

## **The Fielder Flash**

Arlington Historical Society

March 2025 Newsletter



### **Our Venues**

**Fielder Museum** | 1616 W. Abram Street

**Knapp Heritage Park** | 201 W. Front Street

**Arlington Heritage Memorial Grounds** | 600 W. Arkansas Lane

### **Contact Us**

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### **A note from the editor**



**Jason S. Sullivan, 03-31-25**

Newsletter Editor

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This month's newsletter features a look at the National Medal of Honor Museum that recently opened in Arlington. We also have an article on the 1885 Wreck of Engine 642 at Village Creek.

Fielder Museum has a new exhibit coming in late April—"Planes, Trains, and Automobiles." It should be a fun and fascinating look at local transportation. More info is coming soon. Be sure to check it out!

### **Upcoming Events**

- **April 17**—Texas Author Book Club continues with "Sugar on the Bones" by Joe Landsdale—Fielder Museum, 6:30 PM
- **April 27**—"Planes, Trains, and Automobiles" exhibit begins at Fielder Museum
- **May 15**—Texas Author Book Club continues with "Body and Bread" by Nan Cuba — Fielder Museum, 6:30 PM

## **Local History News**

### **National Medal of Honor Museum opens**

*On behalf of Congress, the President awards the Medal of Honor to those who distinguish themselves "by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his or her life above and beyond the call of duty." Over 40 million people have served in the United States Armed Forces since the Civil War, yet fewer than 4,000 have been awarded the Medal of Honor.*

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After much anticipation, the National Medal of Honor Museum opened on March 25. The museum is in Arlington's Entertainment District, near Choctaw Stadium and the Arlington Museum of Art. While several cities vied for the museum, officials ultimately chose Arlington over Denver. Groundbreaking began in March 2022 and was completed in three years.



Shown here is the museum's exterior.

The museum held a black-tie VIP ribbon-cutting event on March 22. Attending dignitaries included 30 of the 61 living Medal of Honor recipients, President George W. Bush, Texas Governor Greg Abbott, and many others. Numerous Veterans attended, as did actor and activist Gary Sinise, whose foundation tirelessly supports military personnel. The night also included activities for the community, including speeches, live music, fireworks, a drone show, and interactive exhibits.

The museum officially opened on March 25, which is National Medal of Honor Day.

At its core, the National Medal of Honor Museum is a biographical narrative, bringing recipients' stories to life. Visitors journey through their experiences via exhibits that include striking photographs, insightful text, interactive elements, videos, historical documents, and personal effects, all within the larger context of their lives. Curators were careful in presenting the stories—not shying away from war but not glorifying violence, promoting propaganda, or getting too political. It's a challenging endeavor and a delicate balance.

The elevated exhibit deck, supported by five concrete columns representing branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, features 31,000 square feet of exhibit space. Despite its size, the museum can only showcase a small percentage of recipients at once. Eventually, there will be rotating exhibits to include stories about all recipients. The most prominent item displayed is a restored helicopter—a Bell UH-1H Iroquois, commonly known as the "Huey"—often associated with the Vietnam War. Hometown hero Neel Kearby, who received the Medal of Honor during World War II, is honored with a theater inside the museum.

The National Medal of Honor Museum is a world-class attraction—one that is patriotic, purposeful, powerful, and poignant—filled with inspirational stories of courage and valor. Arlington is honored to host this museum, and it will be a tremendous community asset for decades. Expect it to attract visitors and recognition nationwide.



*Photos from the National Medal of Honor Museum*

## The Wreck of Engine 642 at Village Creek

*March 15, 1885—On this day, Texas and Pacific Engine No. 642 met a dramatic end, plunging into the swollen waters of Village Creek. It's believed to still be there.*

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As the late, great local historian Mike Nichols described it: "*The late-winter rains of 1885 had been heavy, and on March 15 rain continued to fall, putting Village Creek between Fort Worth and Arlington in a mood: out of its banks, running high, wide and ruthless.*" (Today, this section of Village Creek is in Arlington.)

Heavy rain led to flooding, with the 70-foot wooden bridge over Village Creek requiring reinforcements. Although workers strengthened the bridge, the rain continued and gnawed at the repairs.

Nonetheless, early on March 15, an eastbound passenger train left Fort Worth en route to Texarkana. Engine 642, an iron behemoth weighing over 70,000 pounds, pulled a handful of cars with it.



*One of the few photos of Texas and Pacific Engine No. 642 believed to exist.  
Photo Credit: UTA Libraries Digital Gallery and the Jack White Photograph Collection*

Shortly into its journey, and after the train descended the infamous "Arlington Hill," Engineer Lyman Roach prepared to cross the Village Creek bridge. Once he saw the water's height—only about four feet from the track and over ten feet higher than usual—he desperately tried to stop. It was too late. As the train progressed, the water-weakened bridge collapsed under its weight. The engine, mail coach, baggage car, and most of the bridge plunged into the rushing water. One car dangled precariously with another derailed.

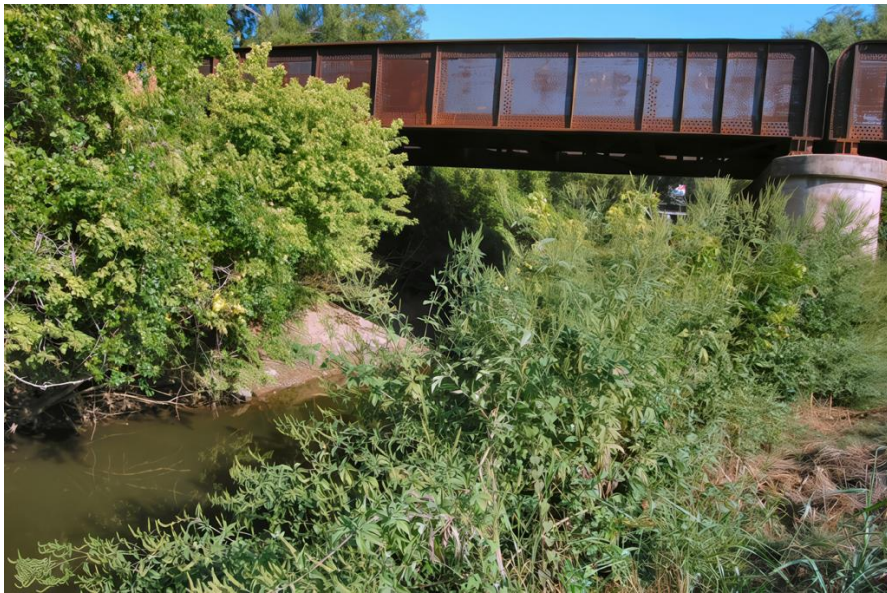
Several injuries were reported; Engineer Roach was badly battered but would survive. Tragically, Fireman J. G. Hobeck (or possibly “Habeck”) perished. The passengers remarkably escaped unscathed.

Pulling the wreckage from the creek proved challenging. The creek bank was steep and muddy, with the engine submerging and sinking deeper into the muck. The other two cars were eventually recovered, and the bridge was back in service within a few weeks. Yet, Engine 642 remained there and was abandoned.

During a 1929 bridge reconstruction, it's believed that workers reported seeing the engine yet left it undisturbed. Numerous searches have since failed to locate it. The exact location is unknown, although it's widely believed to still be in the creek. Excavating a massive 1800s train engine near a former highway (now a busy street) would have been a conspicuous and newsworthy affair. Yet, how does a 70,000-pound train engine get lost in a creek? Despite Village Creek being a tributary of the Trinity River and over 20 miles long, the creek is fairly shallow in most places. It's an enigma.

Today, amid the dense trees and undeveloped land along the creek, it would take a tremendous effort to remove the engine—that is, if you could even find it and if it was feasible to do anything. One would need heavy and specialized equipment to do the job but getting it close enough to the creek would be a challenge. Many also think that such attempts would weaken the soil and render the bridge unsafe, causing further expenses and roadblocks in an already prickly endeavor.

Like a shipwreck lost at sea, the whereabouts of Engine 642 in Village Creek may remain a mystery.



*The Texas & Pacific railroad bridge over Village Creek, built in 1929 to replace the older bridge, can still be seen adjacent to West Division Street on the south side of the road.*