

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS IN TEXAS PRESERVATION: THE CASE OF WASHINGTON-ON-THE-BRAZOS STATE HISTORICAL PARK

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(Resumen)

Los llamados “parques históricos” son una de las entidades más interesantes creadas en Estados Unidos para proteger el patrimonio histórico. Antes que zonas recreativas, estos lugares son en realidad “reservas” en las que los norteamericanos, al igual que hicieron con los pueblos indígenas, han ido apartando del desarrollo del resto de la sociedad aquellos terrenos en los que tuvieron lugar importantes hechos del pasado o en los que quedaban vestigios materiales de acontecimientos o construcciones históricas. Este fue el caso de Washington-on-the-Brazos, antigua capital del estado de Texas y ciudad donde en 1836 los texanos firmaron su Declaración de Independencia de Méjico. En 1915, la administración estatal estableció allí uno de los primeros parques históricos de Texas, y desde entonces burócratas y ciudadanos comunes han luchado por hacer del mismo un lugar de importancia equivalente al hecho histórico que allí sucedió. El éxito de estas iniciativas ha sido discreto, y por eso el parque dista mucho de ser en la actualidad un lugar popular. Aún así, *Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park* es, sin duda, un instrumento correcto y muy digno para difundir entre los texanos la crónica del origen de su estado. La historia de este parque ilustra magníficamente como la protección e interpretación del patrimonio histórico ha evolucionado en Texas y Estados Unidos durante el siglo XX.

On March 2, 1836, the small and ramshackle town of Washington in Washington County entered history when fifty-two representatives of the largest settlements in Texas huddled inside an unfinished building on the banks of the Brazos River to declare independence from Mexico, write a new constitution which established the Republic of Texas, and organized an ad interim government. The delegates worked seventeen straight days and nights, and on March 17 they fled Mexico's advancing troops along with the local citizens. When independence was gained, several of those delegates lobbied to designate Washington as the permanent capital of the new nation. However, the Texas government elected a town named Waterloo as the capital, later renamed Austin. When in 1842 Mexico again invaded the young republic, Texas President Sam Houston moved the capital back to Washington for security reasons. While the capital remained there, the settlement began to grow thanks to the thriving cotton trade that circulated along the Brazos River. It was a short-lived prosperity, though: in 1845 the seat of government was moved back to Austin; in 1858 the town received a mortal blow when the railroad bypassed it; and the Civil War finally sealed its fate. By the end of the nineteenth century Washington was little more than a ghost town, and today's community is only composed of a handful of houses. Despite its slight importance, Texans have always regarded this place as one of the “cradles” of their independence. Hence, it is not surprising that when the historic preservation movement

began in Texas, Washington-on-the-Brazos was one of the first places considered deserving of protection.¹

The origins of historic preservation in the U.S. dates back to the 1850s, when groups of New England citizens began saving historic homes because of their association with early American patriots. Their intention was to use the structures to instill patriotism in the people and teach national history, especially to America's youth. New Englanders' ideas and behavior influenced the entire nation, including Texans, who in the 1880s began to get together to preserve their own historic sites. Organizations such as the Alamo Monumental Society, Texas Veterans Association, and Daughters of the Republic of Texas, led by charismatic preservationists such as Adina De Zavala and Clara Driscoll, appeared at the end of the century to salvage the two historic sites most linked with the patriotic history of Texas: the Alamo and the San Jacinto battlefield.²

Since Washington-on-the-Brazos (as the town is known today) had been the site where the Texas Declaration of Independence had been signed, it seemed logical that Texas citizens should be interested in preserving this place as well. Yet, it was not as attractive as the Alamo and San Jacinto for two reasons. First, Washington-on-the-Brazos was little more than a few ruined houses, far from major towns and roads, whereas the Alamo was located in downtown San Antonio and the San Jacinto battlefield was close to Houston. Second, the event that took place there (the signing of the Declaration of Independence) was less related to a concrete physical place, and the document was not in Washington but stored in the State Archives at Austin. Consequently, only the locals regarded the town site as a place worthy of preservation.

The first step towards the recognition of Washington as a historic place was taken, not surprisingly, by a local educator E. W. Tarrant, superintendent of Brenham Public Schools. In 1900, Tarrant initiated a public campaign in which the children of Brenham raised money among the citizens of Washington County to erect a monument on the exact spot where the building in which the Declaration of Independence was signed once stood. Area residents applauded Tarrant's patriotic initiative and contributed with enough money to pay the cost of the monument, an inscribed granite shaft that was dedicated on April 21, 1900. Aside from the accolades of locals, Tarrant's initiative received statewide commendation and praise from the influential preservation organization Daughters of the Republic of Texas.

At first it seemed that Washington-on-the-Brazos was going to be officially recognized for its historical importance. Neglect soon took over, however, and it continued

1. March 2, 1836 is the official anniversary of Texas' Declaration of Independence. However, it is very likely that this document was really signed on March 3, with additional signatures added later. (R. Henderson Shuffler, "The Signing of Texas' Declaration of Independence: Myth and Record." *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* LXV, January 1962. 312.

2. The first of those New England organizations was the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, which between 1853 and 1858 prevented the historic home of Mount Vernon, a former property of George Washington, to be transformed in a Hotel. Murtagh, William J. *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America*. New York: Sterling Publishing Co., 1993. 28. Miguel Á. López-Trujillo, "A Century of Historic Preservation in Texas," Master's thesis, Southwest Texas State University, 1998. 5-11.

being a forgotten place for another decade. That state of things began to change in the 1910s, when some community groups made up of politicians, entrepreneurs, and influential citizens lobbied legislators to make the state acquire sites related to the most crucial events of the independence struggle and to the Republic of Texas. Their aim was to transform these places into public parks as a way to attract visitors and increase the prestige of their towns. State politicians had no other solution but to accept those demands and set up what became the first historic parks of Texas. These examples made Washington county residents advocate the state purchasing the site where the Declaration of Independence was signed and creating there a public park. The initiative was lead by R. E. Pennington of Brenham, a woman who at the time was publishing patriotic articles and poems in the *Galveston News* newspaper in order to remind people of Washington's importance. Her initiative was soon followed by that of a group of entrepreneurs called the Young Men's Business Association of Brenham, which in 1914 passed a resolution asking to the 34th Legislature to appropriate funds to purchase a tract for a state park.³

This resolution became a bill that representative Sam D. W. Low of Brenham introduced for the first time on March 6, 1915. Initially its passage failed for lack of time, but before an special session of the legislature called on April 29, Low made sure that everybody would be conscious of the importance of the patriotic shrine by distributing among legislators and Governor James E. Ferguson copies of some articles by R. E. Pennington. Immediately, an inspired Ferguson sent a message admonishing the representatives to consider passing the bill for patriotic and cultural reasons. This extra bit of pressure was the necessary final push the legislature needed to pass the bill on May 19, 1915. The following day, Governor Ferguson approved the measure "with personal pride and satisfaction." The legislation appropriated ten thousand dollars to purchase the first two tracts, 32.12 and 17.28 acres, including the 1900 shaft, and officials erected a granite marker on March 2, 1917, to commemorate the acquisition. The grounds, today known as Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park, was the seventh site that the Texas legislature set aside as a historic park.⁴

Washington, together with all the remaining publicly-owned historic sites (except for the Alamo, which has remained under the private management of the Daughters of the

3. State of Texas. Texas Legislative Council. *Texas State Parks: A Survey and An Analysis. A Report to the 56th Legislature*. Austin: Texas Legislative Council, December 1958 (copy on file at the Texas Capitol Legislative Reference Library). Those first historic parks were Gonzales Park, Gonzales County, established in 1907, Acton Park, Hood County, established in 1911, and Fannin Battlefield Ground, Goliad County, established in 1913.

4. *San Antonio Express* 2 March 1916 (clipping on file at Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park Vertical File, The Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas; this repository hereafter CAH); General Laws of the State of Texas Passed at the First Called Session of the Thirty-fourth Legislature Convened April, 29, 1915, and Adjourned May, 28, 1915 (Austin: A.C. Baldwin & Sons, 1915) 3; "Old Washington Steeps in Its Memories of a Glamorous Day," *Houston Post* 28 April 1936; Stanley Siegel, *Big Men Walked Here! The Story of Washington-on-the-Brazos* (Austin: The Pemberton Press, 1971) 98; Quote from *San Antonio Express*, 2 March 1916; Washington State Park Land Titles (copies on file at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Austin, Texas; this repository hereafter TPWD).

Republic of Texas to this day), were placed under the jurisdiction of the Superintendent of Public Buildings until 1919, when state administrators transferred management to a recently established agency, the State Board of Control. Composed of three members (later five) appointed by the governor, the Board of Control was created to be the central purchasing and management agency for state buildings and grounds. Although historic parks could have an advisory commission appointed by the governor to assist in their administration, the board always had the last word in authorizing any action.⁵

Until the 1930s the Board of Control remained the only active state preservation agency in Texas. During those years its members cared only for the most basic maintenance needs of historical parks, however, and never showed a great interest in their development. Their attitude was not surprising; the agency had a land and building management function; it was not a real historic preservation organization interested in interpreting the sites. On the one hand, state legislators never funded parks beyond what was strictly necessary to keep them open; they merely authorized the Board of Control to collect admission fees and to operate concessions as additional sources of revenue. The reason for this was the legislature's belief that state parks, both natural and historical, had to be self-sustaining, because state money should be used to fill more urgent needs. On the other hand, historical parks were only conceived as public lands, regardless of their special historical characteristics. Thus, little or no attention was paid to the interpretive needs of their users. Without money or interest in history, Board of Control officers never prepared any preservation, development, or interpretive plan for historic sites, which remained small and unattractive to visitors during the 1920s and early 1930s.⁶

Such was the case of Washington-on-the-Brazos during its first years of existence. The grounds was completely ignored until 1923, when state legislators officially named it "Washington State Park," employed a caretaker whose salary came from the park's yearly

5. *General Laws of the State of Texas Passed by the Thirty-six Legislature at its Regular Session Convened January 12, 1919, and Adjourned March 19, 1919*. Austin: A.C. Baldwin & Sons, 1919. 323. State of Texas. Texas State Board of Control. *Eight Biennial Report of the Texas State Board of Control for the Biennium Ended August 31, 1936*. Austin: Texas State Board of Control, 1936. 50. Although some advisory commissions were appointed the same year the park was created, their appointments were often delayed for years. For example, the San Jacinto battlefield, purchased in 1883, and the Fannin Battleground Park, established in 1913, did not have their own commissions until 1919 and 1947, respectively.

6. There were two other preservation agencies in Texas, at least officially: the Texas State Library and Historical Commission, established in 1909, and the Texas Historical Board, established in 1923. None of them ever carried out preservation activities at all. (López-Trujillo, "Historic Preservation in Texas" 25, 28). State of Texas. Texas Legislative Council. *Texas State Parks*. Austin: Texas Legislative Council: 1. The minutes of the Board of Control only relate minor improvements or management details. For instance, on August 31 and September 21, 1936, repair works were approved in Washington State Park. Texas State Board of Control Minutes 1991/16-1 through 10, Texas State Board of Control Records, Texas State Archives, Austin, Texas (this collection hereafter cited as box number and TSBCR); Sharon Morris Toney, "The Texas State Parks System: An Administrative History, 1923-1984," Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1995. 14, 37, 95.

appropriation, and appointed an advisory commission named "Washington State Park Commission" to preserve, protect, improve, and beautify the site. Commissioners, as in the case of other historical parks, served with no monetary compensation and lacked any real management power, since their decisions had to be approved by the Board of Control. The first chairman of the commission was the president of the First National bank T. A. Low, a person later spoken of as "the man who has been the inspiring spirit of carrying this thing on for the past eight or ten years."⁷

From their appointment, Low and his commissioners worked hard to transform Washington into a place worth visiting. Their first action took place in 1924, when they had Representative F. W. Hensel of College Station request funds from the Board of Control to implement a landscape plan, create a new entrance, and construct a museum. Their goal was to "develop a park that will be a credit, not only to Washington County, but to the State of Texas." Unfortunately, Board of Control officials rejected these suggestions for economic reasons; \$26,800 had been already invested in the park, and they wanted all historical sites to be as self-supporting as possible. Hence, Washington received no money for its initial development. The meager yearly appropriation financed the most basic maintenance, such as constructing a small storage building for tools and erecting a fence to prevent cattle from invading the area.⁸

Despite the Board of Control's generally negative attitude toward financing the historical site, Washington park commissioners managed to develop its interpretation possibilities exceptionally early. The first major action took place in 1926, when a replica of the building where the Declaration of Independence was signed, pompously called "Independence Hall," was erected. The structure, constructed by Alex Griffin of Brenham, was dedicated on June 3 and exhibited in its interior a "weird assortment of pictures, clippings and artifacts in battered display cases." Although both the chairmen of the Board of Control and of the Washington Park Commission, H. H. Harrington and J. J. Marek, believed the replica to be accurate, its authenticity was questioned from the day it was dedicated. For example, in 1927 preservationist Adina De Zavala complained to Harrington that the replica was actually a reconstruction of the wrong building, and she was indignant that it would go into posterity as the first capitol of Texas. Subsequent historical research determined not only that the replica was inaccurate, but that it had been incorrectly placed. Even so, the inhabitants of the area were delighted because it attracted a substantial number of visitors.⁹

7. *General Laws of the State of Texas Passed by the Thirty-eight Legislature at the Regular Session Convened January 9, 1923 and Adjourned March 14, 1923*. Austin: A.C. Baldwin & Sons, 1923. 123-124. "Washington Steeps in Its Memories," *Houston Post* 28 April 1936.

8. F. W. Hensel, letter to Mrs. J. Wallace Brosig, 28 April 1924, Washington File, 1911/16-35, TSBCR; State Board of Control, letter to Mrs. J. Wallace Brosig, 17 May 1924, *Ibid.*; Board of Control Minutes, 31 May, 6 November, and 10 December 1926, Washington File, 1911/16-2, TSBCR.

9. H. H. Harrington, chairman of the State Board of Control, letter to J. J. Marek, chairman of the Washington Park Commission, 2 September 1926, Washington File, 1911/16-35, TSBCR; S.B. Cowell, Chairman of the State Board of Control, letter to R. F. Ball, General Contractor, Brenham, 1 September 1925, *Ibid.*; Quote from Shuffler, "Texas Declaration of

Additional improvements were approved in 1928: the park was graded; pecan trees were planted; and a copy of the Texas Declaration of Independence was exhibited in the hall. In addition, Governors Dan Moody and Ross Sterling appropriated \$15,000 and \$8,000 respectively to build a second structure that went up in 1931, a brick auditorium to be used for patriotic gatherings such as the March 2 Texas Independence Day Celebration, which the American Legion had sponsored since the end of World War I. The advent of the country's economic depression in 1929 stopped any further investment. In fiscal year 1931, legislators only appropriated \$7,600 for the park, and the following year the amount decreased to \$4,500. Finally, during fiscal year 1934-35, the park received only \$1,200, of which \$630 was to pay the caretaker's salary with the rest for "improvements" and upkeep.¹⁰

Ironically, it was during the economic vicissitudes of the 1930s that money and interest began to materialize for preservation in Texas. One of the more imaginative ways to relieve the hardships of the Depression was to use relief work programs to carry out historic conservation and preservation projects. With the vast majority of the nation's historical buildings, parks, and documents in need of immediate attention, various New Deal agencies and programs hired thousands of architects, historians, archivists, draftsmen, contractors, and laborers with the twin goals of providing jobs and income to these professional groups, while at the same time recording and preserving the past. In Texas, four New Deal programs implemented preservation. The most influential was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Established in 1933 as an emergency program mainly devoted to providing employment to young men and World War I veterans, it carried out construction and conservation projects on public lands, many at state parks. Another important New Deal agency was the Civil Works Administration (CWA). Founded in 1933, it was superseded in 1935 by another of the "alphabet" agencies, the Works Progress Administration, which changed its name to Works Projects Administration in 1939 (WPA),

Independence" 310; H. H. Harrington, letter to Adina De Zavala, 15 October 1927, Washington File, 1911/16-35, TSBCR; TPWD, "Preservation Plan and Program for Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park," November 1977, copy on file at TPWD, a-95; H. H. Harrington, letter to Adina De Zavala, 11 January 1928, Washington File, 1911/16-35, TSBCR; Adina De Zavala, letter to the State Board of Control, 1 November 1927, *Ibid.*; Mrs. J. Wallace Brosig, letter to H. H. Harrington, 12 September 1927, *Ibid.* It is impossible to know which information was employed to document the reconstruction, since no related records survive. It is very likely, however, that the replica was built after an old photograph of Washington showing a wooden warehouse believed to be the original Independence Hall. The remaining descriptions and graphic representations of the original building are scarce and dubious. For general information on Independence Hall see Shuffler, "Texas Declaration of Independence."

10. Mrs. J. Wallace Brosig, letter to H. H. Harrington, 24 July 1928, Washington File, Box 1911/16-35, TSBCR; *Houston Post*, 28 April 1936; Siegel, *Big Men Walked Here!* 98; Texas State Board of Control, *Sixth Biennial Report of the Texas State Board of Control for the Biennium Ended August 31, 1932* (Austin: Knappe Printing Co. 1932) 26. State of Texas. Texas State Board of Control. *Eight Biennial Report of the Texas State Board of Control for the Biennium Ended August 31, 1936*. Austin: Knappe Printing Co., 1936. 40.

and lasted until 1943. Its goal was to provide short-term relief jobs in a variety of fields, including preservation work.¹¹

Besides New Deal work relief programs, the celebration of the Texas centennial in 1936 was another unexpected source of work and funds for historical parks. With all the federal money going to preservation and public projects, Texas could not have celebrated its centennial at a better time. A United States Centennial Commission had been appointed in 1935 to oversee \$3 million in appropriations for the Texas centennial, an event that both state and federal officials viewed as a wonderful opportunity to create jobs and promote tourism in the state. In addition, the WPA provided a total of \$1,160,000 in grants for various centennial projects. Finally, the Texas legislature appropriated \$3 million in 1935 to round out the centennial budget. Although the Texas Central Centennial Exposition in Dallas would get most of the fanfare and money, \$360,000 was appropriated for the erection of permanent memorials and to improve, restore, and reconstruct historic sites and structures across the state.¹²

Amidst this windfall of public money, and taking into account the site's direct connection with the historic events celebrated, it is not surprising that in 1934 Washington-on-the-Brazos commissioners unanimously demanded an appropriation from centennial funds to expand the park. Their petition was not only heard, but Washington State Park became one of the main recipients of revenue. The final allocation of \$34,000 came from WPA and centennial funds. The money was employed in many ways. First, the state purchased 20.98 additional acres of land. Second, CCC workers constructed a stone amphitheater for open-air events. Third, utility and landscaping work was carried out, and the picnic area was improved. Fourth, a monument honoring George Campbell Childress, author of the Texas Declaration of Independence, and the signers was erected. Finally, state officials decided to move a historic home to the grounds of the park as an additional visitor attraction. The house was "Barrington," the farm of Anson Jones, last president of the Republic of Texas, originally located five miles south of Washington-on-the-Brazos. The initial project aimed to restore the exterior and the interior of the house for use as a museum.¹³

11. Michael McCullar. *Restoring Texas: Raiford Stripling's Life and Architecture*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985. 42. Sue Moss, "CCC 50th Anniversary," *Texas Parks and Wildlife*. September 1983: 5. "Works Progress Administration," *The New Handbook of Texas*. Austin: The State Historical Association, 1996. For a detailed list of Centennial Works Projects Administration funds see State of Texas. Texas State Board of Control, *Ninth Biennial Report of the Texas State Board of Control for the Biennium Ended August 31, 1938*. Austin: Texas State Board of Control, 1938. 16-20. The other two New Deal agencies that carried out preservation work in Texas were the National Youth Administration and the Historic American Buildings Survey (López-Trujillo, "Historic Preservation in Texas" 32.)

12. King, Tom C. *Report of an Examination of the Texas Centennial*. Austin: Office of State Auditor and Efficiency Expert, 1939. 2, 8.

13. State of Texas. *Report of the Washington State Park Board, 6 July 1934*. file DC10. Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park Archive. Washington, Texas, 1934. 172. (this repository hereafter cited as WSHPA). State of Texas. Board of Control. *Eight Biennial Report*. Austin: Board of Control: 54. Centennial Division of the Board of Control

The 1936 centennial contributed enormously to a resurgence of public interest in history. Valuable preservation and restoration work was carried out and established a standard of organization that would be missed in following years. Nevertheless, the program lacked staying power and perspective. First, the state made no specific provision to support and maintain all the new facilities and improvements constructed in historical parks during the centennial, except for some local or community maintenance. Second, no scholarly standard was followed. Therefore, most of the work was done to glorify the Texas past rather than to interpret it, rendering much of the work useless for subsequent historical research. Finally, since the centennial program was carried out hurriedly due to political pressure, the historic preservation and restoration work lacked careful preparation, which resulted in errors and omissions. Thus, when the lights of the centennial celebration were switched off and World War II interrupted the flow of federal money, historic parks and sites returned to their previous condition of neglect and anonymity, a situation that lasted for nearly twenty years.¹⁴

Washington-on-the-Brazos was no exception. To begin with, Barrington was not restored, and the house eventually became a barn, providing shelter to the caretaker's mules and storage for their hay. In fact, Jack Phillips, the caretaker, had to leave to park to join the army during the war. To make matters worse, during the 1940s and early 1950s Board of Control appropriations were only \$260 per year, thus obliging park commissioners to find additional sources of outside revenue such as harvesting the park's pecans. As a result, visitors often expressed their disgust at the "dangerous and ugly condition" of the park.¹⁵

In the late 1940s, Board of Control bureaucrats finally admitted that the administration of the historical parks had always been foreign to their duties and very similar to the ones exercised by the State Parks Board. This agency had been created in 1923 by Governor Pat Neff to establish a state park system for public recreation. Although, Neff's initial idea was to develop natural lands as parks, state legislators in the 1930s began to assign the management of new historic parks to the State Parks Board rather than to the Board of Control. Such were the cases of Fort Griffin (1935), Stephen F. Austin Park (1939), San José Mission (1940), Jim Hogg Park (1941), Governor Hogg Shrine (1946), and Independence Historic Park and Port Isabel Lighthouse (1947), which were all under State Parks Board jurisdiction from the day the legislature created them. This development reflected prevailing opinion among state experts that the parks board was the logical agency to exercise responsibility for historical parks.¹⁶

But that was not all. In 1948 Board of Control chairman Hall H. Logan admitted that his organization was "in no way equipped to assist a park in its maintenance problems." According to him, the primary function of the State Parks Board was the

Minutes, 3 October 1936, 1911/16-80, TSBCR; TPWD, *Preservation Plan for Washington-on-the-Brazos*: a-117.

14. Board of Control, *Eight Biennial Report* 14.

15. Siegel, *Big Men Walked Here!* 98; TPWD, "Preservation Plan and Program for Washington-on-the-Brazos" a-117; Washington-on-the-Brazos file, 1944-48, 1911/16-54, TSBCR; Gordon K. Shearer, letter to Dan M. Walker, 27 October 1952, 1977/81-157, Allan Shivers Papers, Texas State Archives, Austin, Texas (this collection hereafter cited as box number and Shivers Papers). Quote from Minutes, 22 June 1955, TSBCR.

16. López-Trujillo, "Historic Preservation in Texas" 27, 38.

management of parks and "they had travelling crews and equipment with which to maintain them." He concluded that the parks board was doing "a conscientious job and it is for the good of our Historical Parks and better State Administration to centralize all like functions under one service." Those reasons led Logan to request the legislature to transfer the control and custody of all historical parks to the State Parks Board. While legislators considered bills introduced in 1943 and 1945, they did not authorize the transfer until 1949.¹⁷

Although the shift seemed to be a wise move for the historical parks, the State Parks Board did little else during the ensuing years to improve their general condition. There were two major obvious problems. First, both the Board of Control (initially) and the State Parks Board (later) ignored the unique characteristics of the historical parks and treated them like any other recreational or natural land. Without a set of specific goals, the two agencies almost always failed to meet the preservation needs and to realize the interpretive possibilities of historical parks.¹⁸

Most problematical, however, the legislature continued to believe that state parks should be self-sustaining and was unwilling to fund them beyond their administrative needs. Hence, appropriations for historic, natural, and recreational areas were meager and prevented managers from undertaking any maintenance beyond what was indispensable to keep parks open. Between 1949 and 1952, for example, legislators designated only \$16,985 to care for the eight historical parks in the parks system. So catastrophic was their situation that in 1952 parks board experts even considered closing all of them.

This situation arose despite the measure of relief had come with the 1940 creation of the Special Park Fund, which accepted the deposit of all park revenues for redistribution within the system. By 1952, however, only eleven of the thirty-seven parks that comprised

17. Goliad State Park in 1932 and Lipantitlan in 1937 were the last two parks whose management was assigned to the Board of Control. First quote from Hall H. Logan, Chairman of the State Board of Control, letter to J. V. Ash, Chairman of the State Parks Board, 7 January 1948, State Parks Board File 1947-48, 1911/16-64, TSBCR. Second and third quotes from Hall H. Logan, letter to Senator Crawford C. Martin, 7 December 1948, Historical State Parks File 1948-49, 1911/16-63, TSBCR. See also Toney, "Texas State Parks" 95, and State of Texas. *General and Special Laws of the State of Texas Passed by the Regular Session of the Fifty-first Legislature Convened at the City of Austin, January 7, 1949, and Adjourned June 6, 1949*. Austin: The State of Texas, 1949. 320. San Jacinto and Fannin battlegrounds were the only two historic sites that remained under the custody of the Board of Control. Why the Board of Control kept the administration of these two parks is stated nowhere, although it could have been due to their patriotic significance, as it can be implied from a 1955 letter in which the Daughters of the Republic of Texas communicated to the Board of Control its opposition to a possible transfer of the San Jacinto and Fannin battlegrounds to the State Parks Board. In their opinion, the Parks Board would charge an admission fee to those parks, and that was unacceptable to the Daughters, because those two places were national shrines for Texans. (Daughters of the Republic of Texas, letter to State Board of Control, 31 March 1955, DRT-Historical Survey Committee File 1956-59, 1911/16-71, TSBCR.)

18. State of Texas. Texas State Historical Survey Committee, *Report to the Governor and the Fifty-Fourth Legislature*. Austin: The State of Texas, 1955. 29.

the entire system showed regular earnings. Besides the fund, officials made other unsuccessful attempts to get the money that the parks needed. In 1950, for instance, Governor Beauford H. Jester asked the legislature to appropriate \$2 million, but his request was ignored. In 1955, legislators took the initiative of launching a \$25 million bond program, but investors were discouraged that the parks lacked sufficient revenue to cover interest on the bonds.¹⁹

Because transfer to the State Parks Board did not improve the general condition of Washington State Park, it was left to the initiative of a group of concerned citizens to take the first steps to rekindle interest in its development. On the occasion of the 120th anniversary of Texas independence in 1955, the Brenham Chamber of Commerce, led by a young newcomer from Houston named Donald Jeppesen, organized the Texas Independence Day Organization (later renamed Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park Association). A non-profit corporation, it had the double objective of saving the park and perpetuating the memory of the events that happened there. Professional historians and representatives of the preservation-minded public composed its board of directors. Among the latter members was influential local Tom S. Whitehead, then publisher of the Brenham *Banner-Press* and owner of Radio Station KWHI. Whitehead was hired as executive director at a salary of \$1 a year.²⁰

In addition to sponsoring the Independence Day celebration, Whitehead, Jeppesen, and the other members of the association began raising funds to set up a park development plan. Plan objectives included building a museum to deposit and exhibit historical relics of the republic era and erecting a better replica of Independence Hall. Thanks to \$30,000 donated by Mary Moody Northen, of the influential Moody family of Galveston, the association planned a statewide campaign to raise a million dollars for the construction of the museum. Lack of a unified leadership kept the campaign from being launched.²¹

The Texas Independence Day Organization was not the only association that appeared in the mid-fifties to fight for Washington Park. In 1957, a group of Brenham women led by Edna Ross Hacker organized the Barrington Society with the purpose of restoring and furnishing Barrington farm to its original appearance and providing a full-time hostess to care for the house. With great enthusiasm, these ladies started their own fund raising in order to pay for both the restoration and the curator. So committed were they to their work during the early sixties that Edna Hacker even contributed from personal funds. This society, along with the Texas Independence Day Organization and the Washington State Park Commission, made various appropriations proposals to the state legislators to initiate a much-needed development plan for the park. Although their voices were not initially heard, they joined with those who pleaded for better treatment of Texas historic sites at a time when the public image of parks was changing.²²

19. Toney, "Texas State Parks" 95, 141-43; Gordon K. Shearer, letter to Dan M. Walker, 27 October 1952, Box 1977/81-157, Shivers Papers; Toney, "Texas State Parks" 99, 100; Texas Legislative Council, "Texas State Parks" 14; Gordon K. Shearer, letter to Dolph Briscoe, 26 September 1952, 1977/81-144, Shivers Papers.

20. Siegel, *Big Men Walked Here!* 98.

21. *ibid* 99.

22. Siegel, *Big Men Walked Here!* 98-99; *Austin American Statesman* 7 September 1955, Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park Vertical File, CAH; "Barrington Society

Unexpectedly, during the 1950s attendance at public parks boomed. The economic bonanza of the fifties had provided citizens with more money and leisure time than ever before, and parks were excellent places to fulfill their recreational needs. Texas state officials immediately realized the economic potential of the growing influx of visitors. For example, in 1952 tourism in Texas produced \$398 million, and the figure was expected to rise in the following years. In 1957 the legislature decided that the time had come to give a boost to the state's park system. As a first step toward formulating a long-range development plan, it asked its investigative arm, the Texas Legislative Council, to carry out a study to determine park needs. Council experts concluded that conditions at most parks were unacceptable, and they strongly urged the legislature to establish an advisory board to administer a sound park acquisition policy, set standards for park development, and allocate sufficient funding.²³

At the beginning, legislators ignored these recommendations because tourism in Texas continued increasing (from three to six million visitors between 1950 and 1960) even though parks were in poor condition, and they preferred to concentrate efforts on advertising the state's attractions rather than repairing and maintaining them. Consequently, the State Parks Board continued to be ill funded; for the 1960-61 biennium only \$664,540 was allocated for the entire park system. However, in 1961 an independent organization named the Texas Research League also surveyed the parks at the legislature's request, and most of its results coincided with those of the Texas Legislative Council three years before. Moreover, the league's professionals also demanded the immediate establishment of a long-range plan to direct park acquisition, development, and maintenance because they considered historical parks and sites to be essential tools to carry out effective preservation activities. The evidence at last convinced legislators, and in 1962 they appropriated \$70,000 for an interagency contract between the State Parks Board and the Department of Horticulture and Parks Management at Texas Technological College to develop the state's first comprehensive long-range plan for natural, recreational, and historical parks.²⁴

To implement this plan, it was again necessary to find new sources of funding. In 1961, Research League experts had recommended utilization of revenue from the Game and Fish Commission, manager of the state's wildlife resources, because many of the activities supervised by that agency (hunting and fishing, for example) occurred in natural parks. Many legislators considered the possibility of merging the State Parks Board and the Game and Fish Commission into a single agency. They argued that by joining the agencies

Has Only One Main Project," *Brenham (TX) Banner Press* 6 July 1967: 1; TPWD, "Preservation Plan for Washington-on-the-Brazos" a-117-118; Siegel, *Big Men Walked Here!* 99.

23. Toney, "Texas State Parks" 151, 149; Texas Legislative Council, "Texas State Parks" i-iv; Established in 1949, the purpose of the Texas Legislative Council was "to investigate departments, agencies, and officials in the State and to study their functions and problems." (Toney, "Texas State Parks" 153.)

24. Texas Research League, "Texas State Parks: Blueprint for Rebuilding a Major Resource," October 1961, Copy on file at CLRL, III; Toney, "Texas State Parks" 160-61; Texas Research League, "Texas State Parks" IV, 1, 2, 10; Texas Technological College, "Texas State Parks: A General Report of Functions, Space Requirements and Policies for the Future," 1962, copy on file at CLRL.

the state would eliminate duplicate positions, improve park management, and provide the desired boost to the park system through the infusion of the latter agency's revenues. Governor John Connally, wanting to offer more attractions to tourists, supported the proposal. Thus, on August 23, 1963, the Fifty-eighth Legislature established the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and charged it with administering the state park system.²⁵

There was a further reason why Governor Connally needed the new agency. This effervescent period of historic preservation in Texas was but a reflection of what was going on nationwide. The federal government was very much concerned about the systematic destruction of thousand of historic buildings and archeological sites resulting from the rapid urban growth of the fifties and early sixties. To address the problem, some federal legislators promoted effective protection of historical resources through stronger legislation (the National Historic Preservation act of 1966 being the foremost example) and by establishing new federal preservation agencies. One of these was the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, created in 1962 to help states plan and develop their own park systems. To achieve this goal, Bureau managers offered states matching grants on two conditions: 1) existence of a park agency to administer the money and, 2) a comprehensive outdoor recreation plan. The first condition had already been fulfilled in Texas with the establishment of the Parks and Wildlife Department. The second condition was fulfilled in 1966, when the Texas legislature presented the State of Texas Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, a ten-year plan that proposed to acquire 150,000 acres of land, 5,000 of which were to contain forty-one new historical sites. Federal money immediately began to arrive. Parks and Wildlife received \$3,356,807 in 1966, and \$2,418,825 in 1967 to acquire and develop parks. By the 1968-69 biennium, the agency's budget, including state money and federal grants, totalled \$5 million.²⁶

This increased budget allowed the Texas park system to expand its inventory of historic places and improve existing ones. One of the first parks to undergo developments was Washington-on-the-Brazos, thanks mainly to the effort of a young legislator from Washington County, Gus Mutscher, who later became Speaker of the House. In 1965, Mutscher succeeded in getting a bill passed that made the Fifty-Ninth Legislature allocate \$500,000 to finance the Washington-on-the-Brazos development plan. In addition, George Red, then president of the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park Association, persuaded the Jesse H. Jones Foundation of Houston to contribute \$200,000 more toward the plan. This budget was augmented two years later with an additional \$300,000 from the Sixtieth Legislature and federal grants, and with \$100,000 that George Butler, president of the Texas Independence Day Organization, obtained through private donations. The development project began in 1966 and lasted until 1970.²⁷

25. Texas Research League, "Texas State Parks" 15; Llo Hiller, "Parks for Texas," *Texas Parks and Wildlife* June 1972: 22; Toney, "Texas State Parks" 169, 290.

26. Beth Grosvenor Boland, "Federal Programs in Historic Preservation," *Public History: An Introduction*, ed. Barbara J. Howe and Emory L. Kemp (Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1988) 134; National Historic Preservation Act, Public Law 89-665, 1966; Toney, "Texas State Parks" 215-16; State of Texas, "Park Development Bonds. Series 1968," 1968, copy on file at TPWD, 1, 2, 17; Hiller, "Parks for Texas" 23.

27. *Houston Post*, 26 February 1967; Siegel, *Big Men Walked Here!* 100.

This effort changed the park's image completely and provided it with almost all of its present attractions. First, an appropriate official name resulted: Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park. Second, the banks of the Brazos and the picnic areas, mostly eroded and abandoned, were reconditioned. Third, the auditorium underwent major refurbishment, which changed its original appearance to provide a more flexible structure, including dining facilities and seating for five hundred. Fourth, in 1968 the board of directors of the Barrington Society, led by their president, Wheeler Nazro, hired architects Harvin Cooper Moore and his son Barry to completely restore the Anson Jones home, office, and kitchen (this last room was largely financed by a grant of \$10,000 from the Moody Foundation of Galveston) The project included the 1967 relocation of the whole complex to a new spot on a level ground overlooking the Brazos river.²⁸

The fifth development, and one of the most important ever carried out at the park, was the construction in 1969 of a star-shaped museum called Star of the Republic Museum. Designed by the Houston-based firm Harvin C. Moore and Associates, the building exhibited collections of printed and graphic documents, artifacts, and other memorabilia related to the period from the origins of Anglo-American colonization in Texas to the end of the Republic in 1846. Surprisingly, its custody was assigned to a community college named Blinn College, Brenham, through the influence of Gus F. Mutscher, by then Speaker of the House, who acquiesced to popular pressure to keep control of the museum in local hands. Initially, Governor John Connally vetoed this decision because he believed that a bigger college, possibly Texas A&M University, should operate the museum. Yet, Mutscher's influence proved too powerful for the governor to overcome, and Blinn College retained the assignment. Since then, this educational institution has always operated the building separately from the park's administration.²⁹

The last and principal improvement realized at Washington-on-the-Brazos was the erection in 1969 of a new replica of Independence Hall alongside the 1900 granite shaft. This long-wished for replica was erected in response to the desire of the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park Association in having a more accurate reconstruction of the original structure. In 1969, the State Building Commission, the agency responsible for state construction, issued a contract for the \$45,000 project to Raiford Stripling, a renowned Texas architect with thirty-six years of experience in reconstructing historical structures. Intent upon historical accuracy, Stripling based his work on historian R. Henderson Shuffler's article on Independence Hall, the archeological data from 1964-68 excavations at the site, and his own intuition as an experienced restoration architect. Since Stripling knew that the data with which he was working was limited and questionable, he never maintained that his replica was *the* reconstruction of the original building, but only his own interpretation of how it might have looked. Although neither Stripling, historians, nor archeologists were completely satisfied with the results, the main goal was satisfactorily

28. *Dallas Morning News*, 27 February 1965, Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park Vertical File, CAH; TPWD, "Preservation Plan for Washington-on-the-Brazos" a-118; *Houston Post*, 6 July 1969; "Barrington Society Has Only One Main Project," *Brenham (TX) Banner Press* 6 July 1967: 1; Siegel, *Big Men Walked Here!* 103.

29. Unidentified newspaper article [1970?], Park Clippings, WSHPA; TPWD, "Preservation Plan for Washington-on-the-Brazos" a-101; *Brenham (TX) Banner Press* 6 July 1977: 1.

achieved; the public eventually had a major, substantially correct attraction to visit. Since the reinauguration of the park on February 27, 1970, the replica has become its jewel and its most visited attraction.³⁰

Although during the first year after its reinauguration the park revived as a tourist attraction, its visitation rate continued to be low because of two major causes: the first one was its location far from major cities and principal highways, and the second was the almost complete absence of original physical evidence of the historic events that occurred at the site. In order to overcome these handicaps, a Parks and Wildlife team conducted a conceptual study to propose further improvements two years later. The most significant proposed enhancements were the following: purchase of additional land to expand park grounds; expansion of the recreational area; reconstruction of the whole Barrington farm to its original appearance; construction of walkways; placement of better interpretive signs to integrate the different attractions into a whole; promotion of park facilities for meetings and celebrations; and, construction of a headquarters-visitor information center.

In this 1972 study, Parks and Wildlife experts also proposed to reconstruct the original town of Washington-on-the-Brazos as it looked in 1836 so that living history programs could be implemented. The project seemed to be the logical continuation of the Independence Hall reconstruction, and excited the imagination of local residents, who dreamed that their park would become "not only a tourist attraction for Texas but for the entire nation." Primary archeological research had already been performed on the town site during the 1960s. Between 1964 and 1968, archeologists James Corbin and Curtis Tunnel identified and studied the site of Independence Hall, and in 1969 archeologists Dessamae Lorraine and Marsha Jackson excavated areas along the entire east side of the old Main Street, called Ferry Street. The latter two researchers located five buildings and suggested the possible location of at least three more structures, thus concluding that "the site presented a unique opportunity to study the evolution of material and cultural lifeways of one of Texas' most important Republic period sites." A private architectural firm, directed by the State Building Commission, analyzed the possibilities of reconstruction with the evidence recovered, and when in 1977 the state bought ninety-four acres west of the park encompassing much of the town site, reconstruction seemed imminent.³¹

Parks and Wildlife staff also pointed out in 1972 two specific problems that the park had developed since its reinauguration. The first was lack of unified management. Since the museum, Barrington, Independence Hall and the Auditorium were operated

30. State of Texas. *General and Special Laws of the State of Texas Passed by the Regular Session of the Sixty-first Legislature Convened January 14, 1969, and Adjourned June 2, 1969*. Austin: The State of Texas, 1969. 379. The most renowned work by Stripling was the restoration of La Bahía Mission and Mission Nuestra Señora del Espíritu Santo de Zúñiga, both at Goliad; see McCullar, *Restoring Texas*, 94; *Dallas Morning News*, 28 February 1970; *Houston Chronicle*, 3 March 1970.

31. Park visitors in 1973 numbered 179,086 (Message of George A. Butler, chairman of the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park Association, [1974?], Park Clippings, WSHPA); TPWD, "Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park. Conceptual Study," June 1972, copy on file at TPWD. Quote from *Bryan-College Station (TX) Eagle* 14 November 1976; Second quote from TPWD, "Preservation Plan for Washington-on-the-Brazos" 14-15; TPWD, "Conceptual Study, Section I.5 (4); *Houston Chronicle*, 27 February 1977.

independently, and the state did not define administrative responsibility concerning each, the result was poor coordination between Blinn College, the Parks and Wildlife Department, and the Barrington Society in areas such as displays, activities, budget, and services. The second problem was the absence of an unified theme which harmonized all the features and attractions located in the park. Not only were visitors confused over the lack of a relationship among the park's different buildings, so was William J. Murtagh, keeper of the National Register of Historic Places. When in 1975 Washington-on-the-Brazos was nominated as a national historic place, Murtagh rejected the nomination in part on the same grounds (the other reason was because too much of it was a reconstruction). These problems were partially solved in 1976 when the Barrington Society ceased to operate the Anson Jones home and relinquished control to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Still, the relationship between this agency and Blinn College was and remains conflictive because of the responsibilities overlap.³²

All the problems stated in the 1972 study demonstrated that the park needed to undertake additional improvements. Unfortunately, it was not the best moment to ask for resources. On the one hand, the development of Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park had been so recent that bureaucrats preferred to spend most of the state revenue in acquiring and developing new historic sites. On the other hand, historical parks as a group produced the least income of the entire park system because of their decayed condition, their high restoration and preservation costs, and because visitors preferred to go to natural and recreational areas. Although the passing in 1966 of the National Historic Preservation Act had provided some matching grants to help finance a statewide system of historical parks, still more funding was needed, and Texas Parks and Wildlife professionals looked for alternative ways to obtain it. The first solution chosen was the issuance in 1967 of \$75 million in bonds for a ten-year state park land acquisition and development program. By September 1968, \$5,750,000 in bonds had already been sold, and that same year Parks and Wildlife instituted entrance fees to help pay the interest. Even though bond money permitted new acquisitions, it was still insufficient to develop all historical parks. By 1971, the bond program had produced \$15.75 million, but the limited revenues from park entrance fees made it impractical and imprudent to issue a new bond series. Official estimates indicated that at least \$11 million were still needed to expand and develop the historical parks system, so Parks and Wildlife administrators called on the legislature for help. The politicians' response was the establishment in 1972 of the Texas Park Fund No.

32. TPWD, "Conceptual Study" Sections I.5.(1) and III.6; The National Register of Historic Places, established in 1966, is the national agency dedicated to inventory historic sites and objects and declare "National Historic Landmarks." According to the keeper of the National Register, Washington-on-the-Brazos nomination was rejected because "the proposed district does not appear to have sufficient historical cohesiveness" since the buildings within the park did not possess "integrity of location, design, setting and association." (William J. Murtagh, keeper of the National Register of Historic Places, letter to Truett Latimer, Executive Director of the Texas State Historical Survey Committee, 13 November 1975, Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park File, Texas Historical Commission Archive, Austin, Texas.)

31, commonly known as the "cigarette tax," because the revenue came from a tax of one cent per pack.³³

The purpose of the cigarette tax was to provide money to update and improve the parks that existed prior to the enactment of the bond program (by statute, bond funds could not be spent on older parks), and to accelerate acquisition of endangered historical and archeological areas. It was expected that if more parks were established, entrance fee income would increase, thus allowing additional issues of bonds to finance park development. In its first year of existence, the cigarette tax raised \$13 million, and, during the entire decade, the tax garnered an average of \$17 million annually. Between 1971 and 1975 the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department targeted one million of this amount solely on historical parks acquisition and development, but by 1979 the percentage of cigarette tax money invested on historic sites had risen to approximately twenty-five percent.³⁴

With the cigarette tax money, Parks and Wildlife tried to augment the number of historical parks under its management and improve existing ones. Still, park progress continued to be very slow during these years. Besides insufficient financial resources, during the early seventies the agency suffered from lack of professional staff to take care of the increased demands of its historical parks. This circumstance hampered for seven or more years the execution of some master plans and the opening of parks to the public, with the consequent loss of revenue from entrance fees. Such was the case of Washington-on-the-Brazos, whose 1972 development plan was delayed for so long that in 1977 it had to be revised.³⁵

The principal modification in the new plan was the dropping of the reconstruction of the old town of Washington. Parks and Wildlife staff eventually rejected the project because it would destroy the archaeological site and there were insufficient data with which

33. "Park Development Bonds. Series 1968" 1, 18; Hiller, "Parks for Texas" 23, 25; "Texas Parks and Wildlife Department," *New Handbook of Texas*. State of Texas. State Interim Committee on Parks and Recreation, *This Land is Our Land: A Report on Texas' Natural Environment*. Austin: The State of Texas, 1969. 40-41. *Texas State Park Policy Issues Workshop*, 24-25 January 1977, copy on file at TPWD, 53; Toney, "Texas State Parks" 248.

34. Toney, "Texas State Parks" 258, 263. Bill Dolman, Senior Advisor for Historic Sites, State Parks Division, TPWD, personal interview by author, August 31, 1998, Austin, Texas, transcript in possession of author.

35. To solve partially the personnel problem, in 1972 Parks and Wildlife provoked a major structural change to recast the department along lines more sensitive to the preservation needs of historical parks. The reorganization consisted of the creation of two new branches within the division responsible for parks, the State Parks Division, to deal with specific preservation issues; their names were the Historic Sites and Restoration branch, and the Interpretation and Exhibits branch. To the Historic Sites branch was assigned the acquisition, development, restoration, and planning of historic sites, as well as the monitoring of construction projects in historical and archeological areas. The Interpretation and Exhibits branch was responsible for the development of interpretive and educational programs for both natural and historical parks. Before 1972, these responsibilities were shared by various branches within different Parks and Wildlife divisions, so the centralization aimed to streamline the agency's performance. (Bill Dolman interview).

to reconstruct the town with a modicum of historical accuracy. Another modification was the redesigning of the park's development to provide a balance between its interpretive and recreational characteristics, and between the preservation of the historic sites and their natural environment.

The two major goals for Washington-on-the-Brazos administrators were now to foster the historical, educational, and recreational use of the park, and to organize the disparate buildings and features into a whole arranged in the following order of historical preference: the 1836 Declaration of Independence, the Republic of Texas, the social and economic history of Washington-on-the-Brazos as the capital of the Republic of Texas, and the historical significance of Anson Jones. State legislators appropriated \$200,000 out of the cigarette tax to carry out the development program, which also included restoration and expansion of the CCC amphitheater and the construction of an interpretive center in the auditorium to display murals, texts, and audiovisual aids.³⁶

Although the town of Washington was not reconstructed, since the late 1970s the park has regularly offered living history programs as part of Texas Parks and Wildlife's general effort to expand interpretation programs at all historic sites. For instance: amateur and college actors re-enact the signing of Declaration of Independence every year; an actor portrays Anson Jones on his birthday and hosts visitors at Barrington; wildlife and youth camps and workshops are organized; and in 1986 a film commemorating the Texas Sesquicentennial called "Independence" was shot in the park and became one of its permanent exhibits.³⁷

Despite all these new attractions, during the eighties the park again failed to attract a substantial number of visitors. Attendance varied between 60,000 and 70,000 persons per year, and it was estimated that a third of them only came for the March 2 Independence Day festivities and during the blooming of bluebonnets in the spring. These figures were significantly low, especially compared with the Alamo's three million visitors a year, and the 1.1 million annual visitors at San Jacinto. To make matters worse, the decline in the number of visitors coincided with a new period of economic straits for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department due to the continuous reduction of revenue from the cigarette tax and the federal government.³⁸

It was true that the cigarette tax had permitted Parks and Wildlife to acquire thirteen new interesting historic sites during the seventies, but stagnant revenues since the beginning of the eighties prevented further acquisitions, new site development, modernization of old parks, and the hiring of more specialized personnel. Cigarette tax revenue declined as the population began to cut back on smoking, and although state legislators renewed the tax in 1983 and \$187 million was collected that same year, the cigarette tax failed to keep up with rising land prices and historic parks' expenses. The situation became even darker when the influx of federal funds from the Bureau of Outdoor

36. Information provided by Mr. Barry Hutcheson at TPWD. TPWD, "Preservation Plan for Washington-on-the-Brazos" 17; *Brenham Banner Press* 13 December 1978.

37. *Bryan-College Station (TX) Eagle* 28 February 1983; *Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park*, February 1998, <<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/washingt/Washington-on-the-Brazos/activity.html>>.

38. "Washington-on-the-Brazos fails as a tourist attraction," *Dallas Times Herald* 27 February 1983: 30 and 36A; *Houston Chronicle*, 28 February 1998.

Recreation decreased from \$15 million in 1979 to nothing in 1982. Although the federal government resumed its allocations in 1983, when Texas received more than \$3 million, the future of this revenue source was uncertain. Thus, Parks and Wildlife administrators found themselves in a difficult position, as the disappearance of so many funding sources coincided with increasing demands for park maintenance and improvement. Some solutions were suggested to replace the declining cigarette tax. The first proposal was to return to the traditional solution of selling development bonds. Hence, in 1985 the legislature authorized issuance of \$30 million worth of revenue bonds. To finance them, the Parks and Wildlife Department had to raise the fees of all services it provided. Another solution was to create a tax on real estate transactions, following the example of other states. But, it was not until 1993 that a "healthier" tax on sporting goods sales eventually replaced the cigarette tax.³⁹

Yet, the monetary and management problems were not an obstacle for Washington-on-the-Brazos park managers to continue suggesting new ways to improve their facilities and interpretive programs. Hence, in 1988 the board of directors of Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park Association commissioned Texas A&M University to prepare a long-range plan suggesting alternative approaches to promoting public awareness of the park and increasing visitation. University experts evaluated site resources and carried out a marketing study. Their main recommendations reflected almost all the practices that today are standard in historic preservation in Texas: to boost archeological research to improve the historical understanding of the park and as a way to attract visitors; to develop attractive and clear entry routes and provide better services; to rotate exhibits regularly in both the park and the museum; to promote access to the river; to explore the possible involvement of volunteer groups in park and museum activities; to conduct detailed marketing research so as to identify target audiences; and to adopt a regional tourism plan to promote the park.⁴⁰

The implementation of this new long-range plan was also delayed for five years because of Parks and Wildlife's endemic lack of economic and personnel resources. The 1988 project was revised twice in 1991 and 1992 by a team consisting of planners, historians, archeologists, and park administrators together with the director of the Star of the Republic Museum and independent consultants. Finally, in 1993 representatives of Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park Association, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and Blinn College reached a commitment "to develop an interpretive plan that will be forward-looking, imaginative, and worthy of the history that took place at Washington."⁴¹

39. State of Texas. Texas Sunset Advisory Commission, "Staff Evaluation. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department," June 1984, copy on file at CLRL, 107-109. TPWD, *A Future for the Past: Texas State Historical Parks*, January 1996, copy on file at TPWD, 14; Toney, "Texas State Parks" 297-98.

40. Center for Historic Resources. Texas A&M University, "A Planning Program for the Washington-on-the-Brazos Park Association," May 1988, copy on file at TPWD, vi-vii, 66-67.

41. Ray Bailey Architects, Inc., "Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park Master Plan," December 14, 1994, copy on file at TPWD, 1.1. Quote from "Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park Planning Report," April 1993, copy on file at TPWD, 5.

This project aimed to develop the park at various levels. On the interpretive level, the signers of the plan proposed flexible interpretations; it aimed at reaching the broadest possible audience by providing attractive information and activities to visitors of any age, ethnicity and cultural background. In other words, it recognized the variety of the park's visitors and the obligation of satisfying their different interpretive needs, an aspect not completely achieved today since Washington-on-the-Brazos's interpretive program is still overwhelmingly Anglo-centered. The interpretive novelties were to provide a better understanding of the Washington Town site, to move Barrington to a location more related to its original context, to expand the living history programs, to coordinate museum and park exhibits, and to build an orientation center to introduce the visitor to the historic significance of the site and the amenities of the park. On the physical level, plan signers recommended acquisition of new land, protection of the park from river erosion, and repair of any river-induced damage. Finally, on the management level, the park's three administrative entities formalized a working relationship, spelled out financial and management responsibilities, and agreed on fostering the public's involvement in the park and relationships with neighboring communities.⁴²

A new team of Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park Association members, Parks and Wildlife staff, and Blinn College personnel solidified these proposals in a 1994 master development plan that made some important modifications to the 1993 project. First of all, they gave priority to development of the cultural, interpretive, and physical resources of the park, thereby abandoning the development of natural resources. Second, they determined to improve the park's circulation, orientation, and information with a directional system and a high-tech exhibition in the visitor's center. Third, as a way to obtain increased revenue the park would expand its facilities by offering a conference center able to host small conventions and professional meetings. Finally, each major park building would focus on one interpretive period in order to unify the interpretive program. For instance, Independence Hall would explain the Declaration of Independence, the museum would tell the history of the Republic, and Barrington was going to be reinterpreted as a living history farm of the 1850s, complete with barns, slave quarters, livestock, and contemporarily costumed staff portraying farm life.

Unexpectedly, a new difficulty arose to prevent the new plan from becoming a reality. In 1994, a deep management crisis developed at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department when it announced that twenty historic sites would undergo cutbacks and that some sites would be closed altogether. These reductions derived from funding cutbacks, personnel reductions, and low visitation rates. After many protests from the public and the other state preservation agency, the Texas Historical Commission, administrators at Parks and Wildlife altered their strategy and, as a tentative solution, turned over management of five historic sites to a private corporation, Texas Rural Communities, Inc. Nonetheless, more definitive solutions were needed.⁴³

42. "Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park Planning Report" 8-21. Most of these suggestions were already proposed in the 1970s (TPWD, "Conceptual Study" section III.)

43. Texas Sunset Advisory Commission, "Texas Historical Commission. Antiquities Committee. Staff Report," 1994, copy on file at CLRL, 31-37; Texas Historical Commission, *Biennial Report 1993-1994* (Austin, 1995) 3.

This last crisis at last convinced many Parks and Wildlife officials that the only way to get out of the profound management troubles in which the historical parks were submerged was by finding aggressive and innovative solutions. Those were the characteristics that defined the Entrepreneurial Budget System (EBS). As its name suggests, the EBS is a current Parks and Wildlife program that promotes businesslike management of state parks and entrepreneurial creativity in expanding park services and visitation. Moreover, EBS administrators aspire to increase sources of park revenue in order to become an economically self-sufficient system by the year 2000. This objective shows how the Parks and Wildlife Department had finally learned a lesson. Rather than expecting improbably generous allocations of public funds, the agency realized that it should obtain most of its money from its customers and from other private sources.

Since its implementation, EBS has allowed parks to develop new and innovative ways to increase revenues and visitation. For instance, most parks, including Washington-on-the-Brazos, now have their own stores where they sell a wide variety of products and merchandise, and rent their facilities as venues for exhibits, social and business meetings, or for special events such as Halloween or historical re-enactments. In addition, EBS also permits park managers to control their budgets in a more independent fashion. For example, if a park exceeds its annual growth target, it gets back as much as thirty-five percent of the extra income, and twenty-five percent of the "exceeded target" money is deposited in a fund for revenue-generating programs. At present, parks can roll over unspent funds from one fiscal year to the next, instead of returning them to the General Revenue Fund.⁴⁴

Since EBS substantially modified and decentralized the structure of park management, Parks and Wildlife professionals realized that their operations should be streamlined as well. The most revolutionary step toward the improvement of historical park operation was the signing on October 1, 1996, of the first collaboration agreement between the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Historical Commission. This move was a logical consequence of the relationship that the two agencies had informally developed over more than eight years in working together on preservation projects such as the Old San Antonio Road (1989–1991) and *Los Caminos del Río* (1990–present). These collaborations repaired most of the past differences separating the two agencies to the point that they realized that their skills, resources, and experience were complementary.⁴⁵

As part of their partnership, officials at both Parks and Wildlife and the Historical Commission agreed to commission an independent agency, KPMG Peat Marwick, to

44. KPMG Peat Marwick LLP, "Texas Historic Sites. A Study Conducted for the Texas Historical Commission and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department," January 1997, copy on file at CLRL, 33-34; Rebecca D. Childress, Michael L. Crevier, and Juliann C. Pool, "Texas Historical State Parks Promotional Activities," Spring 1996, copy on file at TPWD, 1-3.

45. The Old San Antonio Road program consisted in placing markers along the 300-year-old route that linked Texas and Louisiana with Mexico City during the Spanish colonial era, an area extending from the Sabine River to Eagle Pass. And *Los Caminos del Río* takes advantage of the historic and cultural continuity of the U.S.-Mexican border in order to create an historic heritage and touristic region along the lower Rio Grande, between Laredo and Brownsville, Texas, and Colombia and Matamoros, Mexico. (López-Trujillo, "Historic Preservation in Texas" 87, 93.)

conduct an initial evaluation of state-owned historic sites under Parks and Wildlife control in order to determine their situation and to suggest areas of improvement. The study, presented in January 1997, highlighted the main deficiencies of the state park system, estimated that \$187 million would be needed to solve its infrastructure problems, and introduced the most ambitious and innovative preservation program ever launched in the state: the Texas Cultural Heritage Plan. Commenced in 1999, this master plan is a joint effort by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Historical Commission to collect all public and private preservation initiatives under one roof, and to provide them with common guidelines to direct their strategies during the next century. An additional objective will be to ascertain the present status and the future needs of the historic resources of the state, and estimate the money necessary for their regular maintenance and marketing. In the long run, their aspiration is not only to solve all of the park system's problems, but to create "the finest state historic site system in the nation" and to benefit the people of Texas with an "improved quality of life."⁴⁶

The development of Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park will be one of the first serious tests for the Texas Cultural Heritage Plan. To carry it out, state legislators assigned \$6 million from the Texas Park Fund and from park bonds. The park crew, led by director Tom Skaggs, is implementing the work in phases. The first one, the opening of the visitor's center, took place on March 2, 1998; one of the last phases, the Barrington Living History Farm, was recently implemented on March 4, 2000.⁴⁷

Although the future of Washington-on-the-Brazos seems bright and exciting, optimism needs to be moderated for three reasons. First, despite its historical significance and natural setting, the park has not been recognized as a major attraction by the general public. Two main obstacles have worked against its popularity: the site is located far from major cities and major roadways, and it remains poorly connected even today; and, next, there is no original physical evidence of the historic event that gave its importance to the site. Due to this shortcoming, park managers have had to recreate and reconstruct such physical evidence in order to attract visitors. But this has been done in such a disorganized way that visitors have generally failed to see an unified relationship between the different buildings. Moreover, this effort to recreate and reconstruct a historic site raises an interpretive problem about which the persons in charge have to be careful: living history programs and park events are valid provided that they are historically accurate and do not trivialize the learning of history. In other words, they have to be very carefully planned in order not to become "Washington-on-the-Brazos Amusement Park," a Disneyland-like attraction more interested in making easy money with trifling entertainment than in expanding knowledge. Such danger is real, as the frivolous language used in the following quote, taken from the park's Web page, reminds us more of a theme park than a historical-educational setting:

46. Quote from KPMG, "Texas Historic Sites" 100.

47. Ray Bailey Architects, "Washington-on-the-Brazos Master Plan" sections 1.2 and 3.3; Bill Dolman interview; *Houston Chronicle*, 28 February 1998; "Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park," 1997, pamphlet on file at TPWD; *What's New*, January 2000, <<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/washingt/new.htm>>.

Travel back in time to the days when living legends such as Sam Houston and Davy Crockett walked the earth! Shake hands with a historical figure. Follow the daily activities involved in running a mid-nineteenth century plantation. Learn to weave and spin wool. Look at a real leech. Through special events and tours, these activities await visitors to Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park and Star of the Republic Museum.... Enjoy Texas history, nature, and conservation amidst an atmosphere of discovery and adventure.⁴⁸

Second, Washington-on-the-Brazos' interpretative program has an important shortcoming: it is overwhelmingly Anglo-centered, and its presentation of the independence and republic eras of Texas maintains an image of winners (Anglo-Americans) and losers (Hispanics and Native Americans). In a multicultural state like Texas, where Hispanics are anything but a minority, it is not very wise to promote among the users of a historical park such an interpretation of the past, not only because it is biased but also because it is not an effective way to attract the most visitors. Washington-on-the-Brazos' interpretive program needs to acknowledge the role of other ethnic groups in Texas, and should explain why mid-nineteenth century Texans (both Anglos, Hispanics, and Blacks) and Mexicans behaved they way they did. If such program is not possible in Washington, at least it should be implemented in a historic site of equivalent importance. Fortunately, Parks and Wildlife professionals recognized during the 1990s the ethnic variety of the park's visitors, sensed an obligation to satisfy their needs, and have begun to present previously neglected aspects of Texas history.⁴⁹

Finally, optimism should be moderated because insufficient interest and funding have hampered the park's progress during most of its history. Between its establishment in 1915 and its reopening in 1970, Washington-on-the-Brazos' interpretive, economic and management needs were only attended during the brief period of the New Deal and Centennial projects. And between the great development plan of the late sixties and the plan underway today, the park has drifted amidst Parks and Wildlife Department management and economic crises, and has suffered a perpetually low visitation rate.

Despite this history full of obstacles, the park's circumstances have dramatically improved in the last decade. For instance, administrators now manage the site's facilities and economic resources independently, coordinate the efforts of the different public and private organizations that operate in the site, promote it within the Houston regional area as part of the state's heritage tourism effort, and have carried through an innovative and ambitious master plan to modernize and expand the attractions. The history of Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park is a good illustration of how historic preservation has evolved in Texas during the twentieth-century. Let us hope that the work that Washington-on-the-Brazos professionals perform in the twenty-first century place this historic park in the vanguard of Texas preservation.

48. *Activities*, January 2000,

<<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/washingt/activity.htm>>.

49. TPWD, "Texas Historic Sites: A Response to a Report by KPMG Peat Marwick," 1997, copy on file at CLRL, 9.

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