

THE

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

MEDALLION



VOL. 62 NO. 4

INTRODUCING THE
**WASHINGTON
-ON-THE-
BRAZOS
EXPERIENCE**

WHERE TEXAS BECAME TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
THE WASSERMAN FAMILY





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THE **MEDALLION** TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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OUR MISSION

To protect and preserve the state's historic and prehistoric resources for the use, education, enjoyment, and economic benefit of present and future generations.

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ON THE COVER
Opening-day guests at Washington-on-the-Brazos' upgraded visitor center.

HELLO, TEXAS!

As I write this letter, I am filled with pride and excitement as we celebrate the grand re-opening of Washington-on-the-Brazos! This event was not just about unveiling an improved historical site; it represents a significant milestone in our continued commitment to preserving and honoring Texas history.

The journey to this moment began in the late 1960s when the Texas Legislature made a bold investment of \$1 million. This pivotal decision laid the foundation for the preservation of a crucial piece of our heritage, and it ignited a passion in us that has only intensified over the decades.

In the same manner, the Texas Legislature invested taxpayer dollars, and the Texas Historical Commission (THC) built a museum and recreated the townsite at San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site to tell the story of the origination of Texas land grants and the most important printing presses in early Texas.

At Washington-on-the-Brazos, the THC has revitalized the Star of the Republic Museum with interactive exhibits and overseen a complete renovation of the visitor center, along with the recreation of the historic townsite that was home to the first and last capital of the Republic of Texas. Visitors can now walk the same paths of Washington, Texas, as our forefathers did during the Republic era. Interpreters at the site help to bring the experiences of that period to life. Archeological digs and extensive research have uncovered the locations of many buildings that once stood around the

townsite. Many of these buildings have been reconstructed on their original cornerstones and pillars, giving visitors an authentic glimpse of life during the Republic. And in Independence Hall, children of all ages still feel the power of those 59 heroes as they signed the Declaration of Independence on that cold, misty morning to claim Texas as a free and independent nation.

Washington-on-the-Brazos is the next shining star of the Independence Trail, one of 10 regions of the THC's Texas Heritage Trails Program. Traveling through Senate District 18, we invite you to immerse yourself in the rich history of Texas. Beyond San Felipe, you'll discover significant sites, including the somber location of the Goliad Massacre and the legendary "Come and Take It" episode in Gonzales. And don't miss Monument Hill State Historic Site in La Grange, where early Texans are interred after being captured during the Mier Expedition into Mexico and ultimately executed after "drawing the black bean." There are also inspiring tales from places like Victoria, Cuero, Refugio, Palacios, and Wharton. Texas history is alive here—so come and experience it for yourself!

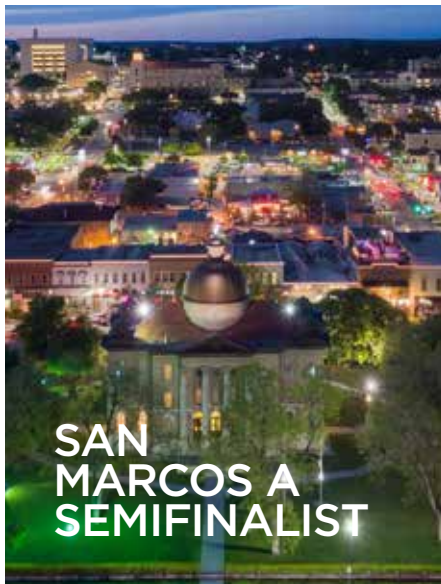
Thank you for being a part of this remarkable journey.



Lois Kolkhorst
Texas Senator,
District 18




LOIS KOLKHORST
TEXAS SENATOR, DISTRICT 18



Main Street America recently announced Downtown San Marcos as a Great American Main Street Award semifinalist. This prestigious award is the nation's top honor recognizing communities for their excellence in comprehensive preservation-based commercial district revitalization.

The Downtown San Marcos organization has spent 40 years transforming the district through infrastructure improvements, sidewalk medallions honoring Indigenous history and endangered river flora, new street signage, and placemaking initiatives like the Legend Has It tour and Downtown Outdoor Gallery.

Downtown San Marcos helped secure more than \$40 million in public and private reinvestment for the district, which has resulted in hundreds of new residents and historically low vacancy rates. The 2026 Great American Main Street Award ceremony will be held at the opening plenary of the 2026 Main Street Now Conference in Tulsa, Okla., on April 13, 2026, where three semifinalists will be recognized as recipients of the coveted honor.

 Learn more:
thc.texas.gov/mainstreet




The Texas Historical Commission hosts its 10th annual Real Places conference, April 8-10, 2026. This milestone year calls for celebration and special programming—make plans now to attend!

The same quality programming and networking you've come to expect from the premier historic preservation conference in the Lone Star State is in store for 2026. Presented again by the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission in partnership with Phoenix I Restoration and Construction, LLC, the schedule features over 100 expert speakers from across Texas and the U.S., more than 50 sessions, workshops,

and tours, several renowned keynote speakers, and more to be announced.

With in-person or virtual attendance options, participants can meet at the Renaissance Austin Hotel for the energy and camaraderie of the in-person event or experience the conference online to stream sessions (recordings will be archived for viewing up to 60 days). New this year is a Premium Plus registration option, offering all sessions and events—plus one pre-conference workshop or tour of your choice—and all meals included.

 Registration and Info:
realplaces.us



APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR THC'S COURTHOUSE PROGRAM

The THC's award-winning Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program (THCPP) is now open for county and city governments to confirm their grant program eligibility and take note of important dates leading up to the grant application deadline.


Counties or cities that own a building that is over 49 years old and functions or previously functioned as the primary seat of county government are eligible to participate.

To be eligible to apply for grant funding in Round XIV, a county representative must complete an online orientation for new participants. This training is asynchronous and can be completed at anytime before the grant

application deadline. Additionally, your courthouse must already have an approved THCPP preservation master plan, or you must submit a draft master plan for review and comment no later than Friday, January 23, 2026.

Please note that master plan preparation requires hiring a professional preservation consultant, typically an architect, and takes about four to six months to prepare.

An outline of master plan requirements along with the THCPP timeline for submitting applications, construction plans and specifications, and new preservation master plans is available on the THC's website.

 Learn more: thc.texas.gov/thcpp




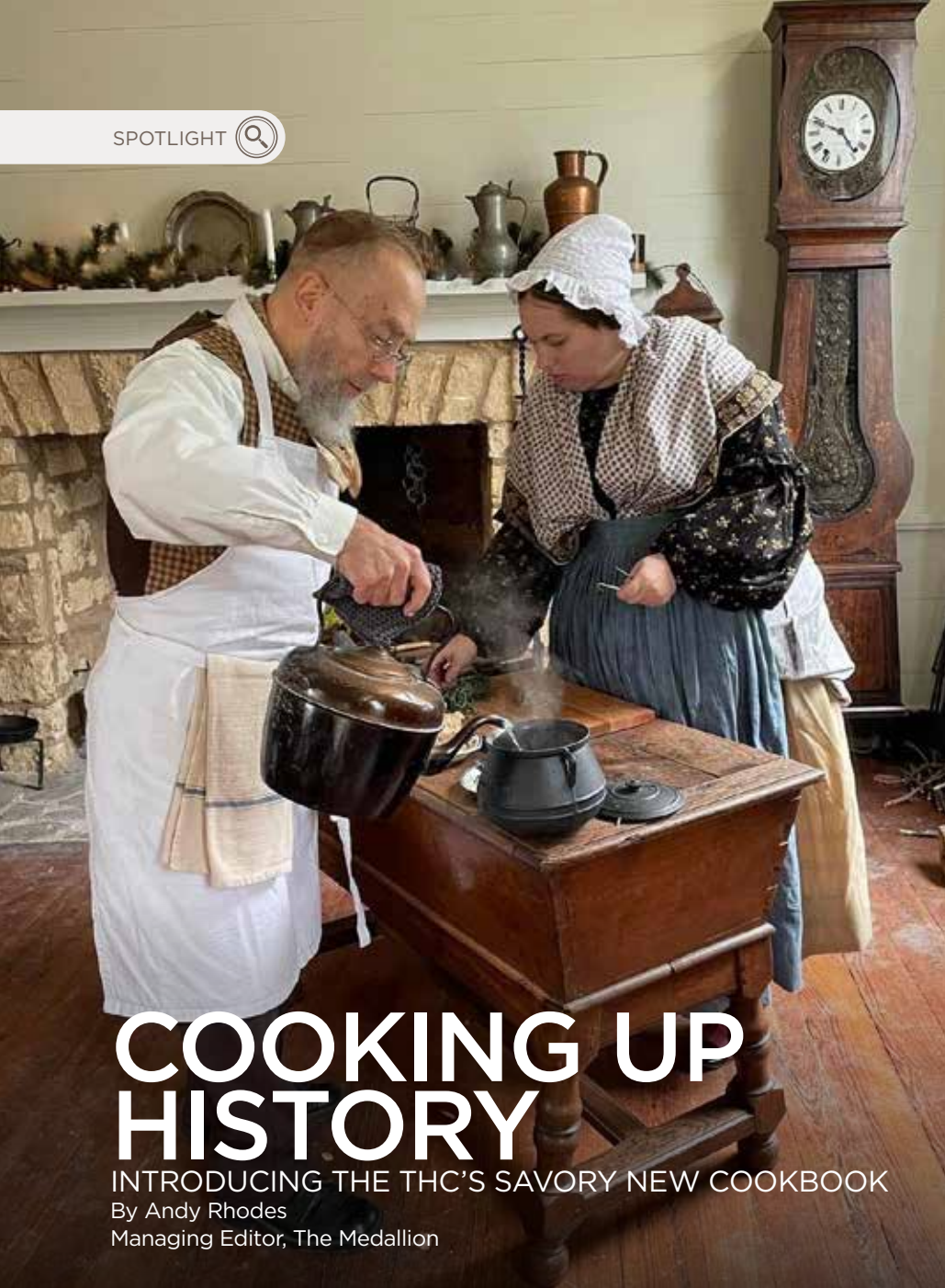
The THC continues its valuable partnership with the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma. Chairman John L. Nau, III recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Caddo Chairman Bobby Gonzalez. This agreement will guide cultural resource planning and management at the Caddo Mounds State Historic Site in East Texas.

The Caddo Mounds site holds deep cultural and spiritual significance for the Caddo people, and this partnership represents a meaningful step in shared stewardship.

Earlier this year, the agency also celebrated the annual Texas Archeology Month (October) with a wide range of events across its state historic sites and partner organizations.

The agency's Archeology Division reported that nearly 18,000 pinch pot kits were assembled and distributed to partners throughout Texas. Approximately 7,000 kits were sent to public schools across 18 counties, with the remainder distributed to libraries, museums, state parks, county historical commissions, and civic groups in 29 counties.

 Learn more: thc.texas.gov



COOKING UP HISTORY

INTRODUCING THE THC'S SAVORY NEW COOKBOOK

By Andy Rhodes
Managing Editor, The Medallion

Fans of Texas history and cuisine can now combine their passions by purchasing the THC's new book, *A Culinary Journey Through Texas History: A State Historic Sites Cookbook*. The 174-page book, featuring a wide-ranging selection of recipes from across the state over the past several centuries, provides a smorgasbord of the foodways of Texans.

The book highlights dishes tied to the THC's 42 state historic sites, with selections representing the Texas Revolution era, early 1900s, and

midcentury delicacies. We asked the agency's Chief Interpretive Specialist Hal Simon, who helped organize the cookbook, how the project came to fruition.

HOW DID YOU COMPILE SUCH A WIDE VARIETY OF HISTORIC RECIPES?

We started out with site-associated historic recipes, which were solicited from the staff at each of our state historic sites. Then the sites' archives were examined to look for mentions of specific foods in historical correspondence or other

documents—those were researched from extant historic cookbooks. Finally, additional period recipes for each site's time period were pulled to help round out the selection. I was surprised at how many actual specific site-associated recipes we had.

WE COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE THE RECIPE FOR POSSUM—IT WAS A FUN ENTRY. HOW DID THAT ONE COME ABOUT?

We wanted to present a full picture of the eating habits of Texans from across our history. In most of 19th and early-20th-century Texas, residents augmented their meals with wild game hunted locally. Possum, raccoon, squirrel, rabbit, and turtle were consumed alongside larger game animals like deer and javelina.



DID THE STAFF TEST MOST OF THE RECIPES TO SEE IF THE MEASUREMENTS AND TIMING WORKED OUT?

Yes! The majority of the recipes have either been made by the interpretive staff at our historic sites as part of their public programs or pulled from the historic recipes I've researched and cooked in demonstrations at Landmark Inn, the French Legation, San Felipe de Austin, and Starr Family Home State Historic Sites.

TELL US ABOUT THE BACKGROUND OF THE COOKBOOK—WHEN WAS IT FIRST DISCUSSED AND HOW DID IT EVENTUALLY GET OFF THE GROUND?

In early 2023, THC Commissioner Monica Burdette, who has published an award-winning cookbook herself, suggested that a cookbook of historic recipes could be an excellent item



for our sites to sell in their museum stores. Our agency's Executive Director Joseph Bell agreed, and the project was begun by the THC's Regional Retail Development Manager Shelley Wong. As it became more focused on researching and documenting historic recipes, it was handed off to the agency's Exhibit and Interpretive Design Specialist Sara Nezamabadi and me as an interpretive project to develop.

THE PHOTOS ARE AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF THE COOKBOOK—HOW WERE THEY PROCURED?



The photos throughout the book were primarily taken at foodways demonstrations at various historic sites. The illustrations and line

drawings were pulled from many of the public domain historic cookbooks that were used in researching this project. Sara networked with our historic sites to compile and select the best possible images to illustrate the book.


WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE AND THE GREATEST REWARD OF WORKING ON THIS PROJECT?

The biggest challenge was not selecting too many recipes to include and making sure that the number of recipes was balanced across time period and category of food. I think the most rewarding part of the work was seeing how it all came together with input from our historic sites, and seeing the historic information transformed by Sara's design into a visually delightful book.



WHY SHOULD SOMEONE PURCHASE THE COOKBOOK AS A FUTURE GIFT?

It's both functional and beautiful. It's the perfect gift for the family foodie or a friend interested in Texas history. It's also beautiful enough to be a coffee table book, which isn't true of most cookbooks!

 Learn more: thc.texas.gov/cookbook

GIVE A PIECE OF HISTORIC TEXAS.

GIFTS INSPIRED BY THE HISTORIC SITES OF TEXAS



Looking to spend holiday gift money? Show your Texas pride with unique gifts inspired by the state's rich history, from apparel and games to home décor. Highlights include the historic sites cookbook and an exclusive Pendleton wool blanket featuring artwork by Caddo artist Chase Kahwinhut Earles.



Find more at texashistorygifts.com or your nearest state historic site store.

ANOTHER NEW BEGINNING

NEW WASHINGTON-ON-THE-BRAZOS SITE
BRINGS TEXAS REPUBLIC ERA TO LIFE

By Andy Rhodes
Managing Editor, The Medallion

A year ago, a meadow at Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site was merely a grassy field with a grove of stately live oak trees. Today, it's an impressive streetscape with two-story historical structures and log cabins complementing an existing replica of Independence Hall. What once involved an evocation of the Washington townsite where Texas was born in 1836 is now a tangible, interactive living-history experience.



On November 8, 2025, state lawmakers and Texas Historical Commission (THC) representatives officially cut the ribbon on the new \$57 million Washington-on-the-Brazos site, which includes the reconstructed buildings and impressively upgraded Star of the



Republic Museum and visitor center. The site honors the location where the Texas Declaration of Independence was signed and interprets life in Texas during the Republic era.

“I believe in the history of this state, the commitment of the people that were here, and the drive and the spirit that they had to say, ‘We’re going to be great, we’re going to be different, and we are going to be independent,’” THC Chairman John L. Nau, III said at the ceremony. “This was work that our commission gladly accepted, and now it’s our job to make certain that visitors and schoolchildren understand why it’s so important.”

Texas Sen. Lois Kolkhorst of Brenham echoed these sentiments

during her speech, quoting the famous “Victory or Death” letter written by Col. William B. Travis during the Texas Revolution.

“But under the flag of independence, we are ready to peril our lives a hundred times a day,” she said, repeating the line for emphasis. “And they did. For a place called Texas. Liberty. Freedom. In a place called Texas—something that inspires people all over the world.”

The site’s transformation, designed in partnership with the Historic Sites Architectural Team, Richter Architects, and designers at Gallagher & Associates, uses multi-sensory storytelling to connect visitors to Texas’ founding. The fully renovated



dismantled and lost to wildfire by 1912. In 1915, the Texas Legislature appropriated funds to turn the abandoned community into a park.

The townsite features staff members in period clothing offering historical background about Washington and details related to each of the reconstructed buildings on and near Ferry Street, including:

- Rucker's Drug Store, which served as an important social gathering place and commercial center, offering goods such as medicinal compounds, health tonics, and general merchandise. One of the few original town buildings

visitor center offers a welcoming entry point, with three floor-to-ceiling video walls, an archeology case with artifacts excavated from the townsite, and an expanded gift shop.

Nearby, the reimagined Star of the Republic Museum is a highlight, especially for those familiar with the 1970 version that previously included many taxidermized animals and outdated exhibits.



In its place are modern galleries, impressive exhibits, and immersive theaters that could be found in modern exhibit halls.

Six galleries tell the story of Texas from pre-Republic times through annexation, featuring custom artwork and sweeping murals. Additional



highlights include a 180-degree theater depicting Texas' origins, a room where families can dress in 1830s-style clothing and understand how families prepare a meal, and Independence Hall Theater with walls that come alive to reveal Republic-era figures.

The aforementioned Washington townsite honors the community that served as the capital of the Republic of Texas. By the 1840s, Washington was a modest town of 1,700 with riverboat trading on the nearby Brazos River. It ultimately declined in population, and its buildings were



captured in historic images, the reconstructed drug store now houses an archeology exhibit dedicated to the town's history and decline.



- Hatfield's Exchange, the other impressive two-story structure, served several purposes that could seem contradictory (or resourceful). The second floor was occasionally used as Congress Hall for legislators, but more often the building served as a bar and billiard hall.



- Heath's Carpenter Shop was originally operated by Samuel Heath, a local carpenter who built most of the structures in the original townsite with local post oak and cedar. The shop was a vital commercial and industrial center, essential for the rapid development of Washington as it became the political and commercial hub of the Republic.



- Sam Houston's Presidential Office is represented by a log cabin that served as his working office and living quarters during his second term as president of the Republic in the early 1840s. The nearby blacksmith shop, once the workspace of an enslaved blacksmith, hosts demonstrations about the essential services provided there.



In the coming year, visitors will also be able to witness the construction of the 1835 replica of Hall and Lott Tavern, an important gathering place for locals and travelers arriving on boats from the nearby ferry stop.



While at the site, visitors are also encouraged to stop by the adjacent Barrington Living History Farm State Historic Site, where they can explore the original home of Dr. Anson Jones, the last president of the Republic of Texas. The site features period costumed interpreters using 19th-century farming practices for planting, harvesting, and working with livestock 150 years ago.

During the site's opening ceremony, Nau emphasized the importance of these buildings and how the reimagined structures will serve travelers and students for decades to come.

"By educating visitors about early Texan society, culture, politics, and agriculture, this site ensures that Texas' present and future can benefit from the lessons of its history," he said.

 Learn more: visitwashingtononthebrazos.com



DUDA'S DEDICATION

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME PARTNERS WITH THC AT ARCHITECTURE FORUM

By Thaddeus Imerman
THC Media Relations Coordinator

Nearly 100 architects, contractors, Texas Historical Commission (THC) employees, and various county elected officials gathered in Austin and New Braunfels on November 20 and 21, 2025, to learn about historic courthouses and the importance of restoring such important landmarks.

Hearing from panels of former and current county judges, architects, and planners and developers, the attendees of the third annual Duda Forum engaged in thoughtful conversation, gaining insight into the THC's Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program (THCPP).

The topic was of particular interest to Steven Semes, a professor of architecture at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana.

"We have many of the same issues that you might have right here in Texas in terms of how to preserve monuments like the Comal County Courthouse that we're in right now," Semes said before the November 21 session.

A decade ago, the university launched a graduate program, a Master of

Science in Historic Preservation, that trains architects to become preservationists and deal with historic buildings.

Semes, who is also director of the Michael Christopher Duda Center for Preservation, Resilience, and Sustainability at the university, explained that the program's launch in 2015 was made possible in part by a financial contribution of THC Commissioner Fritz Duda and his wife, Mary Lee.

Fritz and Mary Lee are the parents of Michael, a University of Notre Dame alumnus and Texas native who passed away in 2019 at the age of 38.

Semes said the Dudas' endowment came with a caveat of sorts.

"One of the requests of the family was that Notre Dame seek out and build on relationships between Notre Dame and Texas," Semes said.

As a result, a few years later, the Duda Forum was born. The first two forums were in Dallas and San Antonio, respectively, featuring partnerships with the Texas Historical Foundation (THF), Southern Methodist University,

and the San Antonio Conservation Society.


"We have been working with them since the Michael C. Duda Center for Historic Preservation, Resilience, and Sustainability was established in 2022," Preziosi said.

The THF will continue to work with the university on future Duda Forums in the state.

Semes said it was Fritz Duda who suggested the topic of courthouse preservation, as it coincided with the 25th anniversary of the THCPP, thereby allowing for a collaboration between the university and the THC.

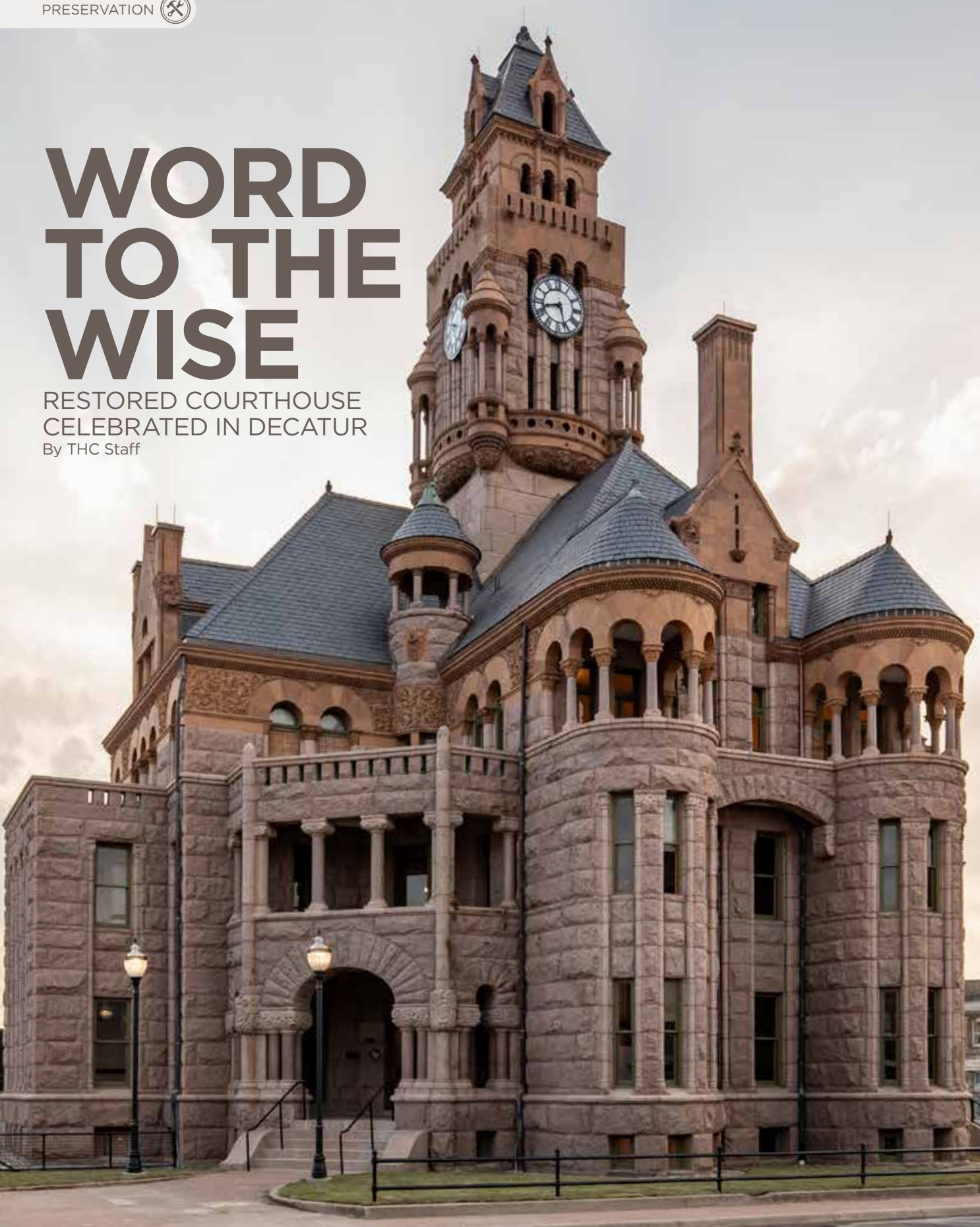
Fritz Duda was unable to attend the 2025 Duda Forum, but Commissioner David Gravelle offered thoughts on the partnership.

"Notre Dame is one of the top classical architecture schools in America—if not the world," he said. "The fact that they have chosen our courthouse program to study and be a part of, I think is a real tribute to our program."

 Learn more:
thc.texas.gov/courthouses

WORD TO THE WISE

RESTORED COURTHOUSE
CELEBRATED IN DECATUR
By THC Staff



The bells of the Wise County Courthouse rang out at 11 a.m. on October 23, 2025. As the peal echoed through downtown Decatur, hundreds of residents and visitors on the courthouse square broke into applause.

The bells signaled the beginning of the rededication ceremony for the fully restored 1896 Wise County Courthouse. The bells had been silent for decades, but returned to life through the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program (THCPP).

Nearby, members of the North Texas Caledonian Pipes and Drums played music befitting the celebratory occasion while a large American flag attached to the ladders of two Decatur Fire Department trucks flapped in the warm breeze.

To officially commence the ceremony, Wise County Veterans Group members carefully clipped the American and Texas flags to the new flagpoles in front of the building. They raised them slowly as the Decatur High School varsity choir harmoniously belted out the notes of the "Star Spangled Banner."

The community's efforts were recognized by all levels of government—from the stirring and inspiring words of Wise County Judge J.D. Clark to the THC's Vice Chairman Garrett Donnelly to the many elected legislators who attended and added their voices to the ceremony. Longtime champion

of Texas' historic county courthouses First Lady Laura Bush sent a personal note praising Wise County's hard work, which was read aloud by Judge Clark.

"Thanks to a grant from the THCPP, the Wise County Courthouse has undergone a nearly two-year full renovation and is now beautifully restored," Clark reported

“
One hundred thirty years ago, the cornerstone of this remarkable building was laid.
”



from part of the letter. "One hundred thirty years ago (this month), the cornerstone of this remarkable building was laid. What a meaningful day to rededicate this important landmark."

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS


In 2023, the THC awarded Wise County an \$8.4 million grant through the THCPP. The full restoration prioritized authentic period restoration and the return of the building's inherent beauty while updating infrastructure support, energy efficiency, and new HVAC, fire suppression, and information technologies.

The courthouse, designed by renowned architect J. Riely Gordon, is in a style known as Richardson Romanesque, named after the influential architect Henry Hobson Richardson. The restoration addressed modifications made over the years. The courtroom balcony, removed in the early 1960s during a renovation that converted the single courtroom into two stacked courts, has been recreated based on historic photographs and archival drawings.

The restored courthouse anchors a vibrant downtown business district. Visitors to the courthouse square

immediately notice a bustling commercial environment with minimal vacant storefronts—a testament to Decatur's participation in the Texas Main Street economic development program.

The Wise County Courthouse stands as a testament to what communities can achieve when they commit to preserving their architectural heritage for future generations. Wise County's restoration journey is one that any Texas county with a historic courthouse can undertake through the THCPP.

 Learn more: thc.texas.gov/courthouses



OH MY GAULT

THC SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS DIG NEWS ABOUT ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE



October was Texas Archeology Month, when the Texas Historical Commission (THC) coordinates a statewide celebration of history and heritage through archeology. On social media, the agency enjoys highlighting stories that dig into the impact archeology has on preservation.

The Gault Site, located between Austin and Waco, has changed our understanding of the first people in the area, with findings at Buttermilk Creek showing human life as far back as 22,000 years. Millions of artifacts like stone tools and engraved limestone cobbles tell a story of adaptation by Ice Age hunter-gatherers.

Dr. Michael Collins was instrumental in preserving the site for ongoing study. The documentary *The Stones Are Speaking*, now available to watch on YouTube, shares the history of the

site and Collins' efforts. After seeing the THC's social media post, one user shared that they watched the film with family and are planning a field trip to the site, calling it "FASCINATING."

Editor's Note: *The THC's social media accounts showcase stories from thousands of years of our state's history, from Native American traditions to Texas Revolution battles to Midcentury Modern architecture. Some posts are especially engaging with our followers, who post wide-ranging comments with personal anecdotes and stories about Texas history. In each issue of *The Medallion*, we'll highlight one of the posts from the past quarter that received the most likes and interactions. Feel free to join the fun by following us.*

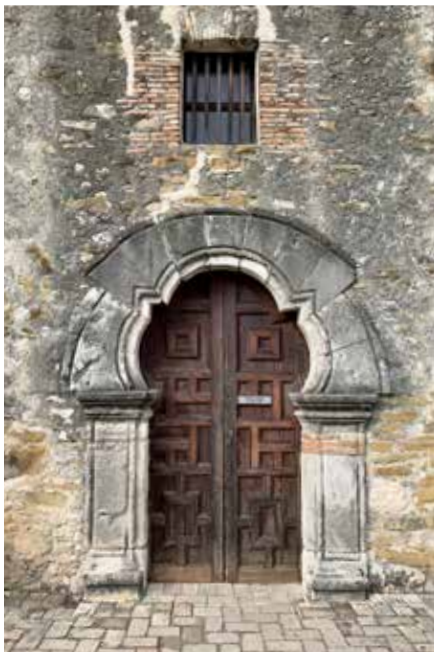


Learn more:
thc.texas.gov/social

WHERE ON EARTH...IN TEXAS

KNOW YOUR TEXAS HISTORY?

Put your skills to the test by identifying the pictured site! The first three people who correctly identify the location will be named in the next issue of *The Medallion*. Please email your answer to medallion@thc.texas.gov or send to: *The Medallion*, P.O. Box 12276, Austin, TX 78711.



LOOK FAMILIAR?

This historic site in South Central Texas remains an active Catholic parish and is known for its distinctly shaped doorway.

ANSWER TO THE PHOTO FROM THE LAST ISSUE:

The site pictured at right is the 1939 Trinity County Jail in Groveton, Texas. Built of native limestone, the Art Deco building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is still in use but is in disrepair and only houses 16 inmates. Congratulations go to the first readers who correctly identified the site: Jerry G Lawrence of Arlington, J. Marie Bassett of Driftwood, and Deborah Tarsiewicz of Abilene. Thanks to all who participated!



CELEBRATING 10 YEARS



REAL PLACES

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PRESENTED BY PHOENIX | RESTORATION AND CONSTRUCTION, LLC

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FIND HISTORICAL DESTINATIONS FROM
ANYWHERE IN THE LONE STAR STATE.

SITES COURTHOUSES MARKERS MUSEUMS

San Jacinto Battleground

Description

On a chilly April afternoon in 1836, this strip of coastal prairie rang with the boom of cannon, crack of musket fire and shouts of "Remember the Alamo!" and "Remember Goliad!" Despite being outnumbered, General Sam

thc.texas.gov/navigator

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