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## VISITORS GUIDE

# SAM BELL MAXEY HOUSE

— STATE HISTORIC SITE —

*Paris, Texas*



**TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION**  
REAL PLACES TELLING REAL STORIES

Welcome to Sam Bell Maxey House State Historic Site. Sam Bell Maxey was a Mexican War veteran, former Confederate general, and future U.S. Senator when his family moved into their fashionable, newly built home on the south side of Paris in 1868. In this home, the Maxey family navigated the political and social landscape from Reconstruction Era Texas through the start of the First World War. The home's newly restored interiors showcase original family furnishings, clothing, and letters. These give insight into the lives of the three generations of the family that bore witness to Reconstruction's challenging legacy.

## RECONSTRUCTION

The Reconstruction Era is usually understood to have lasted from 1865 to 1877, though many of Reconstruction's goals are still a work in progress today. Following the Civil War, the damage of the conflict needed to be repaired and the country reunified. Tension between the goals of healing the divisions in the country and creating justice for all Americans defined this era.

The first few years brought tremendous change to the structure of American society. With the ratification of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the U.S. Constitution, four million formerly enslaved African Americans became full citizens promised the rights and freedoms of every American. They very quickly established schools, businesses, and communities supported by local offices of the federal Freedman's Bureau. They organized politically and elected the first African American representatives to the U.S. Congress who worked for legislation to provide education, protect the political rights, and extend economic opportunities of freedmen. The early years of Reconstruction were a hopeful time for African



Pardon, Franchise Columbia, "Shall I trust these men, and not this man?", Nast, Thomas, 1840.

Americans, when it seemed the promise of America could finally be delivered upon.



"The First Vote," from *Harper's Weekly*, November 16, 1867; Alfred R. Waud.

Eventually, the will of Americans to address the needs for full equality and liberty of the formerly enslaved subsided. By the 1870s, former Confederates, like Sam Bell Maxey, were re-enfranchised and regained state and federal political office before many hoped-for gains in equality could be made for African Americans. In Texas, state Reconstruction ended in 1874 when many

former Confederates took control of the state legislature, as states enacted discriminatory laws that disenfranchised and disadvantaged African Americans in every aspect of life, many early achievements were reversed. Violence and terror campaigns against African Americans reinforced discriminatory laws for generations across America, and it would be nearly another century before the Civil Rights movement made progress to change this. Today, America continues to grapple with the legacy of Reconstruction's unfinished work, and the questions of how to heal a divided nation while providing justice for all.



## A FAMILY HOME

### THE MAXEYS

For Samuel “Sam” Bell Maxey, his wife Marilda and adopted daughter Dora, the fashionable Italianate style home completed in 1868 was another step to the family’s recovery after the Civil War. On the eve of the war, Maxey was a partner in his father’s law firm and had political ambitions in the Texas state legislature. Lamar County was one of the few in Texas to oppose secession, but, when the State of Texas voted to secede, Sam Bell Maxey organized the 9th Texas Infantry Regiment to serve the Confederate States of America. After the war, the nation began the work of Reconstruction as did the Maxey family.



Sam Bell, Dora, and Marilda Denton Maxey, c. 1870.  
1981/177 73.0883, Courtesy of Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

As a senior officer of the Confederacy, Maxey required a presidential pardon to regain his citizenship. After several unsuccessful attempts to request a pardon for his role in the war, President Johnson restored Maxey’s citizenship rights on the recommendation of his West Point classmate General Ulysses S. Grant. After the war, Maxey resumed his legal career, which provided income for his family and the funds to build a stylish home.



The house was always full with extended family and professional colleagues living in the home for months or years. Dora came to live in the house in 1874 with her husband Henry Lightfoot while they waited for their home across Washington Street to be built. Twenty-two years later, Dora’s 18-year old daughter Sallie Lee moved into the house after graduating from St. Mary’s College in Dallas. Marilda Maxey managed the busy household with the help of domestic staff. She oversaw the decorating of the home and planting of the gardens. Her knowledge of horticulture and well-informed aesthetic exemplified the Victorian trait of “tasteful” that conveyed a sense of culture, education, and moral grounding intended to nurture the better tendencies of her family and guests.

With restored citizenship, home established, and family well positioned, Maxey served two terms in the U.S. Senate from 1875 to 1887. Known as “The Beaver of the Senate” because of his tireless work, he developed legislation improving national harbors, railroads, post offices, and post roads. Sam Bell Maxey died in 1895, followed by Marilda in 1908.

### THE LONGS



Lala and Sam Long, 1902.  
1981/177 73.1588, Courtesy of Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

Lala came to live in the home in 1894 when the couple married. She and Sam remodeled the home to suit their tastes and the changing times, but initially preserved and embellished Sam Bell Maxey’s library as a memorial to the family’s patriarch. The Longs were very active in philanthropy and local charities, and entertaining was

The home then passed to another generation of the family, the Maxeys’ great-nephew Sam Bell Maxey Long and his wife Lala Williams Long. Sam Long moved into the house at age 2 with his widowed mother in 1871. The Maxeys provided for his education and training in law and politics. Sam remained with them after the death of his mother in 1883 and took Maxey’s place in the family law firm when he retired in 1892.

important to them. Their extensive remodeling of the home combined two sitting rooms to create a larger, more formal parlor and added a breakfast room and sewing room. Outside, they added trendy amenities such as a summer house and tennis court. Lala’s Georgian Colonial Revival aesthetic was similarly fashionable for the time. It was lighter, simpler and more formal than the richly colored and exuberantly eclectic cultural references of Marilda’s Victorian Aestheticism. The style referenced an idyllic, pre-industrial time that represented patriotism and civic order in an era of industrialization and social change.

### THE NEWBYS

Nancy and John Newby were employed by the Maxeys as domestic staff until the mid-1890s. Nancy cooked and kept the house while John tended to the farm and gardens. The couple moved into a small, two-room home behind the Maxey House with Nancy’s two younger siblings and her daughter Lizzie. Nancy and her mother had been enslaved by Sam Bell Maxey’s father Rice Maxey, and it is likely that John was also. For the Newbys, emancipation and Reconstruction Era laws enabled them to legally marry, and the family that had held them in bondage now paid them for their labor. As a full citizen of the United States, John Newby registered to vote in 1869 for the first time.



Jonnie and baby Alice Fairfax, 1910.  
1981/177/2222/181, Courtesy of Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

Though the couple did not achieve economic independence in their lifetimes, their daughter did. By 1890, Lizzie worked as a domestic for the Terrell family, earning her own wages. She married Austin White in 1881 and by 1900 the couple owned their own home in Paris. Nancy left the Maxeys after John’s death in 1895 and she moved in with her daughter’s family. Before Nancy’s death in 1905, she would see her grandchildren attend school, an opportunity she and her daughter did not have.



Unidentified servant and Alice Fairfax, 1915.

