

Main Street Marshall



Music, food, and art *lure folks to a downtown revival*



Text and Photographs by **RANDY MALLORY**

Founded as the seat of Harrison County in 1841, Marshall embraces its history. I knew that from visiting its century-old rail depot and venerable courthouse square—lit up at Christmas with millions of twinkling lights. I also knew Marshall as the birthplace of such famous Texans as boxer-grillmaster George Foreman, civil rights pioneer James L. Farmer Jr., broadcast journalist Bill Moyers, and influential blues pianist Floyd Dixon.

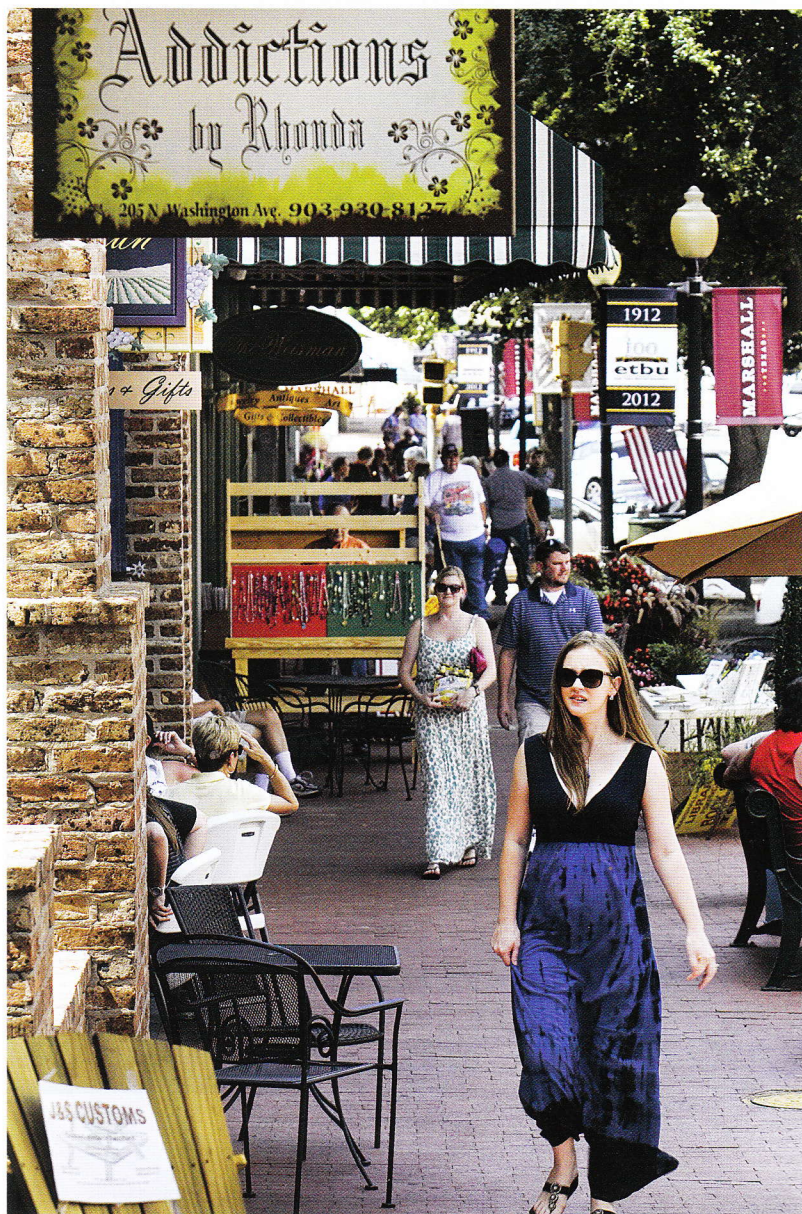
When I heard that Marshall is hopping with new activities downtown and even claims the title “Birthplace of Boogie-Woogie,” I decided to revisit the northeast Texas town hugging the Louisiana line. ▶

LEFT AND RIGHT: On the second Saturday of each month from March through November, downtown Marshall hops with art, music, a car show, and other activities.



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begin my exploration at the 1901 Harrison County Courthouse. Designed by influential architect J. Riely Gordon in the Renaissance Revival style, with corn-yellow brick, pink granite columns, and carved limestone capitals, the courthouse recently underwent a \$10 million restoration. Inside, ornate blue plasterwork adorns the courtroom, and golden light from a vaulted stained-glass cupola filters into the central atrium with its striking cast-iron stairway. Outside, a seven-foot statue of Lady Justice rises from the cupola, surrounded by 12 gilded eagles.



The historic courthouse glows with white lights in November and December during a holiday display known as Wonderland of Lights. Year round, the edifice houses the Harrison County Historical Museum, which offers courthouse tours and stages exhibits on county history. I join a tour with museum director Janet Cook,

ABOVE: Telegraph Park hosts live music during Marshall's Main Street Second Saturday celebrations. LEFT: Dozens of shops and restaurants line Washington Avenue.

who recounts the remarkable expansions of 1925 and 1927. "To add more space, workers cut the east and west wings



free, top to bottom, put them on rails, and slowly moved them out,” she explains. “They filled in the gap so skillfully, you can hardly tell they were moved.” I look closely, and she’s right.

I find another skillfully restored structure a few blocks south of the square at the 1871 mansion called Maplecroft. It’s the centerpiece of the Texas Historical Commission’s three-acre Starr Family Home State Historic Site, where seven structures interpret an early Texas dynasty. After the Civil War, the Starr family owned a million acres across Texas and helped build the state’s railroad and cotton industries. Freshly refurbished inside and out and filled with family heirlooms,

Maplecroft embodies the Starrs’ elegant life at the turn of the 20th Century.

“The Starrs were fashionable but not flashy,” curator Megan Maxwell tells me on a tour of the stately parlor and dining room, which are ornamented with Louis XVI-style furniture. She points out graceful fireplace mantels that look like marble but are actually made of faux-finished slate. I’m amazed at the patterned floor of the downstairs hallway; it’s a reproduction of the original hand-painted canvas floor cloth.

One block east of the square, at Houston and Lafayette streets, a vertical pattern grabs my attention. Blue, green, red, and yellow geometric metal shapes cover the

exterior of an otherwise nondescript building. In 2009, Uruguayan artist Volf Roitman installed the art piece at the request of the building’s owner, transforming a

For more on the 1871 Maplecroft mansion, see texashighways.com/webextra

plain brick wall into an abstract artwork.

Two blocks down North Bolivar Street, youngsters work on their own art outside the Michelson Museum of Art. Inside the museum, more kids and parents hear a drummer play in a gallery filled with early-20th-Century American paintings, including pieces by the museum’s



namesake, Russian-American artist Leo Michelson, whose widow chose Marshall as the beneficiary of his life's works. The museum also houses a permanent collection of African masks and Chinese opera puppets, and hosts traveling exhibits.

Today's artful goings-on are part of Main Street Second Saturday, a monthly arts and entertainment event started in 2004 by the Main Street program to draw locals and visitors downtown.

Most Second Saturday activities happen on North Washington Avenue, so I head that way. En route, I nod to guests

relaxing on the porch swing of the Wisteria Garden Bed and Breakfast, a Queen-Anne style home built in 1884, then pass a Greek Revival house whose backyard has been turned into a live-music venue called Charlie's Backyard Bar.

On East Rusk Street, artists display colorful paintings, and vendors around the corner offer arts and crafts along two closed-off blocks of North Washington. I spy folks sipping lattes under sidewalk awnings outside the historic Weisman Center. Opened in 1900 as the "first department store in Texas," the building was donated to the city, restored in 2001, and subsequently reopened as

a retail cooperative of 15 vendors.

I browse the high-ceilinged marketplace, impressed by the mix of old and new items. Here are gourds trimmed in woven pine needles beside letter openers with animal-head handles. There are antique box cameras and fancy ink pens next to alabaster sculptures and fused-glass jewelry. The third level showcases 10 area artists, while the mezzanine offers antique furnishings and a view of the espresso bar and restaurant on the ground floor, Central Perks. Sipping a glass of spiced iced tea and enjoying tomato basil soup, a tasty sandwich, and seasonal fruit, I gaze out Central Perks'



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hopped-up hotrods now rolling in for Second Saturday's car show. By nightfall, 200 classic cars and 2,000 visitors jam the street.

Across from the Weisman, I poke around an early-1900s furniture store turned into a decor and gift shop called Charley & Bella's. Its upscale offerings range from eclectic clothing and furnishings to Italian glassware and fine china—all sectioned off by walls of salvaged windows and doors.

The 1871 Maplecroft mansion is the centerpiece of the Texas Historical Commission's Starr Family Home State Historic Site, which interprets an early Texas dynasty.

A few doors down, folks flock into a compact emporium called Under the Texas Sun, which offers 85 beers, 70 wines, and gourmet foods. Off-premises consumption is required, but customers

simply step out the door onto a covered patio to enjoy their selections. (On most Mondays, the patio even features an acoustic jam of local musicians.)

At the corner of North Washington and Austin Street, I check out the Blue Frog Grill, a popular eatery with a fine view of the courthouse. Owner Shawne Somerford recommends the Jekyll Isle crab cakes (red claw meat with herbs) and the catch of the day (fresh halibut topped with a tomato-onion-olive-raisin salsa). "We make our own everything here," she says, and I believe her after diving into the beautiful, well-prepared cuisine.

As daylight wanes, local musician Grady Lee cranks out a bluesy tune on the restaurant's small stage. It's part of a live-music series called Words and Voices, which is held at the Blue Frog each Second Saturday. "There was no live music downtown when we started Words and Voices nine years ago," Lee tells me, "but now you find music downtown almost every night."

After dinner, I step across the street to Telegraph Park, where Robin & the Bluebirds, a rhythm-and-blues band from Shreveport, performs while dancers circle across the lawn. The park terminates at the square with a life-size statue of two telegraph operators, marking this as the site of Texas' first telegraph office in 1854.

plate-glass windows to the scene on North Washington.

Next door, I admire the 1880s Knights of Pythias Hall, recently adapted as a visitors center and offices of the Marshall Convention and Visitors Bureau. On the sidewalk out front, the Marshall Symphony's string quartet performs a spirited arrangement of

"When the Saints Go Marching In." It's the perfect accompaniment for the souped-up Corvettes, maxed-out Mustangs, and

ABOVE: Each May, the Starr Family Home State Historic Site (open Tuesday through Sunday for tours) hosts a croquet fundraiser. RIGHT: Antiques at Three Oaks B&B include a Mughal temple lion.



Before night's end, I catch a few tunes from local blues veteran Bobbie Mercy Oliver at Cajun Tex restaurant, just off North Washington on Grand Avenue. Oliver marshals deftly through "Baby Scratch My Back" with alternating guitar and harmonica playing. Behind him stretches a mural of a swamp scene, and another wall depicts a ranch scene. I learn that owners Johnny and Donna Horne hail from Louisiana and Texas, respectively, and their heritage is reflected in both decor and menu. Seated at booths and picnic tables, patrons feast on Cajun cuisine like spicy gumbo and crawfish po-boys alongside Lone Star favorites such as chicken-fried steak and chili.

Cajun Tex restaurant owners Johnny and Donna Horne hail from Louisiana and Texas, respectively. Their heritage is reflected in both decor and menu.

end my day seven blocks from the square on North Washington at Three Oaks Bed and Breakfast, where owners Donna and Mike Musselman have adorned the 1895 Victorian mansion with museum-quality antiques. The entry alone boasts a Mughal temple lion made in the 1400s of gold wire and semi-precious stones, an Italian apothecary cabinet (ca. 1800), and an eight-foot mirror, silvered in diamond dust, that survived the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

Three Oaks B&B lies in the Ginocchio National Historic District, a block from the restored 1912 Texas and Pacific Depot, which now houses a railroad museum and Amtrak stop. After a restful night's sleep, I venture through the tunnel under the tracks, pass T&P steam engine No. 400

(built in 1915), and check out the museum. Period photos of rail workers and sleek locomotives line depot walls. Displays chronicle T&P history and that of the adjacent Ginocchio Hotel (currently being refurbished). At the telegraphy exhibit, I try my hand at Morse code on a signal key linked to another key in the next room. The depot's second-floor terrace offers a view down North Washington to the courthouse square, where I'd heard so much music the night before.

Later, I learn the connection between

The boat suspended from the ceiling at Cajun Tex restaurant came from a fishing camp at nearby Caddo Lake.

the railroad and Marshall's claim as birthplace of boogie-woogie, a style of piano-based blues that musicologists such as Alan Lomax have long linked to East Texas of the late 1800s. In fact, research by San Antonio physician, musicologist, and pianist Dr. John Tenison pegs the earliest boogie-woogie to the Marshall area, with African-American musicians honing the rhythmic piano



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style in barrelhouse bars at logging and railroad-construction camps. The style's characteristic rolling bass line, it is said, mimics the beat of a train on a track. Marshall became the headquarters of the Texas & Pacific Railroad in the 1870s, and local black musicians spread boogie-woogie as they traveled the ever-advancing rail lines. Boogie-woogie gained national popularity by the 1930s and shaped such musical styles as blues, Western swing, jazz, and rock-and-roll.

return to the downtown square on Wednesday to hear that musical heritage in action at a restaurant and pub called OS², which occupies a structure dating to the early 1900s. Here, owner Jan Black offers steaks, seafood, and vegetarian fare, and also stages a weekly performance called Boogie-Woogie Wednesday, along with singer-songwriter shows on weekends. The bar is packed with guests grooving to the rhythm-and-blues sounds of local band Anthony G. Parrish & Friends.

As I tap my feet to the contagious beat, I enjoy a fork-tender filet mignon with béarnaise sauce, a side of steamed mixed vegetables, and an ice-cold beer. I glance around the room—watching the crowd of locals and visitors enjoy

Designed by architect J. Riely Gordon in the Renaissance Revival style, Marshall's 1901 courthouse offers tours Wednesday through Friday.

music with deep local roots, played within the shadow of a grand restored courthouse—and I'm grateful that much of what makes Marshall old is new again. **TH**

Tyler-based writer and photographer **RANDY MALLORY** enjoys exploring Texas' small towns and arts communities. Look for his story on Winnsboro in the January issue.

→ TH ESSENTIALS

Marshall

MARSHALL lies at the intersection of Interstate 20 and US 59, 150 miles east of Dallas. For visitor information, contact the Marshall Convention & Visitors Bureau, 903/702-7777; www.visitmarshalltexas.org. Following are sites in the story.

Attractions and Shops

The Harrison County Historical Museum is in the Harrison County Courthouse (1 Peter Whetstone Square, 903/935-8417; www.harrisoncountymuseum.org). Hours: Wed-Fri 10-4, with courthouse tours at 11 and 2.

The Weisman Center, 211 N. Washington Ave., 903/934-8836; www.theweisman.com.

Charley & Bella's, 216 N. Washington Ave., 903/938-6445; www.charleyandbellas.com.

Under the Texas Sun, 207 N. Washington Ave., 903/935-7678; www.underthetexas.sun.net.

Michelson Museum of Art, 216 N. Bolivar St., 903/935-9480; www.michelsonmuseum.org.

Starr Family Home State Historic Site, 407 W. Travis St., 903/935-3044; www.visitstarrfamilyhome.com.

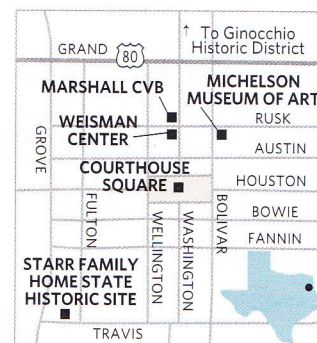
Texas & Pacific Railway Museum & Depot, 800 N. Washington Ave., 903/938-9495.

Dining and Nightlife

Central Perks is inside the Weisman Center, 211-A N. Washington Ave. Call 903/934-9902; www.centralperks.us.

Stottford House restaurant, 210 E. Houston St., 903/935-7818.

R&R Bakery and Coffee Shoppe, 115 E. Houston St., 903/935-3380; www.randrbakeryandcoffeeshop.com.



OS² Restaurant & Pub, 105 E. Houston St., 903/938-7700; www.os2marshall.com.

Blue Frog Grill, 101 W. Austin St., 903/923-9500.

Charlie's Backyard Bar, 303 N. Columbus St., 903/472-4050; www.charliesbackyardbar.com.

Cajun Tex, 104 W. Grand Ave., 903/935-7719; www.letseat.at/cajuntex.

Lodging

Wisteria Garden Bed and Breakfast, 215 E. Rusk St., 903/938-7611; www.wisteriagarden.com.

Three Oaks Bed and Breakfast, 609 N. Washington Ave., 800/710-9789; www.threeoaks-marshall.com.

Events

Main Street Second Saturday features art, music, shopping, classic cars, and food downtown on the second Saturday of each month, March through November. Contact the Main Street Program at 903/935-4417; www.marshalltexas.net/departments/main-street.

Wonderland of Lights Festival runs Nov. 21 through Dec. 31 (closed Dec. 24). Contact the Convention and Visitors Bureau (see above).

