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.

PRESERVE THE FUTURE
Help the Texas Historical Commission preserve the past while touring this historic site. Please be mindful of fragile historic artifacts and structures. We want to ensure their preservation for the enjoyment of future generations.

FRIENDS OF THE SAM BELL MAXEY HOUSE
Join us in protecting this special place. Consider volunteering or becoming a member of the Friends of the Sam Bell Maxey House. For more information please call us at 903-785-5716.

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

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.
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 freedmen schools. 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 Freedmen schools.

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. 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.