

PLANNING YOUR VISIT

Visitor Center's "Gallery of the Republic"

Start your adventure here, where you will learn about the settlement of Texas, the Texas Revolution and gain insight into the lives of the founding fathers of Texas. Please ask at the visitor center for monthly activities and annual events.

Independence Hall Tour

Learn about the story of Texas independence, the beginnings of a nation and what life was like in early Texas republic life.

Barrington Living History Farm Tours

Step inside the home of the last president of Texas, and immerse yourself in an 1850s working farm with costumed staff and period livestock.

Star of the Republic Museum

From 1836 to 1846, the Republic of Texas proudly existed as an independent nation. Dedicated to this legacy, the Star of the Republic Museum reveals the spirit, character and heritage of the people called Texans. Come travel through the portals of time to glimpse into the life of Native Americans. View Spanish, French and Mexican influences that made Texas unique. Blinn College in Brenham administers the Museum.

Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park Association

Park Association members support Washington-on-the-Brazos with time and money. For information or to become a member, write to P.O. Box 1, Washington, TX 77880 or visit www.birthplaceoftexas.com

FURTHER READING

Holley, Mary Austin, *Texas*.

Lack, Paul D., *The Texas Revolutionary Experience: A Political and Social History*.

Murray, Ellen N., *Notes on the Republic*.

Wallace, Ernest, David M. Vigness and George B. Ward, *Documents of Texas History*.

Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site
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Interpretive Guide to:

WASHINGTON- ON-THE-BRAZOS STATE HISTORIC SITE



PHOTO: TXDOT



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WASHINGTON-ON-THE-BRAZOS STATE HISTORIC SITE IS DEDICATED TO PRESERVING THE HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE WHO SETTLED TEXAS, CREATED A NATION AND TRANSFORMED THAT NATION INTO THE MODERN STATE WE CALL HOME. TO LEARN ABOUT THIS DRAMATIC STORY AND HISTORIC PLACE, VISITORS ARE ENCOURAGED TO EXPLORE THE WASHINGTON TOWN SITE, INDEPENDENCE HALL, STAR OF THE REPUBLIC MUSEUM, BARRINGTON LIVING HISTORY FARM AND FANTHORP INN.



WASHINGTON, THE BIRTHPLACE OF TEXAS

The story of the Texas republic and its pioneering spirit begins with Stephen F. Austin and the 300 families he encouraged to settle on the northern frontier of Mexico in 1821. Among them were Andrew Robinson and his family. Robinson established a ferry on the La Bahia Trail near the confluence of the Navasota and Brazos rivers. The town that grew up on the west bank of the ferry crossing became one of the defining places in Texas history.

In 1835 many Texans, both Anglo colonists and Tejanos, concluded that republican government was impossible as long as Santa Anna ruled Mexico. In December the Texans took San Antonio by force and the provisional government in nearby San Felipe issued a call for the election of delegates to a convention. In March 1836 fifty-nine delegates gathered in Washington intent on establishing an independent Texas republic.

The town of Washington had fewer than 200 residents, only one street, and commerce limited to the ferry crossing and crude accommodations for travelers. Nevertheless town promoters offered independence-minded delegates the use of a free meeting hall if they would bring their convention to Washington.



“Left Washington at 10 o’clock. Glad to get out of so disgusting a place. It is laid out in the woods; about a dozen wretched cabins or shanties constitute the city; not one decent house in it and only one well-defined street, which consists of an opening cut out of the woods. The stumps still standing. A rare place to hold a national convention. They will have to leave it promptly to avoid starvation.”

Col. William Fairfax Gray, 1836

On March 1, 1836, as fierce “blue norther” winds dropped the temperature below freezing, delegates convened at Washington in an unfinished frame building. The window openings were covered only with cloth and the ceiling was open to the rafters.

The next day delegates declared their independence from Mexico. Meanwhile, 150 miles to the southwest, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna’s troops laid siege to the Alamo and were planning their final assault. After the fall of the Alamo on March 6, panic seized the countryside and the citizens of the republic fled from the oncoming Mexican Army in what came to be known as the “Runaway Scrape.”

The delegates stayed. They reached agreement on March 17, 1836, adopting a Constitution for the Republic of Texas and naming an interim government. Along with other settlers, the delegates and the new administration quickly left Washington to avoid capture by Mexican forces.



“Reading of the Texas Declaration of Independence” by Charles and Fanny Normann. Collection of the Joe Fultz estate, Navasota, Texas. Courtesy of the Star of the Republic Museum

After the revolution was won, the town of Washington played another pivotal role in the life of the republic. In 1842, Sam Houston moved the Capitol of Texas from Austin back to Washington. As a political center and trade hub, Washington flourished. The Texas Congress, high courts and foreign embassies all moved to town.

When the Capitol was returned to Austin in 1845, Washington’s political significance declined. Nevertheless, increasing steam boat traffic on the Brazos River brought growth and prosperity. The population swelled to approximately 900, and the town boasted dry goods stores, grocery stores, saloons, and practicing doctors and lawyers. In the 1850s town leaders rejected the “newfangled” railroad and cast their lot with river transportation. It was a fatal mistake; commerce followed the iron rails and Washington began a slow, steady decline.

THE LAST PRESIDENT OF TEXAS



The Washington area was the site of the final home of the last president of the Republic of Texas. Anson Jones had arrived in Texas in 1833. Settling in Brazoria, he practiced medicine and his business thrived. Like other prosperous men he was drawn into the political conflicts of his era. Actively serving the Republic of Texas, he was Congressman, Minister to the United States, Senator and Secretary of State. In 1844, at the height of his political career, Jones was elected president of the Republic.

It was a bittersweet legacy of Jones’s short tenure as president for during that time the Republic of Texas ceased to exist. Instead, Texas became the 28th state of the United States. It was left to Jones to declare on February 19, 1846, “The final act in this great drama is now performed. The Republic of Texas is no more.”

With these words Jones ended his public life and political career, retiring with his family to Barrington, the home he had built near the town of Washington. Anson Jones’s star rose briefly with the republic’s “lone star” and faded quickly with annexation.



Barrington farm house and slave cabin. In 1850 over half of Washington County’s inhabitants were slaves whose labor made cotton culture possible.

BARRINGTON FARM

Anson Jones farmed near Washington during and after his presidency. Jones named his farm “Barrington” after his Massachusetts home, Great Barrington. There he lived with wife Mary, their four children, his sister, sister-in-law and five slaves. The family home, two slave cabins, a kitchen building, smokehouse, cotton house and barn made up Barrington Farm.

The economy of the farm relied upon the work of the five slaves. Entries that Jones himself made in his daybook show the variety of the tasks, the efforts of the slaves and ongoing nature of farm work. His words reflect a sense of good fortune and delight in the bounty of his farm.

Barrington Living History Farm

With Jones’s daybook as their guide, the interpreters at Barrington Living History Farm conduct themselves much as did the earliest residents of the original farmstead. The scene is complete with period breed livestock. Interpreters, dressed in period style clothing, help visitors better understand what life was like 150 years ago. Participate in the work of the farm



and become a part of the exhibit. Learn how to drive oxen, help plant and harvest crops, and try your hand at spinning or making soap. Explore the farm and experience the daily lives of those who came before.

FANTHORP INN



Located in the town of Anderson, only 20 minutes away from Washington-on-the-Brazos, Fanthorp Inn represents a thriving inn on a busy

Texas Republic-era stage route from Houston to Springfield, and Nacogdoches to San Felipe de Austin.

At the age of 42, Henry Fanthorp traveled from Lincolnshire, England, in search of a better livelihood. In 1832, he arrived in Washington. Purchasing 1,100 acres, Fanthorp and his wife Rachel eventually built a substantial house. A shrewd businessman, he was appointed postmaster for Grimes County, including the community that was developing near his home.

In addition to stagecoaches and mail, travelers arrived at the Fanthorp home. In a time of lawlessness the home of Henry and Rachel Fanthorp was welcoming and gracious. When inclement weather threatened or nightfall approached, a hot meal and warm bed were the precious commodities that Fanthorp Inn offered its guests.

Both the famous and the unknown sought shelter and hospitality at the inn. The family slaves cooked and served the guests pork, beef, chicken, cornbread and grits as well as sweet potato and apple pie. The Fanthorps’ reputation for hospitality grew and the inn remained busy until the untimely deaths of Henry and Rachel, victims of yellow fever in 1867. Their daughter Mary closed the inn and converted it back into a family home.

Today, hospitality once again reigns supreme as the Fanthorp Inn is opened to the public for tours, school programs and special events.

