



BRISCOE CENTER
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

**Exploring the
American South:
The Briscoe Center's
Southern History
Collections**

**Self-guided tour
Main gallery**

Welcome to the Briscoe Center for American History. Our manuscript, artifact, and library holdings contain a wealth of primary sources documenting many themes in United States history.

This self-guided tour will highlight objects throughout our current main gallery exhibition. While we create changing exhibitions drawn from our collections several times a year, we can display just a small fraction of our collections in our three galleries. You can learn more about our exhibitions, access our online research tools, arrange to visit our reading room, and explore our digital and print publications at www.briscoecenter.org.

This exhibition draws out the history of the South across what historians sometimes refer to as “the long 19th century”—a time of great transformation for the people, government, and ways of life in the region.

THE SOUTH AS TERRITORY

The Briscoe Center's collections comprise one of the top three research resources in the nation for the study of the American South. Our resources provide evidence of westward expansion in early U.S. history, relationships with other colonial and native nations, and a growing economy dependent upon enslaved labor.

► Stop 1

Look for an object that would have been used to measure distance. As the frontier shifted westward, surveyors used chains and pins of standardized length to map territory. This set is in a Spanish unit of measurement, the *vara*, and was used for land grants in Texas. One mile equals about 1,900 *varas*.

► Stop 2

Look for a bill of sale for children.

This is an English translation of an original Spanish bill of sale for two eleven-year-old children, both born in Africa. What different kinds of evidence might this one document provide of these children's lives and the world they lived in?

THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH

From 1812 to 1861, cotton became a global commodity. The South's cotton economy depended on a system of slave labor. Objects here show examples from the Briscoe Center's extensive collections documenting the growth of transportation networks around the region, the trade in cotton goods within the United States and overseas, the exploitation of enslaved labor that made this economy possible, and the growing abolitionist movement.

► Stop 3

In this section of the exhibition, a group of documents and artifacts show evidence of resistance and its consequences. The brutality of slavery is evident in iron shackles that would have bound an individual's ankles.

Look for the large newspaper *The Mississippian and Natchez Advertiser*. The pages of this local paper include a variety of ads and notices. Placed among them are multiple ads for runaway slaves.

► Stop 4

Look for a business card.

This card from J. W. Boazman's business, named the Slave Depot, is a piece of ephemera that reveals the commodification of human beings and the extent to which slavery was seen as a legitimate business.

CIVIL WAR

The Briscoe Center holds significant resources documenting the Civil War and includes eyewitness accounts of battles, reports on military strategies, letters between soldiers and family, and expressions of grief over loved ones who died in battle.

► Stop 5

Look for the encrypted telegram.

Here, a Confederate message written in a Vigenère cipher – an encryption code relying on a keyword or phrase – guards against Union spying using the technology at hand.

RECONSTRUCTION

Roots of the modern United States can be traced to this period during which Congress created a constitutional amendment ending slavery and others addressing equal protection, citizenship, and voting laws. In this section, primary sources include a recently-discovered sound recording.

► Stop 6

Look for the front page of *The Free Man's Press*.

Soon after the Civil War, voices from the black community emerged on the pages of this weekly newspaper, published in Austin.

EPILOGUE

The final section of the exhibition looks at the American South in the late 19th century. As the years passed since the Civil War, the idea of the “Lost Cause” began to emerge.

► Stop 7

Look for the ribbons commemorating veterans' reunions.

After the war, Confederate veterans' associations formed across the South.

In reunion meetings, veterans would share memories of battles and of fallen comrades, such as the written account and map nearby that describes a battle for Chattanooga, Tennessee, where Union soldiers under Ulysses S. Grant defeated Confederate forces.

As you exit the main gallery, the exhibition *From Commemoration to Education: Pompeo Coppini's Statue of Jefferson Davis* provides an opportunity to explore further evidence of how memories of the Civil War and the idea of the “Lost Cause” could be made manifest.

Thank you for visiting the Briscoe Center for American History!



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