In January a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark plaque was erected in front of the home at 718 East Taylor Avenue. It was authorized by the Texas State Historical Commission in 2000. The legend on the marker reads:

Howard E. and Mary Butt House

In 1929 entrepreneur Howard E. Butt moved the headquarters of his developing grocery business to Harlingen. The following year Howard and his wife, Mary, bought this house from its builders, John and Ruth Townsend, a few months after its completion. During the 1930s, Howard's business (H.E.B. Grocery) grew to more than 28 stores in the Rio Grande Valley and South Texas. Known also for their philanthropy and civic work in Harlingen, Howard and Mary Butt lived here until 1940 but owned the house until 1943. Distinguished by its Palladian windows and spiral entry columns, the architectural style of the house is best described as Italian Renaissance.

John D. Townsend, who had the house built, was an agent for the Kansas Life Insurance Co. The two story brick house originally had a blue tile roof and still retains Austrian glass chandeliers, ornate plaster moldings, a stained glass window, spiral entry columns, and parquet and oak floors. The Butts added the tennis courts on the west side.

Brief histories of both Howard and his wife Mary are worth recounting. He was born in Tennessee in 1895. His father was a pharmacist, who because he suffered from tuberculosis, moved the family to Kerrville where the climate was thought to be drier. Howard's mother, Florence, opened a small grocery store there in 1905 in order to support the family of five. By age sixteen Howard, the youngest of three boys, began to manage the store. He was a smart young man and was valedictorian of Tivy High School when he was graduated in 1914.

He gave himself the middle name Edward before enlisting in the U. S. Navy in World War I. Howard served in the years 1917-19 and for part of his service was an aide to the commandant of the Great Lakes Naval Station. Returning to Kerrville he joined his mother in managing the store which in 1921 he converted to cash and carry, then a risky venture when his competitors were still offering credit.

He attempted to expand into other towns and even into animal feed, but all his enterprises failed. His marriage to Mary Elizabeth Holdsworth of Kerrville in late 1924 appeared to change his luck. In 1926 he opened a successful store in Del Rio. Borrowing $38,000 he purchased three small stores in the Rio Grande Valley. By 1935 he began calling them the H. E. Butt Grocery Company but by then had already begun expanding, such as entering Corpus Christi in 1931. It was in 1946 that the stores began to carry the H.E.B. sign, later updating the logo to H-E-B.

In Harlingen he teamed with R. L. Hill, the ice manufacturer here, and together in 1928 they built the giant canning factory of several hundred thousand square feet. It still stands at Jackson and F Streets. This factory served the company well for it produced over 55 products and was especially valuable in the World War II food effort. It
employed over 1,500 people during its peak periods. Van Snell, who served the city in numerous civic capacities, was cannery manager for decades.

As early as 1933, Mr. Butt who was a Mason and devout Baptist, established the H.E. Butt Foundation which helped pioneer philanthropic foundations in Texas. Together with his wife Mary, who had been born in Loma Vista, TX into a large family, they began projects that would address the health and educational needs of South Texas families. They provided seed money for libraries, tennis courts, and swimming pools for smaller South Texas communities. Later he would serve on several college boards.

Mr. Butt assisted greatly in developing the new Valley Baptist Hospital, the Harlingen Public Library, boy scouting, in the establishment of the TB Hospital here, and donated the original building housing the RGV Museum. He died at age ninety-five on March 12, 1991.

Mary Butt, when living in the Valley, worked vigorously to promote programs dealing with crippled children and child welfare as well as pushing tuberculosis diagnosis and treatment. She brought the first equipment to the Valley to evaluate hearing and vision for elementary school children. After moving to Corpus Christi she continued with numerous charitable and civic endeavors. Her work was recognized with honorary doctorate degrees and many awards. She died October 6, 1993 at age 90.