

Star of the Republic Museum

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NOTES ON THE REPUBLIC



*"They were a social people, these old Three Hundred,
though no one seems to have noted the evidence of it."*

Noah Smithwick
Early Settler

This spring, the Star of the Republic Museum will offer its readership and the public a new publication. *Notes on the Republic* is an anthology of nineteen issues of the *Notes*. The following paragraphs reflect selected passages from some of the various essays in the anthology. We hope to pique your interest if you are a recent addition to our mailing list, or if you are someone who has been receiving the *Notes* for some time, to remind you of what you enjoyed reading in the past.

"A Beautiful, Promising Land"

In the late 1830's, the German traveler Gustav Dresel described Buffalo Bayou: "It is lined by beautiful banks, densely covered with bushes. Overhanging branches often brush the boat's deck. One cannot easily imagine more luxuriant vegetation than this. All the timber and underbrush of a tropical climate - cedar, cypress, and the like - rival one another in rank growth. From among them is wafted the fragrance of the blossoms of the magnificent magnolia, which I have seen nowhere in such splendor and profusion." This section of the Bayou is now the Houston Ship Channel.

"Promise in a Lonely Land"

While violating the expectations proper society held for women, and even "entering the criminal world" upon occasion, "women as hell raisers" were characterized by their ability to excel at masculine pursuits - to out ride, out shoot, out drink, and out curse most men. Pamela Mann was the classic "woman as hell raiser." While running a "boarding house" in Houston, she was described as "a most notorious character." She apparently excelled at cursing, with one contemporary noting: "The Madam seems to have committed to memory the whole vocabulary of Billingsgate (a British prison), which she in no measured terms dealt out." At various times she was indicted for "counterfeiting, forgery, larceny, and assault with intent to kill." Condemned to death for forgery, she was saved by an executive pardon from then President Mirabeau B. Lamar.

Yet, Pamela Mann presented a paradox typical of the frontier - she apparently had some social standing. Her sons attended Mr. Hambleton's school in Houston, and when one of them married, the wedding was described as a "grand affair"

with President Sam Houston serving as the best man, and Dr. Ashbel Smith as a groomsmen.

"A Cultivated Mind"

For most Texas Children, education was sporadic, and by 1850, only one child in five or six was enrolled in school. Early settler, John Lockhart, described a typical school day near Washington: "We had to be on hand at sunrise, and sit on hard benches, with no backs, our eyes kept steadily on our books and the only movement allowed was, if the benches were high enough, the swinging of our feet under them. In this position we had to sit until 12 o'clock. Two hours were then given for play time. At 2 o'clock, the master would walk to the door and cry out 'books' when all would resume their seats, there to remain until near sundown."

"We Worked from See to Can't"

In addition to the day-to-day violence, there was always the potential for one of the most tragic aspects to the "peculiar institution" - the selling of human beings. Many slaves spoke of being treated literally like animals. In 1839, one Houston auction yard advertised that it handled "Negroes, horses, mules, and carriages."

Lulu Wilson bitterly recalled the selling of her brothers and sisters. "I gets to thinkin' how Wash Hodges sold off Maw's chillen. He'd sell 'em and have the folks come for 'em when my maw was in the fields. When she'd come back, she'd raise a ruckus. Then many the time I seed her plop right down to a settin' and cry about it. But she allowed they weren't nothing could be done, 'cause it's the slavery law.' She said, 'Oh Lord, let me see the end of it before I die, and I'll quit my cussin' and fightin' and rarin'."

"As A Twig is Bent"

"Tis education which forms the common mind-

Just as the twig is bent the tree inclines,

which interpreted, meant to the schoolboy that the application of the rod was a very important fact in straightening the twig."

John Lockhart

Early Texas Settler

By the 1820's, glass nursing bottles were cheap and abundant in urban areas, in case the mother was unable to nurse or if a wet nurse was unavailable. The first rubber nipples were patented by 1845. Previously, bottle nipples, or "sucks," were made of leather, "resembling the upper part of the thumb of a glove... with the two sides and the top joined together in a button-hole stitch." "Sucks" were fastened by a strong thread wound around the nose of the bottle.

For much of the nineteenth century the infant mortality was so high that fewer than half of the infants born survived beyond ten years. A familiar adage was, "Tis' virtue makes an early grave."

"Epicurean Innovations" and "Johnnies"

In 1840 the bathtub was denounced "as an epicurean innovation from England, designed to corrupt the democratic simplicity of the Republic." The Republic referred to in the quote was the United States, but attitudes in Texas towards cleanliness and bathing reflected the country as a whole in the early nineteenth century.

Americans were not "clean and decent" by today's standards, and it has been estimated that perhaps fewer than one in ten persons bathed even once a

year. While traveling through Texas in the 1840's, Edward Smith suggested that the same cultural attitudes prevailed. "Texans," he noted, "have great natural facilities for bathing, but we scarcely found a Texan who took advantage of them - as a general rule, they were not wasteful with soap and water." Interestingly, in this period, most people did not even use soap, reserving it for washing clothes. They preferred a brisk rubbing with a coarse towel to remove the dirt from their skins.

"Leeches by Thousands and Quinine by Hogshead"

In the 1840's, one Texan, who simply signed the editorial as "Old Settler" commented on the state of medical quackery: "This may well be called the era of quackery. Thousands are daily quacked, out of comfort, out of temper, out of health, out of money, out of liberty, out of their senses, and finally into their graves."

"The Republic of Porkdom"

Eating vegetables was not a common practice in the 1830's. Fresh fruit, warned the *New York Mirror* in 1830, "should be religiously forbidden to all classes, especially children."

Texan Gail Borden made significant contributions in food preservation. The inventor of condensed milk, Borden also worked extensively on other products. In the 1850's he set up a factory in Galveston to produce a dehydrated meat biscuit. The business had eight employees and sold forty thousand dollars worth of finished products annually. His partner, Dr. Ashbel Smith, promoted the product and even went to London with the biscuit for the 1851 World's Fair. There it won a gold medal and attracted world-wide comment. *Scientific American* called the product "one of the most valuable inventions that has ever been brought forward."

Yet, the biscuit was never a commercial success—it simply did not taste good; in fact, it disgusted most people. Deeply in debt, Borden liquidated his assets and moved to New York State where he began processing condensed milk.

Typically in this period, while forks were set on the table, the knife was used instead for picking up food from the plate. Napkins were rare or nonexistent, and people wiped their hands on the edge of the tablecloth.

"The Passion for Erecting Grog Shops"

Drinking had its own laws and regulations, and one visitor noted, "Nothing was regarded as a greater violation of established etiquette than for one who was going to drink not to invite all within a reasonable distance to partake, so that Texians, being entirely a military people, not only fought but drank in platoons." In this period Texans were not beer drinkers. Many considered beer "too weak and too strong - too weak for serious drinkers, and too strong for those who wanted a thirst-quenching beverage other than alcohol."

"Hornpipes, Strathspeys, Jigs and Reels"

"In a moment of temporary insanity, I consented to be instructed in the mysteries of a Kentucky Reel."

Francis C. Sheridan,
Galveston, 1840

For Texans, the experience of fighting and winning a revolution to create a new country was a source of inspiration for numerous patriotic songs. Both the siege of the Alamo and the Battle of San Jacinto are part of a Texas musical mythology. Supposedly, with the final siege of the Alamo, its brave defenders heard the "thrilling, blood-curdling strains of the *Deguello*, the traditional Spanish march of no quarter . . . of throat cutting and merciless death." Actually it is unlikely that the *Deguello* was ever played there because, as one scholar noted, it was a cavalry charge bugle call, and the final assault on the barracks was by infantry soldiers; they would not have been trained to respond to such a call.

Yet, there was music at the Alamo, and not exclusively from David Crockett's fiddle or James McGregor's bagpipes. Santa Anna's army (numbering almost

5,000) had a band with "232 fifers, drummers, and buglers, along with additional brass bandmen." For eleven days the defenders of the Alamo were serenaded with waltzes, excerpts from operas like the "Barber of Seville," and other popular European melodies.

"To Expire Mild-eyed"

The life expectancy in 1840 was approximately 39 years, and the mortality rate in large cities (about 30 deaths per year per thousand) was more than three times higher than today's.

In the early nineteenth century, a cemetery was merely a location for the disposal of a body and a useful, if cold reminder of the brevity of life. Cemeteries in the Texas Republic continued the southern traditions of family plots and an orientation of the graves on an east-west axis. This custom reflected a belief in the second coming of Christ when "with their feet to the east the faithful would rise facing the Savior." Yet, there were exceptions. Captain James B. Bailey, one of Stephen F. Austin's "Old Three Hundred" colonists, on his death bed instructed his wife to bury him standing with his face towards the setting sun because he had "never stooped to any man." Consequently, he was buried in a deep hole like a well, feet first, facing west.

"Houston is Infested with Methodists and Ants"

" . . . From the point of view of the Gospel the morality of the Texians must be pronounced bad - bad! Superlatively bad!!"

Presbyterian David B. Edwards

In 1839, the *Houston Morning Star* noted: "It is a source of much astonishment and of considerable severe comment upon the religious character of our city, that while we have a theatre, a courthouse, a jail and even a capitol in Houston, we have not a single church."

"Stump Speechification"

During political campaigns the dis-

pensing of free liquor was common, and "treats" were exchanged for votes. Francis Lubbock noted that it was customary for a candidate to place a barrel of whiskey with a friend at the local country store. A barrel cost eight to ten dollars in those days, and customers were offered a drink after being informed of who had purchased the barrel. If he drank from the barrel, he was expected to support that candidate. As a candidate for the House of Representatives from Galveston, Mosely Baker supposedly spent \$3000 on "treating" - providing food, and most importantly, liquor for his potential constituency.

The election of 1841 between Sam Houston and David G. Burnet was probably the most acrimonious of any in the Republic period. Burnet made much over Houston's drinking, saying he was a man who "with his robes of office dabbled in intoxication and the foul and most bloated blasphemies trembling on his tongue." Houston likewise accused Burnet of debauchery: "Even some of the soldiers facetiously remarked that the letter 'G' in your name stood for 'Grog'." He also accused Burnet of being "wetumpka," which was the Indian term for hog thief. Houston won the election by a large majority prompting the comment: "Old Sam H. with all his faults appears to be the only man for Texas - He is still unsteady, *intemperate*, but drunk in ditch is worth a thousand of Lamar and Burnet."

"A Free Press"

An immigrant noted: "That the Texians are a reading people is manifested by the fact that there are now twelve newspapers published in the Republic. In a population so small, and with such imperfect post routes, to sustain so many papers must be admitted to be an astonish-

ing circumstance."

In addition to precarious financing, a Republic editor faced other problems common to any newspaper on the frontier - a chronic shortage of paper and supplies, lack of recent news, inadequate labor force, and finally, the distribution of the paper. The *Tarantula* at Washington was once published on the blank leaves of "old blue back spellers."

The lack of ink sometimes stopped a press, and Borden explained the tardiness of the *Register* with the statement: "NO INK, NO INK - the want of this black article has kept our subscribers in the dark for the last week, and enabled the devil for once to appear with a white face." The weather could also wreak havoc with the printing process. One December, the rough cabin that served as the press room for the *Register* was so cold, that when the printer's devil wet down the paper for publication, the paper froze.

"Gambler's Heaven"

In the 1840's America was described as "a nation of gamblers" reflecting a "spirit of hilarity." The same could be said of the Texas Republic. Social life tended to be small scale and face-to-face.

A popular, but rather vicious amusement in early nineteenth century Texas was "gander pulling." According to an early pioneer, "The head and neck of a goose would be greased with soft soap and then the animal tied by the legs to the limb of a tree or to a pole. The winner was the man who, riding at full speed on horseback, pulled off the gander's head."

Primarily because of the gambling, Houston was described as the "greatest sink of dissipation and vice that modern times have ever known." In 1840 the town of Washington had approximately 350

inhabitants, of which 50 to 100 were described as "principally gamblers, horse racers etc. In almost every other house on the public street you could see games of all sorts being played, both night and day."

"Tropical Between Northers"

In 1837 one of the most famous and destructive hurricanes of the nineteenth century came through Galveston - Racer's Storm. A traveler who experienced the storm on a boat moored in the harbor, described the destruction: "Human suffering in the meantime was immense. Men, women, and children were seen floating upon boards, logs, and small boats for days and nights, in every part of the island. Provisions, furniture, and goods of all kinds, had either been swept off, or were found in a ruined condition, scattered over the island. And the homeless inhabitants were seen wandering about in despair, gathering something from the wreck to hide their nakedness, or save them from starvation."

"Chew, Chew, Chew & Spit, Spit, Spit."

*"High & low, rich & poor, young & old chew, chew, chew
& spit, spit, spit all the blessed day & most of the night."*

Francis C. Sheridan
Galveston, 1840

Since it was "considered a necessity," tobacco was listed as one of the major items imported into Texas from New Orleans in 1838. The quantity is surprising. At the port of Quintana in 1836, the merchants McKinney and Williams announced the arrival of a cargo which included 80,000 half-Spanish cigars.

We must be honest, this effort represents a blatant attempt to encourage your purchasing of the *Notes on the Republic* anthology. If we have succeeded, please complete the order form on the next page, and mail it, along with your check, back to the Museum.

The Star of the Republic Museum announces the publication of

NOTES ON THE REPUBLIC

by Ellen N. Murry

Notes on the Republic is about experience - the experiences of ordinary Texans and their interactions with extraordinary events, i.e., the creation and governing of a country!

"Well written and interesting; history in the best sense."

Robert A. Calvert
Texas A&M University

Notes on the Republic is a compilation of nineteen issues from the Star of the Republic Museum's quarterly publication, the *Notes*. A recent recipient of a "**Certificate of Commendation**" from the American Association for State and Local History, the *Notes* have been completely updated and revised for this anthology.

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."

Francis Abernethy
Texas Folklore Society

Design by David Holman
Typography by William R. Holman
Printed at the Wind River Press

8.5 x 11 in., approx. 150 pp., soft-bound,
color cover, 41 deluxe halftone photos.
Limited printing.

----- PRE-PUBLICATION ORDER FORM -----

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Star of the Republic Museum

A CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

On Saturday, March 2, 1991, the Star of the Republic Museum will open a major new exhibition entitled, **"This Feeble Circle of Light."** This exhibit will examine the development of nineteenth century lighting devices and illustrate the remarkable variety of these artifacts available in Texas. With an emphasis on social history, **"This Feeble Circle of Light"** explores the impact of lighting on family life; from candles, lard and whale oil, to kerosene, and finally gaslight and electricity. The exhibit will feature numerous lighting devices including: candle molds and "spill holders," a "Betty" lamp, whale oil and kerosene lamps, early gaslights, and even a replica of Edison's first light bulb!

Last year the number of volunteers involved with the museum doubled, increasing the volunteer hours to over 1,100. This was especially timely, since during the same period there was a 29% increase in individuals who visited the Museum in organized tours (over 16,559 people). Since we view these figures as part of a trend, the Museum could still use assistance in presenting tours, greeting the public, and working with exhibits or in the gift shop. Degrees in Texas history, teaching etc., are not necessary. Enthusiasm and a willingness to learn "a little Texana" are all that is required. If you are interested in becoming involved with the Museum please call the Curator of Education at 409-878-2461 for further information.

Front page illustration and *Notes on the Republic* book cover: *Going Visiting*. By Richard Petri. Courtesy Russell H. Fish, III.

The Star of the Republic Museum has recently received a **"Certificate of Commendation"** from the American Association for State and Local History for the *Notes*. The American Association for State and Local History, a nonprofit education organization, assists historical organizations throughout the United States and Canada in preserving their local heritage. According to Patricia Gordon Michael, the Executive Director, "the AASLH awards program is the nation's most prestigious competition for achievement in the preservation and interpretation of local and regional history." Since there were only 66 awards presented to institutions in both the United States in Canada, it is a real honor that the Museum was chosen to receive this recognition.

In addition, the Museum has been given funds from the Texas Committee for the Humanities to organize a symposium on "Native Americans and the Texas Republic," which will be held in the fall of 1992. This project will also include a new exhibit (to open March 1992), a publication, and public programming, all of which will provide the opportunity for increased public awareness of Native American history in the Republic period (1836-1846), as well as some of the issues facing Native Americans today.

EXHIBIT SCHEDULE
"This Feeble Circle of Light"
March 2, 1991 - October, 1991

MUSEUM SCHEDULE
Wednesday through Sunday
10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m

Administered by Blinn College, Brenham, Texas

Director Houston McGaugh
Curator of Exhibits Sherry B. Humphreys
Curator of Education Ellen N. Murry
Administrative Assistant Gayle L. Piper
Editor. Ellen N. Murry

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