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THE JOURNAL AT FIFTY

by Archie P. McDonald

When people or institutions approach the “Big Five O” in our culture it is customary to make much of it. Such observation may reflect veneration and respect or surprise and wonder that the cause of the hubbub has survived that long. Considering the East Texas Historical Association and its *Journal*, both may apply.

The first issue of the *East Texas Historical Journal* did not reach print until July 1963, nine months after the founding of its sponsoring Association on the campus of Stephen F. Austin State College in September 1962. Founders included E. Lee Lawrence of Tyler, F.I. Tucker of Nacogdoches, and Dr. Ralph W. Steen, president, and Dr. C.K. Chamberlain, chairman of the History Department, at “the college.” Nine-months of gestation is about right for East Texas historians and others, and that first *Journal* was truly Chamberlain’s “baby.”

Board members designated Chamberlain editor of the *Journal* at the organizing meeting, and “editor” was the only title Chamberlain held despite executing all the duties of the Association’s director until his retirement in 1971. The Association and the *Journal* operated that first decade out of Chamberlain’s history department office, located on the second floor of the Birdwell Building, which occupied the northwest corner of the campus. Chamberlain’s secretary, most of the history faculty, and graduate students—especially Joe White of Kilgore—pitched in to help him plan and execute two annual meetings and two issues of the *Journal*.

Until 1972, the Stephen F. Austin State College (after 1968 State University), paid to print the *Journal* and the Association funded its other expenses. Founders furnished Chamberlain with an advisory board composed of Dr. Ralph Goodwin of East Texas State University, Dr. James L. Nichols of SFA, Dr. John Payne of Sam Houston State University, and Mrs. Charles Martin of Kirbyville. Chamberlain also had a distinguished editorial advisory board, which included Herbert Gambrell of SMU, State Archivist Dorman Winfrey, novelist Garland Roark, Judge J.F. Combs, and Governor Price Daniel. Truth told, Dick Chamberlain pretty much pro-

duced the *Journal* with departmental assistance. The first issue featured a front cover designed by artist José Cisneros with layout by Carl Hertzog of El Paso, a contribution arranged by F. Lee Lawrence, co-founder and first president of the Association. Cisneros's cover featured a map of eastern Texas that contained twenty-two icons of the region, ranging from an oil derrick to a longhorn.¹ Contributors of articles included Allan Ashcraft of Texas A&M, Ralph Wooster of Lamar Tech, and Edwin Gaston of SFA.

Chamberlain and crew had produced just two issues when I showed up to teach at SFA in August 1964 and found the department busy with even more enrollment, which had justified the hiring of Bill Brophy, David Cox, and me to help Chamberlain, Jim Nichols, Bob Maxwell, Carl Davis, Tommie Jan Lowery, Vera Dugas, John English, and Joe Ericson to teach history and political science. They were just as busy putting together the Association's third Fall meeting, a half-day affair to be held on campus in less than two months on October 10. The reason I know they were still a'planning was that Jim Nichols asked me to present a paper on research opportunities in eastern Texas history. Talk about a misfit! Fresh from completing a degree at LSU and spending all my time for three years with a topographical engineer in the Army of Northern Virginia, I knew not a thing about his suggested subject. So Jim told me what to say and I did so with bluff and faux-confidence. They also let me publish my first article in the *Journal*, titled "'Westward I Go Free': Some Aspects of Early East Texas Settlement," in October 1966. Those were tentative days for the Association and *Journal*, which nevertheless endured and even prospered under such group sponsorship.

Chamberlain reached SFA's (then) mandatory retirement age in 1971 and had to leave the department chairmanship, but he expected to retain leadership of the Association and the *Journal*. Instead, SFA President Ralph Steen decided that the editor had to be an employee of the University, so Association President Jim Nichols invited me to visit with the Board of Directors about succeeding Chamberlain as editor. Only after I arrived at the meeting did I learn that Jim also had invited Dr. Bobby H. Johnson, a history department colleague who had joined the faculty a couple of years before, to "visit" with the Board as well. Johnson had previous experience as a journalist, so when they offered the position to me I assumed that

1 The original cover has been reproduced as the cover of the Anniversary Issue.

he had declined it. Bobby contributed articles, book reviews, and offered other valuable assistance until his retirement nearly forty years later.

Dr. Steen called me to his office the following Monday morning. Not only was Steen my biggest boss, he was also a most distinguished historian of Texas who had written a seventh-grade text on the subject used by generations of young scholars. So I paid close attention when he said he was making changes. Henceforth, the Association would pay its own printing bill and the University would provide a half-time secretary. This, he said, would make the Association the customer and able to demand on-time delivery of the *Journal*. This had become a problem with the state printer since the Association had such low priority among state agencies.

Steen's decision proved wise. Craftsman Printers of Lubbock held the state contract that year, but I could not imagine why we should continue to print the *Journal* 500 miles away. I soon found out that other printers charged a great deal more to produce the *Journal*. Since we now paid our own printing bill, however, Craftsman shipped issues to me on time—and continued to do so for thirty-seven years, never late. I did change issue dates from October and March to Spring and Fall to create a bigger target, but truth told, Ronald Peters of Craftsman and I enjoyed a long and mutually beneficial partnership. The marvel is that we never met until a couple of years before I surrendered the *Journal* to Scott Sosebee when Mark Baringer and I attended a meeting in Lubbock and Ronald met us at the airport. Only in Texas would so much business be conducted on that kind of trust. Makes me think of Duke Wayne's comment in "The Comancheros:" "Words is what men live by...words they say and mean."

I never had a firm editorial policy for the *Journal*, at least nothing written and fixed. Since our membership blended lay and professional (teaching) historians, with preponderance among the lay folk, I always included at least one article from that group, and the representation of lay historians was even greater among book reviewers. And I readily admit that when Max Lale submitted an article, it led the next available issue. Max was such a vital supporter among lay historians that he deserved nothing less, and I think everyone enjoyed his work. Max's "My War," based on letters to Georgiana Lale during WWII, received more requests for republishing than any other article we presented. Otherwise, I published articles in the order received and accepted unless we changed the schedule with a theme issue, such as women's history or Reconstruction, which usually meant that I had an unusual total of manuscripts on that subject. Once we devoted a

whole issue to a bibliography on Native Americans in East Texas because otherwise it would not have been published at all.

At the end of my tenure as editor, Bruce Glasrud looked over the crop and reported that we had published forty-four articles on African American history—slavery to civil rights—more than any serial except the *Journal of Negro History*. I was astounded by the total. I had published what was submitted and good enough to publish. I suppose a real editor could have kept an account of such information, but such never occurred to me. Bruce's investigation led to a compilation of twelve of those articles published by Texas A&M University Press in 2008 titled *Blacks In East Texas History*.

Prior to 1971, the *Journal's* cover with the Cisneros drawing alternated between yellow and green colored cover material. For a decade or so after that I stuck with yellow to maintain consistency. Then Bob Bowman suggested a more modern design, which featured our logo—a dog-run cabin for which Bob Glover's "Shiloh" served as prototype—and pine trees in dark blue ink against a grey background. That scheme endured until Scott changed the cover in favor of more colorful photos and designs in 2010.

When Steen took away money for printing the *Journal*, he gave back even more when he agreed to pay the salary of a half-time secretary. Without such assistance the growth of the Association and the increased size and prestige of the *Journal* would not have been possible. We began with students, who did their best but changing help every semester was a pain. When Steen agreed to fund a full-time secretary we had the opportunity to achieve continuity. The best were what I called "captives," that is, over-qualified people who were in Nacogdoches because of family. Among most remembered were Karen Gehring, who moved to town when her daughter enrolled at SFA; Kathryn Robertson, wife of a colleague in the biology department; and Catherine McMillan, wife of another in the history department.

Best by far was Mrs. Portia Gordon, whose husband Charlie worked in Lufkin but who chose to live in Nacogdoches. She became my partner in the Association's work during the final decade of that assignment. Mrs. Gordon kept the books, knew all the members, and anticipated the repetitive deadlines of Fall meeting—Spring journal—Spring meeting—Fall journal, with a symposium included each Spring, as well or better than I did.

Joe White, a graduate student who had helped Chamberlain with the

first issues of the *Journal*, proposed and raised funds to endow the C.K. Chamberlain Award, presented annually to the writer of an article judged the “best” in the preceding volume of the *Journal* by a committee of Association members. I never advised this committee. As editor, all the articles had to be “best” to me. That is why I am grateful that Scott did not ask my advice on articles selected for republication in this anniversary issue. All of the articles published during my thirty-seven year tenure are a part of the grand mosaic of the *East Texas Historical Journal* and also a part of me. I read them all, several times. I tried to put singular verbs with singular subjects in the same sentence, spell words with consistency, write out single and double digit numbers, include commas in series of three, and so forth. Otherwise, I tried to stay out of the way and let the experts tell their stories.

The yield is as we find it. The *Journal* goes on, as journals do, under its third editor—at last a truly trained Texas historian. The Big Five-0 doesn't look so big, from this side of it. Who's ready to go for the One Hundred?