

By: Kolkhorst

H.C.R. No. 49

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1 WHEREAS, The State of Texas has customarily recognized a
2 variety of official state symbols as tangible representations of
3 the state's historical and cultural heritage; and

4 WHEREAS, The Burton Cotton Gin & Museum, in Burton,
5 Washington County, is home to what is believed to be the only
6 restored gin of its time period in the United States that remains in
7 its original building, on its original site, and that operates with
8 equipment that was in the facility when the gin closed; beyond its
9 uniqueness, this plant represents a significant chapter in Texas
10 agricultural and economic history; and

11 WHEREAS, First grown in Texas by Spanish missionaries, cotton
12 became an important source of income in the state in the 19th
13 century and has remained a significant part of the state's economy;
14 Texas has led the nation in cotton production in almost every year
15 since 1880, and the state's annual cotton harvest today constitutes
16 approximately a quarter of all the cotton raised in the United
17 States; the largest cash crop in Texas, cotton has been designated
18 the official State Fiber and Fabric; and

19 WHEREAS, Beginning in the 1870s, cotton culture in Texas
20 expanded dramatically: between 1869 and 1879, the number of bales
21 produced in the state rose from approximately 350,000 to more than
22 800,000, and by 1900 the number of bales reached more than 3.5
23 million; this soaring volume placed a heavy strain on the existing
24 gins and their mode of operation; even if steam engines were used

1 instead of animals to power the gin machinery, manual labor was
2 still needed to shift the cotton from one operation to another, and
3 as cotton harvests increased, impatient farmers were forced to wait
4 in ever longer lines at the gin; and

5 WHEREAS, To cope with the upsurge in production, Robert S.
6 Munger, of Mexia, devised a radically new process that became known
7 as system ginning; over the period from 1883 to 1892, he created
8 pneumatic technology that would move the cotton in a continuous
9 manner, directly from the wagon to the gin stand and then to the
10 baling press; modern-day cotton gins still use the process that he
11 pioneered; and

12 WHEREAS, Though highly successful, Mr. Munger's technology
13 was too expensive for a single individual to install, and so local
14 farmers would establish associations to build system gins; in 1913,
15 a group of Burton agriculturists, most of them German Texans,
16 incorporated to construct and operate the Burton Farmers Gin;
17 designed by the Lummus Cotton Gin Company, the gin relied on Mr.
18 Munger's pneumatic system, together with special air-blast
19 equipment to doff lint from the gin saws; and

20 WHEREAS, During the 1920s, the mechanization of cotton
21 harvesting necessitated the addition of still further machinery at
22 the Burton gin, in order to remove the increased volume of trash
23 from the seed cotton; the total power requirement then exceeded the
24 capacity of the gin's original steam engine, and the latter was thus
25 supplanted in 1925 by a Bessemer Type IV diesel engine with 125
26 horsepower; after that engine failed in 1963, it was replaced by an
27 electric motor, though the diesel engine was repaired and kept as a

1 standby power source; and

2 WHEREAS, The Burton Farmers Gin operated from 1914 to 1974,
3 by which time cotton production in the area had almost wholly given
4 way to the raising of livestock; efforts by local citizens to
5 preserve the gin and return it to its 1930s condition began in 1986;
6 as part of the initial phase, the complete gin records, which
7 chronicle cotton production and sales by area farmers as well as the
8 history of the physical plant, were indexed and archived; later,
9 staff from the Smithsonian Institution assisted with the
10 restoration of the gin's Bessemer engine, the "Lady B," which is
11 considered to be "the largest operating internal combustion engine
12 of [its] vintage in the southern United States," and one of the
13 "few, if [indeed there are] any, engines of this age and horsepower
14 in operation outside of a museum"; and

15 WHEREAS, Today, the Burton Farmers Gin constitutes the main
16 structure in the nine-acre complex known as the Burton Cotton Gin &
17 Museum; the gin itself is open for tours year-round and is activated
18 twice a year, during the Cotton Gin Festival in May and the First
19 Bale Celebration in October; listed on the National Register of
20 Historic Places, the Burton Farmers Gin has also been designated a
21 Texas Historic Landmark by the Texas Historical Commission and a
22 National Historic Engineering Landmark by the American Society of
23 Mechanical Engineers; and

24 WHEREAS, A key element of the cotton industry, gins were once
25 a fixture in countless rural Texas communities and a fundamental
26 part of their local economy; today, the Burton Cotton Gin & Museum
27 evokes that earlier time and offers a rare window into a critical

1 technological advance, one that continues to benefit the Lone Star
2 State; now, therefore, be it

3 RESOLVED, That the 81st Legislature of the State of Texas
4 hereby designate the Burton Cotton Gin & Museum as the official
5 Cotton Gin Museum of Texas.