

## **The Role Masonry Played in the Early History of Texas Education**

B.F Skinner once said, “Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten.” His words reaffirm the importance of a quality education. Education is what makes America great; it’s the reason why America has produced so many great writers, thinkers, and orators.

In the great state of Texas, education was given extreme importance from the beginning, thanks to the initiative of some very hardworking individuals. Not only were they all Masons, but they shared a common goal of making sure that Texas had the best possible educational resources to offer its citizens. So, let’s go on a journey together and see how, in the early history of Texas, these men’s Masonic beliefs influenced the course that the education system took.

To understand the true impact of Masonry on the Texas education system, one must first look at what education means to the Masonic Fraternity. The importance of a quality, liberal education is essential to Masonic degrees, and is covered thoroughly in the second degree. Texas was founded by men who were Masons. From the Father of Texas, Stephen F. Austin, to every single president of the Republic of Texas, and often over half of the elected and appointed officials of the Republic, Masons held offices in Texas government. It is only natural, then, that these men would work to establish a system of education that reflected their Masonic values.

Stephen F. Austin lobbied to put educational requirements and guidelines into the Mexican Constitution of 1824. After the Constitution was put aside, Texas declared her independence. However, thanks to Austin’s influence, the new Texas Constitution stated that *“unless a people are educated and enlightened, it is idle to expect the continuance of civil liberty, or the capacity of self-government.”*

Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar was elected as the President of Texas in 1838. He was known as the “Father of Texas Education,” because during his presidency, a bill was passed which set aside lands for public schools and two universities. Some believe that Lamar had the most influence on Texas education, as under him, the founding of the Texas State Library, and the public school and university land set-asides laid the foundation for a Texas-wide public school system. His famous saying, now the motto of the University of Texas was, *“A cultivated mind is the guardian genius of democracy...”* Because of the bill passed under him, new schools and universities were built, giving children a place to learn and grow mentally and physically.

Finally, Sam Houston was another important figure in the history of Texas education. A Mason and a wonderful leader, he himself did not have a good education growing up. This unfortunate event, however, taught him even more about the value of an education. Houston once said, “It is a matter of great satisfaction to me to hope that my children will be in circumstances to receive a good education. Mine was defective and I feel the inconvenience, if not the misfortune of not receiving a classical education. Knowledge is the food of genius, and my son, let no opportunity escape you to treasure up knowledge.”

Apart from individual Masons helping out education in early Texas, Masons as a whole helped establish a lot. In the late pioneer days, the most common place to find a school in Texas was on the ground floor of a Masonic lodge. By making schoolhouses a part of Texan communities early on, Masons assured that schools and education would continue to be a part of Texas as it continued to grow.

Early on, Masonry played a huge part in flourishing education in Texas. Noted Texas historian (and non-Mason), Frederich Eby, said it best when he wrote: "Education in Texas is indebted to the courageous assistance of the Masonic Brotherhood... The evidence leaves little doubt that Masons were using every means in their power...to bring about the creation of educational institutions." All over Texas, the early work of Masonry is reflected in our public school systems, in our universities, and in every kid who is able to take advantage of a quality education and build a better future for him or herself. As Masons everywhere continue this legacy through charities to benefit education; it's easy to see that the journey is not yet over. With generous support, donations, and effort, Masons today continue, and will continue, to better the education system and help build America's future.