

Through the Looking Lens

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By Jamie Twitchel

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Preserving Texas's past in photographs

Humans are sentimental creatures. We fill our homes with trinkets and souvenirs, things with memories and feelings stuck to them like glue. Things we can't get rid of, because it feels like if we part with the object, we part with the memory. Drive across the state, and you'll see the same reluctance to let go writ large. Over the past century, old buildings and objects have slowly cluttered Texas, left like a child's toys scattered across its vast landscape. Some have found owners to use and maintain them. Others lie abandoned, waiting to be remembered.

Fine art photographer, digital media artist, and print maker Jack Knox has made it his mission to remind us of all the "quaint, curious, and unusual" places and objects Texas offers. "These are things that exist in the here and now, but they speak of a time that we can only remember," Jack says. "They provoke a nostalgic feeling in our minds, but that's part of the love of Texas."



After eight years of traversing and photographing the state, Jack turned to his daughter, Lora Gray—book designer and Wimberley resident—to make sense of the photographs and notes. Their efforts resulted in the book *Texas: Ghost Towns, Gas Stations, and a 20-Foot Cowboy*.

Coincidentally, it was a visit to his daughter's home that started his pictorial quest. "I was on Highway 281 toward Spicewood to visit family when I noticed an old metal gas station in Adamsville with a sign saying, 'Luke Jones Music Hall.' A rusty little gas pump was there along with a parking area," Jack recalls. "I'd passed by several times on those trips. Finally, the clouds were just right, so I stopped and photographed it."

Over the years, many gas stations have caught his eye, like the Texaco station in Driftwood. Though no longer used for pumping fuel, it's in good condition and is a favorite picture-taking spot for a nearby wedding venue.



The Mobil station in Jarrell is a can't-miss attraction, too. It's covered head to toe in highway road signs and auto part advertisements from yesteryear. A neon Pegasus flies above, keeping an eye on traffic below. For Jack, it's things like the Mobil Pegasus and the waving Texaco man that create a lifelong fondness for gas stations. "They're such an important part of a town, and a lot of effort went into their architecture," Jack says. "On evening rides as a kid, I insisted that my dad drive by those places so I could see them."

Evening rides and family road trips pervaded his childhood, helping him develop an appreciation for small towns, the aesthetics of old buildings, and all things out of the ordinary. Which is why Wimberley's "A Little Bit of Heaven" mural was a must-have image for Jack.



"I'd been aiming for the mural in Wimberley for a long time," Jack says. "I recently spent several days there taking care of my daughter's farm while the kids were on vacation. I finally got to photograph it one evening before dark."

Even though his book is published, Jack still explores the state, looking for more treasures to document. "I try to find places that have something to photograph, to preserve, to take with me. Texas has so much to see; it's so different," Jack says. "We see it when we travel through the state on our way to New Mexico, Louisiana, or Oklahoma. We see the variety of what's here, and it just gets in your blood. There's no place I'd rather live."



Jack Knox is an award-winning fine art photographer, digital media artist, and print maker turned author. His work has been featured in many magazines and in galleries across the country. To view Jack's work and learn more about his current and upcoming projects, visit www.jackknox.com.