

February 2015



Commissioner Grady Prestage's
PRECINCT 2 COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

"Commissioner's Corner" (February Edition)



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Commissioner Prestage Makes A Special Presentation



From Right to Left: Precinct 2 Commissioner Grady Prestage; County Judge Rob Hebert; Great Grandson of Thomas Taylor Sgt. Eurel Taylor of the County's Sheriff's Office.

On Tuesday, February 24, 2015 during Commissioners Court, Commissioner Grady Prestage presented a portrait of Thomas Taylor that will be hung in the County's courthouse in Richmond, Texas.

Thomas Lane Taylor was a history maker who left a legacy in area communities of a man "who will protect, preserve and promote our heritage." A pioneer and a family man, he summoned bravery and courage to forge a political foundation for African-Americans during Reconstruction, when he was elected and served honorably as the first black Fort Bend County Commissioner for Precinct 2 from 1878-1882.

A lifelong resident of the region, he established roots as an agriculturist and cattle raiser, prospering and purchasing a homestead in Boone's Bend in Wharton County. In 2015, his grandsons, Chancy

Precinct Two Celebrates Black History: Terry v. Adams



U.S. Supreme Court

According to the Texas Historical Commission (THC Marker File #16252), the U.S. Supreme Court heard a series of significant Texas voting rights cases during the first half of the 20th Century which collectively ended the "White Primary" system established in many areas of the south after the Civil War. White Primaries were unofficial, pre-election polls prohibited to African-Americans that effectively prevented them from having any political influence.

In 1950, African-Americans Willie Melton, a farmer, and Arizona Fleming, a businesswoman, began a suffrage movement in Fort Bend County that led to legal action. John Terry and other black county residents agreed to lend their names as plaintiffs in a class action lawsuit filed against A.J. Adams and other officers of the Jaybird Democratic Association. The Jaybirds functioned as a whites-only political organization that operated unofficial "Straw Elections" to select Democratic nominees for local elections. Since most Texans consistently voted for Democratic candidates, any nominee selected by the Jaybirds invariably won in the general election.

The case was heard in the U.S. District Court in Houston, where the court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, because the Jaybirds were operating as a political party and therefore subject to state and

and Tom Taylor, still reside on their beloved grandfather's land.

Commissioner Taylor's public service is extraordinary as he became an elected official during a tumultuous time following the Civil War. In Fort Bend County, the period was marked by conflicts such as the Jaybird-Woodpecker War in which two Democratic Party blocs vied for control. A heated debate during the struggle was whether African-Americans, such as Mr. Taylor, ought to have an opportunity to participate in politics. The ensuing divide raged for more than six decades.

Reflecting on the era, one of Mr. Taylor's descendants noted: "In the [Jaybird-Woodpecker War], they at least were honest enough to acknowledge that some black men were run out of town, while others resisted. My fifth great-grandfather on my father's side, Tom Taylor, was one of the local black [landowners] who resisted 'eviction' from Fort Bend County." However, under great duress, Commissioner Taylor eventually moved his family to Wharton County.



Inaugural Black History Month Celebration honoring Thomas Taylor.

At an inaugural Black History Month Celebration in February, 2015, the City of Missouri City saluted Taylor's successes by renaming a portion of Lexington Boulevard to "Thomas Taylor Parkway". The four-lane roadway winds in front of City Hall and intersects with Texas Parkway, a major thoroughfare. City, county, and state elected officials were

federal laws protecting voters' rights. The ruling enabled the county's African-Americans to vote in an upcoming Jay Bird Primary Election. An appeal filed by the Jay Birds was heard in 1951 by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, who overturned the original judgment by the U.S. District Court. In 1952, local supporters raised funds to enable an appeal to be filed.

The U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments on January 16, 1953 and on May 4, 1953 in *Terry v. Adams*, the high court upheld the original ruling in favor of the plaintiffs. By 1959, the Jay birds Democratic Association had suspended activities. The *Terry v. Adams* historical marker is located on Willie Melton Blvd. in Kendleton, Texas.



Fort Bend County Heritage Unlimited Museum

For more information, we encourage county residents to visit the Fort Bend County Heritage Unlimited Museum located at 630 Charlie Roberts Lane, Kendleton, TX 77451.

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commpct2@fortbendcountytexas.gov

Write away!

joined at the renaming ceremony by more than 40 of Mr. Taylor's relatives who were elated to witness another tribute to their loved one.

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