TESTIMONY ON THE PROPOSED LONE STAR HISTORICAL DRAMA

by

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I appreciate the opportunity of presenting testimony regarding the proposed Lone Star Historical Drama. My experience has been primarily in research and teaching of recreation and park planning and design with particular reference to the protection and human use of the environment. I would like to base the following testimony on this experience and my professional training as a landscape architect.

Traditionally, in this country two fundamental roles have been accepted and carried out by national and state park agencies: protection of important resource assets (natural, historic, archaeological) and provision of leisure service to people (educational, recreational, inspirational, spiritual). Although emphasis varies from state to state, both roles are incorporated in all state park development.

Ample evidence can be documented that these roles have prevailed throughout the history of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The acquisition of the Galveston Island State Park property and the decision to include a variety of recreational uses in the master plan further support the thesis that resource protection and service to people are prevailing philosophical tenets of the Parks and Wildlife Department. Interpretive tours of wildlife areas, recreation vehicle camping, boat launching, overnight shelters, beach and saltwater
recreation, and a concession are now elements of the park master plan. The compatible function of offering indigenous Texas historical interpretation is just one more opportunity now available to the planners and administrators of this park. In fact, if the proposed drama were placed in total park development perspective, it could be argued that it offers greater utilization as well as protection of the resource assets of Galveston Island State Park than do some of the other proposed uses.

Documentation of the relationship between historic dramas and philosophies and policies of state parks is ample enough to justify the introduction of the Lone Star Historical Drama into the master plan of the Galveston Island State Park. For example, the National Conference on State Parks, the national assembly of state park administrators, includes historic dramas as a major element of officially approved state park function. One of the major nine points identified in the furtherance of purposes of planning, developing and managing state parks is to:

"Encourage interpretation of the cultural, environmental, archeological, historical, natural and scenic heritages of our country, thereby providing unique options for satisfying personal experiences." (NRPA, 1971:2)

In Texas, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) cites "Attending Outdoor Concerts, Drama, Similar Events," as one of the 27 activities falling within the scope of the plan.

"This activity includes attendance, as a spectator, at musical, dramatic, artistic, or other non-sporting events which are conducted out-of-doors. Excluded are drive-in movies." (SCORP, 1965:4.0.2.1)
Both the natural and historical aspects of Galveston Island are important environmental elements of the Galveston State Park. The interpretation of these is an appropriate function of the State Parks of Texas as declared in 1963: "The parks should be operated in such a manner that the spiritual and inspirational values are emphasized. To accomplish this, proper interpretive planning should be an integral part of development plans for the parks." (Texas State Parks, 1963:25)

State parks are fulfilling a very real function that is not practiced by other park bodies:

"Between the two extremes—local and national parks—are state parks. State parks constitute resources for the wholesome enjoyment of outdoor recreation, recreation here meaning mental and physical, passive and active, expressive as well as receptive activities." (Jaska, 6-1967:2)

Texas State Parks, like most across the country, undergo thorough analysis of the resource characteristics so that when people are allowed to enter, they can be given special information about each park.

"Experts first assess the biological, geological, archeological and historical significance of the park. This significance is then communicated to visitors by means of interpretive centers, nature trails, campfire circles, and special publications. In Texas, this program has already begun and will eventually serve most of the 60 state parks." (Jaska, 7-1967:25)

Quotations of those knowledgeable about Texas State Parks, such as the above, support the concept of a well-rounded interpretive program, of which historic drama can be an integral part—not a competitive function. The site being considered for the outdoor drama theater is well located with regard to the other functions of the park. It is readily accessible and therefore not interfering with other park functions. It is
on one of the highest land elevations and therefore out of the most ecologically fragile zones. It is located so that it can be incorporated into the nature interpretation trails now shown on the master plan.

The suggested site can serve a multipurpose interpretive function: 1) it can serve the basic function of housing a nightly historic drama of Texas and Galveston origin throughout the summer season; 2) it can be used during other times of the day and at other seasons (with only slight architectural modification) for natural resource interpretive lectures, demonstrations, and exhibits; 3) because it is located adjacent to the planned nature trails, it can provide for creature comforts of the visitors (rest rooms, concession sales, first aid); 4) the elevation of portions of the structure will allow nature interpretive overlooks, providing both day and night-time vistas of outstanding interest and beauty; 5) the planned footbridge across Oak Bayou, connecting proposed parking areas with the outdoor theater, can be constructed to serve a day and night-time function of a nature interpretation overlook, directly over the bayou.

Essential and becoming traditional is the combination of several visitor functions in the state parks of Texas.

"Aside from furnishing opportunity to relax, the system also offers a chance for a person to broaden his personality. Not only can he eat a lunch in the great outdoors, camp under the stars, catch a hard-fighting fish, and splash about in a cool lake, but the State's history and magnificence will also be found preserved in these areas." (Tiller, 5-1966:8)

With the integration of the Lone Star Historical Drama into the
master plan of the Galveston Island State Park, all these desirable functions will be available to the Texas and outside visitors for many years to come. In the midst of intensive expansion of home and commercial recreation development, the park will be able to provide these desirable leisure and educational services for generations yet unborn.
References


