

Star of the Republic Museum

NOTES

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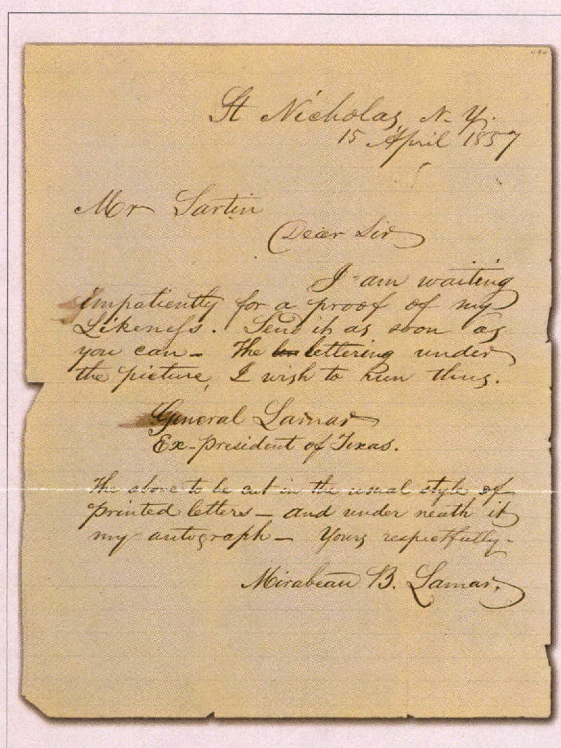
Elections in the Republic of Texas:

NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART, PART II

Mudslinging and personal attacks have been a part of politics in the United States since its founding; it was no different in the Republic of Texas (1836-1846). In the last issue of Notes, we examined the presidential election between Sam Houston, Stephen F. Austin, Henry Smith, and T.J. Green, in which Houston easily won. In this issue, the 1838 election, which was not short on drama, will be detailed. The remaining two elections will be covered in the following issues.

Sam Houston served only two years as the first elected president of the Republic of Texas, from December 1836 - December 1838. It was not due to a scandal or him declining to run for reelection, but because of the new republic's constitution. The first president would only be allowed to serve two years, with the subsequent presidents filling a three-year term. Also, the constitution prevented any president from succeeding himself, leaving Houston to the one term. Considering Houston was unable to run for reelection, a few names rose to the top of the list of candidates, including Mirabeau Lamar, Houston's vice-president and vocal critic, and Thomas Rusk.

Thomas Rusk was a popular individual. He was known as a hero of the Revolution, and was one of the fathers of the Republic who presided over the convention that wrote the Constitution of 1835, was a well-known "Indian fighter" and Houston supporter. He would have been a formidable



Mirabeau Lamar wrote this letter on April 15, 1837, requesting a proof of his "likeness" be promptly sent by an engraver, with instructions regarding the caption beneath the picture, "General Lamar, Ex-president of Texas." This document, along with a variety of other Lamar artifacts, are in the Star of the Republic Museum's collection.

opponent, which concerned Lamar.

In December of 1837, Lamar could not wait any longer and wrote Rusk to learn if he was going to throw his hat into the presidential ring. In Rusk's response, he said he would not run and encouraged Lamar to launch a campaign.

Therefore, in January 1838, Lamar was the first candidate to formally announce his intention to be president of the Republic of Texas. He would base his campaign on being an alternative to Houston's lackluster presidential record. After all, Lamar argued, the only success of Houston's administration was convincing the United States to recognize Texas. Texas was in a worse financial situation due to significant war debt and because Houston's government spent more than it brought in due in part to lenient tariffs and tax policies. In some cases, Houston had to use his personal credit to get supplies for the army.

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Houston had been unable to deliver a highly touted annexation agreement with the U.S.

It immediately became clear the election was going to be between the Pro-Houston and Anti-Houston parties. Lamar, of course, represented the latter. The Pro-Houston party, led by Francis R. Lubbock, met in May of 1838 to discuss names they wanted to put on the presidential ticket. As predicted, the majority of the Pro-Houston men advocated for Rusk to be their candidate. Rusk refused for a number of reasons, one being that he would have turned 35 after the election, which was against the constitution, but the main reason

being he was not in a financial position to launch a campaign or serve if elected. He also stated he had given his word to Lamar that he would not run. This left the Pro-Houston contingent scrambling for another candidate and they settled on Peter Grayson, the attorney general.

Lamar immediately went on the offensive and attacked Grayson's lack of military service during the Revolution and accused Grayson of being involved in shady land deals. Lamar's campaign indirectly attributed the misdeeds of Grayson's Kentucky cousin of the same name to the candidate himself. Unbeknownst to many, Grayson suffered from depression and the character attacks evidently were too much. On July 9, 1838, he stopped by Bean's Station in eastern Tennessee with a note, then took his own life.

The election was only a few months away by the time the news reached Texas. The pro-Houston party hastily nominated James Collinworth, the chief justice of the Texas Supreme Court. However, they neglected to verify his eligibility because, had he been elected, he would have been too young to serve at the age of 32. This did not become an issue, however, as tragedy struck once again. Collinworth drowned in Galveston Bay shortly after his nomination. The most commonly recognized motive for his death was suicide, and that he jumped from a steamboat into the bay. Rumors flew that Collinworth was an alcoholic and had been drinking heavily the week of his death. Others argued he was murdered, but there was no proof of that claim.

With the death of their last two candidates, the Pro-Houston party was floundering. They quickly put Robert Wilson's name on the presidential ballot. He was a well-known businessman and had represented Liberty and Harris counties in the First and Second Senate. However, there was not enough time to

get their candidate's name in front of the voters and Lamar easily won with 6,995 votes to 252. David Burnet, the former ad interim President of the Republic of Texas, barely won the vice presidency. Lamar interpreted his victory as a sign of the rejection of Houston's policies, though his win was more about not having an effective opponent and less about his Anti-Houston stance.

Lamar, and every president thereafter would serve three years, according to the constitution. His three years were not smooth, by any means. Arguably the most significant piece of legislation advocated by Lamar was land for primary schools and colleges or universities. This public education system, which eventually included Texas A&M University, the University of Texas, and Texas Tech University, was slow to be implemented but is an important legacy of Lamar. This success was overshadowed by his administration's challenges.

His term in office saw expenditures exceed receipts by over \$3 million and the printing of paper money known as "red backs," which depreciated to 12 to 15 cents on the dollar. Lamar's administration saw the bloodiest Indian Wars in Texas history, which cost over \$2.5 million, not to mention the countless lives lost on both sides. Lamar also advocated for the removal of the capital from Houston to a more northwest location, a site called Waterloo, soon to be known as Austin. This was a slap in the face to the Pro-Houston folks, which caused more tension between the two factions.

This tension rose to the surface during the 1841 election between Sam Houston and David Burnet. It once again was a campaign of opposites, with Houston leading the charge. This election was marred by vicious accusations, scandal, and gossip.



STAR OF THE REPUBLIC MUSEUM

Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site

Open Daily
10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

936-878-2461 (fax) 936-878-2462

www.starmuseum.org

www.txindependence.org

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THIS EVENT IS MADE POSSIBLE BY:



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Texas Independence Day Celebration

March 2 and 3, 2019

This two-day, park-wide, weekend event commemorates when 59 men gathered in 1836 at Independence Hall in Washington on the Brazos to formally declare Texas' independence from Mexico. There is no better place to learn about this heroic period in this great state's history than where the actual event happened 183 years ago. The Texas Independence Day Celebration features live music, food, traditional crafts, musket and cannon firings, and a 19th-century magician. This year there will be a Mexican Army encampment with historical reenactors as well as a bona fide 1836 Texas Army camp where visitors can wander freely to learn how the soldiers and their families lived.

Special Guests and Entertainment:

- Texas A&M University Singing Cadets.
- "The Birth of a Republic" historical play about the signers of the declaration.
- The Kids History Zone, where children can put their mark on history by signing a large-scale copy of the Texas Declaration of Independence, dressing in period clothing, and taking photos.

At the Star of the Republic Museum:

- The "So Others Could Follow: Four Centuries of Maps That Define Texas" exhibit will open that weekend and will illustrate the evolution of Texas over four centuries, both topographically and politically.
- On Saturday, March 2nd, at 1:30 p.m. there will be a cowboy poet in the Museum theater.
- Star of Texas Dulcimers will entertain visitors in the Museum with performances of American folk music.
- The Museum will feature demonstrators showcasing period skills such as quilting, hand knitting, and tatting.

Special Performances:

- "Dr. Balthasar's Medicine Show" by Interpretive Education Specialist Mike Follin will be back by popular demand. This humorous program recreates a 19th-century frontier patent medicine salesman to give visitors an idea of early health practices in an interactive and entertaining way.

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Brazos Valley Regional History Fair



The 14th Annual Brazos Valley Regional History Fair was held February 8 at Washington on the Brazos. The theme this year was "Triumph and Tragedy in History." Over 260 students with 93 projects competed in five categories to advance to Texas History Day in Austin, and eventually National History Day. Students also competed for \$1,550 in cash prizes due to generous sponsors. The Star of the Republic Museum would like to acknowledge the following sponsors:

FOUNDERS

Washington on the Brazos State Park Association • Brazos County Historical Commission • Jared Patout, CPA • The Blinn College District • Star of the Republic Museum • Washington on the Brazos State Historic Site

TEXIANS

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UPCOMING EVENTS

starmuseum.org

Hands-On-History Saturdays

On the third Saturday of the month through May and then every Saturday from June-August, the Museum will offer a hands-on craft activity for children free of charge. The craft will be available throughout the day, as long as supplies last.

March 16: Quilting

April 20: Wendt Eggs

May 18: Mom Cutouts

June 1: Wildflowers

June 8: Knot Tying

June 15: Weaving

June 29: TBA

July 6: Firecrackers

July 13: Cornhusk Dolls

July 20: Paper Flowers

Runaway Scrape Escape - 3rd Saturday of the Month

Mar. 16, Apr. 20, May 18, June 15, July 20

Admission: \$15 for adults, \$13 for students ages 18 and under, and \$10 for Blinn employees and students

Guests, ages 10 and up, must use teamwork and problem solving skills to decipher puzzles and riddles in order to get out of the room in the 45-minute time limit or be captured by Santa Anna and his army.

Advanced registration is recommended, although walk-ups are accepted based on availability. For more information or to make a reservation, visit www.starmuseum.org/calendar or call 936-878-2461.

Texas Independence Day - March 2-3, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

A living history celebration on Saturday and Sunday, March 2 and 3, 2019, on the 293-acre Washington on the Brazos State Historic Site to commemorate when 59 delegates bravely met in 1836 to make a formal declaration of independence from Mexico.