

THE IRON GATE

VOL. 48

HILLSBORO HERITAGE LEAGUE NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2025



SUMMER *SaVree*

Join us for one of your favorite events of the year!

Enjoy a relaxed come-and-go gathering with delicious charcuterie, dessert and refreshments provided. Discover more about the Hillsboro Heritage League—who we are, what we do, and how you can get involved in preserving our local history. We can't wait to see you there!

4:00 PM – 6:00 PM
HILLSBORO HISTORIC CITY HALL
AUGUST 9TH | 2025



**PAY YOUR MEMBERSHIP DUES
ON OR BEFORE THE EVENT TO
BE ENTERED TO WIN A FREE
PAIR OF TICKETS TO OUR
ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY!**



Greetings from your Hillsboro Heritage League President...

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As President of the Hillsboro Heritage League, I'm honored to share an exciting chapter in our ongoing mission to preserve and celebrate the rich history of our beloved community. We are currently in the process of applying for funding to support our next major initiative—an inspiring project that will identify and tell the stories of the historical buildings that make our downtown so unique.

These structures are more than brick and mortar—they are living links to Hillsboro's past. Through research, signage, and storytelling, we aim to bring their history to life for both residents and visitors, deepening appreciation for the legacy that surrounds us every day.

We look forward to sharing more as the project develops and invite your continued support in helping us honor and preserve Hillsboro's heritage for generations to come.

Warm regards,

Brooke Thompson

Hillsboro Heritage League Mission Statement

The Hillsboro Heritage League is organized to assist in the preservation and restoration of buildings, markers, historical sites, works of art, documents, papers, pictures, records, and writings of historical, traditional or cultural value; to perpetuate those customs of the people and traditions and folklore which seem to beautify and enrich the community life of Hillsboro, to discover and work toward development of areas of natural beauty and charm as well as those places of special natural history interests within the City of Hillsboro and its environs; to disseminate knowledge, promote interest, encourage study and research and to act in an advisory capacity to interested groups of persons and organizations regarding those things already enumerated; and to cooperate with other persons, groups, organizations and agencies in effectuating these objectives. (Adopted April 1979)

MEMBERSHIPS/RENEWALS IN HILLSBORO HERITAGE LEAGUE

The Hillsboro Heritage League exists to protect, preserve, and honor the historic treasures in our city.

Encourage your family, friends, and neighbors to join us as we continue to invest in our rich heritage.

Individual/Family Levels of Membership:

Individual: \$15 Family: \$25 Sponsor \$50 Benefactor \$100

Corporate/Business/Civic Levels of Membership

Supporter \$25 Sponsor \$50 Sustainer \$100 Benefactor \$200

Membership dues cover the period from August 1 through July 31.

Please make your gift payable to Hillsboro Heritage League.

Dues and donations are tax deductible.

Let's Go to the Theater in Historical Hillsboro!

by Susan Shewmake

Curtain in 5 minutes!!! I remember that call so well. I was a costume designer for over 20 years so theater is in my blood. No wonder the names of the theaters in Hillsboro caught my interest as I went around the square. The first on my list is J. Levy Opera House. Built in 1894 by Julius Levy, the building is currently the home of Business Supply Center. It started as a two-story building, then Mr. Levy added the third story where the operas were performed. The "Hillsboro Opera House Company" continued to serve Hillsboro until 1912. The movies made it hard for the Opera House to remain open and it closed. I found a reference on the Explore Hillsboro website that Mildred Holland, a renowned actress, performed at the Opera House on February 5, 1905. The Hillsboro Evening Mirror printed the title of the performance as "The Lilly and the Prince." Next time you walk by the office supply store, look up and you can still see the faint remains of a sign.

Did you know the location of the CASA office on the south side of the square was a theater back in 1926? It was known as the Best Theater. It had 500 seats and was renamed the Ritz Theater in 1940. It was operated by Robb and Rowley United Inc. which later became Rowley United Theatres in 1957. By the 2000s it had become office space and eventually the CASA of Hill County, Texas.

Do you like Italian food? You may have been in the Majestic Theatre located at 57 West Franklin Street. The building was Frenkie's and Milanos in the past. At the top of the building is posted "The Majestic Theater 1890-1932." The Majestic was built in 1890 by attorney James K. Parr who was also one of the original investors in the Texas Electric Railway. The upstairs offered apartments and office space for Mr. Parr. The theater offered live performances and, later, silent movies. The theatre presented its last show in 1932. After the theatre closed, it housed a variety of businesses, including a feed store, Goodyear tire store and a shoe shop operated by Mr. Vernon Nelson. Mr. Nelson used the back of the theatre as his personal apartment.

How about the Texas Theater on Waco Street? It opened in 1926 as the Palace Theater. Renamed the Texas Theater in 1936 by Robb & Rowley, it continued to entertain Hillsboro residents for many years. In 1957 its owner became Rowley United Theaters Inc. The theater was closed for some time before going to Veritas Arts Inc. for renovation in 2019. They hoped to reopen in 2020, but unfortunately that never happened and the building is still closed waiting for the right company to step up and help. There was some exciting news about the property recently as the City of Hillsboro signed a lease for the facility while gauging interest in making the site a community event center. Stay tuned for more information about this exciting prospect!

There was a small theater on Waco Street on the east side of the square known as the Star. It's in the building currently occupied by Star Studded Invitation. Go by and take a look at the sidewalk in front of the building. The name is there for all to see! It was originally known as the Dixie Theater and was located at 103 East Franklin Street. The Dixie's name later changed to the Star and they moved to 77 North Waco Street. Not sure what year they relocated. I'm still searching for information about it.

The Best/Ritz was the only theater in Hillsboro with a balcony, and non-whites were welcome to that theater in the balcony. In the 1940's and 1950's the Ritz specialized in Western movies and Charlie Chan detective movies. The Texas Theater ran first run movies. Movie Tone News provided updates on national news and troop movements in World War II prior to the advent of television. I heard there was a movie theater for African Americans on South Church Street in the block south of the Walnut/Church intersection. Today that location is an open lot on the west side of Church Street. There was also a drive-in theater west of town on Highway 22 that was destroyed by a tornado in the 1970s. There was also a theater that operated at 105 West Elm Street known as the Crystal Theater. More research is needed about these, so please forgive the writer.

I hope this gives you a little insight into how fun our town once was and can be again!

LOOKING TO VOLUNTEER WITH THE HILLSBORO HERITAGE LEAGUE?

Volunteers are always needed to help with programs and projects of the Heritage League and to serve on the board of directors.

There are several committees within the League that you can sign up to be a part of, including: membership, website/public relations, fundraising, nominations, Iron Gate newsletter, and more!

Contact a board member (see back page) or send us an email at hillsboroheritage@gmail.com to signify your interest in learning more!

The League is organized to assist in the preservation of our history for future generations; to perpetuate that history; and to disseminate knowledge and promote interest, and encourage the study and research of that history.



Join us on Saturday, August 9th at Historic City Hall at our Annual Membership Meeting to learn more about the League and our various projects and how you, too, can be involved in our mission!



Saturday, August 9th

4:00 PM — 6:00 PM

Historic City Hall

127 East Franklin Street

SAVE THE DATE!

Hillsboro Heritage League Holiday Celebration

Saturday, December 20, 2025

Rusted Chandelier Events Center

65 West Franklin Street

Details forthcoming!



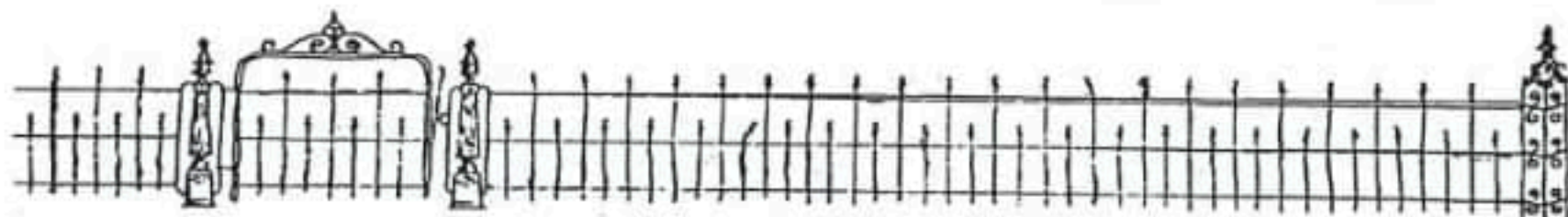
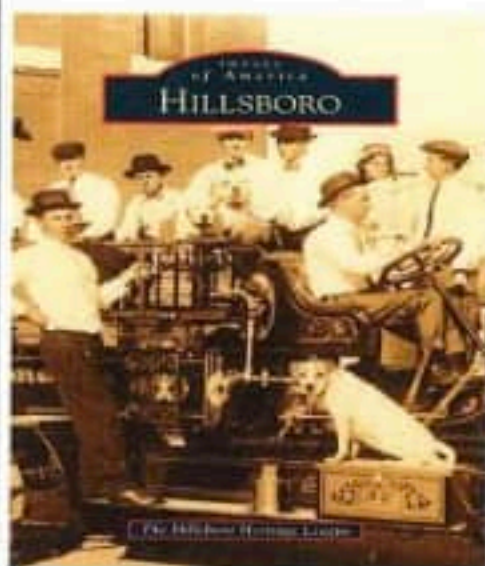
Images of Hillsboro Book for Sale

Looking for the perfect gift for that history buff?

The Images of Hillsboro book that was published by the Heritage League in 2013 is currently for sale again at various locations in downtown Hillsboro. Proceeds from the sale of the book will be used to help fund restoration & preservation projects by the League.

Price: \$25

Available for purchase at Hillsboro City Library,
Finished Seams Boutique & Overflow Coffee Co.



The Iron Gate newsletter is now being distributed digitally!



This will help eliminate postage costs and help the League with savings that can go towards other projects.

A limited number of paper copies will be available at the Hillsboro City Library or by contacting Iron Gate co-editor Russell Keelin at rkeelin@hillsborotx.org or 254-707-2334.

Hillsboro Heritage League 2025 Officers

President: Brooke Thompson
Vice-President: Duncan McLeod
Secretary: Susan Shewmake
Treasurer: Paula Bryant
Iron Gate Editors: Russell Keelin, Deb Hanson & Susan Shewmake

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Hillsboro Heritage League

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