President's Address

President Seth Walton
Fellow members and friends of the East Texas Historical Association: Four years ago next month a historical meeting occurred in Nacogdoches, Texas. Possibly few of you remember the occasion. It was a regional meeting of the County Survey Committees of East Texas. This group endorsed the idea of organizing, or more correctly reorganizing, this East Texas Historical Association.

The following September 29, about 100 or more interested history bugs formally met, adopted a constitution, and elected a loyal group of officers who were, as they are now, unselfishly devoted to promotion of a greater interest in Historic East Texas.

The problems of getting organized, obtaining memberships, and printing our first publication were surmounted and we attained a charter membership of 417 members before our first year closed. We had a capacity crowd in Jefferson at our first spring meeting. During our second year our problems were substantially unchanged; membership, getting the Journal to the press and obtaining suitable program material.

We have at this point succeeded in establishing an organization which has justified its existence and has potentially fine possibilities for future development.

Our publication, the East Texas Historical Journal, continues to afford a medium for the publication of articles and documents submitted by you to our Editor and Editorial Board. If there is not vast store of publishable articles ready several months in advance of our next publication date it is because we have not taken the opportunity afforded us to provide material.

We are exceedingly fortunate to have the unwavering support and assistance of Dr. Ralph Steen and the History Faculty of Stephen F. Austin State College. We are somewhat like the Texas State Historical Association which was "born in the State University... and sponsored by its professors of history" but we are deliberately and intentionally different from that fine organization because we must, if we survive, have the support of everyone interested in the history of our East Texas area—non-professional as well as professional.

Although we may rightfully feel a measure of pride in our accomplishments thus far we have such great opportunity ahead of us we have hardly scratched the surface. When one examines a map of Texas and attempts to formulate some idea of the potential membership for our organization one might conclude that the people in the seventy counties in Texas east of the Brazos River might be among those most interested in the history of whatever area may be delineated as "East Texas." According to the last census (1960) there were 4,936,476 people in these counties. Surely this is
a vast reservoir from which to draw considerably more than our present 310 members.

If one objects to reaching over as far as the Brazos as our primary area of potential membership, it may be pointed out that forty-eight counties in Texas are east of Trinity River and that they had a population of 2,357,895 in 1960. It seems reasonable to me that our organization should be able to reach a strength of four or five hundred members from these counties alone without much effort or difficulty.

A closer look at our membership east of the Brazos River enables us to deduce where our areas of strength and weakness lie.

In the twenty-two county area between the two rivers we have a total of fifty-one members if my calculations are correct. This means there are sixteen counties between these two rivers with no members in our organization and we have members in only six.

Counties East of the Brazos River
Taking a still closer look at the forty-eight county area east of the Trinity we see our greatest strength in Nacogdoches, Jefferson, Harris, Smith, Walker, and Harrison Counties. There are fifteen counties in this area in which we have no members. Do you know someone in any one of these counties, or anywhere else, who may be interested in joining us? If you do, please let us know today.

Again may I reiterate that our organization needs you as members to encourage your friends to join us, send us publishable manuscripts, documents, and information about your activities on the local level which will encourage an interest in historic East Texas. Someone has appropriately said that "facts are the foundation of history" and one of our objectives as an association is to assemble and make available as many facts concerning East Texas as possible. Official records in municipal, county, area
and state archives must be searched and pertinent information and records published. Newspapers, official correspondence, old letters, pamphlets and diaries are also rich sources yet to be mined as one would discover, polish and cut diamonds.

As a recruiting poster might say: "We want you!" Won't you join us in helping to recruit membership and make East Texas history better known through our area, Texas, and the United States?

FOOTNOTES


2Membership statistics are those of March 1, 1965.