

Capitol Tour Additional Information

Special Notes

Groundbreaking ceremonies for the Capitol were held on February 1, 1882. The cornerstone, located on the northeast corner, was laid on March 2, 1885. The celebration of the Capitol's completion and its dedication were held in May of 1888.

The woodwork in the Capitol is made of oak, pine, cherry, cedar and walnut. All of the original woodwork is a combination of machine work and hand carving. During the 1992-1995 restoration, the woodwork was repaired and refinished.

The architect was Elijah E. Myers of Detroit, Michigan. His design won \$1700 and he was paid \$12,000 for the contract document. Other buildings designed by Myers include the state capitols of Michigan, Idaho (replaced in 1912) and Colorado. He also designed the territorial capitol of Utah (later demolished) and a capitol for Utah was never built.

General Background History

Like Washington D.C., the city of Austin was originally planned and designed to be the capitol of a nation. Mirabeau B. Lamar, the second president of the Republic of Texas had been impressed with the location of Austin, then a settlement called "Waterloo" and he urged Congress to choose it as the capital city. In the Spring of 1850, the people of Texas chose Austin as the permanent capital of the State of Texas and a rather primitive capitol was built near 8th and Colorado Streets.

After Texas became part of the United States on December 29, 1845, the state built a more permanent capitol, but after the Civil War sentiment developed to build a new and larger capitol. The Texas Legislature authorized construction of a new capitol building in 1879, and when the old capitol burned in 1881, and new capitol became a necessity. Construction began in 1882 and completed in 1888.

The state was very short of money at that time and in order to finance the construction of the capitol, the state traded more than 3,000,000 acres of state-owned land in the Texas Panhandle, an area which became known as the XIT Ranch, to a Chicago corporation called the Capitol Syndicate. This group of people would be called "developers" today. (Be sure to mention that the Capitol was paid for with the land, not cash, because this is an unusual situation.)

The capitol was designed in the Italian Renaissance Revival style. It is approximately fourteen feet taller than the national capitol in Washington, D.C. The height of the rotunda is 218' from the star on the floor of the Rotunda to the star at the top, which is 8' point to point. The building covers three acres of ground and has 8.5 acres of floor space. (This does not include the area of the Extension) The exterior walls are made of Sunset Red Texas granite, donated by landowners near Marble Falls, nearly 50 miles northwest of Austin. The interior walls are made of limestone which was quarried at Oatmanville (now Oak Hill), Texas, about 10 miles south of Austin. The original plans called for the outside of the Capitol to be built of limestone, but Texas limestone discolored when quarried so it was only used for the inside walls.

A major preservation and restoration project was completed in 1995 in the Historic Capitol. The Texas Capitol Restoration Project began in response to a number of significant concerns. The Capitol was unsafe, overcrowded, and at risk architecturally. A fire in 1983 came dangerously close to destroying the building when fire traveled out of control above the ceiling. The state Preservation Board was created in 1983 to "preserve, maintain and restore the Capitol, the General Land Office Building, and their contents and grounds."

The exterior of the Capitol was in desperate need of restoration. The Capitol Exterior Preservation Project began in June 1991 and was completed in early 1994. The Goddess of Liberty atop the dome has been replaced. A cast was made of the original zinc statue (weighing approximately 2,000 lbs.) and a new Goddess was made from aluminum (weighing approximately 1,000 lbs.). It was installed with the aid of the Texas Army National Guard, the Mississippi Guard, and a Ch-54A "sky crane" helicopter in June of 1986. At this time the original statue is on display at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum. The Capitol Interior Preservation Project Began in August 1992. Restoration of the interior focused on the period 1888-1915. The Historic South Grounds were completely restored in 1995-96'.

South Foyer

The South Foyer is the main entrance to the Capitol. When this area was selected to be the capital city of the Republic of Texas, the site of the Capitol was selected because it overlooked the town of Austin and the Colorado River. The terrazzo floor in the South Foyer commemorates twelve important battles fought on what is now Texas soil. The twelve battles are: Alamo, Anahuac, Bexar, Coleto, Galveston, Goliad, Gonzales, Palminto, Palo Alto, Sabine Pass, San Jacinto, and Velasco. (The order on the South Foyer is in no particular order.)

The two large paintings in the foyer were done by **William H. Huddle** (1847-1892). Huddle is an important early Texas Artist.

The painting entitled “**The Surrender of Santa Anna**” depicts the surrender of the Mexican general to Sam Houston after the Battle of San Jacinto. This battle, fought on a peninsula near Harrisburg was the final and decisive battle of the Texas Revolution. The man on the blanket is General Sam Houston, Commander of the Texas army, beckoning Santa Anna to be seated on an ammunition box. Next to Houston, with his hand behind his ear, is Captain Erastus “Deaf” Smith, the chief scout for the Texas Army.

The man in the portrait on the opposite side of the foyer is **David Crocket**. He traveled to Texas in 1835- early 1836 with a group of his friends and they joined the garrison at the Alamo where they were killed.

The two statues in the foyer were made of Italian marble and are said to be life-sized. The brownish and gray streaks on the statues are a part of the marble. The statues were done by **Elisabet Ney**, a German-born sculptor.

Sam Houston served as Commander of the Texas Army, President of the Republic of Texas and after Texas became a state, U.S. Senator from Texas, and governor of Texas. Before coming to Texas, Houston had been governor of Tennessee. He is the only person who has been governor of two states. In his youth, he had lived with the Cherokee Indians and as a result he always supported the rights of Native Americans. He died in Huntsville, Texas in 1863.

Stephen F. Austin is known as “The Father of Texas,” because of his role in settling and governing Texas. Austin also served as ambassador for Texas at the time of the revolution, and served as Secretary of State for the Republic at the beginning of Sam Houston’s first term as president. He died at the age of 43 in December 1836 (probably of pneumonia) and was buried nearby his sister’s plantation. In 1910 his body was reinterred at the State Cemetery in Austin.

The Rotunda

The Rotunda is one of the most impressive areas of the Capitol. The seals in the Rotunda represent the six sovereign nations that have governed all or part of Texas. It is not necessary to discuss information about the elements on the seals. It is included in case you have questions.

The Spanish seal- features symbols of castles and lions. Spanish explorers arrived in what is now called Texas in 1519.

The French seal- features the fleur-de-lis, the ancient symbol of the Bourbon Kings. France established a colony at Matagorda Bay in 1685. However, France later abandoned its settlement efforts in Texas. Their colony was decimated by disease, Indian attacks, lack of supplies, and eventually mutiny. They later established colonies in what became Louisiana where they were much more successful.

The Mexican seal- features the Aztec legend concerning the location of the future capitol. Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, with Texas forming a part of the new Mexican republic.

The seal of the Republic of Texas- features the lone star encircled by traditional symbols of strength (live oak branch) and peace (olive branch). Directly over the star and 218 feet above, is another star on the ceiling of the rotunda. That star is 8 feet in diameter. Texas won its independence from Mexico in 1836. Texas is known at the Lone Star State although the origin of the phrase is unknown.

The U.S. seal- commemorates the thirteen original states with 13 stripes in the seal, 13 stars, 13 arrows and 13 leaves on the olive branch. Texas was an independent Republic for approximately ten years, from 1836-1846. It had its own money, its own Navy, and established diplomatic relations with France, Britain, and Netherlands, and the United States of America. When Texas joined the United States in 1846, it became the 28th state in the union.

The Confederate seal- features George Washington on horseback. Of course Washington was long dead at the time of the formation of the Confederacy. His figure is encircled by the cash crops of the south; corn, cotton, wheat, and tobacco. The phrase is Latin, meaning loosely, “God will judge.”

Portraits of former presidents of the Republic of Texas and former governors and provisional governors of the state of Texas line the Rotunda on all floors. They are in reverse chronological order starting on the first floor rotunda and continuing up to the fourth floor. Governor Richards was the second woman to be governor in Texas. The first woman to be governor was Miriam Ferguson, wife of a former governor from 1915-1917. James and Miriam Ferguson were known to Texans as “Ma and Pa” Ferguson. Miriam campaigned in 1924 on the slogan “Two governors for the price of one!” Miriam Ferguson was elected governor in 1924 and again in 1932. She served a two year term each time. (Four year terms established in 1974.)

The present governor of Texas is Rick Perry from Haskell, Texas. He was elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 1984 and as the Commissioner of Agriculture in 1990. He served as Lieutenant Governor for the 76th Legislative Session in 1999.

The Texas Legislature

Texas has a bicameral legislature. This means that the legislative body is divided into two parts, the Senate and the House of Representatives. The legislature meets 140 calendar days beginning the second Tuesday in January on odd- numbered years. The governor may call a special session which may last up to 30 days. There is no limit to the number of special sessions he or she is allowed to call. The governor also sets the agenda for special sessions.

The Senate Chamber

This is the Chamber of the Senate of Texas. It was restored 1990-1995 and looks much as it did in 1910. The shutters and the skylights are replicas of the ones first installed. The early skylights admitted so much heat and light that the Chamber became uncomfortably hot. The carpet is also a copy of the second one to be installed in the Senate Chamber (1902)

The Texas Senate is composed of 31 members, each elected for a four year term. Each senator represents approximately 650,000 Texans. Every two years, half of the Senate is up for reelection.

The Senate is presided over by the Lt. Governor of Texas, David Dewhurst. The Lt. Governor is officially called the President of the Senate while he or she presides. Senators may speak directly from their desks. They must first be recognized by the Lt. Governor. Unlimited debate (filibuster) is allowed in the Senate but not in the House. Voting in the Senate is commonly done in the traditional methods of using voice or hand voting: one finger for “yes, two for “no” and three fingers for “present but not voting.” The legislature meets for 140 calendar days beginning the second Tuesday in January on odd numbered years.

If you look up, you will notice the two large brass chandeliers that have light bulbs spelling out “Texas” between the points of their center star. All the chandeliers are the original light fixtures installed in the Chamber in 1890 and replaced the primitive arc lights that were first used to light the Capitol.

The desks you see are the original desks used in the Senate. The same style is used in the House Chamber. The desks in the Senate are walnut and the ones in the House are oak. The only modifications to the desks since then have been the addition of microphones and telephones.

The two large oil paintings at the back of the Chamber depict what are considered to be the two most important battles in Texas history: the Battle of the Alamo and the Battle of San Jacinto. Both pictures were painted by H.A. McArdle, a Texas artist who was born in Belfast, Ireland in 1836.

The painting on the south side is entitled “**Dawn at the Alamo,**” and it depicts the 13th and final day of the siege of the Alamo by the Mexican Army and its leader, the President of Mexico, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. On March 6, 1836, approximately 189 men died fighting for the people of Texas at the Alamo. Although this was a terrible defeat for the Texas forces, it nevertheless allowed formation of a revolutionary government and the drafting of a constitution.

The painting shows William Barrett Travis, who, along with Jim Bowie, was co commander of the Alamo, standing in the blue uniform. Davy Crockett, who brought a group of Tennessee volunteers to help Texas, is shown in the white shirt at the front of the painting, fighting bravely. Jim Bowie is outstretched and holding his Bowie knife (given to him by his brother) is in the shadows behind the torch. The Alamo church is the only structure left today of the original compound. The red flag in the center of the picture that is being dropped is the Mexican flag meaning “No Quarter,” that is, no prisoners would be taken- all those who fought against the Mexican army would be killed.

The other large painting by McArdle is titled “The Battle of San Jacinto.” It is the artist’s representation of that battle which took place on April 21, 1836, only six weeks after the Battle of the Alamo. It was the final and deciding battle in Texas’ war for independence from Mexico. The Texas army, led by General Sam Houston, surprised Santa Anna’s army which was encamped 18 miles southeast of Houston on an area currently bounded by the San Jacinto River and Buffalo Bayou. Houston sent his famous scout, “Deaf” Smith, and two other scouts to destroy Vince’s Bridge. This was a small bridge that connected the peninsula where the Mexican army was camped to the mainland. The destruction of the bridge made it impossible for the Mexican Army to receive further reinforcements or to escape to that area. The Mexican army was defeated in 18 minutes (according to Sam Houston’s official report).

The painting depicts Sam Houston, whose horse has been shot, Mirabeau B. Lamar, wearing a bright red tie, who served as a second president of the Republic of Texas and who chose the permanent capital of Texas, Deaf Smith with the ax tied to his horse, and Santa Anna trying to escape while some of his men still fought. The representation of the battle flag, which was actually white, not blue, is not very accurate. Texas still has the original flag. It is the only flag to survive the Revolution (except the flag captured by the Mexicans at the Alamo). It was made by the wives of the volunteers from Newport, Kentucky, and now hangs behind the podium in the House of Representatives Chamber.

The small painting in the center on the draperies is one of the few portraits that we know Stephen F. Austin posed for. He probably had the portrait made as a gift to his sister, whose birthday he had missed. It was painted in New Orleans by an unknown artist in 1836, the year Texas won its independence and Austin Died.

The following portrait is of **Barbara Jordan** (1936-1996), who, in 1967, became the first Black woman elected to the Texas Senate. In 1973 she became the first woman from Texas to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. She served three terms in Congress. She later taught at the L.B.J. School of Public Affairs, and she died in 1996.

Following is the large full length portrait of **Lyndon Baines Johnson**, the 36th President of the United States from 1963-1968. He was the first Texan to serve in that office. Johnson was first elected to the U.S. House in 1938 and then to the U.S. Senate in 1948. He never served in the Texas Legislature.

Please note the door hinges and door knobs. Made of brass, the hinges weigh seven and three-quarter pounds each. The door knobs are also brass and each has the Lone Star of Texas in the center. They were cast specially for the Capitol when it was built, although replicas have had to be made to replace some of the hardware over the years.

The House of Representatives

The Chamber of the House of Representatives is located in the west wing of the Capitol. Like the rest of the Capitol, it has been recently restored in its circa 1910 appearance. New carpeting, replicated from one of the early carpeted designs, has been installed, and the paintings have been rearranged to reflect a more historical atmosphere. The majority of the desks are original to the House Chamber. They are like the desks in the Senate, but are made of oak instead of walnut. The brown leather chairs are not original. They replaced the original wooden ones in 1941.

There are 150 members in the House, each representing approximately 150,000 Texans. During the legislative session, the rostrum at the front of the chamber is occupied by the Speaker of the House. The Speaker of the House presides over the House. Speaker Joe Straus, who is from San Antonio, is serving his second term as speaker. Unlike the Lt. Governor who is elected statewide, the Speaker is elected by his fellow representatives on the first day of the session.

In 1922, Texas installed a mechanical voting system. In the 1970's a computerized voting system was installed and it was updated during the restoration. Members vote with buttons on their desks which indicate "Yes," "No," or "Present but Not Voting." Other buttons indicate that they have a phone call or that the Speaker wants them at the front. The members also use laptop computers located in the middle desk drawer of each members' desk to show the text of the bills, amendments, etc.

In a gold frame directly behind that speaker's rostrum is the "Battle flag of San Jacinto." This is the actual flag carried into the battle, and is the only original flag used by Texas in the Revolution which is still in the possession of the state. It has recently been restored. During the restoration it was found to be in better condition on the reverse side, so that is the side now displayed. When the House is not in session, a replica of the original is displayed to help preserve the original flag.

To the immediate left of the flag hangs a portrait of **James S. Hogg**. Born in 1851, he was the first native Texan to serve as governor of the state. He served as governor from 1891 until 1895.

To the right of the battle flag hangs a portrait of **Sam Houston** entitled "**The Raven**." He is depicted as an elder statesman and has an Indian blanket over his shoulder, indicating his association and friendship with the Native Americans.

The Extension

Throughout the years the Capitol had become far too small to hold the offices of the governor, the lieutenant governor, the Senate and House of Representatives, and their staffs. When the Capitol was completed in 1888, it was occupied by approximately 350 people. By the 1980s it had become badly overcrowded with approximately 1300 people occupying the building.

After much planning, early in 1990 excavation was started on the extension to the Capitol. It had been decided to construct it underground, immediately north of the Capitol. Any other method of providing the necessary space was considered to be detrimental to the Capitol or too expensive: a tall building would block the view of the Capitol and an addition in a similar style would spoil the appearance of the historical legitimacy of the original building.

The area that had to be excavated was almost entirely solid stone. It was 65 feet deep and required hauling about 40,000 truckloads of debris. It has four floors: the top two house offices, committee rooms, an auditorium, gift shop, and a cafeteria. The lower two are for parking.

The Seal Court is at the south end of the Extension on the E2 level. It contains a large terrazzo reproduction of the reverse side of the Texas Seal. Three icons of Texas history are depicted in the center of the seal: The Alamo, The Come and Take It Cannon, and Vince's Bridge.

The Extension is connected to the Capitol by three pedestrian tunnels, all at the south end of the Extension on three different levels. Of the 150 members of the House of Representatives, two thirds have offices in the Extension; the others have offices in the Capitol. One-third of the 31 Senators have their offices in the Extension. Five additional tunnels connect the Extension with other buildings in the Capitol Complex: the Supreme Court Building, the John H. Reagan Building, the Sam Houston Building, the Texas Workforce Commission, and the Robert E. Johnson Building. These tunnels provide a timesaving and convenient way to travel between buildings, especially in bad weather.

The extension contains skylights which not only provide a large amount of natural light in the building, but allow spectacular views of the Capitol dome. Many of the skylights have the state seal etched on them; others have designs featuring the Lone Star. In the center of the building there is an Open-Air Rotunda. It can be entered through doors on Level E2 and the balcony on Level E1.