

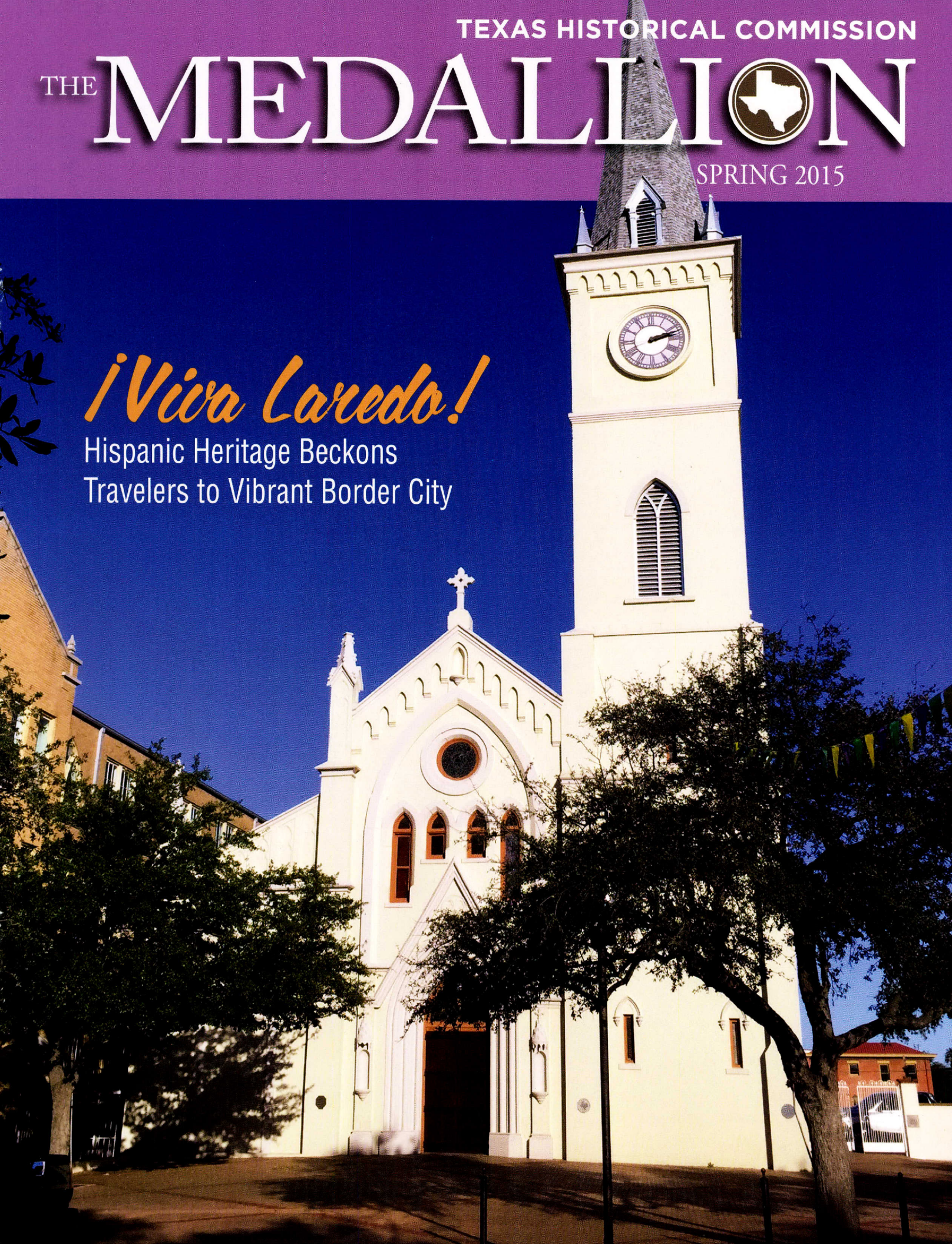
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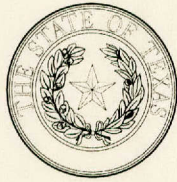
# THE MEDALLION

SPRING 2015

*Viva Laredo!*

Hispanic Heritage Beckons  
Travelers to Vibrant Border City





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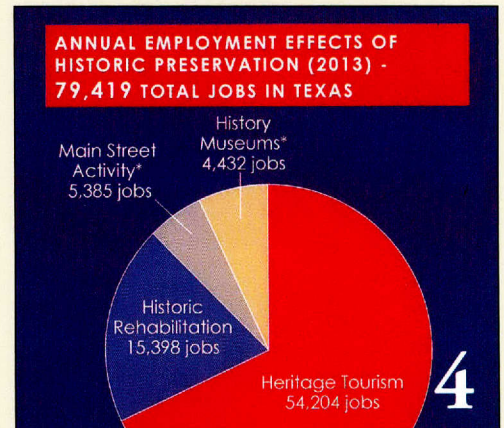
# THE MEDALLION

SPRING 2015

## THC OUTREACH

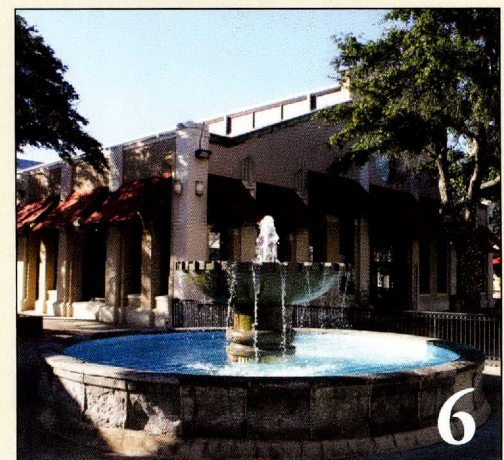
**4** Investing in Texas  
 Economic Impact Report Touts Historic Preservation Benefits.

**5** On the Road Again  
 THC's New Historic Roadway Survey: The Meridian Highway.



## FEATURES

**6** Laredo's History  
 Hispanic Heritage Beckons Travelers to Vibrant Border City.



ON THE COVER:  
 Laredo's San Agustín Cathedral. Photo by Andy Rhodes.

## VISIT US ON THE WEB

[www.thc.state.tx.us](http://www.thc.state.tx.us)  
 Learn more about the real places telling the real stories of Texas.

[www.texasimetravel.com](http://www.texasimetravel.com)  
 The Texas Heritage Trails Program's travel resource

[www.texashistoricsites.com](http://www.texashistoricsites.com)  
 The THC's 20 state historic properties

[www.thcfriends.org](http://www.thcfriends.org)  
 Friends of the Texas Historical Commission



## FAST FACTS

These numbers show the significant economic impact of annual heritage-related spending in Texas (2013).



**BILLION ON HERITAGE TOURISM**

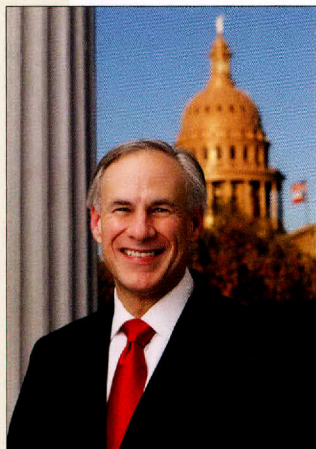


**MILLION ON HISTORIC REHABILITATION**



**BILLION IN TOTAL DIRECT SPENDING**

Source: *Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in Texas, 2015*



Greetings:

Preserving Texas' history is an ongoing responsibility that requires diligence and expert attention. If neglected, we lose a part of our storied past that cannot be retrieved.

In 1953, the Legislature created an agency charged with safeguarding the history of the Lone Star State. Today, the Texas Historical Commission—a group of dedicated archeologists, architects, and professional historians—works tirelessly toward that goal with support from a focused and knowledgeable commission.

It is the values, culture, and heritage upon which our great state was founded and has flourished that transforms our citizens into the famously proud people known as Texans. In order to preserve our unique heritage for our children, grandchildren, and future generations to come, we must continue to support the work of the Texas Historical Commission.

Across Texas, restored historic sites and buildings attract tourists, boost local economies, and spark reinvestment in the heart of downtown districts. Heritage tourism makes a significant economic contribution to our cities and an even greater impact in small towns across Texas, where preservation of older buildings supports employment and pride in local communities.

I encourage everyone to visit our state's historic treasures, from time-honored battlefields to county courthouses and revitalized Main Streets. While these impressive heritage attractions are a sight to behold, it is their history that tells the true story of Texas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Abbott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Greg Abbott  
Governor of Texas

# Historic Preservation: Economic Update

New Report Highlights the Financial Impact of Preservation in Texas

By Andy Rhodes  
 Managing Editor, The Medallion

Every town in Texas has a story to tell—from tales of Spanish missionaries to oil booms and cattle drives. Across Texas, countless compelling stories and places are waiting to be discovered.

Visitors who seek these unique experiences are valuable heritage travelers. In Texas, heritage tourism is a big business that adds billions of dollars to the economy.

In 2013, Texas' preservation activities generated more than \$4.6 billion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and supported more than 79,000 jobs, according to a recently released report by the University of Texas and Rutgers University. This produced significant net tax revenue for Texas, equaling over \$290 million annually. With more than 10.5 percent of all travel in Texas being heritage-related, these tourists contributed a total of \$7.3 billion of direct travel spending to the Texas economy.

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) promotes heritage tourism by assisting local governments and organizations in preserving, enhancing, and highlighting cultural attractions in the state. The program also encourages regional cooperation and promotion of heritage attractions by fostering effective leadership and organizational skills at the local level.

“The numbers prove that our programs are vital links to enriching local economies,” says Mark Wolfe, executive director of the THC. “We’re excited about the significant value these tourism initiatives bring to communities across Texas.”

The UT/Rutgers report (available at <http://bit.ly/1GTbb12>) describes how historic preservation, including heritage tourism efforts, improves the quality of life for Texans and attracts travelers to visit often and stay longer. This in turn attracts new and relocating businesses, which directly invest in the economic well-being of all Texans. The report concludes that when viewed in cost-benefit terms, historic preservation is one of the best investments available for developers and the public. ★

## 1 TEXAS' HERITAGE ATTRACTS TOURISTS

According to a survey of participating sites, the Texas Heritage Trails Program increases revenue and visitation by 13.9 percent.

## 2 HISTORIC PRESERVATION CREATES JOBS

In 2013, historic preservation activities created more than 79,000 jobs, in diverse areas such as retail, construction, manufacturing, and transportation.

## 3 HISTORIC BUILDING REHABILITATION REBUILDS COMMUNITIES

Private property owners invest almost \$741 million annually in rehabilitating designated historic buildings, more than 7 percent of all statewide rehabilitation activity.

## 4 INCENTIVES FOR HISTORIC PROPERTIES ATTRACT REINVESTMENT

Every dollar from federal and state incentive programs triggers \$4–\$5 of private-sector investment. As the new Texas Historic Preservation Tax Credit takes effect this year, the state can expect a strong increase in this investment.

## 5 HISTORY MUSEUMS BRING ECONOMIC VITALITY TO COMMUNITIES

Texas' historical museums (there are more than 700) spend more than \$93 million annually, not including capital expenditures. Even history museums in the smallest communities across the state attract thousands of visitors annually.

## 6 REVITALIZATION OF MAIN STREETS MAKES GOOD BUSINESS SENSE

Since the program's inception in 1981, participating Main Streets have produced an average of \$310 million annually in state GDP. Cumulative reinvestment in Main Street areas has totaled more than \$5.2 billion during this time.

## 7 THE STATE'S INVESTMENT IN COURTHOUSES PAYS GREAT DIVIDENDS

Since 2000, the THC's Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program has awarded more than \$251 million in grants to 91 counties. These projects have created more than 9,600 jobs and added \$615 million to state GDP, while spurring downtown revitalization in counties large and small.

# On the Road Again

## THC Embarks on New Historic Roadway Survey with Meridian Highway Project

By Leslie Wolfenden

THC Historic Resources Survey Coordinator

Historic American highways often conjure up images of “going west” and California Dreamin’. But traffic and aspirations weren’t limited to one direction, as the Meridian Highway proves.

Billed as North America’s first international highway, the Meridian—named for the sixth principal meridian, which it roughly follows—lives up to its title, stretching from Canada to Mexico City.

The road developed from Native American paths expanded by Spanish explorers. Portions later evolved into the Republic of Texas’ Military Road, which became a major path used to take cattle to northern markets.

In June 1911, John C. Nicholson, a Kansas lawyer and early supporter of the Good Roads Movement, spearheaded efforts to organize the International Meridian Road Association. He advocated for a permanent road to extend from Winnipeg, Canada, to Laredo and eventually to Mexico City.

Unlike most of the early transcontinental roads proposed during the early automobile era, such as the Bankhead Highway and the Lincoln Highway, the Meridian Highway extended north-south through the nation’s mid-section and crossed into Canada and Mexico. Like other early transcontinental roads, the Meridian Highway was used for commerce, trade, and tourism, but as the only major north-south route, the Meridian was the main artery for snowbirds from the north seeking warmth in the winter, as

well as southerners seeking an escape from the summer heat. Ultimately, the Meridian Highway evolved into the Pan-American Highway, extending all the way to Argentina.

The Meridian Highway entered Texas at the small town of Burkburnett on the Oklahoma border. From there, the roadway headed south to Wichita Falls, Fort Worth, and to Laredo roughly parallel to present-day Interstate-35. In Waco the highway split off on what was known as the Gulf Division (along much of modern State Highway 6 and US 290) and terminated in Galveston.



In the 1950s, the Meridian Highway traversed Austin as US Route 81 (left). It is now Interstate 35.



alignment, including Decatur, Fort Worth, Waco, Georgetown, Bryan, San Antonio, Cotulla, Laredo, Houston, and Galveston.

“Much like the Bankhead project, our team will document all kinds of historic resources along the roadway,” says Bratten Thomason, director of the THC’s History Programs Division. “They’ll be looking for gas stations, motor courts, signs, and other kinds of roadside attractions that catered to motorists along the international roadway.”

She adds that the project will

also incorporate case studies of five cities to examine development as the route evolved from a two-lane unpaved road to one of the country’s busiest interstate highways. Upon completion, the THC will

announce the results of the research and survey.

The project is funded by a transportation enhancement grant awarded to the THC from the Federal Highway Administration and administered by the Texas Department of Transportation. ★

In total, the Meridian Highway traveled approximately 800 miles across Texas. Its prime years of activity were from the 1920s–1960s.

The Meridian Highway Project is the second major study undertaken by the Texas Historical Commission (THC) and its Historic Texas Highways Program. In scope and scale, it is similar to the two-year study of the Bankhead Highway, which was conducted from 2012 to 2014. In February, the THC sponsored 10 public meetings in cities along the historic Meridian Highway

For additional information about the project and the Texas Historic Highways Program, visit [www.thc.state.tx.us](http://www.thc.state.tx.us), or contact Leslie Wolfenden at 512.463.3386 or [leslie.wolfenden@thc.state.tx.us](mailto:leslie.wolfenden@thc.state.tx.us).



# *Viva Laredo!*

## Hispanic Heritage Beckons Travelers to Vibrant Border City

Text and photos by Andy Rhodes, *The Medallion* Managing Editor

First you see the seven colorful seasonings. Then you feel the coarse surface of the stone pestle. Then you hear the crunch of grinding spices. Finally, you experience the aromatic waves of cumin, coriander, and cinnamon.

This sensory indulgence is a new heritage tourism offering from Frontera Fusion, a Laredo group promoting culinary traditions and recipes. The Texas Historical Commission's (THC) Heritage Tourism

program recently partnered with

Frontera Fusion and other South Texas cultural organizations to promote the region's rich Hispanic heritage. This history is also featured in the THC's newest publication, *Hispanic Texans*, available at [www.texastimetravel.com](http://www.texastimetravel.com).

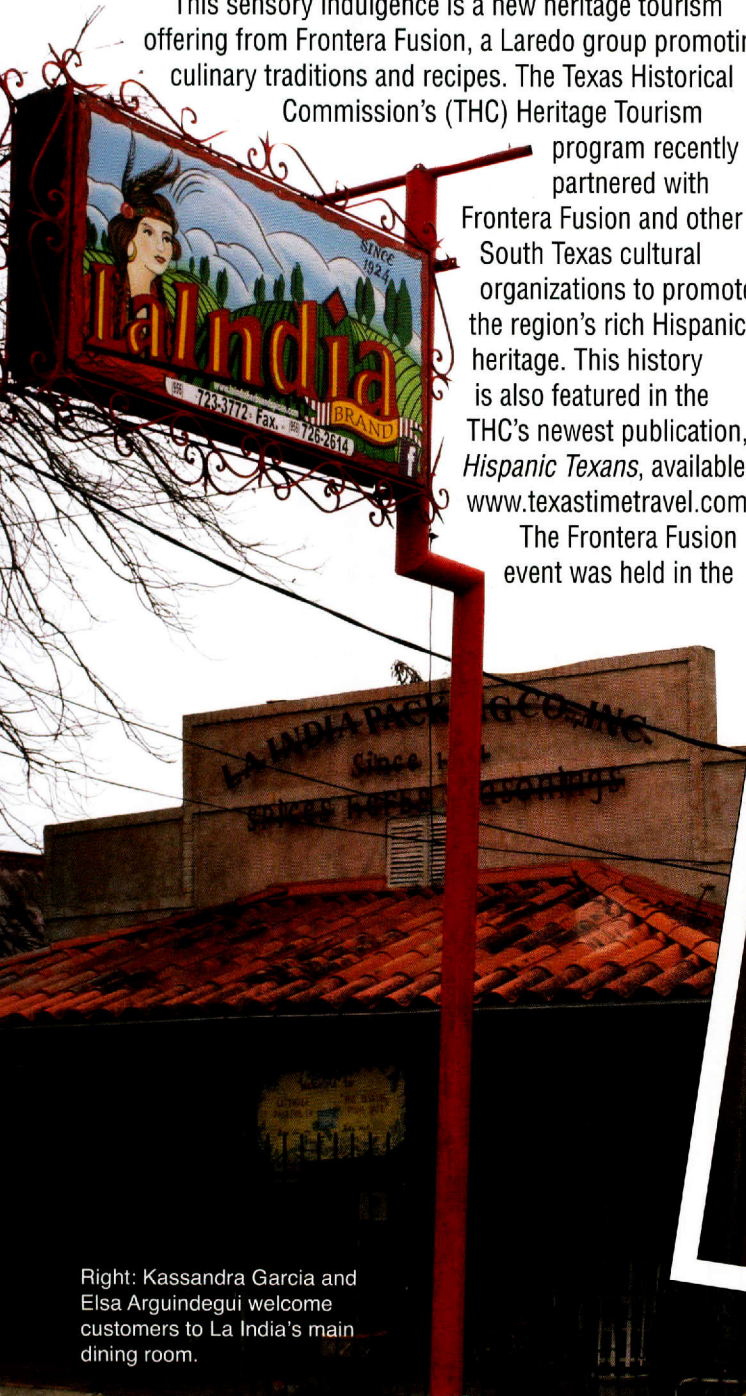
The Frontera Fusion event was held in the

hacienda-like courtyard of Vega's Interiores Mejicanos, a 76-year old import business with origins in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. The culinary event focused on preparing food with a *molcajete*, an ancient stone tool dating to the Aztecs of 4000 B.C. Event participants used *molcajetes* to create a savory spice rub for pork carnitas and a tasty salsa with tomatoes, onions, and jalapeños.

"It's wonderful to see people learning how food has been prepared for centuries with these traditional cooking tools," said Sandra Rocha Taylor of Avenida San Bernardo, a Laredo cultural group. "With all the modern appliances available today, it's easy to forget how these things were done before you just pushed a button."

These types of experiences—an event or attraction combining local food with regional history or outdoor recreation—have always been popular draws for visitors to the Laredo area. In the past, travelers even drove right through Laredo and across the Rio Grande to Nuevo Laredo, where they could enjoy authentic Mexican food and wares. Over the last decade, however, many of these establishments have relocated to the Texas side of the river, where visitors are increasingly discovering their distinctive regional appeal.

Many business relocations occurred due to travel concerns related to drug cartel violence and new homeland security measures,



Right: Cassandra Garcia and Elsa Arguindegui welcome customers to La India's main dining room.



which resulted in tourists avoiding the Mexican border. Unfortunately, these issues also had an impact on visitation to Laredo, though city officials say the concerns are now unfounded.

“There may have been some ill-characterized reports that were inaccurate,” explains Laredo Convention and Visitors Bureau Director Blasita Lopez. “The truth is, the crime numbers around here have been dropping for years.”

Lopez adds that a recent meeting

with Laredo’s police department about crime revealed the city’s statistics are typical or even low compared to other municipalities of the same size (population circa 250,000). In addition, the significant presence of the Border Patrol and other federal institutions helps locals and visitors feel safe. Lopez also mentions that despite the recent troubles across the Rio Grande, Laredo’s ties to Mexico remain very significant.

“Our shared border has so much to do with the way this city is,” she says. “We wouldn’t be the community we are without the culture and commerce that are shared across both sides of the river.”

With that in mind, Lopez mentions several restaurants and retail shops that retain the international appeal that has drawn travelers to the area for decades. Dozens of Mexican import shops, including **Vega’s Interiores Mejicanos** ([www.vegasinteriores.com](http://www.vegasinteriores.com), 956.724.8251), line the former historic Meridian Highway now known as San Bernardo Avenue. In addition, visitors can sample restaurants inspired by Mexican street vendors offering tasty treats like roasted corn, seasoned cabrito (goat), stacked panchos (nachos), and hearty mariachis (breakfast tacos).

One establishment that provides a colorful blend of virtually all the regional heritage-tourism elements is **La India Packing Co. and Tasting Room Café** ([www.laindiaherbsandspices.com](http://www.laindiaherbsandspices.com), 956.723.3772). A fixture in Laredo for more than 90 years, this homegrown business—specializing in spices, herbs, and seasonings—is also a recent recipient of the THC’s Texas Treasure Business Award.

“La India provides our visitors with a full sensory experience—it’s like walking into someone’s home where the most incredible food is being prepared,” Lopez says. “They’ve

done a really great job of preserving and promoting our local heritage.”

La India’s origins date to 1924, when Antonio and Antonia Rodriguez began selling Mexican chocolate and other items from a small grocery store in their home. Over time, Antonio’s failing eyesight resulted in an unintended pivotal change in their business: shifting to a concentration on herbal products.

“After my grandfather (Antonio) became blind, he relied on other senses like smell and taste to help with flavorings and medicines,” says Elsa Arguindegui, La India’s general manager. “He appreciated natural goods and remedies, so he developed relationships with farmers all the way from New Mexico to Peru. I grew up in this house, but I didn’t know what all these different herbs and seasonings were for—now I understand all of them.”

Arguindegui adds that business has been strong lately due to consumers’ increasing interest in organic, natural products. La India employees prepare, pack, and ship their seasonings on site (the family’s original residence), and in recent years have worked with food companies, grocery stores, restaurants, and retail establishments, including WalMart, HEB, and Walgreens. La India also features two cozy dining rooms, where visitors can sample the company’s delectable products in dishes ranging from exquisite chicken mole to savory soups and tostadas.



Top, left: Ingredients for making salsa at a *molcajete* demonstration held at Vega’s Interiores Mejicanos. Above: A sampling of Vega’s international treasures.

“It’s interesting, because these are traditional products we’ve always sold, but they haven’t really been popular with a mainstream audience,” Arguindegui says. “People sometimes think we’re just a packing company or focused on medicinal options, but we have all kinds of home-recipe seasonings and a restaurant that people are becoming more aware of. Even

locals are discovering us now, and we've been here since 1924!"

## La Historia de Laredo

For a fascinating overview of Laredo's vibrant past, travelers can visit the site where it all began: San Agustín Plaza. An ideal way to learn about the city's history is via an onsite walking tour from the **Webb County Heritage Foundation** (reserve in advance at 956.727.0977 or [heritage@webbheritage.org](mailto:heritage@webbheritage.org)).

Eduardo Garcia, a special programs coordinator with the organization, launched a recent tour of the National Register-listed district with a history lesson beside the plaza's magnificent San Agustín Cathedral. He explained that the Spanish arrived here in the 1500s "with a mission of three Gs—God, gold, and glory."

By the mid-1700s, a settlement was developed and named Laredo, likely by South Texas colonizer José de Escandón for a village of the same name in his native northern Spain. According to Garcia, the population at the time was only 86 people; however, there were more than 9,000 head of sheep, goats, and cattle.

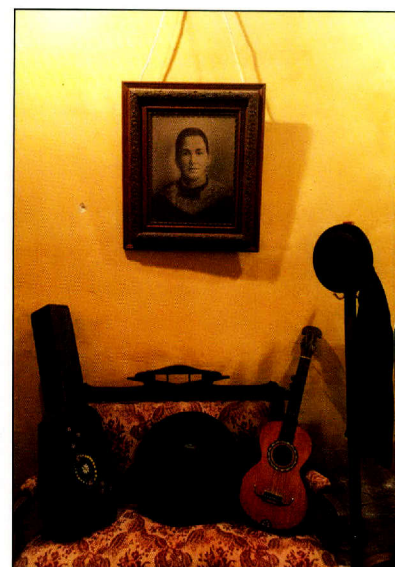
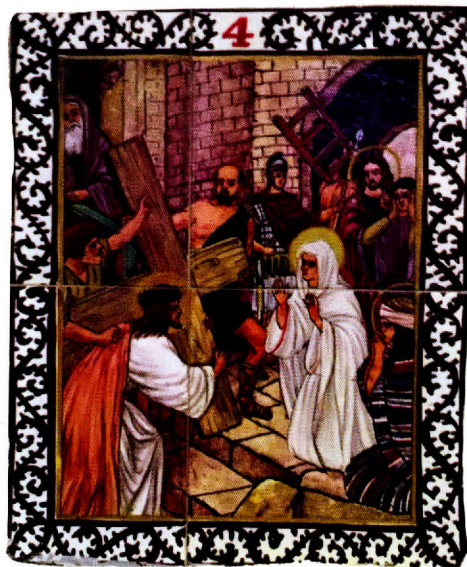
The plaza was laid out according to Spanish law, with a rectangular site surrounded by a church, government buildings, and homes for prominent families. As in other Latin American communities, the plaza was a traditional gathering place for cultural activities, including parades and ceremonies.

"One tradition that came here from Mexico was the Sunday evening *paseo*, where the girls would line up one way on the plaza, and the boys would walk around it in the other direction," Garcia explains. "If a boy was interested in a girl, he would buy *respadas* (ice treats) for her and all her chaperones. If she was interested in him, she might give him a handkerchief. It seems quaint now, but it was a big deal back then."

Getting back to his history lesson, Garcia says that in 1763, the San Agustín church began as an open-air *jacal* (hut). In 1857 a beloved priest, Padre Alfonso Souchon, arrived and

began fundraising for the current five-story tall Gothic Revival **San Agustín Cathedral** ([www.sanagustincathedrallaredo.org](http://www.sanagustincathedrallaredo.org), 956.722.1382), which opened in 1872. The cathedral is open most days for a noon Mass.

Just around the corner is the compelling **Republic of the Rio Grande Museum** ([www.webbheritage.org](http://www.webbheritage.org), 956.727.3480), where the walking tour originates. The building was constructed in 1830 as a home, but in 1840 it became the capitol of the short-lived Republic of the Rio Grande, which opposed the centrist Mexican leadership. According to Garcia, there were several brutal battles, including one where the republic's chief army commander Antonio Zapata was executed and his head displayed as a warning. Ultimately, republic leaders surrendered on November 6, just 283 days after declaring independence.



The museum honors the region's rare claim that it has served under seven national flags. Highlights include displays about the republic, weapons from the era, period furniture, and historic artifacts and photos from the Laredo area.

Next door is the remarkable Spanish Colonial-style **La Posada Hotel** ([www.laposada.com](http://www.laposada.com), 956.722.1701).

Located on the plaza's original site of city hall, the current building was constructed in 1916 as Laredo High School. The hotel incorporates several buildings from the 1800s and features spacious guest rooms and sumptuous Mexican food at the Zaragoza Grill.

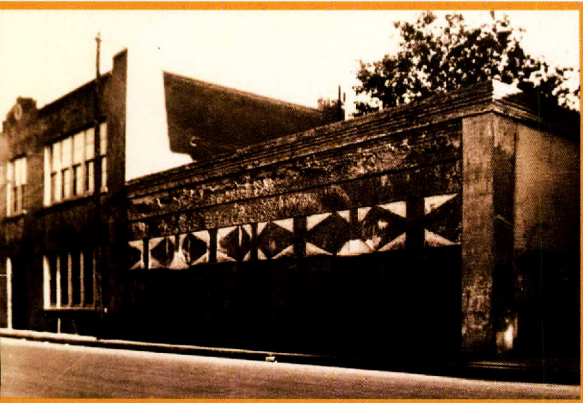
In addition, La Posada houses a modest yet distinctive attraction: **Washington's Birthday Celebration Museum** ([www.wbcalaredo.org](http://www.wbcalaredo.org)). The site features costumes, photos, and exhibits related to the city's 118-year-old fiesta honoring George Washington for his role in making the U.S. a welcome location for the many cultures that influenced Laredo's heritage.



Left: San Agustín Plaza. Right: Plaza Theater.



Continuing the historic district tour, Garcia points out the nearby **Casa Ortiz** ([www.tamtu.edu/casaortiz](http://www.tamtu.edu/casaortiz), 956.326.3200),



a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark dating to 1830. Laredo historians claim the Spanish Colonial residence is Texas' longest continually inhabited home.

A block away is the **Villa Antigua Border Heritage Museum**

Above and left: The Republic of the Rio Grande Museum, including the country's flag held by tour guide Edwardo Garcia. Far left: A tile inside San Agustín Cathedral.

([www.webbheritage.org](http://www.webbheritage.org), 956.727.0977). The museum, housed in a historic Italianate-style home, hosts heritage events and rotating exhibits featuring artifacts, sketches, and photos dedicated to Laredo's celebrated binational culture.

A few blocks away is the city's fabled **Plaza Theater**, a striking 1938 Art Deco/Modern structure with a prominent location on Mercado Plaza. A long-delayed restoration project is expected to help revitalize the plaza, which also contains the **Laredo Center for the Arts** ([www.laredoartcenter.org](http://www.laredoartcenter.org), 956.725.1715) and the **Laredo Convention and Visitors Bureau** ([www.visitlaredo.com](http://www.visitlaredo.com), 956.795.2200).

A mile west lies historic **Fort McIntosh**, an 1846 army compound now serving as a campus for Laredo Community College ([www.laredo.edu](http://www.laredo.edu), 956.722.0521). The fort was first

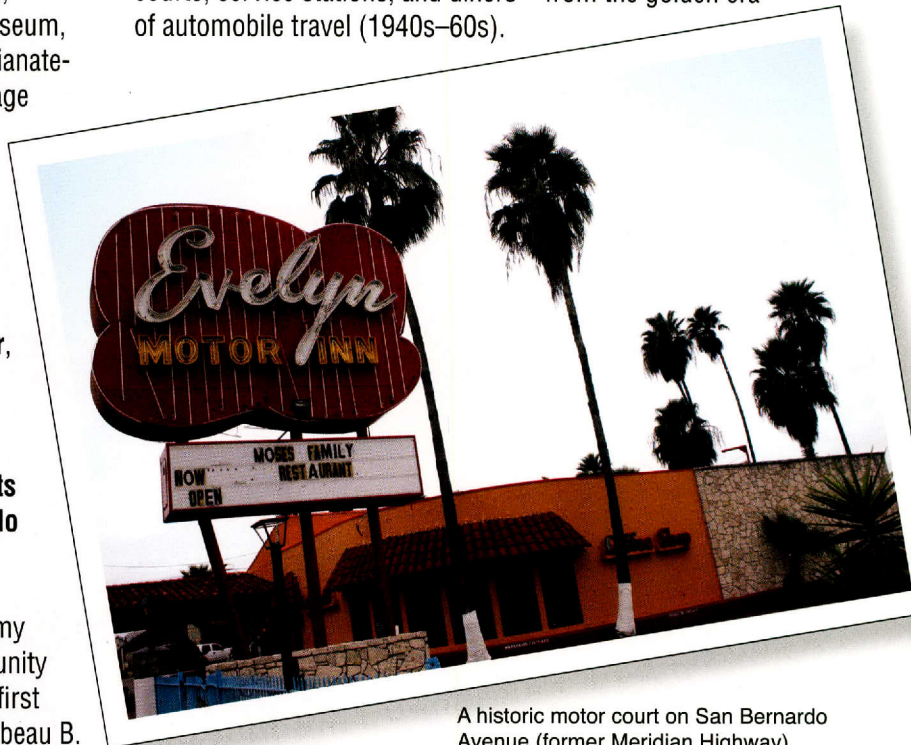
occupied by Capt. Mirabeau B. Lamar, former president of the Republic of Texas, and was active for nearly a century by protecting frontier settlers and hosting operations for military activities ranging from the Mexican War to both World Wars. The fort is now a State Antiquities Landmark and

National Register district, and many of the officers quarters and barracks remain in use.

The fort's origins are tied to a star-shaped earthen compound overlooking the Rio Grande's Paso de los Indios. Accessible via the college's **Lamar Bruni Vergara Environmental Science Center** (956.721.5140), the Paso de los Indios area now contains a nature trail leading to the former site of the "star fort," as it's locally known. Although the structure is long gone (despite a reconstruction by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s), efforts are underway to provide signage and interpretation about this historically significant site.

"The Paso de los Indios was used for centuries before the fort was constructed, and it's considered part of the Camino Real that led to Laredo's founding," says Tom Miller, director of the science center.

A different kind of passageway lies a couple miles to the northeast: **San Bernardo Avenue**. This former stretch of the Meridian Highway, currently being researched and documented as part of the THC's Texas Historic Highways Program, is the north-south counterpart to the east-west Bankhead Highway. Similarly, it features historic roadway structures—motor courts, service stations, and diners—from the golden era of automobile travel (1940s–60s).

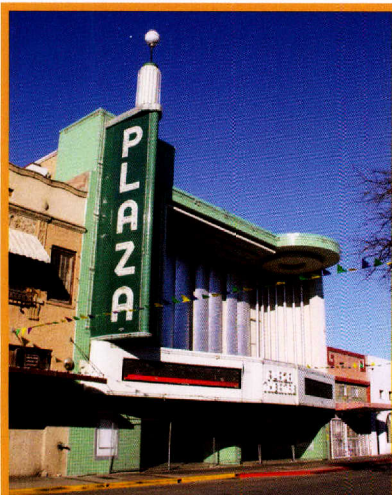
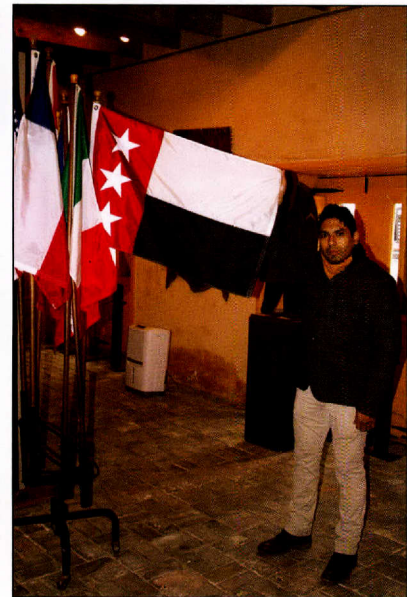


A historic motor court on San Bernardo Avenue (former Meridian Highway).

"My father owned the Pan American Courts, so I was raised on the Meridian Highway," says Avenida San Bernardo's Sandra Rocha Taylor. "Only now do I realize how interesting it was to be part of that wonderful piece of Texas history." ★

View more Laredo photos at [www.thc.state.tx.us/blog](http://www.thc.state.tx.us/blog).

For information about other heritage tourism destinations in this area of South Texas, order a free copy of the THC's *Texas Tropical Trail Region* travel guide at 866.276.6219 or [www.texastimetravel.com](http://www.texastimetravel.com).



# Sesquicentennial Salute

## CHC Commemorates 150th Anniversary of the Battle of Palmito Ranch

By William McWhorter  
Military Sites Program Coordinator

For several years, the Cameron County Historical Commission (CCHC) has planned a major sesquicentennial event related to the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War's conclusion. Finally, the time has arrived: on May 12, the CCHC will commemorate the war's last land battle, fought in 1865 near Brownsville.

The commission's Civil War Sesquicentennial Committee will host a battlefield ceremony at Palmito Ranch Battlefield National Historic Landmark (NHL). Since 2011, the committee has also organized heritage tourism opportunities for Cameron County, from symposiums to historical displays.

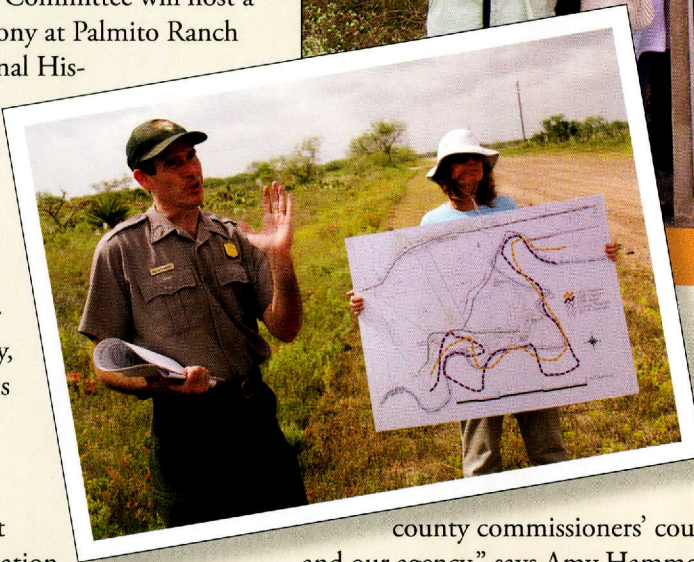
"Our goal is to make sure that Texans and the nation become quite familiar with the Palmito Ranch Battlefield National Historic Landmark," says Committee Chair Wilson Bourgeois. He adds that the battlefield, located just east of Brownsville, is one of the most regionally and nationally significant Civil War military sites in Texas.

One of nearly 254 CHCs in Texas, the CCHC represents a vital link in the state's preservation efforts. Texas is one of just a few states with a statewide network of preservation organizations like the CHCs.

"These front-line historic preservationists have statutory responsibility to initiate programs suggested by their



Above: The first Park Day at Palmito Ranch Battlefield (2008). Left: Historian Doug Murphy and then-Superintendent Mary Kralovec of the NPS discuss the battle's history (2009).



county commissioners' court and our agency," says Amy Hammons, the CHC outreach coordinator at the THC. "For decades, CHCs have worked in a dynamic and positive partnership with the THC to promote local history celebrations and heritage tourism, much like the upcoming event in Cameron County."

One such partnership between the THC and the CCHC manifested with Park Day—an annual event sponsored

by History (previously the History Channel) and the Civil War Trust—which organizes volunteers to clean and repair the grounds of Civil War battlefields. Since the first Park Day at Palmito Ranch Battlefield NHL in 2008, the CCHC has been an active stakeholder.

The CCHC's Sesquicentennial Committee has evolved as a primary local resource for the battlefield's preservation. In addition, the THC has built a rewarding partnership through Park Day and subsequent projects,

“Our goal is to make sure that Texans and the nation become quite familiar with the Palmito Ranch Battlefield National Historic Landmark,” says Committee Chair Wilson Bourgeois.

“For decades, CHCs have worked in a dynamic and positive partnership with the THC to promote local history celebrations and heritage tourism, much like the upcoming events in Cameron County,” says Amy Hammons, the CHC outreach coordinator at the THC.



Members of the CCHC's Sesquicentennial Committee.

with a coalition of local and national stakeholders consisting of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFW) South Texas Refuge Complex, the National Park Service's Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park, the

Brownsville Historical Association, and others.

Because the state does not have an official committee or agency to commemorate the Sesquicentennial, over the past four years the CCHC's committee has worked with these preservation partners and others to

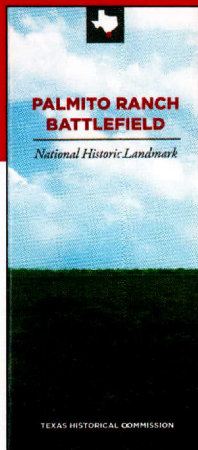
create regional programming for heritage tourists through symposiums, outreach, research, and its upcoming sesquicentennial observance in May.

Since 2008, the THC's Military Sites Program has coordinated Park Day at Palmito Ranch Battlefield NHL, and undertaken several grant-funded projects, including research and archeological studies, a brochure, onsite radio broadcast repeater system with new signage, and regional outreach workshops. These projects have culminated with the USFW's placement of a 360-degree interpretive platform in the core battlefield area in 2014.

Now in the final year of the Sesquicentennial, the Military Sites Program is in the process of publishing a book about the various preservation projects at the battlefield. Staff will also be available at the CCHC's upcoming commemorative event. ★

Civil War History Enthusiasts and Heritage Tourists  
**OBSERVE THE SESQUICENTENNIAL**

**MAY 12**  
**Battlefield Ceremony at Palmito Ranch Battlefield NHL, 9 a.m.**  
 A solemn ceremony, where speakers will pay their respects and a presentation of colors will be held. The event is free and open to the public. For more information about programming, contact the CCHC by phone at 956.244.3770.



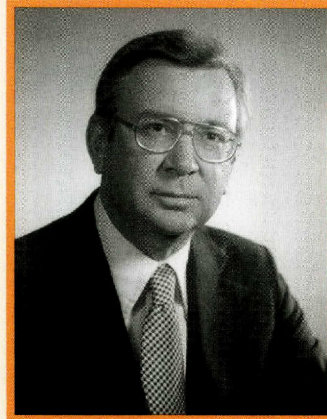
Download the THC Palmito Ranch Battlefield National Historic Landmark brochure now at <http://bit.ly/1HfTzw>.

# Passion for Preservation

Ann Lawrence, Wife of THC Marker Program Founder, Discusses Texas History

By *Rebecca Borchers*  
Executive Director, Friends of the Texas Historical Commission

Ann Lewis Lawrence of Tyler is a trustee emeritus with the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission. Her experiences with preservation are extensive, dating to the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) first historical marker placement at Camp Ford in 1962. She is the widow of Lee Lawrence, one of the THC's first commissioners and an originator of the agency's marker program. Mrs. Lawrence has been a generous supporter of the Friends for many years, and she graciously agreed to answer several questions about the THC's historic preservation work.



Right: Lee Lawrence helped launch the THC's marker program.

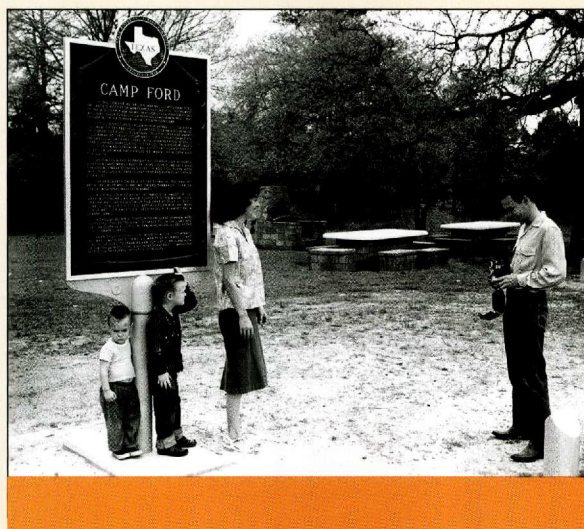
**What is the philosophy that you and Lee have shared about historic preservation?** Our philosophy and interest were heightened when Lee and I purchased the ranch and historic home near Comanche, Texas, built by his ancestors who came to Texas in 1855. We restored it back to the original condition and have lovingly furnished and enjoyed it since it was acquired. We have developed a passion and philosophy of the true Texas pilgrims who came and helped settle Texas.

**Please tell us about your background and how you became interested in historic preservation.** I first became interested in history as a young bride married to an enthusiastic historian. Lee was appointed to the Texas Historical Commission in 1959. We attended meetings for years. Lee started as a member and soon became the president. I learned so much, and read a lot because of his active membership and participation in all Texas historical organizations.

**Why are you interested in the programs of the Texas Historical Commission?** Lee spent a very large part of his life starting and heading probably every Texas state historical organization. I attended meetings and conferences with Lee and my interest and enthusiasm grew as a result.

**What motivated you to support the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission?** I was pleased to become a part of the Friends group, and felt strongly that it offered a great service. It helps finance and encourage more historic preservation and interest in communities across Texas.

**Do you have a favorite personal story about Texas history from your experiences with Lee?** From the viewpoint of Lee's collaboration with John Ben Shepperd and Dr. Rupert N. Richardson in originating and developing the present Texas Historical Marker Program, we spent many weekends traveling all over the state to dedicate new markers.



Visitors photograph the THC's first historical marker (Camp Ford), dedicated by Lee Lawrence in 1962.

**What would you tell others who are thinking about giving to the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission?** If we don't become aware of our own area's history and work to preserve and save it, we will lose a lot of important structures and historical knowledge. ★

**FRIENDS**  
OF THE  
**TEXAS**  
**HISTORICAL**  
**COMMISSION**

To learn more about the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission or to make a gift, call 512.936.2189 or visit [www.thcfriends.org](http://www.thcfriends.org).

# Remember Fannin Battleground!

## Battle of Coleto Creek Set the Stage for Texas' Independence

By *Andy Rhodes*  
Managing Editor, The Medallion

Coleto Creek isn't grouped with iconic Texas independence battles such as the Alamo and San Jacinto. But it should be. The battle, commemorated at the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) Fannin Battleground State Historic Site, fired off a month's worth of tumultuous events in 1836 that ultimately led to independence and the establishment of Texas as a republic.

On March 19, 1836, Gen. James Fannin led an army of 300 Texian volunteers in the pivotal Battle of Coleto Creek. After retreating from Presidio la Bahia to the creek, about 15 miles southwest of Victoria, Fannin and his men spent the day fighting repeated attacks from the Mexican army, under Gen. José de Urrea. By nightfall, the Texians were completely surrounded.

With seven Texians dead and 28 wounded, Fannin's command faced the prospect of fighting their way through Urrea's lines or remaining on the field. Realizing they would have to leave their wounded, which included Fannin, the Texians reworked their defenses, dug trenches, and waited for sunrise.

Fannin surrendered the next day, and Urrea recommended clemency; however, Fannin's company was marched to Goliad and on March 27,



Reenactors participate in the pivotal Battle of Coleto Creek, commemorated at Fannin Battleground State Historic Site.

Palm Sunday, Fannin and most of his men were executed under order from Mexican Gen. Santa Anna. Now known as the Goliad Massacre, the event became a rallying force for the Texians, with battle cries of "Remember Goliad!" urging the soldiers to victory at San Jacinto nearly a month later.

The details of these events and their historical depictions are displayed at the Fannin Battleground site, which unveiled notable improvements just a few years ago. The improvements include the visitors center's expanded interpretation of the events that took place 175 years ago, a new entryway with gates and signage, and a new flag area incorporating the historic entrance gates

and memorial stones. The bandstand preservation project included restoring original window and door openings, painting the exterior structure, restoring the original roof, and installing a new exhibit about the Battle of Coleto Creek. Other improvements include a new restroom building and outdoor interpretation panels.

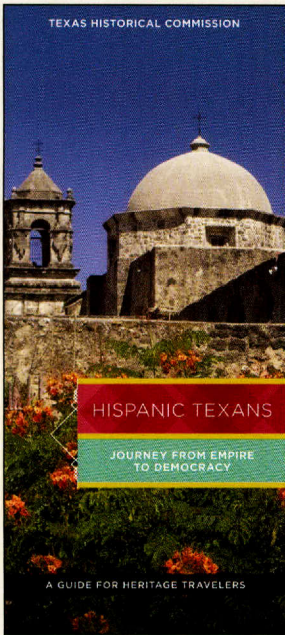
"Because this was such a key battle in the fight for Texas independence, Fannin Battleground is a must-see destination for heritage travelers," said Mark Wolfe, executive director of the THC. "A visit here offers a real opportunity to learn more about the compelling history of our agency's Texas Independence Trail Region." ★

**Fannin Battleground State Historic Site**  
734 FM 2506  
Fannin, TX 77960  
512.463.7948  
[www.visitfanninbattleground.com](http://www.visitfanninbattleground.com)

### GET GUIDED

Fannin Battleground is featured in the THC's recently published statewide travel guide highlighting the history and associated heritage tourism attractions related to Hispanic culture. Order a free copy at 866.276.6219 or [www.texas timetravel.com](http://www.texas timetravel.com). In addition, the site will also be highlighted in the THC's new mobile app, Texas Time Travel Tours.

# THC Releases Cultural Heritage Guide and Travel App



The Texas Historical Commission (THC) recently released a new travel guide and a mobile app celebrating Texas' diverse cultural legacy.

The free 100-page booklet, *Hispanic Texans: Journey from Empire to Statehood*, highlights statewide heritage attractions and serves as an educational resource about the state's Hispanic history. The travel guide includes a timeline, photos, and sidebars commemorating the struggles and triumphs of Hispanics in Texas. Travelers can use the guide to explore notable Hispanic communities and historical and cultural attractions in each of the THC's 10 Texas Heritage Trail regions.

"We're very proud of this guide and the significant history it represents," said Mark Wolfe, the THC's executive director. "We hope it will inspire people to make heritage-themed travel plans and learn about our state's diverse cultural legacy."

In addition, history lovers seeking Texas heritage adventures have a new way to explore the state via the recently released Texas Time Travel Tours app, available for free download from Google Play and Apple's App Store. It launches with the African Americans in Texas tour, offering video and audio highlighting significant stories and sites related to black history throughout the state. It is the first in a series of tours.

For more information about the app and *Hispanic Texans*, visit [www.texasimetravel.com](http://www.texasimetravel.com). ★

## MAIN STREET PROGRAM ACCEPTING COMMUNITY APPLICATIONS

Applications to become a designated Texas Main Street community are accepted only once a year. Communities of all sizes with a historic downtown are eligible to become a Main Street community, and that process begins with a Letter of Intent that is due to the THC's Main Street office by July 31.

Each year, the THC may select up to five Texas cities for official Main Street designation. Historic neighborhood commercial districts are also eligible to apply. With the designation, communities become part of a powerful statewide and national network, and receive a range of services from the Texas Main Street Program staff, including design and technical consultation, strategic planning, on-site manager training, and more. There is no application fee.

For more information, and to download an application, visit [www.thc.state.tx.us](http://www.thc.state.tx.us) or call the THC's Community Heritage Development Division at 512.463.6092. ★



## HISTORIC SITES FREE DAY TO BE HELD MAY 3

In celebration of National Preservation Month and Texas Travel and Tourism Week, the THC will offer free admission to all 20 state historic sites on Sunday, May 3.

Several of the THC's sites have recently been renovated or restored. Please visit [www.texashistoricsites.com](http://www.texashistoricsites.com) and make your plans now to visit one of the sites near you. Historic homes, military outposts and forts, and a national museum are all destination options on THC Historic Sites Free Day.

For a complete list of properties participating and their hours of operation, call 512.463.7948 or visit [www.texashistoricsites.com](http://www.texashistoricsites.com). ★

## GALVESTON TO HOST GRAND EVENT CELEBRATING JUNETEENTH'S 150TH ANNIVERSARY

History was made in Galveston 150 years ago when General Order No. 3 was issued, announcing the emancipation of slaves. To mark the sesquicentennial of that momentous event, Galveston historians are hosting a grand celebration on June 19.

The Galveston Historical Commission's Juneteenth Committee has been planning the event for several years. Festivities include panel discussions, film screenings, picnics, African American heritage exhibits, parades, and concerts. The annual reading of the Emancipation Proclamation in front of the city's official Juneteenth monument will be held June 19 at Ashton Villa.

For more information, visit the Galveston Juneteenth 2015 page on Facebook. ★

Above center: Caddo Mounds and Starr Family Home State Historic Sites.

# Focus on Historic Resources

## Educate Your CHC on the Importance of Historic Bridges

By Amy Hammons

County Historical Commission Outreach Coordinator

The last edition of CHC Corner addressed how the Texas Historical Commission (THC) provides technical advice, affirmation, and moral support. In addition to these general areas of assistance, THC staff educates individuals on the complexities of specific historic resource types.

The THC, Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), and Historic Bridge Foundation (HBF) recently identified the most significant bridges built in Texas in the decades following World War II. These partners held public meetings to discuss what educational materials could best tell the story of these important resources.

Together, THC, TxDOT, and HBF are producing guidance for local preservationists and engineers. TxDOT created a visual glossary of bridge components and the “Dos and Don’ts” of bridge repairs. HBF’s website includes key steps to promoting bridge awareness, and the THC’s website

features a section with additional guidance and information to help the public understand historic bridges.



Above and at right: The Piano Bridge in Fayette County was recently preserved thanks to support from county officials and preservationists.



Photos by Michael Amador/TxDOT

The THC website also features TxDOT’s maps of historic truss bridges and post-World War II bridges

eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Determining the value of historic bridges is particularly important considering their replacement rate due to perceived cost-prohibitive repairs.

“Our preference is that bridges, like buildings, be left at the original location,” says Linda Henderson, a historian with the THC. “However, a bridge may be stored and reused, and

the move may not lessen the bridge’s integrity if it’s historically significant for its engineering.”

Whether rehabilitated or repurposed, bridge use typically is limited to simple conveyance (crossing a

natural feature), while buildings have a seemingly broader range of reuse (retail, office, residence, etc.) that enable reinvention and some degree of return on investment. For this reason, we challenge you to increase the value of historic bridges by highlighting their role in heritage tourism.

“Bridges and other infrastructure are key characters in stories of exploration, settlement, and industry, as much as buildings,” Henderson says.

CHCs can promote local history by highlighting unique historic bridges. More information on saving bridges in your community can be found by searching “historic bridges” on the THC website ([www.thc.state.tx.us](http://www.thc.state.tx.us)). ★

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### Our Mission

To protect and preserve the state’s historic and prehistoric resources for the use, education, enjoyment, and economic benefit of present and future generations.



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## WHERE ON EARTH...IN TEXAS

**Know your Texas history?** Put your skills to the test by identifying the pictured site! The first three people who correctly identify the location will receive a prize and be named in the next issue of *The Medallion*. Send your answer to: *The Medallion*, P.O. Box 12276, Austin, TX 78711-2276 or email to [medallion@thc.state.tx.us](mailto:medallion@thc.state.tx.us). Limit one prize annually per contestant.

Need a clue? This tiny structure is located on the grounds of a courthouse that was restored through the THC's Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program.

Answer to the photo from previous issue: The Noah Cox house is in the City of Roma's National Historic Landmark District.



Built around 1853, the structure has been owned by descendants of Noah Cox since 1856. Vacant since 1987, the house was listed on Preservation Texas' Most Endangered Places list in 2011. Congratulations and prizes go to the following readers who correctly identified the site: Henry Elrod of Boerne, Carolyn Peterson of San Antonio, and Susie Rucker of Corpus Christi. Thanks to all who participated! ★

