

JCHC JOURNAL

J E F F E R S O N C O U N T Y H I S T O R I C A L C O M M I S S I O N

U.S.S. *CLIFTON* WALKING BEAM

KATE HAMBRIGHT

UPCOMING MEETINGS

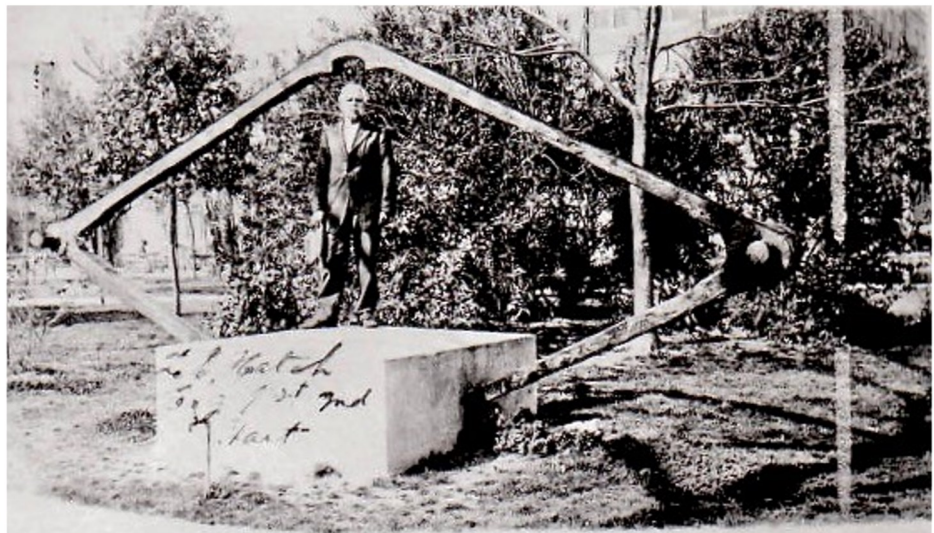
- November 15,
2023 10:00 a.m.

The U.S.S. *Clifton* was captured from Union forces during the battle of Sabine Pass on September 8, 1863 after being bombarded by gunfire from Fort Griffin. The federal gunboat was repaired and converted for use as a blockade runner by the Confederates. After subsequently becoming grounded on a sand bar with a heavy load of cotton, the Confederates burned the *Clifton* to prevent her recapture by Union forces. In the early 1900s, the remains of the steamer were still clearly visible about a mile offshore near the jetties at Sabine Pass.

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Walking beam, U.S.S. *Clifton*, Keith Park. Pictured: Battle of Sabine Pass survivor T. C. Hatch standing inside beam. Photo courtesy of Tyrrell Historical Library Digital Collections.

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An article in the *Beaumont Journal* dated September 26, 1911 states: "Suggestions have been offered by a number of people that the walking beam and a portion of the machinery of the war vessel, "*Clifton*," now lying in the waters off Sabine Pass, be brought to Beaumont and placed in a public park prior to the U.C.V. [United Confederate Veterans] reunion next week." In expanding upon the history of moving the walking beam some years later, a subsequent *Beaumont Journal* article noted that Frank Godsey had conceived the idea of raising the walking beam and brought it to Florence Stratton, the *Journal's* managing editor, in 1911. Stratton then ran a story in support of the movement.

The *Journal* estimated that \$100 would be necessary to salvage and tow the beam to Beaumont and opened a campaign to raise the necessary funds with a \$5.00 donation of its own money. The newspaper, which had the backing of Judge W. H. Pope and Frank W. Godsey as well as the support of many local veterans for the project, asked for popular subscriptions from the citizens of Beaumont and local vicinity. Further contributions became unnecessary, however, when the Chamber of Commerce became intrigued in the project. Frank Godsey personally paid \$75 for Texas Dredging Company to recover the walking beam. He was subsequently reimbursed by Tom Larkin, Secretary of the Beaumont Chamber of Commerce.

The walking beam was raised from the waters off of Sabine Pass on Sunday, October 1, 1911. R. A. Nichols, manager of the Texas Dredging Company; R. L. Martinfield, superintendent of the Texas Dredging Company; Captain H. M. Frederickson; Robert Wood; J. F. McCall; H. M. Bradley; Frank Godsey; and a crew of 15 men aboard the tugboat *Viva* traveled out to the site of the sunken U.S.S. *Clifton* and worked all day to remove the vessel's beam. They secured the 9x18 feet, 5000 lb., diamond-shaped walking beam intact, placed it aboard a boat and towed it to Sabine Pass, where it was then loaded on a flat car of the Texas & New Orleans railroad for transport to Beaumont in anticipation of erecting it on a concrete base in Keith Park as a monument.

Capt. Rogers and a committee of the local United Confederate Veterans Camp approached Mayor Emmett Fletcher and the Beaumont City Council on the morning of October 3, 1911 with their proposal to place the walking beam in Beaumont's "principal park" prior to the upcoming 20th Annual Reunion of the Texas Division of the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) later that same week.

At a regular session of the Beaumont City Council that same day (October 3, 1911), the Albert Sidney Johnston Camp, United Confederate Veterans was granted permission to exhibit

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the walking beam from the U.S.S. *Clifton* in Keith Park at a location to be designated by the Parks Commissioner. The Confederate Reunion convened in Beaumont on October 5, 1911 with the newly installed monument in place. The *Galveston Daily News* reported that the walking beam was an “object of unusual interest” and would have a “permanent resting place” in Keith Park.

Jim Bell Texas
Architecture Photograph
Collection, Private
Collection of Jim Bell,
The Portal of Texas
History



At a meeting of the Albert Sidney Johnston Camp, UCV held on October 15, 1911, the veterans decided to retain the walking beam permanently in Keith Park, and a committee was established to prepare an inscription pertaining to the “memorable engagement of Dick Dowling and his men at Sabine Pass” and place it upon the new monument. The bronze memorial tablet was installed on the walking beam just over one year later, on November 18, 1913, during the Southeast Texas Fair. The ceremony followed a parade given by the Confederate Veterans, the Daughters of the Confederacy and Sons of Veterans that included about 200 old soldiers from counties all over southeast Texas as well as from Alabama and Georgia, 50 Boy Scouts, three bands and the squadron of the Sixth Calvary. The Young Men’s Business League paid for the plaque.

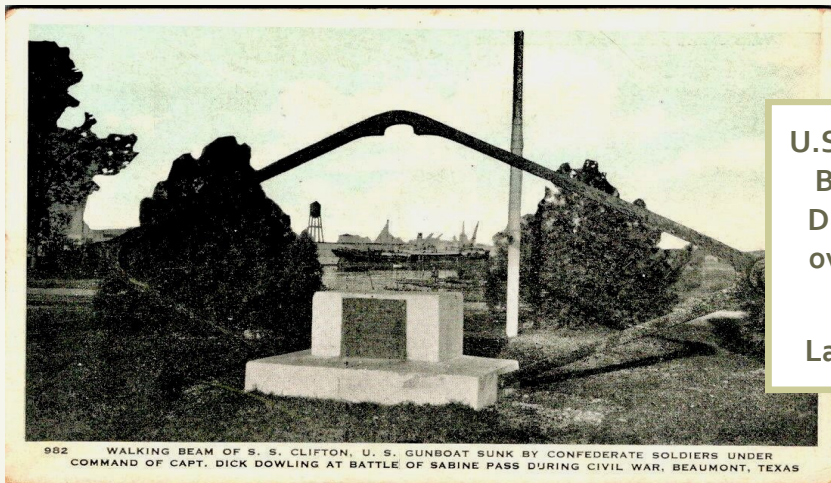
In order to make way for the new City Hall being constructed in Keith Park in 1927, City Parks Superintendent Frank L. Bertscher recommended the removal of the three war memorials then located on the park grounds, including the U.S.S. *Clifton* walking beam, to alternate sites. He requested the Young Men’s Business League (Y.M.B.L.) to appoint a committee to look into the issue. The committee, consisting of Frank Anderson and C. A. Pickett, surveyed local citizens and made its recommendations regarding new locations for

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each of the three monuments to the Y.M.B.L. executive board on February 15, 1927, which approved the committee's recommendations that same day. The walking beam would be moved to Pipkin Park by the City Parks Department. A site near Riverside Drive, which ran through Pipkin Park, would be prepared "within the next few days."

At the time the walking beam was relocated to Pipkin Park in early March 1927, "information with reference to the steamer *Clifton*, the removal of the walking beam of the ship to Beaumont, and the Battle of Sabine Pass, when the boat was sunk by Dick Dowling and



U.S.S. *Clifton* Walking Beam on Riverside Drive in Pipkin Park overlooking Harbor Island.

Late 1920s postcard

his men" as well as "accurate information as to the boat, the battle and walking beam, together with pictures recently published in *The Journal*" was to be placed in a bronze box on the base for the monument, per Park Superintendent Frank L. Bertscher.

In 1962, Henry Beetle Hough, editor of *The Vineyard Gazette*, published at Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, published a startling editorial entitled "In Memory of a Gallant Captain" in which he argued the walking beam should be returned to the north. He stated, in part,

"A Martha's Vineyard hero who has been neglected too long was Capt. Frederick Crocker, one time master of the whaleship *Mary*, of Edgartown, who commanded the federal warship *Clifton* in the Battle of Sabine Pass, Texas on Sept. 8, 1863. The *Clifton* was the flagship of an expedition ... dispatched to seize and cut off from the Confederacy the great southeastern reaches of Texas. Captain Crocker exhibited not only valor but judgment, and it was not his fault that 43 Confederates (Dick Dowling and his Irish born artillerymen) in a mud fort

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frustrated the sea-borne assault. Captain Crocker was made a prisoner, the *Clifton* was repaired for use as a blockade runner ..." etc.

The editorial then described the subsequent burning of the vessel by the Confederates after its grounding on a sand bar and the later resurrection and placement of the ship's walking beam in Pipkin Park. Mr. Hough stated,

"Surely in this centennial year of the Civil War, the people of Beaumont cannot ignore the obvious courtesies of the situation. If the walking beam of the old *Clifton* can be removed from Beaumont and enshrined in Edgartown, an important propriety of history will have been observed."

Hough felt the beam would be better appreciated by the citizens of Edgartown. His remarks were met with a sharp rebuff from Ed Bryson, an editor of the *Beaumont Journal*, who said, "Hough (pronounced "Huff") should keep his cranberry-picking fingers out of Beaumont's business." Various other journalistic shots were fired across the bow. The Whaling Museum and Old Dartmouth Historical Society of New Bedford began to take an interest in the proceedings and accusations were made that Frank Tolbert, a Dallas newspaper columnist, had helped to stir up the controversy with some meddling articles of his own. Finally, Beaumont's City Council intervened on May 15, 1962 when the request from a "gentleman from north of the Mason-Dixon Line" to let them have the walking beam from the U.S.S. *Clifton* was brought to their attention by Councilman Christopher. The City Council passed a resolution "denying and condemning" the request, or, as the *Beaumont Journal* more lyrically expressed it, "forbidding any further fooling around by anyone bent on walking off with the city's walking beam," which would "remain firmly anchored in Pipkin Park." There the matter officially dropped, although the editor of *The Vineyard Gazette* subsequently issued one final appeal in his columns, "If their hearts were as big as their heads down in Beaumont that walking beam would be on its way to Edgartown by this time."

During March 1964, the walking beam and its concrete base were repositioned on the grounds of Pipkin Park in connection with the Pennsylvania-Orleans Street connector project. An August 11, 1964 article in the *Beaumont Journal* about the Chenault O'Brien Camp of Spanish-American Veterans mentions the "recently once-again – moved monument [of the "USS *Clifton* walking beam"] on Riverside Drive." Of particular interest, this article also references the "copper" box containing "documents, newspapers, and photographs" which was located in the corner of the base of the monument. This box and its documents, formerly described as "bronze," was first mentioned when the walking beam was moved from Keith

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Park to its original location in Pipkin Park in 1927. A 1971 photo in the *Beaumont Journal* points out the monument's close proximity to the "stately O'Brien Oak on Riverside Drive."

By March 2013 the U.S.S. *Clifton's* walking beam had migrated once again. Following a year-long conservation and stabilization process at the Conservation Research Laboratory at Texas A&M University, it was installed at Sabine Pass Battleground Park, near the site of the gunboat's former encounter with Dick Dowling and his intrepid Confederate forces in 1863. Members of the Texas Historical Commission Historic Sites staff worked with Matt Kaser of Kaser Designs, Inc. to design a mounting bracket system consisting of stainless steel materials and Teflon-lined supports for the beam. Kaser Designs then mounted the beam, canting it off center to suggest its original orientation while in use as part of the U.S.S. *Clifton's* engines. Photos of the completed project reveal that the box with documents relating to the battle and the ship, which was located in the base supporting the walking beam at each of its two locations in Pipkin Park near Riverside Drive, is conspicuously absent. The current location of the box and its cache of enclosures is unknown (2023). *Editor's note: A complete copy of the article entitled "History of Monuments in Keith Park – Walking Beam, U.S.S. Clifton (updated)" including citations may be requested by contacting the JCHC office.*



The walking beam from the U.S.S. *Clifton* can be seen today at the Sabine Pass Battleground State Historic Site. Photo credit: Texas Historical Commission

MEMORY LANE

Nederland, TX, c. 1940's

A photo of Nederland, TX looking north along Hwy 347 from Nederland Avenue toward Boston Avenue. The Kansas City Southern railroad track is to the right, the KCS depot can be seen just beyond Boston Avenue (where the traffic signal is) and somewhat obscured by the line of telegraph poles, and the long building in the near-distant right still exists today. No date is given, though the one light-colored car would indicate the late 1940s, and no source for the photo is known.



JCHC FALL RECAP

Fall 2023 turned out to be a busy time for the JCHC! In addition to JCHC members being very active with other community preservation efforts, the JCHC itself was pleased to participate in two Texas Historical Marker unveilings and the Third Annual Historic Magnolia Cemetery tour.

First on the calendar was the unveiling and dedication of the Texas Historical Marker for the St. Elizabeth Catholic Community in Port Neches. A beautiful ceremony was held after Mass on October 15th. The marker inscriptions reads: *"The late 1850s saw the arrival of the first Catholic families to the area now known as Port Neches. While no church would be formally founded for many years, the area was frequently visited by traveling missionaries*



Father McClintock and members of St. Elizabeth Catholic Church, in Port Neches.

known as 'saddlebag priests.' They would travel by horseback between towns to celebrate Mass in the log cabin homes of the Catholic families. One such example is Fr. Vitalus Quinon (c. 1850-1894), a French native who established churches in the nearby towns of Orange and Beaumont, and other Texas cities. His parish extended from the Sabine river on the east to the San Jacinto river on the west.

By the turn of the century, the families of Port Neches had to travel several hours to Port Arthur or Beaumont to attend Mass in the late 1910s. The Catholic population of the town had grown to over 400 and a request was sent for a priest to come and formally establish a church. Fr. Fred B. Hardy (1886-1957) was transferred from Nacogdoches to Port Neches in 1922. Fr. Hardy named the church St. Elizabeth, after the daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary. The first church was built from donated and salvaged building materials and served as the home of the congregation for many years. It still stands between the convent and the rectory in the 300 block of Ave. B. That same year, St. Catherine of Siena School was founded and held lessons in the church building. By the late 1920s several hundred students were enrolled. In 1939, after 17 years with St. Elizabeth, Fr. Hardy was transferred to St. Charles Borromeo in Nederland. By 1957, the church moved to its current location on Nall Street to accommodate the growing size of the congregation. St. Elizabeth is still serving the community and beloved by its members."

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JCHC Appointee, Jerrilynn Miller, dressed as Caroline Gilbert Hinchee to share the story of Mrs. Hinchee at the Historic Magnolia Cemetery Tour.

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The following Thursday and Saturday were days one and two of the Third Annual Historic Magnolia Cemetery Tour. The Paul Prosperie, JCHC Cemetery Chair shared the following *"The Third Annual Historic Magnolia Cemetery Tour in October went exceptionally well. Approximately 148 people attended the two-day event, more than the two previous tours had reached. Nine presenters were stationed throughout the cemetery for Thursday evening's tour, with eight on Saturday. Many volunteers and presenters were our own Jefferson County Historical Commission members. Simultaneously, we had a few new volunteers from other organizations, such as the Tyrrell Historical Library and the Beaumont Heritage Society.*

All did a fantastic job helping to conduct this event. I would also like to especially thank JCHC Advisor Lynn Simon for

going above and beyond as a volunteer and spending four days making a mini-documentary on the history of Pipkin School and the Rev. Woodson Pipkin, which we had the pleasure of showing on Saturday. Mr. Simon had hoped to present both the school and the Rev. Pipkin at the Saturday event but could not attend.

In addition, this year, the annual cemetery tour was featured by the Texas Historical Commission in its 2022 CHC Project Spotlights, in which they spotlight and promote County Historical Commissions (CHC) for their preservation projects and efforts to preserve and promote Texas historic resources. It is always good to be recognized statewide for our little but growing project, and all the publicity helps promote our rich history, which we strive to teach.

If you want to be part of the Historic Magnolia Cemetery Tour or want to know more about what we do, email me at rediscoveringsetx@gmail.com, or visit my website at www.rediscoveringsetx.com. "

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October 22nd brought the JCHC to the China Methodist Church for the second Texas Historical Marker unveiling of the month. A celebration and ice-cream social held by the church was well attended, and former members and Pastors were present to lend their remarks during the dedication. The marker inscriptions reads: *"In the late nineteenth century, the Methodist movement spread across the region through travelling preachers, also known as circuit riders. With no circuit riders regularly available and no established Methodist churches in the area, Methodists began to hold services in the homes of various families. In 1895, the Methodist Church in China held services under a brush arbor. The temporary sanctuary known as Kirby Chapel was built near the woods in the area known today as Westbury. In 1896, the church was formally established and the first minister was appointed. Property for the first permanent building was purchased and a new building was erected. Several years later, the church built a larger sanctuary next to the original, complete with steeple and a church bell. Additional rooms were built to accommodate Sunday school classes and meetings. The original building was moved several blocks away and used as one of the first schools in the area. A parsonage was added to the church property in 1918, and a fellowship hall and educational building by 1960. The present church was built in 1984 on the same site. The church has had several names reflecting its heritage. In 1968, the Methodist Church merged with the United Brethren Church which changed the name of the church to China United Methodist Church. Throughout its history, the church was also used as a*



Members of the China Methodist Church pose with their newly dedicated Texas Historical Marker.

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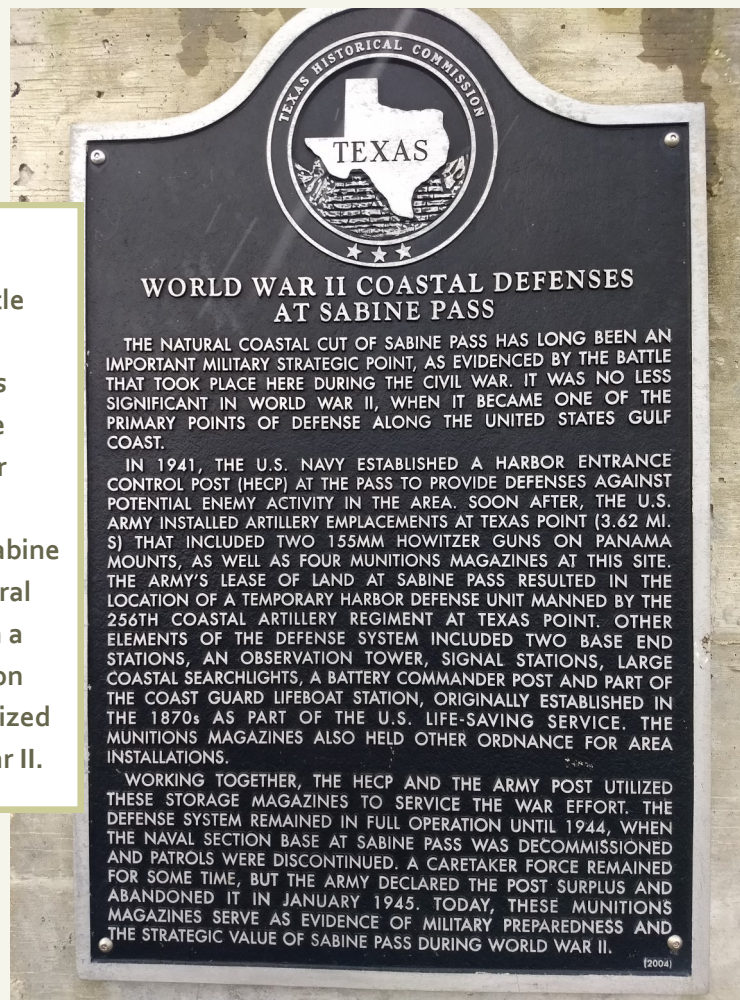
temporary school and for social gatherings. Congregants have participated in numerous community fundraisers, scholarships and outreach programs. Their famous Cajun and Country Cookin' Cookbook has sold more than 10,000 copies since 1975. With humble beginnings, the Methodist Church in China cemented its impact on the lives and heritage of the area through faith and service."

Thanks to our wonderful community in Jefferson County, for supporting the mission of the JCHC, and allowing us to be part of your important celebrations by working with you on Texas State Historical Markers and graciously including us in the unveilings.

MARKER SPOTLIGHT

World War II Coastal Defenses at Sabine Pass

Located at the Sabine Pass Battle Ground State Historic Site, this 2003 Texas State Historical Marker recognizes the importance of Sabine Pass during several major wars, with a particular focus on the defenses utilized during World War II.



UPCOMING EVENTS

- ◇ **November 2, 6:30 p.m.—8:00 p.m.**- “Entertaining at the White House...” McFaddin-Ward House Lecture Series. 1906 Calder, Beaumont, TX. <https://mcfaddin-ward.org/events>
- ◇ **November 11, 2:00 p.m.— 5:00 p.m.**- Temple to the Brave will be open for Veteran’s Day. Experience this unique monument to veterans of all wars. 1350 Pennsylvania, Beaumont.
- ◇ **November 12, 12:00 p.m.—3:00 p.m.**— Holiday Photo Shoot at the McFaddin Ward House. No cost photo opportunities in front of this historic home. For reservations, call 409-832-2134
- ◇ **November 16, 9:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.** Preservation Texas Southeast Texas Regional Summit. For ticket pricing and registration, visit www.preservationtexas.org/setxsummit
- ◇ **November 16, 5:30 p.m.—7:30 p.m.**- Heritage Happy Hour at Texas Coffee Company. <https://beaumontheritage.org/events>
- ◇ **November 16, 6:30 p.m.**— Preservation Texas Presents a Lecture by Stephan Fox.: “Twentieth-Century Architectural Heritage of Texas’ Golden Triangle: *Beaumont, Orange, Port Arthur.*” Dishman Art Museum Auditorium at Lamar University. Visit PreservationTexas.org/Beaumont to reserve your seat.
- ◇ **November 25, 1:00 p.m.—3:00 p.m.**— Santa Mini Photo Shoot on the porch of the John J. French Museum. Advance reservations required. Visit <https://beaumontheritage.org/events>
- ◇ **December 3, December 10, 5:00 p.m.—7:00 p.m.**— Mc-Faddin-Ward Holiday Open House. The McFaddin-Ward House invites the community to delight in the spirit of the season. <https://mcfaddin-ward.org/events>
- ◇ **December 7, 4:00 p.m.—6:00 p.m.** Main Street Christmas Tree Lighting, 500 Main Street, Beaumont. Representatives of area historical sites and museums will have crafts for kids etc.
- ◇ **December 9, 10:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m.**— Family Fun Day “Christmas for Kids” Visit www.museumofthegulfcoast.org/events for more information.
- ◇ **December 17, 5:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m.** Christmas Candlelight at the John J. French Museum
- ◇ **December 17, 5:30 p.m.—7:30 p.m.**— A Vintage Holiday and Last Chance Christmas Market. Walk through the Chambers House, and learn more about how this prominent Beaumont family celebrated the holidays. <https://beaumontheritage.org/events>

GET IN TOUCH

JCHC Offices: 1149 Pearl Street—3rd floor Beaumont, TX 77701
409-835-8701 • www.facebook.com/FRIENDSofJCHC