

# TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

---

## STATEWIDE THEMES POLICY As Applicable To Official Texas Historical Marker Program

### **Purpose:**

The commission shall develop statewide themes for the program related to the commission's preservation goals for the state.

### **Contextual Framework**

The "Contextual Framework" is developed by creating categories of historical associations, at varying levels of specificity, to help structure the identification and study of statewide themes and historic contexts. The purpose of this approach is to build from established models of historic context development, especially those used by the National Park Service, adding more specific examples of activities that have influenced the material culture of Texas.

Although the structure of the framework is hierarchical, the different levels and categories of association are not intended to exist in isolation. Thoughtful development of historic contexts requires many levels of examination, from the macro to the micro, using each broader level to help organize and communicate relationships among the more specific. Likewise, most cultural resources embody many different historical associations and layers of history, so few would be confined to only one category at any level. The framework's multi-level approach is intended to encourage its users to consider the full range of influences that have interacted to shape our culture, history and environment.

The framework is also intended to be as inclusive as possible. Most of the categories describe human activities that can be applied to a wide variety of places, times and cultural groups. Categories associated exclusively with a particular time, place or group are intentionally avoided, as those elements should be dictated by the specific focus of each context. This inclusive approach allows for the development of contexts relating to any period of prehistory or history. Likewise, there are no separate categories for cultural groups like African Americans or Women because the contributions of such groups should be incorporated into any and all historic contexts.

### **Statewide Themes/Topics**

"Themes/Topics" are specific and traditional categories of historical association. These Themes/Topics were adapted for Texas from the "Areas of Significance" used for categorizing the historical associations of properties nominated to the National Register of Historic Places (NR) and are appropriate for selection of potential historic markers:

#### Statewide Themes/Topics

- Agriculture
- Architecture & Landscape Architecture
- Arts
- Communications
- Community Planning & Development
- Education
- Exploration
- Health

- Immigration & Settlement
- Industry, Business & Commerce
- Law, Politics, & Government
- Military
- Natural Resources
- Religion & Spirituality
- Science & Technology
- Social & Cultural History
- Transportation

### **Sub-themes/topics**

“Sub-themes/topics” were developed to divide each Theme/Topic into more manageable areas of study. Although Theme/Topics provide a general structure for identifying associations among cultural resources, the subjects are too broad for the thorough research and evaluation often required of a historic context study. A Theme/Topic-level study would also likely focus on certain aspects of the subject, neglecting others that may be equally important. At the Sub-topic level, the subjects are still broad enough to be inclusive but specific enough to ensure adequate treatment on historic markers:

- **Agriculture**

#### **Sub-themes/topics:**

- cotton & other fiber farming
- livestock production/ranching
- fruit farming
- grain farming
- aquaculture
- vegetables/legumes
- bee-keeping
- fowl production
- cane farming
- wool/mohair
- horticulture/floriculture

- **Architecture & Landscape Architecture**

#### **Sub-Themes/topics:**

- domestic
- recreational
- ceremonial
- commemorative/monumental
- ecclesiastical
- educational
- institutional
- commercial
- industrial
- agricultural

- governmental
- traditional cultural & ethnic
- architects/designers
- interior design

- **Arts**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- literature
- performing arts
- music
- visual arts
- folk arts
- decorative arts & interiors

- **Communications**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- interpersonal
- organizational
- political
- delivery methods & technology
- language
- symbols
- rhetoric

- **Community Planning & Development**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- physical planning
- regional planning
- infrastructure development
- institutional development
- social & cultural influences
- political influences
- geographical influences
- economic influences

- **Education**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- preschool/primary/secondary
- higher education
- informal

- technical
- religious
- continuing/adult

- **Exploration**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- settlement
- conquest
- religious
- economic
- military
- transportation
- scientific

- **Health**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- disease/drought/pestilence
- migration for climate, diet, exercise
- preventive medicine, rejuvenation, springs/spas
- diet & nutrition
- medical practice & profession
- health-related institutions (hospitals, wards, “pesthouses,” sanatoria)
- schools, research facilities, & laboratories
- reform & public health
- life stages
- death
- alternative medicine

- **Immigration & Settlement**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- land-use patterns
- subsistence strategies
- frontier protection
- empresarios & land grants
- trade
- inter-cultural relations
- land speculation
- preserving cultural distinctions & traditions
- borders, boundaries, geo-politics
- impact on natural resources
- landowner rights

- **Industry, Business & Commerce**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- resource exploration & extraction
- labor
- ranching & farming
- professional services
- government/military
- manufacturing & processing
- transportation & distribution networks
- retail
- trade/exchange mechanisms
- consumer services
- marketing & advertising
- sports, entertainment, & leisure
- travel & tourism
- finance
- real estate
- high tech

- **Law, Politics, & Government**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- social control
- colonialism
- human rights & civil rights
- state-building (republicanism)
- federal government
- state government
- local government
- law enforcement, criminal justice & rehabilitation
- political parties
- reform movements
- diplomacy
- terrorism

**Natural Resource Utilization**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- gathering
- hunting
- fishing
- horticulture & agriculture
- habitation

- animal domestication
- timber harvesting
- resource procurement
- recreation
- managing land & water
- conservation & stewardship

- **Military**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- conflict
- training & education
- facility planning & development
- personnel
- homefront
- strategy
- innovation

- **Religion & Spirituality**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- traditional cultural properties
- places of worship & ceremony
- rituals, ceremonies & practices
- religious sects & denominations
- religious communities
- camp meetings, revivals
- tolerance/intolerance
- lawlessness/dissension/protest
- schools & education
- government & law
- iconography & symbols

- **Science & Technology**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- natural resource control
- navigation
- agricultural research/extension services
- medical research
- energy
- defense research
- chemical research & production
- Space Program/aerospace industry
- high tech

- engineering innovations
- invention, diffusion & adoption
- **Social & Cultural History**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- traditional cultural properties/icons
- forming communities
- family & kinship
- food & drink
- clubs, civic & interest groups, volunteer associations
- public celebrations, fairs, & markets
- competitive sports
- recreation, relaxation, travel & leisure
- entertainment & fine arts
- rituals & rites of passage
- commemoration
- social organization & stratification
- social mores & taboos

- **Transportation**

**Sub-themes/topics:**

- animal-power
- boats/ships
- railroads
- automobiles
- trucks
- airplanes
- trails & routes
- roads
- mass transit & public transportation

**Using the Framework to Develop Historic Contexts for State Markers and other THC Programs:**

In addition to focusing on a particular historical subject, such as one or more of the Sub-themes/topics, a historic context study for a marker might also be confined to a particular geographic area, a particular period of time, and in many cases, one or more specific cultural groups. Deciding which area, time period and cultural group(s) to study will depend largely on the purpose for which the context is being developed and the particular characteristics of the subject being examined. Establishing these parameters is the primary purpose of a research design.

It is during this research design phase that the Contextual Framework should be employed. The categories can be used as a kind of checklist, to ensure that all historical developments associated with the focus of study are identified. Using the framework, one could compile a list of Sub-themes/topics that should be included as subjects of research. Based on the goals and the scope of the project, some Sub-themes/topics might be grouped together under a broader subject, using the Topics and Themes as a guide. Others may be worthy of individual study. Each

of those subjects, whether an individual Sub-theme/topic or an amalgamation, would become the focus of a historic context study. For each subject, appropriate geographic and chronological limitations could then be determined, and all associated cultural groups would be identified. This exercise would yield a comprehensive list of the historic contexts that should be researched for the marker project.

---

Texas Historical Commission  
P.O. Box 12276  
Austin, TX 78711-2276  
512.463.6100  
fax 512.475.4872  
thc@thc.texas.gov



**TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION**  
*real places telling real stories*

---

[www.thc.texas.gov](http://www.thc.texas.gov)