



# WELCOME TO THE EOHP

# Newsletter



# ELGIN'S BEGINNINGS

The City of Elgin, located on the Houston and Texas Central Railway (H&TC), was chartered in 1872. What started as a railroad stop for the transportation needs of area farmers, ranchers, and manufacturers became a thriving community of persons with diverse backgrounds, occupations, and interests.

The original plan was to run the rail line along the course of the Colorado River so that cotton could be loaded from local farms. This route presented several challenges, as the land was in a flood plain. The railroad purchased the land, despite the challenges, to lay tracks, store coal, and supply water as replacement fuel for the steam trains. When the inevitable happened---the river flooded in 1869---the course of the rail line and the communities along the route changed. No longer were settlements known as Young's Prairie, Litton Springs, Perryville, and Hogeye to be rail stops. Instead, the line was moved a few miles north so that it would run from McDade to a watering station called Glasscock and then to Austin.

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## EOHP HOSTS BOOK READING

In November 2023, the Elgin Oral History Project (EOHP) hosted a community gathering at the Clever Tiger Art Gallery. Local attorney and author, Mark Owen, read portions of his books, entitled *Little Bill* and *Wingman*. The 30 attendees were introduced to the work of EOHP and encouraged to participate in its mission to capture the history of Elgin by sharing stories of its residents and community events.



Mark Owen, Attorney and Author

*"Oral history is the voice of the people, and it tells the stories that history books can't."*  
Studs Terkel

## STORIES COME TO LIFE

During Elgin's Western Days celebration, on June 21st, an audience gathered at Elgin's Open Room to participate in an event of EOHP's Membership and Outreach Committee.

Karen Bernstein, EOHP Board member and the Open Room curator, and Molly Owen, EOHP member, staged live readings from tales of Elgin's Southside. Excerpts from oral histories of Pete Bega, Delores Del Cantu, T. Berry, Sammy Reese, Juan Gonzalez, and Dr. Jodi Duron were read.

The City of Elgin Mayor, Theresa McShan, read a passage from her father's interview. Shifton McShan told how his family negotiated the financial limitations of the Great Depression and how he became a barber in Elgin.



Andrea Chavarria Taylor reading an oral history at the Open Room



## EOHP's LOGO

The Elgin Oral History Project's logo was created by one of its Board members, Sonia Browder. It symbolizes the mission of the organization to capture stories about the historical roots of the community. The tree is designed in the form of an abstract "E" with a strong trunk and limbs covered with beautiful blossoms—just like crepe myrtle bushes—to represent the strength and beauty of the community's people.

## LOGO CONTINUED

In 1944, the Elgin City Council participated in post-World War II planning for infrastructure improvements and community beautification. The Post War Planning Board, created by the federal government, offered ideas to finance municipal utilities, as well as giving crepe myrtle plants to cities that requested them. Mayor Buck Christian ordered 1,600 crepe myrtle plants with the intent to make Elgin "a Crepe Myrtle" city, like the other towns in Texas. The ladies who were members of the Elgin New Century Club helped to convince residents to order and plant these bushes and trees. Many of those plants are still blooming after almost 80 years, and many are seen in the city's downtown Veterans Park.

Elgin held a celebration in January 1945 after all the crepe myrtles—designated in 1997 as the official shrub of Texas—were in the ground. Elgin's landscape is dotted with crepe myrtles that were planted through the efforts of community leaders and government assistance. They provide a historic reference to the civic pride of an era that continues today. The logo for the Elgin Oral History Project represents this pride and offers inspiration for the future.



<https://www.facebook.com/ElginOraHistory/>

<https://www.instagram.com/elginoralhistory/>





## SPRING MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

The EOHP Spring Membership Drive was a great success. Board member Jacque Smith hosted a get-together at her home on Friday, March 29. The outdoor setting offered a comfortable place for conversation and entertainment, featuring the music of the incomparable Leti Garza who serenaded the guests with original songs and old favorites.

In addition, excerpts from EOHP interviews of T. Berry, Donna Snowden, and others were read to the group. Guests were encouraged to join EOHP and help with collecting stories of Elgin to preserve the community's history.



## EOHP FIRST ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

On August 17, EOHP held its first Annual Membership Program at the Clever Tiger Art Gallery. For the two-hour agenda, several board members gave presentations on relevant oral history topics, which included a sample of an interview of T. Berry.

Sydna Arbuckle, a noted historian of Elgin, preceded the board members' presentations with a short talk about the Mary Christian Burleson homestead.

Lunch was provided to all attendees, and EOHP members were invited to attend the quarterly Board meeting. (See more pictures on page 4.)

## ELGIN'S SESQUICENTENNIAL

Elgin, Texas, celebrated its 150th year of existence in 2022. City leaders began a sesquicentennial effort by appointing a committee to plan community events and establish a record of this historic milestone. An updated version of the centennial publication of Elgin's history was prepared, and a time capsule to be opened in fifty years was buried in front of the Elgin Public Library.

Published and included in the time capsule were transcriptions of twenty interviews that were conducted by the Elgin Oral History Project (EOHP). Half of the interviews were from women, and half were from persons with Black or Mexican heritage. Three of the interviewees were over the age of ninety, and two had Swedish heritage. The stories and reflections offered by these persons provide insight into the community's history.



Sesquicentennial Co-chairs,  
Forest Dennis and Deborah Cartwright  
at Time Capsule Site



Sesquicentennial Float at  
Christmas Nighttime Parade



Sydna Arbuckle talking to the EOHP membership



Bob Makela speaking to EOHP members



Sonia Browder talks about Social Media at the the Clever Tiger Art Gallery

## UPCOMING PLANS FOR EOHP

EOHP's Membership and Outreach Committee will host a series of pop-up recording opportunities for passersby to be interviewed. Check our website, Facebook and Instagram pages for the pop-up locations in downtown Elgin. The following chart lists the dates and times for the pop-up interviews.

| Dates              | Days      | Time             |
|--------------------|-----------|------------------|
| October 10, 17, 24 | Thursdays | 5:00 pm-8:00 pm  |
| October 12, 19, 26 | Saturdays | 10:00 am-2:00 pm |

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram for the time and place of future events.

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## EOHP BOARD MEMBERS

Deborah Cartwright, President  
 Sonia Browder, Vice-President  
 Cheryll Dennis, Secretary  
 John Smith, Treasurer  
 Jacque Smith  
 Karen Bernstein  
 T. Berry  
 Andrea Chavarria Taylor  
 Bob Makela  
 Anthony Moore  
 Angela Nunn

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Mailing address:

EOHP  
 Post Office Box 625, Elgin TX 78621

Our website:

<https://www.oralhistoryetx.org>

<https://www.instagram.com/elginoralhistory/>

<https://www.facebook.com/ElginOralHistory/>

Or, just search @elginoralhistory