

**HAYS COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION**  
**THE WILHELM HOUSE**  
**ACOSTA VILLA, BUDA**  
**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2008**

Gathered around the old layered, limestone fence, HCHC commission members listened as member Mary Giberson told the story of a young German immigrant who joined a wagon train headed for Austin in 1837 soon after his ship docked in Galveston harbor (Hays County Free Press, June 27, 1996 by Barbara Younts) and headed for Austin. Young Christian Wilhelm was so taken with the rolling hills when he arrived in central Texas, because they reminded him of his home in Germany, he was willing to take whatever job was available and stay. He was soon hired by the State of Texas as a carpenter to help build the old Land Office. At the time, the state had no money to pay workers, but plenty of land to barter. So Wilhelm built a small two-room cottage of native limestone with a cellar in 1853 and raised his family on land he was given for his carpentry, located twenty-five miles west of Austin near Onion Creek in the Thomas Moore grant. He later added more land he purchased for fifty cents an acre. Huge cypress trees that grew along Cypress Creek were milled for shingles to supply the great demand fast growing Austin had for building materials. A valuable cash crop, shingles brought top dollar to many of the families that settled west of the Buda area. The creek and many springs in the area provided a constant source of cool, clear water. The Wilhelm family prospered and grew and eventually there were eight children. As the family grew, the little stone house expanded, one room at a time, upstairs and down. Oddly configured, there was no door linking the two second-floor sections to each other. Two separate spiral stair cases led up, one in the front part of the house and another in the newer section, at the back of the house. Concerned about the children's education, Wilhelm built a schoolroom of native rock, nearby and behind the family home. He searched for a teacher for his children and a few other children who lived on nearby ranches and soon found a young Englishman, Harry Corbett, born in India to English parents, who had found his way To Mountain City. As children are wont to do, they soon grew up and were all ready for a more formal education in nearby Austin.

With the schoolhouse now empty, the Wilhelm's built an addition to their home, linking one stone structure with the other, expanding their home to the back even farther as it stands today. Christian Wilhelm died in 1897, but Catherine continued to live in her home on the ranch until her death some twenty years later. When Laura and Claudio Acosta purchased the land, they wanted to bulldoze the old house, not knowing its history and build their home on its original site. Once they were told it was one of Driftwood's oldest homes and its historical significance, they constructed their villa a little south of the old home and the old barn, incorporating the structures into the overall plan of estancia. Acosta plans to fully restore the home and barn, making them an



HCHC member Mary Mattis proudly shows off the plaque presented to her depicting Camino Real Elementary School mascot, the roadrunner, for her help with the foyer mural, which was funded by the Burdine Johnson foundation.



Commission members gather around as member Mary Giberson tells the history of the Wilhelm House.

integral part of the layout. The finished product should be quite a sight to see because the Acosta villa is magnificent.

Commission members gathered by the pool and its waterfall, gently spilling filtered water with soft splashing sounds. Round tables were set up for dinner and sunlight was fading fast as Chairman Kate Johnson called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m. with eighteen members and guests present.

Mary Ann Mattis was the featured speaker at the Camino Real Elementary School dedication and presented Lucy Johnson who represented the Burdine Johnson Foundation, with a plaque, which recognized their contribution of the foyer mural. She reminded members that Old Town Kyle Emporium is having a grand opening November 1 and have a booth for non-profit organizations where the cemetery books will be featured for sale.

Chairman Johnson reminded members we need to re-apply for appointment to the commission. She passed out applications and also said that they would be on [www.hayshistoricalcommission.com](http://www.hayshistoricalcommission.com) to print out, fill in and mail to our respective county commissioner. There will also be ads in newspapers with application forms. We need to do this before the end of January. Members are appointed in February. Our first meeting will be in February or March. The election of a vice-chairman was tabled until then.

LaMarr Petersen moved to reprint a collection of historic recipes from 1830-1900 titled A Pinch of This and a Handful of That. Jim Cullen seconded.

Linda Coker moved to accept the September 25, 2008 minutes. Dorothy Gumbert seconded.

Chairman Johnson said the powers that be in Umland are supportive of a National Historic designation, however they are looking for funding (\$2,500) to help digitalize old photos needed for a display. There might be a grant available with a December 15 deadline. In the meantime, Jim Cullen moved that we help with funding for Umland photos with Lu Hickey seconding.

Richard Kidd has another Oral History in the can with Winnie Moyer and Minnie Nelson. Number two this month will be shot in San Marcos with Gwen Smith at the Farmer's Union Gin, now Texas Reds.

Betty Harrison reported Kim Stracener Zapalac, Honorary Regent for Jacob's Well Chapter, NSDAR, in Wimberley has inquired about the costs of a historical marker. She was not aware the applicant had to pay. She is going to get back to Betty with an answer later. Mary Giberson will work with her (Betty) on one for the Antioch community. If we want to pursue a marker for them, we need to consider who will fund it and if the community would support this. Jerry Kolocny wants one for his home in Kyle. The application period for new markers opened October 15 and closes January 2009, with application forms online, she warned. We have a short window during a busy time.



Although the front porch of Christian Wilhelm's house is now used for storage, when the Acosta family is finished with restorations, it will again be Driftwood's oldest and finest residences.

Jim Cullen said since our last meeting, Dorothy Gumbert secured access to the Storm Ranch between Wimberley and Dripping Springs, where at least three old Hays County cemeteries are located. Dorothy, Jim and Luanne scouted the ranch with owner and guide Scott Storm, visiting Gatlin-Garrett, Cherry Springs and Weaver Cemeteries. They left with Storm's encouragement to bringing the full committee back for a visit. Historic surveys are called for at two of the sites.

Bob Flocke represented the cemetery committee and HCHC at the early October, historical marker dedication at Butler Cemetery.

Cullen managed to get a key to the Middlebrooks Cemetery southwest of Dripping Springs, which is another lovely, traditional hill country cemetery. Here again, a historical survey is called for.

Hays County Commissioner Debbie Gonzales Inglesbe met with Ofelia Vasquez Philo, cemetery maintenance contractor Gene Bagwell and him (Cullen) at Cemeterio del Rio to discuss proposed fencing at that site. Cattle regularly run (through) the site and encroaching development appears to be imminent. This cemetery has most threatened status with broken wires and tombstones lying outside the fencing.

Clearing and restoration work made major progress at previously overgrown Bading Cemetery (old Centerpoint Community) and Cheatham Cemetery between San Marcos and Martindale. More clearing of the old cast iron fence at Cocke Cemetery (Elm Grove Community) took place and Coronado Cemetery is being prepared for Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead).

On a lighter note, Jennifer Trough from the paranormal society has contacted him (Cullen) and wants to investigate the Antioch Cemetery. He has taken it under advisement. The Caldwell County cemetery tours complete with docents as actors in costume, portraying various people buried there appeared to be very successful, but require a lot of work, research, plenty of actors and costumes. Would the Wimberley Players like to tackle the job in Hays County?

By this time it was getting pretty cool by the pool as the sun sank in the western sky. Portable, radiant heaters were brought in and set up around the tables. The light was fading fast and we weren't through, yet.

Richard Kidd brought us up to speed on our [www.hayshistoricalcommission.com](http://www.hayshistoricalcommission.com) site with over 7,000 hits and told of Lu Hickey's Yahoo 360 blog we all have to visit.

Chairman Johnson has a museum in mind when she thinks of restoring the old Hays County Jail, housing Texas Ranger photos and badges and paraphernalia.

There was just a soft glow of daylight left so Scenic and Historic Roads has to wait till we meet again. Anyway, I'm (Linda Keese) still gathering information on signage. Have the roads laid out, though.

Three descendants of Jack C. Hays will be accompanying HCHC members on their trek to California, following the route Hays reportedly took on his journey out there. The 2008 trip will take place November 12 through 19 by train, car and plane to reach the final destination - Oakland.

Shelley Henry reminded members of the upcoming parades in San Marcos on November 8 - Veterans Day and Budafest on December 6, and the book signing and sale in the Hays County Courthouse rotunda December 11 from 5 - 6:30 p.m. She needs participants to contact her. Congratulations to member Ofelia Philo who was one of three singled out to receive a Spirit of San Marcos award.

LaMarr Petersen urged us all to remember to reapply to the commission. We have plenty of projects started to finish and new ones to begin.

As complete darkness fell, the tables were softly lit by the glow of the heaters and underwater lights from the pool. It was time for good food and conversation and afterwards, a tour of the villa by our gracious host. At 7:30 p.m. Ophelia Philo moved to adjourn and Linda Coker seconded.

Respectfully submitted,  
Linda Keese Recording Secretary