

Pronunciation: Thruston = THROUGHS ten

In the northeast Texas town of Mount Vernon, population 24-hundred, (can you check that figure? I saw an estimate of 2,600) yeah I saw that, too...the 2400 came from B.F. but I'll check with City on Monday....old is new again.

Around the courthouse square and in nearby neighborhoods, historic buildings constructed of wood, brick, or stone have been restored and creatively adapted to new uses.

The 1940, native-rock fire station has become the Franklin County heritage museum. An 1894 railroad depot switched to a train museum. Two 1890s commercial buildings house the Chamber of Commerce and a genealogy archive.

There's also a library in a 1900 bank; an art museum in a 1912 jail, and a visitor center in the 1868 home of Henry Clay Thruston—who, at 7 feet 7 inches, was the tallest soldier in the Confederacy!

Two abandoned churches also were resurrected. One, from 1907, became a music hall with monthly chamber music performances; a 1850s house of worship, a residence.

For decades, preservationists used grants and private money to restore local structures, including 60 homes built before World War One. Now, adaptive re-use is a cornerstone of economic development. Funds from a half-cent sales tax and a hotel-motel tax (I'm surprised there are enough places to yield money—I guess the community has bed and breakfast inns in addition to a motel or two?) They don't get that much from hotel-motel, but it's part of the mix...county gov also assists outright and city adm seems good at grants...still use private funds, of course....support preservation, plus grants acquired by the city. In 2009, Mount Vernon adopted zoning ordinances to protect old buildings and to ensure architectural compatibility in new construction.

Mount Vernon and Franklin County participate in the Main Street and Visionaries in Preservations programs of the Texas Historical Commission. The 1912, Neo-Classical county courthouse is undergoing restoration through the commission's historic courthouse preservation program. And in 2009, Mount Vernon was among three cities honored for its preservation efforts with the First Lady's Texas Treasures Award.

Ironically, I'm not sure the irony comes through without the explanation that in good times they tear down and in bad times they maintain...I'd probably just leave that word out...when the Great Depression devastated the area's mostly agricultural economy, home and business

owners couldn't afford new construction, so they maintained what they had—the buildings now restored for new uses.

Local preservationist B.F. Hicks: (begin actualities)

“It's kind of my theme that, sure, nothing gets old if you tear it down. But in our town there was an appreciation for all these buildings spanning at least the last probably fifty years.”
(end actualities).

RESOURCES:

--B.F. Hicks, chr hist presv assn; 903-537-2264

Send CD to him at 201 N. Kaufman, Mount Vernon, TX

--Lee Elliott, City Administrator; 903.537.2252

--Josh Lasserre, THC--512/463-3345