West Texas Museum Association

1929 - 1979
Half-a-Century of Progress . . .

1929-1979

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"The West Texas Museum is not merely a repository for old bones, but a place to broaden the cultural horizons of the Southwest."

Those were the words of Dr. Clifford B. Jones, past president of the West Texas Museum Association and Texas Technological College. Although these statements were made almost 30 years ago, the objectives of the Museum have remained the same.

The following pages offer a brief pictorial and narrative history of the museum since its inception in 1929.
The year was 1929. Texas Technological College was four years old. Yet thoughts for a museum were beginning to develop in the minds of some individuals.

And the onset of the Depression Era was not about to dampen the spirits of these go-getters. There were no funds, no exhibits and not even a building to house a museum. Yet the most important element of all — desire — was there to serve as motivation for those who dreamed of a place where the culture of the South Plains could be preserved and maintained.

Late in the afternoon of March 27, 1929, interested citizens braved a raging sandstorm to discuss the Museum. The Tech newspaper, The Toreador, reported that the purpose of the meeting was to “form a society to help make collections and further the movement (of the Museum) in general.”
Only four buildings were on the four-year-old Texas Technological College campus in 1929 when the idea for a museum was born.

A second meeting, held in May 1929, saw Tech professor R. A. Studhalter elected president and both constitution and by-laws ratified. Collection of artifacts for the destined museum began soon after.

The first annual meeting was held February 28, 1930, in the Engineering Auditorium, one of the four buildings on the new Tech campus. Sixty-nine people attended the meeting to pledge their support. They were even willing to pay the one dollar annual dues — which was considered a large amount of money during the Depression.

Attendance had climbed to a record-breaking 100 members by 1932. Without a doubt, "museum fever" had caught on. And those early museum members had little idea of what their initial efforts would eventually amount to.
In 1935, the Plains Museum Society celebrated its sixth birthday. Substantial progress had been made.

Signs of maturation became apparent during the Society's sixth year. Membership continued to grow; and the Society took several major steps that would have a significant impact on the Museum’s future.

First, several resolutions were presented to the Texas Technological College Board of Directors. The resolutions proposed that the Museum Society be included in the school’s budget and that "the society should have a space for central display of museum pieces to be open to visitors at stated times."

But the question remained: where does one obtain such a building for exhibition purposes?

When it was learned that a large portion of the $3 million budget for the Texas Centennial Celebration had not been designated, members of the Museum Society decided the funds should go toward "their cause."

Sixty-seven West Texas counties united their efforts in hopes of obtaining funds to erect 35 historical markers along Texas highways. But the proposal was rejected by the State Legislature.

The rejection led to a "march to Austin" that began October 17, 1935. Tech President Bradford Knapp and Dr. W. C. Holden led 150 enthusiastic supporters to the Texas capital to make a direct appeal for monies to build a museum.

One state senator summed up the sentiments of the West Texas citizens when he said, "We don't want a cold stone monument. It should be a living monument to commemorate a new type of country and a new kind of history."

But the Legislature's answer was that funds weren't available at that time. The group left for home disappointed. But two weeks later, the Legislature granted to the West Texas Museum Association $25,000 for a museum that would consist of lasting projects.

With the new-founded progress and growth, the need for another change became evident. The Plains Museum Society had outgrown its name. Sixty-seven West Texas counties had endorsed the Austin trip for funds. Appropriately, the Museum Society's name was changed from the Plains Museum Society to the West Texas Museum Association on June 12, 1935, to better represent the larger group.
Some thought it was just a hole in the ground. In reality, the “hole” was the Museum’s basement, that opened in 1937.

Lt. Gov. Walter Woodul, chairman of the Centennial Commission of Control, pledged his support to the West Texas Museum Association. He presented the new building to the Association and said, “A dream of long standing became a reality yesterday with the formal opening of the West Texas Museum.”

The next step was to decide the location for the new museum. In February, 1936, the Association’s Board of Directors, upon agreement with the Tech Board of Directors, selected the northeast area of the circle on the Tech campus, west of the Broadway street entrance, for the museum site. This location is currently the site of Holden Hall.

Groundbreaking ceremonies were held the morning of September 23, 1936. Although the new museum was supposed to be completed by early December, bad weather and shipping delays detained the opening until March 5, 1937.

“A dream of long standing became a reality yesterday with the formal opening of the West Texas Museum. The West Texas Museum Association was presented the museum building by Lieutenant Governor Walter Woodul, chairman of the Centennial Commission of Control.” The Toreador, June 11, 1937

On the opening day, the pride of Lubbock citizens was evident, especially in the newspapers. Congratulatory advertisements from local businesses and patrons flaunted the pages of the campus and city papers, urging people to “visit the Museum.”

After the opening, the Association began to collect funds for permanent collections and art. The funding of temporary exhibits was also undertaken.
Piles of bricks were collected during the "Give-a-Brick" campaign conducted in 1940 to raise funds for building expansion.

Spencer Wells, former Chairman of the Texas Technological College Board of Directors, participated in groundbreaking ceremonies in 1948 for the Museum additions.

A 21-year-old dream was realized with the formal opening of the Museum additions on October 19, 1950.
Community
Pledges Support . . .

By 1938, almost 35,000 people visited the museum annually. From 1936-49, the West Texas Museum was housed in the basement portion of the structure.

Again, money was the factor that kept the Association from continuing building expansion. A “Give A Brick” campaign was undertaken in 1940. The goal for the campaign was the equivalent of 230,000 bricks, with donations accepted in either cash or bricks.

Piles of bricks — all sizes, shapes and colors — were collected. One of the promotional tactics was that Boy Scouts could get into Tech football games using two bricks as a ticket. The campaign was deemed a success, but there still were not enough funds to begin construction.

By the fall of 1948, the Association had raised more than $50,000. The Tech Board of Directors agreed to match the funds under one stipulation — that rooms in the proposed building would be used as classrooms until other facilities were built.

Finally, there was enough money to undertake the construction plans. The new additions consisted of two wings set at right angles, joined by a central rotunda. The first floor (or the basement) was used to house the paleontological collections, with the anthropological and historical material exhibited on the second floor. The third floor was the location for painting and traveling art exhibits.

The central hall was named Memorial Hall. The hall was decorated with a mural of 12 pioneers who had made significant contributions to the West Texas area.

The realization of a 21-year-old dream took place on October 19, 1950, with the formal opening of the Museum additions. Tech President Clifford B. Jones took charge of the dedication ceremonies. He dedicated the Museum to “the enjoyment, enlightenment . . . and culture of the people of the Southwest.”

The year of the Museum opening, 1950, coincided with Tech’s silver anniversary. In honor of this, an exhibit was displayed in the Museum highlighting the historical events of the college’s past 25 years. Included in the exhibit was the bill that proposed the creation of Tech.
The Memorial Hall mural depicted the lives of South Plains citizens who had made significant contributions to the West Texas region.

Nationally known Southwestern artist Peter Hurd was selected to paint the pioneer fresco.
A Mural for the Museum . . .

Because the Memorial Hall mural was to depict the lives of South Plains people, it was appropriate that a southwestern artist be selected to do the work.

Nationally known painter Peter Hurd was chosen to paint the pioneer fresco that would cost more than $100,000.

The mural was, at that time, one of the largest projects of its kind. Hurd took two years to complete the mural. A period of six months was needed to prepare the fresco’s surface for painting. Almost a year was needed for the fresco to harden so the surface wouldn’t scratch.

The 1300-square-foot mural proved to be a challenge for Hurd, but he welcomed visitors to observe as he worked.

The dedication of the mural, on November 18, 1954, caused quite a stir. Not only were distinguished historians and artists in attendance, but also several Broadway and Hollywood actors. Even Life Magazine traveled to Texas to cover the dedication. Southwestern author Paul Horgan presented the mural.

The 1300-square-foot mural took two years to complete and cost more than $100,000. The mural is currently located in Holden hall on the Texas Tech campus.
The West Texas Museum Association purchased the first Spitz Planetarium. The planetarium was billed as enabling observers to "view the celestial world from any point in the world." Although the planetarium was located in an adobe storage room in back of the Museum, capacity crowds turned out for the opening on April 21, 1953, of the celestial celebration.

The first program was called "Spring Skies Over Texas," using the star, sun and moon, twilight, astronomical and geocentric projectors.

By the late Sixties, the Planetarium had attracted thousands of visitors during its 17-year existence. The new Moody Planetarium was made possible through a gift of $250,000 from the Moody Foundation in 1970. The funds enabled the Museum to purchase more up-to-date planetarium equipment from the Spitz Laboratories and to build a unique structure to house the equipment. The Museum Association has added equipment and program materials since 1970 and in 1978 - 1979 has added over $8,000 in new and additional equipment for the Planetarium.
The first Spitz Planetarium was purchased by the Museum Association in 1953 and has attracted thousands of visitors since that time.
Association

Sponsors Exhibits . . .

From January 1951 through May 1956, 114 shows hung in the Art and Rotunda Galleries, sometimes overflowing to the walls of the Auditorium. Exhibit subjects included all media of painting and printmaking, ceramics and textiles, sculpture, photography, native arts and crafts, and historical items.

The Museum originated the "Wyeth Family Modern American Painters" exhibit which was shown in the Art Gallery from April 15 - 30, 1951; "Peter Hurd Paints a Mural" was on exhibition from November to December, 1954; and "The Saga of the South Plains" was shown in the Art Gallery from September 20 to November 13, 1955.

In the fall of 1959, an exhibit featuring milestones in Lubbock's history was produced by the Women's Council and the Museum staff. The exhibit, appropriately named "Cow Trails to Rails" outlined the growth of Lubbock from the creation of Lubbock County in 1876 to the location of the county seat in 1890.

Churches, schools and the coming of the railroad were also highlights in this informative and educational exhibit.
Mrs. John Lott beside the Georgia O'Keefe painting "Purple Hills" which the Lotts gave to the permanent art collection established by the West Texas Museum Association.

An old-fashioned restored surrey buggy was on display in 1959 during an exhibit chronicling the history of Lubbock.
Women's Council
Organized . . .

In 1959, a need was seen for an auxiliary group to the West Texas Museum Association. The Women’s Council was organized for that purpose with 100 charter members.

Mrs. D. D. Webster was elected as the first president of the Women’s Council in 1959. Twenty presidents have followed Mrs. Webster and all have continued to contribute to the Women’s Council as members of the Advisory Board to the Executive Committee.

The organization has become the strength of the Museum Association and volunteers from 13 standing committees furnish service to every function of the Museum.

Membership has grown from the original members to more than 500 volunteers. The pre-requisite for membership in the Women’s Council is membership in the West Texas Museum Association and participation in a brief orientation period outlining the volunteer opportunities within the function of the Museum.

The committees within the Women’s Council are: the Arts Seminars Committee; the Docent Committee; the Fine Arts Committee; the Heritage Projects Committee; the Historical Costumes and Collections Committee; the Hostess Committee; the Junior Program Committee; the Membership Committee; the Museum Placement Committee; the Program Committee; the Special Events Committee; the Treasure of the Month Committee; and the Youth Classes Committee.

Honorary membership into the Women’s Council is always extended to the wife of the President of Texas Tech University. Other honorary memberships are presented with the approval of the Executive Committee of the West Texas Museum Association.
Past Presidents
of the Women’s Council

1958 - 59 Mrs. D. D. Webster (Oletha)
1959 - 60 Mrs. Bryan Edwards (Wildring)
1960 - 61 Mrs. Russell Bean (Pauline)
1961 - 62 Mrs. J. W. Spears (Bernice)
1962 - 63 Mrs. Earl Hobbs (Patti)
1963 - 64 Mrs. David Vigness (Winifred)
1964 - 65 Mrs. William C. Clark (Lucille)
1965 - 66 Mrs. Ivy Savage
1966 - 67 Mrs. Jack Strong (Mary Nell)
1967 - 68 Mrs. Edward L. Gummelt (Nita)
1968 - 69 Mrs. J. J. Willingham (Ruth)
1969 - 70 Mrs. R. Q. Lewis (Dottie)
1970 - 71 Mrs. James G. Morris (Betty)
1972 Mrs. Hoyse McMurtry (Esther)
1973 Mrs. James W. Graves (Lindl)
1974 Mrs. J. B. Joiner (Mildred)
1975 Mrs. J. E. Loveless (Olga)
1976 Mrs. H. A. Anderson (Darlene)
1977 Mrs. Dalton Tarwater (Nancy)
1978 Mrs. F. P. Otkin (Helen)
1979 Mrs. John Graw (Mary Louise)
A New Building . . .

Once Again

At the 35th Annual Meeting of the West Texas Museum Association on November 5, 1964, plans were revealed for construction of a new museum complex on a 15-acre tract at Fourth Street and Indiana Avenue. The announcement was made that the International Center for Arid and Semi-Arid Land Studies (ICASALS) would be an important part of the University and the new museum would serve as a showcase for ICASALS as well as a general regional museum.

On February 8, 1967, the West Texas Museum Association, for the purpose of fund raising, temporarily assumed the name of "ICASALS and Museum Development." The tract of land was increased to 76 acres.

On August 24, 1968, action was taken by the Texas Tech Board of Directors and contracts totaling $2,500,000 were awarded for construction of the first phase of the museum complex. This provided for the construction of a facility three and one-half times larger than the museum building located in Holden Hall and included the Central Unit, Industrial Gallery, Sculpture Courtyard, one-third of the main exhibition wing and the Moody Planetarium.

Groundbreaking for Phase I took place in September 1968. The new building was officially opened November 13, 1970 and a name change from the West Texas Museum to the Museum of Texas Tech University marked the beginning of a new era.
Construction of Phase I of the multi-million dollar complex, including the main museum building and Moody Planetarium, began in the fall of 1968.

After two years of construction and many years of planning, the Museum of Texas Tech University officially opened its doors to the public on Saturday, November 14, 1970.
Association Joined

by Fellow Organizations . . .

ICASALS

The International Center for Arid and Semi-Arid Land Studies was formally established in 1966 when the Board of Regents of Texas Tech University adopted as the special mission of the institution the study of arid and semi-arid lands, which comprise approximately half of the exposed surface of the earth.

"Arid and semi-arid land studies" is interpreted to mean not only the land itself, its plant and animal life, but man in all the varieties of his experiences in arid environments. The International Center is the medium of stimulation, coordination and implementation of public service programs and research activities pertaining to arid lands.

Together with the new multi-million dollar museum, the International Center has as its ultimate goal the creation of a world center of inter-disciplinary knowledge and research of the world's arid and semi-arid lands.
The windmill has become almost a symbol of the West Texas pioneer. This is one of several windmills located at the Ranching Heritage Center.

Ranching Heritage Association

The idea of a Ranching Headquarters, located on the Museum site, was first conceived in 1968. A planning committee of ranchers and historians was appointed by Texas Tech President Grover Murray, to survey existing structures throughout the state and decide whether enough could be found and restored to make the program worthwhile.

In 1969, the Ranch Headquarters Association was formed for the purpose of locating, moving, and soliciting contributions for buildings.

The first structure to be moved was an 1830 log cabin, once the headquarters of the French Count de la Baume's El Capote Ranch near Gonzales in South Central Texas. Since that time, over 23 structures have been added to the display and others are currently being considered.

The 12-acre representation of the ranching business's progress has one main purpose: to allow its viewers a look at the age of pioneers, bold traditions, and the cowboy — America's most illustrious folk hero.
Memories . . .

With Dr. W. C. Holden

Dr. William Curry Holden has been like a torchbearer for the West Texas region. Scholar, historian, author, archeologist, anthropologist, teacher and museum director — Holden is a man who has worn many different hats during his lifetime.

His contributions to the people of the South Plains are numerous. He has written many articles chronicling the history of the region. He was the driving force behind such projects as the Ranching Heritage Center, the Southwest Collection, the Texas Archeological and Paleontological Society and the West Texas Historical Association.

One of his major and more memorable accomplishments has been the development of the Museum at Texas Tech. In fact, the words "museum" and "Dr. Holden" are almost interchangeable, so closely related is one to the other.

If you had told Dr. Holden when he was a teenager that he would eventually be director of a museum, he would have thought you crazy. "I never had the slightest idea I would end up doing anything like this," Holden said.

Holden was one of the founding members of the Museum Association. He has watched the Museum evolve from an idea into a multi-million dollar complex.

Museums were virtually unknown to most people living in Texas during the 1900's. Most museums were found in large eastern cities, such as Chicago and New York City.

Boredom, male college students and chickens were the unlikely factors that led Holden to become involved with the first museum West Texas could claim.

Holden was a history professor at McMurry College in Abilene, where he also spent time as sponsor for a group of young men. Because of restricting rules, the men became restless and began stealing chickens from farmers. To remedy this problem, Holden devised a plan to keep the men busy and away from the farmers' chickens.
The plan was a museum. Holden and "his boys" renovated an old, one-room shack and crammed it full of "anything old."

Abilene was thrilled about their "new museum." When Lubbock heard of Abilene's success with a museum, they decided Holden was just the man to initiate their own museum.

So Holden was made a charter member of the Lubbock-based Plains Museum Society. The relationship has lasted 50 years. Holden has seen the Museum take every step of progress. Yet Holden admits that with the growth, there have also been "plenty of disappointments."

Holden has dedicated his time, his ideas and enthusiasm for 50 years. With men like Holden behind the Museum, the idea of the Museum shall never die.