



TRUST IN THE FUND

THC GRANT PROGRAM HELPS PRESERVE HISTORIC PROPERTIES

By Lisa Harvell and Pam Opiela
THC Architecture Division Staff

The two-story wood schoolhouse stands in a field of dry grass at the end of a narrow dead-end road in rural Wheelock, with paint peeling from its century-old wood siding and windows boarded up to keep out the weather and critters. How did the Texas Historical Commission (THC) discover and help fund rehabilitation of this remote historic building?

For starters, the Friends of the Wheelock School House in Robertson County knew where to look. The organization applied for and twice received a THC Texas Preservation Trust Fund (TPTF) grant to repair the building's historic wood windows. Since TPTF funding is very limited, successful applicants often organize their rehabilitation work in several phases, tackling the most critical work first, then moving to other pressing needs.

Each successful completion of a phase helps spark new fundraising for the next. In fiscal year 2018, TPTF grants helped pay for repairing the school's first-floor windows. With that work completed, the THC awarded an additional grant in fiscal year 2020 to repair its second-floor windows.

"The THC is making such a difference in our community, and we'll be forever grateful for their help in restoring the Wheelock School House," said Kathy Hedrick of the Friends group.

The nonprofit organization was started by local residents who partnered with Texas A&M University, the Robertson County Historical Commission, and other county historical and preservation groups to save the old school, located about 20 miles north of Bryan-College Station. Over the years, it has evolved into an important community meeting place.

BENEFITTING THE BORDERLANDS

Preservation partnerships similarly helped with restoration

work at the historically unique and nationally significant Rio Vista Farm Historic District in Socorro, near the Rio Grande just east of El Paso. The THC awarded a TPTF grant to the City of Socorro, which partnered with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to produce a plan to gradually restore all buildings in the Rio Vista Farm complex, some of which are in desperate need of repair.

The complex was used as part of the U.S. Bracero Program to bring Mexican agricultural workers into the U.S. to offset labor shortages after World War II. Now owned by the City of Socorro, the complex includes a senior center and will soon offer more community services.

Further east, the City of Roma has worked with the Noah Cox family's heirs for nearly a decade to secure TPTF funds





for the Noah Cox house, circa 1853. Cox was an early pioneer, attorney, and public servant in the area. The home's fort-like architecture represents the perils of early border settlements and the blend of Mexican, Spanish, and Anglo-American architectural traditions.

The home's first TPTF grant in 2009 funded the installation of a new roof. A planning grant awarded in 2015 allowed for the completion of construction documents and specifications addressing the complete interior and exterior restoration. The most recent grant was used to stabilize the building's exterior with limited interior stabilization of second-floor wood columns and beams.

The Noah Cox house is now owned by the City of Roma. The city leveraged additional financial support from the Roma Economic Development Corporation, which provided matching funds for the recent TPTF grant.

"The Cox family heirs were instrumental in placing the Noah Cox House into the ownership of the city for the best chance of restoring this significant and unique building in the Rio Grande Valley," said Roma City Manager Crisanto Salinas.

HOW TO APPLY

For those interested in applying to the TPTF grant program, an application guide is available each year (typically in December) to public or private entities for eligible historic properties, sites, or archeological projects. Awards are in the \$10,000–\$30,000 range. Applicants eligible to receive grant assistance must provide a minimum of one dollar in matching cash to each state dollar for approved project costs.

There are two steps in the grant application process. First, applicants are required to submit brief forms for the THC to review prior to each year's deadline. The THC will select the highest-priority projects from the initial applications and invite those applicants to move forward to the second step.



Successful applicants continue the process by submitting detailed project proposals and budgets. At both steps, applications are scored in four areas: endangerment, significance, project viability, and special considerations. The THC encourages applications that address issues of ethnic diversity and other historically underserved subjects, groups, and property types. Grant awards are considered annually by the THC, typically in October.

For additional information about the TPTF grant program, please visit thc.texas.gov/tptf or contact the THC's Architecture Division at 512-463-6094.

TOP AND ABOVE: The Rio Vista Farm Historic District near El Paso received a TPTF grant to help produce a restoration plan. Photos: National Trust for Historic Preservation.

OPPOSITE: The Noah Cox house in Roma benefitted from several TPTF-funded projects.