

“Longtime community museum, culture supporter dies at 94” by Elliott Blackburn, *Avalanche-Journal*

Frances Holden, the ambitious and driven woman who, with her husband William Curry Holden, was responsible for much of modern Lubbock’s museum and cultural development, died Monday. She was 94.

Friends remembered the Plainview native as a striking beauty who adopted her husband’s passions and shrewdly ensured major cultural projects reached fruition. The Holdens helped guide the National Ranching Heritage Center, Texas Tech Museum and Southwest Collections to completion. “Fran was an icon for the preservation of culture in the Southwest,” said Texas Tech University vice-provost Jim Brink. “They were never satisfied, always thought we could do better, always helped us to do better, and Fran maintained Curry’s vision and Curry’s energy long after Curry was gone.”

Holden’s lifelong relationship with Texas Tech began in 1933 and, after marrying her professor, William Curry Holden in 1939, continued through projects tied to the university for the rest of her life.

The couple worked to transform the Tech museum from four relics stored in the chemistry building attic—among them, a burro saddle missing its leather—to the facility on a 76-acre tract of campus. Much later, both would work to help establish the Southwest Collections and on the founding committee of the National Ranching Heritage Center.

John Lott, a retired rancher who worked on that committee with the Holdens and a longtime friend of the couple, remembered her carrying a notebook to stay on top of everything she was involved in—a notebook never in her purse for very long, he said.

Volumes of notes would later be donated to the university collections, he said. “Curry had ideas and Fran would carry them through,” Lott said.

To make sure their cultural plans for Lubbock flourished, she freely tapped every resource she could reach, her friend Isabelle Howe said. She phoned U.S. Congressman George Mahon every morning while he sat on the powerful Ways and Means committee, telling her ally what needed to be happening in Lubbock, Howe said. “She knew a lot of very influential people and was not afraid to capitalize on that,” Howe said. Holden had a rapier wit and was “tough as nails,” Brink said, but always gracious and very well dressed.

Louise Underwood, who shared many of the Holdens’ interests and worked on committees with Frances, said Holden was a striking model at charity events and determined when it came to a favored project.

“They were leading lights in the cultural world,” Underwood said. “They worked so hard, and she was always so good about pursuing whatever good they had decided to do.”

Curry Holden died in Lubbock in April 1993. Arrangements had not yet been set Monday afternoon.