 **MEDIA CONTACT:** Lydia McAfee

210-229-2186

Lydia@sevenimpressions.com

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**Historical Significance of Washington on the Brazos State Historic Site**

It was March 1836 when 59 delegates bravely met in Washington, Texas, while the Battle of Alamo raged on, to do something few have ever done: found a nation and make a formal declaration of independence from Mexico in just 17 days.

Revered as the place “Where Texas Became Texas,” the replica of Independence Hall on the [Washington on the Brazos State Historic Site](http://www.wheretexasbecametexas.org) grounds marks the very place where the government of the Republic of Texas was created and proudly existed from 1836-1846.

What better way to learn about Texas history than by walking in the footsteps of those who created the Republic of Texas? A trip to this historic site and its award-winning [Star of the Republic Museum](http://wheretexasbecametexas.org/about/the-star-of-the-republic-museum/) allows visitors to step back in time and experience life in early 19th century.

The Convention of 1836

On March 1, 1836, delegates elected from each municipality in Texas convened in an unfinished frame building in the unlikely town of Washington--a small, rough-hewn, ramshackle town which had sprung up around a ferry landing next to the Brazos River.

While the forces of General Santa Anna laid siege to the Alamo, the Convention of 1836 declared Texas' independence from Mexico, wrote a new constitution which established the Republic of Texas, and organized an ad interim government.

These delegates periodically received letters from the Alamo while it was under siege, leading to heated discussions about what the delegates’ duty should be. When a delegate moved that the convention put its business on hold and ride to the defense of the Alamo, Texas Army General and delegate Sam Houston insisted that the meeting continue. He pointed out that without both a declaration and a constitution, Texans would be considered “nothing but outlaws, and can hope neither for the sympathy nor respect of mankind.”

Texas Commander of the Alamo William Barret Travis, in a letter that was received in Washington on the day the Alamo fell, Travis challenged convention delegates to finish their work, saying, “ …let the convention go on and make a declaration of independence and we will then understand and the world will understand what we are fighting for. If independence is not declared, I shall lay down my arms and so shall the men under my command.” At great personal risk, the delegates finished their work as Santa Anna and his army marched eastward from the Alamo, hell-bent on capturing the political leaders of the rebellion.

Seventeen Days and Nights

The convention members signing the Declaration were as good as signing their death warrants if the Revolution failed. They were also putting their families at risk and jeopardizing everything they owned. The Texas Revolution could have easily become a long series of the battles at The Alamo and Goliad as the Mexican army advanced across Texas completely obliterating the rebellion. To the delegates assembled in Washington, that scenario was not just an apocalyptic nightmare, but a very real possibility. Yet these men stood their ground. They worked 17 straight days and nights to forge a constitution and a government, a government which served the Republic of Texas well during the decade from 1836 to 1846.

On March 15, news of the fall of the Alamo finally reached the convention and, according to one witness, "spread like fire in high grass," causing "complete panic." One delegate lost a son at the Alamo, another a brother. Heartsick, fearful of invasion by enemy troops, yet focused on the task ahead, the men remained for another two days and completed the task of electing ad interim officials.

On March 17, the delegates, along with the citizens of Washington, fled Santa Anna's advancing troops.

Post-War Washington

When the townspeople returned to Washington after the Texans' victory at San Jacinto, they found it a relatively undisturbed town and the first county seat of Washington County in 1836. The only plundering had been the work of army stragglers or deserters and others fleeing Texans. But Washington languished while various town fathers lobbied for its designation as the permanent capital. A special committee of the Congress passed over Washington and other contenders in favor of Waterloo, a town which would be renamed Austin.

In 1842, President Sam Houston took advantage of renewed invasions by Mexico to move the capital from Austin to Washington.

While the capital of the Republic, Washington grew and thrives as a commercial center for the Brazos River cotton trade, even after the seat of the government was moved back to Austin in 1845. It was the home of the last president of the Republic of Texas, Anson Jones.

In the mid-1850s, Washington suffered a mortal blow when the railroad bypassed it. The Civil War sealed its fate.

**Washington Today**

Washington on the Brazos State Historic Site encompasses the site of the historic town. Consisting of 293 acres, it was acquired by deed from private owners in 1916. It was transferred to the State Parks Board from the State Board of Control by the Texas Legislature in 1949. In 1976 and 1996, more land was acquired by deed from private owners. Today the park is maintained by Texas Parks and Wildlife. The [Washington on the Brazos State Park Association](http://wheretexasbecametexas.org/about/park-association/), the oldest support group for any TPWD park, was created in 1955 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit to initiate and fund preservation projects, celebrations and educational programming at Washington on the Brazos, its four attractions and Fanthorp Inn State Historic Site.

The actual Independence Hall where the delegates gathered to pen the Declaration was destroyed; a historically authentic replica stands in its place. Tours and special events allows visitors to travel back in time to where a nation was born in 1836.

The park’s [Barrington Living History Farm](http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/washington-on-the-brazos/barrington-living-history-farm)was the home of Anson Jones, last president of the Republic of Texas. Handcrafted reproduction log buildings and cropland demonstrate the working of a Brazos Valley farm, circa 1850. Today, interpreters in period costume work the homestead and farm as it was done long ago.

The Star of the Republic Museum was created by the Texas Legislature to collect and preserve the material culture of the Texas Republic, and to interpret the history, cultures, diversity and values of early Texans through 10,000 sq. ft. of permanent and special exhibits. The museum's administration falls under the jurisdiction of Blinn College in Brenham.

Washington on the Brazos State Historic Site is found on the Brazos River at the original townsite of Washington, Texas, a major political and commercial center in early Texas. It is located at 23400 Park Road 12, Washington, TX, 77880—approximately halfway between Brenham and Navasota, off State Hwy. 105. From Hwy. 105, follow either FM 912 or FM 1155 to Park Road 12. For additional information, call (936) 878-2214 or visit the site’s website at [www.wheretexasbecametexas.org](http://www.wheretexasbecametexas.org).