

## VARNER-HOGG PLANTATION

*state historic site*

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## VISITORS GUIDE

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Welcome to Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Site, founded in 1824 by one of Texas' first colonizers, Martin Varner and later owned by Texas Gov. James S. Hogg. Visitors can explore the real stories of the people

### VARNER-HOGG PLANTATION

The Karankawa tribe inhabited the land along Varner Creek long before European contact, but the first recorded settlement of Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Site began in 1824 with the Varner family. Martin Varner, a Virginia native, purchased a 4,428-acre Mexican land grant as a part of Stephen F. Austin's colony in present-day Brazoria County. The Varners and at least two enslaved men farmed and raised livestock on a small scale. They also established a rum distillery in 1829, possibly the first in the state of Texas.

### History of the Plantation

In 1834, Varner sold the property to Columbus R. Patton of Kentucky. The extended Patton family moved to Brazoria County with 40–60 slaves, and with their labor, Columbus Patton built a successful sugarcane enterprise complete with a two-story mill. The slaves constructed the plantation house, smokehouse, sugar mill and their own quarters with handmade bricks made from Brazos River mud. The lives of some of the enslaved people on the plantation are relatively well documented, partly in court records of Patton's contested will in which he made special provisions for four of his slaves, Rachael, Marie, Jacob Steel and Solomon.

Patton and two of his brothers became active in politics prior to the Texas Revolution and served in the Texian army. Patton successfully managed the plantation until November 1854, when his family had him declared insane, possibly as a result of a brain tumor. He was placed in an asylum in South Carolina, where he died of typhoid fever in 1856. The Patton family sold the estate in 1869.

Between 1869 and 1901, the site changed ownership several times. At one point, owners used convicts, many

who lived and worked on this property, from the prosperous landowners to the enslaved people and oil field workers whose labor was essential to the economic viability of the site.

of them former slaves, leased through state prisons. In 1875, however, state investigators found "particular cruelty" toward convicts at Patton Place. This unfavorable attention, combined with the rising cost of convict labor, ended the use of prisoners, and the plantation turned to a sharecropping system.

In 1876, the Texas Land Company purchased the plantation and gradually shifted the site's focus to ranching. The majority of laborers living and working on the property were still African American. The plantation sustained major damage in several 1900s hurricanes. Many of the original buildings, including the sugar mill, were destroyed.

In 1901, former Texas Gov. James Stephen Hogg purchased the property, convinced that large amounts of oil lay beneath the surface. Large quantities of oil were never found during his lifetime. When Gov. Hogg died in 1906, his will recommended his children not sell the mineral rights for at least 15 years. Within that time period, the Hogg heirs struck oil and became very wealthy.

While none of the Hogg children lived in the plantation home, they each spent time at the site. Long weekends with visitors, dinner parties, and outings to the country brought them to the house. In 1919, the Hoggs made several modifications to the house, including the relocation of the main entrance, which resulted in its current appearance.

Ima Hogg, the governor's only daughter and last surviving child, was a great collector and lover of decorative arts, and she furnished the home to reflect her father's love of history and her own admiration for George Washington and other early Americans. The house now contains her extensive collection of 19th-century furnishings and ornamental arts, which she began amassing in 1925. She donated the plantation to the State of Texas in 1958.



## Walking Guide

### 1 THE PLANTATION HOUSE

The plantation house, built for Columbus Patton in the 1830s, originally faced the Varner Creek. A free-standing kitchen structure was located just to the northwest. The current appearance and orientation of the house is the result of remodeling done by the Hogg Family in the 1920s.



Visitors view sugar mill ruins

The raw sugar cane was cleaned and crushed on the second floor of the mill and then boiled and refined into usable sugar in the large metal kettles on the ground floor. Today, visitors can observe 19th-century kettles near the building ruins.

### 3 OIL WELL

Gov. Hogg originally purchased the property in 1901 for the oil he speculated the ground held. In 1918, 12 years after his death, profitable wells and oil derricks were finally established and covered the area. The Hogg children's fortune came from this oil.

### 4 SLAVE QUARTERS

The slave quarters were constructed around the same time as the main plantation house out of slave-made bricks and local materials. After slavery was abolished these small cabins were used to house convict laborers and later by sharecroppers working the land. Like so many other site buildings they were destroyed in the 1900 hurricane. Only the outlines of the cabins are visible due to brick foundations that remain below ground level.

### 5 OIL FIELD COTTAGE

This small house was built in the 1920s during the site's oil boom and used by oil field workers.



Patton family cemetery

### 7 HAL'S HOUSE

This tin-roofed building was the last residence constructed on the plantation in 1921. For many years it was home to Mary and Hal Fields. Hal worked as the ranch foreman before the Hogs purchased the site and lived here as property manager for the Hogg family until his death in 1968.

### 8 THE PATTON CEMETERY

This is the final resting place of at least four members of the Patton family. The 1900 hurricane destroyed most of the cemetery's decorative brick work. None of the original headstones remain, but the obelisk commemorates those buried here. A separate slave cemetery is also said to have existed elsewhere on site, but no trace of it has been located.

### 6 OIL FIELD MANAGER'S HOUSE

Built in the 1920s, this small house was home and office for the oil field manager that oversaw the fields and employees.

Antique furnishings and portraits in the plantation house



### 9 THE SWIMMING HOLE

Gov. Hogg constructed this pool to give his children a place to swim other than Varner Creek, which is home to several species of snakes and alligators.



Gov. Hogg's outdoor bathtub

the time, so he had this outdoor tub constructed.

### 11 THE BARN

The Pattons built this barn in the 1840s, and it was later moved to its current location. It is currently used to display farming equipment, wagons, carriages and items used in sugar cane processing.

### 12 BUNKHOUSE

Built in the 1920s, this building was used for oil field business and workers sleeping quarters and is now the visitor and programming center for the site.

### 10 GOVERNOR HOGG'S BATH

When Gov. Hogg purchased the site, there was no indoor plumbing in the house. The governor, who was 6'3" and weighed more than 300 pounds, did not comfortably fit in the galvanized metal bathtubs of the



Sugarcane wagon in the 1840s barn

### 13 THE PECAN ORCHARD

Pecans were a favorite of Gov. Hogg, and the orchard has been maintained since his time. In the fall, visitors are allowed to pick up fallen nuts with the permission of site staff. Please speak with site staff for more information.

