

## 6. Edger Alley

(former home of Mrs. Sam Houston)

The two-story structure is built of hand-hewn cedar with wooden pegs. In a very few instances square nail heads can be seen. The building faces north. Both floors are identical. Each is centered on a wide hall, 10'x17', with a large 17'x17' room on either side. Originally the kitchen and dining room were in a separate building out back, near the southwest corner. Today, the kitchen is attached.

On the front, tall white columns support the two verandas, above and below. There is a double stone chimney at either end of the house, each serving the fireplaces in each of the downstairs and upstairs rooms.

After Sam Houston died in July 1863 in Huntsville, his widow Margaret Lea Houston returned to Independence with seven of their eight children. (The oldest, Sam Jr., was serving in the Confederate Army.) Although Mrs. Houston still owned a property near Academy Hill, she chose to continue renting it and move into this larger house nearer her mother and overlooking the Town Square. Margaret Houston purchased the house built in the early 1830's by John Bancroft Root.

During the next four years, Mrs. Houston sent her oldest children to Baylor, oversaw the marriages of her two oldest daughters, and persuaded Baylor President William Carey Crane to write a biography of Sam Houston.

### As told by Mrs Asa M. Williams

*"In the family we have always been told that when the epidemic started, Mrs. Houston took her entire family away from Independence to a safer place to live, until the epidemic had run its course. Later, for some reason, she came back home bringing with her only one of the children, and a maid. It was then she fell ill with the fever and died."*

Margaret died in this house at age 48 on December 3, 1867. Yellow fever victims were buried immediately for fear that contaminated bodies spread the sickness. Consequently, Mrs. Houston was buried in Independence next to her mother's vault (across from the historic Independence Baptist Church) rather than being taken to Huntsville where her husband was interred.

### Lea-Houston Cemetery

*The Lea-Houston Cemetery is the resting place of Nancy Lea, her daughter Margaret Houston (wife of Sam Houston), two slaves of Mrs. Houston's, and an infant daughter of W.L. Williams. Mrs. Lea had the stone mausoleum built on her property. Long before her death, however, she had her coffin built, keeping it in her home, often "trying it out" and frequently storing staples like flour and sugar in it. Mrs. Lea was buried next to her daughter's grave when the mausoleum structure began to fail.*

## 7. Town Square (Schoolhouse)

Independence was launched on December 2, 1835, by four land speculators who shared interest "in a certain parcel of ground...to be named Independence." The original town boundaries of Independence consisted of 78 acres, laid out in a grid pattern of 60 regularly-shaped blocks plus four blocks in the center of town that formed the Town Square. Future development of the Square was determined in early 1844 when Independence lost to Brenham by one vote in the bid for the Washington County seat.

One year later, Independence—considered the wealthiest community in Texas—was chosen as the location for Baylor University. By the 1850s, Independence was at its peak as an educational and religious center surrounded by highly productive cotton plantations. Townspeople, Baylor students, and area planters and farmers supported local businesses, most of which overlooked the Square.

The Civil War, poor roads, the lack of a railroad and other reliable transportation took their toll on the community. Even more disastrous to Independence than a fire in 1873 and a tornado in 1882, was the relocation of both Baylor campuses in 1886. The final setback came when the September 1900 hurricane swept through southeast Texas and caused heavy damage in the area.

In the late 1880s, an existing church north of the Square was adapted for use as the public school for white children. When that building burned in 1939, the present schoolhouse was built and used until 1953. Since 1953 the building has served as both a residence and a real estate office. Today, it functions as the community center for Independence.

## 8. Blanton Block

For centuries, Native Americans, explorers, and Texas colonists had traveled along the Trail that paralleled the arc of the Gulf Coast.

By the late 1820s and before Independence was established, travelers on La Bahia Trail found lodging at this site. Portions of the original complex were built of native limestone in the late 1820s-early 1830s. Ben Blanton bought and refurbished the Block in 1859 providing its current name "The Blanton Block." The buildings accommodated a hotel, stagecoach and mail depot, general store, and residence.

Although positioned on a major overland trail, Independence not only was bypassed by the railroad but also was frequently inaccessible because of terrible roads. After Baylor relocated its campuses in 1886, the Blanton complex, as well as the other hotel in town, gradually fell into decline.

In the 1980s, the Zwiener family reconstructed two stone structures that were part of the Blanton Block. Today they serve as landmarks both to the community and to travelers on Highway 390.

## 9. General Store

When Washington County native, Walter C. Lueckemeyer, bought this property in 1926, it already included a "store building, all improvements, and the fixtures." In 1939, Lueckemeyer replaced a false-front building with the present stone structure, fashioning the façade after the most famous architectural icon in Texas history—the Alamo.

### Slot Machines & Bootleg Whiskey

*According to Lueckemeyer's niece, Lynn Lueckemeyer Hollaway, her Uncle Walter had his own style and "from the beginning...made the store a social gathering place offering slot machines and bootlegged whiskey. Seats resurfaced from old airplanes were around the pot-bellied stove in the center...His hunting dogs wandered in and out of the store along with the customers."*

The store remained a Lueckemeyer family business until 1977 when Melvin and Christine Bentke, also natives of the area, bought the property and expanded the grocery trade. Carrying on the tradition of this family-owned and operated business, Mike and Brenda Bentke Meadows acquired the property in spring 2000. The Meadows added a grill and enlarged the back room to accommodate both local folks and visitors. Everybody is welcome!

## 10. Lueckemeyer Cotton Gin

Prior to the Civil War, plantation owners in the Independence area were among the highest cotton-producers and largest slaveholders in the state. After the war, cotton remained central to the Washington County economy well into the twentieth century as evidenced by the number of cotton gins that dotted the county.

### Cotton & Corn ... All the Way!

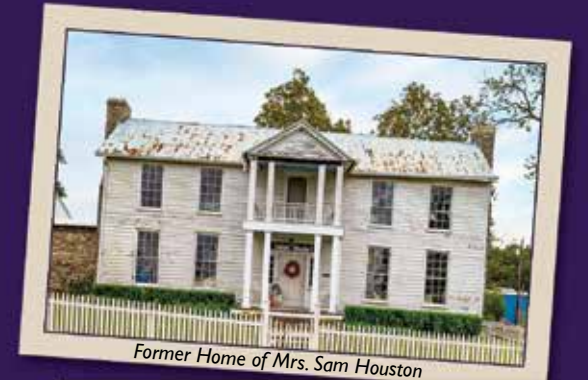
*When Alvin Schawe's family moved to Independence in 1929, he said, "We could go from here to Brenham—on each side of the road, cotton and corn, cotton and corn, cotton and corn, all the way. Now, it's not one patch."*

When Walter Lueckemeyer bought the store property across the street in 1926, he also bought this property where he built a cotton gin, one of three he owned. Lueckemeyer's Independence gin operated until the mid-1970s and was demolished in the early 1980s. A reduction in the cotton crop and technological advances in the processing of cotton made the older gins obsolete.

### Independence Baptist Church

*In August 1839 Independence Baptist Church was formed by Rev. Thomas Spraggins and a handful of others. Until Baylor University moved to Waco, its president was often the church pastor. The original 1858 building was destroyed by fire in 1872 but quickly replaced with the current stone structure. The Texas Baptist Historical Museum is now attached to the old sanctuary building. In 2008 a new building was constructed across FM 50 to house the growing congregation.*

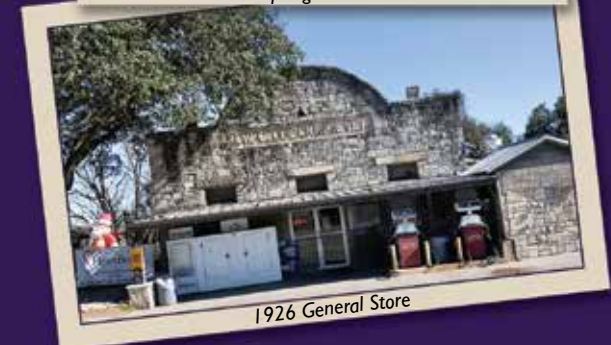
# HISTORIC Independence, Texas WALKING TOUR & SOUNDWALK



Former Home of Mrs. Sam Houston



Sam Houston's springhouse near his residence



1926 General Store



## 1. Antique Rose Emporium

Founded in 1984, the Antique Rose Emporium is an integral part of the Independence community, drawing customers from far away. Much of the Emporium stands on the grounds of the McKnight-Hairston home, built in 1855 from the local beige sandstone. Dr. John McKnight built an impressive home when he married Caroline Hairston, a widow next door.

The main two-story house faced south, while another wing faced the street (east). Across the street was the male campus of Baylor University, built in 1845, also in the Classical Revival style with local sandstone. Long after the home was abandoned (about 100 years), Caroline Hairston's great-grandchildren sold the property. Much of the home had fallen in places and most of the stone had been carted away and used for other building projects.

What was left was much of the attached stone kitchen, which was meticulously restored for the Emporium's sales and display gardens. Beneath the kitchen was a root cellar, used to store vegetables and canned goods. At one time in the history of the McKnight-Hairston kitchen, a cistern was located just outside the north facing wall. A square wood pipe was placed from the cistern, through the stone wall and into the kitchen where it was attached to a pump, providing water into the building.

## 2. Baylor on Windmill Hill

In 1845, Baptist leaders chose Independence to be the location of the newly chartered Baylor University "because of its centrality, accessibility, health and beautiful scenery."

Initially, Baylor opened its co-educational studies in Independence with 24 students at a temporary site on Academy Hill, with plans to build the University's permanent home here on Windmill Hill. Rufus Burleson altered those plans when he assumed the Baylor presidency in 1851. Separating the sexes, Burleson moved the boys to Windmill Hill to what became the Male Campus and primary university facility, while the girls remained at the Academy Hill location (now the site of Old Baylor Park).

Over the years, Baylor built a university complex of impressive structures on Windmill Hill, including Tryon Hall, Graves Hall, and Houston Hall. Today, visitors to Baylor Park on Windmill Hill can walk about the archeological excavations and other university landmarks, including the site believed to be the first burial location of Baylor's namesake, Judge R.E.B. Baylor.

### Liberty Baptist Church

*Liberty Baptist Church was formed in 1866. The name "Liberty" was chosen to emphasize the members' freedom provided at the end of the Civil War. Three or four buildings have housed the congregation since its founding. The current building, built in 1990, is a white framed structure with a gable roof, steeple, and stained-glass windows.*

## 3. Village View

In June 1880, Independence was a town of 424 people — the United States census taker enumerating 291 white, 112 black, and 21 mulatto residents.

When Baylor classes were in session, the population would increase by at least 100 people, maybe even double that, with the addition of out-of-town students, professors, and entire families who moved into town for the scholastic year.

What stands before you is much like a ghost of what once was. Large houses are gone. Once thriving shops have left just bare land. The cotton gin, center of significant activity, can be imagined only by its remaining foundation and several outbuildings.

## 4. General Jerome Bonaparte Robertson House

General Jerome Bonaparte Robertson was born in Kentucky in 1815. He graduated from medical school in 1835 and quickly became fascinated with the Texas Revolution. Robertson arrived in Texas in 1836 first living in Washington-on-the-Brazos but purchased this property in Independence in 1846 for his growing family. County courthouse records state that Robertson was to build a double sawed-cedar dwelling.

Robertson took active political and military roles in Texas. He was captain of the Texas Army, served in both houses of the Texas legislature in the late 1840s and, during the Civil War, led Hood's Brigade as part of the Gettysburg Campaign. Robertson demonstrated a great concern for his men, giving rise to the unlikely nickname of "Aunt Polly."

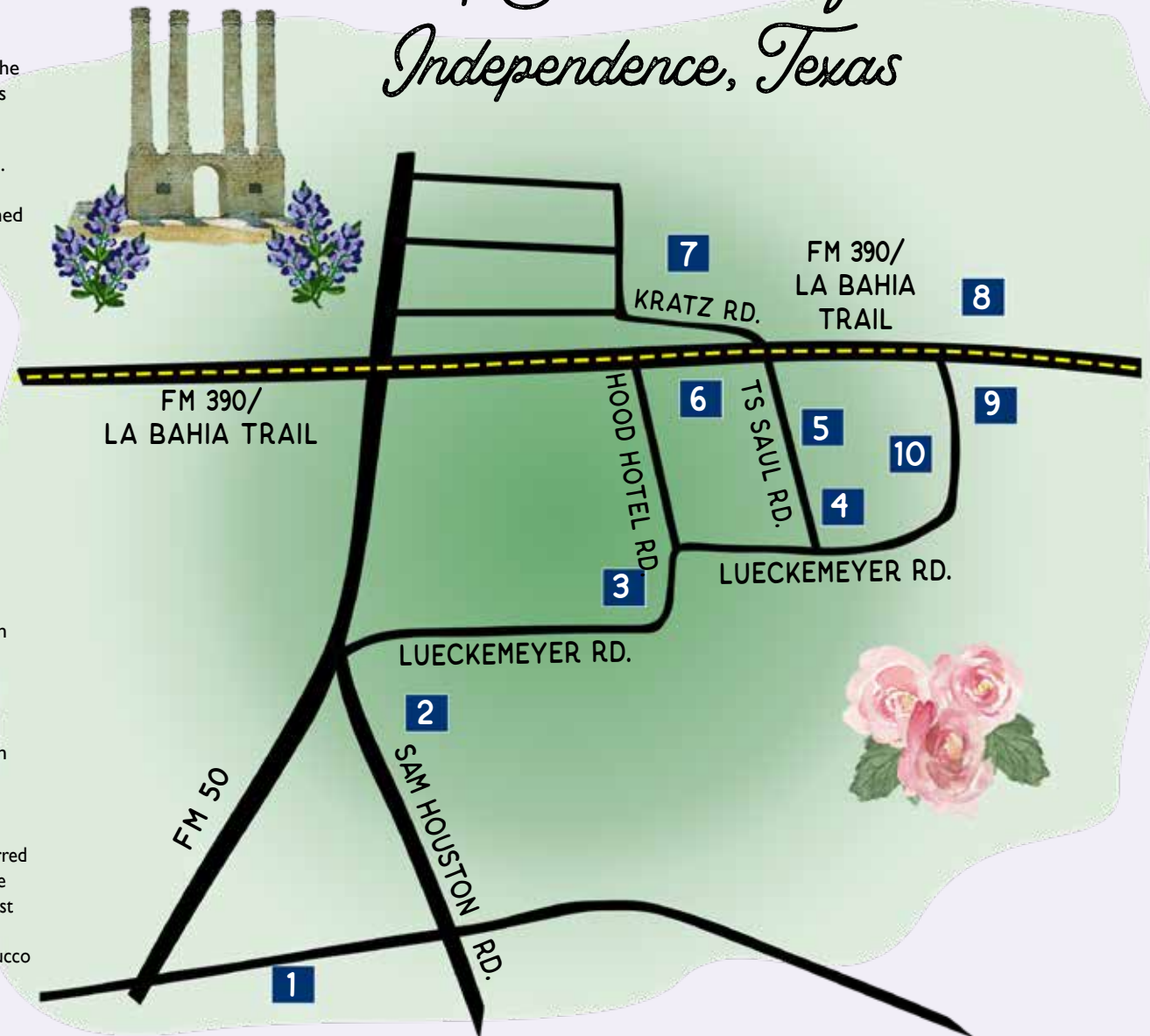
The house passed through a number of owners over the years and was "resituated" on the property several times. The well in the front yard is likely original to the Robertsons.

## 5. Toalson House

The Independence Visitor Center is housed in a historic building referred to by various names: Mexican Jail, Adobe House or Toalson House. The placement of the house and its alignment with the Town Square suggest that it was probably built around 1835 when Independence was being established and the town platted. Built of sun-dried clay bricks with a stucco finish, the construction reflects pre-1836 influences when Texas was a Mexican colony. It is not known who built the house.

After Texas declared its independence in 1836, Sam Houston, President of the Republic of Texas, appointed Independence area resident, John P. Coles the first Chief Justice of Washington County. Tradition states that this adobe structure served as Coles' office and the county's courtroom and jail before the county seat was moved to Brenham in 1844. The building continued to be used as attorneys' offices and later as a residence.

# Historic Walking Tour & Soundwalk of Independence, Texas



Scan the QR code for more information and to listen to Independence's Soundwalk, a guided listening tour of interesting historical sites and stories of the area.



Indicates sites on Soundwalk.