

Fast Facts About the Texas State Capitol

- 1839 - The Republic of Texas established Austin as the capital. A log cabin with two large rooms and smaller meeting rooms served as the Capitol. An eight-foot stockade fence surrounded the structure for protection during Indian raids.
- 1853 - Texas constructed a limestone Capitol located at Capitol Square (near the present-day Confederate Soldiers Monument on the Great Walk). The building lacked architectural refinement and one publication called it an "architectural monstrosity."
- 1875 - The Constitution of 1876 authorized the use of 3 million acres of public land in the Texas Panhandle to pay for a new Capitol. The Capitol Syndicate including John and Charles Farwell from Chicago paid for the construction of the present-day Capitol in exchange for the land, which became the famous XIT ranch.
- 1880 - Texas officials announced a nation-wide design competition for the new Capitol with an award of \$1,700. Eight architects submitted eleven designs. Texas officials approved the design of Detroit architect Elijah E. Myers.
- 1881 - The limestone Capitol caught fire on November 9, 1881. The Capitol Board had been meeting in the building when the fire broke out and the plans for the new Capitol barely escaped the flames.
- 1882 - Contractors began using limestone from south Austin for the foundation. They discovered it began to discolor when exposed to the atmosphere. The owners of Granite Mountain in nearby Burnet County donated all the Texas Sunset Red Granite required. Workers shipped 188,518 cubic feet of granite from the quarry on a specially constructed railroad.
- 1885 - Texans laid the cornerstone on March 2, 1885. Numerous government and civic dignitaries attended the ceremony. The 12,000-pound stone had a niche carved into it to hold a zinc box, which held collected mementoes.
- 1886 - Ten derricks hoisted the massive stones from the railcars to any part of the outside walls. It took over 1,000 people to build the Capitol and when completed the building had 392 rooms, 924 windows and 404 doors.
- 1887 - The dome featured a system of iron braces along with a wrought-iron framework imported from Belgium. They painted the external metal panels to match the Capitol's granite.
- February 1888 - Metal contractors created the Goddess of Liberty by welding 80 pieces of zinc into the four major sections: the torso, the two arms and the head. A crew hoisted each section to the top of the dome and used large screws to hold her together.
- May 1888 - Over 20,000 people attended the week of festivities to dedicate the new Capitol. The celebration included drill team competitions, military displays, band concerts and fireworks. The city added special streetcar lines to bring the large crowds from an encampment a mile outside of town.
- May 16, 1888 - Crowds lined Congress Avenue and filled the Capitol Grounds to view the official dedication of the Capitol. Senator Temple Houston, the youngest son of Sam Houston, accepted the building on behalf of the state. He expressed the pride Texans felt in the building. "This building fires the heart and excites reflections in the minds of all... the architecture of a civilization is its most enduring feature, and by this structure shall Texas transmit herself to posterity."

Texas State Capitol Myths & Legends

- The Texas Capitol is taller than the United States Capitol.
 - The Texas Capitol does stand 14.64 feet taller than the nation's Capitol in Washington D.C.
- There is Confederate gold buried under the oldest tree on the Capitol Grounds.
 - No historical documentation exists that substantiates this often-told legend. In addition, the Capitol Grounds Restoration graded, excavated and restored the acreage around the Capitol during the 1990s. No gold or other treasure turned up during this extensive work.
- Texas does not own the land on which the Capitol stands.
 - Texas has actually paid for the land three times. The Republic of Texas initially purchased the site in 1839 from two men who appeared to have legal title. In 1874, E.M. Smith provided evidence he had purchased a rightful deed for the land from the only surviving member of a pioneer family who perished in an Indian raid. Texas paid Stella McGregor and Kate Sturgis \$20,000 in 1926 after they proved their family had a legitimate and earlier land claim.
- There are cannonballs in the walls of the Texas Capitol.
 - This myth probably grew from a misinterpretation of the building plans. Workers used lime mortar to bond the stones in the walls, with metal anchors used at some exterior locations to bond ornamental granite stones to the base wall. A notation in the Appendix to the Memorandum of Agreement, Exhibit F from October 20, 1884 stated: "...five eighth inch round iron shall be substituted for one inch by one quarter flat iron for the anchors in the exterior walls," which was referring to the anchors.
- Someone is buried on the Capitol Grounds.
 - This legend arose from the fact there have been multiple statehouses in Austin. In June 2000, descendants of John Ballantyne contacted the State Preservation Board regarding the burial of their ancestor. The family had documentation saying he was buried: "...near the river...on the Capitol Grounds." Ballantyne died in October 1846 when Texas still used the log Capitol not near the vicinity of the current Capitol Grounds. It appears that he received a burial at the log Capitol that stood closer to the Colorado River.
- A state official was killed in the Capitol.
 - On June 30, 1903, State Comptroller Robert. M. Love died from gunshot wounds inflicted by former employee William Hill. Love had greeted Hill and invited him into his office. Hill gave a letter to Love and then shot him twice in the chest. Chief bookkeeper J.W. Stephens chased down the fleeing assailant. A struggle took place and Hill was accidentally shot and died later that day.
- There are secret tunnels leaving the Capitol.
 - A myth states that there are secret tunnels for people and horses that extend from the Capitol all the way to Lady Bird Lake. Although tunnels did exist, they were not secret or meant for escape but rather installed for utilities.
- The Capitol received its first women's restroom in 1966.
 - Believe it or not, two of Austin's three Capitol buildings have been scarred by devastating fires. We outgrew our first digs quickly — a tiny little thing built with Bastrop lumber — and so a larger Capitol was built in 1853 only to burn down in The Great Capitol Fire of 1881. By 1888, Elijah Myers' masterpiece was completed, and for nearly a century, it stood strong... until an electrical fire in 1983 did some serious damage to the living quarters and official chambers. This prompted an elaborate 10-year restoration and renovation project that included building the \$75 million Capitol Extension (because what the heck) and replacing the 3,000-pound statue on top of the Dome by helicopter.
- Republic of Texas

- On the floor of the Rotunda is a circular collection of seals representing the six flags that have flown over the state. The seals stand for Texas under Spain, Texas under France, Texas under Mexico, and Texas under the Confederacy. In the middle is a seal standing for Texas in the United States, with oak and olive branches painted to symbolize strength and peace.
- The Goddess of Liberty
 - The statue on top of the State Capitol is The Goddess of Liberty, and her very existence up there is said to make the Texas State Capitol taller than the US Capitol.
- Miriam Ferguson Governor in 1925
 - Along the wall in the Rotunda hangs a picture of Miriam Ferguson, the first woman governor of Texas. She started serving in 1925 and held office for a total of five years. Her husband served as governor from 1915 to 1917 but was impeached during his second term; he was not allowed to hold office in Texas ever again. Interestingly enough, Miriam won the election after ensuring the people she would follow the advice of her husband.
- Builders Paid With Land
 - The main capitol builders, John V. Farwell and Charles B. Farwell, were paid with three million acres of land. Not a bad deal considering they later turned it into one of the largest cattle ranches in Texas.
- The Capitol Fires
 - In 1853, a grand Texas Capitol stood tall after completion only to burn down in The Great Capitol Fire of 1881. Construction of the new capitol followed quickly, and in 1988, the building took shape. However, an electrical fire in 1983 severely damaged the official chambers, prompting the capitol's ten-year restoration, turning it into the structure we know today.
- Largest US State Capitol
 - In reference to square footage, the Texas Capitol is the largest State Capitol in the United States.
- The Capitol is built of Hill Country limestone and granite
 - The Capitol's original plans called for it to be built from native Texas Hill Country limestone, but all of the limestone that the builders could find contained high amounts of iron, which caused it to streak unbecomingly when exposed to air. Luckily, the owners of Granite Mountain Stone Design (now Coldspring) in Marble Falls were willing to donate enough "Sunset Red" granite to complete the outer walls, so the streaked limestone was used in the foundation.
- The Texas State Capitol is most likely haunted
 - Regardless of whether you believe in ghosts, there are numerous reports of ghost sightings at the Capitol. Visitors have supposedly seen and even exchanged pleasantries with famous politicians like Sam Houston, Edmond Jackson Davis, and Andrew Hamilton throughout the Capitol, as well as mysterious figures like the Dome's "lady in red." Check out USA Today's coverage of Capitol hauntings from 2008 if you're feeling skeptical about this.