Honey, Ain’t You Glad We’re Texan: The Mythic Narrative of Texas in The Texas Centennial

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Abstract
The Texas Centennial Exposition in 1936, held in Dallas, was the first exposition of its kind in the state. Texas celebrated its 100th anniversary of independence from Mexico with a permanent Fair Grounds and a 176-day celebration. Focused on Texas history, the Centennial would be so large and important it would attract the attention of the rest of the nation. Texas history could then be utilized for advertisement, and also to communicate a Texas historical narrative. As such, the Centennial was important in not only celebrating Texas history and improving the economy, but also defining a Texan identity. In this paper, I expand current scholarship, examining the Texas Centennial and one of its focal points, the State of Texas Building. With the new scholarship on Texas identity and myth making, such as the new publication of *Lone Star Pasts*, I argue alongside Cummins that the Texas Centennial poses a significant shift in Texas identity. However, rather than the argument that Cummins proposes, crafting an idea of a Western Texas, I propose that the Centennial was used to encapsulate and perpetuate the Texas myth and identity. The acres of Dallas Fair Park came together to create an exposition that combined the large state population into one collective Texas identity. This mythic historical narrative is crafted by the emphasis placed on the State of Texas building and the murals within its different rooms. In conjunction with the ideas of Regionalism and the New Deal, visual narratives, and historical memory, this building serves as a case study for the new developments over mythical historical narrative in Texas.

Keywords
Texas Centennial — Texas History — Fair Park — New Deal

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Introduction
The Texas Centennial Exposition in 1936, held in Dallas, was the first exposition of its kind in the state. Texas celebrated its 100th anniversary of independence from Mexico with a permanent Fair Grounds and a 176-day celebration. The Texas Centennial gained traction at the Tenth District Convention of the Associated Advertising Clubs of America in conjunction with the Texas Press Association at Corsicana in 1923. The opening speech on November 5th was made by Theodore H. Price of New York City, an editor and publisher of the business weekly *Commerce and Finance*, but also an international authority on industry and finance, which led to his presence in Corsicana. Price, in his speech “What Texas Has to Advertise and How to Advertise It,” encouraged his Texas Press audience to explore new ideas and ways to advertise the state by looking at industry, agriculture, and tourism. As Price went on, he stated that “You have something else... it is your gloriously romantic history.” Price suggested an advertisement campaign that focused on Texas history, utilizing the upcoming 1936 Centennial as this new ‘idea’ of advertisement. Focused on Texas history, the Centennial would be so large and important it would attract the attention of the rest of the nation. Texas history could then be utilized for advertisement, and also to communicate a Texas historical narrative. The public attendance of this newly proposed Centennial would bring in revenue for Texas as well as raise awareness of Texas history throughout the nation. Price’s speech was notable as the origin of the Texas Centennial movement and for persuading Texans to share their history with the public.

The Centennial was important in not only celebrating Texas history and improving the economy, but also defining a Texan identity. The main source of Centennial information


2Ibid., 4.

3Ibid., 4. He goes on to expand on the need for land for a permanent exposition site.
is Kenneth B. Ragsdale and his book *The Year America Discovered Texas*. This text has served as the main scholarly research on the history of the Centennial, compiled through a nine-year period of research, interviews, and data collection. A second source of the Texas Centennial exists, but focuses on issues of race and participation in the Centennial. The main photographic record can be found from Polly Smith, who was hired by the Texas Centennial Commission to document the event in 1936. Recently, *Fair Park Deco*, by Jim Parsons and David Bush, offers a survey of the art and architecture of Fair Park, with extensive photographs and brief historical information.

This book’s primary purpose is to examine and survey the Modernist architectural design work throughout the Park to argue for further art historical research. In recent publications, several PhD students have sourced the Texas Centennial Exposition for their own different argumentation over Texas formation of identity. These scholars use the Centennial as evidence for other topics, focusing on national viewership, Western identity, or minority participation. In the most recent discussion over the Texas Centennial, Historian Light Townsend Cummins examines the Centennial as a turning point for historical memory in Texas. Cummings discusses how the Texas Centennial posed a shift in Texas identity, and due to the Centennial, Texas memory leaned more to the Western historical narrative. Despite these differences, overall, each historian has noted the important turn the Centennial makes for Texan experience and identity in the 20th century.

Expanding on this scholarship, I examine the Texas Centennial and one of its focal points, the State of Texas Building. With the new scholarship on Texas identity and myth making, such as the new publication of *Lone Star Pasts*, I argue alongside Cummins that the Texas Centennial poses a significant shift in Texas identity. However, rather than the argument that Cummins proposes, crafting an idea of a Western Texas, I propose that the Centennial was used to encapsulate and perpetuate the Texas myth and identity. The acres of Dallas Fair Park came together to create an exposition that combined the large state population into one collective Texas identity.

The concept of a collective Texas narrative and identity was conceptualized in the State of Texas Building. This mythic historical narrative was crafted by the emphasis placed on the State of Texas building and the murals within its different rooms. In conjunction with the ideas of Regionalism and the New Deal, visual narratives, and historical memory, this building serves as a case study for the new developments over mythic historical narrative in Texas.

### 1. Planning the Texas Centennial

After the speech given by Price, the four hundred members assembled took to their newspapers, such as the Dallas Morning News, to address this new idea of perpetuating Texas history through a grand celebration. These newspapers spoke of the celebration that would communicate the romantic wonders of Texas history while simultaneously advertising the state to the rest of nation. This notion of the Centennial as a celebration of Texas became official terminology on November 7, when the executives Price spoke to declared, “Texas should hold a great celebration at the close of the century in order that the state might properly honor the heroes of the past and simultaneously advertise the wonders of the Texas of the present and the future.” Governor Pat M. Neff gave a proclamation in January 1924 which not only provided the official start of the Centennial Exposition, but also stated its purpose. This Centennial would honor those “who laid the cornerstone of the Texas Empire,” and the Governor called for “great Centennial feats of art, history and industry, not only to show Texas to Texans, but invite the world to be our guests, that people everywhere may know that Texas is as great in achievement as in area.” This proclamation was widely reprinted throughout the state’s newspapers, due to the Texas Press Association, highlighting both the dual purpose of patriotism and advertisement in the Centennial plan.

Specific planning for the Texas Centennial began in 1926 with the Centennial Governing Board, led by Jesse Holman Jones. The Great Depression of 1929, however, changed the tone of the Texas Centennial Exposition, when the revenue and advertisement of Texas gained new meaning for a public reception. The residual effects of the Great Depression on Texas served as an influence and as an aim to bring in jobs for Texans, but also dictated a new narrative for Texas’ own history. The spark that started the Great Depression, the 1929 Stock Market Crash, created a spiral into bank failures and business closures. Texas residents seemed to understand that the stock market crash would affect them, while some seemed to reject its existence. With what Texas scholar Randolph B. Campbell describes as “whistling past the grave optimism,”

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5Jesse Thomas, *Negro Participation in the Texas Centennial Exposition*, (Christopher Publishing House, 1938)


10Lowry Martin, “First Authentic Memoirs of Texas Centennial Celebration History,” *Texas Press Messenger* 12 (January, 1937): 24-29. Ragsdale cites this article, but the official publication is not found.


12Ragsdale, 9.
the Great Depression came slowly to Texas, being denied by newspapers.\textsuperscript{13} The oil industry, supported by Houston refineries, helped slow down the process of the Great Depression in the state. By 1930, an overproduction of oil caused a price drop from one dollar a barrel in 1930 to eight cents a barrel in 1931.\textsuperscript{14} By 1931, there were 18,000 unemployed in Dallas alone, while Houston had an unemployment rate of 23 percent by 1932.\textsuperscript{15} Not only was oil no longer a viable income, but the main facet of Texas agriculture, cotton farming, had completely fallen through. By 1940, over 300,000 Texans were unemployed in private enterprise. Although the State had begun with a sense of safety, after the crash Texas was just as struck by the Great Depression financially and psychologically as was the rest of the nation.

Although the official approval of the Centennial celebration was given by the Texas legislature on May 18, 1931, an issue arose when the Texas Centennial Committee, the body responsible for collecting official Centennial data, realized the Texas Constitution had no provisions for the enormous funding needed.\textsuperscript{16} The way around this issue was a constitutional amendment to authorize the Texas legislature to allow bonds or other funding for commemorative celebrations.\textsuperscript{17} Approved by the chambers, the final task was to get voter approval for the amendment—in the midst of the Great Depression, however, this proved to be difficult.\textsuperscript{18} This amendment to the Texas Constitution in order to be accepted by the public vote, was heavily publicized. The newspapers emotionally appealed to the state, asking how Texas could celebrate its grand history and heroes without the added amendment.\textsuperscript{19} The *Texas Weekly*, specifically, implored the public to take their history into their own hands, warning that the politicians voting on the bill would rob them of their celebration due to economic issues. The *Texas Weekly*, through slight pessimism, urged the public by saying, “It is being freely predicted by Texas political leaders that this proposed amendment will be defeated. If it is defeated, there will be no fitting Centennial celebration.”\textsuperscript{20} Patriotism versus economic depression battled in the face of this amendment. In one last rallying stance for the Centennial, Dale Miller for the *Texas Weekly* proclaimed the Centennial as both an economic rejuvenation and a restoration of Texas pride in the face of the Great Depression.\textsuperscript{21} With this appeal to Texas historical pride the Centennial amendment passed, and by 1934 the Texas Legislature began the official Texas Centennial Commission, which finally declared that Texas would have a Centennial celebration.\textsuperscript{22}

The next move towards the official centennial was selecting a Texas city willing to host the exposition. This city would need to assume financial responsibility for the Centennial, as well as provide two hundred acres of land for building developments and all utility services to the site.\textsuperscript{23} The city would need to present the best monetary offer, including a complete inventory and appraisal of property offered. Austin and Ft. Worth started proposals, but did not complete them. The three largest cities in Texas, San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas submitted complete proposals. It was Dallas, however, with $7.8 million in funds, that offered the most financial support. What helped Dallas win over the competition was not only the ability to give a full $7.8 million in funding without state or federal funds, but also the offer of an estimated 183 acres of land at Fair Park, the Dallas-owned state fairgrounds, to the Centennial Exposition.\textsuperscript{24} Dallas was officially accepted in September 1934, and although Dallas claimed to be financially independent without state or federal funding, both were ultimately needed. However, by 1935, all state and federal funding, including the $1.2 million needed for the State of Texas building was allocated.

With the city selected, the site of Fair Park needed to be remodeled and enlarged for the new buildings. There is no official documentation supporting exactly why George L. Dahl was hired as the central architect and central authority for the Centennial Exposition. Robert Lee Thornton, the leader of Dallas Centennial Commission, insisted that George L. Dahl had completed the original Centennial drafting, and therefore was qualified for doing the whole park.\textsuperscript{25} Dahl also had experience with the firm Herbert M. Green, a large firm that constructed a number of buildings for the University of Texas. Dahl himself designed several buildings for the University when he began working there in 1926. He also contributed to local business buildings in Dallas, such as Volk Brothers and Neiman Marcus. Dahl himself said in an interview “I was the authority,” as every aspect of design was run through him.\textsuperscript{26}

Dahl’s interaction with the State of Texas building, however, was not as authoritative as were his dealings with other buildings. Originally, the building was planned by Dahl and designer Donald Nelson. The State Board of Control, however, not the Centennial Corporation, had control over the State of Texas building. After Nelson and Dahl had drafted the preliminary sketches for the building, they were told in June of 1935 that the State Board of Control had given the building to a San Antonio firm, Adams & Adams.\textsuperscript{27} There are several stories of the reason for this architectural switch. Nelson claims that Adams used their connections in Austin to take the project, believing they convinced the Board that they would do a better job than Dahl.\textsuperscript{28} An interview with Carleton Adams, however, claimed that Dahl was simply making a pro-

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 376.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 377.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 28-29.
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 28-34.
\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., 58-60.
\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., 60.
\end{footnotesize}
posal that Adams was supposed to complete, and the reason they were picked was due to experience. Dahlin, an interview in 1984, believed that the local firm felt left out from the state funded building and wanted local involvement.

This building was proposed as a way to memorialize and honor all of Texas history and those who participated in it. It was the most expensive building to create, at a cost of $1 million, and was placed directly in the center of the Fair Grounds. A speech given by Claude D. Teer honors the new State of Texas building. Although there is no date on the speech, it is inferred that this speech was given after the building was completed. However, this speech includes the intent and planning before the State of Texas building was built, giving insight to the intentions of the Board of Control. Teer describes his duties as the directing agency, charged with building a memorial to the heroes of the past, the present, and the future. I believe that the State of Texas building at the Centennial Exposition is but the beginnings of such a program for Texas [of appreciating heritage]. In every section, local communities have awakened their romantic past...It was their desire to have a spectral shrine, a temple of art, that would be a fitting tribute to those who have sacrificed for the whole State. I believe that the new Hall of State meets the high requirements set...From the time a visitor steps inside the main entrance at the Centennial Exposition, his attention is focused on the stately white building at the head of the Esplanade.

This official statement supports the notions of a planned memorial that would be the central figure of the Centennial Exposition, and also that it was supposed to directly imply a romantic Texas history that would inspire generations. These declarations of intent are not only guidelines for interpretation of the building’s meaning, but also act as proof of it as an intentional memorial to Texas. The term ‘shrine’ evokes notions of worship or even religious relics, it is often used in reference to this public building. This means that the objects placed within this figurative ‘shrine,’ such as murals and sculptures, created the narrative of Texas history to those who enter it in a deliberate context of worship.

Due to issues of design and changing architects, the State of Texas Building was ready to open on September 5th, 1936, months after the official June 6th opening of the Centennial. The entrance of the Fair Grounds of the Texas Centennial opens at the Grand Plaza and the Esplanade of Texas that forms a leading walkway from the entrance of the park to the Texas Court of Honor and The State of Texas Building. This quarter-mile walk beside the reflective pool in the Esplanade not only serves as a pathway for pedestrians, but also causes the fairgoers to fully enter into the new space of Fair Park. On the north side of the Esplanade is the Hall of Transportation, and on the South is the Hall of Varied Industries, Communications, and Electricity. At the end of the Esplanade, the final destination is the Court of Honor and the State of Texas building that dominates the sight line. This T-shaped building, crafted with local Texas limestone, has a frieze with carved Texas flora and the names of recognizable Texas heroes. The main entrance to the State of Texas building has a semi-circular entrance with eighty foot limestone columns. Between the two central columns is a statue of a Native American, the Tejas Warrior, by Allie Tennant. Under this semi-circular section sit five heavy doors and windows that show icons of Texas wildlife that lead into the State of Texas building. The semi-circular entrance room named the Hall of Heroes, is filled with sculptures of Texas revolutionary figures such as Sam Houston, and connects the main Hall of State to the four regional rooms. On the two long walls on the Hall of State are two 90 x 30 foot murals created by Eugene Savage that were proclaimed to be the largest murals in the world.

2. The New Deal and the Centennial Murals

With the Texas Centennial celebration during the Great Depression, the federally funded regional movement in art directly supported this Texas mythical visual identity. The basis for this argument, that Texas used this moment to firmly perpetuate a mythical visual identity, related directly with the factors of the Great Depression and the federally funded regional movement in art. The patriotic spirit captured in federally funded murals as a response to the Great Depression presents the perfect opportunity to Texas. As the public’s desire for a Texas Centennial grew in response to the psychological devastation of Great Depression, the commissioners and planners of the Centennial not only wanted to stimulate the economy, attract tourists, and encourage developments, but also to dictate historical representations of Texas to its audience.

Under the New Deal influence, American artists worked to create a new artistic identity in America, including Texas. This art style was labeled as Regionalism. Stemming from the despair of the Great Depression, there was an opportunity to create a new artistic creation that would focus on the people, their history, and the importance of national expression. These regionalist artists used American history to help raise the spirits of the Great Depression by showing a history that

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29Ibid., 60.
31Parsons and Bush, Fair Park Deco, 2.
32Texas State Library and Archives, box 1991.
33Parsons and Bush, Fair Park Deco, 60-61.
34Parsons and Bush, Fair Park Deco, 79.
had handled hard times and would continue to handle issues in the future. The American history was told through exploits of the common person, where they become icons rather than true depictions of history and individuals. The intent of these artworks were for public consumption, as it was the public who needed to see the inspired American history to improve their psyche. This Regionalist style and ideology directly relates to the murals in the New Deal.

The attention to murals in the New Deal is essential to understanding the impact of the specific State of Texas murals in the public eye. As noted by several American art scholars such as Andrew Hemmingway, Jonathan Harris, Karal Marling and Philip Parisi, federally funded murals promoted a visual sense of pride and nationalism through stylistic choices.37 From the despair of the Great Depression, there was an opportunity to create a new artistic creation that would focus on the people, their history, and the importance of national expression.38 These federally funded murals were a social art for the public, and were focused on telling a story. The mural projects would tell stories, typically of a local history, to create a narrative suitable for the public. The past was consistent subject matter of the muralists of the Section of Fine Arts and other mural projects. This past was known as “usable” and useful to the public, as it gave the unsteady future of the 30s something to look back to.39 The “usable” past was stable, filled with inspiration and answers for the future. These usable pasts would create a narrative that would remind troubled viewers of the previous steady foundation of history to continue.40 However, these ‘facts’ presented in murals often create a romantic, perfected historical narrative that allowed muralists to create uplifting representations to the public, representations and iconography of the local man, while also showing a larger national issue. Ultimately, this came together in the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), the purpose of which was to paint murals in a regionalist style. This notion creates murals where the reality of everyday life merges with monolithic and perfected forms, a firm theme and subject matter required of the artist by the federally funded patron.

Another rift existed from the attempts made by the local “Dallas Nine” in their attempts to paint murals within the State of Texas Building. Jerry Bywaters, a muralist in Texas and an art critic for the Dallas Morning News and the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, was the leader of the local Dallas group formed by Thomas M. Stell, Jr., Harry P. Carnohan, Otis M. Dozier, Alexandre Hogue, William Lester, Everett Spruce, John Douglass, and Perry Nichols. Directly reacting to the Great Depression and the New Deal, local Dallas artist reimagined the style and use of art for America as local Southern Regionalism.41 Putting emphasis on local environment and understanding, these artists worked to create art that had local history mixed with realism. Art that had been imported from outside of Texas could never meet this standard. If it did not

38Marling, Wall-to-Wall America, 28-38.
39Ibid., 39.
40Ibid., 38.
come from the local artists, the subject matter stayed superficial, unable to communicate to the masses who occupied the space. The Dallas Nine, during the WPA and PWAP, has created several murals depicting Dallas and Texas history. During the building of the Texas Centennial, the local Dallas group had believed that State of Texas Building murals would be competition bids and they spent six months researching and making sketches.

When they went to present their sketches, they were outraged to find that the state officials had already hired Eugene Savage, from Yale University, to paint and represent Texas history. Bywaters, in such a rage over what he perceived as an injustice to Texas art with an opportunity to define the visual identity of the state being taken from local artists, wrote a strongly worded letter to Thomas Hart Benton. Bywaters angrily asked for any recommendations to give to the Board of Control, saying “dumb architects in this region are ever to permit any murals with guts and meaning to go up on the walls of our section of the country.” However, this story has several different versions from the Dallas Nine and the hired muralists. Bywaters claimed that the officials refused to talk to him, while Tom Lea, a local El Paso muralist hired to paint the Western regional room in the State of Texas building, said that the murals were never a competition and were always going to the New England muralist.

The intent and planning of these murals in primary sources has been difficult to access, but some documentation has been found within the letters and oral history of the artists. Eugene Savage, once chosen by the Board of Control and Dahl, was to create the main two murals within the Hall of State and also select the other muralists for the regional rooms. These artists were local Texans Olin Travis, Tom Lea, Arthur Starr Niendorff and James Mahoney. Each of these artists knew Savage in some way, either as his student or by having worked with him in a mural commission from the Section of Fine Arts. As noted by Tom Lea, an El Paso native chosen for the West Texas Room, Savage was chosen by the Board of Control for his work with the Yale School of Fine Arts and on the jury of the National Fine Arts Commission. Lea said, “He had done many, many mural commissions, all of ‘em in the east.” However, his origins in New England posed a problem that was vocalized by critics; he did not accurately know Texas history. For example, Dallas Historical Society Director Herbert Gambrell noted that Savage had forgotten to include Anson Jones—the last president of the Texas Republic—in the mural Texas of Today. When asked about the missing figure, he had replied, “Well, I had never heard of [Jones].” Tom Lea went further, saying that Savage painted too closely with a Yale ‘Prix de Rome’ style, and that the murals “seem very dated to me. They don’t have the Texas flavor, which is absolutely what you would expect. You ask a man to come down from New England.” When asked what constituted this Texas style, he replied it was “something that, uh, originated at home. I would have rather seen something that was home grown rather than something that was imported.”

This need for the local reflects the same desire of the Board of Control for the building, where local history and myths are grounded in artistic evidence.

The murals within the Hall of State by Savage are the only murals with a fixed narrative of history, showing allegorical historical tales of the grandeur of the State’s history. The north wall mural, titled “Texas of History,” focuses on the beginnings of the Republic of Texas, primarily the Alamo and independence from Mexico. These historical scenes are punctuated with rays of light that signify the passage of time, as well as levitating female forms. The central figure, representing the Republic of Texas, stands above Stephen F. Austin. The south wall mural, “Texas of Today,” illustrates from left to right, the Civil War, cultural iconography, the education system to the state, and finally the commercial interests of the state. These allegorical and historical murals focus on the passing of time and the major historical moments of Texas. This mural serves as an educational and allegorical narrative, where the focus is centered on the Texas Republic. The discovery of Texas is concentrated in the corner of Texas of History, linking the discovery of Texas to the expansions made by Stephen and Moses Austin in the left-hand side of the mural. The rest of the story, the independence from Mexico, occupies the entire mural, whereas the battles and expansion of Texas take up the rest of the mural space in “Texas of Today.”

The regional rooms feature a contrast to the historical murals of the Hall of State, showing a different facet of Texas identity. The idea of imported, rather than local, went directly against the idea of the Regionalists art movement, which Savage seemed to acknowledge when he selected the four other muralists for the regional rooms of the State of Texas building. Lea recalled that Savage made a point to hire only local artists to paint the murals in the four Regional rooms in the State of Texas Building. These regional rooms do not focus on any historical narrative; they instead depict a mythological component for the state location that they were assigned. Lea, Niendorff, and Mahoney are documented as not recalling ever being given set instructions for their murals, merely being told the regional theme of the room, which led each of them to decide to showcase a symbolic design replete with local iconography and monumental forms. Mahoney stated that he intentionally created a mural showing real ‘traits’ of the South to inspire an overall feeling of the South rather than one specific historical scene.

The eastern room shows the economic prosperity of oil.
through two murals by Olin Travis, born in Dallas, Texas. The two murals he painted, “Pre-Oil Texas” and “Post-Oil Texas,” depict two eras of industry for the East. The center of the north mural, “Pre-Oil Texas,” show two figures cutting down enormous trees, referencing the lumber industry. These trees are framed by the buildings and mills behind; and, as noted by the State of Texas mural description, the lumber mill, cotton gin, and corrugated metal sheds are all referenced from actual buildings in the area.

Beneath the trees in the foreground, shapes that resemble the rocky ground actually showcase human forms. These recumbent figures, melded with the ground, depict the undiscovered ‘slumbering’ oil that lays beneath the East Texas land. As seen in the following mural on the south side of the room, “Post-Oil Texas,” these figural embodiments of oil are rising up through the ground. An oil derrick has replaced lumber as the center of the piece, and the monumental oil figures emerge from this derrick, casting down beams of light from their hands. These light beams illuminate the oil refineries that frame the mural. The rural scene from the “Pre-Oil Texas” is gone, replaced by modern skyscrapers and industrial buildings. With the addition of oil, Texas has gone through a change from rural to urban. This depiction, however, makes oil a mythological symbol, where success of the oil industry on the economy in East Texas is described as monumental oil “beings” and beams of light.

Sparse documentation exists about the instructions for these muralists, but there has been one verbal interview with artist Tom Lea in 1980 by the Dallas Historical Society. Lea there recalls that in 1936 Eugene Savage had a meeting with him, likely because he (Lea) had just won the National Competition in the Section of Fine Arts for the WPA. Furthermore, Savage had seen Lea’s work at Yale, and asked him to come from El Paso to meet with him in Dallas that February. Savage showed Lea the Western room and had asked for a sketch to be sent to Savage and the Board of Control in Austin. This

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50This information was provided by an information booth within the Hall of State site. I cannot find any other coordinating information about the specific location in East Texas.
was the only time Lea would discuss his work in person with Savage. Lea had no help or advice from Savage, and his initial sketches of the murals were approved by the Board of Control in Austin. Lea shared that his inspiration came from the train ride back from his meeting with Savage, looking outside at the rolling Western landscape back to his home in El Paso.

The western room focuses on the icon of the cowboy and western expansion. These murals were created by Tom Lea to show the perfected and romantic identity of the West, but also created the cowboy as an icon of Texan identity. Documentation of names for these murals does not seem to exist, but the Dallas Historical Society has labeled them “Cowboy Mural” and “Family Mural.” On the north wall is “Cowboy Mural,” where Lea has created a heroic, perfected form of a cowboy donned with chaps and a cowboy hat. He is the central figure, framed on either side by a cattle herd and fellow cowhands in the background. To the south of the room, “Family Mural” is a stylized landscape that shows a family of three embarking in a covered wagon. These three figures allow the life in West Texas to be instantly understood: a relatable, yet courageous family, embarking on a brave new trail. This entirety of the Western identity is portrayed with the myth of the cowboy and the family, where the individual masculine cowboy is just as important as the fabled identity of the family crossing the Western frontier. Such depictions of the cowboy and covered wagons are found in earlier ideas of the manifest destiny, but these Texan identities now represent the conquest of the local range and importance of the cattle industry to the economy of the state.

The North Room only includes one mural that shows the change from rural to city life. This unnamed mural is by Arthur Starr Niendroff, from Marshall, Texas. He gained mural experience as an assistant to Diego Rivera and created the only fresco mural in the State building. As shown by local iconography, he claimed to have “Summarized dynamically in paint the civilization of North Texas...the dynamism of the citizens acting upon the great natural wealth,” where the cotton bale and the farm stand as a basis for the North Texas identity. A Texas family, representing the entire region, is embraced by the image of Old Man Texas, a character created in 1906 by the cartoonist John Knott. This fictional character of Texas is holding in his arms not only the representation of the North Texas family, but with reality. The buildings he holds are actual buildings found in Dallas, such as the Power and Light building, Lone Star Gas, and the Magnolia Petroleum Building. This mural is concentrated on the importance of economic development of the area with the image of family framed by expansion of economic production. There is also a hint at the passage of time from left to right, coming together in the center to the image of the child, signifying a hope for the future generation of Texans with these leaps in technology advancement and production. The symbolic mixed with true figures solidify the creation of a mythic representation for North Texas, as the imagined blends with the real into one perfected future.

The South room representation is far more general, as the muralist himself James Owen Mahoney, Jr. claimed that the South Texas he was painting was a “state of mind, not an actual place.” Mahoney had graduated from Southern Methodist University and attended the Yale School, where he had won a Prix de Rome scholarship, which is how he came to know Savage. In a letter written by Mahoney, he recalls being asked to make a mural with subject matter as suggested by the architecture of the room and the concept of “South Texas.” He writes that his mural was intentionally “generalized, romanticized, and idealized, with accessible rhetoric to the public eye.” This visual rhetoric is steamboats, missions, vegetation of yucca and magnolias. The quilt behind the central female figure is what Mahoney claims “[is indicative] of the colorful patchwork quilts for which women of the country are famous.” This mural, documented as intentionally symbolic, creates a notion of the South as iconographic ideas and perfected forms. Responses for the State of Texas building were in favor of this romanticized Texas monument. The most comprehen-

51 Dallas Historical Society, artist record box.
52 Parsons and Bush, Fair Park Deco, 86.
The days following the opening of the Hall of State, the newspaper reported reactions from traveling viewers and locals. Outside visitors from Georgia and California said that the grandeur of the park and the State of Texas building showcases how Texas’ glorious past has influenced the present. Penrose Metcalfe of San Antonio, a State Representative who had opposed the Texas Centennial bill, responded that once he went into the Centennial he understood the magnitude of the exposition and was particularly pleased with the Hall of State and its tribute to the past. On September 20, the front page of the Dallas Morning News described the Hall of State as standing in dignity among the fanfare of the Centennial, and that the central structure is “so overpowering that men walking through its portals, standing face to face with the heroes of the past instinctively remove their hats.” The reporters says the sentiments of the Hall of State is captured in one woman’s standing in the central hall, exclaiming to her friend, “Gosh, honey, ain’t you glad we’re Texans?” The journalist then writes that he feels that each viewer of this Hall, inspired by Texas history, feels the benefits of the past, but is also inspired to do such acts in the future. He imagines archeologists digging up the Hall of State in ten thousand years, thinking it to be a place of worship. A description of the building on September 24 casts the building as, “Heroic in proportions, exquisite in design...a veritable treasure house of historical exhibits that tell the epic of Texas with gripping eloquence, the Hall of State is easily the noblest and most fascinating building at the Texas Centennial.” He notes that while the central hall shows the past of Texas, it is the regional rooms that shows the life of the people who live in the area with the murals and exhibition. On the September 26, one journalist recounted how the structure was built by local Texas stone and its location in the Centennial fairgrounds. They also describe the Savage murals in the central hall, inspired by the history and proclaiming the two murals a monument to men.

By reusing the phrase ‘glorious past,’ as well as by describing the Hall of State as an active historical shrine, the newspapers give solid evidence that the response to the Hall of State was a success, just as the building planners had intended. The resurgence of pride and patriotism created by the building alleviated some of the sadness and hardships brought on by the Great Depression. As a source of pride and historical celebration during the Centennial, the State of Texas building celebrated the historical narrative to Texans, but to the United States as well. There were a great number of hurdles as planners worked toward this Centennial celebration, such as securing government approval, a large enough location, building plans, and finally securing artists. Artists perpetuated these feelings of Texas identity through the regionalist murals, showing the entire scope of Texas history on a huge scale, and creating individual narratives. These narratives created by the regional rooms, as well as the reception of the building as a heroic memorial, created a unanimous celebration of a romantic Texas history.

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3. Conclusion

The days following the opening of the Hall of State, the newspaper reported reactions from traveling viewers and locals. Outside visitors from Georgia and California said that the

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56Dallas Morning News, September 20, 1936.
57Dallas Morning News, September 20, 1936.
58Dallas Morning News, September 20, 1936.
59Dallas Morning News, September 24, 1936.
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