Commissioner Steve Radack and his staff at Cypress Top encourage you to reflect upon March 1836’s importance in Texas History. March 2nd Celebrates Texas Independence Day, while March 6th remembers those lost fighting at the Alamo. March contained both tragedy and triumph, and plays a major role in shaping the Texas we know today.

We are further reminded of our roots each year with the passing of the trail ride through old Cypress at the Park’s doorstep. The riders are destined for the annual Rodeo Parade in downtown Houston. The first ride, the Salt Grass Trail Ride, began in 1953 and passed through old Cypress. In our collections are some photos of that trail ride in February 1958. The trail ride that passed through this year is the Prairie View Trail Ride. The trails have expanded and grown so that today the various groups take several routes to town. However, one or more drives have passed through old Cypress ever since 1953. It is always nostalgic to watch the riders pass.
On Friday, January 24th, the **Cypress Top History bus trip** travelled to the Texas State Historical Commission’s Varner-Hogg Plantation in West Columbia and in the afternoon looked at historical markers in Old Freeport and Quintana. This trip occurred too late to include in the February newsletter. With the multiple buildings and abundant history at Varner-Hogg, our hour and half tour only skimmed the surface of the beautiful site. One could certainly spend an entire day touring the buildings, taking in the history, and checking out the gift shop. Only 66 acres today, the land originated as a 4,000-plus acre land grant issued to the Varner family by Stephen F. Austin. While Varner owned a small handful of slaves on the site, it became a classic “old south plantation” under the ownership of the Patton family. Over the 30 years of ownership, close to 100 enslaved people worked various jobs throughout the property. They worked mainly as servants in the home or harvesting and refining the sugar grown on the property. The tour started with a detailed history and glimpse at the Varner-Hogg home. Knowledgeable guides spoke about the different families that occupied the home (Varner, Patton, and Hogg) and their role in shaping the site into what we know today. The Hogg Family made many renovations to the home during their ownership, one example being the large pillars in the front of the home, meant to emulate the famous Mount Vernon. They certainly add a sense of distinction to the home.

The tour continued into the kitchen area, a building branching off from the main home. Having a separate kitchen was a common practice to protect the main home structure in case of a kitchen fire. On display near the entrance to the kitchen is a painted portrait of the Head Chef, Ike Rhodes. Many interesting items and pieces of furniture stood out while exploring the kitchen. One table looked particularly intriguing as it had what looked like a trough at the bottom. In fact, this piece was used for baking. The trough at the bottom held bread dough and allowed it to properly rise. A piece of fine china also stood out as especially unusual. It was painted to depict the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The Hogg family seemed keenly interested in the Founding Fathers.
Another building, despite appearing fairly plain and simple on the outside, housed one of the most fascinating exhibits. The exhibit explored the lives of some of the slaves living on the Patton’s Plantation. Different panels throughout the building examined the daily lives of the slaves and their lingering impact on the site to this day. As you walked through the rooms, field songs and chants played over speakers, providing an emotional connection as you read about the hardships these people faced. Some original bricks from the home lay exposed and open to touch. On one of the bricks, you could even see the fingerprint of the slave who made it. Life-sized cardboard cutouts of slaves doing various jobs and activities were placed around the museum, further immersing you in the experience.
In addition to slavery, the exhibits also addressed the impact of the oil industry. Just across the hall in the same building, a large room housed detailed pictures and panels about oil in West Columbia. While slavery had played a crucial role in the site since its beginning in the 1820s, the oil boom did not occur until much later. The Hogg Family took over the property in 1901. The patriarch, former Governor James Stephen Hogg, insisted oil was there and had his children promise to remain on the property until it was discovered. It turns out he was right. In 1917, over 15 years after purchasing the property, the Hogg's struck oil. The family made millions of dollars in a little over one month.

The next stop on the trip was to On the River restaurant in Freeport. Everyone enjoyed a delicious lunch before continuing to look for historical markers in Quintana. The marker was found for Old Quintana, a thriving village and seaport from 1532 to 1900. Nothing remains as the village was destroyed in the 1900 hurricane. While observing the marker from the bus,
excerpts from the 1838 diary of Mary Austin Holly’s provided extra information about the village. She was Stephen F. Austin’s cousin who visited Texas several times in the 1830s. Photocopies of maps and drawings were handed out as passages were read over the bus PA system. A quick stop at the Quintana Bird Sanctuary allowed passengers to stretch their legs and take in the view. Some even journeyed to the top of a birding tower for pictures. Near Quintana Town Hall, the historical marker for the Quintana Cemetery was discovered. One of the oldest surviving tombstones there dates back to 1851, while the most recent burials occurred in 1942.
Signing Up for Senior History Bus Trips (Must be at least 50 years old to go on these trips)

You may sign up for:

The March 14 trip is now waitlisted. You may sign up for the waitlist for this trip to History Center in Diboll and The Texas Forestry Museum in Lufkin. There are no history trips scheduled for April. The May trip will be on May 15 to a destination yet to be determined.

Sign up for future trips by emailing cypresstop@pct3.hctx.net or calling (281) 357-5324. You may only sign up yourself plus one friend/spouse. No multiple reservations. You will get a confirmation e-mail a week before the trip if you have a seat.

Cypress Top Historic Park is open seven days a week from 7:00 a.m. to dusk. The buildings are open Tuesdays through Thursdays from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. Formal tours of the museum complex led by CHS volunteers begin from Juergen’s Store at 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. each Tuesday. However, our staff and volunteers are happy to have you visit the store anytime while we are there to give you an impromptu tour of any of the buildings. **Group (6 or more) tours may be booked Tuesdays through Saturdays between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.** Group tours are subject to staff availability, so we recommend you make reservations at least one month in advance. The park and museum buildings are open to all and, as with all events offered at Cypress Top Historic Park, admissions and tours are free.

Juergen’s Hall is a community center, offering many activities and classes for all ages. Please check the Precinct Three website at [www.pct3.com](http://www.pct3.com) for hours of operation and offerings of Juergen’s Hall Community Center.

Members of the Cypress Historical Society are in the Cypress Train Depot (bright yellow building) at Cypress Top Historic Park every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., and on the third Saturday of the month from noon to 3 p.m. They have a great deal of genealogy information on most early Cypress area families. Drop in and visit them when you are in the area.

The March and April calendars can be found on the Precinct Three website under activity calendars. Select from the drop down menu. [www.pct3.com](http://www.pct3.com).

A rose found at the Varner-Hogg Plantation. Photo by Brigid Burke.