THC to honor local native Oveta Culp Hobby

Former lieutenant governor Bill Hobby will be keynote speaker May 31 in a special Texas Historical Commission marker dedication at Killeen’s City Hall.

Tentative plans for the 11 a.m. ceremony on the south side (“girls entrance”) of the former Killeen High School at Avenue D and College include remarks by THC military historian William McWhorter, THC commissioner Tom Alexander, Killeen Mayor Tim Hancock, Bell County Judge Jon Burrows and Paul Harris, Vignettes of Wartime Texas donor and executive vice president of Hoblitzelle Foundation.

(more about Oveta Culp Hobby on back page)

BCHC member named top volunteer

The Texas Historical Commission recently named Bell County Historical Commission member David Evans of Salado its 2006 George Christian Outstanding Volunteer of the Year.

Evans served 20 years as BCHC’s marker chairman, guiding scores of applicants seeking recognition of historic properties and persons through THC historic marker program.

Also, during THC’s annual preservation conference, BCHC chairman Ron Gates accepted the commission’s 16th Distinguished Service Award.

‘Face of Texas’ photo exhibit to open June 30

The Bell County Museum will host The Face of Texas, a collection of photographs by freelance photographer Michael O’Brien, from June 30 through August 25.

Organized by the Old Jail Art Center of Albany, the exhibit features portraits of Texans, with essays by O’Brien’s journalist wife Elizabeth to accompany each portrait. Besides famous Texans like Sissy Spacek and Earl Campbell, the selection includes lesser known Texans: the Gatorfest Queen, members of Waxahachie’s Odd Fellows chapter and the “Van Gogh of Van Horn.”

The current Bell County Quilt Treasury exhibit will close on May 12. Another photo exhibit, Vintage Bell County, will open May 19.

The museum will be open on July 4 from 12 noon to 5 p.m. Information about all museum activities, including a summer camp for young people July 24-27, is available at 254-933-5756.

Museum to host music roadshow, Turnbo

The Bell County Museum will be the scene of two one-day events, beginning with a book-signing for freelance writer Charlie Turnbo and his new book, Salado, Texas: Frontier College Town, on Thursday, April 26, at 5:30 p.m.

The Texas Music Experience Roadshow will arrive on Saturday, May 19. Housed in a trailer, the traveling presentation complements the museum’s current exhibit, Rhythm & Rhyme: Music in Central Texas. On view will be a 1960 Thomas Jefferson High School yearbook from Port Arthur with its photograph of Janis Joplin, as well as a tuxedo shirt, coat and guitar formerly owned by East Texas’ “Gentleman” Jim Reeves. Exhibit hours are 12 noon to 5 p.m.

Bell County Calendar

Turnbo book signing..........................April 26, 5:30 pm
Rhythm & Rhyme exhibit....................through June 16
WBGS headstone hunt........................May 3, 6 pm
1900-style backyard..........................May 12, 9 am-2 pm
Killeen’s 125th birthday....................May 15, 5 pm
Texas Music Experience Roadshow........May 19
Vintage Bell County exhibit.................opens May 19
Salado Cemetery program....................May 28, 9:30 am
Killeen’s 125th birthday celebration.....May 29-June 2
Oveta C. Hobby marker dedication........May 31, 11 am
Holland Corn Fest...........................June 16
The Face of Texas exhibit....................opens June 30
Bell County Museum.........................open July 4, noon-5 pm
Belton’s Fourth of July parade..............July 4
Temple Historic District youth parade......July 4
‘Salado Legends’............................July 21, 28, August 4
BCM summer camp............................July 24-27

This newsletter is published quarterly by the Bell County Historical Commission, Box 712, Belton, Texas 76513-0712. Editorial material may be sent to Annette Lucksinger, 811 Oakhill Drive, Killeen, Texas 76541 (254-699-5916).

(e-mail: asl@vvm.com) The Bell County Historical Commission meets at 7 p.m. on the fourth Monday of most months in Justice of the Peace #1 courtroom, Bell County Courthouse.

The BCHC office on the third floor of the courthouse is open from 9 a.m. to 12 noon Monday through Friday. Phone number is 254-933-5917. (e-mail: hist.comm@co.bell.tx.us)
EVERYTHING OK AT OKAY: Everything except the weather, that is. Joy Brown Oliver of Killeen, along with some 70 Brown family members braved 50-degree winds to attend a dedication ceremony April 14 at the Brown (Okay Community) Cemetery, cemetery just south of the Killeen-Fort Hood Regional Airport. A descendant of Samuel Marion Brown, who donated land for the cemetery, Oliver visited her great-grandfather's grave and marker during the ceremony. She is related to at least eight other Browns buried at the site. Elisha Ivy established a home and store in the area in the 1860s. The Okay community had a post office from 1896 to 1899; in 1903 the Okay School had 34 students and one teacher. After Camp Hood was established in the 1940s, the town virtually disappeared; the Army's Corps of Engineers moved its cemetery's 70 graves to the current site in 1953. According to Oliver, Okay at one time boasted a general store and a blacksmith shop plus the school, where several church congregations met. Besides Oliver, five other Brown descendants participated in the dedication; they included William E. LaGrone, Kristie LaGrone, Tom D. LaGrone, Wendy LaGrone and Roger Whitehead. Two Brown sisters married two LaGrone brothers, producing "double first cousins," a fairly typical outcome in pioneer communities.

Local reps back improved park funding

In response to recent media attention to the neglected state of Texas state parks and a possible transfer of 21 historic properties from Texas Parks & Wildlife Department to the Texas Historic Commission, the legislature is considering a move to allow all of the sporting goods tax to go where it was intended, the state parks themselves, instead of allowing about one-third of the fund to be diverted to other uses.

State Representatives Dianne White Delisi and Jimmie Don Aycock are two of more than 120 co-authors of House Bill 6 that would remove the current $32 million cap. Known as the "Texas Parks Restoration Act," H.B. 6 was introduced by Rep. Harvey Hilderbrand, chairman of the Culture, Recreation and Tourism Committee, and four other representatives. The bill passed 7-0 in Hilderbrand's committee and was sent to the Calendars Committee on March 23.

An identical bill, Senate Bill 252, introduced by Senator Craig Estes, was referred to the Finance Committee, where it remains as of April 18. Twenty-two senators are named as co-authors.

Hilderbrand also introduced H.B. 7, which would transfer those 21 historic sites to the THC. THC manages "some of the most effective preservation programs in the nation," Hilderbrand noted in a press release. According to Hilderbrand, each of the 21 sites would be subject to public input and discussion.

In a February 10 editorial, The Dallas Morning News urged support for H.B. 6 and observed that both House Speaker Tom Craddick and Governor Rick Perry back the effort. Although data vary, the News reported that, if the 1993 law providing for the sporting goods sales tax to go to state parks were to be implemented as intended, some $90 million more would be available for park repairs, road work and longer operating hours.

But Beth McDonald of Austin, Texans for State Parks president, questions the need for legislative action, noting that both the TPWD and THC have had "a common agreement for several years that such (transfer) considerations could be undertaken at any time, without the necessity . . . of legislation." THC, she says, should have joined in the quest for adequate funding for TPWD instead of backing the transfer of historic sites.

The Bell County Museum's research room will now allow researchers direct access to the internet and give them the opportunity to print documents, thanks to a recent gift of $2,000 from Altrusa International, Inc. of Temple for the purchase of a computer and printer.

The museum's recent Big Bell County Garage Sale cleared $8,476.30. Fifteen volunteers assisted.
Exhibit highlights Central Texas music

Betcha never saw a 1914 Edison Amberola or Adolf Schwertner’s 1898 tuba or a 1955 Les Paul guitar owned by Bell County’s only Grammy award winner, Little Joe Hernandez.

These unique items and much more are part of the Bell County Museum’s Rhythm & Rhyme: Music in Central Texas exhibit on view through June 16.

Curated by Bell County Historical Commission member Patti Benoit, the exhibit entertains and teaches at the same time. Visitors may try out 10 different percussion instruments in the “rhythm room” or listen to recordings of artists from central Texas.

One of those artists was Foy Willing (1916-1978), whose name derives from Salado’s first Anglo settler, Archibald Willingham. Born in Bosque County, Willing organized the Riders of the Purple Sage, whose hit, “Have I Told You Lately That I Love You,” remains a country/western favorite. Willing is buried in North Belton Cemetery.

The marriage of polka and accordion music spawned conjunto among Texas Mexicans working-class musicians. One of its most prolific artists was Valerio Longoria (1924-2000), whose family worked on central Texas farms; his 60-year career produced more than 200 recordings.

Besides Schwertner’s tuba, the exhibit includes brass instruments from the Florence Citizens Band, circa 1910; a reed parlor organ, circa 1890; an 1855 melodeon, forerunner of the Victorian parlor organ; and four antique accordions.

Other unusual items include a mechanical music box brought by Joseph H. Schiller in 1853 from his Czech homeland; native American drums, rattles and a flute, lent by Four Winds Intertribal Society and Tejas Winds; and a guitar fashioned from a cigar box by the late Cecil Harrison of Killeen, the same type of guitar on which “Blind Willie” Nelson (1897-1943) learned to play.

Born in a dirt-floored garage in Temple in 1940, Jose Maria DeLeon Hernandez has received four Grammy nominations. In 2005 Little Joe y La Familia received the Grammy for Chicanísimo, having taken the same honor in 1996 for Diez y Seis de Septiembre. His personalized red boots form part of the exhibit, along with a note about his first paid performance: a sock hop in Cameron with his cousin David Coronado and the Latinaires. Little Joe earned $5 for his performance.

Other musicians featured in the exhibit include the Duckens Family of Rogers, a family gospel group who sing at Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church. Organized by Sylvester Duckens and his wife Willie and their 12 children, the group now includes children and grandchildren of the founding couple.

Famed ragtime composer and artist Scott Joplin was in central Texas long enough to have two marches published in Temple by 1896, with negotiations by his (continued on next page)
Exhibit features....

agent, Robert Smith of Temple. Singing “Old Man River” in the role of Joe in the original 1927 Florenz Ziegfield Broadway production of “Show Boat” was Jules Bledsoe, born in Waco in 1943.

Other musicians featured in the exhibit include William Archibald Barclay (1907-1969), born in Temple and for 20 years professor of organ at Southwest Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth; “Slim” Haasler and His Playboys of Milam County; and William Warren, also of Milam County, whose “The Wild Side of Life” topped the charts for 15 weeks in 1952. Six local musicians comprised the Texas Village Boys of the 1950s. Led by Clyde Chessen, the group performed on KCEN on Saturdays.

Woodrow Wilson “Woody” Guthrie, probably best known for “This Land Is Your Land,” was the son of a Bell County native, Charles Edward Guthrie. The younger Guthrie, born in 1912, died of Huntington’s disease in 1967.

A note of contrast in the exhibit is a tribute to Nora Lee Wendland (1897-1988), co-founder of Temple’s Cultural Activities Center with Raye Virginia Allen. Wendland studied violin at Cornell University and taught music at McMurry College in Abilene.

A circa 1930 Temple Boys Choir red jacket and Czech music books are on loan from the SPJST Museum, and a small exhibit recalls the White Horse Band. Organized in 1917, the band was composed of 25-30 businessmen from Belton, Temple and Cameron and was active until after World War II.

Although no harp is involved in “sacred harp” singing, Benjamin Franklin White’s 1844 hymnbook, The Sacred Harp, is still widely used in shaped-note singing, featured in the exhibit. The only instrument employed is “the power of voice in four-part harmony.” Visitors may watch “Sweet Is the Day: A Sacred Harp Family Portrait” while resting on antique church pews.

No exhibit about music in central Texas would be complete without a mention of Julien Paul Blitz, composer of “The Bell County March” during his short tenure at Baylor Female College, 1906-1907. Anyone who hasn’t heard this selection may listen to it via a link at www.bellcountytx.com.

Partial funding for the exhibit, which will remain on view through June 16, was provided by Holze Music Co. - Kim Herrington. The museum is located at 201 N. Main in Belton and is open 12 noon to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Admission is free, and tours are available. Phone number is 254-933-5243.

A.L.

‘Goodbye Old Paint’
Folk and cowboy song archivist John A. Lomax recorded this classic trail drive song for the Library of Congress in 1942. Its history is part of the Bell County Museum’s current music exhibit.

A black cowboy, Charley Willis (1850-1930), worked on the E. J. Morris Ranch, located in Williamson County about one and one-half miles from the Bell-Williamson county line. In 1885 he taught the song to seven-year-old Jess Morris.

Besides recording the song, young Morris worked on many ranches, including the famous XIT in the Texas Panhandle. Born in 1878, Jess Morris died in 1963.

NEW EXHIBIT AT RR&HM: Visitors admire freight packaging of Temple commemorative china at the Railroad and Heritage Museum’s new permanent exhibit, Rails Across America -- Carrying American Products from Farm to Market. The museum is located at 315 West Avenue B in Temple.

* * * * *

Current Bell County Historical Commission officers and chairmen include Ron Gates, chairman; William Stanley, vice chairman and advisory chairman; Dena Hill, secretary; Rae Schmuck, treasurer and finance and budget chairman; Berneta Peeples, reporter; David Yeilding, historical preservation; Nancy Kelsey, historical markers; Stephanie Turnham, history appreciation; Patti Benoit, media consultant; Joe and Dorothy Button, grants; Weldon Cannon, Distinguished Service Awards; Amanda Dyer, program; and Annette Lucksinger, newsletter.
Uncovering secrets of the dead in abandoned Bell cemetery . . .

What happens when an old cemetery is abandoned?
What happens when an abandoned cemetery is in the way of a major highway expansion project?
What happens when apparently no one really knows who is buried in the cemetery?

Answers to these and other questions formed a discussion by archeologist Doug K. Boyd at a recent meeting of the Bell County Historical Commission. Vice president of Prewitt and Associates, Inc. Cultural Resources Services of Austin, Boyd described work by his firm on a Bell County paupers’ cemetery located on Interstate 35 just north of Belton.

Introduced by Jon Budd, TxDOT Waco district archeologist, Boyd described the work his firm accomplished in 2003 and 2004 at the cemetery site, emphasizing that “public participation is important” in such a sensitive undertaking.

According to historic research by Martha Freeman of Austin, Bell County purchased a piece of land measuring 100’ x 477’ in 1898; by 1918 a section 53’ x 96’ was filled with graves; some had been moved from other sites by that time.

As he told of the work at the site, Boyd also related a history of indigent care in Texas, beginning with poor farms, where many of the deceased had lived before their deaths. This system gave way to the county home system in 1912.

As they try to ascertain information about persons buried in the cemetery, researchers have used county home intake records, as well as death certificates. Standard data in some records include the person’s name, date of death, source of information and perhaps comments, but for inmates (Boyd’s word) of county homes, the intake records also include ethnicity, date of birth, age at entrance and the place from where the inmate came.

The cemetery was used for indigent burials until the 1950s, Boyd said, then was converted to a maintenance yard in the 1970s. At that time about 13 marked graves were moved.

When Boyd’s firm began working, sand and road material covered the site. Some people found it hard to believe that it was a cemetery, Boyd said. The survey team could not use remote sensing technology, so after removing road material, workers used a machine called a Grade-all and began locating grave shafts, distinguished, Boyd said, by soil discoloration.

“You’ve heard the phrase “six feet under,” he noted. “These graves were more like three to five feet deep.”

Not only do researchers learn about the history of persons buried in such a cemetery, but over the years, Boyd said, they have learned a great deal about the history of mortuary science. As they worked to locate grave shafts, for example, the team found coffin hardware, including a decorative thumb screw, as well as a group of cut bones, possibly from cadavers researched at Scott & White Memorial Hospital, Boyd said.

He explained the difference between coffins and caskets, the former usually made by a local cabinet maker, thus used longer in rural areas. He related the story of a burial in the Texas State Cemetery in 1884 in which the status of the deceased was indicated by the iron “Cadillac” casket in which he was buried.
Continuing the theme of funerary history, Boyd said that Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War advanced embalming in this country. Families of fallen soldiers on both sides wanted their loved ones to be buried at home; thus traveling embalmers went to battle sites, where survivors sometimes collected funds to have their comrades embalmed for the trip home. When Lincoln was assassinated in 1865, his rail trip to Springfield, Illinois, took 21 days, establishing the practice of embalming.

When required paperwork is completed on the Bell County site, exhumation and reburial of about 99 graves will begin. With exhumation, researchers can learn much more about the person, Boyd said, including gender, trauma, pathology, socio-economic status, ethnicity and general health condition indicated by medical and dental treatments. In addition, mortuary and personal items can help ascertain an approximate date of death.

Remains will then be placed in a perpetual care cemetery of the county’s choice in “the most dignified way possible.” If families have been located, they may choose to bury their loved ones in other locations.

“We’re much more sensitive today about people’s concerns than we were in the past,” Boyd said. In answer to those concerns, reburial ceremonies will provide closure for some.

Today legislation goes far to protect cemeteries. Boyd described a city cemetery in Houston, used from 1840 to 1879; in 1924 Houston and Harris County built a city-county hospital on top of thousands of graves. But, when officials tried to add more buildings in 1985, they ran into new laws protecting cemeteries. A.L.

Genealogical group to visit cemetery
The West Bell Genealogical Society will meet at 6 p.m. on Thursday, May 3, for a “headstone hunt” at the Immanuel Lutheran Church cemetery on Old FM 440 in Killeen.

The “hunt” will include a list of questions to be answered by members and guests as they tour the cemetery.

More information about the meeting is available from Gail Hughling at 254-702-0980.

Vietnam wall replica to visit Killeen in May
Killeen will be the first stop on a year-long tour of the Dignity Memorial Vietnam Wall, according to Keith Turner of Crawford-Bowers Funeral Home. It will be displayed at the Central Texas State Veterans Cemetery on May 18, 19 and 20.

The cemetery is located on State Hwy 195 six miles south of US Hwy 190. More information is available from Turner at 254-547-1275.

Memorial Day to be observed
The annual Memorial Day program at Salado Cemetery will begin at 9:30 a.m. on Monday, May 28. MaryBelle Brown has requested that attendees bring lawn chairs for the event.

Doug Boyd answers questions after addressing the Bell County Historical Commission.
KAHA plans ‘1900-style backyard’ May 12

The Killeen Area Heritage Association will host a “1900-style backyard” on Saturday, May 12, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

“We want to give folks a chance to see how early Killeen residents lived,” says Windy Hallmark, co-chairman of the event with his wife Sue. “Their ‘do-it-yourself lifestyle was very close to how people all over small-town Texas lived.”

The “backyard” will be set up on the grounds of the former Bethel Primitive Baptist Church, 400 South Gray, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Typical to the backyards of early residents were washpots, clotheslines, chickens, a milch cow and, of course, an outhouse. On the back porch were butter churns, egg baskets, perhaps a cooler for ice, home made soap bars. Under a tree, after the chores were done, the women might have worked on a quilt or mended an old one.

“We haven’t found a milch cow yet,” Hallmark says, “but we’re working on a substitute.”

Inside the church, KAHA members will set up items traditionally used by Primitive Baptists in their annual Mothers Day footwashing and communion service.

More information about the event is available by calling 254-699-5916 or 254-634-7750.

Bell residents attend TSHA convention

Several Bell County residents attended the recent convention of the Texas State Historical Association in San Antonio.

In one session Janie Headrick of the Texas Historical Commission noted that in 2005, the latest year for which data are available, “leisure tourism” brought $27.1 billion to the state’s economy. Total income from visitors to Texas was $49.2 billion; based on that figure, federal, state and local taxes amounted to $6.6 billion.

“This means that, without visitors to Texas, each household would have to pay an additional $825 in taxes to maintain the current level of governmental services,” she said. State Rep. Harvey Hilderbran, author of House Bill 6, says that “heritage and cultural travelers spent $29 more per day than non-heritage travelers.”

Leisure tourism includes “heritage tourism,” Headrick noted. The Alamo remains the state’s most visited historic site.

Attending the convention of the state’s oldest history-based organization were Weldon Cannon, Patti Benoit, Bob and Lynne Williams, Darwin and Carolyn Britt, Annette Luckinger and Raye Virginia Allen.

Windy Hallmark works on the interior of his outdoor plumbing project for KAHA’s “1900-style Backyard,” scheduled for May 12, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the grounds of the former Bethel Primitive Baptist Church. The outhouse will be finished with antique barn wood.

Still waiting on historical markers.....

New Bell County Historical Commission marker chairman Nancy Kelsey has communicated numerous times with the Texas Historical Commission since accepting the position. Several THC markers have been “in the works” for lengthy periods of time, but so far, have not been delivered. All were approved under old THC rules during the tenure of former marker chairman David Evans.

The following markers will be dedicated in the near future at listed sites; interested persons should contact marker applicants for more information: Youngsport, Polly Peaks-Elmore (254-628-5002); Seven Star Cemetery, near Hillcrest Cemetery, Temple, James Jackson (254-774-8461); Capt. Milton Wesley Damron and Hermon Aiken, Salado Cemetery, MaryBelle Brown (254-947-5331).

Assisting Kelsey are marker committee members Bill Holmes and Tom Heard.
Discussions the location for a Texas Historical Commission special marker honoring Oveta Culp Hobby are, left to right, Leslie Hinkle, community development director; Glenn Morrison, community services director; Gerald Skidmore, assistant to the president, Greater Killeen Chamber of Commerce; and William McWhorter, THC military historian.

THC to honor Killeen native Oveta Culp Hobby

Former Texas lieutenant governor Bill Hobby will participate May 31 in a special marker dedication at Killeen's City Hall.

The Texas Historical Commission will honor Hobby's mother, Killeen native Oveta Culp Hobby, first director of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (later known as the WAC's) as part of THC's "Texas in World War II Initiative."

Born in Killeen on January 19, 1905, Oveta was the daughter of Emma Elizabeth Hoover Culp and Ike W. Culp, an attorney and state representative. A graduate of Mary Hardin Baylor College, she was asked at the age of 20 to serve as legislative parliamentarian for the Texas House of Representatives. She also received a law degree from The University of Texas School of Law.

In 1931, at age 26, she was married to former governor and widower William P. Hobby, who had assumed the office in 1917 after the impeachment and removal of James E. (Farmer Jim) Ferguson. The Hobbys had two children.

After helping her husband run the Houston Post until 1941, she went to Washington to head the War Department's Women's Interest Section, then served from 1942 to 1945 as director of the new WAAC. At the end of World War II, she received the Distinguished Service Medal and returned to the Post, radio station KPRC and to recently acquired KPRC-TV.

According to a lengthy biography in The New Handbook of Texas, the war years "strengthened her conviction that all Americans deserve equal opportunity." When she was co-chairman of a Houston Armed Forces Day observance, she said to the other chairman: "No celebration of Armed Forces Day will be held in Houston which is not open to everyone who has served in our armed forces -- regardless of race."

In 1953, new President Dwight D. Eisenhower asked her to direct the Federal Security Agency, soon to be renamed the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, with Hobby as its first Secretary. A high point during her tenure was the introduction of the Salk polio vaccine. A high-ranking official called her "the best man in the cabinet."

Numerous prestigious positions and honors fill her biography, and, according to the Handbook, "one of the honors that meant most to her was the naming of the library at Central Texas College," dedicated by President Lyndon Johnson after the college opened in 1967. Hobby died in Houston in 1995.

A. L.