

**Texas 1836 Project Advisory Committee
December 2022**

interesting. Even under Mexican and American control, well into the Nineteenth Century, Texas remained rural and poor—a backwater to more exciting and dynamic places.

Then, something changed. Why is our Texas . . . Texas? Why is it the way it is—why are we the way we are? What is it about this place that, despite its unpromising beginnings, has attracted so much attention over time and has given rise to larger-than-life legends and lore that continue to color this state’s identity? What is this *idea* that makes it all seem to come together?

There was a process that created Texas. The land surely played a part, but geography and climate merely created the backdrop. The people that came here

a good faith effort, but never intended to be the only, or final word, on this topic. Rather, the 1836 Project is the beginning of open and honest conversations about how we Texans see ourselves, how we came to these views, and how we can build upon this shared identity in the future.

THE LAW

House Bill 2497 (H.B. 2497), passed by the 87th Texas Legislature, established the 1836 Project as an advisory committee to promote patriotic education and increase awareness of the Texas values that continue to stimulate boundless prosperity across this state. On September 1, 2021, the law became Chapter 451 of Subtitle D, Title 4 of the Government Code. The requirement of the law includes the following:

Section 451.001 of the Government Code establishes definitions. The “1836 Project” is synonymous with the advisory committee established by Section 451.002 of this legislation. Its nine members reflect the diversity of the state and include:

- x Dr. Kevin Roberts — Chair
- x Senator Brandon Creighton — Vice Chair
- x Dr. Carolina Castillo Crimm
- x —

- (A) presentation of the history of the state’s founding and its foundational principles;
- (B) examination of how this state has grown closer to those principles throughout its history; and
- (C) explanation of why commitment to those principles is beneficial and justified.

Section 451.003 addresses the purposes of this legislation by defining the duties of the 1836 advisory committee. “The 1836 Project [...] shall promote awareness among residents of this state of the following as they relate to the history of prosperity and democratic freedom in this state,” the law reads. This is to be accomplished by promoting awareness of the following:

- x (1)(A) Texas history, including the indigenous peoples of this state, the Spanish and Mexican heritage of this state, Tejanos, the African-American heritage of this state, the Texas War for Independence, Juneteenth, annexation of Texas by the United States, the Christian heritage of this state, and this state’s heritage of keeping and bearing firearms in defense of life and liberty and for use in hunting;
- x (1)(B) the founding documents of this state
- x (1)(C) the founders of this state
- x (1)(D) state civics;
- x (1)(E) the role of this state (and Texans) in passing and reauthorizing the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (52 U.S.C. Section 10101 et seq.), highlighting President Lyndon B. Johnson’s signing of the act, President George W. Bush’s 25-year extension of the act; and Congresswoman Barbara Jordan’s successful efforts to broaden the act to include Spanish-speaking communities.

In addition, according to Section 451.003, the 1836 Project is to:

- x (2) advise the governor on the core principles of the founding of this state and how those principles further enrich the lives of its residents;
- x (3) facilitate the development and implementation of the Gubernatorial 1836 Award to recognize student knowledge of Texas Independence and other items listed in (1)(A)-(D) above;
- x (4)

This section of the law amends Subchapter A, Chapter 521 of the Transportation Code by adding Section 521.013 to require that the Department of Public Safety provide the pamphlet described by Section 451.005, Government Code, to persons who receive a driver's license:

- (1) after applying under Section 521.144; or
- (2) with an expiration provided by Section 521.271(a-2) or (a-3).

Section 521.013 further requires the department to make the pamphlet described by Section 451.005, Government Code, available to the public on the department's internet website.

Section 451.006 calls for a report by the 1836 Project to be prepared, produced, and delivered that provides the following:

- (1) a description of the activities of the project;
- (2) the findings and recommendations of the project;
- (3) a plan that identifies the best method of carrying out the duties under Sections 451.003(a)(1), (4), and (5);
- (4) any proposals for legislation; and
- (5) any other matter the project considers appropriate.

Cemetery. While the State Preservation Board is the property manager, James and her crew are the ones that breathe life and energy into these important places.

Meanwhile, Margaret Koch, Director, Bullock State History Museum related the awesome responsibility that comes with being the facility charged with telling the Texas story in an interactive and tactile way. Museum work is challenging but having a charge as large as Texas makes for even greater trials. Even so, under her leadership “The Bullock” serves an important role as the gateway experience to visitors as they encounter the story of Texas through its objects, exhibits, and programs.

The Honorable Ken Wise, 2nd Vice President, Texas State Historical Association rounded out the April 21 testimony. Established in 1897 to “foster the appreciation, understanding, and teaching of the rich and unique history of Texas and, by example and through programs and activities, encourage and promote research, preservation, and publication of historical material affecting the State of Texas,” the Texas State Historical Association has become a venerated institution in the state. This status does not come without its controversies. It has, through its close control of such publications as *The Handbook of Texas* and the *Texas Almanac*, and the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* become the de facto gatekeeper of what gets told in the Texas story.

On August 29, 2022, the 1836 Project heard the last of its invited testimony. Michelle Haas of Corpus Christi, representing the Texas History Trust, explained the need for wide access to the primary sources that constitute the bedrock of understanding Texas history. A well-known critic of the Texas State Historical Association and many academic historians in the state, Haas has taken on a project to make freely available important sources that includes the voices of Texans who founded, and crafted, this state. She sees this as an antidote to the gatekeeping she

senses coming from institutions of higher education and forces she believes are engaged in manipulating the Texas story to serve political agendas

create what sociologists would refer to as social capital. “We are all just doing our best,” he told the committee, “to make Texas a better place.” He went on to mention that African American Texans including William Goyen and Heman Swett are part of a rich legacy that has influenced all American history.

The testimony of these invited speakers presented a useful cross section of the work—and the mood—in talking about the Texas past as it continues to play out in 2022. From state employees to heads of non-profits, and even private citizens who feel strongly on the topic, these Lone Star citizens shared their experiences from their various vantage points and helped shape a more informed and nuanced view of how we discuss the Texas identity. The committee

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PART THREE

THE STORY OF TEXAS

(The Text of the 1836 Project Pamphlet)

“You don’t just move into Texas, it moves into you.”

Manny Fernandez, New York Times

“The 1836 Project shall provide a pamphlet to the Texas Department of Public Safety that explains the significance of policy decisions made by this state that promote liberty and freedom for businesses and families.”

H.B. 2497, Section 451.005

Why is Texas the way it is? What is its place and what attracts so much attention over time and has given rise to larger-than-life legends and lore that continue to this day?

covered river bottoms or inland cactus groves. Armed with a knowledge of astronomy, water sources and food supplies, they acclimated to an environment which could be harsh and unforgiving, but which also provided a moderate climate during much of the year. In addition to the small wandering tribes, by the 1500s a variety of tribes known collectively as the Caddo had created farming communities and carried on extensive trade with peoples as distant as New Mexico and the Great Lakes.

In the 1520s, a small group of shipwrecked Spanish castaways made their way across Texas led by Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca—credited as the first European explorer in the region. After many trials, the survivors made it back to Mexico with the help of the many small tribes who peopled the land. It is believed that one of the Caddo tribes may have introduced themselves to the Spanish using the word “Teysha” meaning friend or allies. The Spaniards, however, reported little of interest among their “Teysha” friends. There were no European style civilizations, but more importantly, there was neither gold nor silver to fill the coffers of Spain. Subsequent expeditions confirmed these findings and Spain lost interest. For 200 more years, Texas remained the domain of the native peoples.

By 1690, global jealousies among the European powers changed the Spanish attitude about their far-flung northern American frontier. In response to French incursions into Louisiana, Spain had to take a chance on this far northern *despoblado*, or wilderness. To establish control over the natives of these lands, which the Spanish called the great kingdom of the “Tejas,” the least expensive method was religious conversion. Franciscan missionaries marched north to take up missionary work among the Caddo, attempting to convert them into proper Christian Spaniards while others toiled among the natives along the coast. Far to the

French ambitions. When smallpox killed their children, the Caddo refused the advances of the missionaries, using the Spanish outposts merely as stopping points on their annual migrations.

The wilderness rivalry continued for several years. Spanish and French interest in native trade and control enabled the Caddo to play the Europeans off against one another as the natives negotiated to secure their highly prized weapons and trade goods. The Spanish, having made little progress in converting the Caddo, withdrew their scattered missions back to the San Antonio River valley while maintaining Nacogdoches as a defense against French incursions and contraband trade. Spain also sent reinforcements to Tejas. In 1740, José de Escandón established half-a-dozen Spanish settlements along

Everything changed in 1810. Triggered by Napoleon's invasion of Spain, Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla led Mexico's first attempt at independence from Spain. San Antonio became a battleground as the small-town split between those favoring the Royalist cause and those seeking independence from Spain. Texas' first republic and first Constitution, written by Bernardo Gutierrez de Lara, failed in 1813 when Royalist forces including a young lieutenant named Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna arrived from central Mexico. At the Battle of Medina, General José Joaquín de Arredondo defeated an insurgent army and then massacred more than 1,400 settlers opposed to the royal government.

In 1821, after a lengthy eleven-year struggle for independence, Mexico at last emerged as a new nation but its economy was in shambles. Threatened by the Spanish, French, Americans and the ever-present Comanches, Mexican leaders needed to people their northern border. They took a chance and invited American immigrants into the undeveloped, and now nearly depopulated, Tejas.

Where three hundred years of indigenous, Spanish and Mexican control had seen Tejas as full of difficulties and vexations, incoming Americans saw a land of boundless opportunity. The government of Mexico used a system of contractors—much like modern day real estate developers—to grant land to incoming settlers. People like Stephen F. Austin, Martín de León and Green DeWitt agreed to help the government settle people in the region in exchange for grants of large tracts of land. The Americans, attracted by the immense offers of more than 4,000 acres of land for each family, looked to commerce, ranching, farming and plantation agriculture to create a profitable economy.

The presence of enslaved people among these Americans proved a dilemma for Mexico. In 1829, the Mexican government passed a law prohibiting slavery—but exempted

laborers, vagabonds and criminals.” These Americans may have become Mexicans by law, but intellectually they remained attached to the ideals of the American Revolution.

“Honorable and dishonorable alike travel with their political constitution in their pockets,”

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oppression,” Houston declared, “come from what source it

state, and even the great expanse of West Texas started to fill with homesteaders as railroads sold alternating sections of land to farmers. By the end of the century, more than 3 million people called Texas home.

Texas was prosperous but was not economically different from the rest of the South. It was an agrarian state like Alabama or Mississippi. Jim Crow laws discriminating against African Americans, and legal segregation and ethnic bias against minority groups continued into the new century. Like elsewhere in the United States, there was some population diversity with significant areas of German, Czech, Polish, Italian, and other European settlement. The Tejano population remained relatively small and concentrated mostly in San Antonio and the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Yet, Texas was huge and remained full of promise. Promoters had always touted its great potential as a farm and ranch paradise. The idea that everything was bigger in the Lone Star State began to take root. The state government also fostered a probusiness environment. The image of the bold and daring Texan spread across the globe.

In 1901, Texas changed. The discovery of oil, especially at Spindletop near Beaumont, the

Porfirio Diaz led to a decade-long revolution that ravaged the country and drove thousands of Mexicans across the border into the United States, especially Texas. New tensions, cross border violence and raids, summary justice, and extralegal executions often at the hands of state officials marked this dark period. The United States also sent troops to Texas to guard the troubled border, and in 1916 even launched a brief raid into Chihuahua from El Paso in search of rebel leader Pancho Villa, but with little success.

The new immigrants fueled the booming Texas economy as its population swelled. Texas politicians took center stage in Washington D.C. Men such as Edward House, Sam

John Bainbridge, in his 1961 book *The Super Americans*, described Texas as a land of wealthy, boastful, and boorish people but conceded that many were also optimistic, friendly, and pragmatic. To this day, the caricature of the outlandish, loud, and self-important Texan has become a staple of American popular culture.

Even so, Texas reached for the stars. In 1961, with the help and influence of Vice

toward the Republic

From its past and present, and looking forward to the future, Texas has become a mix of remembering the Alamo, watching a rodeo, dancing to conjunto, and busting a rhyme, all with a touch of tuxedo and an aria by Mozart. It is barbecue, barbacoa, chicken fry and schnitzel! Texans are a people of many places united by a shared identity. The hope is that all Texans understand what they are receiving—what they are building upon—as they write new chapters of the story. Texas has always been a borderland, inhabited by people who create exceptional lives. This tale is far from perfect, like most human endeavors. Even so, it is full of optimism, energy, grit, and gumption that sets a bold example for the rest of the nation and the world.

PART FOUR
RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Section 451.006(a) of the Government Code calls for a report to be delivered that provides the following:

- (1) a description of the activities of the project;
- (2) the findings and recommendations of the project;
- (3) a plan that identifies the best method of carrying out the duties under Sections 451.003(a)(1), (4), and (5);
- (4) any proposals for legislation; and
- (5) any

- f* President Lyndon B. Johnson's signing of the act;
- f* President George W. Bush's 25-year extension of the act; and
- f* Congresswoman Barbara Jordan's

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEGISLATION

Section 451.006(a)(4) provides that the 1836 Project make proposals for legislation.

Legislative Recommendations:

The Texas 1836 Project has made great strides in laying the groundwork for the celebration of the anniversary of Texas independence in 2036. We have achieved the objectives of the law that brought it into being.

- x As directed, we have created a pamphlet for distribution through the Texas Department of Public Safety as part of gaining a driver's license in this state. The pamphlet provides a baseline summary of Texas history for educators, civic groups, and private citizens

- x We have also created a comprehensive report that builds upon the work started with

Request of the 88th Texas Legislature in 2023:

x **Appropriate Funds** specifically to pay for the design, printing, publication, and distribution of the 1836 Project Pamphlet, **Telling the Texas Story** described in Section 451.005 of the Government Code. Section 451.004 further states that the Texas Education Agency shall provide funding and administrative support for the 1836 Project, including for the pamphlets described by Section 451.005, to the extent funds are available for those purposes. Funds need to be specifically appropriated for this purpose lest the efforts of the 1836 Project languish in a bureaucratic doldrum. Furthermore, Section 4 of H.B. 2497 states that the Texas Education Agency and the Department of Public Safety of the State of Texas are required to implement a provision of this Act only if the legislature appropriates money specifically for that purpose. If the legislature does not appropriate money specifically for that purpose, those agencies may, but are not required to, implement a provision of H.B. 2497 using other appropriations available for that purpose.

x **Create a history education collaborative** between every Texas public history organization that is currently involved in instructing public school teachers on Texas history including the Texas Historical Commission, the Texas State Archives, Texas Parks & Wildlife, the Texas Preservation Board, the Alamo, the Texas State Museum, partnerships with non-profit institutions across the state to include, but is not limited to, organizations like The Alamo Trust, The Bryan Museum, The Texas Center at Schreiner University, the African American Museum of Dallas, The Cherokee Nation of North Texas, The Sam Houston Memorial Museum and Republic o

x **Provide Input on the Revision of the TEKS**

x **Appropriate funds** to facilitate the development and implementation of the Gubernatorial 1836 Award to recognize student knowledge of Texas Independence.

CONCLUSION

The Texas 1836 Project has made great strides in achieving the objectives of the law that brought it into being. Much of the time so far has been spent crafting a pamphlet for distribution through the Texas Department of Public Safety as part of gaining a driver’s license in this state. We suspect that educators, civic groups, and private citizens will also be interested in gaining access to this publication as a place to start their discussions of The Texas Story. The second great endeavor was the creation of this comprehensive report that builds upon the work started with the pamphlet while expanding on themes that needed more attention. This was greatly facilitated by the presentations made by fellow Texans through a system of public and invited testimony.

Dr. Kevin Roberts, Chair

Senator Brandon Creighton, Vice Chair

Dr. Carolina Castillo Crimm

Robert Edison

Dr. Don Frazier

Commissioner Jerry Patterson

Sherry Sylvester

Richard “Dick” Trabulsi, Jr.

Walter “Mac” Woodward, Jr.