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## Brazos Past: Waco exhibits to mark Election Day

By TERRI JO RYAN  
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Saturday September 15, 2012

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### October event to highlight citizenship

**What:** "Vote for Me" — Sunday Skadoo

**When:** From 2 to 5 p.m. Oct. 7 at Fort House Museum, 503 S. Fourth St.

**Cost:** \$5 per family. Military families are admitted free with military ID.

**Details:** Visitors are invited to explore ideas about local and national citizenship through games and activities. Regular visiting hours for the displays are 2 to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

**Contact:** For information, call the Historic Waco Foundation office at 753-5166.

With more than seven weeks left before Election Day, Historic Waco Foundation unveils an exhibit celebrating not only presidents who have traveled through Central Texas, but also the rights of women to vote for them.

Companion exhibits "Citizens at Last: The Woman Suffrage Movement in Texas" and "The President Visits Waco" are on display at the Fort House Museum until Dec. 15.

"Citizens at Last" is an exhibit created by the Woman's Collection of Texas Woman's University Library and produced by Humanities Texas, the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.



President William Howard Taft came to Baylor in April 1920 for the school's 75th anniversary. This photo shows him visiting law school students.

Baylor University Texas Collection photo

Initially developed in 1995 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the touring display explores the beginnings of the national movement in 1848 with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, through its impact on Texas politics and social history.

Based on the book "Citizens at Last: The Woman Suffrage Movement in Texas," the exhibition uses archival photographs and cartoons, newspaper clippings and other texts to illustrate the political struggle in the Lone Star State.

From the 1893 formation of the Texas Equal Rights Association and subsequent "sister" organizations through the

transformation of the Texas Equal Suffrage League in October 1919 as the League of Women Voters of Texas, the story of the struggle for full citizenship is inspirational and exasperating at times.

Consider that in the discussion of legislators at the Texas Constitutional Convention of 1875, lawmakers debated whether to even allow discussion of a petition from a (female) citizen of the republic asking for the right to vote.

Women — along with convicted criminals and people convicted of dueling — "shall be deprived of the right of suffrage," according to the law of that era.

But after almost 30 years of striving, Texas was the ninth state overall — and the first state in the South — to ratify the 19th Amendment in 1919. It was a landmark moment for all who took place in the struggle for equal representation.

Holly Browning, curator of Collections and Interpretation at Historic Waco Foundation, uses a video monitor as part of the installation, to play short documentary films on the suffragettes. A group of visiting third-graders from nearby Live Oak Classical School huddled around the screen last week to view "Bad Romance: Women's Suffrage," a quirky homage to the crusaders in white linen.

The parody music video lauds activist Alice Paul (1885-1977) and generations of determined women who joined the campaign to win voting rights for women. It is based on a music video by Lady Gaga.

"It really connects with the kids," Browning said.

The curator also brings the Progressive Era to life with selections from The Heritage Collection, the museum's archive of period clothing and gear.

The Heritage Collection, a subsection of the permanent holdings, spans the decades from the founding of Waco through World War II. It consists of more than 3,500 articles of clothing and accessories, with many pieces that belonged to early residents.

The collection was established by local historian Lavonia Jenkins "Bobbie" Barnes, who died in 2000.

Browning has a typical woman's travel suit, circa 1910, in the display, as well as an upscale man's suit from the same era, which helps her tie in the associated display "The President Visits Waco."

Starting with Theodore Roosevelt in 1905, many of the 20th century's American presidents visited Waco, Browning said. Many visited because of the city's connection to Baylor University.

When she started researching the presidential visits, Browning said she hadn't realized the connection between Lyndon Baines Johnson and George Washington Baines (1809-82), who took over the leadership reins of Baylor in July 1863 after Rufus Burleson left to become president of Waco University.

Johnson, his great-grandson and the 36th U.S. president, received an honorary doctorate from Baylor in 1965.

Some presidents (such as Johnson) came to accept honorary degrees from the university. Harry S. Truman did so in 1947, to much hoopla and consternation from trustees. Others, such as Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952 and Jimmy Carter in 1980, made stops here in their respective runs for office.

William Howard Taft came to Baylor years after he left the White House to speak to Chapel at Baylor and meet young lawyers in training.

Among the presidents she cannot place definitively in Central Texas, she said, is Calvin Coolidge, although the notoriously taciturn New Englander had a loyal political appointee in Baylor's own Pat Neff.

"It was said that after Coolidge left office (in 1929, when Herbert Hoover was inaugurated) that he embarked on a tour of sorts, visiting all his Cabinet officers to thank them personally for their service to the country," Browning said.

Coolidge appointed Neff to the U.S. Board of Mediation (1927-29).



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