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Star of the Republic Museum

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The James Wesson Diary A Gift of Insight



Rev. James Middleton Wesson

Wesson. On January 31, 2001 he entrusted the care of this artifact to the Star of the Republic Museum, noting that the Museum was "the logical place for it." Through his donation, Mr. Howard has ensured the diary's continued preservation, as well as future access to it by scholars.

Wesson was born on July 18, 1819, in London, England where his parents, Thomas and Mary Wesson, headed a missionary school. The diary begins in 1836, shortly before his seventeenth birthday, with a recitation of Wesson's personal history and his voyage from England to New York, "determined to try [his] fortune in a new country."

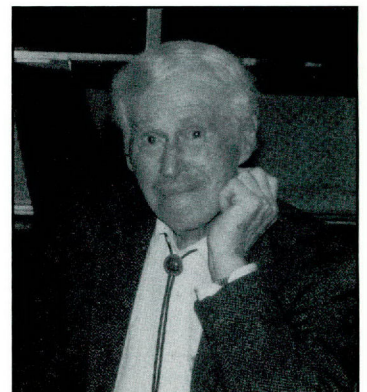
Entries over the next four years describe his work as an apprentice carpenter and his travels through New York, Ohio, Kentucky, Missouri, and Louisiana, on his way to Texas and a new career as a minister. "December 1st 1840, arrived in Galveston; a stranger in a strange land, without money or friends." The consequences of his

Note: All misspellings within quotes are taken verbatim from the diary.

For nearly four decades Mr. John Howard of Washington, Texas has safeguarded the diary of his great-grandfather, Reverend James Middleton

arrival changed as he reached Austin in March of 1841, where he observes, "the hospitality and kindness of the people pleases Moore's Fort." There he joined a class for itinerant ministers, being received into the conference in 1843 and beginning his circuit the following year. While involved in his education, he joined the Travis County Volunteers, under command of Captain Thomas Green, to repel Mexican soldiers trying to take over San Antonio. For the next fifty years Rev. Wesson preached in a number of churches to white and black congregations in Washington and surrounding East Texas counties, generally staying with members of the church where he preached.

Early in his travels as a circuit minister, Wesson recorded his observations at a significant historical event, a treaty meeting with Sam Houston and Texas Indian tribes. "Oct. 6 [1844] Attended at the Treaty Ground to witness a treaty made by Gen. Sam Houston with the chiefs of the Comanches, Anodarkoes, Wacoos, Lipans, Shawnees, Towacanies, Caddoes, Keechies, and Iranies. I take a mellonchally pleasure in looking upon the red men; thinking how different is there situation now from what it was a few years since. When they seemed the lords of these beautiful prarries; and pursued the chase unallarmed by the presence



Mr. John Howard, great-grandson of James Wesson

of the white man. I hope that this treaty may be the means of opening the way for the introduction of the gospel. The business occupied four days.” Wesson was even a participant in making Texas history himself with his involvement in the 1845 annexation vote. “Oct. 13th A poll was opened upon the ground to record the votes for and against annexation to the U.S. Gave my vote, with a hearty good will for annexation.” In addition, he briefly attended the convention formed to construct a constitution in Austin during August of 1845. His involvement and standing in the community won him election to Chaplain of the State Senate from 1855-1856.

During his life, Wesson married three times. His first wife Almira Hoskins, whom he married on February 1, 1847, died four short years later. Their daughter, Mary, had died shortly before, just shy of her second birthday, leaving Wesson to care for their six-month old son, Thomas. “Feb. 8th [1851] Looked upon the loved form of my departed wife for the last time. The body was carried to the church, where an appropriate address was delivered by Rev. S. B. Cameron. After which before the altar where lay the clay cold form of his beloved mother her infant; our own little boy, was dedicated to God in the holy ordinance of baptism.” His second wife, Nancy Byrd, was a daughter of Stephen F. Austin’s “Old 300” colonists. They married in 1852 and had four children who lived to adulthood. After a long and renowned career, Rev. James Wesson died January 22, 1898 and was buried in Navasota.

Primary sources, such as this diary, provide a personal perspective into history and give us a deeper insight into what life was really like for early Texas pioneers. While the profound moments of historical significance or personal tragedy stand out in such a document, the smattering of everyday details adds to the richness and texture of a snapshot of time. Wesson noted weather extremes and the occurrence of rain and sleet, especially in their effect on his travels; in addition, he even mentions the sighting of a comet on March 4, 1843. His mix of the philosophical and the mundane is exemplified in the passage of December 25, 1844—“Christmas Day. Far, far from home; from the friends of my youth. A stranger in a strange land. How does the return of this day bring to my mind the scenes long gone by. The family circle; the Christmas cheer; and all the pleasures of a happy home. Shall I ever see my dear parents, and loved brothers and sisters again? God only knows. If not I confidently hope through the mercy of Him; whose birth this day is designed to celebrate; to meet them where friends shall part no more. Assisted Br. Wilson in making rail fence.”



James Wesson's parents,
Thomas and Mary

Book Reading and Signing Scheduled

Dr. James S. Olson, co-author of *A Line in the Sand*, *The Alamo in Blood and Memory*, will be reading from his book and signing copies for visitors on March 3 and 4 as part of the Texas Independence Day Celebration. The book debuted January 22, 2001 to enthusiastic reviews. *Kirkus Reviews* notes, “A swift and savvy journey through 164 years of Alamo history—from lines in the sand to lines at the gift shop. There are compelling chapters on the restoration of the structure, on Disney’s Davy Crockett phenomenon (which “must have made a dent in the raccoon population”), on [John] Wayne’s meticulous but sluggish 1960 film (the set was cleared of rattlesnakes each morning), on the various academic interpretations of the Alamo, and on the structure’s continuing role as a lightning rod for political activists of all stripes.” *Barnes and Noble* further touts, “In their rewarding book, [the authors] shatter popular illusions and prove that over 165 years, myth has shaped and finally overwhelmed history. Further, through productive research and persuasive reporting, these investigative historians illustrate that at many levels the battle of the Alamo is still being fought.”

The Passing of a Friend

On November 30, 2000, the Museum lost a valuable resource and friend with the passing of Dr. Robert A. (Bob) Calvert. Calvert's expertise in Texas history made him an indispensable sounding board for exhibit development. Along with Dr. Sylvia Grider of the Texas A&M University anthropology department, Calvert most recently made suggestions and provided direction for the points of view for the new exhibition, *The Texas Republic*. In his book, *Texas Through Time*, Calvert elaborates upon the theme of the Texas mystique, the underlying motif of the new Museum exhibition, "The creation of the nation—the Texas Republic—separates the Texas myth from the Anglo North American myth and gives to the culture a Texas nationalism and romantic vision that transcends geography and creates, as Willie Nelson sings, a Texas state of mind."

For 25 years Calvert taught at Texas A&M University as professor of history, specializing in Texas and the New South.

During that time he served as coordinator of graduate studies in the history department, a member of the Press's Faculty Advisory Committee, and co-editor of the Press's Southwestern Studies series. He was a former president of the Texas State Historical Association and a fellow of that organization. From 1967 to 1973 he taught at North Texas State University, from which he received his undergraduate and master's degrees. His Ph.D. is from the University of Texas, where he taught as a visiting professor from 1973 to 1975.

He carried his scholarship into the classroom, where he won several teaching awards. His publications include *The History of Texas*; *Texas Through Time*; *Cartooning Texas*; *Black Leaders: Texans for their Times*; *Texas Vistas*; and numerous articles. Calvert conducted and encouraged research and publication on the Grange, the Progressive Movement in the South, ethnic and labor history, twentieth-century Texas, and other related topics.

Texas Independence Day Celebration

On Saturday and Sunday, March 3 and 4, 2001, Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park will commemorate the 165th anniversary of the signing of the Texas Declaration of Independence in 1836. Come join us in remembering the work of 59 men who met in an unfinished building on a cold March day to decide the fate of a nation. The keynote speaker on Sunday will be U.S. Congressman Kevin Brady of the 8th District of Texas, who represents 800,000 residents in North Harris, Montgomery, Austin, Brazos, Waller, and Washington counties in the U.S. House of Representatives. Brady will speak in the amphitheater at 2:00 p.m.

Experience a day of Republic family fun and feast for the senses as events this year again emphasize Republic folkways, presented through music, demonstrations, and crafts. Artisans presenting nineteenth-century skills and crafts provide the opportunity for visitors to take a token of their visit home by purchasing one of their unique creations. Some of the demonstrations include: blacksmithing, basketry, woodcarving, furniture crafting and caning, quilting, lace making, broom making, and pottery. While browsing through the handcrafted items for sale, enjoy listening to music of the period performed by a number of dulcimer and string groups performing throughout the Park and Museum. An assortment of food and beverages will be available for purchase both days to complement your stay. Following the commemorative ceremony on Sunday afternoon, be a part of the cutting and sharing of a "Texas size" birthday cake. In addition to the activities, all sites will be free to the public.

Meet notable figures from the Republic of Texas, brought to life by the Texana Living History Association. Among the individuals presented are: Stephen F. Austin, Father of Texas; Jane Long, Mother of Texas; Sam Houston; and Alamo participants Davy Crockett, William Barret Travis, and Suzanna Dickenson. Join the Texas Army and other historical groups, dressed in period costume, for demonstrations of military skills and equipment. Finally, as a special treat this year, Dr. James Olson from Sam Houston State University will be on hand all weekend signing copies and reading from his new book, *A Line in the Sand, The Alamo in Blood and Memory*, published January 2001.

P. O. Box 317 Washington, Texas 77880

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Upcoming Events

April 7-8 Lessons from Lydia

With books like "The Frugal Housewife" Lydia Maria Child was at the forefront of a new domestic revolution. Explore how such advice books helped change the lives of nineteenth-century women.

May 12 & 19 Children's Fishing Derby

Children 5-12 learn and practice the skills required to become great tellers of tall fishing tales! Prizes are awarded in numerous classes. This is a "catch and release" event.

June 9-10 A Country Fair

Join in an old-fashioned country fair. Food, games, animals, demonstrations of the latest in agriculture, and competition; all the things that make a fair great.

July 4 H-E-B presents Fireworks on the Brazos

Celebrate our Nation's independence where Texas declared independence from Mexico.

Park Association Website

The Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park Association announces a new website, www.birthplaceoftexas.com, providing information on membership, a calendar of events, maps and directions, and links to both the Park and Museum individual websites. We invite you to take a look at the site and bookmark it for all your information on Washington-on-the-Brazos.

New Arrival

The newest member of the Museum family arrived on November 14, 2000. Shelby Elizabeth Ashton Smith was born at 9:24 pm, weighing 7 lbs. 15 oz., and 20 inches long. She is the first child of Curator of Education Lisa Kalmus Smith and her husband Mark. The staff is truly excited about this new addition and wishes the Smith family the best.

EXHIBIT SCHEDULE

The Republic of Texas, First Floor

MUSEUM SCHEDULE

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

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

Administered by Blinn College, Brenham, Texas

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