

Centennial celebration honors Gentry Building

A 100-year birthday celebration is in the works Nov. 17 and you're invited.

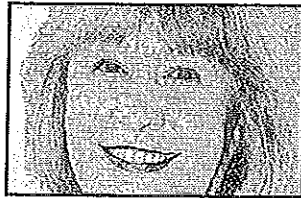
The centennial festivities honors downtown Conroe's oldest construction, the Gentry Building, where the best dressed men on the stylish streets of Conroe once selected the finest in manly chic.

The structure gained its name from its late owners Earle and Iola Gentry. It stands at the corner of Simonton and North Main, a few steps from younger sister Crighton Theatre (1935), and little brother Courthouse (1936) across the street.

It is now owned by Gentry descendent, Anne Gentry Moore, wife of the late A. Lavoy Moore. They had three daughters, two of whom are well known Conroe residents, Susie Moore Pokorski and Bonnie Moore Hanley. The third daughter, Nancy McLemore, lives in Dripping Springs.

Susie Moore Pokorski, state recognized leader of the Young Texas Artists concerts held annually in the Crighton Theatre, reminisced about living in Conroe.

"When I was little," she mused, "I hoped I would live



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Performing Arts Columnist

in Conroe all my life. I felt secure among honest folks. We had the best of small town qualities, with a big city close."

"Even in the 60s, Conroe was an arts town. The Service League brought symphony and museum events to town and to the schools. We even had opera at the refurbished Crighton in the 70s."

Susie remembers life at Conroe High School as well.

"It was so much fun!" she said. "CHS football was really the social scene for us then. Cruising up and down Frazier Street (the Miracle Mile) on weekend nights were the ultimate good times for teenagers."

This family descends from a long line of early Conroe visionaries who were mayors, businessmen, civic leaders, a fire chief, and a police

chief. Anne Moore's husband, A. Lavoy Moore, was a Chamber of Commerce president multiple times, and began a successful plumbing supply business that flourishes still.

Built in 1911, shortly after a second fire that destroyed 65 structures, the Gentry Building was the first to meet the newly mandated code requiring brick, stone or cement that would withstand a similar disaster, should one present itself.

During its century, the Gentry Building has housed a diverse compilation of businesses that include a bank, meat market, barber shop, restaurant, newspaper, District Attorney's headquarters, and Gentry's haberdashery.

In recent times there have been a Peter Lampros Art Gallery, and a decorating design shop known as Hillson's on Main, as well as Jim Pokorski's insurance office upstairs.

Mrs. Moore generously allows the Montgomery County Performing Arts Society to occupy a portion of the charmingly redone upper floor that remains true to the original period.

Today, the upper floor of ten is site for sherry parties,

unique MCPAS dinners, and other gala affairs, even serious board meetings.

Robin Montgomery, a leading authority on Conroe history, writes extensively about this "Miracle City." Not only is his information accurate, his writings are sparkling entertainment as well.

Local attorney Larry Foerster, of the Darden, Fowler & Creighton firm, finds Conroe history fascinating, and has turned his interest into a serious hobby. He spends countless hours compiling precise information that he willingly shares.

Although Foerster is a Baytown native, he came to Conroe in 1978 as an Assistant District Attorney, after a four-year stint as a JAG officer in the U. S. Air Force. Easily assimilating into local culture, he won a role circa 1978 in "Inherit the Wind," with the Little Theatre of Conroe, now the Crighton Players.

Both Montgomery and Foerster imparted information for this column, as did Susie Pokorski.

Along with the momentous Gentry Building Centennial Celebration comes more merriment, as the city

of Conroe observes the longtime presence of another restored landmark, the Madeley Building that sits just around the corner.

It's now home of the Conroe Art League whose gallery grand opening is a part of the Nov. 17 happening.

Eminent sculptor Craig Campobella was chosen as curator of the Gallery at the Madeley Building, and can hardly contain his excitement.

"We welcome the public to come visit and see the prize winning art work on display. About 50 area artists created works in every medium that we are featuring for this grand opening," Campobella said. "And every piece won a ribbon at the Conroe Art League's Fall Judged Show on Oct. 1. The display is titled 'Exhibit 2.' All work will be for sale, but we also invite residents to just visit, see our place, and enjoy being here as much as we do."

Banjo player Joseph Rossier from the Sons of the Republic of Texas will perform inside the CAL gallery.

Other entertainment will be from the Silver Statesmen Barbershop Quartet, with chorus manager Don Cad-

well. Appropriately enough, they will be stationed downtown outside Shepard's Barbershop.

Also providing tuneful diversion will be the Noteables, a seven-piece women's group who sings with keyboardist accompaniment. The Corner Pub owner Rodney Pool expects to provide entertainment as well.

Complimentary snacks will be served at Hillson's on Main, owned by Betty Gibson and Stephanie Hill, and at other locations. An exhibit of vintage autos that harks back to earlier times will assure fitting street ambiance. The celebration goes on from 5 until 9 p.m.

"We especially encourage attendees to dress in fashions appropriate to previous periods," said Theresa G. Thornhill, president of the 150-member CAL.

The centenarian honoree likely will be smiling her secret smile over it all, just as she has for the past 100 years. If she could but talk she'd have a lot of tales to tell.

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