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# Star of the Republic Museum

Government Publications  
Texas State Documents

## Notes

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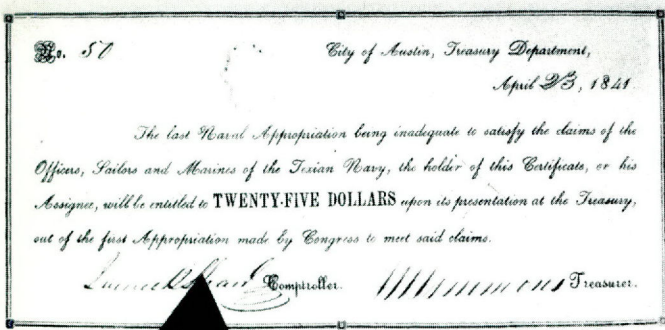
## “Wasps of the Sea” The Texas Navy

During the Republic period, the Texas Navy, though small in size, was instrumental in keeping ports open for urgently needed imports and vital exports to and from the United States. In addition, the Navy kept the Mexican naval forces bound up in their own ports and quelled any realistic attempts by the Mexicans to pursue a sea invasion of Texas.

Early on Texans recognized the importance of protection of the coastline, thus when hostilities erupted between Texas and Mexico, the General Council of the provisional government, in November of 1835, passed a bill providing for the purchase of four schooners and for the organization of the Texas Navy. Until the Navy came to fruition, letters of marque and reprisal were to be issued to men of known character and skill. These commissioned privateers were to cruise within the Gulf of Mexico and make war on all vessels sailing under the authority and flag of the Central Government of Mexico. The small privateers greatly assisted the Texans through captures and protection until January 1836, when the schooners were purchased and the Texas Navy was established. Among the first ships were: the 60-ton *Liberty*, and the 125-ton each *Invincible*, *Independence*, and *Brutus*. On March 12, interim President David G. Burnet appointed officers and named Captain Charles E. Hawkins as commodore.

Although the Texas Navy controlled the sea lanes along the coast, simultaneously allowing for supply of the Texas land-war effort while hindering nautical logistic support to the invading Mexican forces, it was plagued by calamity. The first Texas Navy lasted until the middle of 1837. After making several captures, the *Liberty*, while in New Orleans, in July of 1836 for repairs, had to be sold because the Texas government could not pay the repair bill. While in New York for repairs, the *Brutus* and *Invincible* nearly befell the same fate, but were saved by Englishman Samuel Swartwout, who paid the expenses. The *Independence* successfully captured a number of small vessels, before being captured by Mexican forces during a four-hour running battle. Early in 1836, with half the fleet gone, the Navy suffered another blow when thirty-six year old Commodore Hawkins died.

Samuel Rhodes Fisher was appointed Secretary of the Navy by late 1836, a responsibility that presented numerous problems. The navy that Fisher was asked to supervise and maintain was makeshift and inadequate, with insufficient and ill-trained personnel, and by April of 1837, the Mexican navy had succeeded in blockading the coastal area and all commerce from Galveston was stopped. The two ships left in the Texas fleet were incapable of breaking the blockade, and lack of supplies made it impossible for Fisher to carry out effective measures for coastal defense. To best rid the coastal cities of the enemy, Fisher and new commodore H. L. Thompson decided to cruise the *Brutus* and *Invincible* along the Mexican seaboard, enlisting the ships as decoys to lure away the Mexican ships, clearing Galveston for commerce. President Houston opposed the decision, setting up a struggle of wills. Against Houston's orders, the ships sailed on June 11, 1837 and, although successful early on, the cruise ended with both ships being lost. Upon returning to Galveston Bay, the *Invincible* attempted to lure two Mexican ships into the sandbars, only to run aground itself. When the *Brutus* steered out to help, it also went aground. The *Invincible* was destroyed during



Treasury Warrent issued to the Texian Navy Officers, Sailors, and Marines to cover inadequate naval appropriations. Certificate entitled bearer to twenty-five dollars. Dated April 23, 1841. Star of the Republic Museum Collections.

the battle, and the damaged *Brutus* was finally destroyed within three weeks by heavy storms. Fisher's decision to follow his own judgment led to his dismissal by Houston in September 1837, only to be nullified by the Texas Senate, who criticized Houston's actions as transcending the limits of his authority. The dismissal would eventually be upheld when further charges against Fisher were addressed.

Between September 1837 and March 1839, the Texas Navy was virtually non-existent, save for a brig that was used only as a receiving ship at the Galveston Naval Base. Effects of the Panic of 1837 on Mexico, a revolt in northern Mexico, and the French blockade and seizure of the Mexican fleet at Veracruz worked to Texas' advantage in preventing Mexico from launching a sea attack during this period. In March 1839, the first ship in the second Texas navy was commissioned, the *Zavala*. Between June 1839 and April 1840, the *San Jacinto*, *San Antonio*, *San Bernard*, *Wharton*, *Austin*, and *Archer* were added to the fleet. Over the next few years, the fleet, under the command of Lamar appointee Edwin Ward Moore, would assist a Yucatán revolt; survey the Texas coast; be partially decommissioned because of appropriation cuts; and survive a mutiny. While in New Orleans, aboard the *San Antonio*, the only mutiny in the Texas Navy occurred on February 11, 1842. After killing one officer, the mutineers were quickly captured by US authorities and eventually punished. With Houston's reelection and hostile attitude toward the navy, Moore constantly had difficulty keeping his ships sailing. To further confound naval efforts, Houston withheld all naval appropriations made by Congress; proclaimed the navy to be pirates, requesting that any friendly country capture the ships and return them to Galveston; dishonorably discharged Commodore Moore without a court-martial; and in January 1843, had Congress pass an act authorizing the sale of the Navy. The incensed people of Galveston prevented the sale by forcefully stopping the submission of bids.

A truce in Mexico in the summer of 1843 marked the end of the operative career of the Texas Navy, as the US undertook to protect Texas until annexation. In June 1846, the ships of the Texas Navy were transferred to the US Navy. By 1857, the claims of the surviving Texas Navy officers were settled, closing the final chapter on "those gallant little wasps of the sea" which played a highly important and often overlooked part in keeping the history of the Republic on an even course.

### **Texas On-Line**

Recently the Star of the Republic Museum joined the electronic world of the Internet! We hope to develop a homepage/webpage soon, and at present may be reached via e-mail at [starm@phoenix.net](mailto:starm@phoenix.net). For those of you who "surf the 'net," we would like to share information on several sites covering Texas history that have caught our attention. The following list is by no means comprehensive, but should serve to whet the appetite.

#### **Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park/ Star of the Republic Museum**

(<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/washingt/wob/main.html>)

In addition to letters of the Republic period, a Texas Revolution timeline, tour information, education information, and special events, the site also has areas on "What's New," "Role in History," "Park/Directions," "Activities," and "Nearby Sights."

#### **Lone Star Junction**

(<http://www.lsjunction.com>)

"If you have an interest in Texas and its early history, you've found the right place in cyberspace." Offers information on state symbols, images, and history. "The Archives" provides a multidimensional look at the people,

places, documents, and events of early Texas history. "The Forum" contains areas to share information about Texas and Texans in the 19th century. Other areas include book reviews, commentary, and Texas web links.

#### **Brazoria County Historical Museum**

(<http://www.tgn.net/~bchm/>)

Provides museum and exhibit information, as well as, a selected bibliography on Texas history, photographic archives, documents catalog, and a searchable "Old 300" genealogy database.

#### **DRT Library Homepage**

(<http://www.drtdl.org/~drtdl/>)

The Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library homepage includes library services, research services, library collections holdings, Alamo information, and a rotating display of topics from the genealogy collections.

#### **Institute of Texan Cultures**

(<http://www.utsa.edu/itc/index.html>)

"The Institute provides a forum for understanding culture and history and symbolizes the state's strength in diversity." Areas include: calendar of events and exhibits, Texas Folklife Festival, library services, teacher training, and products and services.

(continued on back page)

The **Star of the Republic Museum** announces the release of the reprint of

## NOTES ON THE REPUBLIC

*Notes on the Republic* is about experience—the experiences of ordinary Texans and their interactions with extraordinary events—the creation and governing of a new country!

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Southwestern Historical Quarterly 96:1 July 1992

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*Notes on the Republic* is a compilation of nineteen issues from the Star of the Republic Museum's quarterly publication, the *Notes*, a recipient of a “Certificate of Commendation” from the American Association for State and Local History. In addition, *Notes on the Republic* received a Mitchell A. Wilder Silver Citation award for excellence in publication and media design from the Texas Association of Museums in 1992.

With topics ranging from bathing and bathrooms, to eating, drinking, and even death, *Notes on the Republic* examines the social history of the Texas Republic (1836-1846), providing new perspectives on a subject many Texans presume they already know.



*“Good writing, good reading, much humanity.”*

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Texas Folklore Society

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on Republic period history!***

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Name _____	<i>Notes on the Republic</i>	\$18.00
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(Contact the Museum for volume discount information)

# Star of the Republic Museum

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## Notes

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### Sam Houston Memorial Museum

([http://www.shsu.edu~smm\\_www](http://www.shsu.edu~smm_www))

The place to find information on General Sam Houston. Includes the Houston genealogy back to Ireland, a chronology of Sam Houston's life, quotes from Houston, calendar of special events, The Folk Festival, educational programs, and a "virtual" tour of the museum grounds.

### Texas General Land Office

(<http://www.glo.state.tx.us/>)

"The Texas General Land Office actively preserves and promotes awareness of the history of Texas public lands through several programs...Established in 1838, the Archives of the Texas GLO consists of records and maps dating to Spanish times relating to the passage of Texas public lands to private ownership." Includes: finding aids, Texas land grants, map collection, on-line exhibits, and publications.

### LaSalle Shipwreck Project

(<http://www.thc.state.tx.us/belle/index.htm>)

"Your official source of news on the dramatic excavation and conservation of the *Belle*—one of the earliest and most important shipwrecks ever found in North America." Project and site are overseen by the Texas Historical Commission.

### Texas State Electronic Library

(<http://link.tsl.state.tx.us>)

Internet information for, from, and about the Lone Star State. Includes an electronic reference desk, Texas state government information, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, and other information services.

### Junior Ranger Camp Scheduled

Every Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday in July from 9 am to noon, the Park offers the opportunity for children 5-10 to be real Rangers! Each day a different topic will be addressed. Junior Ranger participants will learn about Texas history, nature, and conservation through such activities as: building a log cabin, preparing food in a dutch oven, making toys, playing Republic period games, exploring the aquatic life of pond creatures, making paper, and more. The fee for the Junior Ranger program is \$3.00 per child per day. For more information and to make reservations, contact the Park at (409) 878-2214.

### MUSEUM SCHEDULE

Open Daily  
10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

409-878-2461 (fax) 409-878-2462  
Administered by Blinn College, Brenham, Texas

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