April 2017

April 27th Speaker

Architectural Details:
There’s Just Something About that House
Steph Mc Dougal

What makes a house pleasing to the eye, or recognizable as one style or another? The answer is in the details … the architectural details, that is! From Queen Anne to Craftsman to Mid-Century Modern and more recent trends, key character-defining features tell us what is important to preserve and what can be changed without destroying a house’s integrity. Steph McDougal will explain how to “read” a house, identify the changes that have been made to it over time, and understand how to best steward it for future generations.

Steph McDougal is a former member of the board of directors of the League City Historical Society. She has served on the League City Historic Commission for the past three-plus years and is currently the chair. Steph makes her living as a historic preservation consultant, working with city governments and nonprofit organizations throughout Texas and the United States. She is currently working on her second book, a history of Joachim Hintz, a German immigrant and master builder who was responsible for some of Austin County’s most iconic buildings. Her first book, Lighthouses of Texas, was released by Arcadia Publishing in 2014. Steph is a lifetime member of League City Historical Society!
Meeting Minutes
Susan Pierce, Secretary

March 30, 2017

Doug McKee welcomed everyone and announced a Board meeting for next week. Catharin Lewis talked about the Society’s yard sale, which made $1,700. The items that weren’t sold were donated to a woman’s shelter nearby. Catharin announced that the deadline was approaching for members who want to renew membership via the internet.

Doug led a prayer for recently-deceased Historical Society founder, Fay Dudney.

Doug announced that Mike Peterson’s home and the Butler Longhorn Museum will be among those shown in the Bay Area Symphony home tour this weekend. Doug told us about the recent surprise birthday party given for former President Ernie Randall and reminded us of the upcoming Teddy Bear Parade on July 4th. The Living History dinner will be either July 14 or 21 this year.

Despite having technical difficulties with her laptop, our speaker Doryn Danner Glynn gave her presentation on the variety of court records (civil, criminal, and immigration) available online and stored physically at the Galveston County District Clerk’s Office. The Texas Court Records Task Force, commissioned by the Texas Supreme Court, has restored record books statewide, and Ms. Glynn brought to show us books containing all kinds of legal paperwork. Some of these books are displayed throughout the state to encourage interest in this restoration project. Galveston County had lots of records, some dating back to the Republic of Texas (records from 1836-1846), and many immigration records. Interestingly, the Galveston County Courts’ Minute books often made no mention of “local” events such as the Civil War or the 1900 Storm; the courts would just pick up where they left off. Sometimes an event would have an impact on the courts’ dockets. The records show that lawsuits were dismissed because the parties had died during the 1900 Storm and that lawsuits were filed while the seawall was being built. The records of Galveston County also contain inquest records and criminal records, including those dealing with the alleged gambling going on at the Balinese Room.

Meeting adjourned.
March was a rather quiet month, so I made progress in digitizing the collection. We had 308 visitors from Santa Fe, Tomball, League City and various areas in Houston. We held 8 schoolhouse sessions and the groups kept us busy in the gift shop too bringing in almost $400 in sales.

We are delighted to have a new helper, Mr. Stout who shares his many stories and still finds ways to improve some of the things in the museum. He painted a beautiful sign for our Garden classroom and is now touching up our manikins to make them look more “alive”. We also want to thank him for one of his house paintings and a copy of his book entitled, Texas Ghost Images. Do you recognize whose home it is?
We will have another Work Day for odd jobs around the museum during the month of May. I will send out a special notice of the chosen day and we will look for help at that time. I do want to thank Melissa Aguilar, Catherine Gill and Barbara Vermillion for their time and help at the museum.

Our collection is growing again. We had several others who donated items to the museum in March. We want to thank Frank Dorr for donating a folding lap desk and thank Diana Dornak for donating a period costume with a hat. We also want to thank Katie Benoit Hake for donating two very interesting books, entitled The Bobbed Wire IV Bible by Jack Glover and American Costume, 1915-1970 by Shirley Miles O’Donnol. We also want to thank the donor of this desk that appeared on the porch one day.

We want to thank Mallory Keen and her parents who volunteered during spring break at the museum and two days at our yard sale. Mallory earned service hours for her school and her parents shared in the work so we got twice as much done. We now have another teenager earning service hours for school and Noel has been a great help, cleaning, digitizing the collection and climbing ladders and lifting heavy boxes for me. He will be graduating in June, so if you know of others needing volunteer hours for school, please let them know we do need their help here and we would love to have them.

If it has not been mentioned elsewhere, the Society Yard Sale was a huge success. Many thanks to Daryl Krogman, chairman and the many who donated items for sale and the volunteers who helped Friday and Saturday, we brought in over $1700. Our volunteers included Katie Hoke, Mike and Pat Conwell, Sarah Eubanks, Diana Dornak, Phyllis White, Diane Kerkhove, Joanna Dawson, Susan Pierce, Catherine Gill, Mike Peterson, Dan and Mallory Keen, Richard Lewis and I.

Lillian Murphy
Chris Mallios
Family
Did you know that Nana’s Attic, League City’s popular, family-owned boutique in Founders’ Square, was originally the home of the city’s first mayor’s grandparents, Ursula “Dora” and Giuseppe “Joe” Arolfo?

Mayor Johnnie Louis Arolfo’s grandparents left their native land of Italy, the town of Cercenasco, 16 miles south of the metropolitan city of Turin, in the Italian region of Piedmont, shortly after the birth of their first child, Caterina “Katie,” born August 27, 1896. They travelled to La Havre, France and boarded the La Bretagne to New York on February 2, 1897. After arriving at Ellis Island, they took the train to Galveston. Family oral histories say they stayed on the train until the end of the line because they had food and water. The family lived in Hitchcock for a short time which was a thriving dairy and produce mecca. Later they relocated to Dickinson with the help of the Italian consul in Galveston, Clemente Nicolini, who owned property there. They bought several blocks in the Robert Hall Survey of the Nicholstone Addition and became celery farmers, working from sunrise to sunset to achieve their American dream. They moved into the small frame house on the property that would become Nana’s Attic almost a hundred years later in 1895. On December 10, 1898, they welcomed their first child born in America, Lawrence “Chino” Arolfo, the father of League City’s first mayor, Johnnie Louis Arolfo, born May 23, 1923, died December 1995, at age 72.

There are no records of the home’s journey from Dickinson to League City, but the area where it was housed, has an interesting history. The rural neighborhood included Hall Street, north of the Dickinson city limits and north of the intersection of 20th Street East (formerly Hall Street) with California Street. In the early 1960s, the site was used for the unpermitted disposal of chemical waste dumped in shallow pits or on the ground. Drums containing waste were buried in shallow ditches and later covered with soil. The tar and sludge sometimes caught fire. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, TCEQ, declared it a Superfund site in 1986 with the final cleanup occurring 27 years later in 2013.

The Arolfos went on to have three more children: Antoinette (1900-1961), Dominick (1901-1968) and Theresa Beatrice (1904-1973). Tragedy struck in 1906, when Giuseppe died, less than ten years after his arrival in the United States. The story told was that Giuseppe died from internal injuries sustained in a fight in a local tavern when another man shoved him into a table that had a sharp edge. Young Ursula was left with the burden of the farm and five young children. Six years after her husband’s death, in 1912, Ursula perished from complications following an emergency appendectomy, leaving 16-year-old Katie to raise the family.

Six months after her mother’s death, Katie married John Milutin who was 23. The 1930 Census later listed Milutin’s occupation as a screwman. A screwman is a stevedore who stows compressed cotton-bales in the holds of vessels by means of a device called a screw. Saddled with four young children, ranging in age from eight to fourteen, and a new husband,
community rumors began about sending the children back to Italy, although all of them, except Katie, were born here and were American citizens. A local family, the Bogattas, offered to help and arranged for all of them to remain in Dickinson with the stipulation they go to an orphanage.

However, only Theresa and Antoinette went to the orphanage. Lawrence and Dominic ran away. Dominic worked on a farm until he married and Lawrence joined the Navy.

John and Katie lived and raised their five children in the house, except for two short periods of time when they lived in Kemah and then in Angleton. They added two rooms to the original structure to accommodate their five children, Jennie, Lewis, Anthony, Joseph and John Jr. John Sr. passed away in 1971 and Katie remained in her childhood home until her death in 1992. In October 1995, John Jr. donated his childhood home to League City where it became Nana’s Attic.

The family-owned gift shop was started by Marie Benoit Sesher. Her sister and co-owner, Katie Benoit Hake, is a League City Historical Society Board member. Both sisters grew up in historical homes and love doing business in one. They feel they are helping to pass along their appreciation of history to another generation.

In the past 20 years they have been doing business in this historic home, members of the Arolfo family have come by to show off their Grandma’s house. The only change in the originally 650 square-foot home came after it was moved to Founders’ Square. The developers enlarged the door of the bedroom into an open arch and added dormers.

The Benoit sisters are creating their own history in the house. The shop was opened after Marie’s first daughter, Stanzie was born and Marie's second daughter, Gabrielle, took her first steps in the shop.

The Arolfo home is Nana’s Attic’s third location. Its other two sites were also historic homes. Nana's has been at this location over 20 years.

Katie Benoit Hake says, “It seemed like fate that Katie Arolfo was the last owner of the house and now another Katie enjoys the space. “

Next month: More on the original Arolfo family: Arolfo Family Part 2
Photos left to right, top row: Living Room; Moving Day.
Second Row: Front Porch; Windows
Third Row: Owners of Nana’s Attic Stanzie Sesher, Katie Benoit Hake, and Marie Benoit Sesher.
2017 Dues Form
League City Historical Society

Thank you for being a member of the League City Historical Society. It is time to renew membership for 2016. Dues for various types of memberships are as listed below.

To renew your membership, choose the membership level that is best for you, complete the form below and mail to LCHS, P. O. Box 1642, League City, TX 77574. You may also bring renewal and check to the next meeting.

Note: If you have paid your dues in October 2016 or later, you are current for the year 2017.

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**Business Category**

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Please update your membership information.

Name: _____________________________________________________________________________________

(If Family Membership, please include names of family members.)

Address ____________________________________________________________________________________

City__________________________________________________State________________      Zip____________

Phone: Home Phone__________________________Cell Phone: ________________________________

Email Address: ______________________________________________________________________________

☐ Check if your name, address or email has changed recently.

☐ Check if you would like to receive your newsletter, meeting minutes and/or meeting notices by email, to help save on postage.