

The Texas Capitol

A Self-Guided Tour

Large Print Text Only Version of Brochure

The Texas Capitol anchors the four blocks that surveyors designated as Capitol Square in 1839. The first Capitol structure on this site was completed in 1853. The three story, limestone building measured 140 feet by 90 feet and cost approximately \$150,000 to construct. In early 1881, officials held a nationwide competition for the design of a grand new Capitol and declared Detroit architect Elijah E. Myers the winner. The 1853 Capitol went up in flames in November of 1881, and a temporary Capitol was built across the street from Capitol Square to house state government during construction of the new building. The ground-breaking ceremony was held on February 1, 1882. Three years later, builders had finished the foundation and basement walls, and the 12,000-pound cornerstone was laid on March 2, 1885. Workers completed the second floor walls by the end of 1886, installed a copper roof in 1887 and placed the zinc Goddess of Liberty statue on top of the dome in February of 1888. Dedicated in May and formally accepted by the end of the year, the Capitol measured over 566 feet by 288 feet and cost more than \$3.7 million to build.

For over a century, the Sunset Red granite Capitol has stood as a symbol of the legendary spirit of Texas. It is the seat of government...the place where Texans meet to enact laws for the state. To ensure its survival for future generations, the 1990-95 Texas Capitol Preservation and Extension Project returned the building to its 1888-1915 appearance and updated vital systems. To learn more about the appearance of certain areas of the building prior to the restoration, please visit the exhibits located throughout the historic Capitol that are marked with a {star graphic} on the floor plans.

1. South Foyer

Life-sized marble statues of Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston greet visitors upon entering the building. Sculptor Elisabet Ney unveiled them at this spot on January 19, 1903, and replicas were subsequently given to the national Capitol in Washington, D.C. The circa 1936 terrazzo floor commemorates twelve battles fought on Texas soil: at the Alamo, Anahuac, Bexar, Coleto, Galveston, Goliad, Gonzales, Palmito, Palo Alto, Sabine Pass, San Jacinto and Velasco. The two late nineteenth century, monumental paintings by Texas artist William Henry Huddle (1847-1892) are the Surrender of Santa Anna and David Crockett.

2. Treasurer's Business Office

Nearly a hundred years ago, legislators and state employees cashed their paychecks in this Treasury Department room which was considered the bank of Texas. Notice the doorway behind the security bars at the north end of the room; it leads to three vaults that housed the monies, securities and other legal tender of the state. The main room features many Capitol Historical Artifacts, including antique business machines that preceded modern calculators and computers. Today, the restored room houses the Capitol Information and Guide Service.

3. Rotunda and Dome

The terrazzo floors on the first level, including the rotunda's Great Seal surrounded by the six seals of the countries whose flags have flown over Texas, were installed to celebrate the 1936 Texas Centennial. Portraits of the Presidents of the Republic and Governors of the State circle the four public levels of the rotunda. The marble bust of Miriam Ferguson, the first female Governor of Texas, was sculpted by Enrico Cerracchio (1880-1956). The star, in the dome approximately 218 feet above, was installed in 1958 and measures eight feet from point to point. For accessibility and safety reasons, the dome is not open for tours.

4. Agricultural Museum

Soon after the Capitol opened, the Legislature set aside this room to display the state's agricultural products.

The Agriculture Department once used the old scientific instruments that are now featured in the antique Capitol bookcases and horizontal display cases. The food stuffs on display all were grown within the state. Note the modern glass partition system that allows visitors to see the original architecture of the entire space, even into the conference area on the east side of the room. The six-legged table located on the west side of the room is the largest original table in the Capitol Collection. The original wooden Capitol furniture was provided by the A. H. Andrews Company of Chicago, one of the largest dealers in the United States at that time.

5. Secretary of State's Private Office

The Secretary of State works in this historic office, so public touring is not possible. Please visit the exhibit case outside this suite of offices to learn more about the room's appearance nearly a century ago. Next, climb the monumental stairs near the rotunda or take an elevator in the north or south wings to the second floor.

6. Senate Chamber

Thirty-one senators meet here during Texas legislative sessions to work with the House of Representatives enacting the laws of the state. The Lieutenant Governor's original walnut desk is located in front of a reproduction drapery treatment and a mid-nineteenth century portrait of Stephen F. Austin by an unknown artist. Two large paintings by noted early Texas artist Henry Arthur McArdle (1836-1908) anchor the west side of the room. Neither Dawn at the Alamo or the Battle of San Jacinto show absolute historical fact but rather a sweeping view of two important battles in the history of Texas.

7. Governor's Public Reception Room

Like a Victorian parlor, this room is a formal meeting place. But people are also welcome to visit and see the antique furnishings and artwork. Original pieces include the pedestals, mirror, chandelier, large marble-topped table and the S-shaped sofa. When exiting, stop by the exhibit cases along the east wall of the corridor. One case describes the Governor's original private office on the first floor of the building. A member of the Governor's senior staff now offices there, so touring is not permitted.

8. House of Representatives Chamber

This chamber is the largest room in the building. The 150 members of the House of Representatives work with the Senate to enact the laws of the state. The only textile in the Capitol Historical Artifact collection hangs behind the Speaker's desk: the flag from the 1836 Battle of San Jacinto. Other artwork in the room includes the first native Texas governor James Stephen Hogg by Freeman Thorp, the Settlement of Austin's Colony by Henry Arthur McArdle and Sam Houston by William Henry Huddle. Upon exiting the east side of the Chamber, take the monumental stairs or elevators to the third floor, north wing of the building.

9. Legislative Reference Library

From the balustrade surrounding the atrium, peer down into the Legislative Reference Library, the repository for materials related to the Texas legislature. This working library, once a division of the State Library, features some unusual artifacts including the desk-like chair along the north wall. This chair was supposedly used by Santa Anna during his Texas campaigns. Also note the carpeted floor below. The original floor was linoleum but present-day library officials preferred a quieter material, so the design and color of the historical linoleum were reproduced in carpet during the Capitol Restoration Project.

10. Supreme Court Courtroom

This room served as the core of the Texas judicial system from 1888 to 1959, when the court moved to its own building northwest of the Capitol. Now used as a meeting room, its original importance is reflected in the walnut furnishings, the elaborate drapery treatment and the fine wool carpet. The Latin inscription on the judges' bench means "Just as to our fathers, may God be to us." The three nearby portraits of Abner Lipscomb, John Hemphill and Royal Wheeler are among the earliest portraits in the collection. These justices were the first to serve the Supreme Court after state annexation in 1846.

11. Court of Criminal Appeals Courtroom

The Court of Appeals had occupied this space for only three years when the Texas constitution was amended in 1891 to split the duties of the court into criminal and civil branches. The Court of Criminal Appeals held its hearings here until 1959 when it moved to a new building. Historically, this room received less elaborate decoration when compared to the Supreme Court Courtroom. However, many of the room's oak furnishings, including the public seating and curved attorneys' table, match the walnut versions across the hall. Take the north wing elevators to the ground floor/basement rotunda.

12. Ground Floor Rotunda

By the 1980s, the ground floor resembled a maze with narrow hallways. Today, it better reflects its original architectural appearance. When standing at the ground floor rotunda, look up and note the glass blocks. The first floor rotunda above originally featured glass blocks in an octagonal design; these were replaced in 1936 with terrazzo flooring. During the restoration project, a "veneer" of new glass blocks was installed on the ground floor ceiling to represent the original glass floor from the ground while maintaining the terrazzo floor above. The ground level, with its concrete flooring, low ceiling and simple decoration, was originally intended as storage space. Next, leave the north wing, either through the wooden doors and down the two sets of stairs, or take the elevator to the Extension (E1).

13. Capitol Extension

Before the historic Capitol could be restored, the occupant overcrowding problem was solved by completing the underground Capitol Extension in 1993. In addition to office spaces for Senate and House of Representatives members, the Extension also contains a bookstore, cafeteria, hearing rooms, auditorium and two levels of parking for Capitol staff. Outside the cafeteria, note the reverse of the State Seal in terrazzo one level below. Surrounding are portrait busts of many individuals important to Texas history. To exit this building, either retrace your path into the Capitol or take one of the two elevators near the open-air rotunda to the north grounds.

Hours

The Texas Capitol is open weekdays from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. and weekends from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Hours are subject to change. Please call 512.463.0063 for extended hours during legislative sessions which occur for 140 days every odd numbered year beginning the second Tuesday in January.

Tours

The Capitol Information and Guide Service is open weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and weekends from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The helpful guides furnish information and conduct free 30-45 minute tours of the building. Capitol tours are conducted every day except Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Day and Easter. Tours are given during the following hours:

Monday through Friday:	8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Saturday:	9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Sunday:	Noon - 3:30 p.m.

Visitors Center

The Capitol Visitors Center, located on the southeast corner of the historic grounds, introduces visitors to the Capitol Complex through interactive exhibits and two digital video presentations, "Beyond the Dome" and "XIT-A Capitol Deal". A large Texas gift shop, free and open daily, also is featured. Groups of ten or more are encouraged to make advance tour reservations by calling the Visitors Center at 512.305.8400. For Texas travel information, please call 512.463.8586.

Legislative Sessions

The Capitol is very busy during legislative sessions. Parking is available at the Capitol Visitors Garage located at 12th and San Jacinto Streets, however, the building is crowded and access to certain areas is restricted. Usually only the galleries of the legislative chambers are available for touring during session.

Guidelines for Visitors

Please do not touch the furnishings, paintings and statues. Photography is allowed throughout the Capitol, Extension and grounds except as noted. While inside, tour groups must remain orderly and speak quietly. One adult chaperone is required for every ten students. Food and beverages are not permitted while touring. The public is welcome to eat at the Capitol Extension cafeteria or picnic on the Capitol grounds.