

REMARKS OF FIRST LADY ANITA PERRY

TEXAS GOVERNOR'S MANSION HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE OF RESTORING

TEA Broadcast 2-11-09

Thank you students and teachers for inviting me to speak today. It has been a while since I found myself back in the classroom... all I can say is I'm relieved it's not for a parent/teacher conference.

Instead, today, I'd like to talk to you about one of our state's most historic and beloved landmarks: the Texas Governor's Mansion.

The Governor's Mansion is the most celebrated house in the state. Built in 1856, it is the oldest continuously occupied executive residence west of the Mississippi – and has housed proud Texans such as Sam Houston and President George W. Bush. My husband and I have been honored to live there since January of 2001.

As you've probably studied in school, Texas became a state in 1845. Roughly a decade later the Legislature approved \$14,500 for construction of what they deemed a "suitable residence" for the Governor of Texas. And as you can see, our reputation to do "everything bigger in Texas" was around, even back then (reference grand photo of mansion).

The construction contract was awarded to Austin master builder Abner Cook, who adopted the popular Greek Revival style of architecture for the home. He was a man of great vision and even better resourcefulness... he owned a clay pit on the Colorado River not too far from the construction site, which he used to mold the bricks that are still used today to build the mansion.

The design for the house included a deep veranda, floor-length windows and wide hallways to allow breezes to pass through and cool the house... a summertime necessity in Texas. The "X-and-Stick" railings on the porch were an

Abner Cook trademark. Four main rooms were crafted on each floor, two on either side of a broad central hall. The kitchen was set up in the rear wing, and the second floor was where governors could rest after a long day's work. The 29 foot Ionic columns that were erected to span across the front porch added the finishing touches to this stately home.

Though the construction project ran about 6 months past its completion date, the finished mansion... I believe... was without a doubt worth the wait.

Texas's fifth Governor, Elisha Marshall Pease, his wife, Lucadia, and their daughters became the mansion's first residents. In fact, shortly after it was completed, Governor Pease held an open house for his Austin neighbors to come and take a look around. And, like any proud homeowner, he personally gave his guests...which totaled about 500...a guided tour. Afterward, he invited them all to stay for supper.

Furnishing the mansion at that time proved to be quite pricey, so the Pease family made the house more comfortable by using their own furniture. I'm sure Mrs. Pease, like many First Ladies who followed her, still tried to hide her husband's unsightly recliner upstairs and out of view!

In 1859, Sam Houston, former president of the Republic, famous frontier legend and hero of the Texas Revolution, was elected governor. It was in the hallways of the Governor's Mansion that Sam Houston famously paced in deep contemplation on whether or not Texas should secede from the Union and join the Confederacy during the Civil War.

And it was because of the Mansion's sparse furnishings that the governor ordered a massive mahogany four-poster bed to give him a place to rest... which has been a popular stop on our tour of the mansion for years.

Temple Lea Houston, the governor's 8th child, became the first baby born in the mansion. He was the final addition to a mischievous troupe of siblings.

One time, 5 year old Andrew Jackson Houston locked members of the legislature in the old Capitol Building and hid the key. Threats of a whipping had no effect, and only when Governor Houston threatened to have him arrested was the key produced.

Governor Houston later joked that his son had done a better job of controlling the legislature than he could!

In 1901, Texas First Lady Lena (Lee-nah) Sayers redecorated the mansion in late Victorian style – adding fancy parlor furniture and a forest of potted plants to the established home.

This extreme home makeover was done just in time to welcome Texas' first presidential visitor, William McKinley and members of his cabinet, to Texas. Anger over the Civil

War still ran high in Texas, and Governor Joseph D. Sayers, a Confederate veteran, and President McKinley, a former Union officer, set an example of reconciliation during an elegant state dinner in the mansion dining room.

And it seemed that wouldn't be the last great meal the Governor's Mansion would see.

Many years later, in 1941, Governor Wilbert Lee O'Daniel – better known as "Pappy" – hosted a barbeque to celebrate his election to a second term in office...with 20,000 of his closest friends.

Pits were dug on the mansion grounds to cook 19,000 pounds of meat, including a buffalo shot by Pappy himself. Guests enjoyed 1,000 pounds of potato salad, 3,500 loaves of bread and 32,000 cups of coffee.

I can't even imagine having to do all of those dishes!

As you can see, the Governor's Mansion has been the setting for some important – and unforgettable – moments in Texas history.

That's one of the reasons the tragic fire set by an arsonist at the mansion in 2008, has left sorrow in the hearts of many Texans, like you, who know these great stories.

Many of you saw the pictures in newspapers or on the evening news... scenes of flames rising from the roof of the historic home as firefighters bravely fought the fury...

...and the sight of those beautiful columns built by Abner Cook ... now with charcoaled scars from the intense heat.

Fortunately no one was home at the time of the fire and no one was hurt battling the flames. And since the mansion was undergoing extensive maintenance, all of the valuables like Sam Houston's bed and Stephen F. Austin's writing desk had been removed and were far out of harm's way.

But the history lost in this fire is significant.

In July 2008, I established a non-profit organization called the "Texas Governor's Mansion Restoration Fund" to raise money to rebuild this national landmark.

My inspiration to take on this project came not just from seeing the house where I lived in flames, but by remembering the stories of the mansion like the ones I shared today... and remembering the faces of the thousands of schoolchildren who visited the Governor's Mansion each year.

The look in their eyes when they come up the walkway to the larger than life home is something magical; and their Texas pride just beams.

(PAUSE) We will rebuild this historic home so that thousands more students can have the experience of walking the same hallways as Sam Houston and hear the tales of other mischievous governors' children and parties.

The Governor's Mansion belongs to me and YOU, it belongs to all Texans.

I hope that you'll help me raise awareness about how important it is that we restore the mansion by talking about it with your fellow teachers, students, friends and family. This year the Texas Governor's Mansion Restoration Fund working with the Texas Education Agency will launch new social studies lessons that will bring the Mansion alive. The units will be available for you to share. When all is said and done and we've restored our stately home, I hope you'll come and visit.

Thank you again for letting me share my love for the Mansion and its history and for doing your part to make sure the Texas Governor's Mansion has more stories to tell well into the future.

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