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## Park, museum preserve legacies of Texas heritage

By Cray Pixley

ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

The diminutive town of Washington, Texas is an unassuming outcrop of farms, homes, gas stations and shops seven miles outside of Navasota.

But Washington is not just another sleepy settlement existing on the fringes of a slightly larger town. It is the site of a gold mine of Texas history.

Washington is the home of the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park heralded as the birthplace of the Republic of Texas.

On March 2, 1836, in an unfinished building a short distance from the Brazos River, Texas delegates declared their independence from Mexico and formed the republic.

The historic park boasts three buildings celebrating Texas independence and the beginnings of what were to become the Lone Star state.

In the true spirit of Texas pride, the structure housing treasures from the years of the republic and state is a stone edifice in the shape of a star.

The Star of the Republic Museum, administered by Blinn College, is a two-story building in which artifacts and exhibitions chart the lifestyle and history of 19th century Texans.

The ground floor of the museum is dedicated to exploring the lives of the men and women who helped build the republic.

The work of Sam Houston, Anson Jones and many other founding fathers are chronicled through photographs, artwork and exhibits of their personal property.

Mementos such as money, flags, weapons and medical instruments give visitors an idea of

life in early Texas.

Mexican sabers, pistols and Indian bows and arrows give testament to the early settler's struggles against Mexican invasions and Indian raids.

Indians posed a constant threat to settlers. The words of President of the Republic Mirabeau B. Lamar give insight into the new Texans' feelings toward their neighbors.

"The white man and the red man cannot dwell in harmony together," Lamar said. "Nature forbids it."

But the Cherokee and Comanche tribes were not always out

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causing trouble.

One glass-covered display shows sticks Indians used in a ball game.

Virtually every facet of Texas' past is covered in the museum's exhibits.

The core of the star houses the Jesse H. Jones Theatre, which presents films focusing on Texas history.

This month, the theater premieres "The Republic of Texas", an orientation film that provides visitors with a background for their tour of the museum.

A winding ramp takes museum visitors to the opening of the second floor where a gigantic cotton bale serves as a reminder to how crucial the cotton industry was in the state's development.

Mercantile, economic and agricultural aspects of Texas are the

subjects of exhibits. The second level offers a glimpse into the lives of everyday 19th-century Texans.

Along with the cotton, there is a vintage cotton gin and a reminder that more than 40,000 slaves lived and worked at farms during the reign of the republic.

A photograph of the slave Anne Freeman Groves ironically lists her residence as Independence, Texas.

A mock interior of a dry-goods store displays the wares available to customers from the mercantile trade.

Iron pots, brass candlesticks

and bags of dried foods stand on the shelves. A jar of rock candy seems to be waiting for a hungry child.

Most stores of the century carried huge barrels full of molasses, vinegar, wine and cider. The shops also had household and farm goods for consumers.

It may surprise some visitors that steamboats once navigated Texas rivers. A model of one, *Yellow Stone*, recalls the days of river travel. The decks of the vessel provided space to transport cotton from one landing to another.

The second level opens to an observation deck from which the surrounding countryside is visible.

Farms, pine trees, horses and cows dot the land in addition to the low-level Brazos River. It is still too early in the year for the wildflowers to color the park grounds.

The riches of the museum are visited by few tourists during the fall and winter months.

During the colder months, the museum receives about 100 visitors each day, Barbara Sulek, a weekend employee of the museum, says.

She says visitors seem to be governed by the weather and the presence of bluebonnets in the fields.

"We don't have large crowds when the weather is cold," she says.

"It's when the bluebonnets bloom that the people pour in. On most spring weekends, we get 1,000 to 1,500 visitors."

Visitors Gerry and Ruth Christianson from Taylors Falls, Minnesota were not put off by the cool breezy weather or the lack of a plush carpet of wildflowers.

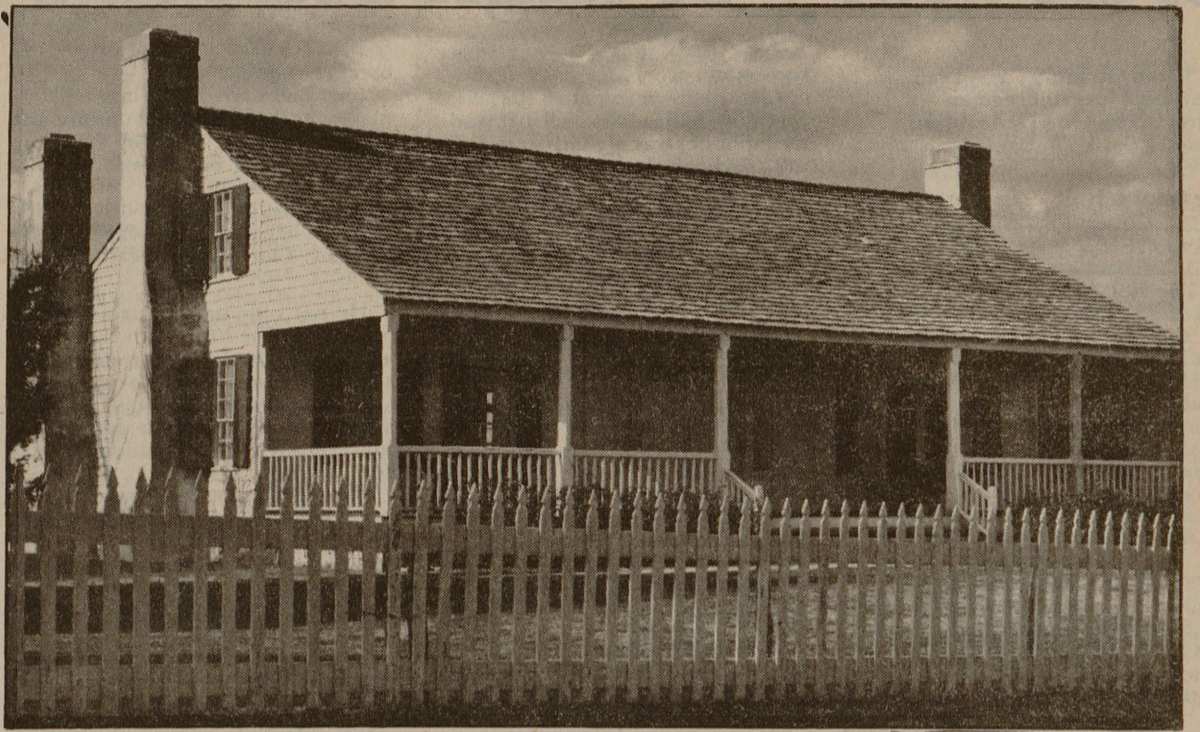


Photo by Ronnie Montgomery

The historic home of Anson Jones, the last President of the Republic of Texas, stands in

the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park and is open to the public for tours.

"We are retired and visit museums all over the country, but Texas has the best," he says.

"It's surprising the number of artifacts that this museum has on display. Most I've been to didn't have this many."

Ruth Christianson agrees with her husband.

"I think it is tremendous about the number of artifacts that were salvaged for the museum," she says. "We really are enjoying this visit."

Like most museums, the Star of the Republic has a gift shop full of souvenirs.

The mementos include books about Texas history, museum T-shirts and the obligatory bumper stickers and buttons. More traditional items include cornhusk dolls, iron piggy banks, steamboat models and wooden dolls.

Once the rounds have been made in the museum, visitors can take a stroll through the home of the fourth and last president of the republic, Anson Jones.

A few minutes walk from the museum, Jones' white cedar home is surrounded by a picket fence and overlooks the Brazos.

Barrington is the restored plantation home that Jones built in 1845.

Although the house commands a prime location in the park, it originally stood about four miles outside of Washington. In 1936, it was moved to the park as part

of the republic exhibit.

Tours of the home are given by guides from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

The spartan furnishings inside were the property of Jones or contemporary to his time.

The master bedroom features a huge feather bed with a colorful quilt and a dresser used by Jones and his wife. The guest bedroom sports an early model of the trundle bed.

The dining room is set for supper and guide Edna Jackson points out the petite size of the dinnerware.

"The people were much smaller in the 19th century," she says. "The plates are tiny in comparison to present-day sizes."

The upstairs room is off limits to visitors because of the difficulty in descending the narrow staircase.

The home is curiously missing a kitchen, which is detached from the home. In Jones' day, cooking inside the home would have been a fire hazard.

Even the small kitchen proved too hazardous. Jones' cookhouse burned down four times.

The final monument to Texas Independence is a replica of Independence Hall.

In 1836, the 59 delegates met in a similar hall to declare Texas free and separate from Mexico.

The unfinished frame hall is

modest in design and decoration, but accurately reflects the original structure.

The empty chairs and long wooden tables call to mind the men who worked for Texas' freedom over 150 years ago.

Along the pathway to the hall, a dirt trail branches off toward the river. A sign along the way proclaims the path leads to a river overlook.

The trip is hardly worth the walk. The river is visible but only from a tangle of weeds and other growth. The view is restricted by the opposite muddy bank and trees.

It's best to skip the river overlook and stay with the historical buildings. A better view of the river can be seen on the highway leading to the park.

The park is well worth seeing. To visit Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park, take Highway 6 South to Navasota. In Navasota, take Highway 105 West for seven miles before turning right onto FM 1155 to the park.

The museum hours are March through August, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. September through February, Wednesday-Sunday at 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free.

The Anson Jones home is open daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$1 for adults and 50¢ for children.



Photo by Ronnie Montgomery

John Grimm, 6, of Magnolia, studies a model boat on display in the museum at Washington-on-the-Brazos.

## Telephone becomes newest source of advice, diversion, romance

NEW YORK (AP) — Beware the telephone.

TV ads may tease and promise adventure at the fingertips. But it's all now, pay later, when the monthly bill shows where late night loneliness and the pursuit of romance dug into the wallet.

That once-friendly instrument, masquerading in the colors of the rainbow and shapes that range from computer clever to Space Age gothic, is at your service with services you never dreamed you'd want.

Everything is available: from pay-as-you-talk to Santa to pay-as-you-dream about sex.

A firm in Seattle brought down the wrath of parents with a half-hour Christmas show featuring Santa Claus.

Children were told to hold their telephones toward the screen, whereupon tone-activated signals dialed up that jolly old elf so the kids could chat with him, while the computer logged and charged for the calls.

Things have changed in the telephone world, not so much because the changes are needed, but because they are possible. And profitable.

Today's telephone junkie can have intimate chats with all kinds of strangers.

Now a whole new series of 1-900 numbers are opening up.

On some you are a quiz show guest, answering with your push-button phone to maybe win a prize. But you pay for the call, perhaps \$2 for openers and more if you stay on the line.

A simple call on one adult sex line in New York City can run \$20 or more, whether you talk or not.

The telephone has spawned a new business that some say is eclipsing \$400 million a year and growing.

An evening of letting your fingers do the walking can ring up a \$200 phone bill in a couple of hours.

The same comforting device that gave you grandma's warm and comforting voice now gives you everything from strange sex to sexy strangers, from gays in search of companionship to high school kids on a high. It offers up the stock market, the latest interest rates, advice on mortgages.

That's not all. On the gab lines you can chat with strangers, search for a date, leave your number for promised human adventure, dispel in seven push-button digits that most universal of all human conditions, loneliness.

And if one is too shy, dial the adult lines (in New York there are more than 200 of them) and become an aural voyeur to kinky sex, erotic

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It is 5:30 a.m. in New York City and CBS has sandwiched in between its late-night rerun and morning business shows a commercial or two showing a black-dressed villain and a pretty blonde a la Perils of Pauline urging viewers to call a certain 970 number and rescue this damsel from certain boredom.

When the number is reached (after several tries) a woman's voice says the call will cost \$5 unless you hang up now.

Then you are assigned your personal code number and given another telephone number to call. After several tries again, you enter your code, then push another num-

ber as instructed and finally reach a young, breathless voice named Linda. She is apparently ready to field your favorite fantasy, although she volunteers nothing.

You find that she is a 22-year-old college graduate (political science) from a New York state university, is thinking about joining the Peace Corps, and is saving money to go to Europe to visit a friend.

You hesitate to ask, "What's a nice girl like you doing in this racket," and inquire instead, "Are you well-paid for this?"

She answers no. Then someone steps in and terminates the call. Either time was up or the questions were going too far.

Three weeks later the television invitation to call carries a sotto voce addendum: "Ten dollars a call."

This particular operation is offered by one of a group of companies, known usually as Omni Phone Inc. of Seattle, although in Texas the name is HDL Inc.

The marketing and promotion is handled by a firm called the Megaquest Group, based in Seattle. The companies employ about 500 people and operate in about 30 cities domestically, plus all of Canada and in London, Rotterdam, Paris and Australia.

One of the satellite companies, Phonequest, was the one that engineered the Santa calling show. It was syndicated to 30 domestic and four foreign markets.

When the Seattle station began getting irate calls, it quickly ran a warning to children with the printed words telling them to ask Mom and Dad first.

Why did Phonequest, which has used the program for four years, rely on the electronic dialing technique? A spokesman said it was to

prevent children from dialing the wrong number.

When one of the firm's 970 numbers in New York City was dialed and reached after several abortive tries, a pretentiously sexy female voice answered and offered to be companionable.

When the phone bill came in, it registered four calls and two additional minutes. The charge was \$79.80, even though three of the calls never produced an answer.

When the number was called back, post billing, this was the conversation:

Hi, how much to party line.

How much does this call cost?

You didn't hear the recording?

There was no recording.

Nineteen ninety-five.

Goodbye.

That number also was advertised on television, with an attractive young woman adding under her breathless message, "\$19.95 a call."

It so happened that particular number was another Omni Phone enterprise. Betsy Superfon, known erroneously in the trade as "Betsy Superphone," is chief executive officer of the Seattle-based firm.

She says the company offers everything from soap opera updates to joke lines, from dial-an-insult to group access lines.

She outlined plans to go into other areas with information storage and retrieval via voice, a kind of telephone postal service, as well as interconnections between computers, and varying menus available on a single line to get specific data, for instance in sports, that the caller desires.

There is also a proposal to acquire her firm from herself and partners Joel and Rebecca Eisenberg. They claim a 1987 net income of not less

than \$4 million.

The would-be acquirer is a Texas firm called WurlTech Industries of Houston, which is listed on the New York Stock Exchange as a billiard table manufacturer. It was recently quoted at about a dollar a share.

Of the unanswered but charged-for calls, Superfon said she would refund any justifiable costs on receipt of a complaining letter.

She said there is a quality control program to prevent such errors.

Would she continue the current gab line and adult services in light of her future plans?

"Absolutely. People are lonely, have been lonely and always will be lonely."

Besides, for many people the phone lines provide a real service for companionship, even though many of the people who link up by voice rarely see each other.

"Telephones are really safe," she says.

There is already the beginning of a second generation of telephone-line dating.

From New York City comes word of a "Fax," or facsimile-transmitter club, which for a few hundred dollars will let you fax your message to someone else's fax, and never hear their voice if you don't want to.

Chris Elwell, editor of the Information Industry Bulletin, one of the few authoritative sources in the dial-it industry, says using the telephone for information is nothing new.

New York telephone operators have been giving the time of day since the late 1920s, with the weather and traffic information following.

The old operator and the party line were avenues for news and gossip.