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Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Volume 120, Number 2, October 2016,
pp. 146-161 (Article)

Published by Texas State Historical Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/swh.2016.0061>



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James E. Pearce, the first director of the Texas Memorial Museum. *UT Texas Memorial Museum Photograph Collection, di_10413, the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, the University of Texas at Austin.*

“They are Hauling off Bits of Texas”: James E. Pearce and the Effort to Establish a State Museum

BY LYNN DENTON*

AN UNDATED NEWSPAPER CLIPPING GLUED IN A SCRAPBOOK IN THE files of the Texas Memorial Museum captures the driving purpose and sense of urgency of University of Texas at Austin (UT) faculty member and anthropologist James Edwin Pearce to establish a state museum. For more than seventeen years, between 1919 and 1936, in hundreds of speeches, newspaper interviews, articles, pamphlets, and letters, Pearce advocated the essential instructional and educational function of museums in society. He called on individual citizens, educators, organizations, and elected officials to keep historic, scientific, and private collections within the state. As he observed researchers from “the East and the West” hauling bits of Texas away to universities and museums elsewhere, “Dr. Pearce [thought] something ought to be done.”¹

Pearce almost saw success in the 40th and 41st Texas Legislatures, of 1927 and 1929 respectively, but his vision for a UT-based state museum was not realized until 1936 amid the Texas Centennial preparations. The groundbreaking for that institution, the Texas Memorial Museum, occurred on June 11, 1936, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt triggered a remote controlled detonation from his railroad car at East Avenue and Fourth Street in Austin.² A little more than two years later, and

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¹ James Pearce, undated newspaper clipping, clippings file, James E. Pearce Files (Texas Memorial Museum, University of Texas at Austin; cited hereafter as Pearce Files, TMM).

² “Plans for the Reception of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in Austin Thursday, June 11, 1936,” Pearce Files, TMM; “Drama in the Capitol City,” *Texas Centennial Review* (Dallas), June 25, 1936, clippings file, Pearce Files, TMM.

only two weeks before the public opening, James E. Pearce, the museum's director, died suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart attack.³

Pearce is now almost completely forgotten. Commemorative newspaper coverage and public remarks for the temporary opening held the November after his death marked the beginning of a shift in public remembrance of the museum's origins, reporting that: "Mr. Pearce was assisted by the American Legion centennial committee which was a vital force in getting the movement started for the Texas Memorial Museum."⁴ This wording echoed Gov. James V. Allred's museum cornerstone dedication the previous December, when he emphasized and heightened the role of the American Legion. Pearce was not mentioned once in Allred's speech.⁵ When the UT Law School outgrew its original law building, it was remodeled and renamed Pearce Hall in 1954, but demolished twenty years later for the construction of the Graduate School of Business. The Texas Memorial Museum's scientific monograph series that partially carried his name, the Pearce-Sellards Series, ceased publication in the mid-1980s. The junior high school named in his honor, opening to architectural design accolades in 1959, became one of Austin's most beleaguered schools at the end of the twentieth century and now has a new name as the Young Women's Leadership Academy. Eighty years after the Texas Centennial, the museum he finally saw completed is struggling to remain open.⁶

Research, analysis, and discussions of forgotten histories often center on oppression, gender, class and race struggle, and the displaced or dispossessed. That is not James E. Pearce's story, and yet this particular erasure of history, this forgetting, is a reminder of other histories that are elided in the reshaping of public memory and spaces. The trajectory of his museum project takes place in the early days of the professionalization of the museum field and within the context of the early years of anthropology and history at the University of Texas, among now iconic faculty members and presidents—J. Frank Dobie, Roy Bedichek, H. Y. Benedict, Charles W. Ramsdell, and W. J. Battle.

James Edwin Pearce, described as both stoic and extremely sociable, was "as much at home kidding in a cow-lot as he was at ease in the Town and

³ "Museum Head Dies Suddenly," *Austin American*, Oct. 23, 1938.

⁴ Clifford Snowden, "He Worked for 20 Years on a Dream," *Daily Texan*, Nov. 24, 1938.

⁵ "Speech of Governor James V. Allred at dedication of Texas Memorial Museum (Sponsored by American Legion of Texas)," Dec. 19, 1937, Pearce Files, TMM.

⁶ Kelli Weldon, "Pearce Middle School Renamed for Bertha Sadler Means," *Community Impact Newspaper* (Central Austin), Apr. 29, 2014, <<https://communityimpact.com/austin/education/2014/04/29/pearce-middle-school-renamed-for-bertha-sadler-means-2/>> [Accessed May 31, 2016]; Eleanor Dearman, "Six Months after Dramatic Budget Cuts, Texas Memorial Museum Continues to Operate," *Daily Texan*, Mar. 31, 2015, <<http://www.dailytexanonline.com/2015/03/30/six-months-after-dramatic-budget-cuts-texas-memorial-museum-continues-to-operate>> [Accessed May 26, 2016].

Gown Club or the university classroom.”⁷ Born in 1868 in Person County, North Carolina, he was the third son in a farming family that relocated to Hunt County, Texas, in 1871. After completing high school in Campbell (east of Greenville), he remained there as a teacher for two years before entering UT in 1890. He is listed in the *Catalogue of the University* for the session of 1890–91 as a distinguished student in the freshman class, taking German, English, history, and mathematics. Pearce completed a bachelor’s in literature in 1894, a degree that required equal emphasis in the fields of history and English. The 1894 *Cactus* yearbook, which claimed to be the first student annual, listed Pearce as a student assistant in history and as a class officer: the toast-master. A total of twenty students were in Pearce’s cohort, seven of whom were women. The class yell conveys something of the spirit of this group: “Rah! Bray! Roar! Cap and Gown, On the Town, Class of Ninety-Four!”⁸ *The Cactus* also recorded sixteen faculty members, not including the law and medical faculty. George P. Garrison was the only history professor. Pearce remained at UT to complete his master’s degree in 1895, and in the *Cactus* for that year, he was listed among the faculty as a “Fellow in History.”

His name next appears in the July 1895–July 1896 *University of Chicago Annual Register* as a student in the Graduate School of Art, Literature and Science, and his area of study is listed as history and political science.⁹ In that particular register there is no indication of which quarter Pearce was in residence. However, in the fall of 1895, at the age of twenty-seven, Pearce was again in Texas to begin a remarkable twenty-two-year career as principal of Austin High School. He continued coursework at the University of Chicago in the summer quarter of 1899 and the spring quarter of 1900, changing his area of study from history to sociology and anthropology.¹⁰

The first years of the twentieth century represented a contrast of accomplishment and tragedy for Pearce. In June 1900, he married Mignonette Carrington, an accomplished educator and UT alumna who had earned a bachelor of arts degree in 1889 and master’s in 1890. Interestingly, she and her older sister Lillian (UT bachelor of literature, 1887) also attended the University of Chicago in 1898–99. Pearce and the Carringtons undoubtedly knew each other already since the sisters, members of a prominent Austin family, directed the University Preparatory and

⁷ “Tribute to Dr. Pearce,” *The Alcalde* 27 (March 1939): 129–130. An inset in the tribute noted “A committee composed of Roy Bedichek and James H. Hart from the Town and Gown Club wrote the resolution to Dr. J. E. Pearce – an indication of the high esteem in which he was held by this club, of which he was a member.”

⁸ *The Cactus*, 1894 (Austin: Senior Academic and Senior Law Class of the University of Texas, 1894).

⁹ *The University of Chicago Annual Register, July 1895–July 1896* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1896), 197.

¹⁰ *University of Chicago Annual Register July 1899–July 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 413.

Grammar School.¹¹ The first volume of the *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* (now the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*) in 1897 listed both Pearce and Mignonette as members of the nascent organization.¹² Pearce took a year-long sabbatical from his responsibilities at Austin High School, and the newly married couple left for France, where he studied at the School of Anthropology in Paris. They returned to Austin in 1901, at which time Pearce resumed his duties as principal, but in March 1902, Mignonette died one week after giving birth to a daughter. They had been married less than two years.¹³

As a student at UT, Pearce formed a community of future colleagues and friends who would become supporters for his museum project. At the University of Chicago and the School of Anthropology in Paris, he was introduced to and absorbed the role that museums played in university research, instruction, and student learning. He also observed the relationship between world expositions and the creation of museums that outlived them. His tenure as high school principal established the wider networks that he would draw on during the campaign for a museum—a campaign shaped by each of these periods of his life.

Prior to marriage, Pearce began to build a statewide and national reputation as a “public school man” who embraced new ideas and effectively accomplished them. He conducted studies of secondary education and normal schools in Texas. A bequest to establish a manual training department at the high school in 1896 provided not only the money but an important stage for his energies. His approach to this work, delivered in a paper entitled *Manual Training in Education* to the Texas Academy of Sciences in 1899, was enthusiastically published in *Atlantic Monthly* “as it comes from an authority on psychology and education so widely known and highly respected.” Pearce argued, “Manual training enables one who may not have to labor in life to understand those who do; and moreover to appreciate and sympathize with them.”¹⁴ He added: “There is a strong tendency in the education world to give all of the good things to the boys, and I wish to enter my hearty protest against any injustice in the case of manual training.”¹⁵

¹¹ Also known as the Carrington School, Lillian Carrington continued as its owner and principal until World War I. See Carrington Family, Biographical Files (Austin History Center, Austin, Texas).

¹² “The Affairs of the Association,” *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 1 (October 1897): 138, 141.

¹³ It is not clear if namesake infant Mignonette lived with Lillian after her mother’s death, but when Pearce married Belinda Doppelmayer (who graduated from UT with a bachelor of arts degree in 1894) in September 1909, Mignonette joined the household. United States Thirteenth Census (1910), Population Schedules, Travis County, Texas.

¹⁴ James E. Pearce, “Manual Training in Education,” paper read before the Texas Academy of Science (January 1899), p. 9, Biographical files: James E. Pearce (Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

During his tenure as principal, Pearce periodically taught at the University of Texas. He served in the Department of Institutional History as an interim instructor in the fall of 1912 during the leave of absence of department chair, Dr. Linley Keasby. Then in 1914, he received an appointment as unpaid adjunct professor of sociology in the department. Keasby abruptly resigned in 1917, and Pearce was called on to replace him. The museum effort did not begin with Pearce's fulltime appointment, but it took its shape and gained momentum under his direction. Perhaps Pearce's influence was at work when Keasby requested administrative support for an anthropological, ethnological, and industrial museum within the Department of Institutional History in May 1914.¹⁶

By 1919, Pearce had successfully changed the name of the Department of Institutional History to the Department of Anthropology and organized an ambitious project, jointly undertaken with the Smithsonian Institution, to identify archaeological sites in Texas. Pearce drew on his public school experience to craft a statewide survey of "Texas Indian remains," requesting permission from Annie Webb Blanton, the state superintendent of education, to send a questionnaire to schools in the state. He closed his letter to her by saying "I am with you entirely in your program for educational legislation in the pending session. You may command me if I can be of service to you."¹⁷ She agreed to his survey. One version of the letter Pearce subsequently distributed noted her support and asked the recipient to "read this communication before your school and ask your children to make inquiries at home." A more detailed form letter addressed "To the State and County Officers, School Officials and Teachers of Texas" invoked civic pride by stating "our lack of a creditable museum [reflects] on our educational progress and patriotism which the proposed archaeological investigation, it is hoped will remedy at least in some degree."¹⁸

That same February, Pearce wrote a fifteen-point letter to the university's building program committee, advocating "extensive museum facilities" as a logical outgrowth of the survey project. He argued, "A well-ordered museum is a most potent teaching factor and has high value, not only for the student, but for the general public as well." He then boldly went on to outline a multi-storied fireproof building with glass-roofed courtyard and included a rough sketch of a floor plan, noting that he "could furnish all technical details, from the Anthropologist point of view, for a building within ten days."¹⁹

¹⁶ Helen D. Barnard, "Early History of Research in Texas Archaeology by the Department of Anthropology, and the History of the Anthropology Museum of the University of Texas" (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1939), 206–208.

¹⁷ James E. Pearce to Annie W. Blanton, Feb. 11, 1919, Pearce Project Letters, 1918–1923 (Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory, University of Texas at Austin; cited hereafter as TARL).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Pearce to the Committee on Building Program for the University, Feb. 26, 1919, Pearce Project Letters, 1918–1923, TARL.

The committee failed to act on this ambitious proposal, but the museum concept received wider attention on March 2, 1920, at the TSHA annual meeting in Austin, when Dr. Alex Dienst, vice-president of the association, gave an address entitled "A Great Public Museum for Texas." The remarks received enough interest that they were published in full in the March 14 edition of the *San Antonio Express*.²⁰ A Texas Museum Association formed at the meeting and consisted of eight members, including Dienst, Adele Looscan, who was president of the TSHA and also active in the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, UT president H. Y. Benedict, and Pearce.²¹ In a May 1920 letter to Benedict, chairman of the museum committee, Pearce outlined a series of recommendations that formed the plan he generally followed in his efforts to secure a museum over the next decade. Central to his vision was a state-funded museum on the UT campus governed by the university's board of regents. The museum would encompass the fields of history, anthropology, paleontology, geology, and biology with professional curators and scientists for each area. His plan of action included a "state committee of five hundred or more prominent citizens," active press and publicity campaigns, and solicitation of wealthy donors for financial and collection support.²²

The following year, on April 21 at the TSHA annual meeting, Pearce delivered a talk entitled "Museums—Their Use and Place in Learning and in the Transmission of Culture." There, and in the accompanying publication of the same name, he charted the "means and methods of preserving knowledge in general" before summarizing important museums, highlighting their absence in Texas. He pointedly noted that "Belgium, one-seventieth the size of Texas, with a population about double and possessed of about the same wealth, has a great museum of natural history devoted entirely to Belgium collections." Other observations included that the Ohio State Museum was founded by the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society. And he firmly justified such comparisons as a matter of pride by saying:

The writer feels that it would be little less than a disgrace to our great wealthy state, to allow the work of exploring this field and of gathering its interesting artifacts into collections for study in future ages, to be done by outside people and the

²⁰ Alex Dienst, "A Great Public Museum for Texas, An Address delivered by Dr. Alex Dienst, Temple, Texas before the Texas State Historical Association at its annual meeting in Austin, Texas on March 2, 1920" (typescript), Pearce Files, TMM; "Says Texas Should Have a Great Public Museum," *San Antonio Express*, Mar. 14, 1920, clippings file, Pearce Files, TMM.

²¹ Richard B. McCaslin, *At the Heart of Texas: One Hundred Years of the Texas State Historical Association, 1897-1997* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2007), 75.

²² Pearce to H. Y. Benedict, May 19, 1920, Pearce Files, TMM.

interesting results carried away to distant centers to serve for the edification and enlightenment of more enterprising populations.

In his concluding rationale for a museum, Pearce added: "So largely do progressive communities have them that their presence is one of the surest marks of intelligence and enlightenment."²³

The remainder of the 1920s was marked by cycles of effort tied to Texas legislative sessions. In January 1923, Pearce mailed letters enclosing "Museums—Their Use and Place in Learning and in the Transmission of Culture" to all members of the legislature as well as individuals, organizations, and the press. The letter began by "calling attention to a need which the author regards as primary for purposes of higher education, of public education, and of satisfying the legitimate demand of proper State pride." However, in a new strategy, Pearce also included the idea that the building could be dedicated to the memory of Texas soldiers of the "late or other wars."²⁴ Adele Looscan penned a response requesting extra copies she could personally mail to the legislature and commiserated that "a project of anything having an educational or patriotic basis requires patient waiting and persistent effort."²⁵

In preparation for the 1925 session, the faculty adopted and the UT Board of Regents unanimously approved a resolution concerning a state museum presented by the University Committee on Museums and Archives chaired by Pearce. The "whereas" preamble to the resolution invoked museums as key to the "intellectual and education life of all progressive peoples," decried that Texas collections were lost to museums in the North and East or "scattered and destroyed by unappreciative heirs," and called on Texas patriotism, "which should be cherished and kept before the public, and especially before our youth, as an incitement to higher purposes."²⁶ A funding item for a permanent state museum proposed as part of the university's budget for the 1925 general appropriations bill was unsuccessful because the Texas Board of Control refused to recommend appropriations for a non-existent institution. The extent of Pearce's intense involvement with the museum effort is partially reflected in his state highway map marked with legislative districts and members who were contacted regarding the museum, as well as his pocket-sized directory of the members of the 39th Legislature. It is filled with his nota-

²³ James Edwin Pearce, *Museums—Their Use and Place in Learning and in the Transmission of Culture*, University of Texas Bulletin 2133 (Austin: University of Texas, 1921), 12, 17, 20.

²⁴ Pearce to Those Who May Be Interested, Jan. 20, 1923, Pearce Files, TMM.

²⁵ Adele B. Looscan to Pearce, Feb. 3, 1923, Pearce Correspondence, 1923–1926, TARL.

²⁶ Resolutions Concerning a State Museum by The Committee on Museums and Archives, Adopted by

tions regarding who was a UT alumnus or whether the member had children attending the university.²⁷

In February 1926, another Texas Museum Association formed at the university for the purpose of promoting a state museum. It consisted of twenty faculty members, with Pearce as president, and included Eugene C. Barker, W. J. Battle, and E. H. Sellards. The tactic proved to be slightly different this time, as it was a membership organization designed to garner broad public and financial support to offset the costs of printing and mailings. Pearce wrote articles in the April and May issues of *Alcalde*, the ex-student's publication at UT, which were then distributed further. Two different letters accompanied the publication. In one, Pearce noted "these materials are being sent out by the Texas Museum Association with funds provided largely by impecunious University professors. Funds on hand are utterly insufficient and additional funds must be had if a campaign of enlightenment is to be conducted over the State from now until the Legislature meets."²⁸ It concluded with a request for the recipient to send names of other prominent citizens who might be interested. The other version, with a handwritten notation by Pearce that went to four hundred Austin citizens, made the case for a museum, but added a new twist. Pearce countered a proposal that the museum could be organized as part of the Texas Centennial Exposition and then left to Austin or the university, offering instead that if the museum were already in place, it might attract the Centennial exposition to Austin. He concluded by proposing:

[A] few prominent and influential citizens of Austin get together at a small dinner party with representative members of the faculty, including President Splawn, for a general conference upon ways and means of securing this museum. Please drop me a line indicating whether or not you would be willing to attend such a dinner, each person present to pay for his own plate.²⁹

The year 1926 marked the biggest push for a museum to that date. Pearce began corresponding with governor-elect Dan Moody in the fall of 1926. Along with an invitation to join Dr. Splawn and him for a dinner at the University Club to discuss the state museum idea, Pearce expressed his intention of sending the Moodys, "as evidence of my personal good will, a box of my choice pecans. . . . I have made it a practice for many

the Faculty Feb. 1924. Approved unanimously by the Board of Regents of the University, Sept. 15, 1924. Pearce Files, TMM.

²⁷ J. E. Pearce, "Control Board Not Authorized to Put Museum in UT Budget," *Austin American*, Dec 27, 1926; Official Highway Map of Texas 1926, State Highway Commission; *Membership 39th Legislature, Presented by Carl L. Phinney of Brown County Candidate for Re-election for Chief Clerk House of Representatives 39th Legislature* (undated pamphlet), Pearce Files, TMM.

²⁸ According to the statement of receipts and expenditures for the Museum Association prepared by Treasurer E. H. Sellards on Apr. 28, 1927, the fundraising campaign garnered \$289.54. The entirety of

years to make such a donation to incoming Governors.” A thank you note came from Mrs. Moody, who remembered interviewing Pearce regarding his pecan crops as well as being a member of the Man and Nature Club while at the university.³⁰ Pearce’s warm reply did not miss the opportunity to include the newest pamphlets for the museum project. By that point the reprinted *Alcalde* articles were titled *The Urgent Need for a Texas State Museum* and not only included the 1924 resolution but its endorsement by TSHA, the State Board of Control, the Executive Committee of the Ex-Students’ Association of the University of Texas, and the State Federation of Women’s Clubs.³¹

An extensive letter writing campaign sought testimonials that he incorporated into a new pamphlet entitled *Facts and Opinions Supporting the Demand for a Texas State Museum*. Respondents included directors of museums from around the country, Texas businessmen, elected officials like U.S. Senator Morris Sheppard (a UT alum and former B Hall resident with Pearce), members of the American Legion, and key university faculty.³² In an attempt to add to his mailing list, Pearce went so far as to write the Internal Revenue Service office in Dallas requesting names of individual income tax payers with “exact address and amount of taxes paid for that year.”³³ There is no record the office responded. Simultaneous to the testimonial campaign, Pearce conducted a survey of each state to identify museums founded and supported with public funds. Frequently, he directed these inquiries to the state superintendent of public instruction. From this he compiled a comprehensive table in preparation for the 1927 legislative session.³⁴

In July 1926, Pearce also began corresponding with Will C. Hogg regarding Major George W. Littlefield’s bequest to UT for the construction of a memorial arch, the Littlefield Memorial Gate. Hogg was a Littlefield board trustee, and Pearce’s proposal to him was to complete the arch as planned but redirect the remainder of the fund to the purposes of the state museum “on condition that the statuary shall be placed in a court on the ground floor of the museum building, the statue of Victory to occupy the center of such a court and the portrait statues to be placed about the

this sum paid for the reprinting of the two *Alcalde* articles in pamphlet form.

²⁹ Pearce form letters, 1926, Pearce Files, TMM.

³⁰ Pearce to Attorney General Dan Moody, Nov. 13, 1926 (quotation); Mildred Paxton Moody to Pearce, Nov. 26, 1926, Pearce Files, TMM.

³¹ J. E. Pearce, *The Urgent Need for a Texas State Museum (Including Resolutions by the Committee on Archives and Museums, University of Texas Faculty, and Endorsements by Organizations)* (undated pamphlet), Pearce Files, TMM.

³² Texas State Museum Association, *Facts and Opinions Supporting the Demand for A Texas State Museum*, (undated pamphlet), Pearce Files, TMM.

³³ Pearce to Charles C. Hopkins, Oct. 18, 1926, Pearce Files, TMM.

corridors of the court in the most artistic and effective way."³⁵ In a related letter to UT president Splawn, also a Littlefield trustee, Pearce further proposed to incorporate the Stark family gift for housing its collection into the museum project with the understanding that the collection would be placed there. He envisioned that the two funds "would constitute an evidence of public interest and good faith which might go a long way toward securing a favorable action on the part of the Legislature."³⁶ His letter to Lutchter Stark in this regard also attempted to marshal support for redirecting "a million and some odd hundred thousand dollars" from the state's sale of the Kerrville hospital to the building of the museum with the proviso that it would include commemoration of the deeds of Texas heroes and recognizing that this step would require the support of the American Legion.³⁷ In early August, he sought editorial support from the *Houston Post*, *San Antonio Express*, *Dallas Morning News*, and *Houston Chronicle* "to put this matter before the Texas public to the best advantage."³⁸ None of these plans came to fruition.

As Pearce gauged the diminishing likelihood of legislative funding and attempted to find creative solutions such as the Littlefield and Stark proposals, he carved up the financial needs into ever smaller requests. In response to a note from Hogg that stated "you folks are not asking for enough—\$1,000,000 is *the* least you ought to ask," Pearce explained "The State treasury is in a bad way at present. There will be a deficit of several million dollars at the end of the current fiscal year and the tax rate has been cut from 35 to 23 cents for the first year of the next biennium. . . . Our bill calls for only enough to organize and plan a museum and acquire certain collections during the current year and next year."³⁹

Senator T. J. Holbrook of Galveston introduced Senate Bill 61 to establish a state museum in the 1927 session, but the bill never made it out of the finance committee.⁴⁰ Acting as president of the museum association, Pearce pressed ahead with the mailing and public information campaigns in the press. Another version of the pamphlet was printed as *Letters of Famous Texans Advocating a State Museum in Connection with the University of Texas*. He distributed a flyer entitled "From a Group of the Older Faculty Members of the University of Texas" signed by twenty-four university notables includ-

³⁴ Museum Information from Various States for State Museum Project, Pearce Project files, 1926-1928, TARL.

³⁵ Pearce to Will C. Hogg, July 22, 1926, Pearce Files, TMM.

³⁶ Pearce to W. M. W. Splawn, July 27, 1926, Pearce Files, TMM.

³⁷ Pearce to H. J. Lutchter Stark, July 30, 1926, Pearce Files, TMM; The United States Veteran's Bureau purchased the hospital, briefly a project of the Department of Texas of the American Legion, in May 1926. See Rebecca J. Herring, "Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Kerrville," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/sbvo7>> [Accessed June 3, 2016].

³⁸ Pearce to *Houston Post* editor, Aug. 2, 1926, Pearce Files, TMM.

³⁹ Hogg to Pearce, Dec. 30, 1926; Pearce to Hogg, Jan. 16, 1927, Pearce Files, TMM.

ing President Splawn, librarian E. W. Winkler, and professors T. U. Taylor (engineering), E. C. Barker (history), H. Y. Benedict (dean of the College of Arts and Sciences), W. J. Battle (classical languages), E. P. Schoch (chemistry), and Pearce. His remarks to the legislative members that year began with, “At the risk of being regarded as something of a nuisance, I am addressing you again . . . commending the project of a State Museum.”⁴¹

Holbrook introduced the museum bill again in 1929 as Senate Bill 189. It cleared the Committee on State Affairs and passed the Texas Senate with only four votes against in early February. The bill then moved to the Committee on Education in the House, where it was favorably reported but received no further action. In a March letter to geologist and paleontologist E. H. Sellards, Pearce concluded “the bill has been lost for the present session. I shall learn if the Governor will mention it in the call for the Special Session.” By early June, Pearce and Barker secured Governor Moody’s support for a new bill in the special session. Introduced by Senator Holbrook and Representative Helen Moore, also of Galveston, as an emergency measure, it too failed.⁴²

Before the full Senate vote, Pearce prepared a single-sheet flyer touting the widespread support for the measure from “the teaching profession of Texas, the learned and patriotic societies of the State and thousands of enlightened citizens” as evidenced by a long list of organizations, including the UT faculty and Board of Regents. He also took the opportunity to address two new issues—site location and favoritism—by stating “This bill has no special interests behind it. The museum is to be located by a disinterested board.”⁴³

The flyer elicited a terse request from H. Y. Benedict, named president of UT in 1927, demanding copies of the formal endorsements attributed to the regents and the faculty. Pearce’s three-page response assured Benedict that he relied on the earlier resolutions of support, noting the only substantive change in the proposed bill was the insertion of a locating board “urged by the Governor in a conference between him and you and me.” Although Pearce included an apology for the “error if it is to be so regarded,” the action clearly created or ignited a source of tension between the two men that would appear again as a disagreement regarding the location of the Centennial museum.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ S.B. 61 (Holbrook), Jan. 13, 1927, 40th Texas Legislature, <http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/LASDOCS/40R/SB61/SB61_40R.pdf#page=6> [Accessed June 3, 2016].

⁴¹ “From a Group of the Older Faculty Members University of Texas to the Members of the Fortieth Legislature” (flyer), January 1927; Pearce to “Gentlemen of the Legislature,” Jan. 28, 1927 (quotation), Pearce Files, TMM.

⁴² S. B. 189, Feb. 4, 1929, *Senate Journal*, 41st Texas Legislature, <http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/LASDOCS/41R/SB189/SB189_41R.pdf#page=27> [Accessed June 3, 2016]; Pearce to Sellards, Mar. 14, 1929 (quotation); Pearce to “Members of the Forty-first Legislature,” June 6, 1929, Pearce Files, TMM.

⁴³ “State Museum Measure S.B.189 (Sen. Holbrook)” (flyer), Pearce Files, TMM.

At this point, the momentum for the museum Pearce envisioned was lost. In early 1930, he asked Governor Moody to consider the museum if he called another special session, and in the fall he sent mailings to the members of the State Board of Education. He appealed to colleagues and organizations around the state and urged that they express support in order to offset regional interests he felt hampered the effort, but there is no record he directly contacted every member of the legislature as in the past. Holbrook again carried a museum bill in the 1931 session, but it was again unsuccessful.⁴⁵

After the 1931 session, the idea of a museum became part of the bigger initiative to plan and fund the Texas Centennial observances. By August 1931, at least some of Pearce's attention centered on organizing the Texas exhibits for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair Centennial Exposition. Under the header "Centennial May Leave Building," a September 25, 1932, report in the *Austin American* shared Pearce's optimistic observation that "the Texas Centennial Exposition of 1936 will leave behind it a permanent museum building that will have a close kinship in origin with the famous Eiffel Tower of Paris."⁴⁶ This optimism darkened considerably as the American Legion initiated its program to independently seek federal dollars for a Centennial museum at UT. The plan was to fund building construction through sales of a commemorative fifty-cent Centennial coin and to use one floor of the museum as state headquarters.⁴⁷

In response, Pearce composed a letter to elected representatives "in support of the cause of a creditable centennial celebration . . . with a special plea for the construction and equipment of a creditable State Museum as part of the Centennial Celebration." He went on to say: "The American Legion have now got forward with their program to construct a State Museum Building on the campus of the University of Texas to a position that assures this building, but gathering up, cataloguing and displaying creditable exhibits in the Museum is yet to be provided for." He pleaded for appropriations "sufficient to provide a museum that will not shame the scholars and forward looking citizens of the State in the presence of the great tide of visitors to come in to Texas with the opening of the Centennial gates."⁴⁸

He wrote a new tract, *The Need for a State Museum in Texas*, to accompany his correspondence. He reiterated examples of important research and private collections lost to the state and cited influential and successful

⁴⁴ H. Y. Benedict to Pearce, Feb. 13, 1929; Pearce to Benedict, Feb. 14, 1929 (quotations), Pearce Files, TMM.

⁴⁵ Pearce to Governor Dan Moody, Feb. 18, 1930; Pearce to "Members of The State Board of Education," Oct. 30, 1930, Pearce Files, TMM.

⁴⁶ "Centennial May Leave Building," *Austin American*, Sept. 25, 1932, Pearce Files, TMM.

⁴⁷ Pearce to S. C. Dellinger, Sept. 4, 1933, Pearce Files, TMM. Dellinger was curator of the University Museum and chair of the zoology department at the University of Arkansas. See <https://libinfo.uark.edu/specialcollections/findingsaids/dellinger.html> [Accessed June 3, 2016].

museums as examples of what could be accomplished. “The wise peoples of the earth, however, have looked about sharply for every means within their reach for spreading knowledge. Among the agencies which they have discovered and utilized with the greatest efficiency for supplementing the work of the schools is that of exhibiting objects that teach lessons to the general public . . . they have devised the fair, the exhibition or exposition, and the museum.”⁴⁹

While enumerating the richness of Texas collections and the scientific and educational importance of a university-based state museum, Pearce directed his sharpest criticism at historical museums under the direction of patriotic societies:

They are usually valueless for purposes of science and aid little in spreading knowledge. Their custodians, often lame duck politicians, ex-soldiers or other worthy but ignorant and untrained persons who mistake sentiment for knowledge, gather old clothes of generals, furniture made from houses or trees associated with former public characters, and like stuff, which is absolutely valueless in any attempt at enlightening the public. . . . The children of the people who build them are ashamed of them and their grandchildren tear them down.⁵⁰

Pearce also pursued philanthropic support in one last push for a museum that would be devoted to the preservation and dissemination of knowledge. He included the new publication in letters to personal contacts at Humble Oil, Sinclair Oil, the Gulf Company, and Magnolia Petroleum Company in hopes of attracting a benefactor for the project, although no financial support materialized from those sources.

The 1935 appropriation for the Texas Centennial included \$225,000 for the exhibits, furnishings, and equipment of the Texas Memorial Museum building that was to be located on the UT campus. University President Benedict included Pearce as one of three faculty members to serve with a Board of Regents Memorial Museum Committee. The board clarified museum governance, reviewed the role of the American Legion in the coin sale effort, supported additional federal funding legislation, authorized the president to apply for a grant to aid in financing the construction of the museum through the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, and finalized the site for the museum.⁵¹

Pearce oversaw the anthropology exhibits during the campus Centennial celebrations in 1936. Appointed temporary director of the museum

⁴⁸ Pearce form letter, 1934, Pearce Files, TMM.

⁴⁹ Pearce, “The Need for a State Museum in Texas” (typescript), p. 1, Pearce Files, TMM.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵¹ H.B. 11, Appropriation for Celebration of Texas Centennial, 44th Texas Legislature—Regular Session, <http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/scanned/sessionLaws/44-0/HB_11_CH_174.pdf> [Accessed June 3,

in May 1938, he outlined in a subsequent five-page letter why he should be made director in full, concluding:

I neglected to say that I advocated, after the appropriations were secured for the Museum, the election of a permanent director from some other institution . . . because President Benedict and I disagreed so seriously about the location of the museum and its proper relation to the University that I thought it best to advise bringing in some outsider. That situation has of course entirely passed and I believe now that I may be considered on my merit.⁵²

The “situation” that had passed was actually university president H. Y. Benedict, who died on May 10, 1937. The board of regents appointed Pearce museum director on June 15, 1938, four months before his fatal heart attack.⁵³

James E. Pearce is one of our state’s “museum masters,” those described as “imaginative museum leaders who gave thought to the purposes of museums and took the institutions with which they were connected in new directions.”⁵⁴ The museum Pearce finally directed was not the original he imagined with a grand roofed courtyard, expansive galleries, and spacious laboratory and instructional areas, but he nevertheless embraced it as an opportunity for research and education. During the 1929 museum effort, when asked why he had “exhibited so strong an interest in getting started a State Museum,” Pearce reiterated his conviction that it would allow Texas to keep her best students and her best collections, adding that he had lived in Texas from his “babyhood.” Both pride and practicality inspired him to erase the “stigma” of no state museum. Finally though, addressing the implication that he might garner personal gain or glory out of such an effort for Texas, he answered, “If I had wanted badly to get money I should have hastily left teaching long ago.”⁵⁵

Throughout the two decades of what might be characterized as “museum fever,” Pearce chaired the UT Department of Anthropology, taught classes, applied for and received grants to conduct statewide fieldwork in Texas prehistory, recorded and excavated sites, gave innumerable talks to local organizations and clubs, and served in the leading scholarly and professional organizations in the field, including TSHA. He wrote opinion pieces for newspapers, cultivated and experimented with pecan

2016]; Benedict to Pearce, Apr. 13, 1935, Pearce Files, TMM.

⁵² Pearce to the “Committee of the Faculty on the State Museum of Natural History,” n.d., Pearce Files, TMM.

⁵³ Leo C. Haynes, Secretary, The Board of Regents of the University of Texas at Austin, to Pearce, July 7, 1938, Pearce Files, TMM.

⁵⁴ Edward P. Alexander, *Museum Masters: Their Museums and Their Influence* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1983), 428.

varieties on his farm west of town near Lake Austin, and supported two daughters in post-graduate work. His earnestness, humor, friendship, and frustration permeate years of correspondence. In retrospect, his final archaeological monograph, *Tales That Dead Men Tell*, is an equally apt title for the years of museum work and the efforts to build a state history museum.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Pearce, "A Personal Note," Pearce Files, TMM.

⁵⁶ J. E. Pearce, *Tales That Dead Men Tell*, University of Texas Bulletin 3537 (Austin: University of Texas, Bureau of Research in the Social Sciences, 1935).