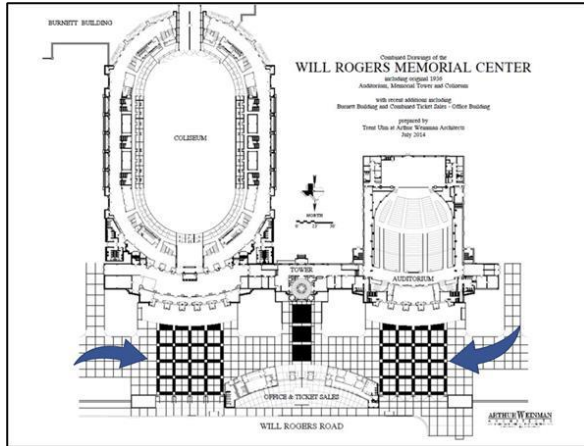


DRAFT INTERPRETIVE PLAQUE TEXT

Historic Tile Auditorium and Coliseum Murals

Will Rogers Memorial Center, 3401 West Lancaster Avenue, 76107



Created to commemorate the State of Texas Centennial (1836-1936), two 200-foot long, hand-painted tile murals trace the state's settlement and industrial development. The murals were integrated into the facades of the National Register listed Will Rogers Memorial Center auditorium and coliseum.

Following a concerning social media post about the depiction of African Americans in the auditorium mural, the Mayor's office asked the Fort Worth Art Commission to seek community input and make a recommendation. During the commission's public hearing of November 21, 2019, community consensus emerged strongly in favor of presenting historical context for the murals at the site.

The Art Commission appointed the Will Rogers Memorial Center Interpretation Advisory Panel in January 2020. They recommended that permanent interpretive plaques be embedded in the plazas in front of the coliseum and auditorium, an idea based on a concept by City of Fort Worth Historic Preservation Officer Murray Miller.

The result of more than two years of research and meetings with focus groups representing the diverse cultures depicted in the murals, the draft interpretive plaque text contained in this document was endorsed by the Art Commission on May 15, 2023. Local culture and Texas history experts were consulted to ensure historical accuracy.

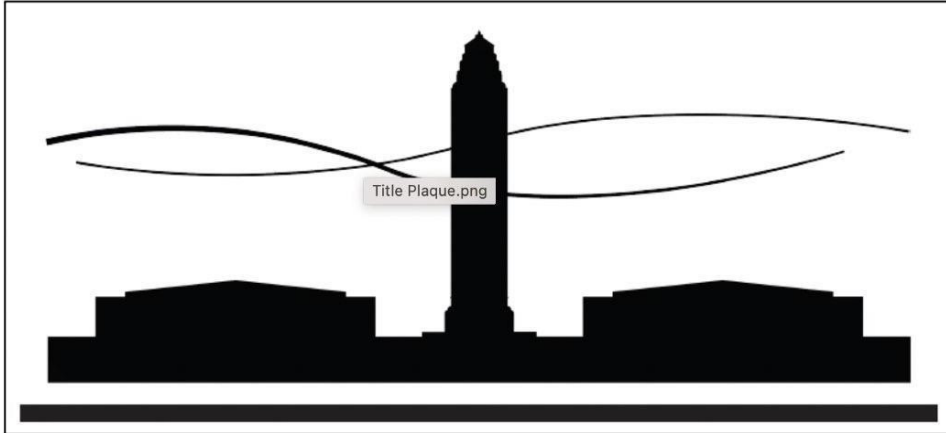
The design for the interpretive plaques will be presented at the Fort Worth Art Commission immediately following the Public Hearing on June 12, 2023. Except for the introductory plaques for each mural, the images below are photographs of the six scenes in each mural along with corresponding draft plaque text. Limited to 600 characters, the total character count appears in parentheses.

The goal of this project is to encourage viewers to learn more about Texas' multifaceted history and to foster cultural equity and understanding in our community. For more details about the Public Hearing please visit: <https://www.publicart.org>.

DRAFT INTERPRETIVE PLAQUE TEXT

COLISEUM

Will Rogers Memorial Center Coliseum Mural Introduction



The Will Rogers Memorial Center's Coliseum and Auditorium were the centerpieces of the 1936 Frontier Centennial, a celebration of 100 years of Texas independence. Exciting displays and reenactments of frontier life glorified popular mythology of the "Old West." The 200-foot-long, hand-painted tile murals on the two buildings' facades feature highly romanticized interpretations of cultural histories. Installed in 2023, these plaques result from a community-centered City of Fort Worth initiative supported with federal American Rescue Plan Act funds to promote cultural equity and understanding.

[598]

Plaque 1



For thousands of years, various indigenous societies have inhabited the area now known as Texas. By the time European explorers came to the Americas, sophisticated tribal nations with unique languages, cultural practices and structured social systems hunted the plains, worked the land, raised families, and engaged in trade. In 1836, Republic of Texas President Sam Houston established policies promoting friendship and trade with indigenous people; however, they were overridden almost immediately when he left office, leading to mistrust and warfare between Native Americans and the colonists.

[597]

DRAFT INTERPRETIVE PLAQUE TEXT

COLISEUM

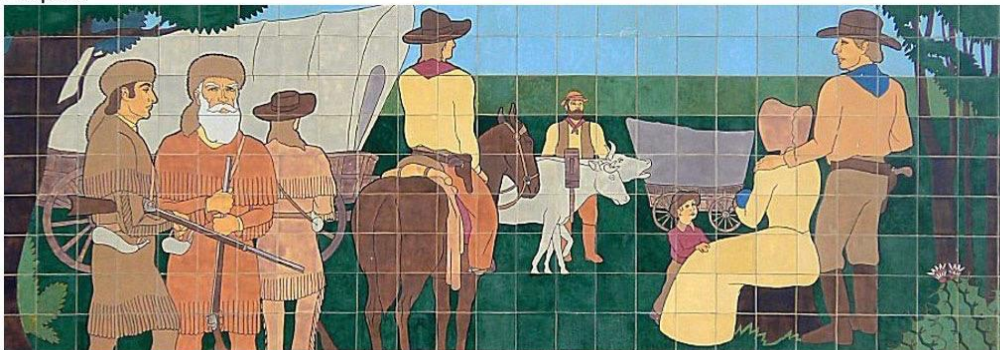
Plaque 2



Indigenous people lived in a harmonious and spiritual relationship with the American buffalo and all of nature. Many depended on the bison for food, clothing, and tools, and honored them in stories and ceremonies. Plains Nations Indians were also skilled horse riders and breeders as well as agile hunters. By the late 1700s, their settlements moved efficiently across the plains following herd migrations. When failed governmental policies led to the near extermination of the bison in 1878, Anglo colonists, moving further into native lands, were empowered to suppress and control Native people.

[600]

Plaque 3



In 1825, Stephen F. Austin brought 300 families to Mexican-governed Tejas, where Indigenous people vastly outnumbered Anglo immigrants. To control Indigenous land, Mexico granted land agents (*empresarios*) like Austin to recruit Anglo colonists to settle expansive territories. The first colony, with a population of 1,790 including 443 enslaved people, spread between the Brazos and Colorado rivers. Stories of dangerous expeditions onto Native lands led by rugged frontiersmen shaped the stereotypes of the 'peaceful and industrious colonist' braving attacks of the so called 'uncivilized Indians'.

[599]

DRAFT INTERPRETIVE PLAQUE TEXT COLISEUM

Plaque 4



The Lone Star flag flew over the Texas Republic in 1839. Trading posts promoted the exchange of Native textiles, jewelry, and basketry for food, clothing, and other necessities. Although this scene depicts peaceful trade, the years preceding Texas Independence were full of conflict and violence. When Mexican law banned slavery in 1827, differences in cultural and political thinking led to revolution. To protect their families, Indigenous peoples and nations moved deeper into their ancestral homelands as more Anglos came to the new Republic. Eventually, Native Americans were forcibly removed.

[598]

Plaque 5



The United States annexed the Republic of Texas in 1845, as the 28th state. The first census (1850) listed 212,592 people residing in Texas. The Texas economy depended on agriculture, particularly cotton, and the railroad was important for long-distance travel and transportation of goods. Cattle ranching brought prosperity to Texas and large landowners. Although slavery was abolished in the Confederate states in 1863, news of emancipation did not come to Texas until June 19, 1865, which, through the tireless efforts of Fort Worth's Opal Lee, became a national holiday, Juneteenth, in 2021.

[595]

DRAFT INTERPRETIVE PLAQUE TEXT

COLISEUM

Plaque 6



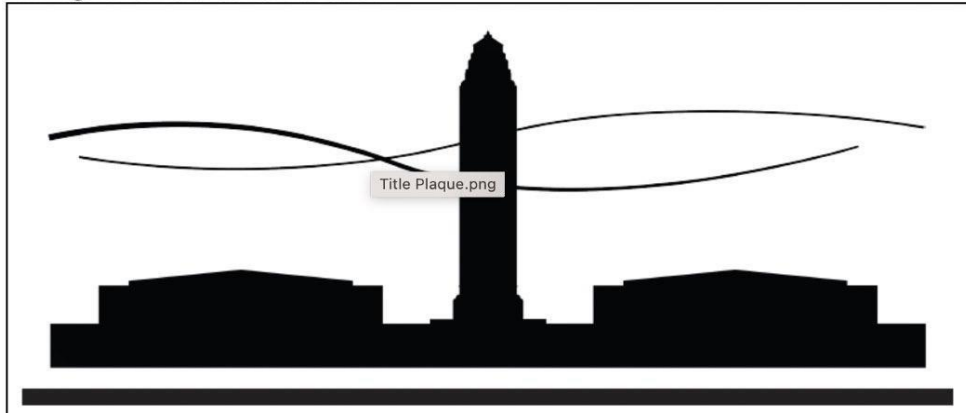
Although the Mexican Vaquero is not shown in this scene, many modern-day ranching techniques and popular cowboy practices can be traced to them. Skilled horse and cattlemen, Vaqueros participated in traditional sporting events called *charrería*, the precursor of the modern-day rodeo. Working ranch hands by day, *mestizo* (mixed Native American and Spanish people), Black, *Anglo* and Indigenous horsemen often competed in roping and riding competitions in their free time. By the 1890s, organized rodeos were popular spectator events that gave cowboys a chance to demonstrate skills honed on the range.

[599]

DRAFT INTERPRETIVE PLAQUE TEXT

AUDITORIUM

Will Rogers Memorial Center Auditorium



Introduction

In 1936, these murals were considered the largest set of mosaics in the world. Like other public artwork created during the Great Depression (1929–1939), stylized images feature intertwined cultural stories. Themes directed by Texas Christian University professor and one-term Fort Worth Mayor William Jackson Hamond focused on progress and achievement. Nevertheless, the murals did not represent an accurate story. The goal of these interpretative plaques is to encourage viewers to learn more about Texas' multifaceted history and to foster cultural understanding and equity in our community.

Plaque 1



Spain, France, and Mexico flew flags over Native American land from 1519 until 1836. Each nation's influence can still be seen today. First to claim the new territory, the Spanish named it *Tejas*, the Caddo word for "friendship." Spanish missions set up as cultural centers for training and education enabled Spain to take Native lands and resources by forcing religious and cultural assimilation. The departing Spanish conquistador and the sterned-faced and traditionally dressed Mexican trio reference Mexico's rejection of colonial rule in 1810 and the fight for Mexican independence.

[587]

DRAFT INTERPRETIVE PLAQUE TEXT

AUDITORIUM

Plaque 2



After Stephen F. Austin brought the first colonizing settlers to Texas, other Anglo immigrants seeking new opportunities followed, including David "Davy" Crockett. Indigenous people far outnumbered Anglos when United States annexed Texas in 1845. Resisting intrusions onto their lands, many were killed, enslaved, or forced into Anglo society. The 1850 Texas Census, including immigrants and enslaved peoples, indicated that ethnic diversity in Texas was greater than any other southern state. Having seceded from the Union when the Civil War started, Texas did not fully rejoin until 1870.

[595]

Plaque 3



Texas ranching has been a major economic industry since 1730. The ancient practice of branding, permanently marking by hot iron, was brought to the New World by the Spanish. It became state law in 1848, requiring cattle owners to register unique brands as legal proof of ownership. With the invention of barbed wire (1874), Anglo land ownership, made possible after the forceable removal of Native people, boomed, and vast parcels of land for grazing cattle and farming were created. Workers, by necessity and by force, were ethnically diverse, including women and enslaved Blacks and Indigenous people.

[604]

DRAFT INTERPRETIVE PLAQUE TEXT

AUDITORIUM

Plaque 4



For the first two decades of 20th century, Texas agriculture led the state's economic growth. Texas produced almost one third of America's cotton. This scene depicts tenant farming and sharecropping, systems in which freedmen and poor white and Mexican workers farmed rented land for a share of the harvested crops. Sharecropping rarely resulted in farm ownership. After World War I (1914-1918), landowners were forced to modernize, using machinery to harvest over twenty-five million acres of cotton, wheat, corn and other crops. The use of and relationship to land began to change profoundly. [595]

Plaque 5



The modern Texas economy was booming in 1901. The discovery of oil in Beaumont was international news. Spindletop, the largest gusher the world had ever seen, blew oil more than 150 feet high and produced an unprecedented 100,000 barrels of oil per day and 3.5 million barrels the first year. Abundant oil became the economic powerhouse in Texas and new industries in shipping and transportation began to take off. In 1940, Texas led all U.S. states in oil production. The remaking of the land since the time of Native people, and its now commodified resources was a profoundly different place. [594]

DRAFT INTERPRETIVE PLAQUE TEXT

AUDITORIUM

Plaque 6



New Deal programs helped Texas recover from the Great Depression (1929–1939). Federal funding for parks, highways, and public buildings provided much-needed work and improved infrastructure. Though not acknowledged here, the diversity of men and women who contributed to the building of new school buildings, the county hospital, a new city hall and public library, and the Will Rogers Memorial Center, including the Pioneer Tower, Coliseum and Auditorium, was likely significant. Progress and achievement had changed the state, and the city, but not without commitment and not without sacrifice.

[596]



DRAFT INTERPRETIVE PLAQUE TEXT