

# 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

## THE MELODY MAIDS

COMING TO A THEATRE NEAR YOU!

### UPCOMING MEETINGS

- September 18, 2024
- November 20, 2024

The Melody Maids were a southeast Texas treasure, a group that touched millions of lives. The group was established and directed by Mrs. Eloise Milam in 1942 the Melody Maids as an all-girl singing group which was comprised of hundreds of young women, spanning thirty years.

Now, 82 years after the group's creation, a documentary film is being produced to share the impact the Melody Maids had during some of America's most pivotal times.

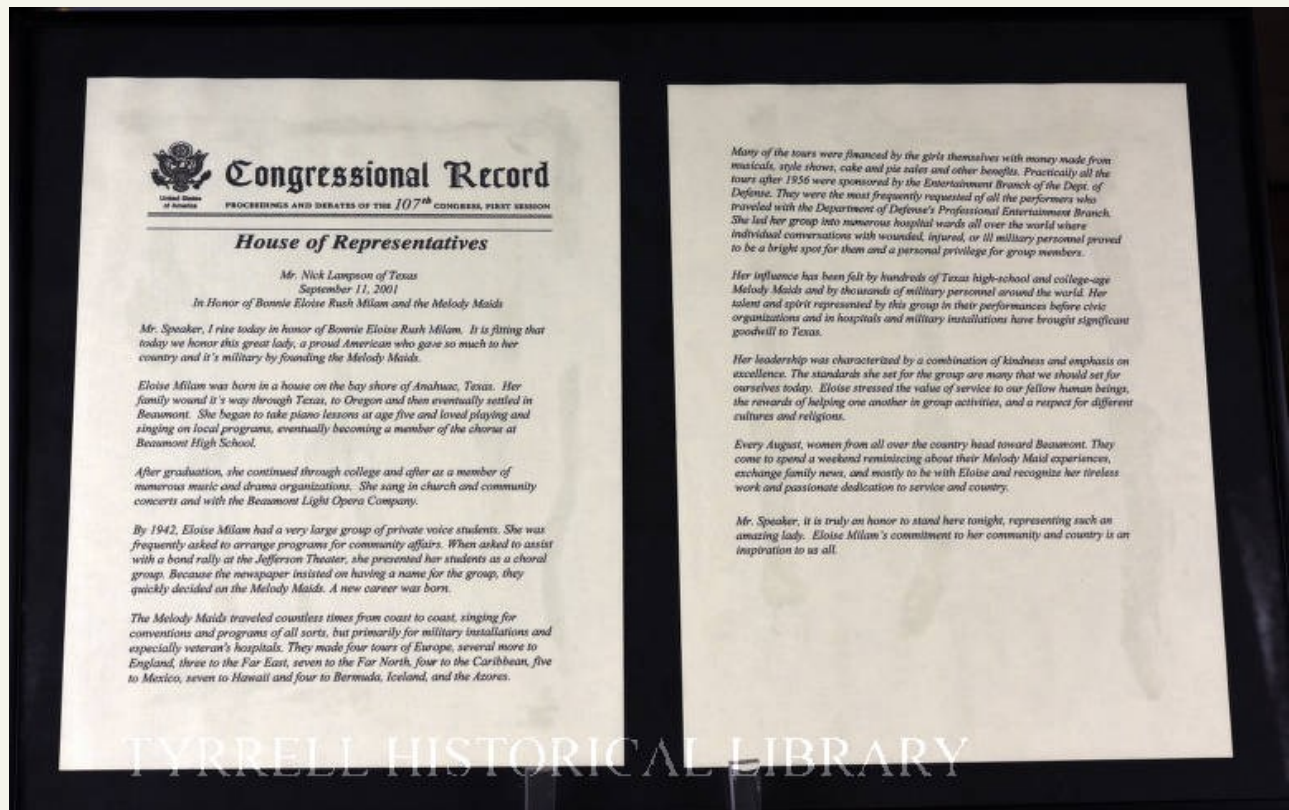
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A photo of some of the Melody Maids in Hawaii in 1954 with American servicemen. *Photo courtesy of the Tyrrell Historical Library digital collections.* (Continued on page 2)

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Congressional Record from Congressman Nick Lampson, submitted on September 11, 2001 to honor (Bonnie) Eloise Rush Milam and her unparalleled service to American and it's military. *Photo Courtesy The Tyrrell Library Digital Collections.*

The first performance of the Melody Maids was at a 1942 bond rally at the Jefferson Theatre, no one could have predicted the opportunities that this group would offer young girls, nor could they have predicted the generations of lives that would be impacted by the group and Mrs. Milam's leadership.

While the group was composed of young girls— junior high school to high schooled aged, the girls met the highest expectations of Mrs. Milam, and upheld the three M's: Music, Morals, and Manners", of which she was noted as saying "the least important, is music". These "three M's" are, according to film producer, Kai Jai Conner, the lessons that changed the girls' lives. Because of the experience of the Melody Maids, many of these young girls went on to become successful and influential women in their own rights.

Though the film is still in its production stages, Kai Jai has high hopes for what she describes as a "passion project", a project created in part, to honor her mother, a Melody Maid herself.

To learn more, please visit the Melody Maids Movie on Facebook and Instagram.

Constructed in 1929-1930 for \$700,000, this complex was built by Miles Frank Yount and named for his daughter. Yount was a founder and partner in the Yount-Lee Oil Company, which made its fortune in the second Spindletop Oil Boom in 1925. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978, the complex includes an apartment building, commercial-retail building, and garage. The core of the complex is the three-story apartment building, featuring terra cotta glazed brick, projecting bays, hipped-roof porches, parapet walls, and a red tile roof. It is a fine example of the Mediterranean revival style in Texas. Recorded Texas Historic Landmark - 1999





## CAROLINE GILBERT HINCHEE HOUSE RESTORATION

The most recent project completed on the Hinchee House is the exterior paint job. A coat of primer and the exterior paint coat on siding and trim has the house looking the best it has in years. There is still much to do, but the Hinchee House now has a new roof, repaired foundation, siding repairs, and a new paint job!

In other news, an October fundraiser is planned to benefit the Hinchee House restoration: a Bridgerton-themed Bingo fundraiser will be at the Beaumont Event Centre on October 20, 2024. For more details see the Caroline Gilbert Hinchee House website at <https://thebeaumontpreservationsocietyoftexasll.com/events-calendar>







Photos of the Hinchee House from August 27, 2024 as exterior painting is completed.  
*Photo credit: Theresa Goodness*



## 161<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Tour of Sabine Pass Battleground State Historic Site

Saturday, September 7, 2024

2:00-3:30 p.m.



On the afternoon of September 8, 1863, a small garrison of fewer than fifty Confederate artillerymen in Fort Griffin defeated a large Union invasion force including four navy gunboats. Outnumbered more than a hundred to one, a young Irish saloonkeeper from Houston named Dick Dowling led his men to victory in a battle that Jefferson Davis later called be the most amazing achievement in military history. Come hear the remarkable story behind this famous battle on the ground where it happened.

The tour will start near the water at the covered area with historic panels explaining the battle. Although the battleground park charges a \$5 per car fee for entering automobiles, the tour is free and open to anyone interested in history.

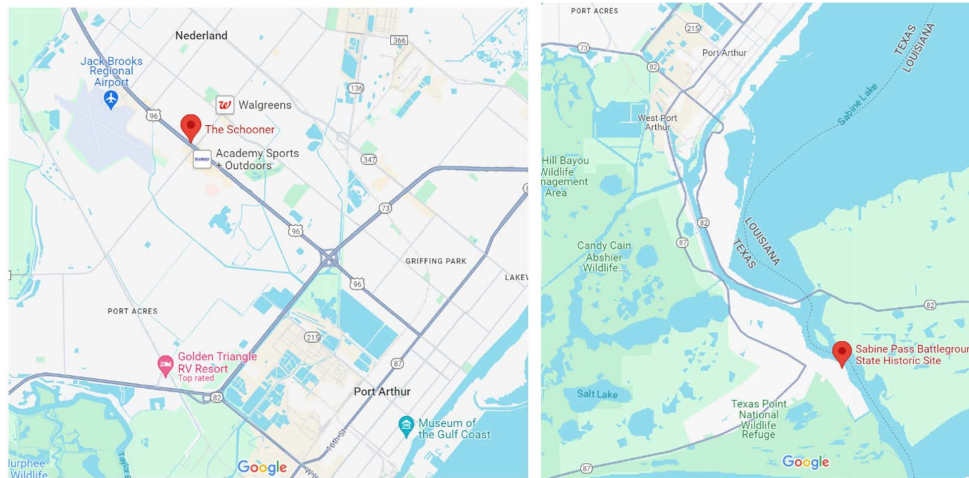
The tour will be conducted by Ed Cotham, author of *Sabine Pass: The Confederacy's Thermopylae* (Univ. of Texas Press, 2004). Ed is a former president of the Friends of Sabine Pass Battleground and the Houston Civil War Round Table. Ed has been leading tours of Texas Civil War



battlefields including Sabine Pass for more than 25 years. The author of many books on Civil War and Texas history, Ed also serves as a volunteer Marine Steward for the Texas Historical Commission.

Sabine Pass Battleground is located at 6100 Dick Dowling Road in Sabine Pass, a small community located off Highway 87 about 15 miles south of Port Arthur.

For those who wish to come early, an informal group will be gathering at about 11:30 am. for a Dutch treat lunch at the Schooner Restaurant, 1507 S Hwy 69, in Nederland, TX 77627. This restaurant is about 95 miles from Houston. It is then about 24 miles from the restaurant to the battleground in Sabine Pass.



Those not wishing to join the group for lunch may instead want to make a morning visit to the Museum of the Gulf Coast located at 700 Procter St. in Port Arthur. Open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m, the Museum of the Gulf Coast tells the story of the Texas/Louisiana Gulf Coast region, beginning with paleontology and biology. Permanent exhibits include a section on Native Americans, European contact, the Texas Navy, the Civil War, economic and cultural growth, the petroleum industry, and the region's maritime history.

## JOHN R. ADAMS BUILDING



John R. Adams building C. 1940s. Photo Courtesy The Portal to Texas History

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In 1926, the John R. Adams Building, 448 Austin Avenue, was completed in downtown Port Arthur. According to the National Register nomination for the Port Arthur Downtown Historic Business District, the Adams Building, was designed by noted architect Henry C. Mauer in a Renaissance Revival style. Mauer designed a number of private residences, including the McFaddin-Ward House and the Caroline Gilbert Hinchee House.

The history of this building is detailed in the [National Register nomination file](#) available on THC's Historic Sites Atlas:

"Another indication of growing wealth in Port Arthur during the 1910s was the emergence of high-style commercial buildings in the central business district, signaling the city's status as a major shipping center and oil boomtown. With the exception of the United States Post Office and Federal Building, up to this point only hotels, railroad depots, residences, and churches featured substantial architectural detailing. Ship Chandler John Robert Adams changed that in

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John R. Adams building c. 1960s with modern updates to the exterior.

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1915 when he had the John R. Adams Department Store erected at 501 Austin Avenue, at the west corner of the intersection of Austin Avenue and Fifth Street. Born in Jasper, Texas, to Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Adams in October 1869, John Robert Adams worked five years with a Beaumont lumber company before relocating to Sabine Pass, where he started a ship chandler business in 1898.

Upon moving to Port Arthur in 1902, Adams kept his ship chandler business along the outlet to

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Photo of Adams Building as of August 28, 2024 as it undergoes renovation by Motiva.  
Photo courtesy of Les McMahan.

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the Gulf, but also opened a grocery store in the 600 block of Procter Street. When the grocery store burned in a fire, he immediately reestablished the business in a new building at the intersection of Fifth Street and Austin Avenue. There, he sold groceries as well as supplies and equipment for ships. In addition to the ship chandler and grocery businesses, Adams ran an undertaking operation, Adams Undertaking Company, which he sold in 1919. John Robert Adams's accomplishments went beyond business; he also became involved in politics as a British vice consul between 1901 and 1916 and as a vice consul for Norway between 1913 and 1938. In 1923, Adams was decorated with the Knight of the Order of St. Olaf by King Haakon of Norway.<sup>23</sup> As an important early Port Arthur pioneer, businessman, landowner, and government official, John Roberts Adams left an indelible mark on the development of Port Arthur, especially during the 1910s and 1920s, when his commercial success soared. The John R. Adams Department Store consists of a two-part, load-bearing brick commercial block building designed in the Prairie Style, characterized by paired groupings of windows, a roof parapet articulated by a stone belt course, projecting pilasters, and an inset cast stone sign.

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Photo of Adams Building as of August 28, 2024, as it undergoes renovation by Motiva.  
Photo courtesy of Les McMahan

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The profits Adams earned operating his businesses out of the John R. Adams Department Store enabled him to commission the John R. Adams Building, later named the World Trade Building, at 448 Austin Avenue in 1926 to house various commercial enterprises and professional offices. Designed by H. C. Mauer and built by Jefferson Construction Company, Inc., the seven-story, three-part commercial block building encompassed one-quarter of a city block, making it one of the largest commercial buildings in the Port Arthur central business district. Costing \$555,000 to build, the Adams Building exhibits several characteristics of a Renaissance Revival-style building such as quoins, rusticated lower stories, belt courses, elaborate entry porches, and the use of the Classical orders and motifs.<sup>24</sup> Providing office space for doctors, lawyers, and other professionals, as well as housing Adams's own businesses, the Adams Building proved important to the 1920s development of Port Arthur's downtown core. Across the street from the United States Post Office and Federal Building and Merchant's National Bank, the Adams Building occupied a

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prominent location within the central business district. The Adams Building architect, H. C. Mauer, worked out of Beaumont, where he designed primarily high-style residential and commercial buildings. A 1924 article in the *Port Arthur News* announcing plans for the construction of the Adams Building described the edifice as follows:

*Planned to be of reinforced construction throughout, the Adams Building will be fire proof and combine a number of features of the most up to date metropolitan skyscrapers, including express elevators, running ice water on all floors and offices arranged in suites. Marble colonnades will be used at the Fifth Street and Austin Avenue entrances. The John R. Adams Company [is] to occupy the Fifth Street side and the Hodges Department Store the Austin Avenue side. Over 150 offices are planned in the upper floors of the building.*

The Adams Building, along with the Federal Building, the A.E. Scott Furniture and Hampton Furniture Building, and the current Port Arthur Public Health Department building, were purchased by Motiva Enterprises, LLC in 2019. The company's plans to restore the Adams Building were put on hold during the COVID pandemic, but since last year have been moving along. At the March 5, 2024, Port Arthur City Council meeting, Motiva officials gave an update on the project's status, reporting major structural work should be completed by the end of August and minor structural work tapering off by December, 2024, when other contractors will begin work. The goal for completion of construction is by year end of 2025. Motiva has been working closely with the Texas Historical Commission and has filed for state and federal tax credits for this project. In July, 2024, Motiva filed an application with THC for Part 2/B: The Description of Rehabilitation describes the building's existing condition as well as the proposed work. This ensures that the completed project will fully meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

## GET IN TOUCH

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