVEY

Although flooding is not a rare occurrence in southeast Texas, Hurricane Harvey took things to a whole new level.

The greater Houston area received upwards of 30 to more than 40 inches of rainfall during this tropical downpour, which equates to about 19 trillion gallons. It's safe to say that many wildlife populations in the area are accustomed to periodic flooding, sought higher ground and were minimally impacted by the rising water. Two species, the Mexican Free-Tailed Bat and the Alligator Snapping Turtle, though, are currently being monitored.

The Houston Area Bat Team confirmed that no less than 30 bridges across the greater Houston area are home to the Mexican Free-Tailed Bat. The Waugh Street Bridge that crosses Buffalo Bayou in the shadows of Houston's central business district, has become a tourist mecca because prior to Hurricane Harvey it was home to approximately 250,000 – 300,000 Mexican Free-tailed Bats. Normally, the bats roost safely in spaces between the bridge's beams high above the flowing water.

During Hurricane Harvey, as the water approached the bottom of the bridge, some of the bats escaped and took shelter in adjacent buildings. Others were forced out by the rising bayou and crawled out onto the bridge. Around 200 or so of them were rescued and released after the threat had passed, but unfortunately, a sizeable section of the bridge was submerged.

However, the colony was not a total loss. The center part of the bow-shaped bridge barely stayed above water level, and a large number of the bats that were in the bridge survived. After the water went down, thousands of bats emerged and were joined by a second stream with thousands of bats.

The Houston Area Bat Team is surveying Houston's other 29 known bat bridges and will report back.

The Alligator Snapping Turtle lives below the surface of Buffalo and surrounding bayous. For the past year, wildlife biologists

with the Turtle Survival Alliance have been trapping and monitoring Alligator Snapping Turtles in a section of Buffalo Bayou between downtown Houston and Shepherd Drive. According to Turtle Survival Alliance Director Eric Munscher, the substantial population of Alligator Snapping Turtles in Houston is the only known urban population in the U.S.

Texas Parks and Wildlife teamed up with the Turtle Survival Alliance to set up a snapping turtle hotline to report any wayward critters that may have been displaced from their habitat by the floods. In the early morning hours of September 12, Houston Police reported a large turtle blocking traffic on Memorial Drive near Waugh. TPWD and Turtle Survival Alliance were alerted.

TSA biologists noticed the 89-pound snapping turtle was part of the ongoing research and had been previously marked by biologists. This turtle had been captured and tagged by TSA earlier, so it was known exactly where this turtle lived just seven months prior. Surprisingly, he had only moved few hundred yards downstream.

Followed by cameras and reporters, TPWD and TSA safely returned the turtle nicknamed "Harvey" to his home.

TPWD is still encouraging Houston area residents to report displaced Alligator Snapping Turtles so that they can be recruited into the long-term study and to report sightings of Common Snapping Turtles onto the website iNaturalist.org. ★

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Homer and his dog Rusty were the inspiration for my photo-essay 'Mutt 'n Man.' They lived in Hugo, a small town on the plains of Colorado. I was first attracted to the sign, as it was hard to miss, when Homer and Rusty appeared and stopped to chat a while. The while turned into several hours as Homer unfolded his philosophy on life, and I left feeling that they probably could fix everything.

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TWELVE MONTHS OF COLOR



Many gardeners want color in the landscape year-round. To that end, include both perennials and annuals, but don't overlook the desirability of short-season bloomers.

In January, paperwhites and daffodils followed by white cemetery and blue flag iris enliven the winter landscape. They are all tough perennials that can be planted as bulbs or rhizomes in the fall.

Texas mountain laurel, a showy, short-duration bloomer, and redbuds are obvious February choices, but fruit trees also begin blooming during the month. Your favorite peach, plum, citrus and pear can furnish color as it prepares to bear fruit.

March is the time for naturalized larkspur and wildflowers including bluebonnets. They are usually established by seed spread in the fall. Cross vine and *Salvia greggii* are also showy.

In May there are lots of blooming plants from which to choose. It's daylily time. Roses also are their best in early summer. Zinnias are my favorite flower for cut flowers, and they attract butterflies. They can be established by seeds or transplants.

Beginning in mid-summer and through the autumn, vincas, butterfly vines and the blue *Salvias* bloom. Other summer color is provided by lantanas, *esperanza* and *Poinciana* that thrive in hot, dry weather.

Fall specialties include cape honeysuckle, fall aster, mint marigold and *Salvia coccinea*. Roses, cape honeysuckle and *Salvia coccinea* all keep blooming into December giving way to winter annuals.

The go-to list of sun-loving winter annuals includes snapdragons, stocks, pansies, calendula, alyssum and dianthus. In deep shade, cyclamen provides spectacular red, white, pink or lavender flowers.

Your twelve months of color can be built around a few showy long duration blooming plants. I would include several of the tough roses such as "Katy Road" (*Carefree Beauty*), "Martha Gonzales," butterfly rose and "Belinda's Dream," all of which can bloom up to nine months each year, in this list. They are especially productive March through June and October through December.

Two reliable, mid-summer plants are cosmos and *esperanza*. Seed cosmos in March for blooms through November in prepared beds or a sunny vacant lot. *Esperanza*, a shrub also called yellow bells, grows up to seven feet tall and is showy from May through November.

For the fall, cape honeysuckle is a good backbone plant. Its small orange tubular flowers cover the vigorous upright vine from June through December.

If you want to individualize the list—and challenge yourself—try to create 12 months of your favorite colored blossoms. White, blue, red or yellow are possible. Twelve months of shade blooms is another possibility. Perhaps the toughest challenge of all comes from deer country where diligent gardeners can have 12 months of deer proof blooms! ★

Gardening

BY CALVIN R. FINCH, Ph.D
Horticulturist



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