

Honoring Texas Heroes: The San Jacinto Monument and its Cornerstone

by Sally Anne S. Gutting

On April 21, 1937, construction workers eased the cornerstone of the San Jacinto Monument into place. The placement was the climactic act in a political drama that had played itself out in Texas almost since the battle itself in 1836. The story of how this cornerstone and the San Jacinto Monument were created and financed represents a fascinating confluence of three distinct views of what the memorialization of Texas history should be.

The statewide patriotic hereditary organization, the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT), worked from its inception in 1891 to promote state history and the memory of Texas' war heroes. DRT's vision for the San Jacinto Battlefield, the sacred space they lobbied the state to purchase and improve since the group's launch, focused on perpetuating the memory of the heroes who actually fought for Texas' independence.

Jesse H. Jones, Houston financier and head of the federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation, wanted to use the one hundredth anniversary of Texas' victory over Mexico to create a statewide celebration of grand proportions that all Texans could enjoy and celebrate their state's great history, especially victory in a battle that Jones believed fundamentally affected the history of the United States and the world.

The state-level Texas Centennial Commission and

its overseeing state agency, the Board of Control, held a third and somewhat broader view of the centennial celebration. The Commission worked to supervise all centennial projects, including the Centennial Exposition in Dallas, the restoration of the Alamo and Goliad, the construction of local history monuments around the state, and the building of the grand San Jacinto Monument, a memorial they believed would serve as a permanent reminder of the Centennial, the Texas Revolution, and the struggles of the Texans.

THE DRT: PERPETUATING THE MEMORY OF THE HEROES

Although men fought the Battle of San Jacinto, women have figured prominently in its commemoration. On November 6, 1891, a group of seventeen women from Galveston, Brazoria County, and Houston met at the Houston home of Mrs. Mary Jane Briscoe to found the Daughters of the Lone Star Republic (later changed to the Daughters of the Republic of Texas at the first state convention in April 1892). The women who met were the Texas elite — the wives, daughters, and granddaughters of the founders of the Republic. Inspired by the 1891 reunion of the Texas Veterans' Association, they sought to memorialize their venerated ancestors and create a place of honor for them in public memory. As women and direct descendants of Texas heroes, the "Daughters," as they would come to be known, recognized it as their primary duty to preserve the history and culture of their state. In their constitution they made specific claim to their duty "to secure and hallow historic spots erecting monuments thereon."¹

Later in the month of November 1891, the women of Galveston and Houston organized themselves into two chapters. Eight Houston women, headed by Mrs. John R. Fenn, made the care of the San Jacinto battlefield their top priority. They adopted the name, the "San Jacinto Chapter," and began to work (and continue to work) tirelessly for the preserva-

*San Jacinto Monument,
as it stands today.*
Photo: Sally Anne S. Gutting

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tion of the battle site. Through their efforts and the cooperation of the Texas Veterans' Association and the state government in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the women secured the state's purchases of various parcels of land that now comprise the San Jacinto Battleground State Historical Site. They have also worked to beautify the area and erect historical markers memorializing the achievements of Sam Houston's army and marking the actual sites of historical importance.²

At the time the San Jacinto Chapter organized in 1891, the battleground had fallen into disrepair. In 1836, the land belonged to Peggy McCormick, the widow of Arthur McCormick, who received the land through a deed issued by Empresario Stephen F. Austin on August 10, 1824.³ Following the battle, McCormick petitioned the new government for damages that she never received, and eventually, she sold most of the land before her tragic death in the 1850s.⁴

Much to McCormick's annoyance, her privately-held land almost immediately became a tourist attraction. Several early San Jacinto Day celebrations took place at the site, including the 1856 meeting of a group of Texas veterans that later became the Texas Veterans Association (TVA). At this time, former Governor Francis R. Lubbock established a fund, eventually entrusted to the San Jacinto Chapter, to build a proper monument to commemorate the battle. In May 1883, the state, at the urging of the TVA and others, bought ten acres of the battleground site where a community cemetery had developed around the graves of fallen San Jacinto heroes, and a marker commonly referred as the Brigham Monument had been erected by TVA members.⁵

Immediately after its founding in 1891, the San Jacinto Chapter began active involvement with the battlefield. The group hosted many trips for veterans, state legislators, and Houston businessmen to the site. With the TVA, the women petitioned the state government to purchase the entire battle site, and in 1897, Governor Charles Allen

Culberson signed a bill appropriating \$10,000 for the purchase of 250 acres at the location for the creation of a public park.⁶ Unfortunately, by 1900, when prices had been agreed upon with the numerous fractional owners of the original McCormick land, the state had gone \$400 over budget. The San Jacinto Chapter stepped in and donated the necessary funds, finalizing the purchase of slightly more than 336 acres.⁷

On June 4, 1901, the San Jacinto Chapter hosted a tour of the battlefield with a small group of state officials involved in the land purchase. Along on the trip was James Washington Winters, Jr., of Big Foot, Texas, one of only five living survivors of the battle and the last one physically able to make the journey. Winters described the battle and pointed out twelve sites of particular note, including the location of the famed Twin Sister's cannons and the locations of Santa Anna's and Sam Houston's camps. The Daughters temporarily marked these twelve locations with twelve-foot galvanized pipes driven nine feet into the ground, and in 1912 the San Jacinto Chapter spent \$650 to replace the twelve pipes and mark eight other sites with twenty large, permanent granite boulders that remain at the battleground park.⁸

In 1901, when the group toured the battlefield, there was nothing but a cemetery and a large unfenced area.⁹ The chapter petitioned the legislature for \$25,000 to improve the land, including digging an artesian well for

drinking water. But the legislature responded by appropriating only \$1000, an insufficient amount that was left unused. Following a 1903 investigation of the site by two state senators and three state representatives hosted by the Daughters, the officials recommended the appropriation of \$30,000 for improvements and the establishment of a Board of Trustees, a majority of whom were to be Daughters. The Texas Legislature approved only \$20,000, but Governor S. W. T. Lanham vetoed the bill. The Daughters came through again for San Jacinto, loaning \$600 of its own money to make the most pressing enhancements.¹⁰

Governor Thomas M. Campbell signed Senate Bill Number 18, appropriating the money to buy fourteen acres of property fronting Buffalo Bayou and for basic improvements in 1907. The bill also provided for a three-person San Jacinto State Park Commission to oversee the site's upkeep. In appreciation to the women of the San Jacinto Chapter, the text of the bill specified "that one or more of said commissioners may, in the discretion of the Governor, be selected from the patriotic organization known as San Jacinto Chapter, Daughters of the Republic of Texas, or from any kindred organization."¹¹ With this act, the state established the San Jacinto State Park as Texas' first state park, unifying lands owned and improved upon by the Daughters. Although the state now owned the land and had organized an advisory committee to



San Jacinto Memorial, September 18, 1936. Courtesy W.S. Bellows Construction, Inc.

maintain it, the women of the San Jacinto Chapter continued to involve themselves in the preservation of the site and worked to keep the memory of the battle in the minds of all Texans.¹²

In 1936, Texas celebrated the centennial of its victory over Mexico. Who originated the idea to host a state centennial celebration is debatable. Governor James Stephen Hogg is believed to have spoken hopefully in 1903 that Texas would appropriately observe the event, and so-called “Centennial Clubs” emerged around the state by 1915.¹³ Most Centennial literature states that the idea came at a meeting during the Tenth District Convention of the Associated Advertising Clubs of America, held in early November 1923 in Corsicana.¹⁴ New Yorker Theodore Price gave the keynote address, “What Texas Has to Advertise and How to Advertise It.” Price spoke at the convention as the editor and publisher of *Commerce and Finance*, a weekly business newspaper. He believed that a large celebration of Texas history and its industrial and agricultural achievements would bring worldwide attention to the state and attract millions of visitors. He mused in his speech, “I wish that I lived here, that I might have a hand in developing the idea, for the picture of an International Exposition to Celebrate the Centennial of Texas inflames my imagination as I hope it may yours.”¹⁵ Delegates to the conference passed a resolution stating their desire for a grand celebration to honor both Texas’ early heroes and the achievements of the past century. Along with the Texas Press Association, the advertising club formed the Texas Centennial Survey Committee to explore statewide feeling for a Texas-sized Centennial Exhibition event as suggested by Price.¹⁶

Work to organize an event suitable to celebrate one hundred years of Texas freedom progressed slowly. The Survey Committee met January 8, 1924, to discuss the exploratory research undertaken in the previous few months. In cooperation with Governor Pat M. Neff, the committee began planning an open Texas Centennial Celebration Conven-

tion to be held in the Senate Chamber of the State Capitol on February 12, 1924, and both Governor Neff and the Committee issued press releases urging all Texans to attend the meeting in Austin.¹⁷ More than one thousand people came, and the group vowed their support to a “Texas Centennial Exposition, bold enough to please the still hearts of Austin, Travis and Houston, and big enough to mirror the accomplishments of Texas to the sons and daughters of earth.”¹⁸ A new “Centennial Governing Board of One Hundred” was organized out of the Survey Committee, and first met in January 1925. It was not until April 1926, however, that the group’s first choice for permanent chairman, Jesse H. Jones, agreed to serve.¹⁹

JESSE JONES: THE VISION AND THE FINANCING

Two years later, on March 31, 1928, Jones publicly presented his vision for a centennial at a Fort Worth Exchange Club dinner in his honor. He declared “the day of the world’s fair is past” but

told listeners he believed “our history is so rich and colorful and interesting and romantic” that Texans could hold a celebration that would attract international attention. Jones recognized that the state of Texas was too large for a single exposition and pointed out that Houstonians and Dallasites would not be enthusiastically attracted to an exposition held in each other’s cities. Jones’ vision for the centennial did include an expanded State Fair of Texas at its permanent fairgrounds in Dallas, but more importantly to Jones, it included the celebration of all of Texas’ history in the statewide creation of monuments and state parks and also the presentation of pageants and reenactments celebrating Texas history. At San Jacinto, Jones envisioned a great celebration, reenactment, and pageant in addition to the construction of a monument to the valiant Texans who fought and died there. Although Jones would become influential in the appropriation of federal funds for the Texas Centennial celebrations, he concluded his speech with his “ready



Bronze Sun Dial Memorial erected by the San Jacinto Chapter of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, dedicated April 21, 1940. Photo: Sally Anne S. Gutting

and anxious” call to pass on the leadership of the committee to another.²⁰

Jones officially stepped down as head of the Centennial Governing Board of One Hundred on December 28, 1931, at a joint meeting of the One Hundred and the new Texas Centennial Committee. Plans for the Centennial progressed as the Texas State Legislature worked to pass the legislation necessary to hold a state-sponsored event. In 1931, a statewide constitutional referendum had to be passed to allow state funds to be spent on an exposition, an event that the constitution specifically prohibited the state from financing.²¹

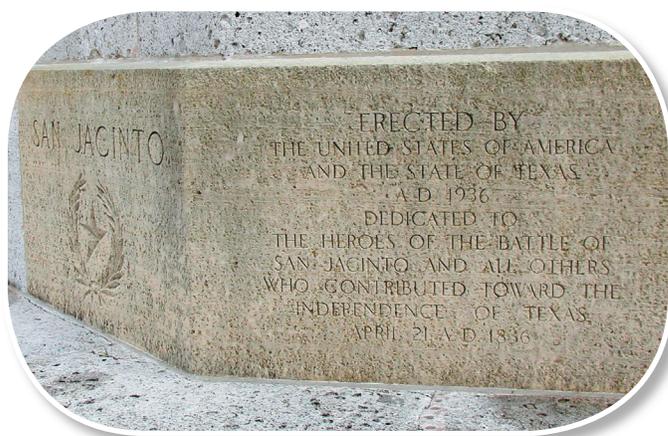
The referendum passed in November 1931, and after a brief legislative struggle both the House of Representatives and the State Senate passed legislation on February 27, 1934, for the creation of a permanent Texas Centennial Commission composed of not less than thirty members, a Texas Centennial Advisory Board of not less than one hundred people, and the holding of a large central exposition. It also specified that official Centennial celebrations “of a historical character” would be held with local support on the appropriate historical dates in San Antonio, Goliad, Brenham, Nacogdoches, Huntsville, and, of course, Houston.²² With the passage of this legislation, Jesse Jones and the Daughters of the Republic of Texas were now certain to have their large centennial San Jacinto Day celebration.

A year later, on April 25, 1935, both houses of the Texas Legislature passed House Bill No. 11, appropriating \$3 million for the funding for Texas’ 100th birthday celebration. Governor James Allred signed the bill into law on May 7. A nine-member Commission of Control for Texas Centennial Celebrations, headed by the lieutenant governor, was created to supervise the appropriation. In addition to the \$1.2 million funding of a central exposition in Dallas, the bill appropriated \$1,075,000 for Centennial celebrations and expositions outside of Dallas County.²³ Specifically, the Alamo would receive \$250,000 for restoration and celebration, and \$250,000

was allocated “for the erection and equipping of a permanent memorial at the San Jacinto Battlefield commemorating that historic battle.”²⁴ The act also provided for the Commission of Control for Texas Centennial celebration to make a formal application for federal funds and federal participation in the Centennial project and that 50 percent of the federal funds must be designated for local celebrations.²⁵

In Washington, D.C., the federal Texas delegation and visiting members of the Commission of Control for Texas Centennial celebrations worked for the passage of House Joint Resolution 193 and the appropriation of \$3 million for the Texas Centennial celebration. The bill gained Congress’ approval on August 12, 1935, and it provided for a United States Texas Centennial Commission to control the federal appropriation.²⁶

Texas now had the money to create a Texas-sized centennial, but the question of how to spend it remained unanswered. At the hearings to distribute the \$3 million appropriation, the president of the planned Texas Centennial Exposition at Dallas asked the federal commission for \$2 million. The following day, William Neal Blanton, general manager of the Houston Chamber of Commerce, asked the commission for a mere \$350,000 to build a memorial building for San Jacinto.²⁷ Jesse Jones, a man dedicated to the memorialization of Texas history and not the commercialization of the Centennial, made a speech to the U.S. Texas Centennial Commission on



San Jacinto Monument Cornerstone, today. Photo: Sally Anne S. Gutting

August 17, 1935, before the Commission finalized its allocation decision. In what Blanton labeled “the strongest presentation of the case of San Jacinto I have ever heard,” Jones called for \$2 million of the appropriation to be used at San Jacinto, the Alamo, Goliad, and other historic sites.²⁸ Jones brought the Commission’s attention to the debt the people of Texas and the larger nation owed to the Texans who were mas-



Jesse H. Jones laying the cornerstone of San Jacinto Monument, April 21, 1937. Courtesy Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, CN Number 08813, Jones (Jesse Holman) Papers, ca. 1880-1965.

sacred at the Alamo and Goliad and who won at San Jacinto. He stated:

And how shall we commemorate them? By suitable markings and monuments and memorials at these sacred places? Or shall it be by a little bigger show? A little more carnival? Something that will die with the passing of the exposition? Another building to be torn down? Another department added? More money spent to have a big time? None of which will have any serious or direct connection with the sacred events we are to memorialize.²⁹

Jones continued about the purpose of the centennial and the problems of a commercialized exposition that did almost nothing to permanently recognize the efforts of the courageous soldiers fighting for Texas independence. He reminded the Commission that the exposition could make money at the gates. Jones concluded, "To me, it will be little less than sacrilege to spend this money for strictly exposition or commercial purposes, desirable as they are—throwing a crumb or a white chip to the blood-tainted shrines that made Texas great: San Jacinto, the Alamo, and Goliad."³⁰

The same day Jones made his plea, the United States Texas Centennial Commission announced the allocation. The Dallas Exposition would receive \$1.2 million, with San Jacinto and the Alamo each receiving \$400,000. Goliad would receive only \$50,000.³¹ Although Houstonians such as Houston Chamber of Commerce president Gus S. Wortham and Hiram O. Clarke, Jr., chairman of the Houston Centennial subcommittee, expressed excitement over the amount, Jesse Jones was disappointed in what he considered to be the wasting of \$1.2 million federal dollars on the commercial Centennial Exposition in Dallas.³²

Nevertheless, the state Commission of Control for Texas Centennial Celebrations progressed with its lofty plans for San Jacinto. The Commission planned to apply for a Public Works Administration grant of at least

\$350,000 in order to allow one million dollars for the construction of the monument, but at Jones' urging, the Commission amended its application September 7, 1935, to ask for a PWA allotment of 45 percent of the combined state and federal appropriations, a total of \$650,000.³³ On February 11, 1936, the state Board of Control accepted the PWA's offer of a grant "in the amount of 45 percent of the cost of the Project upon completion, as determined by the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, but not to exceed, in any event, the sum of \$250,000."³⁴ In addition to state, federal, and PWA funding, the Houston Ship Channel Commission donated \$40,000 to the effort.³⁵ The Centennial Committee now confirmed it had the money for a San Jacinto Monument that Jesse Jones would consider suitable to commemorate the victory that brought about Texas independence and that he believed to be the impetus for the creation of the United States as it ultimately came to exist.

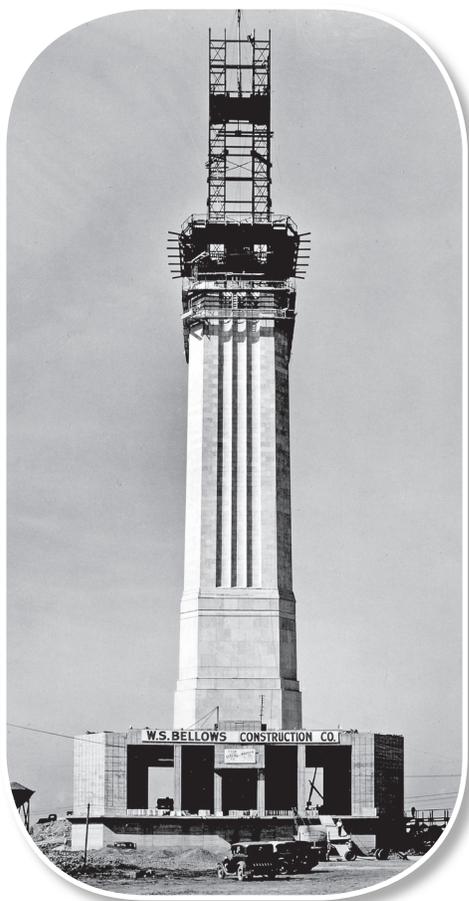
BUILDING THE MONUMENT

At the time of the announcement of the allocation of \$3 million in federal funds on August 17, 1935, preliminary drawings for a memorial complex with a central rotunda and two wings — one to serve as an auditorium and the other as a battlefield museum, along with an outdoor amphitheater — had been drawn by Houston architect Alfred C. Finn. Jesse Jones recommended Finn for the San Jacinto project, and Finn was officially named as the head San Jacinto architect on August 26, 1935. Finn, a close associate of Jones, was named without a traditional design competition.³⁶

Although Finn was the official architect, he took his inspiration for the present monument from Jesse Jones. Jones' biographer, Bascom N. Timmons, wrote that Jones drew the plans himself with the Washington Monument topped by a star placed on top of the Lincoln Memorial as inspiration.³⁷ Finn himself and later his son, Alfred C. Finn, Jr., stated that Jones gave him a crude sketch of this design as well.³⁸ The gen-

eral design of the monument to the San Jacinto heroes was simple and planned before the funding had been agreed upon, perhaps as early as August 1934.³⁹

However, at the end of 1936, Jones suggested that Finn work on sketches to "[feel] out a design for the top of the Monument other than the star."⁴⁰ Over the next few months, Jones and Finn debated the design for the top of the tower — a statue of a soldier or a star. Although at one point, Jones favored the soldier design, by May the debate had shifted to the design of the star. Jones favored a star whose points rested on the top of the monument leaving open space underneath, while Finn preferred the star resting solidly on the top without the open space. Jones' design, of course, won out.⁴¹ Although Finn is officially credited with the design of the monument, according to his son, full credit should rest with Jones.⁴²



San Jacinto Monument in Progress, May 31, 1937. Courtesy Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, CN Number 11855, Jones (Jesse Holman) Papers, ca. 1880-1965.



Alfred C. Finn, Jr. and workmen on top of the Star of the San Jacinto Monument, April 15, 1938. Courtesy Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, CN Number 11984, Jones (Jesse Holman) Papers, ca. 1880-1965.

Finn completed the general architectural plans for the construction of the monument shortly before the centennial celebration of San Jacinto Day, April 21, 1936. The 100th anniversary of victory at San Jacinto was one of the largest centennial celebrations in Texas that year. Despite rain, several thousand spectators attended the elaborate program at the battlefield. According to newspaper reports, by 7 a.m. on the day of the celebration, cars and people jammed the park's entrance roads and all of the interior roads.

The day-long celebration began with a flag-raising ceremony of both the Texas state flag and the United States flag by Houston-area high school R.O.T.C. cadets, followed by a large Catholic military mass honoring the heroes of San Jacinto. Four archbishops, twenty-five bishops, and several hundred priests and parochial school students participated in the mass that lasted past noon. The patriotic program sponsored by the Sons and Daughters of the Republic of Texas began at 2:30 p.m. and featured an address by Governor James Allred followed by the annual reading of Sam Houston's official report of the battle. The celebration was deemed a huge success.⁴³

In the months following San Jacinto Day in 1936, Finn and the Board of Control continued to make progress on the battle monument. The Board of Control approved Finn's plans on April 25 and subsequently authorized him

to advertise for bids from construction companies for the actual building of the monument.⁴⁴ At a special meeting on June 4, the Board of Control approved Finn's recommendation that the W. S. Bellows Construction Company of Houston be awarded the contract to construct the monument. Its bid of \$758,300 was the lowest of the seven competing companies, and construction began in earnest on the project shortly after June 4.⁴⁵

INSCRIBING THE CORNERSTONE

The San Jacinto Chapter of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas had worked tirelessly for the battlefield in the past, and because of their efforts, they assumed a sense of ownership surrounding the battleground, a feeling that remains strong today. Because of their close ties to San Jacinto, the women felt that they should have a say in what happened to the battlefield park.

Jesse Jones, always the man with control and power (financial and otherwise), corresponded with Finn throughout the monument's construction and received each version of the cornerstone inscriptions – inscriptions that would honor those in government who worked for the monument and secured its funding and construction. In the first inscription plan, dated March 18, 1937, the left-hand side of the cornerstone was to blaze in three-inch-high incised Roman letters "San Jacinto." Underneath was a Texas star sur-

rounded by a branch of live oak leaves to the left and a branch of olive leaves to the right. On the left of the star read "Erected" and to the right "A.D. 1936." Below, one-and-one-fourth inch-high letters read, "This cornerstone leveled by the honorable Jesse Holman Jones for the State of Texas."⁴⁶ On the right-hand half of the cornerstone would be a listing of prominent state and federal officials in incised Roman letters, the names one-and-one-fourth inch and the positions three fourths of an inch:

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA

JOHN NANCE GARNER
Vice President of the
United States of America

JAMES V. ALLRED
Governor of the State of Texas

COKE R. STEVENSON
Speaker of the House of
Representatives of the State of Texas

CLAUDE D. TEER Chairman

JOHN F. WALLACE, HENRY C. MEYER
Members of the State Board
of Control

JOHN V. SINGLETON
Chief of Centennial Division

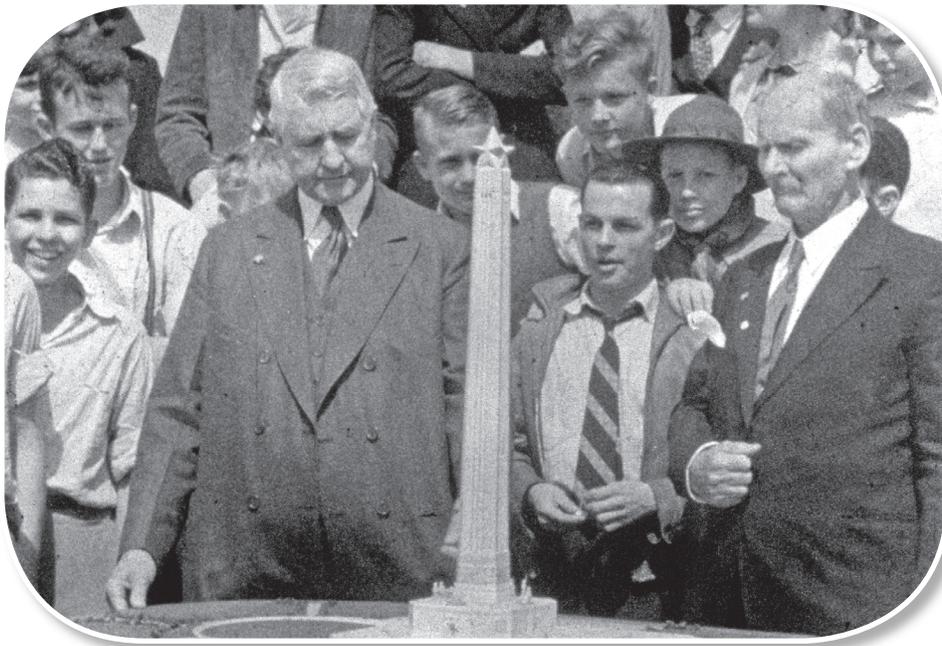
Erected By the State of Texas

With funds appropriated by the
federal government and the

State of Texas to Commemorate
One Hundred Years of Texas
Independence.⁴⁷

Upon the urging of Jones, Finn changed the list, later in the month, to include Walter F. Woodul, Lieutenant Governor of Texas. He also expanded the dedication to read, "Erected by the federal government and the state of Texas — dedicated to the heroes of the battle of San Jacinto whose deeds won for Texas Liberty and independence April 21, 1836."⁴⁸

The cornerstone was to be laid on San Jacinto Day 1937, a celebration the Daughters had traditionally controlled. At the San Jacinto Chapter's monthly meeting on April 1, 1937, the women detailed their plans for the cornerstone laying. They had high expectations for the 101st anniversary, but because of the construction of the monument and the significance of the cornerstone place-



Jesse H. Jones and Andrew Jackson Houston, Sam's youngest son, with a model of the monument. Note the equestrian figures on the roof of the museum. They were not built. Courtesy San Jacinto Museum of History

ment, they would not have exclusive control over the festivities. The Daughters would have their traditional afternoon program with the reading of Sam Houston's report, award the Daughters of the Republic of Texas and Sons of the Republic of Texas essay contest prizes, and provide a speaker of their choice, but the higher profile events — speeches by Governor James Allred and Jesse Jones and the placing of the monument's cornerstone — would occur during the morning program.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the Daughters continued to assert a degree of authority by asking for a place on the morning program and also recommending that Jesse Jones include information, provided by them, in his speech "pertaining to the part played by the San Jacinto Chapter, Daughters of the Republic of Texas in influencing the State to appropriate a fund to purchase the battlegrounds."⁵⁰

The women also wanted permission to review the inscription on the cornerstone prior to any final decision. Mrs. Carrie Franklin Kemp, acting president of the statewide organization and member of the San Jacinto Chapter, received permission from the chapter to send a telegram to Claude Teer, chairman of the state Board of Control simply reading, "The Daughters of the Republic of

Texas ask that they be given the privilege of reviewing the inscription to be placed on the San Jacinto Monument before final decision is made."⁵¹ The Board approved Kemp's request and forwarded Finn's plans to the chapter.⁵²

Kemp and Madge W. Hearne, president of the San Jacinto Chapter and granddaughter of Sam Houston, reviewed the plans just over two weeks before San Jacinto Day and the official cornerstone laying.⁵³ Upon reading the plans for the cornerstone, the women notified the president of the Sons of the Republic of Texas, Kenneth Krahl, and the three leaders telegraphed Claude Teer on April 7. They protested that the cornerstone would honor living men by proclaiming their names in prominent letters on the cornerstone and not do the same for the memory of those who won independence for Texas.⁵⁴

The group also telegraphed Governor Allred with their disapproval. Upon receiving the telegram, his first notice that the cornerstone would name him, Governor Allred sent a letter to the Board of Control asking that his name be removed, writing, "Since the people of Texas and of the nation are responsible for this monument, it occurs to me that it would be much more appropriate to simply state that the

monument was erected by the people of Texas and of the nation, without crediting a few of us who happen to be officials with it."⁵⁵ Shortly before noon on April 7, Lieutenant Governor Walter Woodul and speaker of the Texas House of Representatives Coke Stevenson also submitted requests to the Board of Control that their names be removed from the inscription.⁵⁶

Despite receiving the telegrams of protest from the Sons and Daughters in Houston and the letters from Allred, Woodul, and Stevenson, Board of Control Chairman Teer and member John Wallace announced that the plans for the cornerstone would continue as planned. Wallace and Teer both stressed that the cornerstone was only a small part of the monument and that the names of the heroes were to be engraved in large letters at a more prominent spot, the entrance to the building. Furthermore, the two reminded the public that engraving the names of those connected to the project in the cornerstone of a federal or state building was a common procedure.⁵⁷

Hearne, Kemp, and Krahl called an emergency joint meeting of their groups at the San Jacinto Chapter's meeting house, the Log House in Houston's Hermann Park, for the evening of Wednesday, April 7. Sons' President Kenneth Krahl chaired the meeting that was announced publicly in both the *Houston Chronicle* and the *Houston Post*. Joined by members of the local United Spanish War Veterans camp, the group expressed their disgust with the Board of Control and Alfred Finn's decision to place the names of living persons on a memorial. It was pointed out that the San Jacinto State Park Commission with the Sons and Daughters had suggested the following inscriptions for the cornerstone in the week preceding the controversy:

Built in the Centennial year, A. D. 1936 by the United States of America, the State of Texas, in memory of the heroes of the battle of San Jacinto fought April 21st, A. D. 1836.

On the other side, the proposed inscription read:

This monument is a realization of the effort to pay tribute hoped for through the century. Daughters of the Republic of Texas, Sons of the Republic of Texas, and patriotic friends.⁵⁸

At the meeting, Krahl said that he did not see any reason for the Sons and Daughters to be listed on the cornerstone of the monument, and the group concurred. The men and women at the meeting agreed to support the inscription favored by the Spanish War veterans, "Erected by the United States of America, the State of Texas: Centennial tribute to the patriotism, sacrifice and valor of the men who here fought the battle of San Jacinto under General Sam Houston, April 21, 1836."⁵⁹ The groups adopted a resolution that stated their desire that no living persons' names be placed on the monument. Carrie Franklin Kemp acknowledged that the state and federal officials listed on the cornerstone plans worked to secure funds for the memorial, but urged, "Let this memorial take a broader, deeper message to future generations."⁶⁰

In opposition to Kemp, Mrs. Eugene Harris, a member of the San Jacinto Chapter of the DRT and an officer of the Houston Daughters of the American Revolution, recalled for the group her conversations with Claude Teer and Alfred Finn. Stating that Teer viewed their present attitude as unfair and improper, Harris repeated Teer's offer that a committee composed of three or five individuals go to Austin and meet with him to discuss the cornerstone. She also spoke of a conversation with Finn in which he stated that placing the selected names on the cornerstone was a usual procedure that could be viewed the same as an artist's signature on a piece of work. Furthermore, according to Finn, the cornerstone would be a relatively insignificant part of the monument, located in a back corner of the site, not on the front area that most visitors would see.⁶¹

Judge John M. Moore, president of the state Sons of the Republic of Texas,

disagreed with Harris, stating that the San Jacinto Monument was special: "If it were a part of a federal, city or state building, it would be different. But when it comes to a monument of this kind, I don't think any living man should have his name on it. If anyone's name should go on it, why not start at the top and put in the name of every taxpayer in the United States."⁶² Former Governor Ross Sterling agreed with Moore, saying, "there is no place on that monument for a cornerstone. The monument, itself, is a cornerstone."⁶³

To the men and women meeting at the Log House, the San Jacinto Monument would not be just any federal or state project. It would not even be just another Centennial monument. This was the monument that embodied the respect Texas held for the sacrifices of its heroes. Nothing should obscure that fact. Armed with the new information that Allred, Woodul, and Stevenson had requested removal of their names from the cornerstone, the group selected Madge Hearne, Kenneth Krahl, John M. Moore, San Jacinto State Park Commissioner William T. Kendall, Spanish-American War veteran Guy McLaughlin, and Houston Mayor Richard H. Fonville to travel to Austin with Sterling and Kemp to meet with the Board of Control on Thursday, April 8.⁶⁴

Two hours into the committee's discussion with Teer and other board members, a messenger from the Capitol interrupted the conference. The controversy over the cornerstone and the names of the living governmental officials had been resolved with the passage of legislation forbidding the names of the living on centennial monuments or buildings.⁶⁵ In the morning session of April 8, Senator Thomas Jefferson Holbrook of Galveston proposed Senate Concurrent Resolution Number 54, a bill that called not only for the ending of the practice of inscribing the names of the living on memorials and buildings dedicated to celebrating the Centennial, but also called for the removal of names from buildings and memorials already constructed and dedicated. The resolution passed by a vote of 22

to 5, with one senator abstaining and three not present. The House of Representatives amended S.C.R. No. 54, removing the clause calling for the removal of names already inscribed in existing centennial monuments and buildings. The Senate concurred with the House, and the Speaker of the House and president of the Senate signed the resolution that same day.⁶⁶

The Board of Control responded to the resolution with frustration and uncertainty as to whether a new inscription could be decided upon and made ready for the planned ceremony. San Jacinto Day was less than two weeks away, and Teer reasserted that including the names of federal and state officials involved with the project on the inscription was a standard procedure. He also expressed his opinion that the whole controversy seemed silly considering how small the cornerstone would be. Nevertheless, the Board was required to obey the legislation.⁶⁷

Madge Hearne said to the *Houston Post* regarding the controversy, "All this trouble could have been avoided if Mr. A.C. Finn, architect of the monument, had treated us with the consideration to which we thought we were entitled.... He treated us like children."⁶⁸ The members were not children, and they held a power that the Board of Control and Alfred Finn did not fully realize. In light of the last-minute legislation, Teer invited the group to propose a substitute inscription to Louis Wiltz Kemp, chairman of the historical advisory board of the Centennial Commission. Kemp would then make a decision and recommend a proper inscription to the Board of Control for approval.⁶⁹

Kemp met with Carrie Franklin Kemp, John Moore, Hearne, Krahl, Kendall, and J. Perry Moore, chairman of the San Jacinto State Park Commission, on Monday, April 12, to draft the new inscription for the monument. After a four-hour meeting, the group proposed that the inscription read, "Erected by the United States of America and the State of Texas, A.D. 1936. Dedicated to the Heroes of the

Battle of San Jacinto and all others whose deeds won for Texas Liberty and Independence, April 21, A.D. 1836.”⁷⁰ The Board approved the inscription, and Finn’s design placed it on the right side of the cornerstone in one-and-one-half inch incised Roman letters.⁷¹ The left hand side would simply read “SAN JACINTO” in four-inch incised Roman letters above an incised star of Texas surrounded with a branch of live oak leaves to the left and a branch of olive leaves to the right.⁷² The Daughters won their battle, and only names of Texas heroes would be mentioned.

LAYING THE CORNERSTONE

Meanwhile, the Masons of Texas protested the selection of Jesse Jones as the ceremonial cornerstone layer in late March 1937. In a letter written by Past Grand Master, Frank C. Jones, they argued that George Washington, a Mason, laid the cornerstone of the United States Capitol and a Mason had laid the cornerstone of the Texas State Capitol. They also argued that Sam Houston had presided as Chairman at the organizational meeting of the Texas Masons and that many of the Texas heroes were in fact Masons. Most convincingly the Masons argued that Jones had been invited to lay the cornerstone by Board of Control member John Singleton without the Board’s approval. The ceremony had been promised to the Masons, the only organization with a cornerstone laying ceremony. Although he was quick to point out the generosity of Jones and acknowledge that he was a friend of the Masons, Frank C. Jones went so far as to say that “it is proposed to slap these Masons in the face by asking a non-Mason, Jesse Jones, to lay this cornerstone.” But as the controversy over the cornerstone inscriptions emerged, the cry of the Masons faded and Jones prepared to dedicate the cornerstone.⁷³

On the morning of April 21, 1937, Jesse Jones dedicated the large cornerstone. In his speech to several thousand spectators, Jones stressed the importance of victory at San Jacinto to the United States and world. He also ap-

plauded that the state was finally building a monument to honor the deeds of the Texans who fought for Independence.⁷⁴ Following Jones’ speech and the sealing of historical documents into the cornerstone, members of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, each holding individual state flags, filed by the cornerstone followed by members of the Sons of the Republic of Texas. The patriotic groups sponsored their own program that afternoon, at which they too honored the deeds of Texans during the Texas Revolution and at San Jacinto.

The Bellows Construction Company and Alfred Finn completed the San Jacinto Monument in the first quarter of 1939, in time for its official dedication on April 21, 1939. Upon completion, the San Jacinto monument, towering 570 feet above ground, was the tallest stone monument in the world.⁷⁵ The tall octagonal shaft topped by a star serves as a reminder of the unique history of Texas and the sacrifices of the veterans of San Jacinto to all Texans and those who visit the site.

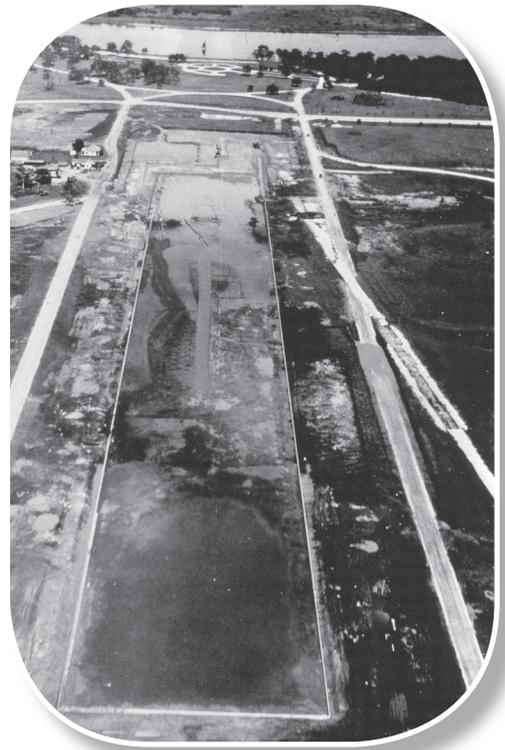
Although the Daughters of the Republic of Texas did not officially donate money for the construction of the memorial, their contribution was vital, as Houston civic leader Thomas H. Ball stated in 1937:

As a man desiring to pay honor where honor is due, I am inclined to believe that, without the good women who have maintained organizations from colonial times until the present, the busy men would not have preserved the shrines of liberty such as Mount Vernon, the Alamo and San Jacinto.⁷⁶

The Daughters donated much more for the construction of the monument than the \$1.2 million dollars given by the state and federal governments through the years of leadership and inspiration needed to acquire and preserve the battleground. Without their work, the great monument would have cost more than only \$1.2 million.

The Battle of San Jacinto lasted only eighteen minutes. Yet the fight to control how it was to be permanently me-

morialized raged on for almost one hundred years. The events that led to construction of the San Jacinto Monument and the laying of the cornerstone illustrate that persistence usually prevails. At critical junctures, the DRT realized its romantic vision of the battleground through its organizational persistence. The group also prevailed in its view that no politicians or other living persons should be honored on the cornerstone. Of equal importance was the vision of Jesse Jones, who thought the monument should be built on a heroic scale. His dream competed with those who would have been just as happy to spend the money on centennial celebrations and parties. These events would undoubtedly have remained in the memories of all attendees but would have been lost on future generations. In the end, the grand and imposing San Jacinto Monument is a memorial not only to General Houston and his troops, but also to the vision, persistence, and political insight of the groups and individuals who fought for its construction. ✧



The reflection pond under construction.
Courtesy San Jacinto Museum of History.