

## Texas History Month: Museums in Huntsville

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Written by Erin Cassidy and Cheryl Spencer based primarily on information from the following museum websites:

- Sam Houston Memorial Museum website - [http://www.shsu.edu/~sмм\\_www/](http://www.shsu.edu/~sмм_www/)
- Texas Prison Museum website - <http://www.txprisonmuseum.org/index.html>
- Veterans Museum of Texas website - <http://www.heartsmuseum.com/home.htm>
- Walker County Historical Commission website (Gibbs-Powell Home Museum) - <http://www.co.walker.tx.us/history.htm>
- Wynne Home Arts Center website - <http://www.thewynnehome.com/>

Read by Cheryl Spencer, Library Associate in Special Collections.

In honor of Texas History Month this March, our podcast today highlights the wide variety of museums and historical sites located in Huntsville.

The complex of buildings at the Sam Houston Memorial Museum was begun in 1905 with the preservation of Sam Houston's Woodlands home by Mrs. Bertha Kirkley, a Sam Houston Normal Institute history teacher, and a group of her students. The central museum building was built in 1936 as a project of the Texas Centennial Commission. Sam Houston's Steamboat house, an exhibit hall, and a replica blacksmith shop also form part of the museum experience. The Museum is an excellent place to learn about Sam Houston and his family, as well as the Texas Revolution. The Sam Houston Memorial Museum, now registered as a National Historic Landmark, is located at the corner of Sam Houston Avenue and 19<sup>th</sup> Street.

Since 1989, the Texas Prison Museum has preserved and exhibited the history of the Texas prison system, from the perspective of both inmates and prison employees. The prison museum, located on I-45 at exit 118, seeks to educate the public about the state correctional system and to preserve artifacts, documents, photographs, and oral histories. Artifacts related to Bonnie and Clyde, as well as exhibits about the Texas Prison Rodeo, are among the most popular attractions at this local museum.

The Gibbs-Powell House, a Greek-revival style home built in 1862, is now a Texas Archaeological Landmark, a Texas Historical Landmark, and a county museum. Operated by the Walker County Historical Commission, the house is decorated inside with historical furniture, furnishings, books, documents, and images. A vintage horse-drawn buggy is also on display in the driveway at the rear of the house, which is located on the corner of 11<sup>th</sup> Street and Avenue M.

The nineteenth century mansion known as the Wynne Home was given to the City of Huntsville by Samuella Wynne Palmer, trustee of the estate of Ruth Wynne Hollinshead. The historic house, located on 11<sup>th</sup> Street near Avenue N, has been renovated and re-opened as an arts center, providing a diversity of exhibits, classes, and workshops. Here the community can learn about dance, weaving, pottery, and many other engaging topics in art and culture.

American veterans are commemorated at the Veterans Museum of Texas, also known as the HEARTS museum, which stands for "Helping Every American Remember Through Serving." The museum, currently located inside West Hill Mall but planning to relocate to new facilities later this year, was founded in 1994 by Charlie Davis and Charlotte Oleinik. Artifacts and informational posters on display seek to honor all veterans and to educate visitors about the experience of military personnel in the major wars of modern history. Local veterans often volunteer at the museum to provide first-hand stories and demonstrations.

At 13<sup>th</sup> Street and Avenue N, the Joshua Houston, Jr., home has been restored as the first project of the Walker County Heritage Foundation. Son of Sam and Margaret Houston's servant Joshua Houston, Josh Jr. was a capable blacksmith who had a thriving business on the half lot to the south of this structure. He and his brother married the Orviss sisters, who were well educated and active in the African American community after Reconstruction. Currently owned by the Woodward family, the house is covered by an historic easement and is frequently utilized for community meetings and tours.

Additional museum information, photos, and hours of operation can be found at each museum's website. Links to those websites can be found on the Newton Gresham Library website on the Podcasts page. Other options for history-related entertainment in the area include a visit to the iconic statue of Sam Houston on I-45, a walking tour of historic Oakwood Cemetery, or a stroll around the square in downtown Huntsville. Whether you're looking for a way to celebrate Texas History Month or just in search of a new way to pass a Saturday afternoon, the Huntsville area has something to interest just about everyone.