

Griffin

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tribution to American literature and the changes to our country," Bush said.

In January, the Friends of the Mansfield Public Library learned that their application for the designation had been approved by the Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations (ALTAFF), a division of the American Library Association. Landmark status has only been awarded nationally 115 times since 1986 and only four other times in Texas, said Jillian Kalonick, marketing/public relations specialist for ALTAFF. Other Literary Landmarks honor Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner, Robert Frost, Mark Twain and Willa Cather. Honored authors must be deceased and must have significant ties to the landmark, Kalonick said. The other Texas landmarks include the O. Henry House and Museum in Austin, the Menger Hotel in San Antonio (which honors O. Henry, Theodore Roosevelt and Oscar Wilde), Katherine Ann Porter's home in Kyle and the Lorenzo D. Zavala State Archives and Library Building in Austin.

Bush has been at every Literary Landmark dedication in Texas, except the Menger Hotel, she said.

"Mrs. Bush, in her remarks, made a point of emphasizing how special this is," said city spokesperson Belinda Willis.

Bush, who said she read "Black Like Me" in the ninth grade, was surprised to find out that Griffin wrote it. She knew him from his book, "Land of the High Sky," about her hometown of Midland.

"I never knew until I started working on this talk that he was also the author



Former first lady Laura Bush poses with the children and grandchildren of John Howard Griffin. Special to the News-Mirror/Belinda Willis

of 'Black Like Me,'" Bush said.

Having a former first lady and hundreds of people attend the dedication made it very special, Griffin's children said. After word of Griffin's experiment got out in 1960, his family received death threats and he was hanged in effigy from the spotlight at Broad and Main streets in downtown Mansfield. Griffin's children remember comments like "Is your father still a (racial slur)?" and "You don't look half black" while growing up in Mansfield.

"This is a different town," said son John Howard "Johnny" Griffin, 55, of Arlington.

"Maybe they've finally changed their minds," said son Greg Griffin, 53, of Mansfield.

Daughter Mandy Griffin Fenton, 44, of The Colony said her father, who died in 1980, would have loved the Literary Landmark.

"He would be thrilled to know that what he did, people are still paying attention to it," she said. "It was probably more than he expected, definitely not that 50 years later and people are still talking about it."

"Black Like Me" has been translated into 14 languages and sold more than

10 million copies. It still sells about 50,000 copies a year.

The book, which is required reading in some college classes, has never been out of print. Wings Press is releasing 12 of Griffin's works as eBooks this year, said Robert Bonazzi, his biographer.

Morgan Atkinson, filmmaker of the new Griffin documentary, "Uncommon Vision: The Life and Times of John Howard Griffin," said he was a little nervous about the Sunday afternoon screening of the film at Mansfield's Farr Best Theater.

"Normally at my screenings, I'm the authority (on Griffin)," Atkinson told the standing-room-only crowd at the theater. "Here, you all know more about him than I do."

Atkinson spent five days in Mansfield a couple of years ago to get a feel for the town and to meet the Griffin family, he said.

"When I think of John Howard Griffin, I think of courage, commitment and a love of knowledge," Atkinson said. "That's what the Friends of the Library are all about."

The Friends sponsored the dedication, paying \$750 for the bronze plaque that will be mounted near

the library's front door in Griffin's honor.

"We're really proud of this honor and that the Mansfield community turned out to support the library," said Paula Highfill, president of the Friends of the Mansfield Public Library. "I think programs like this prove what a vital part of the community the library is. We're bringing history to life, not just checking out books."

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