



# EXTRA! EXTRA!



## Texas Journalists Making History

96<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL BATTLE OF FLOWERS® ASSOCIATION

# Oratorical Contest

### 2021 TOPIC DESCRIPTION

In the early days of the nineteenth century, when the land that was to become Texas was a vast expanse of wildness and political unrest, along with settlers came a stream of individuals who risked life and limb bringing the press to Texas. The earliest “newspapers” were single sheets and most often espoused or denounced a singular cause. They communicated passionate opinions about loyalty to Mexico or Spain, or they advocated for insurrection, revolution and statehood, or they announced important Declarations. In those uncertain times it was not uncommon for printing presses to be spirited from town to town to escape impending threats and for newspapers to be initiated and closed down routinely.

Likewise, early permanent newspapers communicated the political, religious and special interest voices of their journalists. Simple geography and inclement weather made gathering what we could call “news” difficult. But through an exchange system of printing the articles from each other’s papers, and personal eyewitness or word of mouth reports, they began reporting on military and political events and publishing key political documents. In this way journalists contemporaneously captured the history of events as well as expressing opinions.

In that era, publishers, editors and printers were men of fortitude, grit and courage who endured erratic revenue, paucity and delays of supplies, and unpredictable distribution. Most were part-time, also being civic leaders or soldiers, businessmen or politicians who were engaged primarily in these endeavors. Nevertheless, by the Civil War Texas had spawned over 400 “newspapers.”

In each subsequent era of Texas history, the evolving technology and demographics had their effects on how journalists told and distributed their stories and opinions. The railroads, telegraph and telephone enhanced both content and distribution. Film, programmed radio and TV news and networks brought additional dimensions and immediacy to reporting. Categories of coverage broadened to include agriculture, business, entertainment, social issues, sports, law. Texas news rooms, whether newspaper, radio, or television, went from one room, one-man offices to buildings teeming with the life of beat reporters and complex equipment.

Moreover, Texas journalists, from their own points of view, in their own styles, cast in different roles, not only told the stories of Texas but were an integral part in making history and creating change. Some participated personally in historical events. Many used their trade to advocate their politics. Some shined a light on abuses and conditions that in turn lead to reforms. Whether the arena was the small towns of Texas or the big cities, an editor or publisher exerted great influence by telling the other side of a story, calling out public officials, and bringing unknown facts forward affecting elections and political movements. And from small town editors to big city reporters, to journalist scribes who painted word pictures of the era, to media conglomerates, to TV anchors, they made contributions to what we know of Texas history and national history.

Texas is rich with the legacy of journalists. This year’s topic invites you to choose from an era a Texas journalist, group of journalists, publication or production, and discover who they were and share how their work either told an important part of the Texas story, contributed to history or influenced change from a perspective that inspires you. You might choose to tell the story of how an early newspaper like the *Telegraph and Texas Register* and Editor Gail Borden not only influenced the movement but became part of the story of the Texas Revolution, or you might choose to focus on a single Texas journalist, like Caro Crawford Brown, telling a single historically important story of corruption and why that mattered. You could find your inspiration in the role of a paper like *La Prensa* that served as the leading Spanish-language paper and Mexican cultural voice. Consider journalists whose stories of Texas have come from their personal experiences and observations of Texas that provide a kind of contextual history. Examples are Elmer Kelton who used his personal observations and knowledge of Texas to tell a huge story of the era, the West Texas drought, or Américo Paredes who chronicled life on the border in the early 20th century. Are you inspired by a media campaign in any era that influenced reform? Or by the role of a Texas journalist in evolution of technology and its impact on telling the stories of Texas?

Think of the headlines of the eras and the multitude of significant events that were reported about Texas. What were those stories of the era that journalists captured as they unfolded. There were stories of jubilation and disaster, intrigue and corruption, of politics and money, of crime and law, of causes and conditions, of science and technology, of people and events that made the headlines—statehood, war, the Galveston flood, women’s suffrage, the assassination of President Kennedy. And who were those journalists who gave us the first reports of what was to become history? What defined them and made them extraordinary? How did their Texas heritage and experience affect their making or telling history?

The topic and description are intentionally broad to provide an opportunity for creativity and personal inspiration. “Making History” includes the recording and publishing of facts describing people, events, conditions, natural phenomena, and actually being part of history. We encourage and invite you to focus on one Texas journalist, group of journalists, publication or journalistic production or enterprise to illustrate how he/she/it made history. You may choose from the topics below or select one that fits within this Topic Description. **Remember that the core events or activities of your topic must have occurred at least fifty years ago, prior to 1972.**

#### SUGGESTED TOPICS

The Story of *Gaceta de Texas*

Godwin Brown Cotten and the *Texas Gazette*: Revolutionary Journalism

Gail Borden and the *Telegraph and Texas Register*

Texas Journalists and Annexation

Ronnie Dugger, *The Texas Observer*

Liz Carpenter: Press Secretary and Media Advisor

Ignacio Lozano and *La Prensa*

Texas Journalists and Sam Houston

Vivian Castleberry, *Dallas Times Herald*

Texas Editors Influence Reforms in the Progressive Era

*The Galveston News*

Caro Crawford Brown, Courthouse Reporter, *Alice Daily Echo*

George Bannerman Dealy, *The Dallas Morning News* and the Making of a Giant

Lenora Butler Rolla, *The Dallas Express*

Julia Scott Reed, *The Open Line*

Américo Paredes

Don Hampton Biggers, West Texas Crusader

Bob Schieffer, *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, Kennedy Assassination

Dan Rather, KHOU-TV, Hurricane Carla

Mary Austin Holley, Eyewitness to Early Texas Life

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Oscar O'Neal Griffin, Billy Sol Estes  
George McElroy, *A Life of Firsts, The Informer and Houston Post*  
Ben Ezzell, *The Canadian Record*  
J. Frank Dobie  
William Sidney Porter, O. Henry, *Rolling Stone and Other Writings*  
Walter Cronkite  
The Hobbys of Houston  
Jovita Idar, *La Crónica and Beyond*  
Elmer Kelton, *The Texas Dust Bowl*  
Charles DeMorse, *Father of Texas Journalism*  
Jim Lehrer, *Dallas Times Herald and KERA Newsroom*  
Francis Moore and the Republic of Texas  
Staley T. McBryer, "The Orville Wright of Offset Newspapers"  
Eugene Alexander Howe, *Amarillo Globe-News and the Tactless Texan*  
Spanish Language Newspapers of Texas  
The Impact of the Galveston Storm of 1900-*The Galveston Daily News*  
Col. Charles S. Diehl, *San Antonio Light*  
Alfred H. Belo  
John Henry Brown  
*True West*  
Blackie Sherrod  
Moses Koenigsberg