

Beating the Heat: Texas Style

The summer of 2011 will go down in the history books as one of the hottest on record. We grumble about the heat every time we step out of our air-conditioned houses and cars. It is hard to imagine life without those luxuries! So just how did the early Texas settlers manage this heat?

First, clothing was designed for protection from the heat. Most summer clothes were made from either cotton or linen, both of which are lightweight and breathable. People kept their skin covered for protection from sunburn, insects, and thorns. Women wore dresses with long sleeves, and bonnets with large brims in the front and back. Men wore large brimmed hats, long

sleeves and neckwear to accomplish the task. Clothing was worn in layers to allow sweat to be absorbed by the layer closest to the body, which would feel cool when a breeze would blow. Layers also helped trap cool air near the body and filter hot air away. Mary Austin Holley wrote in her diary, that if there were no gentlemen about, she would go “without stockings and with the thinnest covering in other respects.”¹

Houses were built in a location to optimize the breeze, then built with open breezeways through the center—style known as “dogtrot” houses. In the summer, fireboards were used to close off the fireplace, and usually windows were not covered with curtains. According to Mary Austin Holley, some believed it was best to build on the west side of a bayou or lake to escape the “miasma,” or unhealthy air that followed the rising sun². She wrote that her brother wanted to send his children to Kentucky to escape the unhealthy summer air.³ Although disease was more prevalent in the summer, it was not the air that was unhealthy, rather the multitude of mosquitoes that caused diseases like yellow fever.

Amos Parker wrote,

*To fight the moscheto [mosquito] is like “beating the air;” give a blow in front, and he is in the rear, brush the rear, and he is in front—and so on all day long. And when you have done, you have only excessively fatigued and perplexed yourself, and left him the uninjured master of the field. The only chance to get rid of such a keen tormentor as this, is to hang yourself, or run away.*⁴

Another way to escape from mosquitoes was to cover oneself with a “mosquito bar,” or thin netting. Mary Rabb wrote of spinning enough thread for forty-six yards of “muscato baring” while sitting in the open air without any covering⁵. Dilue Rose Harris wrote that the mosquitoes “were as large as grasshoppers.”⁶ She said to escape from them, people went “bathing” in the bayou. She recalled that the water was “cool and clear,” but quickly infested with alligators. Mary Austin Holley also spoke of “bathing” for relief from the heat. She recommended taking salt baths twice a day for increased “vigour.”⁷

It was not unusual to suffer from “summer complaint” due to spoiled food during warm weather. People stored

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Summer Survival

Below is a checklist for a well-prepared Texan in 1836, illustrated with items from the Museum collection:



Well hook

Tied to the end of a rope, then dropped into a well, to provide a cool place to store fresh food.



Water bucket

Handmade wooden bucket for carrying water.



Keeler

Milk was poured into a keeler and placed in a springhouse to cool.



Canteen

Staffordshire canteen for carrying water or liquor.



Canning jar

Salt glazed jar used for preserving fresh vegetables.



Fan

Silk fan with gold sequins and ivory sticks, for the more genteel woman.



Jug

Thick stoneware jug provided an insulated container for holding all types of liquids.



Summer jacket

Men's linen summer "blouse," military style.



Water keg

Wooden water keg with hole for stopper.



Bonnet

Cotton sunbonnet with brim; longer piece in back to protect neck.

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the more perishable items, such as milk and butter, in cellars, springhouses, or even underwater in nearby lakes or streams. Food also could be hung on a hook, then dropped inside a well to hang just above the water level. Most food preservation involved salting, spicing, smoking, pickling, or drying.

¹ Holley, Mary A, and James P. Bryan. *Mary Austin Holley: The Texas Diary, 1835-1838*. Austin: University of Texas, 1965. Print.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Parker, A.A. *Trip to the West and Texas: Comprising a Journey of Eight Thousand Miles, Through New-York, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Louisiana and Texas*. Memphis, Tenn.: General Books, 2010. Print.

⁵ Rabb, Mary C, and Ramsey Yelvington. *Travels and Adventures in Texas in the 1820s: Being the Reminiscences of Mary Crownover Rabb*. Waco [Tex.: W. M. Morrison, 1962. Print.

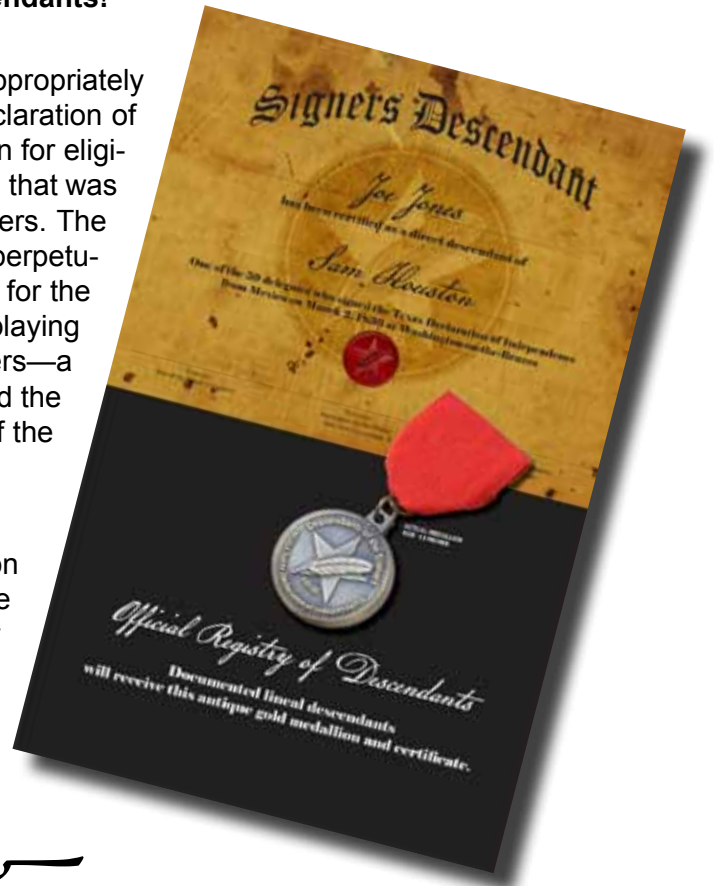
⁶ Harris, Dilue R. *Life in Early Texas: The Reminiscences of Mrs. Dilue Harris*. s.l: s.n, 1970. Print.

⁷ Holley, Mary A, and James P. Bryan. *Mary Austin Holley: The Texas Diary, 1835-1838*. Austin: University of Texas, 1965. Print.

News for Descendants!

The Museum has established an official Registry for appropriately documented descendants of the signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence. The Registry, which requires an application for eligibility, is geared towards refining and verifying the research that was done during the past year by our volunteer lineage researchers. The information compiled will be protected and maintained in perpetuity by the Star of the Republic Museum. Those approved for the Registry will receive a certificate and medallion, both displaying a logo designed especially for descendants of the Signers—a Texas star emblazoned with a quill pen. This Registry, and the people whose names it secures, preserves the memory of the men who changed the course of Texas' history in 1836.

Also, souvenir items from the 175th anniversary celebration of Texas' independence are now available online, just in time for your Christmas shopping convenience! Surprise your family members with a Descendant t-shirt, mug, keychain, totebag, and more! Visit www.starmuseum.org for more information about the Registry and the souvenir items.



Night at the Star of the Republic Museum



*Come one, come all, to the museum to see
Spirits of the past talking to you and me!
Bring your flashlights to travel through time
And discover the secrets of life gone by.*

*Back to the Republic of Texas we'll go
To meet Stephen F. Austin and a buffalo!
Along the way, if you look just right,
The history might come to life!*

The Star of the Republic Museum at Washington on the Brazos State Historic Site will present *Night at the Star of the Republic Museum* on Saturday, October 22. From 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., the lights will go down and the museum's exhibits will come to life! Explore the museum by flashlight—but BEWARE of what's around the corner!

"This event will allow visitors to discover the history of Texas in a different light!" said Anne McGaugh, Curator of Education. "The exhibits look very dramatic in the dark. This will be a fun way to learn about Texas history from over a dozen live costumed characters who seem to have just stepped out of the exhibits to tell their story!"

Admission fee is \$5/Adults, \$3/Students. Don't forget to bring a flashlight!

To view a video clip from last year's *Night at the Star of the Republic Museum*, go to:



Star of the Republic Museum

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Museum Recognized with Recent Awards

The Star of the Republic Museum is the recipient of several recent awards. The museum and Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site received an Award of Merit from the American Association for State and Local History Leadership in History Awards for the website TXINDEPENDENCE.ORG. The museum also received two awards from Texas Association of Museums in the 32nd annual Mitchell A. Wilder Publication Design Awards competition. The awards are: a Silver Award in the Non-Print Media Category for TXINDEPENDENCE.ORG; and a Merit Award in the Invitations Category for its 175th Anniversary postcard invitation, designed by Charlie Kelm of Blinn College.



Home School Days

Every Thursday in October, the Star of the Republic Museum and Barrington Living History Farm will present "Childhood in Early Texas," an interactive, hands-on program for the entire family. Discover what life was like in Texas for a child in the mid-19th century. Learn about childhood chores, clothes, and schools, and make some old-fashioned toys to take home. No minimum group size required. Reservations and pre-payment required: call (936) 878-2461, ext. 236. Limited space available.

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-2:30p.m.
Cost: \$8/child, \$6/adult
Picnics welcome!

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STAR OF THE REPUBLIC MUSEUM

Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site

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

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

www.starmuseum.org
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