



## **Friends of the San Jacinto Battleground**

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*BATTLEGROUND LISTED AMONG TEXAS' MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES FOR 2010*

### **FRIENDS OF THE SAN JACINTO BATTLEGROUND LAUNCHES INITIATIVE TO RESTORE 1836 NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK “SAVE THE SAN JACINTO BATTLEGROUND FUND”**

**AUSTIN, TEXAS (February 4, 2010)**— Two announcements made here today, Preservation Day 2010, may mark the turning point in protecting the future of the San Jacinto Battleground, a State Historic Site and National Historic Landmark located near Houston. The site commemorates the decisive battle of San Jacinto that was fought on April 21, 1836 between Sam Houston’s Texas army and a division of the Mexican army under Santa Anna. San Jacinto, the most important battle in Texas history, is the place where the Texas army defeated Santa Anna and won Texas independence from Mexico.

This morning on the steps of the Texas State Capitol, the San Jacinto Battleground was named among seven sites (the only one in Harris County) to the list of *2010 Texas’ Most Endangered Historic Places*. The selection was made by Preservation Texas, Inc., a statewide partner of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

“The landscape is all that remains of this important historic site, and without a comprehensive preservation plan that respects the historic integrity of the entire site, its future is at risk,” stated Susan Lassell, president of Preservation Texas.

The Friends of the San Jacinto Battleground, a volunteer support and advocacy group for the site, nominated the battlefield for the *Endangered Historic Places* designation.

“Texans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century considered the San Jacinto battlefield “hallowed ground” and “sacred soil,” said Friends’ President Jan DeVault. “The acreage that the state purchased between 1883 and 1909 became the first Texas state park.”

During the ceremony, Friends President Jan DeVault announced the launch of a \$1 million statewide campaign to purchase and rehabilitate a 19-acre tract located outside the state-owned area, but within the battlefield. The Friends’ immediate goal is to raise \$625,000 by June 1, 2010, to acquire this property, now owned by the estate of late Houston attorney John O’Quinn, to protect it from recently proposed development and industrial encroachment.

DeVault introduced the campaign under the name of “SAVE THE SAN JACINTO BATTLEGROUND FUND,” in recognition of the fact that this 19-acre tract is one of several scattered tracts of land outside the state-owned property that shape the landscape of the battlefield and should be protected as part of the battlefield rather than paved over.

“Recent archeological surveys and archival research have confirmed that the battlefield extends into several areas outside the state-owned historic site. Our goal is to acquire as much of the original battlefield as possible,” she said, “so that San Jacinto will rank among the finest preserved battlefield landscapes in America.”

DeVault added that threats to the integrity of San Jacinto Battleground are similar to encroachment threats experienced in recent years at such notable Civil War battlefields as Gettysburg, Manassas, and The Wilderness. “There is no reason why Texans can’t work to save their own premier Texas Revolution battle site from the same kind of threats,” she said.

Foremost among these threats at San Jacinto is a workforce development center recently proposed on the 19-acre property by the Port of Houston, San Jacinto Community College, the Economic Alliance of the Port Region, and others. “We do not oppose the construction of this facility,” said DeVault, “but we do oppose its construction on land that will result in additional senseless encroachment on the battlefield’s landscape.”

### **Significance of the Property**

Located on Buffalo Bayou between the 1836 Texas Army camp site and Lynchburg Ferry, the 19-acre tract contains portions of the historic Harrisburg-Lynchburg Road. In 1836 this route was used in March and early April by thousands of civilians escaping the Mexican army in the episode known as the Runaway Scrape. On April 16, Santa Anna’s cavalry took this route to the ferry in an attempt to secure the crossing for the advancing Mexican army. The cavalry reached the ferry and turned south to seize supplies at New Washington (now Morgan’s Point), eight miles away. Santa Anna and his infantry joined the cavalry at New Washington two days later in preparation for the army’s return to the ferry crossing.

On April 18, Sam Houston’s spies captured a Mexican courier who told the Texans of Santa Anna’s position. Houston also learned that Santa Anna would be attempting to return to the ferry to cross the San Jacinto River. In a rapid march, the Texas army left camp opposite the town of Harrisburg and marched east, on the south side of Buffalo Bayou, crossing this 19-acre tract and reaching the ferry on the morning of April 20. The Texans seized the ferry landing, captured a Mexican flatboat coming up the river from New Washington, witnessed “tories” across the river who had arrived to escort Santa Anna, and established a camp on Buffalo Bayou. These maneuvers intercepted and blocked Santa Anna’s march to the ferry and resulted in the start of a two-day engagement culminating in the famous Texan charge during the afternoon of April 21 that led to Santa Anna’s defeat.

According to noted author and award-winning Texas Revolution historian Dr. James E. Crisp, Associate Professor of History at North Carolina State University, “The actions of April 20, including the arrival of Houston’s army at the Lynchburg Ferry, the capture of the supply boat intended for Santa Anna and the Mexicans, and the return of the Texas army to the camp where they prepared for the skirmishes on the 20<sup>th</sup> and the climactic battle of the 21<sup>st</sup> are, without question, critical parts of the two-day confrontation between the two armies, and their locations should be considered integral to the battle that is celebrated on this site. The historical importance of these sites, in conjunction with the Battle of San Jacinto, is beyond question.”

DeVault also stated: “The confluence of Buffalo Bayou and the San Jacinto River, the historic Harrisburg-Lynchburg Road, and the landscape of marshes and woods along this route determined the outcome of the battle of San Jacinto. All of the associated land, and not merely the state-owned property, should be preserved so future generations of Texans will be able to visualize, appreciate and understand this battle and how it took place. The 19-acre tract that we are attempting to purchase is the centerpiece of the corridor that needs to be protected.”

“Additionally, the property to be purchased is one of the last remaining natural wildlife environments on the Houston Ship Channel,” DeVault noted. “The area needs more green-space, not less.”

Goals for the property include its rehabilitation consistent with the restoration of the biological and ecological value of the area. Reconstruction of the natural setting will restore animal habitats, a tidal marsh, riparian forest, coastal prairie, and, potentially, a freshwater wetland.

“Time is of the essence to save this property,” DeVault stated. “Donations of any amount will be most gratefully received and are important in defining this cause as a statewide preservation effort led by concerned citizens.”

To contribute to SAVE THE SAN JACINTO BATTLEGROUND FUND, contact Jan DeVault, Friends of the San Jacinto Battleground, 720 Houston Club Building, 811 Rusk St., Houston, Texas 77002, (713) 237-8997. All contributions to the Friends of the San Jacinto Battleground qualify as tax deductible charitable contributions in accordance with the Internal Revenue Code.

On-line contributions and pledges are encouraged at [www.friendsofsanjacinto.org](http://www.friendsofsanjacinto.org)

San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site is a National Historic Landmark located in La Porte, 22 miles east of downtown Houston. The threats to the battlefield’s integrity and future, both within and outside the state-owned site, include lack of adequate funding for interpretation and rehabilitation, environmental concerns and industrial encroachment from nearby Houston Ship Channel industries, and incompatible development and proposed construction projects.

The San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site is owned by the State of Texas and managed on behalf of the state by Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. The Department acknowledged long-term threats to the battlefield when the Parks and Wildlife Commission approved a Master Plan in 1998 that aims to restore the state-owned Site to its 1836 appearance. The Friends of the San Jacinto Battleground supports the preservation mission of the Department, but is independent of the Department and not an affiliated or nonprofit partner of the state agency.

**The Friends of the San Jacinto Battlefield is a Section 501(c)(3) Texas nonprofit organization and is the operating name for San Jacinto Battleground Association. Founded in 2002, the all-volunteer organization receives funding support solely from membership fees, grants and donations. The mission of the Friends is to preserve, protect and reclaim San Jacinto Battleground and promote historical scholarship, archeology, commemoration and public understanding of the battle of San Jacinto and the events of the Texas Revolution period.**

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