



# ELGIN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ELGIN, TEXAS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

## LITTIG REUNION AND JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION

By Karen Bernstein, Documentary Film Maker and EOHP Director



On Juneteenth of this year, Elgin Oral History Project (EOHP) joined with the farm community of Littig, TX, to celebrate the federal holiday. The Littig Preservation Alliance, a group of residents in the small, unincorporated community just west of Elgin, planned a reunion weekend and asked EOHP to be a sponsor and participant. The former Freedom Colony was settled by Black farmers after the U.S. Civil War and has strong ties with Elgin. Both Littig and Elgin are named after the railway commission officers who were involved in the building of the tracks in the area (A.B. Littig and Robert Morriss Elgin). Littig is in both Bastrop and Travis Counties, and many Elgin residents attended Littig schools, including Shifton McShan. He attended the Biting School for children of color in the 1930s along with his brother and many lifelong friends. EOHP board member, Charlotte Swenson, remembers the bus route which transported Littig residents, like Pamela Fowler, to Elgin schools.

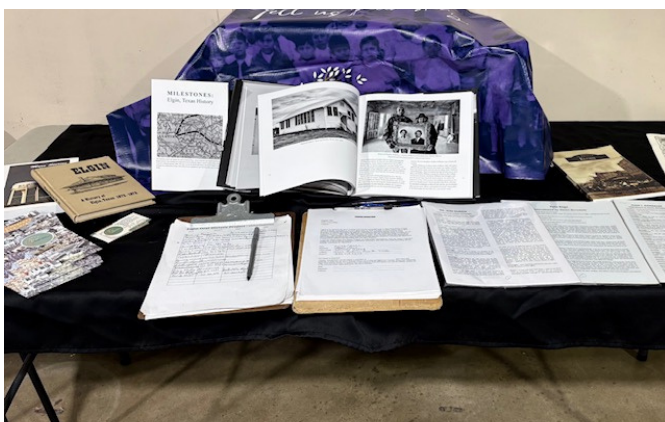
At the Littig Reunion in the VFW Hall, children and adults played games, shared in barbecue and delicious desserts, and viewed a well-curated slide show filled with images of the descendants of Jackson Morrow and other formerly enslaved farming families. During the period of Reconstruction after America's Civil War, Mr. Morrow bought approximately 2,000 acres and granted land rights to the people of color who had worked the Blackland Prairie. The opening plenary address was given to Dr. Audrey Mackey who had lived in Littig as a young boy, then became one of the youngest graduates of Huston-Tillotson University in Austin. He spoke emotionally about growing up in Littig, extolling the community spirit and sense of camaraderie. Dr. Mackey related a harrowing experience of work that began from sunrise to sunset, filling a barn with hay for the winter, only to witness a fire which burned the day's work down. Within the next few days, the Littig community had rebuilt the barn, [PAGE 2]



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without question or complaint. Such were the bonds between the families of Littig and their friends in Elgin.

Dr. Mackey went on to explain the amazing connections within the chain of Freedom Colonies that stretched from Northeastern Travis County into Bastrop County. Despite the lack of modern conveniences like telephone or internet, there was a code amongst the formerly enslaved population who were now emancipated. Each community, however small, would have three essential parts: a church, a school, and a cemetery. A church became more than a religious institution. It was a community center with a school to educate the descendants who had never received such services prior and a cemetery to commemorate those who built the community. Rooted in emancipation, built on faith, and sustained by descendants of Jackson Morrow, the residents of Littig have changed over the years, but the sense of preservation remains.



At the reunion, Ms. Ruby Williams—Ms. Ninnie—was honored as the oldest living resident of Littig at age 101. She was brought to Elgin's VFW Hall by her granddaughter, Tory, and great grandsons. People came from as far as Dallas and Houston to celebrate with new and old residents of Littig and Elgin. DJ Reese provided the music, and an impressive amount of raffle items and prizes were given away. In the coming months, many descendants of Jackson Morrow will be interviewed for EOHP, starting with Ms. Ninnie. As ever, it is our mission to fill in the blanks of history by spoken and recorded word.



*Ms. Ninnie, her granddaughter Tory, and great grandsons.*

#### HAVE YOU VISITED OUR WEBSITE?



Visit  
<https://oralhistoryetx.org/>  
 and explore the rich history  
 and culture of Elgin, Texas and  
 its impact on our lives today.

# ELGINITES READ CHARTERS OF FREEDOM AT VFW POST 6115

By Jacque Smith, Event Organizer and Community Volunteer

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July with the heat index at 103°F, ten patriotic Elginites read the Declaration of Independence and excerpts of the U.S. Constitution aloud at the Elgin VFW Post 6115.

Jacque Smith opened the program, welcoming all who were willing to brave the heat to hear what our Charters of Freedom promise all Americans. Following the opening comments, Debra Edwards moved the audience with her heartfelt rendition of “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

Reading the Declaration of Independence was an essential part of the program to give the audience an understanding why our Forefathers – and Foremothers – were willing to break away from British rule. King George III’s rampant and often violent mistreatment of the Colonists had become so intolerable that they were willing to risk death for treasonous actions in the hope of gaining independent freedom. Elgin Oral History Project Board Member, Molly Owen brought the passion and fierce commitment of the signers to life in her moving reading of the Declaration of Independence.



The audience reads from their booklets, *The Constitution of the United States*, as Amendment readers read aloud.



Constitution and Amendment readers gather before the program begins.

To help the audience personalize the U.S. Constitution – a challenging document to understand – Judy Henry extended an invitation to the audience to read the Preamble aloud with her. This short paragraph explains why the *Constitution* was written. Then everyone settled in to hear the *U.S. Constitution* read Article by Article as they followed along in the booklet titled, *The Constitution of the United States*. The panel of Constitution readers included Mayor Theresa McShan, Chris Montemayor, Jeff Wahrmond, Leti Garza and Rev. Amy Meyer. [PAGE 4]

## INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING?

Tell Us  
= YOUR =  
Story

Do you know an Elgin story that should be preserved? Are you interested in recording the history of our beloved city?

Contact us! We’d love to work with you!

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Amendments that related to specific Articles and Sections in the Constitution were read in conjunction with those respective Articles and Sections to give the audience context – what the Constitution originally said and how it was changed. The panel of Amendment readers included Judy Henry, Paul Henry, Darshay Reese and EOHP Board Member Karen Bernstein.

Not all Amendments were read aloud. Elgin Oral History Project Board Member Charlotte Swenson and her husband, Tim Fender, designed and built the fun Amendment Match Game that included the Bill of Rights and other stand-alone Amendments. Charlotte's game tested participants' knowledge of these important Amendments.

This event could not have happened without the commitment of these patriotic members of the Elgin community. Nor could they have stood in front of the engaged audience without the extremely generous, enthusiastic donations of the following individuals and organizations: Deborah Cartwright, Mark Owen, Lillian Gates



*EOHP Board Members Charlotte Swenson and Lillian Gates display the Amendment Match Game.*

Barbara Bogart, Beki Willis, Morgan Louvier, Nancy Scott, Debbie Wahrmond, Stef & Tiffany Finley, Elgin VFW Post 6115, First Presbyterian Church, Bastrop County Republican Party, Bastrop County Democratic Party and the Texas Civil Justice League.

## BASTROP COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION WORK CONTINUES

By John C. Smith, Commission Member and EOHP Director

The Bastrop County Historical Commission (BCHC) is a county governmental entity with a board composed of members appointed by the County Commissioners Court. The mission of the BCHC is to identify, research, preserve, and share the history of Bastrop County.

The primary functions of BCHC are to (1) research local history; (2) support, promote, and assist with the designation of historic sites and landmarks, including cemeteries; (3) offer educational programs and community events; (4) partner with local organizations to expand historical awareness; (5) advocate for the preservation of historical documents and artifacts; and (6) provide guidance and

resources for preservation projects.

From Indigenous peoples and early settlers to the residents of the towns that we know today, Bastrop County history is defined by resilience, culture, and connection. The BCHC is committed to preserving the voices and memories of County residents through recorded interviews and archives. BCHC has started a collection of oral histories to document the experiences, traditions, and perspectives of current and former residents. These first-hand accounts keep the past accessible so that future generations can learn and feel connected to the people who came before them.

## ORAL HISTORIES ADDED TO WEBSITE

**Krista Lee Marx** moved to Elgin in 1972 at five years of age when her father accepted a call to serve at a local church. She graduated from Elgin High School and returned home after college, spending 33 years with the Elgin Independent School District and serving in various roles, including first-grade teacher, reading specialist, and instructional specialist. Krista is deeply embedded in the Elgin community, holding leadership positions with the Elgin Arts Association as its president, Downtown Elgin Inc., and the Elgin Main Street Board. Krista has been instrumental in the growth and success of the annual Pearls Before Swine Art Show and the Elgin Hogeye Festival, serving as the coordinator for the popular Cow Patty Bingo fundraiser. Krista is passionate about downtown Elgin and the importance of maintaining a vibrant, connected community and has a deep appreciation for Elgin's history and traditions, such as the annual Western Days celebration. Krista emphasizes in this interview the community's spirit of coming together to support those in need, citing examples of fundraisers and benefits organized by local groups and individuals.

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**Sue Beckwith** is a long-time resident of Elgin, Texas, who has been deeply involved in community initiatives concerning local food, historic preservation, and the sustainable development of rural cities, like Elgin. She worked closely with her dear friend, former Mayor Marc Holm, on various projects, including the restoration and preservation of the original homestead of Mary Christian Burleson. Sue is responsible for efforts to establish local food initiatives. These efforts include farm-to-kids after-school programs in the Elgin Independent School District, agricultural programs at the Austin Community College campus in Elgin, and the establishment of the Elgin Local Food Center for several years. Sue was the start-up manager for Coyote Creek Organic Feed Mill, the first commercial organic feed mill in Texas, and Jeremiah Cunningham's World's Best Eggs, both in Elgin. Sue is the founding Executive Director of the Texas Center for Local Food, a non-profit organization headquartered in Elgin, focused on supporting local food economies across the state.

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**Ed Rivers** is a fifth generation native of Elgin, Texas, with a rich family history dating back to the late 1800s. His ancestors owned a mercantile company and were involved actively in banking, ranching, church, and civic affairs for 150 years. Ed has continued the tradition by living and working in Elgin, as well as raising a family of four children with his wife Karla, a third generation Elginite.

Mr. Rivers has been and continues to be a community leader through his work as a businessman and entrepreneur. He has demonstrated leadership with the chamber of commerce, city boards and commissions, a stint on the city council, and school activities. His recollections of school, family, friends, businesses, and events reflect his love of the community—its people, culture, and heritage—and demonstrate why he is respected for his honesty and trustworthiness. They also reflect the changes in the community created by population growth and societal influences. What Mr. Rivers expressed implicitly was hope that Elgin will continue its heritage of community involvement and pride, in a place where neighbors care for each other and want the city to succeed.

# MARK YOUR CALENDAR

## PLANS FOR END OF 2026 AND 2027

- **Next Regular EOHP Board Meeting**

Saturday, October 10, 2026, at 10 a.m.

The meeting will feature David Thompson, a local storyteller. Mr. Thompson will share Texas tales, including one about Mary Christian Burleson who is an early Elgin settler. The community is invited to the meeting at a location to be announced.

- **Holiday Social Event**

A social gathering for the community will be scheduled for an evening in November or December. Readings from interview transcripts and other activities may be part of the event. Watch for an announcement about the date, time, and location.

- **More Interviews and Other Projects**

Elgin's Mexican Cemetery was designated in 2026 as an endangered Latinx Landmark by Latinos for Heritage Conservation. EOHP plans to showcase this site and its historical significance to the community through interviews with the individuals responsible for the designation. The project will be an on-going effort through 2027.

Plans to engage elementary school children in local history are being made. EOHP board members are considering ways to bring interviewing skills and techniques into classrooms with the intent of sparking interest in preserving community and family histories.

## 2026 EOHP BOARD MEMBERS

Karen Bernstein  
Sonia Browder  
Deborah Cartwright  
Lillian Reyes Gates  
Bob Makela  
Byron Mitchell  
Tracy Ortiz  
Molly Owen  
Ruby Simms  
John C. Smith  
Charlotte Swenson  
Andrea Taylor

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Us

### EMAIL:

[info@oralhistoryetx.org](mailto:info@oralhistoryetx.org)

### REGULAR MAIL:

P.O. Box 625, Elgin, Texas 78621