WEBSITE REVIEWS

Museums of Port Isabel
(www.portisabelmuseums.com)
Accessed March 21, 2012

For those contemplating a visit to any of the three museums in the Port Isabel complex, the Museums of Port Isabel website is invaluable. Visitors easily navigate the site by either selecting one of the three main links at the top of the page or by selecting a link from the site index shown on the right side of the page. The website provides information about upcoming events, hours, locations, and a brief overview of the collections of the Port Isabel Historic Museum, the Treasures of the Gulf Museum, and the Point Isabel Lighthouse. Specifics about events and programs at the museum, such as Lighthouse Market Day, Queen Isabella Market Day, Telling Our Stories, and Lighthouse movies are accessed directly from the site index. Persons interested in participating in the events sponsored by the Museum will find links to pages concerning vendor applications and vendor maps, and guidelines for Day of the Dead altar submissions.

While the website is useful for vacation and event planning, it is not a portal to in-depth historical coverage. Those looking for resources for scholarly study will not find them here. The website does not go into detail about the history of the collections beyond brief overviews and highlights of historic events, nor does it provide photographs of the collections or virtual tours of any kind. Bibliographies of resources for further study are also nonexistent. As for what you will find on the Facts! page, visitors see a long random list of historical dates and facts pertaining to the Port Isabel Museums, the Port Isabel Lighthouse, and the cities of Port Isabel, Laguna Madre, and Padre Island. Additionally, a page explaining the Dia de los Muertos holiday gives those unfamiliar with the event the basic significance and history of the celebration. For those interested in the museum’s history, the website devotes a page to the museum’s beginnings and its present day existence.

Information of particular interest to public historians includes the Historic District Design Guidelines, a history of the museum complex, and the meeting and contact information for both the Laguna Madre Museum Foundation and the Historic Preservation Board. The website also provides contact information and the professional background of the museum administrator, Jeannie Marie A. Flores. Other features worth noting include a Queen Isabella Market Day poster and a map of the El Paseo Hike and Bike Trail.

Wendy Thompson

Northeast Texas Digital Collection
(www.dmc.tamu-commerce.edu/edm)

This Texas A&M University-Commerce website contains a variety of primary sources from libraries, community museums, and historical associations located in the small towns around Commerce; it does not include resources on Dallas. The goal of this project was to preserve primary sources and provide the public with materials from 40 digitized collections.

When searching the database, keywords or phrases can be entered to narrow the results. Different collections can be accessed, but knowing what collection to browse can be confusing. Some categories are self-explanatory like African Americans, the Korean War, and World War II. To
navigate the site it helps to know the small towns, counties, and libraries in the area around Commerce.

The site provides a variety of content, including letters, pictures, and excerpts from theses, oral histories, scrapbooks, and memorabilia. While this is valuable information, the explanation is brief. Dates of pictures are given, but the website categorizes some pictures incorrectly. For example, pictures from World War II are included in the section on the Korean War. The site offers no explanation on their categorizing method.

The most interesting letter is entitled “A Slave by a Colored Man.” The explanation stated that this was a firsthand account of a slave’s experience with the Indians in Gainesville, Texas. The site names the creator, but it is unclear whether the creator is the author of the letter or the person who wrote the explanation.

Some of the primary sources available are spotty and unreadable. The site would benefit from the inclusion of typed copy to explain the fuzzier images. Maps are included and add an interesting variety to the site. The maps, including hand-drawn and painted maps, reflect different subjects and time periods.

A thesis collection is accessible for reading, but it only includes two works. Despite the small number of theses, this would be a valuable source of information to other students and researchers. With the ease of downloading information, theses and dissertations are easily accessible. When searching for information, the terms can be narrowed by format, date, creator, and subject.

The videotaped oral histories are particularly enjoyable. It is great to view the reaction and expressions of the interviewee; however, the site does not include a transcript of the interview, only key words of the subjects discussed. A category titled “Time Logged-Transcript” also appeared, but no explanation is given as to what this means.

This is a good site for preserving local history. The website might be improved by adding transcripts of oral histories, and more theses should be available for students and researchers. The website offers primary sources online and is a good beginning for any student, researcher, or anyone interested in local history. This would be a great project for those interested in making local history easily available.

Sharon Hill

East Austin Stories - Radio-Television-Film
(www.rtf.utexas.edu/eas)
Accessed March 26, 2012

As a project produced by the School of Communications at the University of Texas, East Austin Stories promotes interest in the diverse culture and history of the eastside neighborhoods of Austin. Organized through a class in the Radio Television Film (RTF) department, the site tells stories of the past and the present to create awareness of the community and to preserve those stories. Students in the university program and residents of the East Austin community create documentaries to tell unique stories specific to the area. Local screenings allow the students and the community to come together to view the documentaries. Through the production of these documentaries, the creators of East Austin Stories wish to create community interactions and educate outsiders about the area.

Simple to find, the website comes up first when searching “East Austin Stories” on a search engine. A clear association with the University of Texas exists, which provides the website and offers the class that produces the documentaries. Easily accessible, the website includes the names
of student directors, as well as contact information. Once on the site, the viewer can locate documentaries by titles, directors, subjects, people, and places. Historians do not always document community history well in minority communities. Many ethnic groups, including large Mexican American and African American populations, historically call East Austin home. Each of these groups brings its own cultural practices and contributions to the community creating a diverse atmosphere. The website itself notes that, “Nowhere is more rich in stories than East Austin, where colorful celebrations and tantalizing cuisines are a way of life” (East Austin Stories, 2012 front page heading).

The website creates a way to preserve the stories and history of this community in documentary form. Not only does this website provide a depository for storing community stories, but it also supplies a place for generations of future researchers to learn about the community. Public historians could use these documentaries as a starting point for further research. Cultural and recreational activities are some of the most explored themes on this website, and historians could conduct research to tie current practices to the history of the community. These stories are part of a larger historical and cultural context of the community and give insights into a distinct sense of place and memory.

A finding aid furnishing detailed information about exactly who and what is contained in the documentaries might prove useful to researchers. The website provides some historical background information about the East Austin community; however, more information could add a better understanding of the uniqueness of the area. Although not created by historians, this website contains immense potential for further research into East Austin.

Esther Rivera

The Edwards Aquifer Website – Barton Springs
(http://www.edwardsaquifer.net/barton.html)
Accessed March 31, 2012

Many consider Barton Springs, an outlet for artesian water from the Edwards Aquifer, to be the crown jewel of Austin’s cultural resources. Archeologists estimate that humans have occupied the region surrounding the springs for over 10,000 years; however, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Barton Springs played a particularly prominent historical role in the region as both an economic resource and a source of recreation. For a cultural resource to be meaningful, the resource must be placed within its historical context. To that end, public historians will find in the pages of the “Edwards Aquifer Website” a rich source of information about the important role that Barton Springs played in the history of Austin.

In addition to an examination of hydrology and conservation, the website includes a history of Barton Springs. The history begins with the archeological artifacts found in Zilker Park reflecting ancient human habitation. It tells the story of Billy Barton moving to the springs around 1837 and naming them for his daughters. It includes the reference to the springs by the commission charged with selecting a permanent seat of government for Texas in 1839; however, in making this connection to the establishment of Austin, the author avoids making wild claims about the importance of the springs to this decision. He makes no claims regarding the relationship of then-President Mirabeau B. Lamar to the site. The history explores the continuous relationship of Barton Springs and Zilker Park to Austin throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A casual look at the “Edwards Aquifer Website” might lead the reader to conclude that the site is maintained by the Edwards
Aquifer Authority, the governmental entity that manages the aquifer. That conclusion would be wrong. Gregg Eckhardt, “an environmental scientist who has been studying the Edwards Aquifer and issues surrounding it since 1972,” maintains the site. According to his online biography, Eckhardt created it in 1995 because he “perceived a need for internet based resources on the Edwards Aquifer that would be unbiased, educational, and non-technical.” A visit to the home page leaves no doubt about Eckhardt’s opinion of the importance of the aquifer to the region.

A searcher can easily find the website’s Barton Springs pages. A pull-down menu, centrally located on the home page, includes a link to the “Barton Springs” pages. The history is well-documented with a variety of references hyperlinked within the article, making them easy to access. The website also includes numerous pictures reflecting the uses of the springs through the years with links allowing enlargement of the images.

Barton Springs is a hydrological phenomenon inextricably linked to Austin. The “Edwards Aquifer Website” clearly places this cultural resource within its historical context, making it a valuable resource for public historians.

Teri E. Flack

Lift Every Voice: A Toolkit of Texas African American History
(http://www.utexas.edu/world/lifteveryvoice/index.html)
Accessed March 29, 2012

Lift Every Voice is a website intended for use by teachers, students, and scholars to help them educate and learn about African American history in Texas. The visually appealing site offers samples of oral histories, lesson plans for teachers of varying grade levels, a web resource guide, and essay writing tips. It also includes information on the annual Barbara Jordan Historical Essay Competition, which awards scholarships to grades nine through twelve students across Texas who write essays on African Americans in the state. With heavy emphasis on expanding the Civil Rights Movement from the pages of textbooks into eyewitness accounts and spoken narratives, the site stresses the importance of the untold descriptions of history of African Americans in Texas.

While it appears that Lift Every Voice began as a well-meaning home base for African American history, the upkeep is relatively poor outside of the Barbara Jordan essay competition. The section for oral histories only contains ten histories, but it explains a project through the University of Texas that collected the oral histories of hundreds of African American Texans. The lengthy explanation of the project completed years ago seems amiss because only a small percentage of those histories are available through the site, leading the viewer to believe that no new oral histories have been added since the site’s inception. Also, many of the links on the resource guide are discouragingly outdated. Additionally, there has been no revision of the archival resource portion since the set-up of the site, and in many of the collections it points historian scholars to websites which are no longer available or have been moved.

A useful site for educators, Lift Every Voice offers lesson plans for grades four through twelve. However, the majority of plans are intended for high-school level students. The plans are thorough and include several on the importance of oral history and techniques for capturing histories beyond the pages of a textbook. Neither topic is normally the focus of K-12 educators’ curriculum, so any of these lesson plans are extremely helpful to a teacher trying to explain these matters while generating student interest.

Although Lift Every Voice is not significantly helpful to the public history
scholar, it is a fantastic idea for linking students, scholars, and educators of African American Texas history. It was built on a solid foundation, but the website lacks important updates to make it as useful as it could be. With revisions to links, additional sources, and depth added to current information, this site would serve its initial purpose as a multifaceted resource for anyone interested in African American Texas history.

Sarah Marshall

**The National Archives Experience**  
([www.docsteach.org](http://www.docsteach.org))  
Accessed March 23, 2012

As part of the National Archives Experience program, the *DocTeach* website is an online educational resource for teachers. It is designed to help them create, use, and share educational activities centered on primary historical documents. The National Archives encourages educators to use primary sources in teaching history as a way to engage students in active, rather than passive, learning. They believe that primary document activities inspire students with diverse learning experiences that encourage subjective questioning and analytical interpretation in contrast to traditional school texts and lectures.

The homepage guides educators in three directions: create an original activity based on the use of primary sources; search ready-to-use activities; or search an online archive of primary documents. To create an original interactive learning activity, teachers can choose from seven tools based on different historical thinking skills. These skills reflect professional historian standards of practice, including historical interpretation and analysis, comprehension, connecting historical events across contexts, and research methodology. Teachers customize the tool by inserting primary documents from the website that fit in the historical context of their lesson. Educators are encouraged to register with the website and share the activities they created with the online community. The main page also links to interactive activities created by teachers in the network and by professionals associated with the National Archives. Teachers have the ability to modify ready-made activities by exchanging primary documents and altering the pre-written instructions associated with each lesson. The National Archives makes available thousands of documents spanning from colonial America to the present day.

The online archive allows teachers to search, browse, and print primary documents for use in the classroom. Further, students can learn from a range of types of resources, such as maps, images, videos, documents, and charts.

The website guides teachers at each stage in creating, customizing, and using interactive learning activities. The variety of options can be dizzying for new users. A brief tutorial video accessible from the homepage would alleviate some of this confusion. Overall, *DocTeach* is an invaluable resource for teachers because of the ability to create and tailor activities to suit a large variety of history lessons. This website could also be a helpful resource for museum educators as a way to engage visitors in exhibits. The National Archives’ purpose—to encourage students to engage and ask questions of the past—can extend beyond the classroom as the larger profession of public history seeks to engage in a historical dialogue with the public audience.

Bonnie Tipton Wilson