

The Fielder Flash

Arlington Historical Society

April 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

Email: fielderh@swbell.net

Website: www.arlingtontxhistory.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/FielderHouseMuseum

Phone: 817-460-4001

A note from the editor



April marks the Fielder Museum's 45th anniversary. While we didn't have a big celebration, it's an important milestone for us. This month's newsletter features a look back at how it all began and a look towards the future. And speaking of the future, Fielder Museum is revving up for our "**Planes, Trains, and Automobiles**" exhibit, which begins soon with two upcoming events—one of which is an exclusive invite-only for our members. You won't want to miss it. Hope to see you there!

Jason S. Sullivan, April 2025

Newsletter Editor

JasonSSullivan@gmail.com

Upcoming Events

- **May 15**—Texas Author Book Club 2024-2025 season concludes with "Body and Bread" by Nan Cuba —Fielder Museum, 6:30 PM
- **May 24**—AHS Member-Only preview day for new "Planes, Trains, and Automobiles" exhibit, Fielder Museum, noon to 4:00 PM || **Invites coming soon!**
- **May 25**—"Planes, Trains, and Automobiles" exhibit opens to the public, Fielder Museum, 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM

Arlington Historical Society News

Fielder Museum turns 45

In April 1980, Fielder House opened its doors as a museum. From humble beginnings, the museum has carved a path in preservation amid a city destined for progress. There were challenges from the outset, and the journey has had its ups and downs. But we're still here.

Fielder Museum has become interwoven into Arlington's history while also exhibiting and archiving some of our city's greatest historic treasures. We're proud of our museum and the progress we've made. It hasn't been easy; nothing worthwhile ever is. But what's next for the Fielder Museum? Where do we go from here? And how do we, a small, non-profit historical society with limited resources operating a local history museum—and Knapp Heritage Park and the Arlington Heritage Memorial Grounds—stay relevant when museums are increasingly becoming a thing of the past?



Fielder Museum - Home of the Arlington Historical Society

Fielder Museum almost never was

When the prominent Fielder family built their home in 1914, it sat on a 215-acre hilltop farm. The palatial two-story brick home, one of the first in Arlington, was surrounded by groves of oak trees, beautiful fruit orchards, and plentiful vegetable gardens. Fondly known as the “Home on the Hill,” it was the center for many social gatherings. The Fielders lived in the house until the 1950s, with the home staying in the family a short while after the deaths of Mr. and Mrs. Fielder—James died in 1948; Mattie died in 1950. The house was later converted into apartments.

The 1960s and 1970s were pivotal times in historic preservation. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 helped establish policy, criteria, organizations, and public interest. And during the next decade, many across the country found themselves swept up in patriotism for America’s upcoming bicentennial in 1976. Preservation and patriotism intersected and helped promote a new way of thinking and doing.

By the 1970s, decades after the construction of the Fielder home, a bustling city of over 150,000 people had sprouted up around the homestead, nearly swallowing it whole. The farmland was long gone, replaced by busy streets, neighborhoods, and other markings of a growing city.

Shortly after the bicentennial, an article appeared in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram: “*Technology encroaches on Arlington mansion.*” It referred to the Fielder House

and how potential developments in the area could result in the house being demolished. The City of Arlington had purchased the former residence and its property, in an acquisition for right-of-way, for the Fielder-Abram-Division Street overpass. “Location, location, location,” as they say in real estate, and indeed, the house’s locale made its future uncertain. The City contemplated selling the property, but preservationists thought the old house had potential.

A group formed the Fielder House Foundation to preserve the structure and turn it into a cultural and historical museum. They sought \$100,000 for renovations and their first-year operating expenses—a considerable amount at the time, equivalent to nearly \$500,000 today. Time was of the essence, though, as the Arlington City Council agreed to a brief reprieve before trying again to sell the property.

Unfortunately, there wasn’t enough time for an extensive public donation campaign. The foundation hoped to persuade 50 local businesses or organizations to donate \$2,000 each. Donations came in from groups and individuals, but frankly, the foundation needed a miracle. That miracle came from Tom Vandergriff, who generously donated \$50,000 to help the foundation reach its goal. His parents lived near the home, and he had fond memories of seeing the home in his youth. He also wanted to help preserve Arlington’s history.

(Continued on page 5)

A collection of headlines and newspaper clippings from the Fort Worth Star-Telegram related to the early days of Fielder Museum.

Technology encroaches on Arlington mansion

Arlington group hopes to preserve historic home

House savers match grant

**Vandergriff gift helps
Fielder House hit goal**

**History home
at Fielder House**

"Obviously, I think it is important that Arlington, already one of the most important cities in Texas and destined to be one of the greatest, start to preserve something of its history," the former mayor said.

'Old Arlington' comes alive at Fielder House

ARLINGTON/SOUTHEAST TARRANT Fort Worth Star-Telegram MAY 7-8, 1980

Memories of the past
amid a hustling, bustling city

The Fielder House

Historic home preserved by dedication

With the funds secured, renovations began, and preparations ensued to turn the former home into a museum. The museum opened on April 20, 1980, with exhibit halls, classrooms, a lecture room, meeting rooms, and office space. Early exhibits included photographs from the J.W. Dunlop collection and a traveling exhibit about lesser-known Texans. The museum also began acquiring items related to Arlington's history for future exhibits and archives.

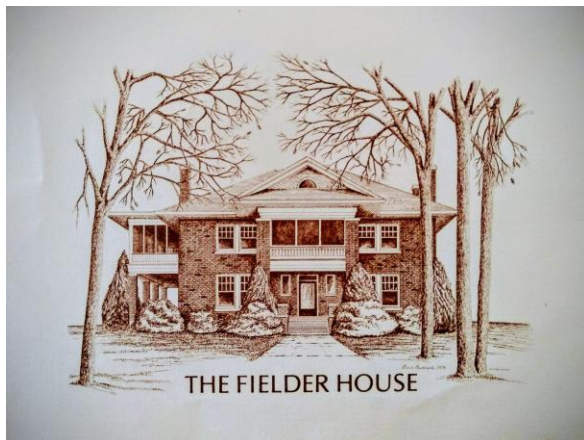
Today, we fondly remember some of those early supporters—Martha Walker, Rene Harris, Arista Joyner, Dorothy Rencurrel, Tom Vandergriff, and countless others—who helped lay the foundation for the Fielder Museum. We wouldn't be here without their dedication, hard work, and sacrifice. Yet, 45 years later, we still face many of the same obstacles as they did back then—funding, engagement, encroachment, competition, and more. It's a different world now, for better and for worse, and patriotism and preservationism are no longer in our favor. But they triumphed, and so can we.

Historical societies must keep one eye on the past and one eye on the future. As Arlington continues to grow and the world continues to evolve, we must do what we can to preserve our past. If we don't do it, who will?

One must think that as the country approaches its 250th anniversary in 2026—its *semiquincentennial*, if you want a fancy word for it—there likely won't be the same fervor of patriotism as there was in 1976. And technology, whether it's social media, smartphones, AI, or whatever comes next, still encroaches on the old Arlington mansion. Indeed, that newspaper headline from 1976 is just as relevant now as it was nearly 50 years ago. Not that technology is our most prominent enemy, but it's not our greatest advocate, either.

However, 2026 also marks the 150th anniversary of when the railroad first came through the area and Arlington became a town. If there was ever a time to reconnect with Arlington's history, now might be the perfect time to do it.

As we start thinking about the Fielder Museum's 50th anniversary in 2030, which seems so far away, but really isn't, we need your support to get there. Local history museums are an endangered species with an uncertain future. And once they're gone, they're gone.



How can you help? Consider becoming a member of the Arlington Historical Society, joining our board of directors, donating money, volunteering time, or helping spread the word about what we have to offer. We need you. And, above all, come out and see us! Museums only thrive when people visit them. Without visitors and supporters, museums simply become a storage unit for the past, and there are already enough of those.