

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
**HISTORIC  
HEIGHTS**

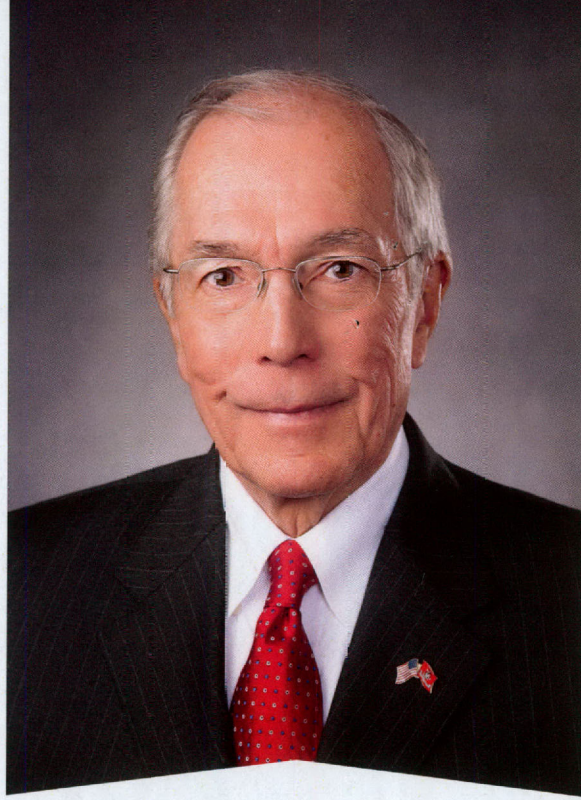
— STATE HISTORIC SITES UPDATE —

2023

*Leading Historic Texas into*  
**THE FUTURE**

TEXAS  
HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION   
REAL PLACES TELLING REAL STORIES





## THC CHAIRMAN **JOHN L. NAU, III** ON HISTORIC SITES

The Texas Historical Commission's network of 36 state historic sites collaborate and engage with their host communities and help position them as travel destinations across Texas and beyond.

THC's sites remained open throughout the pandemic and visitor attendance rebounded in 2022. The agency added four new state historic sites during the biennium—Old Socorro Mission, Palmito Ranch, the Bush Family Home, and Presidio La Bahía.

In 2021, we celebrated the reopening of the French Legation in Austin, the renovated visitor center at Mission Dolores in San Augustine, and the completion of the Villa de Austin historic townsite at San Felipe de Austin in Sealy. In 2022, we opened the new Levi Jordan Learning Center in Brazoria County, restored the ballroom at the Nimitz Hotel in Fredericksburg, and installed a new lens at the Port Isabel Lighthouse.

The THC supports Texas history educators and the K-12 student population at its state historic sites.

All of the THC's on-site field trip materials meet TEKS standards and the new digital content developed for schools will also adhere to the state educational requirements. An online learning portal offers a robust collection of learning experiences for districts, home schoolers and visitors from around the world.

In the near future, we will have a new Alamo Visitors Center that will tell the story of the Texas Revolution—a story that is sure to spur new interest and increase visitors to our many historic sites. We plan to be ready for this renewed interest which is why we continue to advance restoration projects at the state historic sites. A restoration and expansion of the San Jacinto visitor center as well as the restoration of the 1836 battlefield landscape will transform the site into a world class destination.

Major work is underway at Washington-on-the-Brazos to re-envision the entire visitor experience. By linking the Star of the Republic Museum, the townsite of Washington and the Barrington Plantation, visitors will gain a greater

understanding of our history. And, a new visitor center at Levi Jordan Plantation will focus on the African American experience in Texas.

The THC continues to address network-wide deferred maintenance needs including stabilization of the adobe structure at the Magoffin Home and the foundation at the Varner-Hogg Plantation main house.

With the continued support of the Texas legislature and elected officials across the state, we will continue to preserve our most important historic places for future generations to experience, learn and enjoy.





*Visit*

# HISTORIC TEXAS

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) has 36 designated state historic sites that represent every corner of the state, its history, and character. Within the network of sites, there are two museums that have been accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. Four new historic sites were added to the network—Old Socorro Mission in El Paso, Palmito Ranch Battlefield near Brownsville, the Bush Family Home in Midland, and Presidio La Bahía in Goliad. Presidio La Bahía joins other revolutionary sites that tell the story of Texas independence. The THC is focused on improving the visitor experience at these key sites as Texas approaches its bicentennial.





## PRESIDIO LA BAHÍA

The Presidio, established in 1749 during the Spanish colonial period, was crucial to the development of Texas. Witnessing filibustering expeditions and playing a role in the Mexican War for Independence from Spain, the Presidio was the site of the Goliad Massacre on Palm Sunday 1836, marking one of the bloodiest chapters in Texas' quest for independence from Mexico.



Presidio La Bahía is located in the Texas Independence Trail Region.  
[visitpresidiolabahia.com](http://visitpresidiolabahia.com)





## BUSH FAMILY HOME

The Bush Family Home is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as the residence of an exceptional family who shaped state and national politics in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Family members would eventually serve as two U.S. presidents, a First Lady, a vice president, a Second Lady, two state governors, a U.S. representative, a U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and a director of the CIA.



Bush Family Home is located in the Texas Pecos Trail Region.  
[visitbushfamilyhome.com](http://visitbushfamilyhome.com)



## PALMITO RANCH BATTLEFIELD

The Battle of Palmito Ranch was the final land battle of the American Civil War. It was fought May 12–13, 1865, along the banks of the Rio Grande, 13 miles east of Brownsville and 10 miles from the Union-held seaport of Los Brazos de Santiago at Texas' southern tip. The battle, a Confederate victory, took place more than a month after Gen. Robert E. Lee's surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia to Union forces and 13 days before the Army of the Trans-Mississippi's May 26 surrender in Galveston.



Palmito Ranch Battlefield is located in the Texas Tropical Trail Region.  
[visitpalmitoranchbattlefield.com](http://visitpalmitoranchbattlefield.com)

## OLD SOCORRO MISSION

Old Socorro Mission is the site of a former mission named Nuestra Señora de La Limpia Concepción de los Pirces de Socorro del Sur, founded in 1682 to serve Spanish families and Native American communities displaced from New Mexico during the Pueblo Revolt. The historical records detail not only the mission, but the Piro Pueblo that was established alongside it. Rebuilt at least twice, the mission was destroyed in 1829 by the flooding of the Rio Grande and was ultimately relocated.



Old Socorro Mission is located in the Texas Mountain Trail Region.  
[visitoldsocorromission.com](http://visitoldsocorromission.com)





## MISSION DOLORES

In October 2021, Mission Dolores State Historic Site reopened after a two-year restoration. The new visitor center's exhibits focus on the cultural crossroads between the Ais, Spanish, and French and its lasting historical impact. Located in the newly remodeled 1,900-square-foot gallery, the space highlights objects found during archeological excavations, including stone, ceramic, and metal artifacts that illustrate the story of the people who lived at Mission Dolores in the 1700s. Mission Dolores features walking trails, a disc golf course, campgrounds, and group pavilions.



Mission Dolores is located in the  
Texas Forest Trail Region.  
[visitmissiondolores.com](http://visitmissiondolores.com)



## SAN FELIPE DE AUSTIN

In November 2021, the Villa de Austin townsite opened at San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site. The Villa is an outdoor exhibit evoking the look and feel of San Felipe in the early 1830s. Visitors can walk through eight structures in the historic representation including a printing office, school, courthouse, hotel, and bake oven. This large-scale exhibit offers a captivating glimpse of life on the frontier during the era of American settlement in Mexican Texas.



San Felipe de Austin is located in the  
Texas Independence Trail Region.  
[visitsanfelipedeaustin.com](http://visitsanfelipedeaustin.com)





## FRENCH LEGATION

In October 2021, the French Legation officially reopened after a two-year restoration. The Legation—one of the oldest buildings in Austin—was constructed as a private home for France’s representative to the Republic of Texas, Alphonse Dubois, after the French monarch officially recognized the Republic as a sovereign nation. The historic structure and landscape provide a cultural destination where people from the surrounding neighborhoods can gather. A visitor center and café are new additions to the site.



The French Legation is located in the Texas Hill Country Trail Region.  
[visitfrenchlegation.com](http://visitfrenchlegation.com)



## LEVI JORDAN PLANTATION LEARNING CENTER

In June 2022, the Levi Jordan Plantation State Historic Site celebrated the opening of a learning center and archeology lab. The site of a sizable plantation operation, today Levi Jordan Plantation provides a unique opportunity to understand the evolving agricultural history of the South and the early African American experience in Texas through a public archeology program.



Levi Jordan Plantation is located in the Texas Independence Trail Region.  
[visitlevijordanplantation.com](http://visitlevijordanplantation.com)





## UPDATES FROM AROUND THE STATE

### FORT LANCASTER & FORT GRIFFIN RUINS STABILIZATION

At Fort Griffin, the contractor disassembled three stone chimneys and reconstructed them on newly engineered foundations. The work at Fort Lancaster focused on masonry and adobe restoration at Barracks Company H., including stabilizing existing masonry by repointing mortar joints and using salvaged stone to build up the walls. The restoration of the Private Norris grave marker adds an important feature to the site's interpretation. The ruins stabilization projects at Fort Griffin and Fort Lancaster represent phase one of the initiative.



### NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR BALLROOM

The ballroom of the historic Nimitz Hotel—the oldest section of the National Museum of the Pacific War and boyhood home of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz—was recently restored to the mid-century splendor of his last visit there in 1945. The restoration included 1920s-era stencil patterns on the walls and creation of a stained-glass window emulating a porthole on the *USS Missouri*, a tribute to Nimitz.



### LANDMARK INN REPAIRS/ WASHHOUSE EXHIBIT

The restoration and interpretive installation of the washhouse at Landmark Inn represents the period during which John and Rowena Vance operated their mercantile and hotel at the site. During the years of the Vance Hotel operations, the building was used as both a washhouse for hotel and client laundry and as a bathing facility for guests and travelers. With the addition of a laundry firepit area with washtub tables and a drying yard, the washhouse will be available for laundry demonstrations and other programming.





## PORT ISABEL LIGHTHOUSE LENS INSTALLATION

The THC's Historic Sites Division contracted with ArtGlass Florida for the design, fabrication, and installation of an accurate, functioning reproduction of a third-order Fresnel lens and lamp. In December 2022, the THC celebrated the illumination of the Port Isabel Lighthouse.

The Fresnel lens, named for physicist Augustin-Jean Fresnel, changed the world and saved countless lives—the early-1800s lens design was a monumental step forward in lighthouse lighting technology and maritime safety. The light at Port Isabel Lighthouse is illuminated nightly.



## FORT MCKAVETT

The site is working with NASA on its dark sky programming to include photometer testing to monitor night sky visual quality. Staff is also working with the Sandia National Lab on a telegraph exhibit. This project will aid with on-site programming and an interactive public exhibit.

## SAN JACINTO BATTLEGROUND

The November 2021 illumination event provided visitors with a memorial to honor Texans who died defending Texas and America from the Revolution to the war in Afghanistan. Each candle placed throughout the sight represented an individual person. The program was well received with plans to host the exhibit on a biennial cycle.

## FORT LANCASTER

The site received an American Battlefield Protection Program grant for archeological analysis. The new information sheds light on historic conflicts with Native Americans. It is the only U.S. fort in the West to be attacked by Native Americans—an 1867 battle between Company K of the 9th Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers and the Kickapoo people.

## KREISCHE BREWERY

Beer breweries have studied and evaluated the historic brewing process and organic evidence of past brews to produce new beer recipes. Three Texas breweries collaborated to create a special historic beer released at the site's Bluff Schuetzenfest. One beer, a Texas lager, will be entered into the national Great American Beer Festival.





## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

### CADDO MOUNDS CULTURAL CENTER AND GRASS HOUSE

The reopening of the Caddo Mounds visitor center destroyed by a 2019 tornado is underway. The new visitor center will have venues for learning and cultural events. The Caddo grass house at Caddo Mounds was reconstructed with the participation of the Friends of Caddo Mounds and Caddo tribal members.



### SAN JACINTO BATTLEGROUND

The San Jacinto Battleground and Monument has conceptual plans for future improvements. This includes renovating and expanding the museum, restoring the battleground, and constructing immersive and interactive exhibits. These upgrades will make the site a world-class destination, bookending the journey of Texas' independence from the defeat at the Alamo with the victory at San Jacinto. The Battleship Texas has been permanently relocated from San Jacinto, paving the way for a restoration of the 1836 battleground.

### WASHINGTON-ON-THE-BRAZOS

The site is completely reenvisioning and redeveloping its visitor experience. This will better interpret the site's important history through updated gallery exhibits, outdoor interpretive installations, and compelling high-tech interactive displays. This project will link all the site's venues and locations into a single cohesive experience.



### NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The award-winning National Museum of the Pacific War continues to attract thousands of visitors annually. Having achieved accreditation with the American Alliance of Museums and designation as a Smithsonian Affiliate, the museum is considered one of the top military museums in America. In 2023, the museum will open a children's exhibit depicting WWII on the home front through the eyes of a child. Featuring three vignettes—a rural scene, a city scene, and an internment camp—visitors will get a glimpse of growing up under the cloud of war. This exhibit is the first phase of a major renovation of the George H.W. Bush Gallery.

### FANTHORP INN

The exterior preservation project at Fanthorp Inn includes extensive window repairs, siding replacement, roof replacement, and exterior paint. The inn has seen a growing interest due to its public programming. Visitation has grown even with the site's limited operational hours.





## LEVI JORDAN PLANTATION

The THC anticipates further development of a visitor center and exhibits at Levi Jordan Plantation through the design development phase, and funding for land acquisition to partially restore the plantation's boundaries and secure other features. Locating the slave quarters is a priority, strengthening the ability to tell the stories of African American Texans' resilience, strength, and ingenuity through time.



## MAGOFFIN HOME

In 2020, an architecture firm specializing in historic adobe buildings analyzed the exterior walls at the Magoffin Home. They found that immediate action is needed to prevent the eventual collapse of the exterior walls due to the progressive deterioration of adobe blocks behind the stucco. The house is an important cultural institution in the El Paso area and represents a multicultural family on the U.S.–Mexico border at the Rio Grande.



## VARNER-HOGG PLANTATION

The plantation house at Varner-Hogg was originally constructed in 1835 by an Austin Colony settler, Columbus Patton. Using bricks made by hand, enslaved persons constructed the house, smokehouse, sugar mill, and their own living quarters. Today, only the house and smokehouse remain intact. Periodic flooding over many decades has taken a toll on the soft bricks and softer mortar that support the plantation house. In 2019, the THC hired an engineering firm to perform a comprehensive analysis of the building conditions and modes of deterioration. Their report forms the basis of the proposed project to stop and remediate ongoing damage to the foundation.



## EISENHOWER BIRTHPLACE

The first phase of site upgrades at Eisenhower Birthplace will address the site's greatest need by providing an improved landscape interpretive plaza and vehicle entry, relocating the Eisenhower statue to create a focal point on entry. This phase will also improve both pedestrian and vehicle access. Phase two will include a new visitor center to provide much-needed interpretation so visitors understand the humble beginnings of one of Texas' favorite sons. The final phase will restore a sense of the neighborhood by outlining neighboring houses, providing an entry gate, and conserving the Dwight David Eisenhower statue.



## KREISCHE BREWERY & MONUMENT HILL

The improvement project at Kreische Brewery and Monument Hill will build a new visitor center suitable to honor the men who gave their lives for Texas, complete with updated interpretation, a retail facility, and modern conveniences. The project would incorporate an open-air pavilion to provide events and programming to celebrate the site's military commemoration and beer-brewing past. It will also address ruins stabilization of the brewing structure.





## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING AND INTERPRETATION

The Historic Sites Division effectively addresses the needs of Texas history educators and the K-12 student population at its properties. Just as the existing on-site field trip materials meet TEKS standards, digital content developed for schools will fully address the state's educational requirements and be accessible online to help meet distance-learning needs for home schoolers or school districts.



### DISTANCE LEARNING

The Historic Sites Virtual Learning Portal is an expansion of the agency's online center for education. Visitors from around Texas and the world can access resources that take the public into the robust collections and across physical landscapes. The program addresses needs for accessible distance-learning content by creating online educational and interpretive programming and virtual tours. For other learners and history enthusiasts, the software will help develop experiences such as exhibits and tours. With the disruption to school operations during the pandemic, the Historic Sites and Communications divisions launched programming on the web. Several sites produced series and hybrid programs with materials for virtual summer camps. The National Museum of the Pacific War developed an extensive menu of topics for virtual outreach, expanding the museum's educational programming and strengthening its reputation as one of America's best military museums.



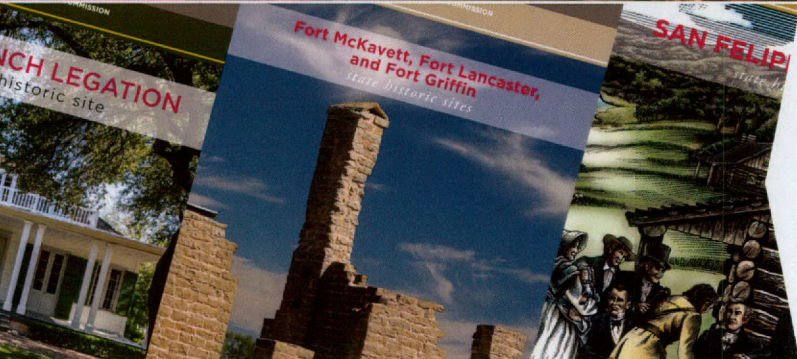
### LIVING HISTORY

The sites also feature active living-history programs, including the National Museum of the Pacific War's Combat Zone; San Felipe's Villa de Austin townsite representing 1820s–30s Austin Colony life; Barrington Plantation's heritage livestock presenting agricultural life during the Republic; and military frontier life at the western forts of McKavett, Lancaster, and Griffin.



### INTERPRETIVE FOCUS

An interpretive master plan (IMP) is the bedrock for the interpretation of history at each site. The Fulton Mansion IMP was finalized, and IMPs are underway for Charles and Mary Ann Goodnight Ranch, Presidio la Bahía, Landmark Inn, Maxey House, Casa Navarro, and San Jacinto. These plans are the defining product in outlining the sites' interpretive focus in programming and exhibits.



### GUIDEBOOK DEVELOPMENT

The French Legation, San Felipe de Austin, and western forts guidebooks are new publications that provide visitors more information on the sites and assist in product development for sites' retail operations. Guidebooks are scheduled to be completed soon for San Jacinto Battleground, National Museum of the Pacific War, Eisenhower Birthplace, and an update to Caddo Mounds. The Forts and Casa Navarro guidebooks are translated into Spanish to expand awareness of Texas' unique history to international visitors.



## COLLECTION STEWARDSHIP

The Historic Sites Division's curatorial staff members work to support collections needs and outreach at historic sites.



**PORTRAIT OF LILY STARR, 1872, STARR FAMILY HOME**

This portrait of Frank and Clara Starr's young daughter dates from the year before Clara's early death. The painting's frame required conservation due to deterioration. In 2021, site staff coordinated conservation for the painting and frame, which was successfully completed by Anne Zanikos, a conservator based in San Antonio.



**SAM RAYBURN'S CONGRESSIONAL DESK, SAM RAYBURN HOUSE**

This desk was donated to the THC by Townsend Van Fleet in April 2022. A standard-issue desk from the U.S. House of Representatives, it was used by Sam Rayburn until 1940, just prior to his becoming Speaker of the U.S. House.

**BRASS SIDE PLATE, EARLY 19TH CENTURY, MISSION DOLORES**

Recently conserved under a partnership agreement between the THC and Texas A&M's Conservation Research Lab, this brass side plate was found during the archeological excavations at Mission Dolores overseen by James Corbin in the 1970s. The object dates to the early 19th century and would have been attached to a muzzle-loaded firearm.

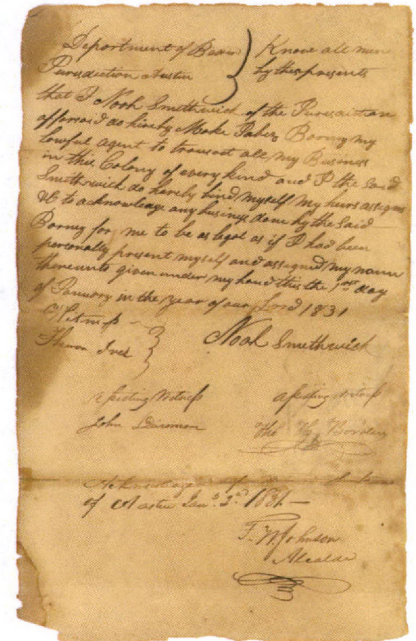


**EASTLAKE CRADLE, LATE 19TH CENTURY, FULTON MANSION**

This Eastlake-style cradle was donated in 2021 to Fulton Mansion by Katie Lewis Holt, a close relative of the Fulton family. She inherited it from her great grandfather, Joseph F. Smith, first cousin of Harriet Smith Fulton and founder of Rockport, Texas.

**GLASS BOTTLE STOPPER, FRENCH LEGATION**

This glass bottle stopper is newly conserved under a partnership agreement between the THC and Texas A&M's Conservation Research Lab. This object was located during the excavations conducted by The University of Texas during the 1960s, and was found near the area believed to be the historic legation kitchen. The design matches a stopper design patented in France in the earliest decades of the 19th century.



**NOAH SMITHWICK LETTER, SAN FELIPE DE AUSTIN**

This compelling historic document was donated by James P. and Jodie S. Bevill. Noah Smithwick wrote one of the most well-known memoirs of San Felipe de Austin recorded by a former resident.



# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

There are 16 Friends Group organizations that provide operational, promotional, and programming support through their volunteer boards and general membership. Thirteen of those groups operate as private nonprofit organizations, while three are fiscally sponsored by the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission. In the last biennium, Friends Group organizations supported projects such as living history and military history reenactment programs, holiday events, funding support for maintenance and restoration projects, and docent and volunteer activities. Friends Group members also are instrumental in promoting historic sites to their local community leaders and elected officials.

## CURRENT ACTIVE HISTORIC SITES FRIENDS GROUPS

- Casa Magoffin Compañeros
- Fort Lancaster Company
- Friends of Caddo Mounds
- Friends of Casa Navarro
- Friends of the Confederate Reunion Grounds
- Friends of Fort Griffin
- Friends of Fort McKavett
- Friends of Fulton Mansion
- Friends of Kreische Brewery and Monument Hill
- Friends of Landmark Inn
- Friends of Mission Dolores
- Friends of Sam Bell Maxey House
- Friends of San Felipe de Austin
- Friends of Starr Family Home
- Varner-Hogg Volunteers
- Washington-on-the-Brazos Historical Foundation



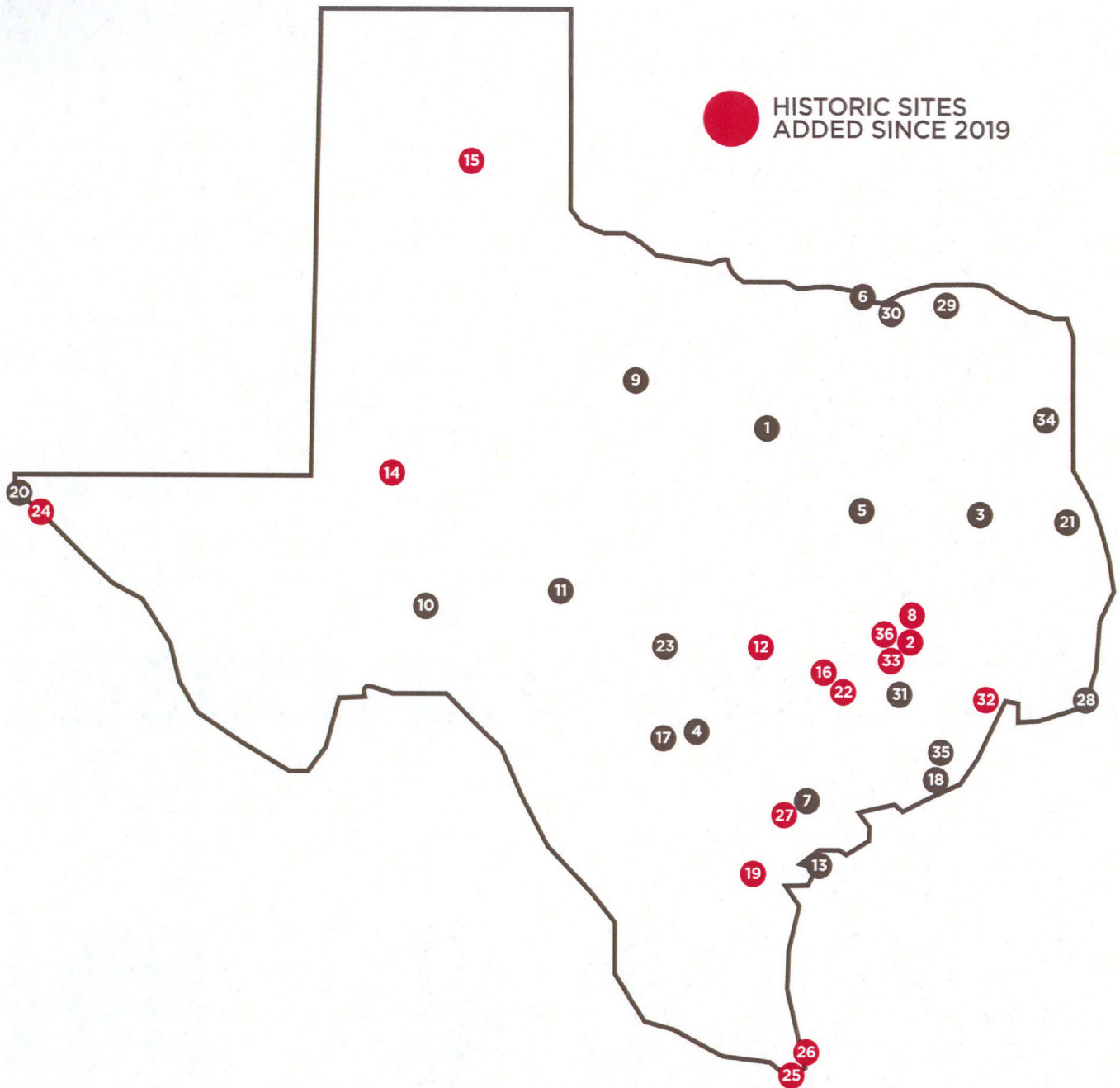
# AWARDS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Historic Sites' staff work has been recognized for their professionalism and dedication to preservation, interpretation, and visitor experience. The following is a list of recent distinctions and awards:

- The Preservation Award for Restoration was awarded to the French Legation by Preservation Austin. The Preservation Awards honor the preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration of historic and recent past-properties.
- The Founders Award is given by the Texas Living History Association to an individual who has demonstrated outstanding contributions to living history in Texas. The 2022 award was given to Chandler Wahrmond, lead interpreter at Fanthorp Inn State Historic Site.
- The Texas Star Award is given by the Texas Living History Association to a site or organization that has demonstrated outstanding overall contributions to living history in Texas. The 2022 award was given to San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site for its Villa de Austin project.
- The National Park Service and the Institute of Museum and Library Services awarded a Save America's Treasures grant for the rehabilitation of the Mission Dolores archeological collections.
- A Humanities Texas grant was awarded for the development of a digital scavenger hunt to celebrate the grand opening of the Levi Jordan Plantation State Historic Site.







# OUR 36 STATE HISTORIC SITES



- |                               |                                       |                                |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 Acton                       | 13 Fulton Mansion                     | 25 Palmito Ranch Battlefield   |
| 2 Barrington Plantation       | 14 Bush Family Home                   | 26 Port Isabel Lighthouse      |
| 3 Caddo Mounds                | 15 Goodnight Ranch                    | 27 Presidio la Bahía           |
| 4 Casa Navarro                | 16 Kreische Brewery                   | 28 Sabine Pass Battleground    |
| 5 Confederate Reunion Grounds | 17 Landmark Inn                       | 29 Sam Bell Maxey House        |
| 6 Eisenhower Birthplace       | 18 Levi Jordan Plantation             | 30 Sam Rayburn House           |
| 7 Fannin Battleground         | 19 Lipantitlán                        | 31 San Felipe de Austin        |
| 8 Fanthorp Inn                | 20 Magoffin Home                      | 32 San Jacinto Battleground    |
| 9 Fort Griffin                | 21 Mission Dolores                    | 33 Star of the Republic Museum |
| 10 Fort Lancaster             | 22 Monument Hill                      | 34 Starr Family Home           |
| 11 Fort McKavett              | 23 National Museum of the Pacific War | 35 Varner-Hogg Plantation      |
| 12 French Legation            | 24 Old Socorro Mission                | 36 Washington-on-the-Brazos    |



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## MAJOR CAPITAL PROJECTS COMPLETED OR UNDER DEVELOPMENT

The following is an overview of projects completed or under development to date to enhance the visitor experience. There is approximately \$69.4M invested and budgeted for the network of State Historic Sites. The total amount includes privately raised funds, federal funds, and state appropriations.

