

## **Pine Cone Profile, May 2021**

### **Perky Beisel**

Happy May, East Texas Historical Association members! and may this month's joy and optimism mirror the hope so many of us are experiencing for this year. One of the greatest delights of traveling East Texas roads during this time is passing the fields of bluebonnets and Indian paintbrushes flowering along the wayside—and imagining how much early settlers of the Piney Woods enjoyed their beauty.

It is that gift of imagination blended with her sense of history that has brought Perky Beisel to Pine Cone Profiles this month. Long convinced that the struggles and successes of earlier Texans help us understand the present, Perky brings them all to life. Using everything from oral histories to gravestone markers to museum exhibits, she has helped communities examine their traditions, families explore their roots, and students discover their heritage. Her devotion to authenticity and fairness is evident in her every action, from classroom teaching to session presentations—and here she is, in her own words:

#### ***Where do you live?***

Mount Enterprise (Rusk County)

#### ***How long have you been in East Texas Historical Association?***

Since 2005 (sixteen years)

#### ***What convinced you to join?***

I was an easy sell, I became a member my first month in Nacogdoches. As a public historian, it was immediately clear to me that many ETHA members are involved in public historic projects (archives, museum, historic preservation, oral history, etc.) in some form and fashion, and there is no better way to network than through the diverse membership of such a large regional organization such as the ETHA.

***What is there within ETHA that has kept you a member?***

The quality of articles, presentations, and the general bonhomie and camaraderie of the membership. I joined because it was the right thing to do. I enjoy remaining a member because without fail there's always that "one" session or article in the journal that resonates with me. I distinctly remember the organized labor session at the Fall 2019 meeting in Nacogdoches. All of the presentations were top-notch and easily equal to anything one expects at national conferences. I still remember being warmly welcomed at that first fall 2005 meeting by so many people whom I now consider friends who I look forward to seeing each year.

***What is there about Texas that attracts you?***

So much of East Texas's history is linked to my era of specialty (Gilded Age/Progressive Era 1865-1929) that there is a wealth of research topics and opportunities for collaboration. Texas's built environments and cultural landscapes are so multi-layered and diverse that any drive becomes an exploration.

***What is there about history that attracts you?***

The mystery of past lives, why people made the decisions they did and how they dealt with daily life – their landscapes, homes, barns, jobs, recreation, etc.

***How do you usually pursue history: reading books/articles? writing columns? attending conferences? watching documentaries? filming documentaries? doing research? exploring graveyards? teaching classes? developing exhibits? organizing programs? pursuing genealogies? administering courses? writing books? what else?***

Can I say all of the above? Certainly I teach a lot and read the usual monographs and articles. But most of my focus is on my current projects list that includes oral histories, historic resource surveys, exhibit dismantling and collections management, cemetery cleanings, slide collection digitization, a series of

interpretive wayside panels, organizing the Association for Gravestone Study's national cemetery conference to be held here in Texas (I will prevail over COVID-19!!!) and yes, my own research projects. I watch the usual historical series and documentaries; and I especially enjoy historical mystery series. I highly recommend Jacqueline Winspear's Maisie Dobbs series and C. S. Harris's Sebastian St. Cyr series (by Candice Proctor, PhD and one-time faculty member at Midwestern).

***Why do you love history? Has there been anything in your personal life that led to this? What was it?***

I got bit by the bug early. Born near the Oregon Trail, grew up on a farm where Jesse James and William Quantrill really could have stayed the night, cut and baled hay on a Gilded Age estate, went to college along the Santa Fe trail at the oldest four-year university in Kansas, relatives who told me family stories over and over every summer, and so forth.....

***What is your favorite historical period or historical movement? Why?***

Everything from Ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt (my MA is in Classical Archaeology) through World War II – after that too many living people..... I'm currently learning more about Eastern Africa after visiting Tanzania last year. Anything with agricultural history, architectural history, equestrian history, and cemeteries.....

***Who is your favorite historical person? Why?***

That is really hard.....too many to list.

***If there is one event in history at which you could be present, what would it be?  
Why?***

Right now, the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia – did they really know what they were doing, their legacy? What did they argue about that did not make it into the historical record? What were their intentions? And wouldn't it be nice to know what they REALLY thought of each other?!?