

SR Visits

Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library

Katy Ginanni, Column Editor

Built of the same Texas limestone used to construct the Alamo, the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT) Library shares ground with that famous structure. Although the state of Texas owns the building and the grounds on which it stands, the DRT owns the contents. The library was opened in 1945, and the collection focuses on the period in Texas history, 1836–1846, when Texas was a country unto itself. *Serials Review* 2010; xx:xxx–xxx.
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Introduction

Beyond the cool, thick limestone walls of the Alamo in downtown San Antonio, Texas, lies a building that houses the Daughters of the

Republic of Texas (DRT) Library. To understand the mission of the DRT Library, it's helpful to understand some of the history of its neighboring structure.

The Alamo was built as a Spanish mission and was originally known as Misión San Antonio de Valero. The Spanish missions were built to convert the native population to Catholicism. They served as small, self-contained towns. In the early 1800s it became a Spanish fort. The soldiers referred to it as the Alamo after their hometown Alamo de Parras,¹ and the name stuck. But it is the battle in 1836, between troops of Mexican General Antonio López de Santa Anna and the Texian and Tejano defenders, for which the Alamo is most well known. Though the defenders were defeated, the Alamo shrine is still remembered as "a place where men made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom."²

The DRT was chartered in 1893. To be a member, one must be able to verify direct descent from a citizen of the Republic of Texas, which was in existence from 1836 to February 16, 1846. One of the missions of the DRT is to encourage the study of Texas history and to preserve its documents, and the DRT Library seeks to do just that. The library was begun because shrine hostesses (who are always DRT members) often received questions from visitors to the shrine, and a reference collection was needed. Dr. William Eager Howard of Dallas became the initial benefactor by donating his personal library of Texana materials to the DRT in 1943. His friend, San Antonio banker John King Beretta, was also a collector of Texana, and he followed suit in 1945. This reference collection began to grow, and it was moved into Alamo Hall (which was originally San Antonio fire station #2). The collection still grew, and the Daughters began to raise funds for a new building. Sallie Ward Beretta, wife of John King Beretta, then donated a substantial sum in memory of her husband, who had since passed away, and construction began. The new library, a beautiful reading room west of Alamo Hall, opened in 1950. The design and materials used were meant to complement the existing structures. An addition to the south end was built in the early 1970s. In the late 1970s a second addition was made to the north. Then in 1989 a climate- and humidity-controlled vault was added for the storage of rare books, manuscripts, photographs and other sensitive material. Several years ago, the library took the important step of installing a state-of-the-art fire suppression system. All funding came from donations and grants.

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Library Director Leslie Sitz Stapleton was generous with her time during the visit and during editing of the column.

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58 The library previously had a halon system. The new system, a
59 3M™ Novec™ 1230, is environmentally friendly and safe for
60 documents and artwork.

61 No tax money—federal, state or local—was used to construct the
62 library. It was built with DRT money but was deeded to the state of
63 Texas, which owns all of the grounds and buildings, including the
64 Alamo itself. Artifacts in the Alamo belong to the state of Texas. The
65 collection in the library, however, belongs solely to the DRT.

66 The Collection

67 Many of the documents one would expect to find at the DRT
68 Library are actually held at the Texas State Archives in Austin. The
69 DRT collection covers Texas history up to about 1900 and San
70 Antonio history up through 1950. It includes book and serial
71 collections, manuscripts, vertical file collection, photo collection,
72 fine arts prints, newspapers and even sheet music—all about Texas.
73 There are a number of Spanish documents in the archives. The
74 oldest document in the collection is dated 1551 and is from a
75 Spanish king. Another particularly interesting document held by
76 the library is a manuscript map drawn by Stephen F. Austin of his
77 colony. Austin's father, Moses Austin, received a grant from the
78 Spanish government to bring a group of colonists to the area. Those
79 settlers were known as Americans. Eventually, they began to refer
80 to themselves as Texans. When Moses Austin died, he left the
81 grant to his son, Stephen.

82 The library has a small collection of early Texas art. In fact, some
83 of the artwork that is used in Texas history textbooks is made from
84 prints of original artwork in the DRT library. One of the artists
85 represented in the collection is Theodore Gentilz (1819–1906), an
86 early San Antonio painter. The library does not normally collect
87 artifacts, but sometimes they come with a book or manuscript
88 collection. In some cases, the books and artifacts must be taken
89 together or not at all, and so the library ends up with some unusual
90 and interesting items. One example is the petticoats of Susanna
91 and Angelina Dickinson, wife and daughter of one of the Alamo
92 defenders. A visiting group of Texas bobbin lacers was especially
93 excited to view these unique items.

94 The library is proud to have two of the thirteen known copies
95 from the first printing of the Texas Declaration of Independence.
96 They are broadsides printed on March 2, 1836, and distributed to
97 let people know that Texas had declared its independence from
98 Mexico. One is especially noteworthy; it was noted by Samuel
99 Maverick, who was present at the constitutional convention in
100 Washington-on-the-Brazos (so called to distinguish it from
101 Washington-on-the-Potomac).

102 Clientele and Visitors

103 Leslie Sitz Stapleton, library director, notes that there is no regular,
104 consistent user population. Visitors come from all over the **United**
105 **States** and the world. As one might expect historians are the
106 primary users of the library. Another large group of users are the
107 Alamo enthusiasts, and as Stapleton acknowledges, there are a lot
108 of Alamo enthusiasts! Genealogists also visit the library regularly,
109 and the remainder is the casual visitor who wanders over from the
110 Alamo. Some visitors may have seen their surnames on the list of
111 Alamo defenders in the shrine, and tour guides refer them to the
112 library. The library keeps a vertical file on each Alamo defender.
113 Some files have one or two pieces of paper, while others have an
114 entire shelf of materials. The files may contain research (both
115 published and unpublished), newspaper articles, family bibles, and
116 marriage, birth and death certificates (both originals and copies).

The Alamo shrine receives approximately 2.5 million visitors 117
every year. In comparison, in a nine-month period in 2009, the DRT 118
library had only 516 visitors inside the library. More than 4,000 119
came to the gated entrance, but many of those were mostly 120
directional questions, such as “Is this the Alamo?” and “Where is 121
the bathroom?” As noted earlier, most of the visitors are academics 122
working on dissertations, books or articles. One professor at a local 123
university sends his students to the library for extra credit in 124
coursework. 125

A surprising visitor to the DRT Library is pop music star Phil 126
Collins. He was a fan of the television show *Davy Crockett* when he 127
was a youngster and also of the 1960 movie *The Alamo* that starred 128
John Wayne. Collins became interested in Texana and Texas 129
history, and now he visits the DRT Library whenever he is in San 130
Antonio. He is a frequent visitor. Sometimes he has specific 131
questions related to Texas history, and sometimes the staff simply 132
trots out new acquisitions to show him. 133

A not-so-surprising visitor was movie director Ron Howard. 134
Howard was the original director of the 2004 version of *The Alamo*, 135
and he and his staff did much of their research at the DRT Library. 136
However, Howard and the Disney production company had 137
creative and financial disagreements, and Howard left the project. 138
He was replaced by Texan John Lee Hancock, who also conducted a 139
great deal of research in the DRT Library. 140

141 Organization of the Library

The DRT Library functions as its own unit. Administratively, it is 142
not related at all to the Alamo shrine. Stapleton began working in 143
the library in 2000 as a library assistant. She went on to earn an 144
MLS from University of North Texas and became director in 2008. 145
She is joined by seven staff members, including four professional 146
librarians. They are Martha Utterback, assistant director and 147
photograph and art curator; Chuck Tucker, reference librarian; 148
Caitlin Donnelly, archivist; Beverly Ewald, catalog librarian; 149
Madalene Morgan, bookkeeper; Lydia Cuellar, library assistant; 150
and Charles “Rusty” Gamez, library technical assistant. Ewald 151
catalogs any new serials that are received by the library. Morgan is 152
responsible for the check-in of serials, and for maintaining the 153
subscription and renewal records. 154

155 Resources

With no acquisitions budget *per se*, every single item in the 156
library's collection could be considered a donation. Some of the 157
books in the collection are donated outright. Some items are 158
purchased with donated funds. Stapleton receives publisher 159
brochures and flyers. If a book pertains to Texas or San Antonio 160
history in the specified time period, then Stapleton uses donated 161
funds to purchase. Because it is a non-circulating collection, she 162
seldom buys more than one copy. Stapleton keeps a list of 163
donations that have been made in honor of or in memory of 164
people. When the library acquires a new book, she will ensure that 165
a bookplate is added to indicate in whose honor the book was 166
purchased. 167

The library currently has between twenty-five and thirty 168
journal subscriptions. Most of those are donated by the organiza- 169
tions that produce them. Some of those are DRT-sponsored 170
organizations. (There are over 6,000 individual DRT members. 171
Chapters are scattered throughout Texas and many at-large 172
members reside in states. San Antonio alone has three chapters.) 173
The journals are almost exclusively about Texas history or 174
genealogy, although there are a few library and archives journals. 175
The library does hold some back runs of historical titles, including 176

177 *Cattleman*, and *Frontier Times*. Currently, the library does not
178 provide access to any online journals.

179 Automation

180 Since December, 2006, the library has been using an integrated
181 library system from EOS (Electronic Online Systems). The
182 primary use of the system is for the online public catalog.
183 However, the library does also use the system for serials check-
184 in. Current issues appear in the public catalog, and the catalog is
185 available on the Web. It can be accessed from the library's Web
186 site at www.drtd.org. Most of the items in the collection are
187 cataloged, and the Dewey Decimal Classification system is used.
188 Most of the subjects are Library of Congress Subject Headings;
189 however, the library has found it necessary to add a few original
190 headings. "Alamo Defenders" is one example of an original
191 heading. Even the vertical files in compact shelving have been
192 cataloged, although not the individual contents of each file.
193 Currently, the library does not subscribe to any full-text
194 databases, but they do provide access to Heritage Quest Online
195 and PERSI, both genealogical index and abstract databases from
196 ProQuest LLC.

197 Conclusion

198 Many people who have lived in San Antonio their whole lives and
199 bring their visitors to the Alamo do not know that the DRT Library
200 exists, and Stapleton would like to change that. The library has
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201 had several open houses this past year, allowing visitors to come
202 in to view some of the special items in the library. She would also
203 like to provide more outreach to schoolchildren. Of all the
204 busloads of children that visit the Alamo during the year, most
205 never visit the library. The Alamo has started a summer day camp
206 for nine- to twelve-year-old children, and one of the morning
207 sessions is held in the library. Stapleton would also like to reach
208 out to teenagers to get them interested in Texas history and to
209 cater more to the many tourists that visit the Alamo shrine. To
210 that end, the DRT Library joined the world of social networking in
211 2009 by starting a page on Facebook. Soon afterward they began a
212 blog, which is updated weekly and highlights the library's
213 collection.

214 Another important project Stapleton wants to tackle is a new
215 facility for the library. Fortunately, the DRT agrees with Stapleton
216 and has started a capital campaign for a new building. A new
217 facility will be somewhere on the grounds, even if that means
218 increasing the grounds. The library cannot build up, as that would
219 detract from the view of the Alamo shrine. And for the dedicated
220 employees of the library and the members of the DRT, that is of the
221 utmost importance.

Notes

- 222
- 223 1. Author unknown, *The Alamo History*, <http://www.thealamo.org/history.html>
224 (accessed January 30, 2010).
 - 225 2. Author unknown, *The Alamo History*, <http://www.thealamo.org/history.html>
226 (accessed January 30, 2010).