

Texas Historical Commission Staff (DKU), 1/11/82

Official Texas Historical Building Marker without post
for attachment to brick
Harrison County (Order #6445)

Location: Old Longview Rd. (extension of W. Houston),
3 mi. W of Marshall

EDGEMONT*

VIRGINIA NATIVE MONTRAVILLE "MONT"
HALL (1819-71) HAD THIS GREEK REVIVAL
PLANTATION HOUSE BUILT SHORTLY
AFTER MOVING TO HARRISON COUNTY
IN 1844. DESIGNED AND CONSTRUCTED
BY W. R. D. WARD, IT FEATURES A
DISTINCTIVE PORTICO WITH OCTAGONAL
COLUMNS. HALL BECAME A SUCCESSFUL
PLANTER AND A LEADER IN POLITICS,
LAW, BUSINESS AND THE AREA'S EARLY
RAILROAD DEVELOPMENT. HIS POLITICAL
CAREER INCLUDED SERVICE IN THE
TEXAS LEGISLATURE AND THE 1861
STATE SECESSION CONVENTION. **
RECORDED TEXAS HISTORIC LANDMARK - 1981***

*1/2 inch lettering
**3/8 inch lettering
***1/4 inch lettering

Claire Williams
2-17-82

APPLICATION FORM FOR OFFICIAL TEXAS HISTORICAL MARKER

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
P. O. Box 12276, Austin, Texas 78711

RECEIVED
JUL 10 1981

A written history, signed by the author, must accompany this form before it will be accepted.

Harrison	July 10, 1981	
County	Date	
1. Edgemont		
Title of marker		
2. Edgemont		
Name of building, cemetery, public square, park, archeological site, etc., where marker is to be placed.		
3. "Old Longview Road," (extension of West Houston), three miles west of town		
Marker site (street address or highway number)		
4. Marshall		
City or nearest city. If marker is to be placed on a highway or in a small community, you must briefly explain how to get there from nearest town shown on a Texas Highway Department road map. For example, "Marker will be in Bastrop Beach, which is 6 miles south-east of Angleton on FM 523."		
5. on house		
Distance (miles, yards, feet) and direction (north, south, east, west) of subject from marker site. For example, "Subject is 1/2 mile southwest of marker site."		
6. Richard Anderson	Edgemont	Marshall
Owner of marker site	Address	City
7. Richard Anderson	same	
Sponsor of marker	Address	City
8.	3704 Fitzgerald	Marshall
County chairman	Address	City
"I have reviewed the narrative for this marker and attest to its accuracy."		
9. Max S. Lale	same	
Person to whom marker is to be shipped	Street Address	City
Note: If marker is to be placed on a highway right-of-way, it will automatically be shipped to your district highway engineer.		
10. brick		
Surface to which marker will be attached (i.e., wood, brick, stucco over stone) if not on post.		

ORDER FORM

Please consult page 7 for specifications of the markers available. Check the items desired below. Then mail this application and narrative history, together with a check made payable to the Texas Historical Foundation, to the address above. No applications will be accepted unless payment is included.

If marker application is cancelled after the inscription is written, the Texas Historical Foundation will deduct the cost of writing the inscription from the refund.

HISTORICAL MARKERS

- 16" x 12" grave marker (comes with mounting bar) \$175
- 16" x 12" building marker with post \$225
- 16" x 12" building marker without post \$175
- National Register plaque \$ 35
- 27" x 42" subject marker with post \$575
- 27" x 42" subject marker without post \$525
- 18" x 28" subject marker with post \$325
- 18" x 28" subject marker without post \$250

DIRECTIONAL SIGNS

- Please indicate quantity desired and location:
- 24" x 24" Historical Markers In City sign \$ 65
 - Black and white (for farm-to-market roads, state and U.S. highways)
 - Green and white (for interstate highways)
-
- 18" x 22" Historical Marker in black and white only) \$ 65
 - For city streets and county roads
 - with arrow pointing straight ahead
 - with arrow pointing left
 - with arrow pointing right
- 5% State sales tax must be added to above prices except if purchased by a tax exempt organization.

MARKER REPLICA PAPERWEIGHT

This item should be ordered at the same time marker is ordered. Indicate quantity desired. Allow six months from completion of marker for receipt of paperweight.

- 3" x 4" plastic paperweight mounted with replica of marker \$ 75

CLIP AND DETACH ON DOTTED LINE

Edgemont

by
Max S. Lale

0-145

Edgemont is the plantation home in Harrison County which Montraville Jefferson (Mont) Hall built for himself and his family, construction of which began in late 1844 or early 1845.¹ It is located approximately three miles west of downtown Marshall on what originally was the Marshall-Henderson stagecoach road, now an extension of West Houston Street. This road later became known as the "Old Longview Road" after construction was completed on U. S. Highway 80 (connecting Marshall and Longview) several hundred yards north. Sitting atop a topographic feature long known as Hall's Hill, the handsome, red brick, two-story Greek Revival home was the residence of one of Harrison County's most notable early residents.

A native of Virginia, born April 13, 1819, Hall migrated to Harrison County from Alabama in 1844² and purchased 640 acres of land in the G. W. Morgan Survey from the estate of Benjamin Barton, on a portion of which Edgemont now stands.³ After it had suffered many years of neglect and disrepair, a collateral descendant of Mont Hall -- Richard Anderson of Marshall -- bought the house and 299.099 acres of land in 1976 and restored the house to its original appearance, removing several exterior additions and interior partitions to do so. An attorney and the present county judge of Harrison County, Anderson is a great-great-grandson of Mont Hall's sister. Edgemont was entered on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.⁴

The original tract of 640 acres on which Edgemont is situated was bounty land

awarded by authority of Albert Sidney Johnston as secretary of war, the Republic of Texas, to George W. Morgan, who, " . . . having served faithfully and honorable (sic) for the term of twelve months from the 11th of Sept 1836 unto the first of July 1837 and having been honorably discharged is entitled to twelve hundred and eighty acres of bounty land . . ." ⁵ Less than two years later, Morgan transferred all his right, title and claim to the bounty certificate to A. G. Gholson for \$275. Three months later, for \$640, A. G. Gholson transferred the certificate to Samuel Gholson, who received a patent for the original 640 acres and an additional 433 acres in the George W. Morgan Survey. ⁶ Benjamin Barton bought the Edgemont 640 acres from Samuel Gholson on July 30, 1842, giving his note for \$1,000. ⁷ He died before the debt was liquidated, however, and, his estate being insufficient to satisfy the indebtedness, his administrators requested permission from the probate court to sell his land holdings. Mont Hall was the successful bidder for the 640 acres. ⁸

On the property when Hall bought it was a small dwelling at the foot of what would become known as Hall's Hill, no doubt constructed of logs from the timber with which the property abounded, which Hall and his family occupied until Edgemont was completed about 1847. ⁹ Here began the development of plantation holdings which at one time, according to unverified reports, totaled 10,000 acres of land. It was from this land and this home that Mont Hall rose to a position of leadership in agriculture, public affairs, politics, business, the practice of law and the first successful effort at railroad building in Northeast Texas. Situated on grounds encompassing 20 acres, Edgemont was surrounded, after its completion, by slave quarters, a log smoke house, a cane mill, a barn of hewn logs which was said to accomodate 100 head of livestock, and other appurtenances common to the period. ¹⁰

It was from this family seat that Hall, an attorney as well as a planter, emerged as a local spokesman for the conservative faction in national affairs, state representative from Harrison County, delegate to the state's secession convention and a director of the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, later incorporated into the Gould system which became the Texas & Pacific railroad. Ironically, Mont Hall's extensive holdings may have shrunk at the time of his death on May 11, 1871, because of the effects of the Civil War on the local economy, to the point that Edgemont and its 640 acres were sold at sheriff's sale for \$3,304. Mont Hall, Jr., the oldest son, was the successful bidder.¹¹

Soon after awarding a contract to architect-builder W. R. D. Ward for construction of Edgemont,¹² Hall was married on July 10, 1845, to Mrs. Mary Ann Robertson (1819-1860), a widow, by whom he had five children: Montraville Jefferson Hall, Jr. (b. April 6, 1846, d. March 6, 1887); Octavia Virginia (b. September 8, 1848); Mary Blanche (b. November 11, 1850, d. July 8, 1917); Cornelia Emma (b. February 11, 1853); and John Vespasian (b. August 7, 1855, d. March 26, 1909).¹³ Mrs. Hall is buried in the family burial ground just west of Edgemont.

Hall's rise as a planter is reflected in an exhaustive demographic and economic study over the past decade by Dr. Randolph Campbell, professor of North Texas State University. In the federal census of 1850, in which his principal occupation was noted as "lawyer," Hall was recorded as the owner of real property (including 200 acres of "improved" land) worth \$4,000 and 14 slaves who had produced 15 bales of cotton in 1849. Still shown as a lawyer in the 1860 census, Hall in the preceding 10 years had increased his holdings to 1,147 acres worth \$30,000 (including 635 acres of improved land) and personal property (including 34 slaves) worth \$64,525. His 1859 cotton production was shown as 104 bales. Only 10 other planters in a

county which in 1860 had the largest slave population in the state owned more bondsmen, and only nine other planters in one of the state's most productive cotton counties produced a larger cotton crop in 1859.¹⁴

Hall's rise to prominence as a planter was paralleled by an increasing involvement in the public affairs of Harrison County and Northeast Texas. His movement into local politics began as early as the sectional crisis of 1850, when he participated in public meetings on the free soil issue, in which he represented the conservative, pro-compromise -- or "Opposition" -- position and was a candidate for the state house of representatives. In this contest he was opposed by Louis Trezevant Wigfall, later to become a United States senator and Confederate senator. R. W. Loughery, the editor of the Marshall Texas Republican and a figure equally as ultra-southern as Wigfall, endorsed the latter. In the November 1850 election the Opposition polled 275 votes (out of 809) in favor of the Pearce Bill, and Wigfall defeated Unionist-Democrat Hall by a vote of 276 to 467.¹⁵

Two years later, when the passions of the sectional crisis had cooled somewhat, Hall attended an organizational meeting of the Democratic Party and once again became a candidate for the state house of representatives, this time successfully. Of seven candidates for three places, all three victors were men with previous affiliations with the Opposition, including not only Hall but also George W. Whitmore, a small planter on the eastern side of the county who had been a Whig sub-electoral in 1852.¹⁶

By the time the secession crisis of 1860 appeared on the horizon, Hall had moved more firmly into the southern Democratic Party position. When he attended a public meeting called by Mayor James M. Curtis for Friday, November 16, 1860, Hall had completed the transition with saving grace, motivated perhaps by his

increasing wealth arising from the plantation system and almost certainly by the immense pressure being placed upon all persons in the public eye. Hall was appointed a member of a seven-man resolutions committee which included two former state representatives, Pendleton Murrah, who would become Texas' last Confederate governor, and J. M. Clough, who would lose his life as a lieutenant colonel at Fort Donelson. Others appointed were County Judge George Lane, brother of the San Jacinto hero Walter P. Lane, who would become a Civil War general; William B. Ochiltree, the former Whig leader turned ultra-southerner; and two men Gil McKay and Eli H. Baxter, who had announced as Constitutional Union Party electors during the recent election.¹⁷

At the election for delegates to the secession convention from Harrison County which followed, four men were elected: McKay and Ochiltree of the resolutions committee, and Alexander Pope, a prominent attorney, and W. T. Scott, a railroad builder and the county's wealthiest citizen. Ochiltree resigned to become a delegate from Texas to the Confederate Congress, however, and at an election held February 23, 1861, Mont Hall was elected in his place on the Harrison County delegation.

Concurrently with his increasing stature as a planter and at the bar, in a practice in which he participated for a time in partnership with James Turner,¹⁸ Hall also was intimately involved in a long, discouraging effort to bring a railroad into Marshall. Interest in railroad building was evident as early as October 1849, only five years after Hall bought the property on which he built Edgemont. In that year, Charles C. Mills, a prominent Whig planter, represented the county at a southern railroad convention in Memphis. Early the next year, James McCown, a planter who owned 55 slaves,¹⁹ received a charter from the state legislature incorporating the Marshall Rail-way and Plank Road Company, an enterprise

on which nothing was accomplished, the charter eventually lapsing. In February 1852 the legislature chartered a second railway corporation involving Harrison County men -- the Texas and Louisiana Railroad Company -- but this project also died an early death.

Following this second failure of local initiative, businessmen-promoters from outside the community entered the picture when the state of New York chartered an Atlantic and Pacific Railroad Company, but at its organization this company amounted to little more than a shell. William R. D. Ward of Marshall (who had built Edgemont) was one of 25 directors, along with Dr. Jephtha Fowlkes of Memphis, former congressman Thomas Butler King of Georgia and ex-secretary of war Robert J. Walker of Mississippi. Taking its cue from New York, the state of Texas on December 21, 1853, adopted a statute for building a Mississippi and Pacific Railroad, though without creating a corporation for that purpose. Instead, the law invited some existing company to contract to build the road. Representatives from the Atlantic and Pacific soon had residents of Harrison County talking enthusiastically about "our railroad."

An official ground breaking was held in Marshall on July 4, 1854, and work did actually begin that month toward Marshall on a line from Swanson's Landing on Caddo Lake, where it would effect a tie-in with water routes to the Mississippi. In the process of developing this line, the company involved a number of local railroad enthusiasts led by Ward and including Mont Hall and Louis T. Wigfall, the former political opponents. However, after the ground breaking and some work at Swanson's Landing, this effort, too, came to naught.

Hope was like the phoenix, however. The local promoters reorganized under the charter of the Texas Western Railroad Company, a corporation created by the Texas

legislature on February 16, 1852, which was sold to the Atlantic and Pacific Company. Some of the Texas Western stockholders wound up once again as stockholders in the Texas-chartered company. William T. Scott served on the executive committee, while Ward, one of the original directors, became a director also. The Texas Western promoters were able to sell enough of a \$25 million stock issue to continue the construction already begun at Swanson's Landing, and in August 1856 new life was injected into the undertaking when the state legislature, with considerable prompting from State Senator William T. Scott, passed a law amending the company's name to the Southern Pacific Railroad Company. The renamed company held its first stockholders meeting on October 6, 1856, and, although Harrison County was represented on the new board by Scott, Ward and Hall, along with former governor J. P. Henderson (soon to be elected to the United States Senate while living in Marshall), 10 of the 19 directors were from the north.²⁰

Within less than a year, on June 1, 1858, although the line was operative, it was sold to pay the debts for which it had been mortgaged. Dr. Jefferson M. Saunders of Marshall (who sold his home in Marshall to Wigfall, then had to foreclose the mortgage)²¹ bought the property for \$40,000 and immediately sold it for the same price to a group of investors composed primarily of Harrison County residents already involved in the project. A complex court battle followed, ending finally in October 1859 with yet another reorganization, with Fowlkes winding up as president and William T. Scott as vice president.²²

In the view of Dr. Campbell, it seems unlikely that any of the promoters, including Hall, was "greatly enriched" as a result of their venture. Certainly Wigfall was not. He was, and continued to be for the remainder of his life, both

profligate and impecunious.²³ But, as this historian has written, it is difficult to determine just how much real money the investors had ventured in the first place. This much can be asserted with certainty, however. Harrison County, "thanks to a combination of outside entrepreneurs and local planter-businessmen, had one of the few operating railroads anywhere in antebellum Texas and the only one in that part of the state."²⁴ Prominently among these was Mont Hall, whose wealth, legal acumen and political experience undoubtedly contributed significantly to such a consumation of a long and discouraging process.

After the death of Mrs. Hall in 1860 and her burial in the family cemetery at Edgemont, Hall married Mrs. Julia Brandon Houghton, also a widow, on October 23, 1861,²⁵ during the first year of the Civil War. The new Mrs. Hall moved into the family home, Edgemont, and assumed her role as wife of one of the county's wealthiest and most influential men and surrogate mother of his brood of children. To this circle was added a sixth Hall child, Thomas Brandon, on October 20, 1862.²⁶

Occupied as he was with his many agricultural and business interests, Hall soon was to become more heavily involved in another activity, an important role in the affairs of the always straightened treasury department of the Confederacy. A grandson, M. H. Gwynn, was quoted during the latter years of his life as saying that his grandfather accepted a post as assistant treasurer of the Confederacy's Trans-Mississippi Department.²⁷ The appointment, according to this story, was made by C.S.A. President Jefferson Davis because Hall had saved his life during the Mexican War.²⁸ Many years earlier, Gwynn had written in a local newspaper that he remembered "when one of the upstairs rooms at Edgemont contained millions of dollars of Confederate money of all denominations."²⁹

However, the best evidence of Hall's duties for the Confederacy would seem to

be a document in the Hall family file in the archives of the Harrison County Historical Museum. This is an "Exchange Certificate," issued from the "C. S. Depository's Office, Marshall, Dec. 4-64," and signed by Hall as "C. S. Depository." An evidence of indebtedness, this exchange certificate was issued to J. H. Cain for \$600 of "Old Issue" treasury notes "to be exchanged, on his order, for 2/3 that sum in 'New Issue' notes under Act of Congress of 17th Feb'y 1864 when this office shall be supplied with funds for the purpose and on surrender of this certificate."

But whatever Hall's official title, and whatever the limits of his authority, it seems obvious that Hall's position in the treasury department was one of trust and responsibility, reflecting the esteem in which he was held as one of Harrison County's leading citizens.

There is some indication, too, that Hall engaged during the latter years of the war in the lucrative cotton trade centered on the Mexican city of Matamoros, though the author has not been able to establish this with certainty. Owners and contractors hauled cotton behind ox teams the many hundreds of miles from as far away as northwest Louisiana and southwest Arkansas, a punishing task made profitable by the Confederacy's desperate need for foreign exchange. An implicit understanding permitted the Confederate States and the United States to look the other way as neutral bottoms left the Mexican shores at Bagdad, destined for the looms of Europe. Given his connections, his wealth and the position he occupied, it is entirely possible that Hall engaged in this trade on his own, and it is equally possible that the "millions of dollars" which a grandson remembered at Edgemont in later years was money remaining after the war from funds allocated for the purchase and shipment of cotton in the interest of the Confederacy.

Edgemont, the locus of this and so much other early history of Harrison County, has been described and its significance recorded in several professional publications. Already mentioned is the documentation which led to its listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Under the title of "Mont Hall," an early name for the house, Drury Blakeley Alexander in his authoritative "Texas Homes of the 19th Century,"³⁰ wrote that "This porticoed, two-story Greek Revival house has the familiar hipped roof and interior chimneys of the Georgian period. Its octagonal columns, however, are more typical of the Victorian style after certain medieval influences were introduced." Dorothy Kendall Bracken and Maurine Whorton Redway in "Early Texas Homes,"³¹ wrote that "The color of the brick of the two-story residence . . . and the detail work of its entrance, with its two-story columns and second-floor balcony, are distinguishing marks of a century-old house. It is one of the few ante-bellum homes that remain standing in the Marshall area."³² . . . "The present owner, Mrs. Leala /Leola/ Anderson, has added a few modern features to the house, which is sometimes called 'Edgemont' by the Anderson family."³³ Structurally, however, the old dwelling remains the same as in its early days."

The dominant focal point of the north facade is a central, pedimented portico supported by two two-story, white octagonal columns. Pilasters which repeat the column configuration are fixed to the facade. Both entrances on the first and second floor consist of a single door with transom and high lights. Eight six-over-six light windows with wooden lintels are symmetrically arranged with four windows on each side of the portico.

The symmetrical arrangement is present in the plan as well. Each floor has a central hall 15 feet wide with two rooms on each side which measure 20 by 20 feet.

Each room has its own fireplace. Two massive brick chimneys, located on the center-line equidistant from the midpoint of the roof, accommodate all eight fireplaces. The interior walls are covered with plaster from sand, lime and animal hair, and have been perfectly repaired by the present owner.

Two-foot thick walls support 12-foot ceilings on the ground floor and 10-foot ceilings on the second. Original wide board heart pine flooring and joists, plus the original molding, woodwork trim, mantels and their pilasters, doors, hinges and hardware are still intact. The original stairs and stairwell have been restored, with duplicate rounds replaced as necessary.

The downstairs hallway has collapsible triple doors at the rear, closing off a central hall on the south. This feature permits cross-ventilation for the entire floor, accenting the natural flow of air which results from the house's elevated position. Mont Hall specified that plans for his house include a dumb waiter for his convenience during entertainment of his guests.³⁴

The present owner bought Edgemont in 1976, returning from Houston, where for several years he practiced law with the firm of Andrews, Kurth, Campbell and Jones, to purchase the house and to restore it as his home. At that time, a partition closed off the stairwell to minimize the difficulty of heating the entire house, and the south end of the lower floor hallway was partitioned off to form a room, though no structural walls were disturbed. The rear entrance was altered, and a porch had been added. A family-type one-story room had been added to the northeast side of the house.

During restoration, the stairwell was opened, the room-forming partition was removed from the lower-floor hallway, the porch at the rear of the ground floor was removed, and the family-type room was eliminated.

As a result of these efforts to return the house to its original design, Edge-

mont twice has been featured on the home tour which is a highlight of Marshall's annual Stagecoach Days festival in May, the first time during its restoration, in 1977, and the second in 1980, after the restoration was completed.

Aside from a modern kitchen and bathroom, the house would be perfectly familiar to Mont Hall, even after the 110 years since his death on May 11, 1871. He would find Edgemont still to be a gracious setting for social occasions of the sort at which he entertained both before the Civil War and in the few years spared to him after the war ended. One such an occasion was a dinner at which he entertained members of the bar, apparently in April 1868.³⁵ A newspaperman who attended reported that

On Wednesday Col. M. J. Hall gave a complimentary dinner to his associates of the Bar at which were present Hon. J. R. Williamson, Mr. Jarvis of Wood, the District Attorney, Judge Drury Fields, and Mr. Poag of Panola, ex-Gov. Clark, in addition to lawyers of Harrison County, who are in attendance at this term of court. We had the pleasure of being a participant. The state-ly residence of the Colonel is situated about three miles from town. Every-thing passed off in the most agreeable manner. The dinner was excellent and all the arrangements connected with it were of a character to reflect a flat-tering compliment to the felicitous taste of the fair hostess. It was one of the most pleasant reunions that has occurred since the close of the war. "Wine, Wit and Wassail" prevailed. Toasts were drunk to the memory of Stone-wall Jackson, to his Excellency President Johnston, to the restoration of kindly feeling, and the government to its original purity, and other expres-sions of "rebel" sentiment were well calculated to shock the sensibilities of the Reconstruction Committee of the present Congress.

It was about this time, too, that Hall's continuing interest in his home county found expression in another way. The same newspaperman reported that

Travelers and teamsters cannot fail to appreciate Col. M. J. Hall's improve-ment of that almost impassable bottom, immediately west of his residence, on the road leading west from Marshall. The substantial double bridge, extend-ing across the bottom, which he has erected, is decidedly an institution, while the grading and citching of that memorable steep hill will tend to make the labors of teams and teamsters much lighter. The Col. is certainly en-titled to the thanks of the public. 36

Undoubtedly Hall was influenced in this civic-minded undertaking by the fact that for a time after the demise of the slavery system of plantation operation he was a partner in a mercantile establishment in Marshall, Hall & Daniel. This business, naturally, would have prospered or declined in some degree on accessibility to Marshall on the part of what still was predominantly a rural population, and Hall's Hill and the broad bottom west of it still was a significant barrier in wet weather, despite the multi-teamed stagecoachs which managed to operate over this principal route to the west. In 1866, during the period when federal occupation authorities still were supervising a system of contract labor for recently-emancipated freedmen, Hall employed several in his store, among them a Bill Haney who was under contract to work 12 months at \$15 a month.³⁷

Following Hall's death and burial in Marshall's Greenwood Cemetery, his estate may have been found to be far less valuable than it had been during the years immediately preceding the Civil War (and probably less than it might have been supposed at the time), or Hall may have joined in the fairly common practice in Harrison County of refusing to pay taxes to a reconstruction government. In any case, Montraville Jefferson Hall, Jr., became the owner of Edgemont in an unusual manner. Deed records show that the younger Hall acquired the property -- 640 acres and "the improvements thereon" -- at public sale, bidding \$3,304 for the land and the house in which he lived with his sister, Blanche Hall Gwynn, and her husband, Dr. William C. Gwynn.³⁸

Dr. Gwynn, who was born about 1838 in Lebanon, Tennessee, was a medical student at the University of Nashville, now Vanderbilt University, at the outbreak of the Civil War. He returned to the university after the war and was awarded his medical degree in 1867. He migrated to Harrison County about 1870 and began the

practice of medicine in Marshall. He and Blanche Hall were married on February 22, 1872, and became the parents of one son, Montraville Hall Gwynn, born January 8, 1873. Dr. Gwynn died in Marshall on July 7, 1879, "presumably" of heat stroke.³⁹

Mont Hall, Jr., died March 16, 1887, after which ~~Dr. and~~ Mrs. Gwynn continued to live in Edgemont ^D ~~until the physician's own death two years later~~. It appears from the language in land records still surviving that John Vespasian Hall, the youngest of Mont Hall's five children by his first wife, also resided at Edgemont as at least a partial owner of the original 640-acre tract, although this is not completely clear. Under his will dated October 1, 1887, his sister, Blanche Hall Gwynn, was appointed executrix of his estate after his death on March 25, 1909. In his will John V. Hall listed "what is known as my home place in Harrison County, Texas about three and a half miles west of Marshall, said place is a part of the G. ^W Morgan headright survey and contains two hundred and three 65/100 acres of land. The same being deeded to me by M. J. Hall, decd. and B. H. Gwynn, March 30th, 1882, and recorded in Book 14, page 305, with all improvements thereon . . . I give and bequeath to my beloved sister B. H. Gwynne (sic) my undivided interest in the estate of M. J. Hall Jr., decd."⁴⁰

In any case, Edgemont passed into possession of Montraville Hall Gwynn, only child of Dr. and Mrs. W. C. Gwynn, at the latter's death on July 8, 1917. By her will she gave "to my dearly beloved son, and only child, Montraville H. Gwynn, all my property of whatever kind, or where ever situated of which I may died possessed of (sic) . . ." Included in the inventory and appraisal was 172 acres of the G. M. Morgan headright valued at \$3,440.⁴¹

At the trough of the Great Depression, on July 2, 1931, Mr. and Mrs. M. H. Gwynn signed a deed of trust to D. E. Nicholson, trustee for The State National

Bank of Terrell, Texas, for "All that certain lot tract or parcel of land known as Edgemont the Hall Place, about three miles west of the City of Marshall . . ." ⁴²

This transaction was followed less than a year later, at a sheriff's sale, by transfer of the property by sheriff's deed to The State National Bank of Terrell, the record again showing the deed to include "all that certain lot, tract or parcel of land, known as Edgemont, the Hall Place . . ." ⁴³

J. B. Anderson, great-uncle of the present owner, acquired Edgemont later the same year, on December 29, 1932, paying \$8,000 to The State National Bank of Terrell for a receiver's deed for the property, once again described as " . . . all that certain tract or parcel of land known as 'Edgemont' the Hall Place about three miles West of the City of Marshall. ⁴⁴ At his death on October 17, 1953, his wife Leola Anderson was bequeathed title under a will dated August 11, 1952, becoming his executrix and sole beneficiary. The plantation was described, again, as "Edgemont, the Hall Place." ⁴⁵

Mrs. Anderson continued as owner of the plantation until October 11, 1970, when on her death the property passed to her husband Archie Melady. ⁴⁶ After his death on March 29, 1974, the property became available, by purchase from his estate, for acquisition and ownership once again by a family member. Richard Anderson "had suppressed a yearning to own the old place during his early years," ⁴⁷ and its availability in this manner prompted him to resign from his position with his Houston law firm to buy Edgemont and to restore it as his home. ⁴⁸

Already listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Edgemont is eminently worthy of designation as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark. The purity of its architectural style, its age, its long history of family ownership, the

the integrity of its restoration and the eminence of its builder, Montraville Jefferson Hall, combine to make it one of the most notable antebellum homes in Texas.

July 6, 1981

NOTES

1. He acquired the site on November 30, 1844; Book A, page 596, Probate Records of Harrison County. It seems probable that construction would not have begun earlier than the spring of 1845, both because of more favorable weather and because the house is built of hand-pressed brick and with lumber sawed from timber on the property.
2. Hall family vertical file, archives, Harrison County Historical Museum, Marshall; genealogical information in the file is extracted from the Hall family Bible.
3. Probate Records, op. cit.
4. Letter, Texas Historical Commission, to Richard Anderson, October 4, 1977; see also U. S. Department of the Interior form, "National Register of Historic Places Inventory -- Nomination Form," February 22, 1977, copy on file in the office of the Texas Historical Commission, Austin, Texas.
5. Book A, page 97, Deed Records of Harrison County.
6. Book A, page 97, Deed Records of Harrison County; Book A, page 98, Deed Records of Harrison County.
7. Book A, pages 31-32, Deed Records of Harrison County.
8. Book A, page 596, Probate Records of Harrison County.
9. Marshall News Messenger, September 8, 1974.
10. The present owner believes he has discovered the location of the slave quarters, presenting an unusual opportunity for archeological investigation.
11. Book 4, page 164, Deed Records of Harrison County. Harrison County fell heavily and increasingly into debt in the late 1860s and 1870s, under both military and Radical Republican appointed county officials. Dr. Randolph B. Campbell, professor of history, North Texas State University, in an unpublished history of this period in Harrison County, strongly suggests that there was at least an informal taxpayers' strike against the imposed county government.
12. Later one of Harrison County's most successful businessmen, Ward also designed Magnolia Hall, Marshall's first structure placed on the National Register of Historical Places, as well as other notable structures in Marshall, and, as did Hall, became a director of the Southern Pacific Railroad Company; see "National Register of Historic Places -- Nomination Form," op. cit.
13. Hall family file, archives, Harrison County Historical Museum, op. cit.
14. Randolph B. Campbell, "Planters and Plain Folk: Harrison County, Texas, as a

Test Case, 1850-1880," The Journal of Southern History, Vol. XL, No. 3, August 1974, pages 393-398. In Dr. Campbell's unpublished book, op. cit., he notes that Hall's was an individual case "dramatically" illustrating the upward trend among small planters which characterized the period in Harrison County history.

15. Campbell, unpublished history, op. cit.; also, Campbell, "Planters and Plain Folk," op. cit., pages 393-394.
16. Ibid. Whitmore, because of his rigid position against secession, became the object of a recall petition seeking his expulsion from the state legislature. He subsequently moved to Smith County, where he was elected to the Congress during Reconstruction.
17. Ibid.
18. See marker application, The Turner House, Marshall, offices of the Texas Historical Commission.
19. See marker application, First Baptist Church, Marshall, offices of the Texas Historical Commission.
20. Five directors were from New York, one each from Rhode Island, Georgia, Washington, D. C., Indiana, Mississippi and New Jersey, and six from Texas. In addition to Scott, Hall, Henderson and Ward, the state was represented by Dr. J. Taylor and C. S. Todd. "First Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, Chartered by the State of Texas," New York, American Railroad Management Journal Office, 9 Spruce Street, 1856. This now extremely rare and handsome little leather-bound book is unpaginated. Authority for its publication is a printed statement from S. Jaudon, secretary, datelined "Office of the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, New York, November 24th, 1856," which quotes from the minutes of the annual meeting: "At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors, held this day, Mr. T. Butler King, from the Special Committee appointed at the meeting of the Board of Directors, on the 8th of October, presented the following report, which was read; and, upon action, it was Resolved, That the said Report be approved and adopted, and that five thousand copies be printed for distribution."
21. See marker application for The Wigfall House, Marshall, on file in the office of the Texas Historical Commission.
22. The above discussion of railroad development in Harrison County is largely from the unpublished history by Dr. Randolph B. Campbell, op. cit.
23. Wigfall marker application, op. cit.
24. Campbell, unpublished history (quotation), op. cit.; for the benefits of the railroad to one specific planter, see Max S. Lale and Randolph B. Campbell (editors), "The Plantation Journal of John B. Webster, February 17, 1858 -

November 5, 1859," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Vol. LXXXIV, No. 1, July 1980, passim. The complete journal is deposited in the library of East Texas Baptist College, Marshall.

25. Hall family file, Harrison County Historical Museum, op. cit.
26. According to a newspaper account published many years later, Thomas Brandon Hall was drowned at the age of three when he fell into the 70-foot water well which served the plantation. Always with "30 to 40 feet of fresh water" in it, this was a dug well and was faced with hand-made brick, presumably manufactured on the place; the Marshall News Messenger, September 4, 1974, page 8A.
27. Ibid.
28. Until better evidence is forthcoming, this account must remain suspect. Having bought the Barton property late in 1844, Hall evidently began construction of Edgemont early in 1845. Only months later, on July 10, he was married to his first wife, and his first child was born in April 1846. If Hall did in fact serve during the Mexican War, it would have been for only a short period and most likely would have been in a Texas unit. Davis, it will be remembered, commanded a regiment of Mississippi infantry.
29. A clipping of this story, published in the Marshall News Messenger on February 16, 1930, is in the Hall family file, Harrison County Historical Museum, op. cit.
30. Published for the Carter Museum of Western Art by the University of Texas Press, Austin, 1966, pages 115, 246.
31. Southern Methodist University Press, Dallas, 1956, page 92.
32. An unfortunate misstatement of fact which can be attributed only to unfamiliarity with the surprising number of such structures still standing today, more than a quarter-century after this was written.
33. In this connection, the name "Edgemont" was appearing in legal descriptions of the property as early as 1931; see Appendix A.
34. See National Register nominating form, op. cit.
35. A contemporary account was reprinted in the Marshall News Messenger's "Yesterday" column on April 13, 1959.
36. Reprinted from a contemporary account in the Marshall News Messenger's "Yesterday" column, April 30, 1961; Hall's Hill, on which Edgemont is situated and which the newspaper described, was a favorite testing ground for automobiles in the early years of automobiling. Owners believed they had a superior vehicle when they could negotiate Hall's Hill in "high gear." Hall's concern for "teams and teamsters" may have had something to do with the cotton traffic to Matamoros during the Civil War, following a trail which was

difficult at best but particularly so, because of the absence of watering places between the Nueces and Rio Grand Rivers. One of the few on this leg of the long haul was the creek which flowed beside the main house on the Santa Gertrudis portion of the King Ranch, west of the present day Kingsville.

37. Campbell, unpublished history, op. cit.
38. Book 4, page 164, Deed Records of Harrison County.
39. Hall family file, Harrison County Historical Museum.
40. It is possible that this tract of 203 65/100 acres was not a portion of the original 640 acres but rather was land which previously was in family hands. The manner in which land was described in legal records at this time in this portion of Texas makes it almost impossible to trace precisely.
41. Book S, pages 377-382, Probate Minutes of Harrison County. The value placed on the property -- \$20 per acre -- is curiously only \$136 more than the price Mont Hall, Jr., paid for the 640 acres including the plantation house 42 years earlier.
42. Vol. 37, page 375, Deed of Trust Records of Harrison County.
43. Vol. 191, page 514, Deed Records of Harrison County.
44. Vol. 194, page 201, Deed Records of Harrison County.
45. Vol. 54, pages 238-267, Probate Minutes of Harrison County.
46. Case No. 7818, Probate Court of Harrison County.
47. Marshall News Messenger, May 22, 1977.
48. Case No. 8433, Probate Court of Harrison County.

APPENDIX A
Chain of Ownership

- Soldier's Certificate A. Sidney Johnston, Secretary of War, Republic of Texas, to George M. Morgan, dated December 9, 1838, filed October 3, 1840, Book A, Deed Records of Harrison County, Texas, page 97; " . . . George M. Morgan having served faithfully and honorable (sic) for the term of twelve months from the 11th of Septer 1836 unto the first day July 1837 and having been honorably discharged is entitled to twelve hundred and eighty acres of bounty land for which this is his certificate . . ."
- Transfer G. M. Morgan to A. G. Gholson, dated June 12, 1840, filed October 3, 1840, Book A, Deed Records of Harrison County, page 97, in consideration of \$275, " . . . all my right, title and claim in and to the within certificate and do by these presents authorize the commissioner of the General Land Office to Issue a patent in the name of A. G. Gholson . . ."
- Transfer A. G. Gholson to Samuel Gholson, dated September 22, 1840, filed October 3, 1840, Book A, Deed Records of Harrison County, page 98, in consideration of \$640 "in hand paid" . . . "all right, title and interest in and to the above soldier's certificate of twelve hundred and eighty acres of land and also authorize the commissioner of the General Land Office to issue the patent in the name of Samuel Gholson."
- Patent State of Texas to Samuel Gholson, assignee of George M. Morgan, filed April 15, 1850, Book H, Deed Records of Harrison County, page 466, 1,073 acres of the George M. Morgan Survey.
- On July 30, 1842, Penjamin Barton executed a note in favor of Samuel Gholson in the amount of \$1,000 covering the purchase of 640 acres in the G. M. Morgan Survey; "If the above note is not punctually paid when /it/ becomes due and I shall make him a deed in fee simple to six hundred and forty acres of land which he holds my bond for then the note is to draw eight per cent interest until paid from date." Book A, Deed Records of Harrison County, pages 31-32. At his death, Benjamin Barton's estate was insufficient to pay his indebtedness, and his administrators requested permission to sell land holdings to satisfy his indebtedness.
- Order of Sale from Probate Court Thomas W. Clark and James M. Barton, administrators of the estate of Benjamin Barton, to M. J. Hall, 640 acres of the George M. Morgan Survey, executed November 30, 1844, Book A, page 596, Probate Records of Harrison County.
- Sheriff's Deed M. J. Hall Estate to M. J. Hall, Jr., dated March 9, 1875, filed July 10, 1875, Book 4, page 164, Deed Records of Har-

arrison County, consideration \$3,304 at public sale " . . . the following described tract or parcel of land containing six hundred and forty acres with the improvements thereon situate lying and being in Harrison County three miles more or less west from the town of Marshall in said county and known as the tract or parcel of land where Benjamin Barton resided at the time of his deceased (sic) and the same tract where M. J. Hall resided and occupied at the time of his decease and the same tract where William Hall resided on the 5th of March 1844 and the same tract whereon M. J. Hall, Jr., William C. Gwynn and his wife, Blanche Gwynn now reside and occupy and the same being known as the homestead plantation and the lands contiguous to and adjoining the same plantation and homestead on which M. J. Hall decd. resided and occupied at the time of his death for a more full description of the said land reference is here made to deed bearing date 5th day of March 1844 from T. W. Clark and James M. Barton, decd and recorded Book O, pages 228 and 229 of record of deeds in Harrison County."

M. J. Hall, Jr., was the eldest child of the five children of Montraville J. Hall. Mary Blanche Hall was their third child. John Vespasian Hall was the youngest. Under John V. Hall's will dated October 1, 1887, Blanche Hall Gwynn, widow of Dr. W. C. Gwynn, was appointed administratrix of his estate after his death on March 25, 1909. In his will John V. Hall noted "what is known as my home place in Harrison County, Texas about three and a half miles west of Marshall, said place is a part of the G. W. Morgan headright survey and contains two hundred and three 65/100 acres of land. The same being deeded to me by M. J. Hall, decd. and B. H. Gwynn, March 30th, 1882, and recorded in Book 14, page 305, with all improvements thereon . . . I give and bequeath to my beloved sister B. H. Gwynn my undivided interest in the estate of M. J. Hall, decd. consisting of houses and lots in Marshall and all the lands belonging to the estate of M. J. Hall decd. in this and other counties." Book N, pages 546-549, Probate Minutes of Harrison County.

Blanche Hall Gwynn died July 8, 1917. Her son was Montraville H. Gwynn. "I give and bequeath to my dearly beloved son, and only child, Montraville H. Gwynn, all my property of whatever kind, or where ever situated of which I may died possessed of (sic) . . ." Included in the inventory and appraisal was 172 acres of land valued at \$3,440. Book S, pages 377-382, Probate Minutes of Harrison County.

Deed of Trust

M. H. Gwynn, et ux Mrs. M. H. Gwynn, to D. E. Nicholson, trustee for The State National Bank of Terrell, Texas, dated July 2, 1931, filed July 3, 1931, Vol. 37, page 375, Deed of Trust Records, Harrison County: "All that certain lot tract or parcel of land known as Edgemont the Hall Place, about three miles West of the City of Marshall, Harrison County, Texas, containing about 434 48/100 acres more or less, being 362 38/100 acres of the G. W. Morgan and 72 1/100 acres of the Wm. Walker surveys in Harrison County, Texas, about three miles West of the City of Marshall."

Sheriff's Deed

M. H. Gwynn to The State National Bank of Terrell, Texas, dated May 3, 1932, filed May 12, 1932, Vol. 191, page 514, Deed Records of Harrison County: "All that certain lot, tract or parcel of land, known as Edgemont," the Hall Place about three miles west of the City of Marshall, Harrison County, Texas, containing about $434 \frac{48}{100}$ acres more or less, being $362 \frac{38}{100}$ acres of the G. W. Morgan and $72 \frac{1}{100}$ acres of the Wm. Walker surveys in Harrison County, Texas, about three miles West of the City of Marshall."

Receiver's Deed

C. J. Maner, receiver for The State National Bank of Terrell, Texas, to J. B. Anderson, dated December 29, 1932, filed December 29, 1932, Vol. 194, page 201, Deed Records of Harrison County, consideration \$8,000, " . . . all that certain tract or parcel of land known as 'Edgemont' the Hall place about three miles West of the City of Marshall, Harrison County, Texas, containing about $434 \frac{48}{100}$ acres more or less, being $362 \frac{38}{100}$ acres of the G. W. Morgan and $72 \frac{1}{100}$ acres of the Wm. Walker survey in Harrison County, Texas, about three miles west of the City of Marshall . . ."

J. B. Anderson died October 17, 1953, leaving a will dated August 11, 1952, designating his wife Leola as his executrix and bequeathing his entire estate to her. Vol. 54, pages 238-267, Probate Minutes, filed October 2, 1954. Included in the estate was 370.2 acres of land more or less, "known as 'Edgemont' the Hall Place, about 3 miles west of the City of Marshall, in Harrison County, Texas . . ."

Warranty Deed

A. G. Melady, by administrator, to Lee O. Spruell, April 12, 1976, Vol. 784, page 84, Deed Records of Harrison County.

Warranty Deed

Lee O. Spruell to Richard Anderson, May 12, 1976, Vol. 786, page 510, Deed Records of Harrison County.

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Dorothy Kendall Bracken and Maurine Whorton Redway, "Early Texas Homes"
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Company, Chartered by the State of Texas"

Articles

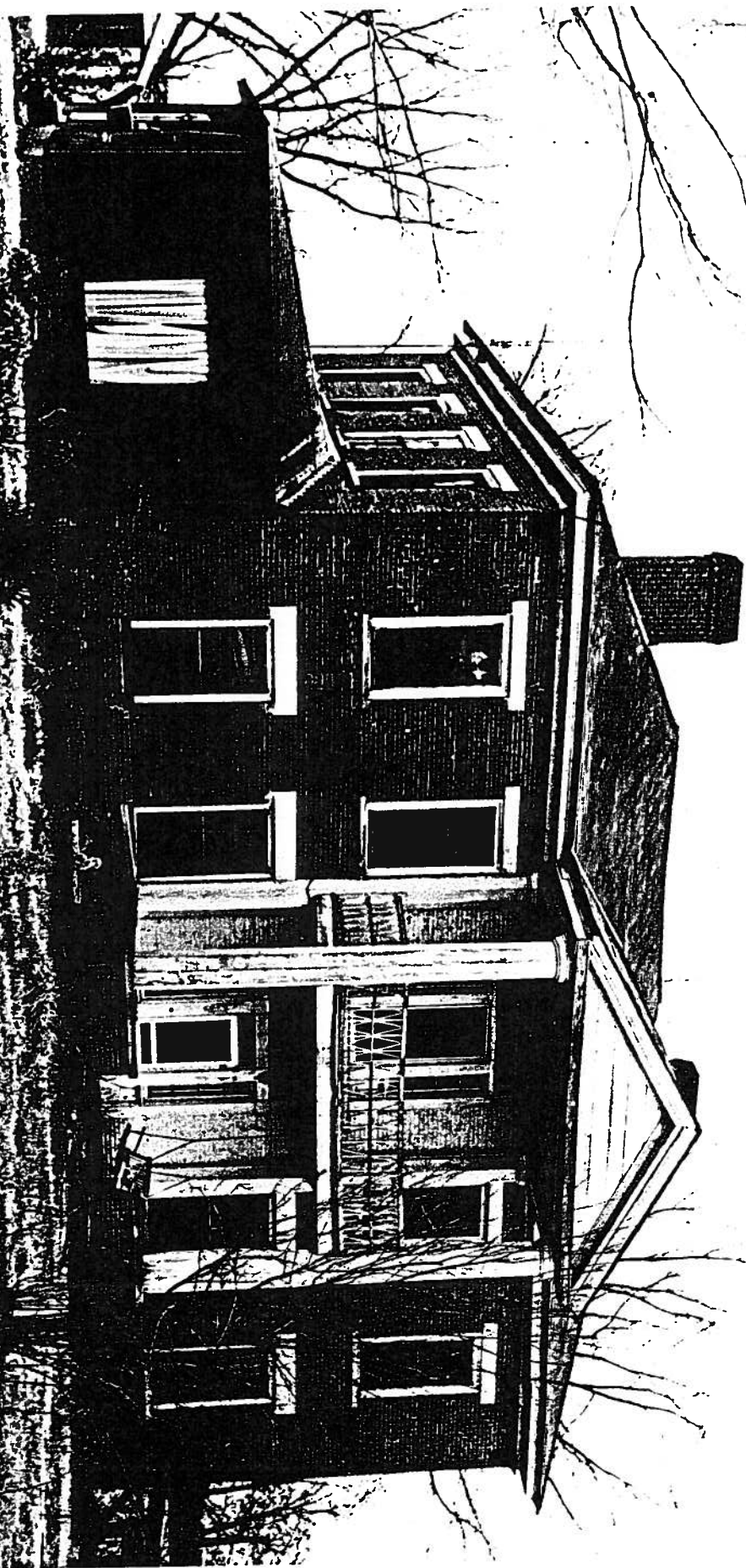
The Journal of Southern History
Southwestern Historical Quarterly

Newspapers

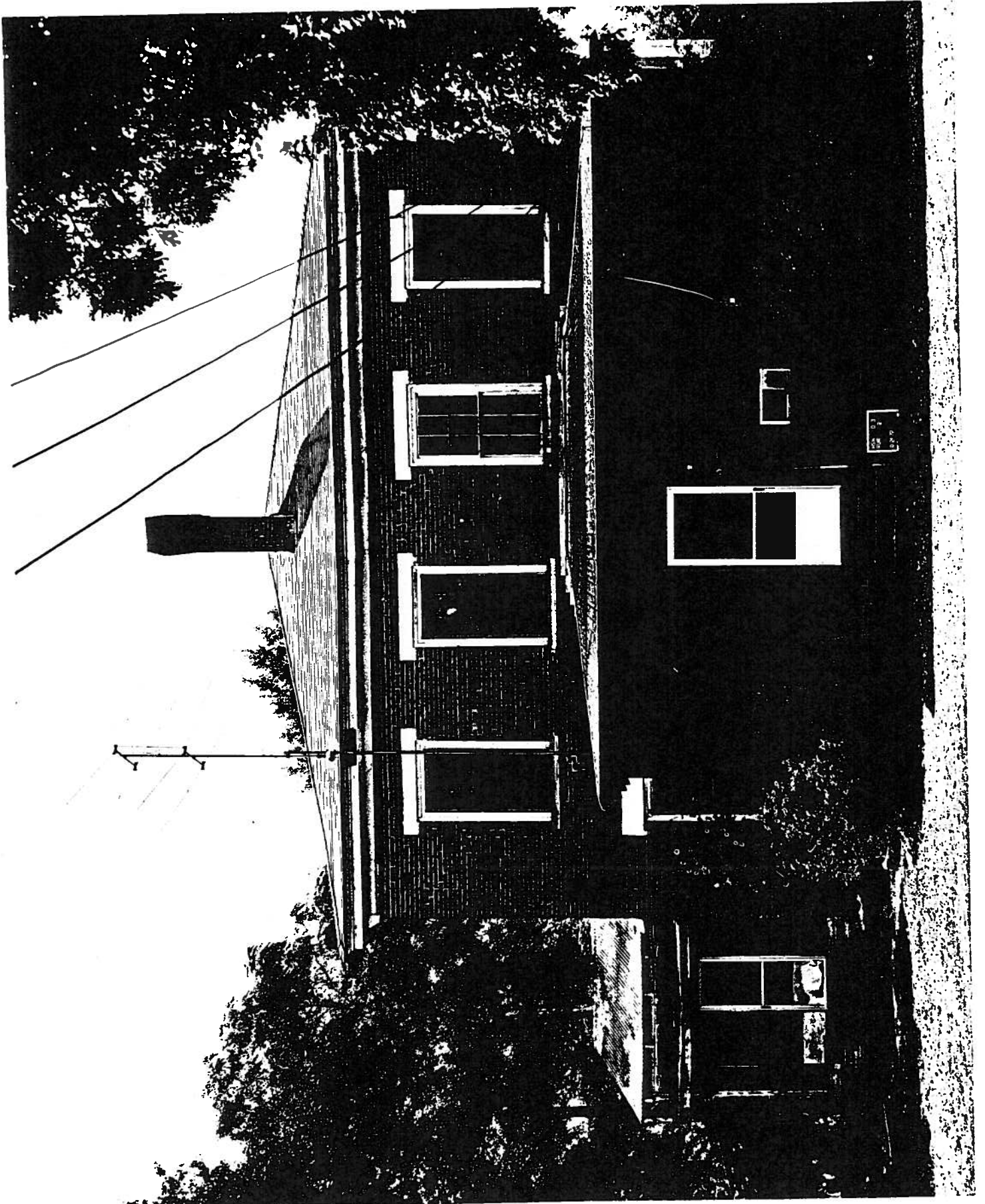
The Marshall News Messenger

Other

Archives, Harrison County Historical Museum



Photograph from THC National Register file



Edgemont, Harrison Co
After ca. 1980 remodeling



0445

MARKER TITLE Edgemont JOB NO. _____
CITY Marshall COUNTY Harrison
TYPE OF MARKER Med. 16x12 Bldg. Marker w/o post DATE 7-22-81
level of significance local

**EVALUATION OF
APPLICATION FOR COMMEMORATIVE MARKER
TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE STATE MARKER COMMITTEE:

Your appraisal of the attached dossier is hereby requested. To assist you in your deliberations, the comments and recommendations of the staff are included. If your own comments are extensive, you may attach other sheets, or write on the back of this one.

Please retain in your file all but this evaluation sheet, which we request that you return to the state office at your earliest convenience. If the majority of the State Marker Committee recommends acceptance, the inscription will be written and sent to you for your approval. At that time you may wish to refer to the history previously submitted.

**Truett Latimer
Executive Director**

Architectural evaluation: Typical of highstyle 5-bay Greek Revival house. Portico, interesting supported by octagonal columns more often associated with High Victorian buildings. Bunched wheat motif on balustrade. Alterations include the windows recently changed from 6/6 to 9/6. Appears also to have sliding glass doors at rear. Recommended for building marker.
Peter Flagg Maxson, 10/12/81

Historical evaluation: Mont Hall was a prominent planter and merchant of early Marshall. His brick home, Edgemont, was built in 1845-47. It was listed on the National Register in 1977 and is also deserving of the building marker. Recommend approval. *C. Williams*
11-2-81

Administrative evaluation: *Recommend approval*
Claire Williams, 11-2-81

RECOMMENDATION OF SMC MEMBER:

Signature, SMC Member Date



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
1511 Colorado
P.O. Box 12276
Austin, Texas 78711

MEMORANDUM

TO :Claire

FROM :Peter

RE :Edgemont

DATE: 2 November 1981

.....

I called Richard Anderson, current owner of Edgemont near Marshall, Harrison County to ask about the windows as shown in recent photographs. As you will remember, photos taken 10-25 years ago showed 6/6 windows throughout, whereas the most recent had 9/6. I was apprehensive that a conscious attempt had been made to 'early it up' a la Williamsburg.

In talking to Anderson, it appears that the old windows were severely deteriorated and had to be repaired. Through some foul-up, the contractor had 9/6 windows specially made in Houston and the owner, while unhappy with the result, did not consider the matter worth litigation. He was told that 6/6 windows of that size would not be structurally sound, which sounds highly improbable. But apparently the repairs were undertaken with best of intentions.



P. O. BOX 12276
AUSTIN TEXAS 78711

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

TRUETT LATIMER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

February 18, 1982

Mr. Bill Southwell, Jr.
The Southwell Company
P.O. Drawer 299
San Antonio, Texas 78291

NO. 6445

#2020
RE: Medallion & plate without post

EDGEMONT

Harrison County

Dear Mr. Southwell:

Enclosed is an application for Medallion #2020 and plate without post for attachment to brick, Edgemont, 3 mi.W of Marshall, Harrison County, Texas.

We would appreciate a rubbing of this inscription.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Frances Rickard
Frances Rickard
fr

SHIP TO: Max Lale
3704 Fitzgerald
Marshall, Texas

Harrison

PRESS CLIPS

TPA Texas Press Service Inc.
A business affiliate of the Texas Press Assn.

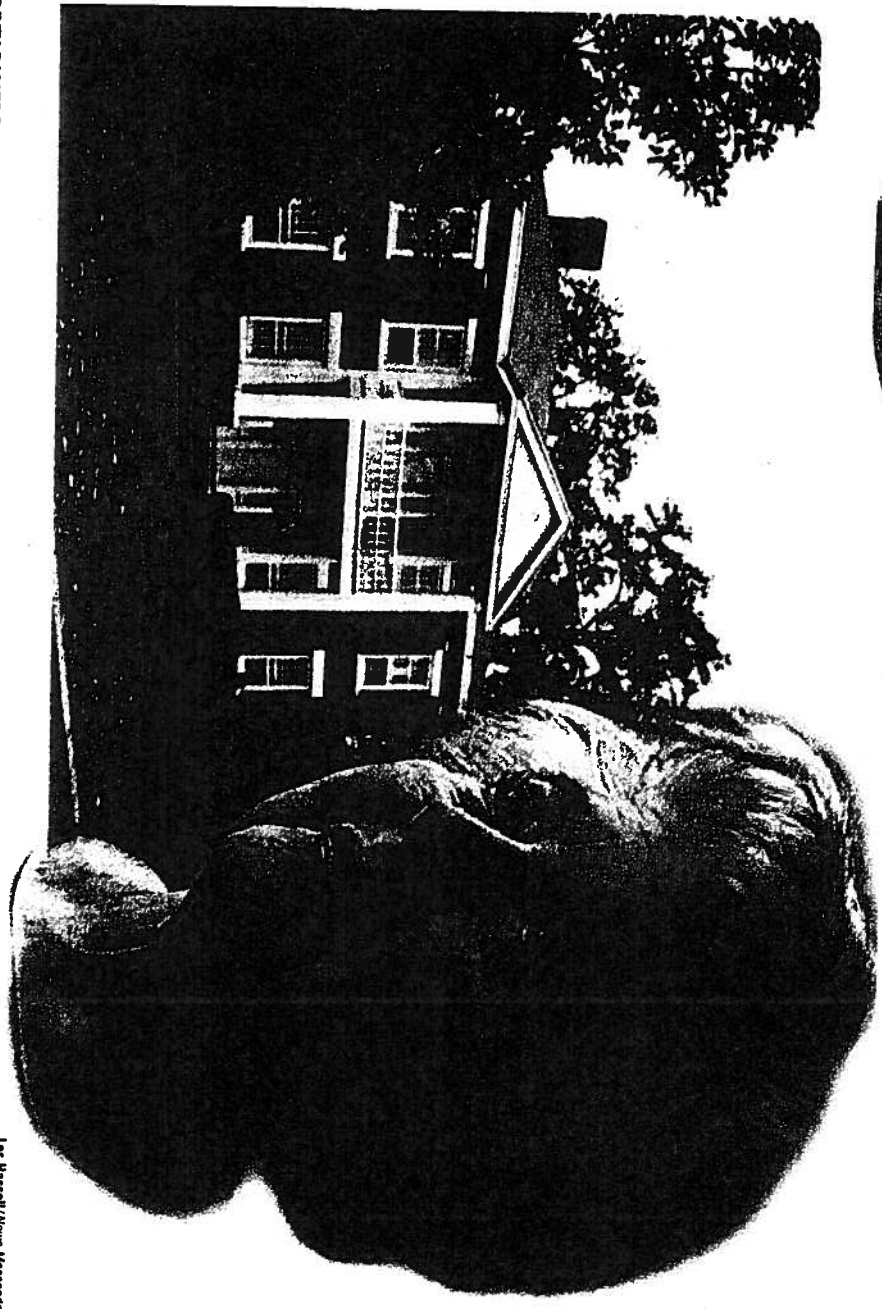
718 W. 5th St., Austin, TX 78701
512-477-6755 FAX 512-477-6759

Marshall News Messenger
Marshall TX

NOV 15 1998

*From Reconstruction
to the Depression,
there were bridge
builders and bridge
burners on the journey
through cultural,
social and political
change in America.*

*Audrey Disiere, raised
in Harrison County,
was a bridge builder.*



AUDREY DISIERE BEGAN educating the the sons and daughters of former slaves and sharecroppers in the 1920s and 1930s while she was growing up at Edgemont, this historic Harrison County plantation.

Legacy of Learning

Las Hassell/News Messenger

By RICHARD DUNCAN
News Messenger

Audrey Disiere is a woman of accomplishment.

In 1967 she and her husband Francis founded Deep South Insurance, which now operates in 12 states and is the largest general insurance manager in the state of Louisiana. In 1995 she donated \$30,000 to East Texas Baptist University for the renovation of Marshall Hall, where she went to school and served as postmistress from 1940 to 1941. She has traveled the world, visiting such exotic locales as London, Florence, Italy.

But perhaps her finest accomplishment, aside from being a wife and mother — which she says are her finest accomplishments — are the fruits of her desire to help the underprivileged, a desire which began at the tender age of 9 and has continued throughout her life.

Mrs. Disiere was born Dec. 19, 1923, to parents Elisha Christopher Warr and Eyle McCauley Colter Warr. When times became hard for her and her parents, she moved to Harrison County to live with a couple she terms her "foster" parents, Judge and Leola Anderson, at the sprawling Edgemont plantation.

Edgemont, which was once as large as 10,000 acres, is located about three miles west of Marshall on old U.S. Highway 80. The two-story, red brick home that sits on the property was completed in 1847, and was constructed of brick fired on the estate itself and laid into place by the hands of slaves.

It was into this environment, this heritage, that young Audrey was placed. Although at the time she didn't understand the impact of Edgemont's past — the forced labor that enabled its construction or the work done by the slaves in the fields to make it prosperous — she did understand its present. She knew that there were young black children working on the farm who needed help.

Although no longer a slave plantation, during the early 20th

century, Edgemont was still home to people accustomed to hard labor for little or no returns. There were a number sharecropper families living on the plantation — the Mitchells, Shaws, Bells, Turners, and Murrells, among others.

Aside from their hard scrabble method of making a living, the families had something else in common.

Mrs. Disiere remembers they all had children who labored on the estate at the expense of any chance to get an education. There simply wasn't time or money enough for such a luxury — there was just too much work to be done.

"It was just horrible to see all of those children going without an education," she said.

But in an age when many grown men and women looked upon uneducated sons of slaves and sharecroppers as acceptable convention, a 9-year-old girl, then known as Miss Audrey Warr, did something about it.

With her foster parents aid and blessing, she began the process of providing some semblance of a school for the children.

She made good use of the resources she had and set out to provide a rudimentary education for the 15 or so children on the plantation.

"I was usually available around 4 o'clock in the afternoon," Mrs. Disiere said. "We'd all sit beneath the shade of the oak trees on wagons and such, and have ourselves a little make-do

classroom. In bad weather, we'd use the milk bar.

fundamentals key to survival, and prosperity in a world that demands at least a basic education.

"I taught them how to count," she said. "We learned the A-B-C's, we took primer books and read the sentences, like 'See Jack run after Spot,' those sorts of things — things to improve their reading skills. We learned all the colors, holidays, and how the months and years worked."

But she wasn't content with simply improving the children's reading and analytical skills.

She said she also sought to teach them social graces, how to be like the men and women.

"We spent a lot of time on manners," said Mrs. Disiere. "I taught them to always say 'yes sir' or 'no sir,' and we talked about Jesus, too. I had a little book I called my 'Jesus book,' and we learned about Jesus and about respecting your father, those sorts of things. I had a lot of fun with the children."

Audrey wasn't the only one having fun — the children and their families enjoyed the experience as well, she recounts.

"They (the families) doubted me a little at first," she said. "But I sincerely saw that I loved it. And they just loved me, and I did them. Later, they all sent me postcards about what the were

doing. We've lost contact now, but all of us have some wonderful memories."

From Audrey's early efforts as a teacher to the present day, she and her family never stopped doing whatever they could to give a helping hand.

When Ruby Burgee, a woman who had been sent to a mental hospital for allegedly killing two people, couldn't get enough to eat and needed employment, it was Mrs. Disiere who gave her a job.

"She (Ruby) was a poor maid," Audrey said, laughing, "but she was a heck of a bodyguard."

Mrs. Burgee repaid her kindness with years of good service. When Burgee's house later burned to the ground, the Disieres rewarded her good faith by building her a new one and paying her utilities to boot.

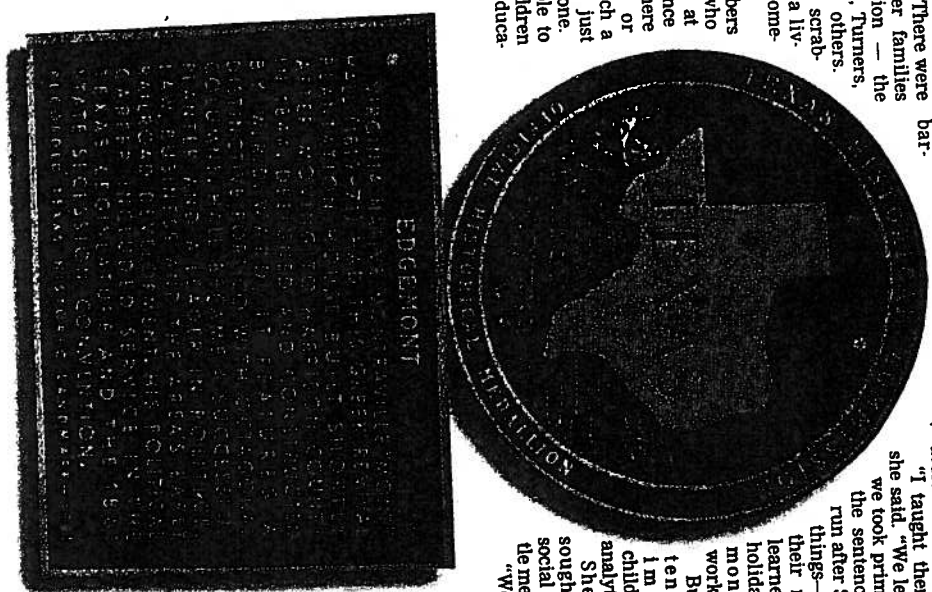
When Henry Bell, a long-time employee of the Disiere's, didn't have the money to send his gifted son to a good school, it was the Disieres who put him through medical school at the University of Chicago.

The Disiere's sponsored Gracie English, conceivably the first African-American real estate saleswoman in Louisiana, as she prepared for her real estate exam.

They also lobbied to bring Southern University and Louisiana State University to Shreveport so that kids without privileged backgrounds could get an education at a reasonable price.

Reflecting on her own years of hardship, Mrs. Disiere explained what motivated her to try to do so much for those who needed help.

"I've seen a lot of impoverished people," she said. "I've been impoverished myself. I've seen unfortunate black and white folks working in terrible conditions for next to nothing. I just wanted all of those people to know that someone cared about them, that someone knew enough about human nature to know that there's a little gold inside of everyone. It's just a matter of finding it and helping them bring it out."



A HISTORICAL MARKER is posted outside Edgemont, completed in 1847.