

**Recorded Texas Historic Landmark
Replacement Marker for Old Stone Fort**

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**THE OLD STONE FORT
And
THE STONE FORT MUSEUM**

I. CONTEXT

Don Antonio Gil Y'Barbo's stone house, built between 1788 and 1791, and the Stone Fort Museum, a 1936 replica structure, form a backdrop for events that shaped Nacogdoches and eastern Texas, including the development of the northern borderlands of the Spanish Empire, westward expansion of the United States, early preservation activities in Texas, and the historical zeal of the Texas Centennial.

At the end of the Seven Years' War in Europe in 1763, Spain gained ownership of the lands west of the Mississippi River. East Texas was then transformed from a defensive borderland to an interior province, and the government sent the Marquis de Rubí on a tour of inspection.¹ The recommendations of Rubí reflected his dissatisfaction with the settlements. He proposed the abandonment of the presidio of Los Adaes, as well as the remaining missions of eastern Texas. The recommendations became law in what is commonly known as the New Regulations which ordered the abandonment of East Texas and the resettlement of its occupants to San Antonio de Bexar.² The enforcement of the New Regulations by the Governor of Texas, the Baron de Ripperdá, set into motion events that led to the founding of modern-day Nacogdoches by the displaced Adaesonos and the building of what would become the "Old Stone Fort" by their *de facto* leader, Antonio Gil Y'Barbo.

Y'Barbo's stone house, built on the Camino de los Tejas in Nacogdoches, was the site of many events that influenced the development of Nacogdoches and the region. As a gateway to Texas under the succeeding governments of Spain, Mexico, the Texas Republic and finally statehood, Nacogdoches and Y'Barbo's house played host to events of international consequence. The obvious strength of the stone house meant it became a place of refuge during a crisis. Three filibustering expeditions used the stone house as a base of operations including the Magee-Gutierrez filibuster in 1812³, the men assembled by Dr. James Long in 1819, and the Fredonian War in 1826.⁴ With each episode, the stone house served as temporary fortification during the unsuccessful attempts to establish a new government.

In 1806, Governor Antonio Cordero y Bustamante resided in the building while Col. Simón de Herrera negotiated the Neutral Ground agreement with General James Wilkinson, and in 1807, Zebulon M. Pike's soldiers were billeted there on their return from Mexico.⁵ From the stone house expatriate José Álvarez de Toledo y Dubois

prepared the first newspaper set to type on Texas soil in 1813.⁶ In the aftermath of the Fredonia Rebellion, Colonel José de las Piedras garrisoned his Mexican soldiers in the stone house and was later ousted in 1832 by Texans in the Battle of Nacogdoches. During the Texas Revolution, Committees of Safety and Correspondence met in the stone house, and it witnessed a stream of Texas' personalities including Sam Houston, Thomas J. Rusk and David Crockett.⁷

Y'Barbo's house survived the many changes that took place on the Spanish borderlands as the region transitioned into part of the frontier for westward expansion of the United States. However, the building did not survive the drive at the turn of the century for change and progress. In spite of the Cum Concilio Club's statewide effort to save the building, it was torn down in 1902 to make way for a modern drugstore. While the effort to save the building may not have been the first preservation effort in the state, the loss of the building opened the eyes of other organizations to the growing tide of destruction. The Daughters of the Republic of Texas began a campaign to save the missions near San Antonio shortly afterwards, and possibly, as a direct result of the loss of the stone house.⁸

The Cum Concilio Club was undeterred by the loss of the building and determined to rebuild the structure as soon as possible. On February 28, 1908, the Club opened the doors of a reconstructed memorial building erected on Washington Square.⁹ The memorial building on Washington Square served the town as an early library¹⁰ and museum.¹¹

The Texas Centennial aroused a renewed interest in local history, and the town proposed to replace the memorial building with a more accurate replica of the stone house. On October 16, 1936, the Nacogdoches Historical Society dedicated the replica building on the campus of Stephen F. Austin College. The Stone Fort Museum is now over seventy years old and embodies two histories – the museum building is an important landmark which reflects the historical zeal of the Texas Centennial, and it commemorates the history of a structure integral to the formation and growth of Nacogdoches: Don Antonio Gil Y'Barbo's house, its architecture, its occupants and their stories.

II. OVERVIEW

Antonio Gil Y'Barbo was 43 years old when the Spanish Crown ordered the abandonment of eastern Texas, including his native home of Los Adaes.¹² Established by Marquis de San Miguel de Aguayo in 1721, Presidio Los Adaes was the primary civil settlement and Capital of the Province of Texas for 50 years.¹³ Though the missions and presidios of eastern Texas were expensive to maintain, their purpose was to prevent French incursions along the northern borderlands, With the end of the Seven Years' War in Europe in 1763, Spain gained ownership of the lands west of the Mississippi River and a degree of comfort.¹⁴ The change eventually led to a reorganization known as the New Regulations of 1772. Based on recommendations of the Marquis de Rubî, the reorganization called for the evacuation of 500 people living in the areas around Los Adaes and Dolores de los Ais.¹⁵ Among the inhabitants was Antonio Gil Y'Barbo at Rancho el Lobanillo.

During the forced resettlement of the residents of eastern Texas to San Antonio de Bexar, Y'Barbo became the leader of the Adaesanos. Upon arrival in San Antonio, both

Y'Barbo and Gil Flores traveled to Mexico City in an effort to reverse the Royal Order. Eventually, the Adaesanos were allowed to return as far east as the Trinity River to establish the new town of Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Bucareli. It was midway between the groups' homeland in eastern Texas and San Antonio, but when trouble erupted in the spring of 1778, the group traveled further east rather than return to San Antonio de Bexar. On May 13, 1779, Gil Y'Barbo wrote from vicinity of the abandoned Nacogdoches mission requesting permission to remain in East Texas. In October 1779, he was named Lieutenant Governor of the new pueblo of Nuestra Senora del Pilar de Nacogdoches.¹⁶ Five years after the Royal Order to abandon East Texas, Antonio Gil Y'Barbo had shepherded almost 350 men, women, and children back home. The settlers' return to East Texas marked the beginnings of Nacogdoches. The most famous of Gil Y'Barbo's contributions to the future stability of Nacogdoches is his stone house.

Date of Construction

Built sometime between 1788 and 1791, the stone house became the center of Y'Barbo's trading activities and the heart of town life. The Adaesanos arrived at the abandoned Nacogdoches mission site in the spring of 1779, but recorded descriptions of the town make no mention of a building that must have dominated the landscape until Y'Barbo sells the stone house in 1805.¹⁷ Shortly after the group of settlers led by Gil Y'Barbo arrived in Nacogdoches, the Governor of Spanish Louisiana, Athanase de Mezieres, visited the settlement. In August 1779, he wrote from Nacogdoches that the inhabitants, "wander among the heather, offering their clothing for food, and exchanging hunger for nakedness."¹⁸ Although de Mezieres was opposed to the settlement of East Texas, it is improbable that he would not mention the presence of a two-story stone building in Nacogdoches.

Even as late as 1788, Pedro Vial's expedition traveled to Nacogdoches and reported that it is "situated in the midst of a forest of different kinds of trees (and has) dwellings made of wood. The number of the houses must be 80 or 90, and (the number) of inhabitants from 200 to 250 Spaniards and Frenchman." The writer does not mention a structure as impressive as the stone house must have been.¹⁹ A possible reference to the stone house is found in Manuel Gaspar de Verazadî's letter to the Viceroy in 1791, in which he claims, "Y'Barbo has a public store in which he sells to the inhabitants goods, brandy, cane rum, gunpowder, packs of cards and tobacco."²⁰

Verazadî's report on Nacogdoches contributed to Y'Barbo's arrest that year on charges of smuggling, and he was jailed in San Antonio. Even after his acquittal in 1796, Y'Barbo was not allowed to return to Nacogdoches,²¹ yet in 1805 he sold his stone house to José Luis de la Bega. Antonio Gil Y'Barbo probably built his stone house as either living quarters and/or a place business sometime between Pedro Vial's visit to the area in 1788 and Verazadî's report on Nacogdoches in 1791 or Y'Barbo's removal from Nacogdoches in the same year. The town grew up around the house which was located on el Camino Real de los Tejas and what would become the corner of Main and Fredonia Streets.

Construction of Y'Barbo's House

Y'Barbo's stone house was an adaptation of French and Spanish Colonial architecture following the traditional form including exterior doors for each room, exterior stairs on

the gallery porch, and fireplaces within the walls of the structure. The form of the porch is similar to the *ramada* of early Mexican structures, and coincides with the development of the *galerie* in the French architecture of Louisiana and the *piazza* in the English colonies.²² A hip roof protected the *galerie* porch and plastered exterior walls. The Sanborn Fire Insurance map for July 1885 shows the original hip roof and exterior stairs on the house.²³ Similar architectural layouts are preserved in St. Genevieve, Missouri. St. Genevieve was established in 1762 as part of the “Illinois Country” governed by the French. Examples of French Colonial architecture are the Bolduc House built in 1770, and the Bequette-Ribault house dated to 1778.²⁴

There is a possibility that the house was not only influenced by neighboring French traditions, but constructed by or under the direction of French craftsmen. Nicholas de la Mathe was a merchant who carried on a lively contraband trade from Point Coupee, Louisiana. When the residents of Nacogdoches lived further west in Bucareli, Nicholas de la Mathe financed the construction of a large church for the settlement.²⁵ After Y'Barbo returned to the Nacogdoches area, he continued his association with his long-time friend and associate. Perhaps De la Mathe acted as the benefactor once again.

The stones used in the original stone house were worked from a rock known as Weches glauconite. The Weches formation is a marine sedimentary rock of the Eocene age. Newly exposed outcroppings of Weches are green-gray and contain a ferrous iron clay mineral. In weathered outcroppings of Weches, the major mineral is goethite which imparts a yellow-orange color to the Weches.²⁶ The interior walls were made of ten-by-fourteen-inch sun-dried adobe blocks. Hand-hewn black walnut was used for sills and casements. The structure measured seventy feet along the Camino Real (currently Main Street) by twenty-three feet (along the current Fredonia Street). Originally each story had two main rooms, although subsequent owners rearranged the interior partitions and added a lean-to at the back.²⁷

The stone house was an important example of eighteenth century residential architecture, adapted over the years to the needs of its owners. At the time of its demolition, it was one of the oldest stone structures in the state.

Ownership and Uses of the Stone House

With the sale of the house in 1805 to Jose de la Bega, the house began its long journey of public, private, residential, military and commercial service to the town. Over the next 100 years, owners and tenants used the house as a grocery store, restaurant, law office, courthouse, cobbler shop, jail, military barracks, saloon, and of course, a fort. José Luis de la Bega sold the house in 1806 to William Barr²⁸ who maintained a business partnership with Samuel Davenport. Together, the two operated the mercantile business of Barr and Davenport in the stone house.²⁹ During this time, Davenport's godson, John Durst moved to Nacogdoches and worked in the business.³⁰ In 1810, William Barr died leaving his property to Samuel Davenport.³¹ Three years later, during the Magee Gutierrez filibuster, Davenport acted as quartermaster for Magee's army. Stockades were built in Nacogdoches between the houses on the plaza, and the army, under the supervision of Christian Hesser, was headquartered in the stone house. The filibusterers stayed in Nacogdoches for about a month before they moved on to Trinidad and then La Bahia.³²

When Magee and Gutierrez left Nacogdoches in September 1812, they failed to establish any leadership for the settlement. By the time José Álvarez de Toledo y Dubois arrived from Natchitoches in April 1813, the town was in chaos. Toledo reestablished order and set about preparing a newspaper, *Gaceta de Texas*, for the new government.³³ Gutierrez distrusted Toledo and accused him of traitorous acts. When ordered to leave Texas and relinquish his press, Toledo left but took his press with him. Even though the type for the newspaper was already set from the headquarters of the stone house, Toledo packed up his completed typeset for a newspaper imprinted with *Nacogdoches, 25 de Mayo, de 1813* for a journey across the Sabine to Natchitoches. By June 12th, Shaler and Toledo had printed the *Gaceta* in support of Texas independence.³⁴ The first newspaper addressed to Texans about Texas was presumably set to type on Texas soil in the headquarters of the rebellion: Y'Barbo's stone house.

The insurrection started by Magee and Gutierrez ended in August 1813 with Toledo's defeat at the Medina River. As the rebels tried to flee Texas, the residents of Nacogdoches fled also. Samuel Davenport abandoned his business at the stone house and fled with his family to Natchitoches.³⁵ Nacogdoches was rendered a virtual ghost town but slowly gained in population as residents returned to their homes and Americans moved into the vacant town.

In 1819, the Spanish government became concerned over the large numbers of Americans moving back into the area, but failed to prevent their immigration. When Luis de Onís and John Quincy Adams signed a treaty in 1819 between Spain and the United States establishing Texas as a part of Spain, the anger of American colonists boiled over into another filibustering expedition. Dr. James Long of Natchez, Mississippi led a force of 300 men into Nacogdoches on June 21, 1819 with intent to seize Texas from Spain. Because Nacogdoches was essentially abandoned, assuming control of the area simply meant occupying the area. Dr. Long established a provisional government in Nacogdoches at the stone house owned by Samuel Davenport who joined Long's expeditionary force. Much to their surprise, the United States did not support this attempt to wrest Texas from Spain and imposed a blockade along the border. Long found it increasingly difficult to obtain supplies for his men. James Long's attempt to free Texas from Spain ended when Lt. Colonel Ignacio Pérez, commanding 550 Spanish soldiers, marched into an abandoned Nacogdoches on October 28, 1819.³⁶

In 1821, Stephen F. Austin could raise only 21 residents in Nacogdoches to hear the orders of the newly established Mexican government.³⁷ The town, once again, began to grow. While the stone house was owned by Samuel Davenport during this time, its use is unknown. William Buford Dewees traveled through Nacogdoches in the 1820s and eventually acquired land in Texas. Although historians question the manner in which Dewees' notes were published, the entry for June 10, 1821 provides an account of the use of the stone house:

The whole population consists of about one hundred. The town was nearly destroyed in the revolution of 1812, since which it has not been rebuilt, and of course is a very desolate looking place. The buildings consist of a large stone church, another large stone building with eight or ten apartments in it. What it was constructed for, I am unable to say, but

at the present time it is occupied by several families. The remainder of the buildings are adobes, except for a few which are made of wood.³⁸

In 1824, Davenport died leaving the stone house to his son, John Davenport, who traded it to John Durst in 1829.³⁹ In the meantime, the stone house had become the site of another filibustering attempt.

Haden Edwards left his Kentucky home in 1820 and by 1823 was petitioning for a land grant along with Stephen F. Austin. On April 15, 1825, Edwards received an empresarial grant to settle 800 families in the Nacogdoches area. Edwards arrived in Nacogdoches on September 25, 1825 knowing that the lands around Nacogdoches carried significant preexisting claims by Spanish settlers, Indian residents and earlier settlers from the United States. At the same time, if he was to succeed as an empresario, he needed good land to attract new settlers. To the disbelief of some residents, Edwards posted a notice on the streets of Nacogdoches announcing that all who claimed previous land grants from the Spanish or Mexican governments must come forward immediately and substantiate their claims. With all claims endangered, the settlement was immediately at odds. News of the trouble in Nacogdoches reached Mexico City, and while Edwards was in the United States recruiting more settlers, the Mexican government revoked his grant.⁴⁰

Haden Edwards returned to the news that all his work was lost, as were the lands of the settlers he had brought from the United States. With so much at stake, Edwards was able to find plenty of recruits in his bid to establish a new republic. During the Fredonia Rebellion of 1826, the Postmaster of Nacogdoches, Patricio de Torres, wrote to Stephen F. Austin of the insurgents: "They have entered Nacogdoches, unfurled on high, amid the great huzzas of the town, a banner of white and red, which they had planted on the plaza; it has a lettering that says Independence, Liberty and Justice. The house of stone they have fortified and provided with all kinds of provisions, which they have taken from the neighbors."⁴¹

The activities in Nacogdoches attracted the growing attention of the Mexican authorities in San Antonio, and finally on December 11, 1826, Lt.Colonel Ahumada left for Nacogdoches with slightly over 100 soldiers. Support was not growing for Edwards in Nacogdoches either. More Anglos opposed the movement than supported it, and both Anglos and Mexicans could be found on each side of the dispute. Many of Edwards' supporters were captured near San Augustine by Anglo residents Stephen Prather, Alexander Horton and Cherokee allies. With difficulties in San Augustine, and troops on their way from San Antonio, the Fredonians began to disseminate. Martin Parmer moved west, and the Edwards' brothers fled to Louisiana.⁴²

Y'Barbo's stone house was used as a temporary fortification one more time during the fight known as the Battle of Nacogdoches. In response to growing American immigration, the Mexican government adopted the Law of April 6, 1830. This law removed control of immigration and land policy from the states and gave it to the federal government. In the fight over control of the important issue of land settlement, the Anglo population of Texas naturally sided with the Federalists and opposed the Law of April 6, 1830 which signaled the end to immigration. The resulting conflict erupted first in Anahuac in the summer of 1832. Colonel Jose de las Piedras, Commandant of the 12th Battalion of the Mexican Army stationed in Nacogdoches, smoothed over the troubles in

Anahuac. Returning to Nacogdoches, Piedras decided to prevent any such troubles in his District. In July, Piedras ordered the Anglo population to turn in their guns. When the men came to town, they planned to fight rather than turn in their weapons. Piedras was warned of the arriving troops and fortified himself in the stone house, the church, and at his headquarters in the Red House. At first unsuccessful, the Americans finally forced the Mexican troops to retreat from the stone house to their defense in the Red House. That night, Piedras slipped out of town but was later captured. He and his men were delivered to the authorities in San Antonio. The violence at Nacogdoches and Anahuac in 1832 was the beginning of active Anglo opposition to the Mexican government.⁴³

After purchasing the stone house from his step-brother, John Durst moved his family from Louisiana and lived in the stone house from 1829 until 1834.⁴⁴ On April 7, 1830, his daughter, Benigna Durst, was born in the stone house.⁴⁵ When he moved his family to Mount Sterling, John Durst sold the house to Juan Mora, the *alcalde*, and Vicente Córdova, the *regidor*. These two men used the building partly as a courthouse and office to execute their public duties. In September 1837, the stone house became the Republic's first official court in East Texas with presiding Judge Robert M. Williamson.⁴⁶

In 1840, Vicente Córdova was forced to sell his half of the building at public auction to cover a debt to Rebecca Danzey Fenley.⁴⁷ While the building was co-owned by Rebecca Fenley and Carmel Mora, Adolphus Sterne contracted with Carmel Mora for the "east small room" at \$2.50 per month. At the same time, Bennett Blake rented half of "the middle room" for \$5.00 per month.⁴⁸ In 1842, Rebecca's sister-in-law, Harriet Fenley Roberts acquired interest in stone house from Maria del Carmel Mora. In the same year, Rebecca Fenley transferred her interest in the stone house to Harriet Roberts.⁴⁹

During this period, the building was also sublet for a variety of businesses. The earliest advertisement for a business in the stone house is the 1846 advertisement for W. C. Allison, Attorney and Counsellor at Law.⁵⁰ Harriet and her husband, John S. Roberts managed a grocery and saloon business in the house until his death on August 9, 1871. Harriet's son, Lycergus, then managed the business.⁵¹ Lycergus must have contributed substantially to the management of the business because in August 1852, the *Nacogdoches Chronicle* advertised for L. S. Roberts' grocery and billiard saloon in the "Old Stone House."⁵² By the late 1870s, the building had transitioned to a new common name of the "Old Stone Fort." David Lee advertised a billiard and bar room at the "Old Stone Fort" in the *Nacogdoches News* on July 20, 1877⁵³ and B. D. Sapp & Sons advertised on May 24, 1884 as proprietors for "The Old Stone Fort" Saloon with "First Class Pool and Billiard Tables."⁵⁴

The building's nickname, "Old Stone Fort," influenced not only the architecture of the 1936 replica, but also influenced the naming of a number of groups and businesses. The Stone Fort Rifles Volunteer Guard was formed on November 22, 1887 as part of the Texas Volunteer Guards,⁵⁵ the Stone Fort Drug Company was formed in November 1906⁵⁶, and products such as "Old Stone Fort Flour" were available as early as 1907.⁵⁷

Shortly before her death in 1874, Harriet deeded the stone house to her daughter-in-law, Susana A. H. Roberts.⁵⁸ Susana and her husband, Lycergus, either operated a business in or leased the stone house to other proprietors until they sold the building on June 15, 1901 to the Perkins brothers.⁵⁹

Destruction of the Stone House

As early as 1884, a segment of the population was considering the future of the building. In that year Charley Sterne, son of Adolphus Sterne, wrote an editorial to suggest Nacogdoches "let nothing mar the beauty of your town or obstruct the demands of trade...." Instead, Nacogdoches should build a monument and "let the old fort go."⁶⁰

Nacogdoches citizens discovered in 1901 that the heirs to L.S. Roberts' estate sold the stone house to Charles and William Perkins and that the building indeed would be destroyed to make way for a modern building. This news fired a public debate over the fate of the building, and the newspapers were filled with editorials both pro and con:

"The old Stone Fort at Nacogdoches is to be torn down and a new building built where the old Fort now stands. What has become of Nacogdoches patriotism?"--- Jacksonville Banner. "Patriotism is scarce when you go after it through a fellow's pocket book."⁶¹

"Let our cities, towns and villages call meetings, discuss the situation and a committee or committees be appointed to raise the necessary money and pay to the late purchasers the amount of purchase, in that Texas shall not bear the obloquy and shame incident to the tearing down of the Old Stone Fort. A prompt and speedy appeal to the people of Texas at this juncture will meet with a prompt and material response. The state should have purchased this property long ago, but it seems the Legislature thought that the price was too exorbitant. Money should not weigh against patriotism."⁶²

"Marble and granite are well enough when it is the best we have, but in this case we do not want them. The old fort appeals to our hearts and our senses in manner that no art of language can approach--one is the substance, the other the shadow."⁶³

"I may be willing that the Old Stone Fort, (from whose hoary walls has oozed a continuous stream of "calamity water" ever since 1854 and for how much longer I don't know) should be torn down, and the ground upon which it stood plowed up and sowed in salt, and the rocks of which it is composed pulverized"⁶⁴

While most were content with expressing their opinion publicly, the material efforts to preserve the building arose from a variety of women's clubs in Nacogdoches and across the state. The *Houston Herald* described a meeting dedicated to the preservation of the Fort at the residence of Mrs. Mary Jane Briscoe. The groups in attendance included the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Woman's Relief Corps, the Art League and the Society for the Federation of Clubs.⁶⁵ These women's clubs hoped to raise sufficient funds to purchase the lot from the Perkins Brothers and prevent the demolition of the building. The Editor of the *Daily Sentinel*, R. W. Haltom, described the problem clearly only a few weeks before the building's demolition:

Whatever sentiment may exist, pro or con, the subject is brought down to a square business proposition, and it will take a money and plenty of it to change the plans already laid out. Its present owners bought it at a fancy price for a business location for their own use and they are not disposed to sell it at any price. The question of removing the stones and re-erecting

them into some sort of monument in memory of the original building and its history, is the only thing to consider.⁶⁶

On February 4, 1902, the Perkins Brothers advertised for sale the stones and woodwork of the old fort,⁶⁷ but eventually donated the whole building to the Daughters of the Confederacy with the understanding that it would be removed and the ground entirely cleared by the fifteenth of March.⁶⁸ Within days of this announcement in the local paper, the job of tearing down, moving and re-erecting the building was taken on by a women's club in Nacogdoches, the Cum Concilio Club.⁶⁹ The Club planned to immediately rebuild the structure on the public square. Mrs. C. W. Butts remembers the week before the contractor demolished the building: "before the building was torn down, an opportunity was given all whom desired to visit, one more time, the sacred old building, and in February of 1902 a religious service and reception was held within its walls. The Rev. W. W. Watts, pastor of the Methodist Church, and the Rev. W. T. Tardy, pastor of the Baptist Church, led the religious services which consisted of Bible reading, prayer and song service, followed by informal talks from various visitors." The Cum Concilio Club sold Dresden china souvenir pieces to raise funds to rebuild the Stone Fort. The set of china included cups and saucers, vases and bon-bon dishes. The Club also organized lectures and other events to raise money for their cause. One such event was a lecture by William Jennings Bryan entitled "The Common Man."⁷⁰

The last of February 1902, Henry Millard was contracted to tear down the stone house and haul the stones to an empty lot where they sat for five years.⁷¹ By September of that year, a reporter for the *Daily Sentinel* greeted the arrival of the Perkins Brothers' new office building on the corner occupied previously by the stone house as "a representative of the new and larger era in which we live." The reporter declared that, "we live in a prosaic age, in which imagination counts for less than facts, and its is simple truth to say that the Fort was an architectural blot on the horizon, an ugly protuberance thrusting its ugliness continually in the face of the town, a survivor of primitive conditions painfully out of place in modern Nacogdoches, and its most devoted, and super sentimental friends, deep down in their heart of hearts, were glad to welcome the enterprise that decreed its doom."⁷²

For others, the loss of the stone house created an awareness of the need for preservation in Texas:

The fate of the Old Stone Fort at Nacogdoches has aroused the United Daughters of the Republic with renewed activity in the effort to preserve the old historic land marks so prominent in Texas history. The demolition of the Old Stone Fort was permitted by sheer procrastination, and this association of Texas' patriotic women are determined that it shall not occur again and they have already inaugurated a vigorous move for the purchase and preservation of the old Missions near San Antonio. These missions are not threatened as yet by the march of commercialism, and as these noble women have begun an early campaign, we have every assurance that their efforts will be crowned with success.⁷³

Reconstructions and the Stone Fort Museum Centennial Project

On February 28, 1908, the Club opened the doors of a reconstructed memorial building erected on Washington Square, the public square located on Mound Street between Arnold and Hughes Streets.⁷⁴ Mr. R. B. Shearer of Lufkin donated his architectural services for the construction of the memorial building as a one-story structure with Arts and Crafts design elements.⁷⁵ The memorial building on Washington Square served the town as an early library⁷⁶ and museum.⁷⁷ The Cum Concilio Club donated the building to the Nacogdoches School district in 1925 for use as an adjunct school room.⁷⁸ The “relics” gathered to date and furniture made from the wood of the original building were transferred to Stephen F. Austin State Teachers College.⁷⁹ No sooner had the artifacts left the building than its current occupants began to collect new ones. The history teacher of Nacogdoches High School began making a collection of artifacts to be housed in the “Old Stone Fort” and styled the building as, “The East Texas Museum.”⁸⁰ By 1934, the memorial building on Washington Square was in need of repairs. C. O. Rockwell, state relief field man approved a project for repairs to the building with a grant from the Texas Rehabilitation and Relief Commission which administered Federal Emergency Relief Commission grants during the Depression. At the same time, the formation of the Nacogdoches Historical Society looked forward to the upcoming Texas Centennial with calls for the rebuilding of the Stone Fort.⁸¹

The Texas Centennial did indeed arouse a renewed interest in local history. As early as 1934, the Texas Centennial Advisory Board of Nacogdoches, composed of Miss Virgie Sanders, Roy Gray, Mrs. Tom Davidson, Hal B. Tucker and Robert P. Hall, in concert with the Nacogdoches Historical Society, proposed to replace the memorial building with a more accurate replica of the stone house located near the college (Stephen F. Austin State University).⁸² On March 31, 1936, Dr. A.W. Birdwell, president of the college, was authorized by the Board of Regents of the State Teachers Colleges⁸³ to reconstruct Y’Barbo’s stone house on the campus of his school out of funds from the Texas Centennial Commission. On April 16, 1936, the Texas Centennial Commission approved the project,⁸⁴ and a contract to build was awarded by the State Board of Control on March 20, 1936 to H.C. Hatchl for \$18,483.35.⁸⁵ Architect Hal B. Tucker designed the centennial structure in cooperation with the Nacogdoches Historical Society and the local Centennial Advisory Board.⁸⁶

Work on the Centennial structure, built as a museum on the College campus, began on June 13, 1936.⁸⁷ Four hundred yards of native rock were excavated from a rock quarry east of Nacogdoches while more stones were recovered by razing the existing structure on Washington Square.⁸⁸ Construction was completed, and on October 16, 1936, representatives of the State Board of Control presented the building to the Nacogdoches Historical Society. The Society in turn gave the building to the College. Colonel Thomas H. Ball, president of the Board of Regents of Texas State Teachers Colleges, accepted the structure for Stephen F. Austin State Teachers College.⁸⁹ Artifacts donated previously to the Rare Book Room of the College were transferred to their final home in the Stone Fort Museum.⁹⁰ In the initial months after opening, the building was managed by students of the College⁹¹ and in June of 1937, President Alton Birdwell named Mrs. Lois Foster Blount as the first Curator of the Old Stone Fort Museum.⁹²

Stephen F. Austin State University grew around the Museum, and the building is currently located on the intersection of Alumni Drive and Griffith Boulevard in the heart of the campus. In 1990, the Board of Regents of Stephen F. Austin State University approved renovations to the building totaling \$302,000.00. Renovations included replacement of a rotting porch and roof, upgrading of the electrical and plumbing lines, installation of central air and heat, and removal of ‘window units’ across the front of the building.⁹³

Renovations included three changes to the façade. First, carpenters replaced the eight evenly spaced columns supporting the porch with nine unevenly spaced columns as reflected in photographs of the original house. Second, six erroneous ‘gun ports’ were filled with iron ore of the surrounding wall in such a way as to be clearly an addition to the original 1936 construction. These changes were an important step in restoring a degree of authenticity to the building even though they altered the 1936 design. The building’s long association in Nacogdoches as the “Old Stone Fort” influenced the design of the 1936 construction and resulted in the inclusion of the six “gun ports” on the first floor that did not exist in the original building. These supposed gun ports were 10 inches square, the depth of the wall (3 feet) and filled with wood blocks on the interior. The most likely explanations for the inclusion of these erroneous gun ports are the holes for the floor joists of the porch visible in photographs of the original building combined with a bias towards building a fort. Finally, a “lean-to” structure was added to the rear of the building to mimic an addition known to exist (in photographs) on the original building toward the end of its lifespan. The addition provided climate-controlled storage for collection materials and office space for staff.⁹⁴

The architectural firm of Kent, Marcellos and Scott of Lufkin, Texas drafted the plans for the project and the construction job was awarded to J. E. Kingham Construction Company of Nacogdoches. Work was completed in 1992, and the Museum reopened its doors again on September 25, 1992.⁹⁵

Mission of the Stone Fort Museum

The Stone Fort Museum is a non-profit educational organization supported by the State of Texas and Stephen F. Austin State University. The mission of the Stone Fort Museum is to serve the public and Stephen F. Austin State University as an educational center dedicated to providing natural and cultural heritage learning opportunities accessible to a diverse audience. As Nacogdoches’ oldest museum, and as an educational unit of SFASU, the Stone Fort Museum will promote life-long, self-directed learning both through human interaction and interaction with objects and ideas.

The Museum’s interpretive goals are grounded in its two defining roles:

1. As a Texas Centennial project replicating an important extant structure in Texas’ history, the Museum will interpret Antonio Gil Y’Barbo’s stone house; including the human and natural history of the region and Texas as they relate to the house, its architecture, its occupants and their stories, the three buildings that comprise its preservation timeline, and the cultural, social and natural history of eastern Texas up to the demolition of the original house in 1902.

2. As an educational unit of Stephen F. Austin State University 's and Nacogdoches' first facility to collect, preserve and exhibit the region's rich cultural heritage, the Museum will not only be dedicated to the highest standards of museum practice in its operations, but will serve the University and public as an educational resource for best practices in museum science and the role of museums in society.

In support of the above mission and interpretive focus, the Museum selectively collects artifacts which Museum staff determine are useful in interpreting the pre-history and history of East Texas prior to 1900 with special emphasis on the Spanish and Mexican periods beginning in 1690 with the establishment of the Spanish Mission Tejas and ending with the overthrow of the Mexican government in 1836 by Texas revolutionists.⁹⁶

III. SIGNIFICANCE

Built on the Camino de los Tejas, Antonio Gil Y'Barbo's stone house played host to events that influenced development of Nacogdoches, the region, and the state. As a gateway to Texas, Nacogdoches and Y'Barbo's house were at the epicenter of international conflict and change throughout the succeeding governments of Spain, Mexico, and the Texas Republic. Remembered most often for its military history, the house was the headquarters of two filibustering expeditions against the Spanish government and one against the Mexican government, and it was the site of the Battle of Nacogdoches, an early conflict in the battle for Texas' independence. The expatriate José Álvarez de Toledo y Dubois prepared the first newspaper set to type on Texas soil in the house,⁹⁷ and Horatio Bigelow published the Mexican Advocate from the house during the James Long filibustering expedition.⁹⁸ During the Texas Revolution, Committees of Safety and Correspondence met in the stone house, and it witnessed a stream of Texas' personalities including Sam Houston, Thomas J. Rusk and David Crockett.⁹⁹ During the ownership of Juan Mora and Vicente Córdova, the stone house became a courthouse for the community, and in September 1837, Judge Robert M. Williamson presided over the republic's first official court in East Texas.¹⁰⁰

Antonio Gil Y'Barbo's stone house served the town in its various roles as residence, commercial businesses, military headquarters, courthouse, and landmark for more than 100 years from its construction in the 1788 to its demolition in 1902. As the town changed and the structure aged, the building became a symbol for both sides of a heated preservation debate. Turn of the century attitudes towards advancement and progress were at odds with a budding preservation movement. As the focus of one of the earliest preservation efforts in Texas, and possibly the first effort to save a historic structure, the stone house became a rallying point for the preservation-minded, particularly women's clubs, across the state.

Y'Barbo's house at the time of its demolition was one of the only remaining examples of Spanish Colonial residential architecture in the state. The Stone Fort Museum replica structure preserves, at least in part, the rich architectural tradition of the earliest European occupants of eastern Texas. The importance of the history of the original building to the existence of the replica is expressed in Reverend George

Crocket's warning to the town in 1933 regarding the 1907 memorial structure: 'Now this building is not the Old Fort at all, but only a memorial of that edifice, and we are guilty of, if not actually giving, at least permitting, false information about a building which ought to be sacred to every citizen of this city.'¹⁰¹ The significance of the replica structure, while a landmark in its own right, is grounded primarily in its relationship to the original building. Now over seventy years old, the Stone Fort Museum replica structure is an important landmark which reflects the historical zeal of the Texas Centennial and commemorates a structure integral to the formation and growth of Nacogdoches.

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