

Star of the Republic Museum

NOTES

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2019

Star of the Republic Museum: 50 Years of Texas History

On January 1, 2020, the Star of the Republic Museum will enter an exciting new era in its almost 50-year history spent telling the story of the Texas Republic. Through legislation filed by Sen. Lois W. Kolkhorst and Rep. Ben Leman, the Blinn College District and Texas Historical Commission (THC) have established a partnership that ensures that when the museum celebrates its 50th birthday on March 1, 2020, its future is brighter than ever before.

Through this new collaboration, Blinn will maintain its standing as owner of the museum, its facilities, and artifacts, and will continue to oversee the museum's educational programs. Further, the Blinn Board of Trustees will establish an advisory committee to work in partnership with the THC to oversee and promote the educational and public awareness programs at the museum, the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site, and the Barrington Plantation. Under the partnership, the THC will apply its expertise to the day-to-day operations of the museum.

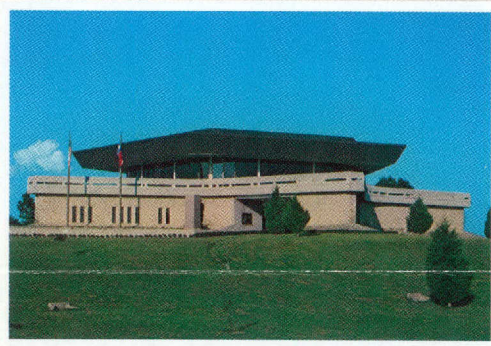
Of course, just as the museum celebrates Texas' rich history, it has a storied legacy all its own. Built to commemorate the historical importance of Washington-on-the-Brazos, the Star of the Republic Museum was officially dedicated on March 1, 1970. The construction of the star-shaped, two-level, 20,000-square-foot complex was completed in less than one year, from November 1968 to September 1969.

However, its history goes back much further. Designed to revamp a neglected Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park in 1955, several Brenham citizens formed the Texas Independence Day Organization (TIDO). In addition to sponsoring the annual Texas Independence Day Celebration, the group began raising funds to develop the park and construct a museum. Donations trickled in.

Mary Moody Northen contributed \$30,000 in 1962 to finance a statewide campaign to raise a million dollars to construct a museum. However, the campaign was abandoned.

Four years later, Representative Gus F. Mutscher of Brenham, with the support of the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park Association (formerly TIDO), sponsored legislation to finance the construction. The legislature responded by appropriating \$800,000 contingent upon private contributions of \$200,000. The Jesse H. Jones Foundation of Houston donated the \$200,000 in 1967. During the following 18 months, the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park Association, under the leadership of George

Red and George Butler, finalized plans for the museum. Financial shortages forced the Association to apply for \$300,000 of additional funds to complete the building and the legislature approved the request in July 1968. Individual donations continued to come in and gradually exceeded \$100,000.



The Star of the Republic Museum

Originally the property of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the museum was transferred to the administration of Blinn College in September 1969 by House Bill No. 634 of the 61st Legislature. With state appropriations of \$45,000 in 1969 and \$65,000

in 1970, the museum began operations. In 1971, \$65,000 was again appropriated for operating expenses; this doubled to \$125,000 in 1972.

Under the direction of Dr. James H. Atkinson and O.E. McGregor of Blinn College, the museum employed John P. Landers as the first director/curator. The Star of the Republic Museum officially opened on March 2, 1970, with a parade, ribbon cutting, and keynote address by Governor Preston Smith. Prior to the opening, Landers traveled around the state collecting and borrowing objects for temporary

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display. Artifacts were brought to Washington to ensure that there would be exhibits in the galleries on opening day!



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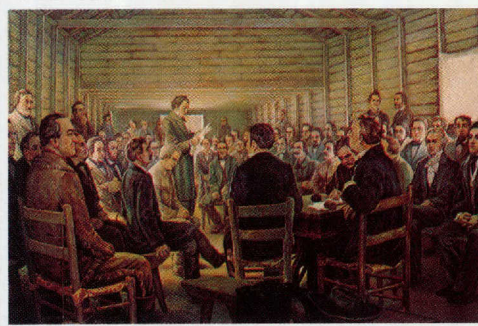
The first years of the museum were dedicated to establishing the mission. Once the focus to represent the 10-year period of the Republic was clear, building a world-class collection became the ambition.

During his administration, Landers assembled a sizeable collection of Texas furniture and began the manuscript and autograph collections. Succeeding Landers in 1972, John W. Crain enlarged the museum's research and manuscript collections, assembled a large Texas map collection, and inaugurated a program of art and temporary exhibitions. Sherry B. Humphreys, Curator

of Exhibits, assumed the title of acting director in 1976 after Crain's resignation and continued the program of art, culture, and craftsmanship with temporary exhibits. Humphreys after serving 27 years stated, "Working at the museum was a long eventful journey and I still feel that it is a part of me." Humphreys and Curatorial Assistant Edith Dickschat worked towards instituting permanent exhibitions of local historical importance. D. Ryan Smith assumed the duties of director in September 1977.

During the museum's first decade, the collections grew with donated and purchased objects that represented the Republic of Texas period. The Texana Collection, a major contribution, from L. Cletus Brown, Jr., added more 700 documents, maps, and artifacts to the museum, which includes some of the museum's best-known pieces, including the earliest known Lone Star flag, dated from 1839, which has been published in numerous Texas history textbooks. These generous donations, given when the Star of the Republic Museum only had a small collection, formed the nucleus of an important collection of Texana, and helped enable a fledgling museum to become a recognized institution accredited by the American Association of Museums.

Another artifact significant to the Star of the Republic Museum is the painting by Charles and Fanny Normann, *The Reading of the Texas Declaration of Independence*, on loan from the Joe Fultz Estate of Navasota, Texas. This painting has been featured in almost every Texas history textbook that has ever been printed.



The Reading of the Texas Declaration of Independence by Charles and Fanny Normann, on loan from the Joe Fultz Estate of Navasota, Texas.

The second decade began the commitment to create permanent exhibits utilizing core artifacts from the museum's collections that addressed topics specific to the Republic era, including an exhibit which focused on the individual signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence for the 1986 Sesquicentennial. Another memorable exhibit of the 1980s featured the "Come and Take It" cannon that prompted the Battle of Gonzalez. The museum welcomed Houston McGaugh as the director in 1987. McGaugh would remain at the helm until his retirement in 2019, making him the longest serving director of the Star of the Republic Museum.

The 1990s ushered in a first for the museum – too many artifacts and too little space! The solution was the construction of a 10,000-square-foot collections storage area, conservation lab, work room, and curator's office. This expansion allowed for the artifact collections to be stored in an ideal environment and provided space for future growth.



Blinn officials and Director Houston McGaugh (R) break ground on the collection's storage area.

The Millennium Campaign in the late 1990s was created to embark on a dynamic new interpretive project to better encompass the overall political, military, and social history of the Republic and Texas' place in U.S. history. This campaign raised \$1,000,000 for a complete museum renovation. The galleries were redesigned, new exhibits added, audio/visual components were selectively placed to enhance exhibits, and an 1,800-square-foot, interactive Discovery Room for visitors of all ages was built. The movie *Once a Nation* was introduced, replacing the previous film created in the late 1980s.



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
www.facebook.com/staroftherepublic

The newsletter also is available to download from our website at www.starmuseum.org.

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Blinn College District
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Former Star of the Republic Museum Director Houston McGaugh, Blinn College Foundation Executive Director Susan Myers, the Honorable Gus. F. Mutscher, Blinn College District Chancellor Dr. Mary Hensley, and former Blinn College District Board Chair David Sommer at an event honoring Gus Mutscher in 2017.

collection. The Asa Hoxey papers were purchased and offer a glimpse into the daily life of a family from Independence, Texas. During this time the Education Department, under former Curator Anne McGaugh, revamped the Discovery Room into the fully interactive Pioneer Playroom and developed the Night at the Museum program. The Runaway Scrape Escape Room also was created during this time. A quest to make the museum's collection more accessible via the internet led to the digitization of 3,028 artifacts on the Portal to Texas History website in partnership with The University of North Texas.

An ambitious genealogy project to locate living descendants of the signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence also began. Dr. Shawn Carlson, Curator of

Collections and Exhibits at the time, spearheaded the project along with the La Villita Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Over 1,500 proven descendants were found and many attended the 175th Texas Independence Day Celebration, including Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson and Sam Houston IV.

Now, as the museum stands on the cusp of its 50th birthday, it is stronger than ever. Through the new partnership between the Blinn College District and the Texas Historical Commission, the museum will be administered by two institutions committed to its success. We look forward to spending the next 50 years telling the story of our Texas forefathers and providing a window into this exciting time in the history of the Lone Star State.

The millennium brought three years of transformation to a close and introduced Texas to a new Star of the Republic Museum, a multifaceted museum that provided visitors with an unparalleled history of the Republic of Texas. The museum temporarily was entrusted with one of the original handwritten copies of the Texas Declaration of Independence as well as journals from the Convention of 1836 to mark the 168th anniversary of Texas Independence.

The second decade of the 21st century continued the growth of the museum's



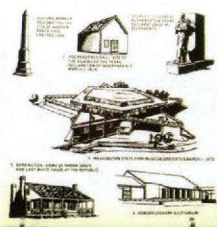
Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson, former Curator Sharon Carlson and Sam Houston, IV at the 175th Texas Independence Day Celebration.



An aerial photo of the museum taken on October 19, 2019 by Toni Klemm.

ARTIFACT CORNER

During the opening and dedication of the Museum on March 1, 1970, museum-themed merchandise was available to commemorate the special occasion. Some of the items sold were small jewelry holders, glasses, plates, and mugs — all with the Museum logo or images of the Washington on the Brazos historic sites.



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UPCOMING EVENTS

Hands-On-History Saturdays

On the third Saturday of the month through May, the museum will offer a hands-on craft activity for children, free of charge. The craft will be available from 11:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., as long as supplies last.

December 21: Holiday Crafts

January 18: Knot Tying

February 15: "Tin" Punching

Christmas and Holiday Crafts at the Museum

Saturday, December 7, 2019

Enjoy a pioneer Christmas experience at the Star of the Republic museum! We will be making Moravian Stars, Christmas Crackers, Paper Ornaments, Snowflakes, Whirligigs and coloring sheets for all ages will be available all day while the museum is open. Appropriate for all ages.

Free with paid admission \$8 adults/\$5 children

Call 936-878-2461 or email donna.barker@blinn.edu for more information.

Runaway Scrape Escape

Saturday, January 18

Admission: \$18 for adults, \$15 for students, ages 10-18

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, email donna.barker@blinn.edu, or call 936-878-2461.

Brazos Valley Regional History Fair

Friday, February 7, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Students from across the Brazos Valley Region will present projects (papers, exhibits, websites, documentaries, performances) based on a national theme, "Triumph and Tragedy in History." The top two placing individual and group winners out of each category and division will qualify to compete at Texas History Day in Austin in April. Visitors are invited to watch the performance category and view the exhibits after judging.

Anyone wishing to volunteer, please contact Donna Barker at 936-878-2461.

Texas Independence Day

Feb. 29 - March 1, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

A living history celebration on Saturday and Sunday, February 29-March 1, 2020, 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.

Check our website for more information as the event approaches.