

Research by Lee alum leads to historical marker at Double Bayou Dance Hall

American Studies thesis sets foundation for state recognition of hall known for Texas blues

ANAHUAC, TX — Before he began researching the Double Bayou Dance Hall in Chambers County to complete his thesis for the American Studies course offered through the Lee College Honors Program, alumnus Caleb Moore had never heard of the little one-room gathering spot on the “Chitlin’ Circuit” where blues legends like T-Bone Walker and Big Joe Turner stopped to perform on their way to Houston.

Now, many of the facts that Moore uncovered for his research paper grace a Texas Historical Marker recognizing the dance hall’s significance to the predominately African-American community of Double Bayou and those who flocked to it for generations, eager to end a hard day’s work by dancing to the rich sounds of Texas blues filling the rafters and spilling into the surrounding woods.

Established in the late 1920s and constructed of wood, hog wire, and cedar logs under a tin roof, the original dance hall structure was destroyed by a storm in 1941 and rebuilt nearby just after World War II. For Moore, an honored guest at the historical marker dedication ceremony hosted in late June by the Chambers County Historical Commission, it felt good knowing he played a role in ensuring the story of the Double Bayou Dance Hall will endure even if the building itself does not.

“If people don’t write the history down, it disappears,” said Moore, who graduated from Lee College in May 2013. “Now the dance hall has something that will stay, something that’s set in stone. People can look at the marker to remember and learn about their heritage.”

The American Studies class combines American literature and history, using an interdisciplinary approach to help students examine American culture and gain an understanding of how literature reflects historical events. Retired instructor John Britt started the course and was team-teaching with faculty member Kathleen Sydnor when Moore settled on the Double Bayou Dance Hall as the focus of his final capstone project, which requires students to complete a research paper about an event of literary or historical significance.

“Lee College is one of only a few community colleges in the country with an American Studies program,” said Britt, a past executive committee member of the Chambers County Historical Commission and an award-winning author and historian. “I suggested the topic and (Moore) ran with it. He dove right into the research.”

At the dedication ceremony, descendants of the dance hall’s owners and members of the community listened to live music and reminisced on good times over old photos, mementos and plates of barbecue. Moore was surprised to see his own aunt in one of the shots in the photo archive, reminding him of the lesson he learned while working on the thesis that ultimately brought the historical marker to Double Bayou.

“You can think something doesn’t have anything to do with you, but everything in this world has a connection to you,” he said. “You just have to take the time to learn history, talk to people and explore the world around you.”