A “window” into the fellowship of the Knights of Pythias

Sometimes, when the wind is blowing in the right direction and the timing is right, events that you only dreamed would happen have a way of sneaking back into reality.

Such is the story of the return of a stained-glass window that was dedicated on the upper floor of the Chisholm Trail Heritage Museum (CTHM) building in 1908. Built in 1903, the now historic Knights of Pythias Hall was constructed by a group of Cuero businessmen who pooled their financial resources for the purpose of meeting regularly to promote a moral uplifting and betterment of society. Some 100-plus members would meet regularly in a large ceremonial meeting space, known today as the Wofford Room, named for Cuero merchant and rancher, John T. Wofford.

In 1908, one of the chapter’s members, Judge Charles Sumners, died and at that time a stained-glass window was placed in his memory in one of the window openings facing Esplanade Boulevard. Judge Rudolph Kleberg presided over the window presentation and gave an eloquent speech about Judge Sumners’ service to his community, claiming him as, “A Knight without fear and without reproach.”
Unfortunately, after decades of dwindling membership of the Cuero chapter, the organization ceased to meet and the building and many of its original architectural features were sold in 1975. Organizational papers were destroyed; several pieces of furniture were sold to another Pythian Lodge in Temple, Texas; and the stained-glass window was sold locally to an antiques dealer and Cuero merchant.

When the CTHM board of directors began restoring the hall in 2004, several attempts were made to purchase the window, but the stained-glass window had found a place of honor with collectors Art and Sally Means. Two of Cuero’s most avid antique collectors, Mr. and Mrs. Means had built a hall in 2004, several attempts were made to purchase the window will soon find its permanent location at the corner of West Courthouse and Terrell Street, the English-German School, circa 1880, is entering its earliest phase of the renovation process. Reported by Diana Thibodeaux

Several other original features and artifacts have returned to the building, including ceiling light fixtures; a pot-belly wood stove; ballot boxes that were used for member selection; and furniture (chairs and ceremonial altar) that were purchased from the Temple Midlothian Lodge, # 50. Fortunately, the majority of the building’s architectural detail on the second floor remained intact until the Chisholm Trail Heritage Museum purchased the building to create a Museum dedicated to our local Western heritage and multi-purpose community spaces located on the second floor.

Currently under restoration, the window will soon find its way back to the Knights of Pythias Hall, Jewel Lodge, # 103. The CTHM Board is deeply grateful to the Means family for making this iconic restoration possible. The CTHM Board is deeply grateful to the Means family for making this iconic restoration possible.

As the seasons change and cooler weather is approaching, exciting changes are also approaching at the English-German School site adjacent to the Chisholm Trail Heritage Museum. Finally situated in its permanent location at the corner of West Courthouse and Terrell Street, the English-German School, circa 1880, is entering its earliest phase of the renovation process. Reported by Diana Thibodeaux

Work has begun on the foundation for the structure and a perimeter fence constructed of metal and welded wire panels (which will support jasmine vines, adding visual appeal and privacy). Chip Dence of East End Builders of Victoria, Texas, is overseeing the layout, preparation and construction of both the foundation and the fences. Fisher Heck Architects of San Antonio, highly regarded for preservation architecture, is directing the adaptive re-use of the historic structure.

With all the street projects currently taking place in Cuero, West Courthouse Street was evidently due for a face-lift: the City of Cuero has provided an added bonus to the project by funding parking right in front of the building. The City approached Chisholm Trail Heritage Museum Chairman, Robert Oliver, and a plan was agreed upon for diagonal parking spaces to be incorporated into the City’s scope of work, thus saving the Museum money.

The simple wood frame schoolhouse was established by some of the early leaders of Cuero who understood the vital importance of a quality education and to accommodate the influx of German immigrants to the area. Eventually converted to a residence in 1911, it served as a family home for many years. In 1965, the structure received an Official Texas Historical Medallion and was recorded as a Texas Historic Landmark. After the building sat abandoned and in disrepair for many years, several members of the Board for the Chisholm Trail Heritage Museum came to its rescue, and the historic English-German School was given an opportunity for yet another purpose. A planning grant in the amount of $4,800 was obtained from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and, together with dollar-for-dollar matching funds, was used to create an Historic Structures Report in 2014. The intent of the Report was to document the structure’s history and existing condition, as well as provide goals for the use or re-use of the structure and has become the road map which will guide the renovation process. The rehabilitation of the English-German School will maintain the core building form while reconstructing missing elements – front porch, back porch, side addition – allowing the structure to accommodate its new use as a multipurpose building for CTHM.

A Hands-On Texas History Classroom

Several functions to be incorporated into
The best accepted origin story of the Old Chisholm Trail begins during the American Civil War (1861 – 1865), well before the celebrated cattle drives for which it is known today. With the outbreak of war, Union forces beat a retreat to Kansas, out of Texas and hostile Indian Territory. The path they took would become known as the Chisholm Trail after one of their guides, Jesse Chisholm.

Chisholm, of Scottish and Cherokee descent, was well known in Indian territory as a trader, interpreter, guide, and businessman. During the War, he traveled extensively up from Indian Territory on the Canadian River to Kansas transporting various supplies. After his death on March 4, 1868, the trail he used would become part of the trail that transported over 1 million cattle in a 10-year period, known today as the Chisholm Trail.

A good friend of Texas and Indian Territory native Americans, Jesse Chisholm traveled their trails extensively to trade with them. He spoke several native American languages and was valued as an interpreter at treaty negotiations. He visited Bird’s Fort, Comanche Peak, the council grounds near Waco, San Antonio, and other places of importance to Texas Indians. It is interesting, and seems appropriate, that history remember this path that later became so vitally important as the Chisholm Trail.

After the Civil War, most Texans were left with very little real wealth. One of the few things in abundance was the thousands of cattle that grazed throughout the Lone Star State. One of the few men who recognized an opportunity to harness this wealth was Joseph McCoy, an Illinois businessman. After traveling to Abilene, Kansas in mid-1867, he soon arranged eager buyers for the cattle herds that would quickly dot the Texas landscape in a mass movement of animals the world had ever seen. Beginning in 1867 and lasting for the next 17 years cattle moved up the Chisholm Trail, 20 miles north. This town was moved to its present location when the railroad came to the area in 1906.

Memories of Old Time Cowboys and the Chisholm Trail

Where is now that once familiar Chisholm Trail, Winding northward sure and slow. Gone forever – destroyed by progress, Gone to realms of long ago. Never more will behold trail bosses, With their brave and dastardly bands, Guide the restless longhorns Through the Texas border lands. Yes, the cowboys trails are over And the dim trail gone at last. But his name will be transmitted From the borders of the past.

– H.H. Halsell, 1939

A History Spotlight

How did The Old Chisholm Trail get its name?

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Cowboy Camp is an educational outreach program initiated in 2011 by board member and former schoolteacher Candy Glidden. Candy, her family, and a host of dedicated volunteers put on a dynamic five-day camp funded by educational grants and community partnerships – made possible at no cost to students. Curriculum features age-appropriate demonstrations and activities designed to immerse students in the customs and traditions of the 19th-century, post-Civil War and cattle-drive era through observation, discussion and participation.
Our permanent exhibit, *Ranching Heritage of the Guadalupe Valley* was made possible by the generous financial support of the individuals, families, ranches, and business leaders in the 2011-2016 Capital Campaign Pioneer Circle.

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**INTERESTED IN JOINING THE PIONEER CIRCLE?**
Consider a year-end gift.
Tax deductible contributions to this historic capital campaign may still be made up to December 31, 2016.
Please contact any Board member, or call the Museum at (361) 277-1866.

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Salute to Oldest Family-Owned Texas Brewery

One of our first and most loyal sponsors, Spoetzl Brewery, is just up the road in neighboring Shiner, Texas.

You don’t have to be from around here to enjoy a cold Shiner on a hot Texas day. Since 1909, the website brags, “every drop of Shiner Beer has been brewed at the Spoetzl Brewery” in the town that bears its name. Now boasting just over 2,000 residents, Shiner welcomes thousands of visitors every year to tour its famous production facilities.

The brewery sends more than 8 million cases of delicious Shiner Beer to states across the country. Community events and support are in abundance through its Shiner Beer Runs, Shiner Sessions, and “Toast Our Troops” fundraiser. Generosity is at the heart of the man who launched Spoetzl Brewery, Carlos Alvarez, and his team. Founding CTHM board member Sue Sulsar shared that the Museum has fortunately been one of the brewery’s long-time beneficiaries.

“We had formed a board of directors, established our articles of incorporation and bylaws in 2000, and in 2002 decided to have our first fundraiser with a “cowboy cookout” theme, reminiscent of the original trail riders – our first Taste of the Trail,” she recalled. “I was on the Spirits Committee, which was alcoholic, of course. I had enjoyed Shiner Beer since I first started drinking beer, and drove to the brewery to meet with John Hybner, who has since retired. John and his team did not hesitate and donated three kegs – that’s 150 gallons of beer!”

Sue fondly noted that the Spoetzl Brewery has consistently supported the CTHM in so many ways. “They not only donate the beer, but purchase sponsor tables and underwrite the tents for our “Saloon” or “Cantina” at our bi-annual fundraiser, and donate silent auction items, such as baskets and their neon signs. They even created a ring-toss game at their booth in so many ways. “They not only donate the beer, but purchase sponsor tables and underwrite the tents for our “Saloon” or “Cantina” at our bi-annual fundraiser, and donate silent auction items, such as baskets and their neon signs. They even created a ring-toss game at their booth.

Sue said, “I was really glad I did. My mother was thrilled and I was incredibly impressed.” Sue noted, “Spoetzl Brewery is very supportive of small communities and we are extremely grateful.”

“Spoetzl Brewery is very supportive of small communities and we are extremely grateful.”

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Thank you first time joiners and members renewing your membership to the CTHM. Your support and friendship are very important to us. Please note your annual membership will begin on the date of payment and go to that date in the following year. Our records will reflect that information.

2016 CTHM Membership
As of March 2016

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