



The Palo Alto Gazette

Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site

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500,000 Reasons to be Thankful

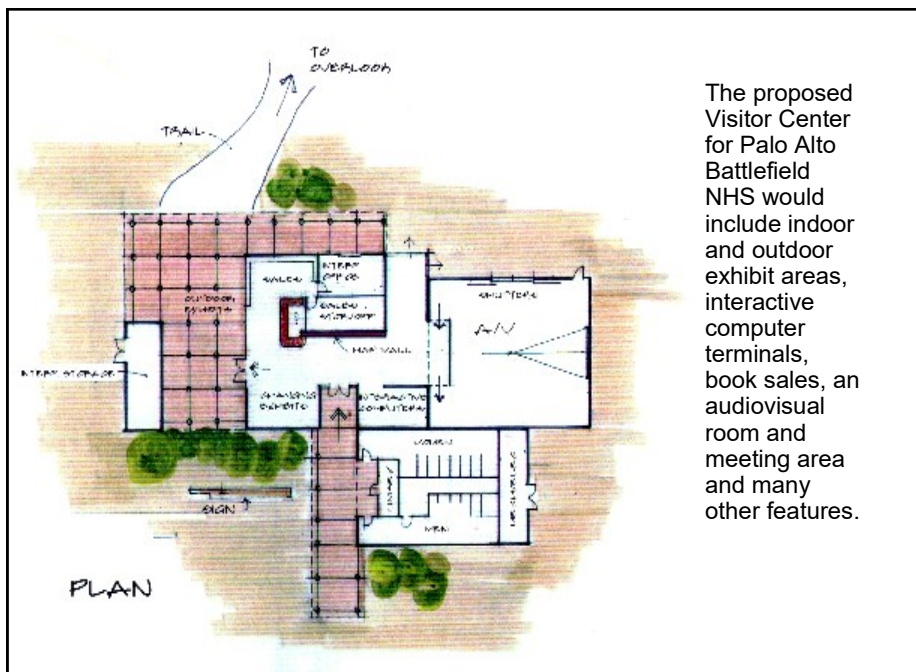
Funding received for on-site development

A \$500,000 grant from the Houston Endowment will allow the park to take the initial steps toward construction of permanent facilities at the park. The grant was awarded during the November meeting of the Houston Endowment in Houston, Texas.

The grant comes in response to a request made on behalf of the park by Mary Yturria, the City of Brownsville and the Brownsville Community Foundation. In the proposal known as the "Brownsville Palo Alto Initiative," these partners requested \$2.5 million dollars to fund the entire visitor center complex as proposed in the park's General Management Plan and Development Concept Plan.

The \$500,000 represents a significant step toward achieving park goals. The Brownsville Palo Alto Initiative partners plan to approach other foundations and funding sources to encourage them to participate in the visitor center project. It is anticipated that the show of support by the Houston Endowment as well as by the Brownsville community will produce a positive response to these requests.

It is important to note that the Houston Endowment's decision not to fund the entire project did not represent a lack of confidence in the proposal. To the contrary, the Endowment



The proposed Visitor Center for Palo Alto Battlefield NHS would include indoor and outdoor exhibit areas, interactive computer terminals, book sales, an audiovisual room and meeting area and many other features.

Board of Directors noted that it did not generally fund projects

outside of the Houston area and that the willingness to offer one half million dollars represented a strong show of support for the park and its goals.

(See, Endowment, p. 5)

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Palo Alto Acquires Important Land Tract

On February 9, 2000, Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site achieved a milestone when it received title to an additional 583 acres of land within the designated park boundary. The purchase more than doubles the expanse of property previously managed by the park and allows the National Park Service to protect 1139 of the 3,400 acres set aside for Palo Alto. More importantly, for the first time, the park owns land at the heart of the Palo Alto battlefield. The property encompasses the site of many of the most important maneuvers and actions of the 1846 battle.

The tract has also been designated as a primary area for visitation. Under the guidelines set forth in the park's General Management Plan, this area will contain an overlook, trails, and interpretive markers. The park has already started detailed planning on these projects and it is expected that construction of the trail and overlook will begin as early as Fall 2000.

In the meantime, the park staff will attempt to provide access to visitors as quickly as possible. The park has already scheduled a number of tour groups and school programs on the site and will explore other ways to open the area to the public.

The acquisition of this tract of land also allows the park to begin efforts to restore the natural environment. Since 1846, ranching and farming

activity has changed the look of Palo Alto: the resaca, used as a water source during the battle, is now dry; portions of the prairie have been overtaken by mesquite and cactus, and much of the tall grass that once covered the field is gone.

The park's Division of Resource Management has developed plans for reviving much of the scenery encountered by soldiers. In the coming months, the park will move ahead with a variety of projects to restore portions of the resaca and prairie, remove fences and other intrusions, and recreate an environment that closely approximates the appearance of the battlefield at the time of the 1846 clash.



Hugh Duffy and Jac Roberson of the NPS Denver Service Center stake out part of the planned trail system for Palo Alto.

Park Receives Newspaper Collection

Palo Alto's archival collections have benefited recently from the generosity of an enthusiastic collector. In recent months, Rene Torres, a resident of Brownsville, has donated a number of historic newspapers to the park.

Most of the newspapers date from the 1846-1847 period and contain information about maneuvers and activities of the U.S.-Mexican War. Several of the publications, including runs of the Cleveland Herald and the Massachusetts Spy are difficult to find and contain valuable regional perspectives on the war.

Torres first began collecting newspapers several years ago. While at a flea market, he spied several old editions with pictures and articles about Brownsville and Matamoros and a passion was born. Since that time, he has expanded his collection by scouring flea markets, antique shops, internet sales areas, and any other outlets where papers might be found for sale.

He offered his collection to Palo Alto simply because he believed that the information might be useful to the research and interpretive mission of the park.

The park will use the donated items in several ways. While the first concern will be for preservation of the papers, they will be an important addition to the park's research archive. Many of the newspapers are in extremely good condition and of display quality. These may be included in future exhibits and interpretive presentations.

What's Eating Us?

Palo Alto Acts to protect yuccas and other plants

The abundance of yuccas on the Palo Alto Battlefield has recently blossomed into a troublesome resource protection issue. As springtime approaches and the plants have begun to bloom, staff has been confronted with a growing number of people entering the park for the purpose of collecting the large heads of flowers.

Although these flowers are quite striking in appearance, the white blossoms are primarily sought after

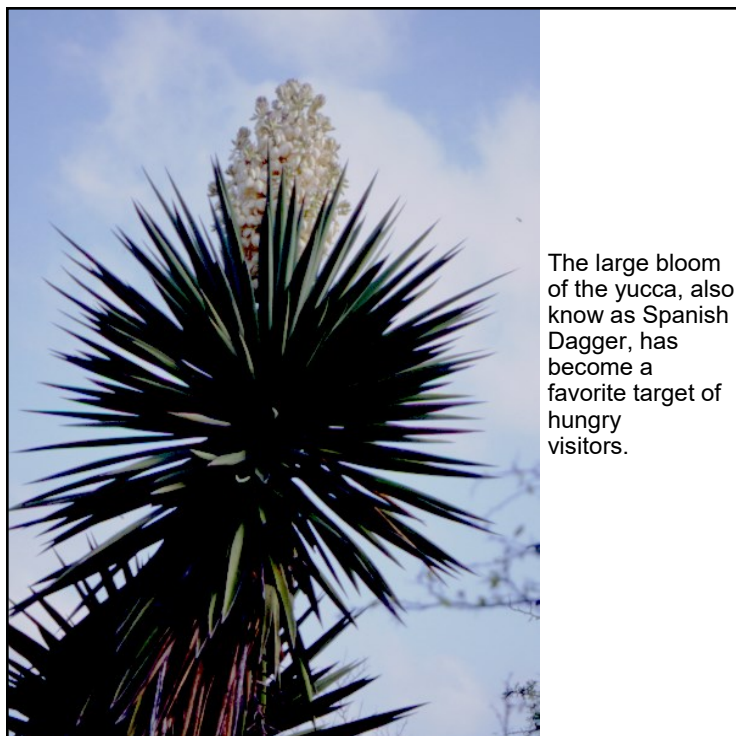
for their flavor. The petals are a traditional South Texas springtime delicacy, often served fresh in salads or sometimes sautéed with nopalitas, onions, and other ingredients.

Cutting of the flower head does not harm the plant, but the methods used to harvest have posed a problem. In

several cases, scavengers seeking to collect some of the blooms have trampled other plants and produced some permanent damage. On at least one occasion, someone knocked over and destroyed a yucca while trying to reach its flowers.

In response to this damaging activity, the park has increased patrols and had discussions with a number of the collectors. The

individuals who have been doing the collecting. These collectors are generally local citizens who were unaware that the cutting of plants within the park boundaries is a federal offense. The park has taken a proactive approach while informing these visitors of the rules and regulations and the consequences of repeated violations. The park staff will continue to educate visitors and will enforce all applicable rules



The large bloom of the yucca, also known as Spanish Dagger, has become a favorite target of hungry visitors.

and regulations. Palo Alto has a variety of options at its disposal to ensure that its natural and cultural resources are properly protected. This may include a \$500 fine and/or up to six months in prison for any individual who harms or destroys the plants and animal life found within the park.

Palo Alto has been selected as a pilot park for the National Park

Spreading the Message

Service "Messaging Project".

The program is an effort by the Service to present the American public with a clear view of the NPS preservation and public service mission.

The goal of this project is to demonstrate that each park is an important component of the entire 379-unit National Park system and to better inform the American public about the unique natural and cultural areas to be found within this system. The first step toward achieving this goal is to develop media styles and standards that are consistent and recognizable throughout the Service.

As Palo Alto develops it will assume a lead role in defining the designs that will become the norm for other National Park Service sites. All aspects of park communication, from pamphlets and entrance signs to the design of the *Palo Alto Gazette* will become models for other parks to follow in coming years. Much of this process will center around emphasizing the use of the NPS arrowhead and the trademark black band on all park communications.

The selection of Palo Alto as a pilot park is intended to benefit the entire Service, but it is also an important opportunity for the park. As one of seven pilot programs nationwide, Palo Alto will be receiving guidance and support with the development of pamphlets, videos, interactive computer programs, park signs, posters, wayside exhibits, and many other forms of public outreach.

News and Notes

New Directional Signs

Motorists in the City of Brownsville now have some help finding Palo Alto. In January, a series of directional signs were installed at key intersections in the city, pointing the way to the National Historic Site. The signs were purchased by the park and installed by the Texas Department of Transportation. The park plans to erect additional signs in the coming months.

Park Awaits New



One of the park's new signs guides motorists to the Palo Alto site.

Staff Member

Palo Alto will receive a valuable addition when Luis Krug joins the park's staff in April.

Luis will be transferring from Padre Island National Seashore in Corpus Christi. He will serve as the park's resource protection or law enforcement ranger.

In this position, Luis will devote a great deal of time to patrolling park property and enforcing

regulations against hunting, illegal collecting, dumping, as well as attempting to put an end to the recent assault on the park's yuccas (see p. 3). He will also be responsible for developing the park's protection policies and will coordinate efforts with other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies in the area.

Football Exhibit a Success

Some laughed, some shrugged, some did not know what to think, but many who

viewed Palo Alto's display at the Brownsville Public Library responded.

The exhibit, entitled "A War For Football?" focused on the relationship between the U.S.-Mexican War and that passion of modern Texas: football.

At one level, the presentation offered some fun trivia and some very circuitous links between the sport and an oft-forgotten war. For example, Quarterback Joe Montana started his

football career at Monongahela, Pennsylvania's Ringgold High School—a school named for Major Samuel Ringgold who commanded the U.S. artillery in the battle of Palo Alto.

More importantly, the display was intended to serve as a promotion of the park and a tool to encourage library patrons to visit the park's interim visitor center.

The project appears to have been a success on both counts. In the two months that the display occupied the foyer of the library, it is estimated that more than two thousand patrons stopped to view the information. Moreover, in the first few weeks that the exhibit was in place, more than three dozen visitors directly stated that the display motivated their interest in the park.

The apparent success of the display has encouraged the park's Division of Interpretation & Visitor Services to move forward with similar projects, including a display intended to attract the interest of nature enthusiasts and one directed toward Winter Texans.

Schools Programs Continue

Palo Alto has continued to build on its successful education program. Throughout the fall of 1999, Park Ranger Karen Weaver conducted more than 70 programs that reached over 1,000 school children in the Brownsville area. Many of the programs involve intensive activities that provide each student individual attention and hands-on experience with historical props and artifacts.

Any educator interested in participating in Palo Alto's school programs should contact Karen Weaver at (956) 541-2785 x232.

A Word From The Superintendent



We are making significant progress in our efforts to secure funding for the park's visitor center and trail system. The generous grant received from

the Houston Endowment is but one example of the support that exists in providing facilities at the park. Special thanks go to Mary Yturria, Richard and Christy Burton and the City of Brownsville.

The recent acquisition of a 583 acre tract will allow for the construction of a trail and overlook on the northern core portion of the battlefield. An offer was made to acquire a 275 acre tract which contains the southern core battlefield area.

As we acquire designed tracts within the authorized boundary of the park, we must assess and identify methods to protect the resources found on the property.

Upon arrival, our new protection ranger, Luis Krug, will assist in developing the park's resource and visitor protection program.

Palo Alto is experiencing an increase in the collection of yucca flowers. This theft denies visitors the opportunity to view and enjoy an important part of our local landscape. If a visitor observes an individual collecting any item from the park, they are asked to notify park staff. Our natural and cultural resources belong to all of us and we have a duty to protect them for the benefit of current and future generations to come.

As we aggressively move forward to accomplish our operational interests, I want to take this opportunity to commend my staff for the accomplishments that they have made for you and Palo Alto. With little fanfare, they helped to keep the vehicles and operation running, developed fire and resource protection plans, produced and presented programs for Brownsville ISD students and

community organizations, provided technical assistance to historic preservation projects occurring within our community, designed and developed directional brochures and exhibits, performed trail rehabilitation and litter pick-up, and a host of other important activities. These dedicated professionals include: Oralia Fernandez (Administrative Officer), Doug Murphy (Chief, Interpretation & Visitor Services), Aaron Mahr (Historian/Chief of Resource Management), Karen Weaver (Park Ranger) and Jesse Camarillo (Volunteer).

This is the first edition of The Palo Alto Gazette for the new millenium. Therefore, I want to take this opportunity to thank you and all of our partners for your support over the years. With a dedicated staff and your continued support, Palo Alto's future will continue to be bright and full of promise!

David Vela

Endowment (Continued from p. 1)

The grant also reflected the active participation of Brownsville philanthropist Mary Yturria, who has served in a leading role in the efforts to develop the park and to advance the National Park Service mission at Palo Alto.

As the park and its partners continue to pursue funds for construction of a visitor center complex, activity continues on a number of other fronts. A project is already underway to rehabilitate portions of the core battlefield and resaca system.

Likewise, park staff and landscape architects from the NPS Denver Service Center have already started designing the first mile-long phase of the park's proposed trail system and an associated battlefield overlook. In the near future, this trail will provide visitors with a view of the northern core portion of the battlefield. The park is also designing the markers that will provide orientation, safety messages, and historical information to visitors who will use the interpretive trails and overlooks.



The Palo Alto Gazette is a publication of Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site.

For Information contact:

Palo Alto Battlefield NHS
1623 Central Blvd, Rm 213
Brownsville, TX, 78520

Telephone
(956) 541-2785 x230

email
paal_interpretation@nps.gov

Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site
1623 Central Blvd., Suite 213
Brownsville, TX 78520

