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Pages from the Past

How well do you remember the French Legation?

1. Texas was a republic between the years of ____ and _____. Why was Texas first denied admission and then later allowed to join the United States?
2. The French Legation was built in the _____ style. Where was Dubois' inspiration for style acquired?
3. _____ was the first country to recognize Texas as an independent nation. Why do you think they did this?
4. Alphonse Dubois' title was _____. Why was an ambassador not sent?
5. How does the French Legation house differ from a true dogtrot home? How can one tell the French Legation was built as a dogtrot? Why were houses built this way?
6. Dr. Robertson and some partners bought the French Legation in 1848 to open a _____. Why do you think they did that? What may be some reasons for its failure?
7. Two generations of Robertsons lived in the French Legation for ninety years [1848 – 1940]. Name four major historical events that took place during that time.
8. Why was the kitchen built separately from the house?
9. Why did the kitchen have a dirt floor?
10. Name memorable pieces from the house and kitchen. How and why were they used?

Pages from the Past

How well do you remember the French Legation?

Teachers' Key

1. Texas was a republic between the years of *1836 and 1846*. *Texas was first denied admission to the United States because of its status as a slave holding state. Later, Texas was admitted with a non-slave holding state – in order to preserve the balance between the two types of states.*
2. The French Legation was built in the *French Colonial style*. *The front porch with its square columns and the French doors that lead outside from every room are indicative of this style. Dubois was probably influenced to build this type of home after seeing them in New Orleans.*
3. *France* was the first country to recognize Texas as an independent nation. *France was interested in Texas because cotton was grown there. Texas was glad to be recognized by France. The French had money, power, and international influence.*
4. Alphonse Dubois' title was *charge d'affaires*. *Texas was too new to have a high-ranking ambassador. Had Texas remained an independent country, they would have received eventually received an ambassador.*
5. How does the French Legation house differ from a true dogtrot home? How can one tell the French Legation was built as a dogtrot? Why would a house be built this way? *The Legation differs from a true dogtrot home in that it has doors at either end of the central hallway. We can tell the Legation was built as a dogtrot because there is exterior wood on the interior of the house. Homes at this time were built as dogtrots because the open breezeway allowed for the flow of air through the house to keep it ventilated. The dogtrot name came about because family dogs could run free through the open areas of the home.*
6. Dr. Robertson and his partners bought the French Legation in 1848 to open it as a *school for girls*. Why do you think they did that? What may be some reasons for its failure? *In the mid-nineteenth century, daughters from affluent families studied at girls' schools or female seminaries, where they learned to speak French, play a musical instrument, paint, and to improve their penmanship and reading. Today, an institution such as this is called a finishing school. Some reasons for its failure might be the conditions in Austin at that time – the threat of Indian attacks and epidemics.*
7. Two generations of Robertsons lived in the French Legation for ninety years [1848 – 1940]. Name four major historical events that took place during that time. *The Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World War I, and the Great Depression all took place while the Robertsons lived at the French Legation. Railroads, the telephone, the automobile, electricity, and the radio all came to Texas in those ninety years.*

8. Why was the kitchen built separately from the house? *In the Southern United States, most kitchens were separate from the house to reduce the danger of a fire spreading to the main house. It kept cooking odors and heat away from the house as well. It is believed that the Legation's kitchen burned several times before 1880.*
9. Why did the kitchen have a dirt floor? *The kitchen had a dirt floor because it reduced the cost of construction and helped to prevent fires.*
10. Name memorable artifacts from the house and kitchen. How and why were they used? *Memorable artifacts from the kitchen include the glass flycatcher [lures and traps flies so they cannot escape], panetière [bread cooler or baker's safe], chauffe bain [used to heat hot water for one's bath], and lavabo [used for running water]. Memorable artifacts from the house include girandoles [oil lamps], lap desk [for writing letters], cellaret [used to chill wine bottles with spring water], and smoke bells [used to catch soot given off by tallow candles].*