Texas Independence and the Ring-tailed Panther

Martin Parmer, one of the fifty-nine signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence, was a leader, much like the other delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1836. When he arrived in Washington, he had already served in the General Assembly of the state of Missouri and as President of the short-lived Fredonia Republic. But he was also an experienced and fearless frontiersman who called himself the “Ring-tailed Panther.”

The origin of his nickname has been the subject of intrigue throughout the years. There are several stories which have lingered long past the demise of Mr. Parmer himself. Nevertheless, they all confirm that Martin Parmer was a colorful character with a strong will and a tough spirit.

His son, Thomas Parmer, wrote in 1874 that the name was based on an incident that occurred around 1820 in Missouri. Martin Parmer rescued a young girl being held by the Osage Indians. During the course of the rescue, he shouted at the top of his lungs, “I’m the Ring-tailed Panther from Missouri.” After that, he was always known as the Ring-tailed Panther.

Another version, collected from Wetmore’s Gazetteer by Pearl Palmer Ripley, tells how Parmer and his son were sucked into a whirlpool while traveling by keel boat on the Missouri River. When asked later if his son had been scared, Parmer replied, “No, madam, I am a real ringtail panther, and I feed all my children on rattlesnakes’ hearts, fried in panther’s grease!”

Finally, Henderson King Yoakum cites an incident described by Thomas Parmer. While intervening during a fight at the Missouri constitutional convention of 1821, Martin Parmer again proclaimed to be the Ring-tailed Panther.

The descendants of Martin Parmer held the annual Parmer/Palmer family reunion at Washington-on-the-Brazos on March 29th, with over 100 people in attendance. They were able to view several original documents signed by Martin Parmer from the Museum collection. Also on exhibit was Martin Parmer’s cane, which was donated to the Museum by Frank Palmer, a descendant of Martin Parmer. The Ring-tailed Panther would have been proud of the legacy he left behind!
Texas Independence Day 2003

Texas Independence Day 2003 has come and gone. Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site celebrated the 167th anniversary of the signing of the 1836 Texas Declaration of Independence from Mexico on March 1-2, 2003. Several thousand visitors joined in the celebration and experienced historic craft demonstrations and living history presentations. "Texas Heroes" Sam Houston, Stephen F. Austin, Mary Austin Holley, William Barret Travis, and Suzanna Dickinson made special appearances in the Museum theater throughout the weekend. "Gone to Texas," a theater group sponsored in part by Raven Rangers of the New Army of the Republic of Texas and Sam Houston Memorial Museum, captivated audiences with a musical production about the life of Sam Houston.

The Independence Day program, sponsored by the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park Association, began on Sunday with a concert by the Blinn College Band and the Pledge of Allegiance to the Texas flag. The keynote speaker was the Honorable Tom Craddick, Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives. A black powder gun salute by the Texas Army followed the inspirational speech, and then a "Texas-sized" birthday cake was shared with the crowd. A fun time was had by all who came out to the park to celebrate Texas Independence Day.

Republic of Texas Art Contest 2003

During the Texas Independence Day Celebration festivities, Star of the Republic Museum hosted the annual Republic of Texas Art Contest Awards Ceremony. All area fourth graders in Grimes County and Washington County were invited to create artwork depicting Texas history through the Republic Period in Texas. The Washington County students receiving awards were: First place, Madison Edgar; Second Place, Colin Crenshaw; and Third Place, Sterling Merryman. Honorable Mention awards for Washington County went to Shelby Perez, Anna Martinez, Alexus Curry, Julie Fischer, Jeremy Zettel, Tyler Hohlt, Meagan Smith, Tyler Blankenship, Karina Engeling, and Angela Wesneski. The Grimes County students receiving awards were: First Place, Jacey Bauer; Second Place, Elizabeth Cobb; and Third Place, Jamie Nalley. Honorable Mention Awards for Grimes County went to Nicholas Mask, Jereme Gamble, Rebeca Rivera, Kenneth Nelms, Yesenia Puentes, Jenna Anastasiades, John Brak, Samantha Pursley, Randy Boyer, and Phillip Wenzel. The overall Grand Prize went to Dillon Knebel from Brenham Elementary. The winning entries were on display at the Museum through the month of May.
Childress Statue Relocated

A long time friend of the museum has found a new home. The statue of George C. Childress, which has greeted visitors at the museum since 1970, has been moved. Recent visitors may have noticed that the granite pillar that served as a backdrop for the statue had been slowly sinking into the ground. Engineers from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department determined that the structure should be moved to a more stable base closer to the Visitors Center at the Park. Moving day was a little traumatic for Mr. Childress, as he was lifted under the armpits by a large crane, and carried to his new home. When all was said and done, however, he settled onto the new platform and was ready once again to proudly greet visitors at the “Birthplace of Texas.”

George Campbell Childress is commonly acknowledged as the primary author of the Texas Declaration of Independence. He was born in Nashville, Tennessee, and first came to Texas in 1834. He returned to Tennessee to recruit volunteers for the Texas army, then in late 1835, he left permanently for Texas, where his uncle, Sterling C. Robertson, was organizing Robertson’s colony. Childress was elected as a delegate for the Convention of 1836 where he read the proposed declaration to the delegates, and forever secured his place in the history of the Republic of Texas.

CURATOR’S CORNER

Wedding dresses, grandma’s quilt, and baby’s christening gown are all treasures to be handed down within the family. But how do you make sure that these fragile textiles will survive for generations?

First, handle them as little as possible. If you must touch them, make sure that your hands are clean. When lifting, always use some kind of support—such as a flat board—to prevent undue stress or tears in the fabric.

Before storing, check for stains and soils to determine if cleaning is necessary. If not removed, stains will only become worse over time. You should also remove any pins that might snag or cause rust spots. Gentle hand-washing with multiple rinses is preferred, depending on the fabric.

Once cleaned, check for any damage that may have occurred. Do not press with a hot iron. Because textile fibers will shrink or swell in response to temperature and humidity, it is important to provide cool, dry storage conditions of about 70 degrees and 50% humidity to prevent stress on the fibers. This means no attics, basements or garages.

If you are using flat storage, make sure your boxes are clean and insect free. Acid-free boxes and acid-free tissue paper are available from archival or museum supply catalogs. Use the tissue paper to line the box and to interleave between folds of fabric. Unbleached muslin may also be used to separate layers. Each fold should be padded with a roll of crumpled tissue paper to prevent creasing. It is also a good idea to re-fold items periodically along different lines. Avoid stacking too many items in each box or they will be crushed.

If you plan to hang dresses, use sturdy hangers and pad them out to conform to the shape of the shoulder; then cover the hanger with muslin. Muslin dust covers should be used instead of plastic. Allow plenty of air to circulate, whether hanging or boxed, to prevent crushing. Check periodically for insects, moisture, or other problems.

Keeping your textiles clean, insect free, and stored in a moderate environment with low light, low humidity, and moderate temperatures, will increase the lifespan of your fragile keepsakes and enhance your enjoyment of them for many years.
Schedule of Upcoming Events
Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Site

June 14, July 12, August 9  Stagecoach Days
Fanthorp Inn State Park
11:00 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Admission: $4 adults, $2.50 children

June 25  TEA Workshop: “Bringing History to Life in the Classroom”
Star of the Republic Museum
Presented in conjunction with the TEA Region VI Service Center and Blinn College Department of Workforce Education, this all day workshop will provide 7 hours of Continuing Professional Education credits. Register through ESC Region VI for Workshop number 303-9686. Forms may be downloaded from www.esc6.net. Fee: $35

July 4  H-E-B Fireworks on the Brazos
Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Site
Celebrate the Nation’s independence at the last capital of the Republic of Texas. Free Blue Bell ice cream and Coca-Cola starting at 7:00 p.m. Houston Symphonic Band will perform in the amphitheater at 8:00 p.m. Fireworks display will begin at 9:00 p.m.

July 8  “Childhood in the Republic”
The Museum staff will present this special program at the Nancy Carol Roberts Public Library in Brenham at 2:00 p.m. Learn about Republic era toys, chores, and schools with a hands-on presentation to children ages 6 and up. Free admission

A Texas Connection to the Fourth of July

The Fourth of July has a double meaning in Texas history. In addition to the significance of the date in U. S. history, it marks a noteworthy event that took place in the Republic of Texas. President Anson Jones picked the date of July 4, 1845 for the assembly of the Convention of 1845 in Austin to consider the United States’ offer of statehood. The original proclamation, signed by Anson Jones, will be on view at the Museum during the July 4th celebration. The offer for statehood was accepted by a vote of 55-1. After the vote, delegates began drafting the first Texas state constitution, which was completed in August, 1845.