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## East Texas Colloquy

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## EAST TEXAS COLLOQUY

by Bobby H. Johnson

As you read this potpourri of historical news items, the East Texas countryside will be readying itself for that annual outdoor art show which only nature can provide. Nothing can exceed the beauty of our East Texas foliage as evident in the autumn of the year. On the other hand, spring has its merits, too. As these words are being written, the outdoors is alive with color — the varied shades of green in early leaves, the pure whites and soft pinks of the dogwood, the vibrant hues of the redbud, and the myriad colors in a field of wild flowers. Nature is schizophrenic, but what a wonderful madness!

In case you are wondering about the author's sanity, the above is also intended to remind readers that a journal published twice yearly necessarily has to be prepared some time in advance. This requires considerable forethought on the part of our news correspondents, so we repeat our request for early submission of news events which may be several months off.

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Our spring meeting in Henderson on February 28 was a success, both in terms of attendance and quality of program. Approximately 75 persons attended the sessions held in Henderson's beautiful First National Bank. Dr. Fred Tarpley of Commerce, program chairman, provided a varied program which spanned more than a hundred years of East Texas history.

The opening session featured a discussion of "Old Houses of Rusk County." Participants were Mrs. Gordon Brown, Mrs. Carl Jagers, and Mrs. Mary Frank Dunn. James W. Byrd of East Texas State University completed the session with a paper entitled "Jefferson's Diamond Bessie Murder Mystery." Several students from ETSU participated in a panel discussion on the writing of bicentennial community history. Dr. Frank Jackson chaired the panel composed of Mike Breckway, Bill J. Beesley, and Lea Ann Dupriest. A fascinating discussion of Scott Joplin, complete with tapes of his music, rounded out the morning session as Jerry Atkins of Texarkana spoke on "Scott Joplin: His Early Life in East Texas." Charles L. Dwyer, Director of Libraries at Sam Houston State University, delivered the luncheon address. His talk was entitled "An Appreciation of John W. Thomason." Samples of Thomason materials were displayed at the Howard-Dickinson House, where members adjourned for dessert. The Association extends its appreciation to Dr. Tarpley and Mrs. E. H. Lasseter, who handled local arrangements.

In the business session which preceded the meeting, the officers dealt with that age-old problem of money. Rising costs and inflation have taken their toll on the Association. One solution will be to increase our membership rolls, so members are urged to publicize the organization at every chance with due emphasis on the importance of preserving our historical heritage. The following types of memberships are available: student, \$4; regular, \$8; sustaining, \$50; and patron, \$100.

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Local historical activities continue to further appreciation for the past in our region. The city of Lufkin is to be commended for establishing the Historical and Creative Arts Center which opened early this year in the Old St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church. A project of the Lufkin Service League, the Center has

already presented several attractive exhibits, including one on our Indian heritage and another on the image of America in caricature and cartoon. A few miles north, the Nacogdoches Bicentennial Commission has opened the City Spirit Art Center, which is used for exhibits, performances, and teaching. The Houston County Historical Commission sponsored a historical pageant entitled, "Houston County Under Six Flags." Area schools cooperated in this bicentennial project. Doubtless many other communities in East Texas are involved in similar activities. Hopefully, the cultural spin-off from the national bicentennial celebration will do more to advance awareness of our rich heritage.

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Another Bicentennial venture that will prove helpful to Texas historians is the publication of *Women in Early Texas*, edited by Evelyn M. Carrington. A compilation of biographies of fifty notable women, the book was produced by the Austin chapter of the American Association of University Women. It may be ordered from Jenkins Publishing Company for \$12.50.

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Our belated congratulations go to the Smith County Historical Society/Commission for winning an award from the American Association for State and Local History. The award was voted late last year in honor of the group's program to promote interest in local history and for its excellent *Smith County Chronicles*.

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The Texas State Genealogical Society continues to provide services for those interested in the human side of history. Prospective members may write the organization in care of Percy Fewell, P. O. Box 7076, Dallas, Texas 75209. The Society publishes a quarterly on genealogical matters, STIRPES.

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An interesting bibliography of books on trans-Mississippi railroads is available from the Hale County Historical Society and Llano Estacado Museum. Entitled *Railroads of the Trans-Mississippi West: A Selected Bibliography of Books*, the work is edited by Donovan L. Hofsommer. It sells for \$2.50 and may be ordered from the Llano Estacado Museum, Box 20, Wayland Baptist College, Plainview, Texas 79072.

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Archives and libraries are increasingly experiencing the problem of theft of materials. Since recovery of stolen items often proves difficult, the Society of American Archivists is inaugurating a comprehensive program on archival security. Assisted by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Society has established a register of lost or stolen archival materials in its national office in Chicago. Procedures now exist whereby a dealer, archivist, or properly identified individual can contact the SAA to determine if a particular item is missing or stolen. Institutions that have suffered a theft in the past twenty years or suspect that missing items have been stolen may contact the archival security program at the following address: University of Illinois, Chicago Circle, The Library, P. O. Box 8198, Chicago, ILL., 60680.

A potentially useful book for local historians is the *Texas Museums Directory*, now available in a revised edition. The preface defines museums as "organized and permanent non-profit institutions, essentially educational or aesthetic in purpose, which exhibit objects with intrinsic value to science, history, art, or culture, and which are open to the public." The work includes a number of photographs and the listing is alphabetical by cities. Those interested in copies might contact the Texas Historical Commission and Texas Historical Foundation, which published the book through a grant from the Moody Foundation of Galveston.

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The Association is in possession of a number of copies of a 1931 publication of papers read at the annual meeting of the East Texas Historical Association, 1928-1931. They were published as a bulletin of the East Texas State Teachers College at Commerce. The Association hopes to sell these issues, thereby bolstering our sagging treasury. If you are interested, please write the editor in care of this journal.

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A unique telling of the story of the American frontier, *A Fair and Happy Land* by William A. Owens, has been published by Charles Scribner's Sons. *A Fair and Happy Land* follows the course of Owens' own ancestors as they moved through nine states in two hundred years, always on the outer fringe of a new frontier. He recounts in graphic terms the frontier experience — foraging into wilderness, claiming land, fighting Indians, enduring great hardship for the sake of elbow room and independence.

As they travelled westward, from Pennsylvania to Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, Alabama, Arkansas, and finally to Texas, the Cleavers crossed paths with the famous: George Washington, Daniel Boone, the Lincolns, Andrew Jackson, and others. These new Westerners watched the American Revolution from a distance, faced conflicts over slavery and religious freedom, fought the Indians during the War of 1812, and joined both armies in the Civil War. Interwoven with these momentous events are Owens' moving descriptions of the Cleavers' work-a-day lives as they, and many like them, opened the American frontier.

Williams A. Owens is Professor and Dean Emeritus of Columbia University. Born in Pin Hook, Texas, Dr. Owens is an expert in folk music and folk materials, and he is the author of nine books including the highly and widely praised *This Stubborn Soil* and *A Season of Weathering*. While writing *A Fair and Happy Land* he travelled throughout the eastern half of the U.S. searching for his own roots and researching the travels of his ancestors. He writes in his introduction, "I wanted to know what they treasured, what they laughed at, what they believed in, what they fought for. I wanted to get close to them, generation after generation, as I could — to walk on the land they had walked on, to see the rivers and valleys and mountains they had known — to seek out their human essence . . . Their toughness of body and mind and purpose, as strong in those who marched with them, changed a wilderness into a country — a country not quite the dream they had dreamed, but better than people like them had ever known before."