

Liberty Hill Preser

By Shirley Schlinke

Many of the cars in west Williamson County display bumper stickers saying "Shop in Downtown Liberty Hill." Some wonder what Liberty Hill has to offer that any other small community does not. The answer — quaintness with class.

Except for its continued strong pride, Liberty Hill has been an average small town until a recent rebuilding project.

After developing Durham Park, a subdivision in Liberty Hill, Mr. and Mrs. John Chesley sensed a need for additions to the business section. They purchased several buildings in town and began with only a dream. Since then, that dream has become a reality.

Many of the building fronts now display classy, nostalgic signs of the 1880s period that give the town a look of newness, yet also a unique preservation of the past.

"When we came to measure for the area of the rooms, we found terrible filth. We also had to watch our step very carefully to keep from falling in," said Mrs. Chesley with a grin.

"In one of the rooms above the theater I found a few small bottles I decided to pick up. I realized later they were filled with formaldehyde and the room I was in was where they embalmed bodies," she said.

"Many people probably thought we would never get this far. "But," she said, "we've always had a knack for taking old things and making them go."

Both Lon Fitzgerald and A. C. Witt came to the Chesley's wanting to lease two of the buildings for a theater and bakery respectively. In turn, the Chesley's designed and decorated the buildings to fit their needs.

Other buildings carrying new fronts are the Liberty Hill Feed and Seed which was the first to be rebuilt;

Emphrain Roddy Hardware, named for one of the first settlers in the area and Main Street Emporium, displaying a new canopy and original stained glass windows.

The newest happening in town is the public library which opened Monday. "This has really been my baby," explained Mrs. Chesley with a chuckle.

Plans for the library began in the spring. It now contains over 2,000 volumes with new ones being brought in every day. All books, shelves, carpet and labor have been donated by the community. "The cataloging and shelving has been done by kid power and a few women. We could never have a library without the willingness of so many to work," noted Mrs. Chesley.

The school has also taken on a new face with a new building finished last July, just in time for the first students in the past eight years. "The high school lost its accreditation due to a lack of students in 1968. But I expect 519 students and 24 teachers this fall," said Bud Perry, superintendent of schools. "By May, if we fulfill all Texas Education Agency requirements, we will be fully accredited," he said.

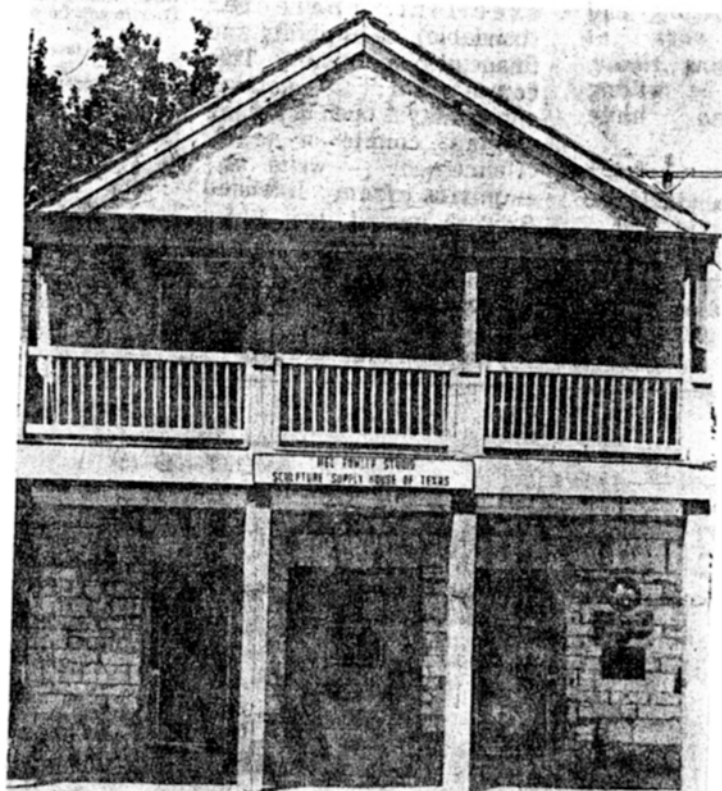
The city has developed a park with the main attraction a large piece of sculpture donated by Mel Fowler, a local sculptor.

The oldest building in town bearing the date 1871, was also restored by Fowler where one of his three studios is located. He also has studios in New York and Italy.

The park is also the site for a monthly flea market that attracts around 2,000 persons every first Saturday of the month.

An International Sculpture Symposium will be held in the park. From Oct. 11 - Nov. 30, 22 sculptors from France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Tunis and the United States will be staying in local homes of Liberty Hill while they work on their art. The finished pieces will then be donated to the

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Hill Preserves Past

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park.

"I feel we are really moving toward a cultural center with several local artists and musicians in town," said Carolyn Harper, local resident.

"There is plenty of newness about the town which is good, but the real treasure is the older people who had parents and grandparents who settled the land. Many of these have helped to keep a homey flavor to Liberty Hill," said Ellis Posey, local free-lance writer, and publisher of the *Libertarian*, the local newspaper.

Owners who have continued that homeyness are the established businesses. Some of these are MacMahan's an Allman's Grocery Stores, Canady's Texaco and Quick Service Garage, Wanda's Cafe and Joe Spivey's Real Estate.

"I feel the native 1880s atmosphere has continued because of a bunch of cantankerous people who love each other," explained Posey.

The early history of Liberty Hill is difficult to pinpoint. The town shifted to the east twice as a new post office, store or stagecoach stop relocated. Taylor Smith in 1838, John and Amelia Bryson in 1852, and the Rev. William Oliver Spencer in 1853 all came by wagon train and settled near each other in log cabins in the Liberty Hill area.

While touring Texas to find where there was a need for post offices, U.S. Senator Thomas Jefferson Rusk, chairman of the Senate Post Office Committee, stopped and spent the night at the Spencer home. Rusk promised to assign a post office to the area. When asking for a name, Spencer said, "these people are peaceful, Liberty-loving folk. I live upon a hill. Let's call it Liberty Hill," so folklorists go.

The town continued to grow when a wagon train of 48 settlers and 52 slaves came from South Carolina and settled in Liberty Hill in 1854. That same year, John Bryson led the Methodists while they met in homes until a church was built in 1870. The original building was two and one-half stories. The half was used by the Masonic Lodge until they built downtown in 1883 where they continue to meet today. Other parts of the building were used for school and church and is now used solely for church activities.

The Baptists also begin by meeting in camp revivals but moved to the village by 1882. Rev. W. O. Spencer donated the grounds for the church. The original building was rebuilt after it burned in 1903 and is now used today.

The Methodist two-room school was outgrown in 1882 after the Austin and Northwestern Railroad passed through the town. A charter was granted in 1884 for a Liberty Normal and Business College. Many families moved to enroll their children. The building burned in 1903 and was replaced by a similar brick structure which was later converted to a public school.

The future seems to be one of great progress. Presently under construction is Jenks Branch subdivision, named for a local historical creek. The homes in the edition will be patterned after the 114-year-old, early Texas-style Tom Synder home which is located in the subdivision. Synder was a wealthy cattleman who settled in Liberty Hill in his earlier years.

Many changes have been made in the town since these early days, but the route Liberty Hill has and seems to continue on is one of progress while preserving the rich history and heritage of the past.

