

Self-Guided Tour, Non-school Groups

We would like to welcome you to the Museum of South Texas History. We hope you will enjoy your time here and will learn something about the history and heritage of the area in which we live.

- I. The Butterfly Garden: As you moved toward the mesquite entry doors, we hope you noticed the flowers on the west side of the walkway. They are a collection of plants native to this region that attract butterflies and birds. You passed several types of Lantana, as well as Butterfly Weed, Manzanita, Spring Mist Flower, and Desert Yaupon.
- II. The Grand Lobby: In the center of the lobby be sure to look up into the tower. Notice the chandelier, which is created of steel and copper, with 3 different animals worked into the artistry. Can you find them? There are 8 more South Texas animals in the metal-grille archways of the grand lobby. Above the grilles, the North and South walls are adorned with metal railings most of which were recovered from the original Hidalgo County Courthouse, completed in 1910 and demolished in 1954. The remainder of the railings were replicated from the originals. This reception area counter top and entry doors are crafted of mesquite wood, which is a tree that grows abundantly in this area.
- III. The Store: If you are interested in reading about the history, flora or fauna of our area, the books you are looking for are here. There are also cookbooks and craft kits for those who love to stay busy. Many souvenirs including jewelry, photos, and stuffed toys are also available.
- IV. The Courtyard: As you leave the store, walking south down the tile corridor and turning right (west) you will find the entrance (double glass doors) to the Heritage Courtyard. It contains native plants, a hand pump, fountains, and a brick walkway of names that represent the people and ranch brands of South Texas.
- V. The Old Jail: This part of the museum was completed in 1910 and served as the original museum site. A right turn will take you to the archives and library/reading room of the museum. If you are interested in researching a topic or are curious about one of the

- museum's exhibits, then you might want to make an appointment with Barbara Stokes and spend some more time there. (There is an elevator located down the hall on your right.)
- VI. A left turn will take you to the Freddy Gonzalez exhibit, and into the original jail building which contains galleries for temporary exhibits that will be changing periodically. Climb up the old metal stairs to the Hanging Room, Violent Cell area and Old Town Room. You may leave this area by the front stairway and make your way back across the courtyard. When you re-enter the newer building, retrace your steps to the Grand Lobby. Now you will be ready to climb the stairway to our newest area. (Or you can take the elevator behind the stairs)
- VII The Rio Grande Legacy is a three part, permanent exhibit, which begins at the top of the stairway. It tells the story of the borderlands of South Texas and Northeastern Mexico.
- a. River Frontier
- i. The Mosasaur (a sea lizard) lived in the oceans that covered this area millions of years ago. Does he look like a dragon?
 - ii. The Mammoth displayed here is cast from a specimen found in Florida. In the wall display on the left, you will find the fragments of a mammoth found in China, Nuevo Leon. They were discovered on a ranch owned by Mr. De la Cruz from Edinburg. He remembers sitting on mammoth teeth as a child.
 - iii. Paleo-Indians appeared 12,000 years ago to hunt using the atl-atl, weapon launcher.
 - iv. The Coahuilteicans lived and traded in the Valley. Their background mural was painted by Jan Vriesen, the internationally-renowned muralist, of Milaca, Minnesota.
 - v. The Coast of Mexico, *New Spain*, was explored by Pineda, who sailed the Gulf of Mexico, *The Spanish Sea*.
 - vi. The tile floor is an ancient wind rose design. The wind rose was used on maps as an aid in navigation. The ship models in this area were made and donated by Mike Walsh and Raul Guzman Jr. The star/sky mapping shows how the stars might have looked to the sailors on the ships navigating the Spanish Sea(Gulf of Mexico)
 - vii. The horse mannequin depicted in this area is modeled from a Spanish Barb, which was a hardy breed popular with the

Spanish. His arrival marked the re-introduction of the horse into the New World (the Americas).

- viii. The *jacal* was the common frontier house. This house with its thatched palm roof was constructed on the San Vicente Ranch owned by Enrique Guerra.
- ix. Jose de Escandon established towns and missions in South Texas on his land grant called Nuevo Santander. He will be the subject of a film to be shown in the theatre that now shows the artifact slide show with guitar accompaniment.
- x. The “dress up” area gives all an opportunity to try on the clothing and touch the weapons used by the Europeans.
- xi. The *casa mayor*, great house, was the fortress that the jacal dwellers sought when danger threatened. Notice the exposed blocks, which are *sillar* or caliche blocks, donated from a fortified structure North of Edinburg.
- xii. The *horno* or stone oven was modeled from a photograph of an old oven found on the McAllen Ranch.
- xiii. The oxcarts traveled in caravans for protection and carried goods from place to place.
- xiv. Father Hidalgo, a most unlikely rebellion leader, fights to free Mexico from Spanish rule in 1821.

b. River Highway

- i. The buildings in this area were based on those in old photographs from Matamoros and Monterrey.
- ii. The **Texians** defeated Santa Anna’s army and the Texas Republic was born.
- iii. Commerce and Trade on the Rio Grande brought merchants from Ireland, France, and Italy to the area.
- iv. The Rio Grande to the Rio Nueces became a disputed **no man’s land** called “Wild Horse Desert”.
- v. The woman representing the laundress/camp follower was modeled after a re-enactment participant at the Battle of Palo Alto.
- vi. The Manifest Destiny of the United States caused lands under Mexico’s control to be disputed. The Mexican War lasted 18 months, dividing families on either side of the Great River.
- vii. The Steamboat Era brought news, culture, and modern ideas. The model of the steamboat constructed here resembles the type of boat used on the Rio Grande. (Please step on board

to view a 6 minute movie about steamboats on the Rio Grande River)

- viii. **Cotton is King** in Bagdad and the Rio Grande River became a lucrative trade route.
- ix. Slavery issues divided Texas as well as the North and South. As the Civil War ended in the United States, the “Mexican Adventure” began between the French and the Mexicans. Cinco de Mayo became their day of celebration.
- x. The Rio Grande hotel is an interpretation of the only hotel in Brownsville in the 1860’s, (which was named the Miller hotel).
- xi. The cattle kingdom era began. The cycle of ranch life kept an unhurried pace. *Vaqueros* and cowboys became folk heroes. Vigilante groups and Captain L. H. McNeely’s Texas Ranger force were the law of the land.
- xii. The leña fence on display was built by Jimmy McAllen using period wire and old staples to show the type of fence used before the invention of barbed wire.
- xiii. The Santa Fe Ranch is depicted in the mural scene with cow patties compliments of their cattle. The chuck box, once used at the McAllen Ranch, is mounted on a Springfield wagon nicknamed “Old Reliable” because it is one of the most durable of wagons, especially on rough terrain.
- xiv. Wells and windmills brought water to the ranches and their inhabitants, ranch life now included modern conveniences such as mill-ground flour and a wagon shed. Cattle brands are now registered and barbed wire is used to fence pastures.
- xv. The wagon displayed in the wagon shed was used at La Reforma, a ranching community on a private ranch.
- xvi. As you leave the upstairs exhibit area please stop and look to the left to enjoy a bird’s eye view of the native plants below. From south to north you will see Sabal Palm, Huisache Tree, Potato Tree, Nopal/Prickly pear, and Spanish Dagger, purple sage/Cenizo, Wild Olive, Desert Yaupon, Brazilian pepper Bush, Honey Mesquite Tree, Mountain Laurel, Spanish Dagger, Agave, Huisache Tree, Sabal Palm and Cenizo/purple sage. The circular bed is filled with succulents from a nearby ranch and the stairway garden contains Porter weed (native butterfly plant).

- c. River Crossroads/ 20th century gallery (downstairs, beginning at the train station)
- i. They call it the Magic Valley! Its rich soil grows almost anything, if you just add water! Agriculture booms! Newcomers pour in! Modern times arrive!
 - ii. Land Seekers- With the railroad, come “land excursions” – sales tours conducted by land development companies. Each winter, potential buyers arrive by the trainloads, mostly Anglo-Americans from the Midwest.
 - iii. The Key to the Valley’s “Magic”-1904: Big-scale agricultural irrigation begins with the railroad’s coming. Trains haul in heavy equipment and pumping machinery.
 - iv. Canal Building- Men, mules and muscle build the early canals. Survey crews map routes through mesquite and cactus. Axe-wielding brush crews hack out rights-of-way. With mule-drawn plows and earth scrapers, construction crews break the soil and build canal embankments.
 - v. Early Farm Life-Farm families, mostly from the Midwest, pour into the Magic Valley. Finding land covered in thorny brush, many hire Mexican laborers to help clear it. Newcomers live in tents or *jacales*; frame houses and barns come later.
 - vi. Garage and Model T/ Horseless Carriage- Truly, the automobile is a revolutionary invention: a personal, self-propelled vehicle that gives unprecedented mobility to the average person. From a spindly horseless carriage, it becomes by 1910 a modern machine.
 - vii. A frontier look with false fronts and wooden sidewalks marks new Valley towns. Hotels, saloons, and businesses line dirt streets. Houses, schools, and churches rise. Stores sell goods for farm and city folk.
 - viii. For many Texans of Mexican descent, the Valley’s Anglo-American influx brings traumatic changes. As ranch lands become irrigated farmlands, numerous Mexican-Texan (*tejano*) ranch workers lose their ancestral homes and livelihoods.
 - ix. Mexico, 1910. Revolution! Francisco Madero’s revolt ends decades of Porfirio Díaz’ iron rule. Elected President, Madero soon faces new uprisings. In 1913 his

army commander, Huerta, still loyal to Díaz, overthrows Madero. Huerta becomes President, but rebellions against him break out across Mexico.(look for Pancho Villa's saddle in this area)

- x. Zimmermann Telegram stirs national outrage. Coupled with the Germans' resuming unrestricted submarine warfare, the telegram prompts the US to join the Allies in April 1917. The deadlock breaks, and Germany surrenders in November 1918.
- xi. Commercial air service arrives in the Valley. On March 9, Brownsville opens its Municipal Airport with fanfare and celebrities, such as Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart.
- xii. Prohibition: The 18th Amendment becomes law (January 16,1920), prohibiting the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages in the US. Most Americans support Prohibition at first, but later ignore it. Liquor smuggling thrives, with a main corridor through South Texas.
- xiii. An agriculture-based economy and border location temper the Great Depression's local impact. People seeking work arrive from the States and Mexico.
- xiv. Oil! In the 20th Century, black gold and its products, especially gasoline, are increasingly vital and profitable. Only dry holes mark the first attempts to drill for Valley oil. But in 1920, the region's first producing oil field is discovered in Starr County.
- xv. Oil and natural gas production grows, along with air service and international trade. The Port of Brownsville opens. Cities expand; more roads are paved. Electric utilities and telephone lines extend further. Radio stations go on the air.
- xvi. The Army Air Corps starts building new bases, including the Valley's. North of Mission is Moore Air Field: there pilots transition to advanced trainer and actual fighter planes. At Harlingen Army Air Field, airmen train as machine gunners and bomber crews. From Brownsville's air base, pilots fly gunnery-practice missions and patrol offshore waters. Engine noise and gunfire shake the Valley's wartime skies year round.

- xvii. With a global war to fight, American military forces require increasing quantities of food, fuel, clothing, and armaments. Domestic production cannot fulfill military and civilian needs equally. In 1942, the Federal government imposes nationwide rationing.
- xviii. Its fertile soil, irrigation, and year-around growing make the Valley a wartime food factory. The chief products are vegetables and citrus fruit. Agricultural production soars, aided by increasing mechanization and crop dusting.
- xix. Under a joint U.S.-Mexico program, *Escuadro Aereo 201*, pilots train at Brownsville and other bases.
- xx. During WWII the last American wartime use of horse-mounted cavalry is on the Lower Rio Grande. From Forts Brown and Ringgold the 124th Cavalry patrols the border country with horses, as well as armored cars and jeeps. They keep alert for possible enemy infiltration across the Rio Grande.
- xxi. Atomic Bomb/August 6, 1945- A lone American B-29 appears over Hiroshima, Japan. Moments later a searing blast wipes out much of the city-the first wartime use of an atomic bomb.
- xxii. After the War, a spirit of optimism is in evidence as Valley people anticipate renewed growth and development. Valley cities take steps to encourage growth by expanding city services and making other improvements. New subdivisions are laid out. Builders see the demand for more housing, but are held back somewhat by the lingering war-time scarcity of building materials and restrictions on building. Lumber is imported from Mexico to alleviate this shortage.
- xvii. Valley residents have long had an appreciation of their home's history and natural environment. Some have written articles and books. Museums and wildlife preserves have been established. In 1991, Los Caminos del Rio is organized to promote the region's natural and cultural heritage. Some Valley families trace their roots back to the original Spanish or Mexican land grant holders. There is a renewed awareness of the need to preserve the Valley's native flora and fauna.

*We hope you have enjoyed your visit to the museum.
Thank you and come again soon.*