

WHAT IS A COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION?

The county historical commission (CHC) is a vital link in Texas' preservation network. CHCs conduct programs suggested by the County Commissioners Court and the Texas Historical Commission (THC). Over the years, CHCs have worked in a dynamic and positive partnership with the THC to preserve Texas' heritage for the use, education, enjoyment, and economic benefit of present and future generations. They have been responsible for the preservation of countless historic buildings, artifacts, documents and other pieces of Texas history.

CHCs are responsible for reviewing all applications for state historical markers before they come to the THC. They also serve as advisors to their Commissioners Courts on matters of historic preservation. In addition, they often operate county history museums, develop archival collections, promote local history celebrations and heritage tourism, publish books and brochures dealing with the county's history and historic sites, undertake surveys of cultural and historic resources, conduct oral history projects, and all other manner of preservation programs.

In Texas, counties may be designated as Certified Local Governments through the county historical commission, thus becoming eligible for federal grants to carry out their preservation programs.

Source: Texas Historical Commission
Website: <http://www.thc.state.tx.us>

HARRIS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

<http://www.harrischc.org>

The Harris County Historical Commission (HCHC) is composed of 50 local historians who are appointed by the County Judge and Harris County Commissioners Court for two-year terms. All are volunteers, dedicated to preserving and documenting Harris County history.

HCHC has an active historical marker program. There are presently over 300 state historical markers in Harris County and dozens more are in progress. If you know of a subject or landmark that qualifies for a state historical marker, please contact the HCHC Marker Mentor Committee Chairman.

THC has a separate program to designate Historic Texas Cemeteries. Please contact the HCHC Cemetery Committee Chairman for information on designating and marking historic cemeteries.

Patrick S. Van Pelt, HCHC Chairman

Bernice Mistrot
Marker Review Committee Chairman

Debra Blacklock-Sloan
Marker Mentor Committee Chairman
(713) 491-0971

markermentor@harrischc.org

Trevia Wooster Beverly
Cemetery Committee Chairman
(713) 864-6862

cemeterychair@harrischc.org

Information current as of April 2, 2009



HARRIS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

A PARTNER OF THE
TEXAS HISTORICAL
COMMISSION



SOURCE OF
OFFICIAL TEXAS HISTORICAL
MARKERS IN HARRIS COUNTY

TEXAS HISTORICAL MARKER PROGRAMS IN HARRIS COUNTY

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) and Harris County Historical Commission (HCHC) encourage citizens to become involved in recognizing historic people, places, and events through placement of official Texas Historical Markers. Any individual or group may apply for a marker for a qualifying topic. While there is no guarantee that a marker will be approved, an accurate, well-documented application has an excellent chance of approval.

There are three similar marker programs: **Subjects** (such as businesses, communities, events, individuals, organizations, schools, professions, religious congregations, social movements, and sports), **Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks** (structures, such as bridges, buildings, and manufacturing facilities), and **Cemeteries**. The three marker types have somewhat different eligibility criteria and application requirements.

In general, a Subject, Landmark, or Cemetery must be **at least 50 years old** to qualify, but **age alone is not enough**. It must also have historic significance, that is, some **“influence, effect, or impact on the course of history or cultural development”** in the local community or beyond. Two exceptions to the 50-year rule are that historic events may be marked after 30 years, and individuals may be marked after they have been deceased for 10 years.

All marker applications require a completed application form and a narrative history with documentation, both submitted as e-mail attachments. The Narrative (typically 5 to 10

pages) is the most important part of the package, and the one that will take the most work to prepare. Landmarks and Cemeteries also require photos, site plans, and maps.

Prospective marker applicants should contact HCHC before starting work on a marker application to obtain narrative guidelines and a data sheet. Completing the data sheet will help both the applicant and HCHC understand the scope of the topic and the requirements of the application process, such as ensuring financing and consent of the property owner at the marker site.

Upon request, an HCHC member familiar with the general topic may be asked to serve as a mentor. The job of the mentor is not to prepare the application or the narrative, but to assist the applicant with understanding the THC rules and to suggest research ideas and sources, so that the resulting Narrative and other attachments will meet all THC criteria.

THC has prepared **Marker Research Guides** for several broad classes of marker types – Cemeteries, Houses and Buildings, Churches and Synagogues, Communities, Organizations and Institutions, Individuals, Events, and Texas in World War II. These guides are available on the THC website and are very useful to novice and experienced researchers alike. The example narrative at the end of each Guide is of particular value in illustrating the level of detail expected.

The **Marker Toolbox** section of the THC website includes “How To” guides for several types of historical resources, including census records, Confederate pension records, newspapers, oral history, photographic collections, and Sanborn maps.

Applicants must pay all expenses associated with the marker process – including the research, application fees, fabrication cost of the marker, its installation, and the dedication ceremony. Depending on marker size, the total cost for the whole process is typically from \$1,000 to \$2,000.

All applications for markers to be placed in Harris County must be approved by HCHC before being filed with THC. Since THC will only accept marker applications from October 15 to January 15, the entire process from start of research to marker dedication, often takes the better part of two years, especially for cemeteries, which must first be “designated” as a Historic Texas Cemetery before the marker application may be filed.

Applications meeting the basic criteria, with an informative, well-written Narrative that is clearly supported by good reference notes and all necessary attachments, follow the most expeditious path. Prompt responses by applicants to THC requests for fees, clarifications, and marker text approval will also expedite the process.

The application period for markers to be delivered late in 2009 has already closed. The HCHC deadline for Subject and Landmark markers to be delivered late in 2010 is **September 1, 2009**.

Applications for Historic Texas Cemetery (HTC) designation are simpler than marker applications, and may be filed at any time of year through the HCHC Cemetery Committee. However, applicants who also wish to receive a Cemetery marker in 2010 must submit the HTC designation application to HCHC by **June 1, 2009**.