

## 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's 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 atlatl, weapon launcher.
  - iv. The Coahuiltecs 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.
- c. “River Crossroads” 20<sup>th</sup> century gallery is in production and will be opening in the future.

As you leave the 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).

*We hope you have enjoyed your visit to the museum.*

*Thank you and come again soon.*