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Capitals of the Lone Star

Texas Has Had Eight of Them and Austin Defended Its Right to the Honor With Cannon In the "Bloodless Archives War," Defying Sam Houston Himself

ONE may boast that the capitol building of Texas cost \$60,000,000 or one may explain why it did. The average Texan does not bother to explain, however, he merely boasts; boasts of the capitol just as he does of Texas resources from producing the best circus fleas to the great output in cotton and oil. And the capitol at Austin is the largest state building in the world, no matter what the cost.

In imposing grandeur of native pink granite it covers three acres, and if one wishes to figure floor space in acres there are eighteen, and to bring the granite to the city required the laying of ninety-five miles of railroad. For this great edifice Texas gave 3,000,000 acres of land to a building syndicate. Texas land in 1881 was not particularly valuable, one dollar an acre was a good price, and the fact that the syndicate later sold the land for much more proves the statement of the \$60,000,000 capitol. In present day figures it is seemingly an extravagant expenditure, but at that time Texas congratulated herself on the deal.

Texas wanted a structure that would be magnificent, colossal, a display for pride. Her independence and liberty had been so sacrificingly won that it deserved a glorious monument, and her future might hold greatness undreamable—Texas would build a capitol worthy of it all!

The stepping stones to this state house of millions were little frame houses in rural communities, legislative halls which were far from cities and railroads, and the first potentates of the young nation could not even be sure of a safe meeting place, they were likely to be routed by invading Mexicans or Comanches. They dragged the government about, from place to place, but their wanderlust was one for peace.

San Felipe was the first seat of government. There the colonists of Austin's Colony daringly gathered and discussed their woes. State grievances were expected to be taken to Coahuila, the district to which Texas belonged, but private ones were loudly expressed in San Felipe.

On October 1, 1832 a general council was called and the colonists started the ball of freedom rolling, a ball which gathered momentum and exploded in a revolutionary bomb four years later. At this first general conference the delegates wrote a petition which they sent to the government in Coahuila, making specific protests.

They asked that the Mexican immigration law be repealed, a law which prohibited settlers from the United States; they asked that Texas be made a separate state from Coahuila, and requested that the English language be used in all government affairs. Stephen F. Austin presided at this meeting and was the guiding hand.

One year later they met again in San Felipe and wrote in more emphatic terms their wishes for independence, and though Sam Houston was one of the aggressive, determined personalities, it was

By CARRIE J. CROUCH

Austin with his unquenchable fighting spirit who undertook the perilous task of presenting their desire to the Mexican government in Mexico City. It cost Austin

more than a year in a Mexican prison and great hardship but he returned to San Felipe to give directions in the growing revolution, and it was here he later wrote: "War is declared. Public opinion has proclaimed it with one voice. The campaign is opened."

Austin continued to send appeals to the colonists and in San Felipe he was elected commander-in-chief of the army, and here, too, a provisional government was created with Henry Smith as governor, dictating the work that was carried on until the first Congress was called to meet at Washington-on-the-Brazos.

THE first constitutional congress met March 1, 1836 at Washington-on-the-Brazos, and while the little town had a name of distinction it had little else. The municipal attractions consisted of some fifty houses, with scarcely more than one hundred population, and not one of the buildings had a seating capacity for fifty-eight delegates. There was, however, a newly completed blacksmith shop whose proprietor was one of the zealous patriots, and the one minister of the community as well. The Rev. Noah L. Byers placed benches in his shop, and fitted it for the momentous occasion, and the warm hospitality of the "village smith" overcame in part the icy blast of a late Texas northern. The flapping curtain at the opening of the shop did not tend toward privacy any more than protection, but the interested people of the countryside were at least respectful. They tip-toed in and out. There was nothing to record the human interest features of the convention, no news hawks, no private wires, no radio, no printing presses, not even a paper to report it.

Texas, nevertheless, has always been proud of its first representatives. Twenty-five counties in the state have been named for delegates to that first convention. The members were outstanding in the colony, practically all had had legislative experience in other states, and contributed a broad point of view for the organization.

It is Samuel Houston who has come down through history as the man of the hour in Texas independence, but Richard Ellis was the acting president, and Samuel P. Carson was the most

celebrated in constitutional affairs. He was from North Carolina, had served several years in Congress, been a member of the state senate and was never relinquished as a favorite son for after he had moved to Texas he was called back to serve at a constitutional convention. Other notables were James W. Collingsworth who had served as United States attorney in Tennessee; Thomas J. Rusk, a prominent attorney of Georgia, and George C. Childress, chairman of the committee on the Declaration of Independence, to whom the credit of authorship has been



The Present Capitol Building at Austin

The Texas constitution was clearly patterned after that of the United States, and it was adopted one hour after its first and only reading. Those hours of composition were tense, laboring not only under weighty problems and heavy work of drafting so great a document the members held themselves together under the strain of an approaching enemy army. They knew the Mexicans were ready to strike, would strike somewhere.

ON THE second day of the convention the blow came—a letter from Colonel Travis. He was besieged in the Alamo. He was calling for reinforcements. General Houston hurriedly left the convention but the rest labored on, completing the declaration that day, March 2, and on the sixth of March the Alamo fell.

Washington-on-the-Brazos was the capital of the republic only nineteen days for it was in the path of the Mexican army, and the officials were forced to move to safety. They established the government at Harrisburg, with D. G. Burnet elected president.

Harrisburg was in reality only the country estate of John Richard Harris. He had been one of Austin's first "300" colonists, a man of great ability and energy and he had explored the Texas coast, found the head of river navigation and there secured almost 5 000 acres. Buying schooners and sloops, building a store, he established a line of commerce between New Orleans and Texas. But this line of trade was just well opened when Harris contracted yellow fever in New Orleans and died.

Mrs. Harris had not yet moved to Texas when she received the news of her husband's death, yet she was undaunted by the cruel blow. She left at once for Texas with her two young sons and took up the work her husband had started. Accepting each new experience with a pioneer's fortitude she was not disconcerted when the capital of the Republic moved in on her. She established the newcomers in comfort.

The location of the Harris home was at the junction of the Brazos and Buffalo and was a point of considerable vantage, so much so that it appealed to the entire staff and later President Burnet was insistently in favor of making it the permanent capital.

News of the continual advance of the Mexicans prevented Harrisburg from long being the seat of government, and the Harris family as well as the official one made a speedy departure.

Harrisburg was burned. Mrs. Harris went back to the ruins of her home after the revolution and announced she would build again. She built on a larger scale, with real luxury for the times, for through her eastern connections she learned that the home of Governor Tompkins of New York was to be razed and she purchased much of the interior. The fine old paneling, the massive doors and even door knobs and andirons were brought to Texas.



Old Capitol at Houston

Her home was one of the show places of the state and later became the hotel of Harrisburg.

When the cabinet left Harrisburg they planted the seat of government on Galveston Island, which seemed during those perilous times, much safer than the mainland. It was here that the news of San Jacinto victory was received, and this termination of the revolution prompted another change in the capital.

PRESIDENT BURNET and his staff moved to Velasco. Safety was no longer the all absorbing question but Velasco had no special features for the seat of government and President Burnet called the next session of Congress to meet at Columbia.

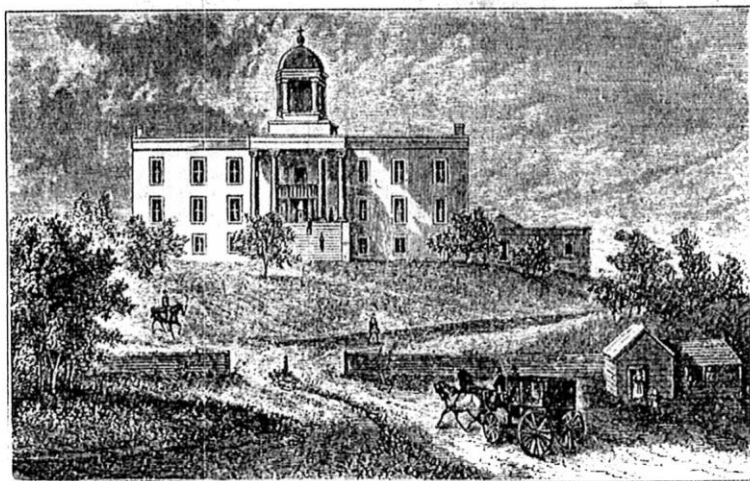
On the first Monday in October, 1836, the first congress of the new republic met. It was well known that one of the chief issues would be the question of a permanent capital, and all the principal towns had their representatives. Strong claims were presented by Goliad, Velasco, Matagorda, Washington-on-the-Brazos, and Houston, and Houston was finally selected by a majority of votes.

Upon official inspection and closer scrutiny Houston did not come up to the picture presented by its boosters. But the citizens were quick to make promises and started a capitol building at once. This large frame building became the Capitol-Hotel a few years afterwards, and still later was replaced by a brick structure which carries the same name.

There was, however, always a dissatisfaction over the location. Some of the officers complained of lack of space, others of the climate, and objections were brought forth at every session.

Eventually, in October, 1837, Congress appointed a committee to find a better situation, and a month later another committee was named to personally investigate the selection made by the first commission. The little town of Bastrop was recommended by both groups and they secured an option on a tract of land. But this did not settle the question. Congress accepted the report of the commission; President Houston vetoed it. And the capital was a question mark to the end of the republic's days.

A congressional proviso had been made that the capital should not be further changed until 1840, and President Houston held to that, stating it with characteristic directness. Congress upheld the president's veto but a bill was soon brought up in congress for the change in 1840. This bill went so far as to select a name for the city and to state the number of leagues of land to be incorporated. The capital of Texas was to be called Austin, and to (Continued on page 23)



Capitol at Austin In 1870

Capitals of the Lone Star

(Continued from page 7)

ist of twelve leagues of land, one of which was to be reserved for a state university. When President Lamar came into office he appointed a commission to choose the new site, and this commission made a long tour and extensive exploration, finally deciding on a small settlement on the Colorado River, thirty-five miles above Bastrop. The settlement was only four families and was called Waterloo.

Waterloo was a surprise to the general citizenry of the republic. Few had so much as heard of the community, but as the se-

ated that it would be. The citizens of Austin were not so sure of that. They wished to live at the capital, and they had no particular fancy for following it around, or for giving up the prestige of the town.

IN DECEMBER, 1843, President Houston sent thirty-five state troopers to remove the records. They got so far as to place them in a wagon. Then the population of Austin charged.

Historians report the incident as the Archives War, but while one cannon was

Congress at old Washington-on-the-Brazos. The legislative body did not have access to the records but it went on with its work. Houston held Congress at Washington-on-the-Brazos—Austin held the records.

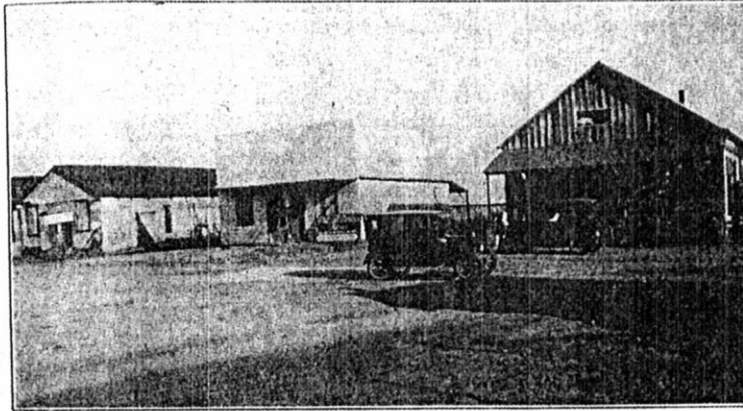
Anson Jones had just been elected to the presidency of the republic when the United States accepted the annexation of Texas. He had not yet had time to take part in the capital controversy, but he stood in front of the building at Austin and delivered his farewell address, lowered the Lone Star flag and raised the Stars and Stripes. There Governor J. P. Henderson made his inaugural speech.

The old capitol building burned on November 9, 1881, and \$50,000 was immediately appropriated for a temporary structure. Then Texas turned to thoughts of a greater capitol, one worthy of the largest state in the Union.

THE one feasible plan for securing a costly building was setting aside state land and offering it to a building concern. This was done; the land was advertised, and on January 1, 1882 bids were opened and the contract finally let to the Farewell Syndicate of Chicago, which became commonly known as the Capitol Syndicate. Land had a valuation of fifty cents and a dollar an acre then, but the land was held by the company for years and it had a natural increase of great value, some of it bringing \$50 an acre.

Austin, the capital, is different from little Waterloo of '39." It is hard to believe that the broad, beautiful Congress Avenue was once the bed of a creek, the fishing stream and swimming hole of the community; that Comanches in war paint paraded up and down; that food was hauled from Houston and required a month to make the trip; that bacon sold for one dollar a pound, and flour brought \$100 a barrel. And at that time Austin was a world capital.

San Felipe—Washington-on-the-Brazos—Harrisburg—Galveston—Velasco—Columbia—Houston—old capitals of Texas, some of them resting (Continued on page 32)



Washington-on-Brazos Today

lection seemed unanimous with the commission, congress and the president, which accomplished the feat, the new town of Austin, alias Waterloo, was quickly on the mental map of the republic. Whenever objections were evinced the members of the project were ready to describe the purple hilltop of Austin, the rolling prairies, the fertile soil, the bountiful water, and the immense possibilities.

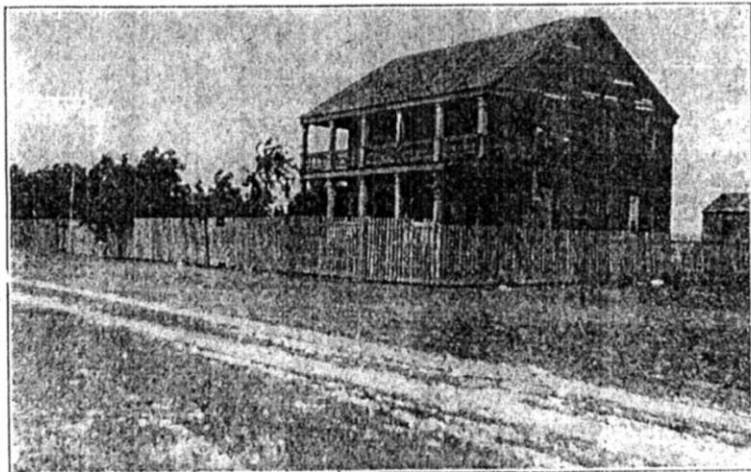
AUSTIN was born with a silver spoon in her mouth; she came into the world a capital of a nation. Streets and avenues were laid off, the city was platted and planned.

On October 17, 1839, President Lamar and his staff arrived. The population was beginning to move in, long caravans, settlers with families, those without, vehicles of every description and transportation of every form brought the new citizens. The capital seemed at last able to be proclaimed. But it was not. It might have passed the great flood of protest but it had not entirely emerged. The new wooden capitol, the growing town, the ambassadors from the United States, England, and France might call the world that it was a recognized capital of a republic and a nation, but it did not impress all of Texas.

General Houston had a second administration, and he had no more respect for the commissioners' selection and the site of Austin than he had in his first term. He announced Austin was too far on the frontier that the capital should be brought back to the interior, and he strongly inti-

in action and the troops retreated across the river, there were no fatalities. The Austin contingent recaptured the records and the soldiers retreated still further—empty-handed. The city of Austin placed a guard at the Capitol and this was maintained as long as Texas was a republic.

President Houston, however, did not change his private opinion or his official authority. He continued to declare Austin was too exposed to Mexicans and Comanches for serious transaction of government affairs, and he called his next session of



Former Capitol of Texas at Old Velasco

San Felipe—Washington-on-the-Brazos—Harrisburg —Galveston—Velasco—Columbia—Houston—old capitals of Texas, some of them resting entirely on the glory of the past. Washington-on-the-Brazos ranks first in historical significance and the state has made a park there, the school children of Texas have erected a monument, and recently a replica of the old blacksmith shop has been built.

The great capitol in Austin may have taken three million acres; it may be valued at \$60,000,000 but Texas is proud of it. Texas may boast, but she is fitted to quote the words of Maculey: "A people that takes no pride in the noble achievements of remote ancestors will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered with pride by their descendants."
