

SAM BELL MAXEY HOUSE

— STATE HISTORIC SITE —

Paris, Texas

Post-Visit Guide

Grade 4

Overview: Managing the Maxey House

Marilda Maxey managed a bustling five-acre estate that hosted her family, servants, grandchildren, and frequently visiting politicians throughout her lifetime. In this activity, students will use primary sources to investigate the scope of work and daily chores required to run the Maxey House.

Grade 4 Social Studies TEKS

(4) History. The student understands the political, economic, and social changes in Texas during the last half of the 19th century. The student is expected to:

(A) describe the impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Texas.

(12) Economics. The student understands patterns of work and economic activities in Texas. The student is expected to:

(A) explain how people in different regions of Texas earn their living, past and present, through a subsistence economy and providing goods and services.

(21) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software; interviews; biographies; oral, print, and visual material; documents; and artifacts to acquire information about the United States and Texas;

(B) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions;

(C) organize and interpret information in outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps.

Materials

- Historical images for display/distribution
- Graphic organizers

Vocabulary

- **domestic:** having to do with a household or family
- **primary source:** an original artifact, document, diary, autobiography, recording, or any other type of information created during a time period

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Activity: KWL Chart

10 minutes

Have students complete the Maxey Family KWL chart and share their experiences, including any new questions they have after visiting the site.

Primary Source Activity: Working at the Maxey Family Home

Historical Context

As the lady of the house, Marilda Maxey oversaw all of the family's domestic affairs, especially since Sam Bell Maxey spent much time traveling for his careers as a lawyer and U.S. senator. She and Sam constantly wrote letters in which they discussed news about their home. Sam praised Marilda often for her decisions regarding upkeep and maintenance of the estate. She was responsible for managing the servants, keeping the household accounts, overseeing all indoor and outdoor work around Maxey House, and entertaining any visitors with well-planned dinners and a welcoming atmosphere. When Sam Bell Maxey went to Washington D.C. for the congressional session, she occasionally went with him, even though she disliked Washington social life and missed her own house terribly. While she was in D.C., Marilda wrote letters to family staying at Maxey House for updates on everything happening at her home.

The Maxey's African American domestic staff may have included a butler, maid, and cook, who lived on site. Household servants began their day as early as 6 a.m. and worked until 10 p.m. every day of the week. A cook for a smaller household would probably wash and mend laundry and mind the children in addition to their cooking duties throughout the day. Other workers tended to the outdoor work of the estate including care of the horses, livestock, landscaping, flower gardens, and vegetable gardens. A servant named Nancy Newby and her husband John worked for the Maxeys from at least 1871 to 1880. Nancy had been formerly enslaved by the Maxey family and had traveled with them from Kentucky to Texas. In 1871, Nancy made a total of \$35.65 for the year. John made less money and took out loans from the Maxey family. While they worked at Maxey House, these staff lived in the servant quarters.

Display/distribute the **letters** of Marilda Maxey regarding work at her home. Read them aloud or ask for volunteer readers.

Distribute the graphic organizer and have students work individually or in pairs to complete it. Share responses.

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ELA Extension Activity: Imagining the Past

ELA TEKS

(16) Writing/Literary Texts. Students write literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas. Students are expected to:

- (A) write imaginative stories that build the plot to a climax and contain details about the characters and setting

Explain to students that telling the story of the Sam Bell Maxey House without sharing the perspectives of any of the servants is an incomplete history. The Maxeys had been slave owners and some of the servants working in Sam Bell Maxey House were formerly enslaved persons. Ask students to think about how a formerly enslaved man or woman might have felt living and working in the home of a former Confederate general.

Display/distribute the **extension images** from the Maxey home. Allow students to select which image they'd like to use to write their fictional narrative. Using the pictures and their knowledge from their visit at the Maxey House State Historic Site, have students write what they imagine a day in the life of a member of the household staff might have been like. Share responses.

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Image Resource: Marilda Maxey



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Activity Resource: Text of Letters by Marilda Maxey

February 18, 1877

John and Nancy are taking good care of everything ... John has hauled manure only two days; he went and got a horse from Mr. Brome, and hauled two days, and then Mr. L. rode the mare to Cooper and remained there a week; and since his arrival home, it has been raining every day ... John has planted onions peas, mustard, cabbage seed, radish, lettuce, and in fact everything in the vegetable line except potatoes.

May 12, 1878

Everything looks well. John has just mowed the grass and the yard is very pretty. The roses are not blooming very much now. They are taking a rest after their profuse blooming in the early part of the season. The pears are ___[plenty?] full. A plenty to do well. The fruit trees are not so full as usual, still there will be on a bundle of fruit if nothing happens to it. Nancy is canning the gooseberries. The raspberries are beginning to ripen. Will be a plenty for all purposes. The strawberries are all gone. Nancy says they have up three cans, and John is going to get up two more this week. The chickens, she says, are doing very well. She says she is so sorry you are not coming soon. She is so anxious to have you at home once more. She seems to be doing her best to keep up everything in her line.

June 25, 1885

I thought that when you all left that I would visit my friends while you were away, but I have been out of the yard once. August still worrying with the weeds in the orchard. Uncle Tobe asked August why he did not cut the weeds out of the orchard – that he had ‘knowed the place for many years, and he had never seed it look so bad.’ August’s face turned red as a beet, but said nothing. Yesterday August finished fitting rattan hay around the Strawberries, and I hope we will, if we live have Strawberries next year.

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Working at the Maxey House Graphic Organizer

Date of the Letter	What was the chore/work?	Who did the chore/work?	Where was the work done?

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Extension Images: Unidentified Servants and Children

Images courtesy of Sam Bell Maxey House State Historic Site



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