

*taking the sites
to the next level*

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

HISTORIC HEIGHTS

An Update On the Texas Historical Commission's 20 State Historic Sites



Telling Real Stories to Young People and Families

Students and families discover Texas heritage through the real stories told by the real places restored and maintained by the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) Historic Sites Program. With notable improvements and extensive renovation work completed at many sites, the staff has turned its attention to developing more programs that educate, enlighten, and enrich the lives of families and young people. School children and visitors of all ages are welcomed to these special places to experience firsthand the sights, sounds, stories, and lessons of Texas history.

SCHOOL FIELD TRIPS AND EDUCATION MATERIALS

State historic sites have unique stories to tell, and are destinations for engaging school field trips that support the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum standards. Local, state, and national history is emphasized in 4th, 7th, and 11th grades, but sites host students from every grade, including preschool.

In 2013–14 more than 26,000 students attended field trips at State Historic Sites, a 62 percent increase from 2011–12. Educational programs are also offered to other youth groups such as scouts and homeschoolers.

The value of quality programs offered at the sites are extended with online educational materials that can be used in the classroom. Many sites also provide teacher workshops to build connections with educators and students.

Cover: Visitors listen to a traditional Caddo story at Caddo Mounds State Historic Site. Below: Caddo Regents Academy first grade, Caddo Mounds State Historic Site.



“Educational experiences at the THC’s historic sites inspire wonder, imagination, and learning that enrich our lives through the real stories of Texas history.”

**MARK WOLFE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

Historic Sites offer dozens of programs for kindergarten through high school students, and often customize programs to meet educators’ needs. Field trips include tours, exhibits, classroom materials, and hands-on activities. For example, at Fulton Mansion State Historic Site, programs in scrapbooking and storytelling teach creative writing. Other programs teach science and math through the study of invention and technology. Site programs cover an array of human experience, and multidisciplinary programs align with TEKS standards in social studies, economics, art, science, math, and English language arts, showing that history is relevant and useful in understanding our world today.



Students pose in front of the new exhibit at the Fulton Mansion State Historic Site.



“...thank you for providing our students with such a wonderful experience. The students had a great time and learned some Marshall history in a very meaningful way.”

SHIRLEY FLETCHER, MARSHALL INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM COORDINATOR, STARR FAMILY HOME STATE HISTORIC SITE, OCTOBER 24, 2014

At Casa Navarro State Historic Site in San Antonio, new field trip programs for 4th, 7th, and high school grades were developed focusing on the importance of Tejano patriot José Antonio Navarro. The programs were piloted in Fall 2013 through a grant from the Zachry Foundation, which provided free transportation, admission, and materials to 670 students from 38 school groups representing underserved communities in the San Antonio area. Teachers and students were enthusiastic about the programs, which featured hands-on, multimedia, and interdisciplinary experiences. Casa Navarro State Historic Site will continue to pursue private partnerships to offer underserved schools free field trip transportation to the site.



Clockwise from above: Victorian Fair at Starr Family Home State Historic Site. Below: Royal ISD students play with hoops at San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site. Below left: Students in San Antonio discover the importance of water management with hands-on activities at the cistern at Casa Navarro State Historic Site.



CAMP PROGRAMS

Some of the THC historic sites partner with multiple organizations and community groups to offer more immersive and memorable experiences at summer camps for young people. Participants unplug from technology and spend their days engaged in physical activity focused on history and learning.

Fulton Mansion State Historic Site's Summer Experience in Aransas (SEA) Camp is a partnership between the site, the Texas Maritime Museum, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and the Bay Education Center that gives kids the opportunity to spend a day at each of the partner sites. Hands-on activity themes have included architecture, inventions, ranching, and 19th-century summer activities at the shore. In 2013–14, 307 young people attended SEA Camp from the Rockport area.

The Old Stories, New Voices Youth Camp at Fort McKavett State Historic Site is a successful partnership between the THC and

the Texas State Historical Association that hosts disadvantaged 4th and 5th graders of diverse backgrounds. Hands-on, live-in experiences expose campers to the many cultures that have contributed to the history of Texas, including Native American, African American, and Hispanic. Grant funding helps children from urban centers throughout Texas attend the week-long program in West Texas. They practice Buffalo Soldier drills, learn about Native American lifestyles and the history of frontier forts in Texas, and canoe, camp, and hike with naturalists. Each year, about



Old Stories, New Voices Youth campers learn military drill instruction by a Buffalo Soldier reenactor.

50 young people attend the camp, which has operated since 2006. Former participants often return as leaders and junior counselors.

“My favorite part was when we got to look through that machine [a stereoscope] that you put the card in and it looks like you are in that place. I can't wait to go again to the Fulton Mansion.”

SAM, A 3RD GRADE ROCKPORT STUDENT WHO PARTICIPATED IN FULTON MANSION STATE HISTORIC SITE'S "EUREKA! INVENTIONS" PROGRAM, SPRING 2014



Above: Student views a stereoscope during the SEA Camp, Fulton Mansion State Historic Site.

Left: Camp participants play tug-of-war, SEA Camp, Fulton Mansion State Historic Site.



Left: Educators in 19th-century uniforms give a tour to a young visitor at Fort Griffin State Historic Site. Above: Visitors learn about Caddo culture at Caddo Mounds State Historic Site.

LIVING HISTORY FOR ALL AGES

Several historic sites offer major living history events designed for students, in which interpreters in period costume demonstrate daily life in the 19th century. Students move through multiple interactive stations learning about life on the Texas frontier, which includes everything from laundry and spinning cotton, to games and music, to cooking on the cattle drives.

Fort Griffin, Fort McKavett, and Fort Lancaster State Historic Sites offer annual themed programs that focus on the history of Central and West Texas from about 1840–1883. Though designed for 4th through 7th graders, students of all ages are welcome and enjoy the experience. In the 2013 and 2014 programs, 1,840 students attended these events and more than 160 living historians participated at Fort McKavett State Historic Site alone.

“Our guide was outstandingly knowledgeable and really brought the lives of this family to life! It was a great time.”

STARR FAMILY HOME STATE HISTORIC SITE VISITOR,
COMMENT ON TRIPADVISOR.COM, 2014

Other living history events for students include the Starr Family Home State Historic Site Victorian Fair, Landmark Inn State Historic Site Pioneer Day, and Confederate Reunion Grounds State Historic Site Civil War Living History School Day. In 2013–14,

more than 38,000 people attended public events geared toward youth and families at state historic sites.



Family Archeology Day, Confederate Reunion Grounds State Historic Site.



Staff at the Starr Family Home State Historic Site teach visitors how to make corn husk dolls.

IMPROVED FACILITIES FOR LEARNING

With initial conservation and physical improvements to sites well underway, the THC is enhancing the visitor experience with improved facilities for learning, including interactive exhibits and spaces to host educational programs, school field trips, and learners of all ages. New exhibits and updated visitors centers were completed at Fort Griffin State Historic Site and Caddo Mounds State Historic Site during this biennium.

Exhibits provide a rich learning environment with high-tech multimedia and hands-on experiences. They appeal to a variety of learning styles and are designed to make the sites' stories accessible for all. Interactive elements include touch-screen computers and engaging activities that all ages can enjoy together.

At Caddo Mounds State Historic Site, new exhibits bring the 800-year-old Caddo village to life with wall-size murals of daily life and a recreated Caddo house, ceramics, and foodstuffs. A shaded outdoor pavilion and indoor classroom expand the site's ability to serve area school groups.

New exhibits at Fort Griffin State Historic Site include interactive features that allow students to feel what it would have been like to carry a soldier's pack filled with supplies for an expedition; listen to stories of people who lived at the fort, including Buffalo Soldiers and civilian families; and check out the impressive horns of a Texas



Top left: A young visitor examines a topographical map of Fort Griffin State Historic Site. Above: Visitors experience the real stories of late 19th century Fort Griffin area residents at an interactive kiosk in the new exhibit. Left: The new Fort Griffin State Historic Site visitors center opened in October 2014.

longhorn. A video timeline draws visitors through the long history of the site, from Plains Indian life through the fort's military operations, to the arrival of the railroads, which transformed the American West.

In addition, updated amenities at these facilities—such as new restrooms, benches, and a cool place to take a break—are aimed at improving the visitors' experience so they may extend their stays. Gift shops offer items that promote the agency and site, including educational items and souvenirs.

“ I think the [Fort Griffin] visitor's center is spectacular...it is breathtaking. I bought two books, read the exhibits, watched the film, and generally appreciated it all.”

SHIRLEY CALDWELL, FORMER COMMISSIONER
TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION



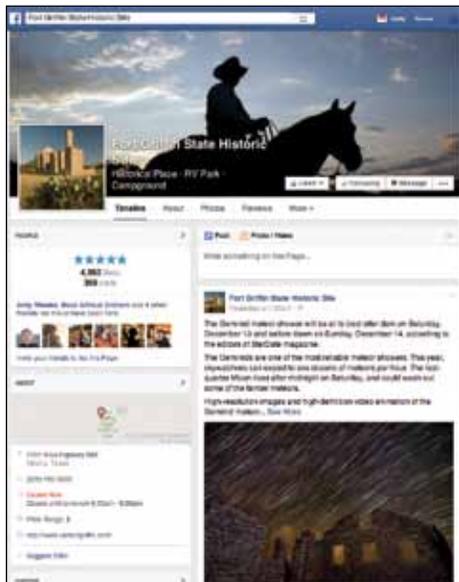
Above: Caddo Mounds State Historic Site's new exhibit brings a village to life. Right: Caddo Mounds State Historic Site's new visitors center.



New exhibitions and improved learning facilities are currently under development and will be opening in the coming biennium at Fort Lancaster, Magoffin Home, Landmark Inn, Levi Jordan Plantation, and San Felipe de Austin State Historic Sites.

NEW WAYS TO TELL STORIES

Audience research indicates that visitors are looking for a variety of ways to explore the intriguing real stories of Texas history. Outdoor interpretive signage, audio tours, and expanded programs at sites offer an enriched experience with many options for visitors to enjoy these Texas treasures. Technology also allows the sites to vastly expand their reach, with new ways to tell stories online.



Sixteen THC state historic sites Facebook pages reach more than 16,000 people daily.

Audio tours allow visitors to access the real stories of the sites on mobile devices at their convenience. The Fulton Mansion currently has two audio tours available for visitors. One explores the historic significance of plants in the gardens, and the other leads visitors on an exterior architectural tour that highlights the mansion's Second Empire design and unusual construction methods that have helped it withstand more than a century of hurricanes. Sabine Pass Battleground implemented a mobile



New exhibit installation, Sabine Pass Battleground State Historic Site. Below right: Casa Navarro State Historic Site's online exhibit.

phone audio tour that is keyed into its outdoor interpretive signs, which allows visitors to discover the site's Civil War story through vibrant narration and graphic panels while immersed in the coastal landscape. An online version of the tour makes it accessible to a wider audience.

The THC is pursuing new ways to provide resources for teachers and learners of all ages. Classroom materials, multimedia tours, videos, online exhibits, events calendars, and blogs are shared online through the agency's websites and social media outlets.

You can view Casa Navarro's exhibit about José Antonio Navarro and the Sam Bell Maxey House's feature exhibit, "A Christmas Wedding" on those websites under the Explore tab. Sixteen sites actively use social media, reaching more than 16,000 people daily on Facebook alone. More than 4,000 people started following state historic sites' Facebook pages since November

2013, representing a 53 percent increase in traffic in just one year. By staying connected to audiences through social media, historic sites are able to bring the fascinating stories of Texas history to fans every day.

THC sites solicit visitor feedback and conduct audience research to inform future enhancements to tours, exhibitions, and programs. Surveys are being conducted at the Sam Bell Maxey House to learn more about how potential visitors would enjoy experiencing the museum. You can participate at www.svy.mk/1C3PyMz. The results will help inform how the sites integrate technology, online learning, and immersive hands-on activities into visitors' experiences in ways that speak to every generation's sense of wonder and exploration.



“Superb—one of the best online museum sites I’ve ever seen. Thank you for taking the time to make this available to those of us who cannot easily get to San Antonio.”

— COMMENT ON CASA NAVARRO STATE HISTORIC SITE ONLINE EXHIBIT, VANCOUVER, CANADA



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“...it was my eighth trip,
and we loved the newly
renovated museum exhibits
and the stories we heard
yesterday. Great day!”

LORRAINE LAZARINE DORMAN,
CADDO MOUNDS STATE HISTORIC
SITE VISITOR

Fast Facts:

- In the last four years, the heirloom longhorn herd at Fort Griffin has met more than **27,000** students and their families.

- Education has expanded at sites:

	FY11-FY12	FY13-FY14
School Field Trips	16,079	26,155
Family Events	30,410	38,134
Outreach Programs	51,210	104,705

- THC historic sites have gained more than **4,000** followers in 2014 on social media, a **53%** increase over the previous year.
- More than **16,000** people follow THC historic sites on social media daily.



Cub Scouts look at a map at Caddo Mounds State Historic Site.