

Talking Book Voices Podcast

Season 3, Episode 7

America250 and TBP

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Podcast Transcript

Alicia, Michele, and Peggy

Summary: In this episode, join Engagement Specialist Alicia as she explores how the Talking Book Program is celebrating America's 250th anniversary. Featuring guests Michele Chan Santos and Peggy Price from the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, this episode highlights the Texas America250 Reading Challenge, traveling exhibits, and a special lobby exhibit showcasing Texas's contributions to American history. Learn more about how readers of all ages can participate in this statewide celebration at www.tsl.texas.gov/america250.

NARRATOR INTRO: Welcome to Talking Book Voices, the podcast. Get ready to embark on an adventure with us as we dive into and celebrate the magic of the Texas Talking Book Program. Let's raise our voices together and make the world of literature accessible for all. The Texas Talking Book Program is a division of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and serves as a regional library for the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, a division of the Library of Congress. The Talking Book Program

provides specialized library services to individuals who have a qualifying visual, physical, or reading disability, such as dyslexia.

In each episode of Talking Book Voices, we will delve into the heart of the program, uncovering its history, sharing inspiring stories, and exploring the vast collection of materials it has to offer. We will bring you the latest updates, interviews with program experts and patrons, and useful tips to make the most of this invaluable program for Texans and beyond.

So, whether you're an avid reader, someone with a print disability seeking accessible materials, or just curious to learn more about this great program, this podcast is made for you! Don't forget to visit us at www.texasalkingbooks.org for more information. So, let's begin Texas Talking Book Voices, a podcast by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

ALICIA: Hello TBP Voices listeners! I am so excited that you're joining us on this episode of TBP Voices, where we're going to be exploring America250, which is the 250th anniversary of our country. And to talk about how America250 and the Talking Book Program intersect, first I'd like to welcome on Michele Chan Santos, the Center for the Book Coordinator. Hi Michele, how are you?

MICHELE: Good! Thanks so much for having me on your program.

ALICIA: Of course! So, for listeners who may not be familiar, what is America250, and why is this anniversary significant both nationally and here in Texas?

MICHELE: As I'm sure most of our listeners are aware, this Fourth of July marks the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The national America250 initiative recognizes that this historic milestone is an opportunity to reflect on our nation's past, to honor the contributions of all Americans and to look ahead optimistically to the future.

Here in Texas, libraries, museums and communities all around the state have special exhibits, events and celebrations planned for not just Fourth of July weekend but throughout 2026. One of my favorite items to recommend at a library in Texas is one of the original copies of the Declaration of Independence, printed on July 4, 1776. It's on display at the downtown location of the Dallas Public Library and is in great condition. It's spine-tingling to see it in person. If you check out our Lone Star Libraries series on the TSLAC YouTube channel, we have a great video about the Dallas Public library and the Declaration of Independence.

ALICIA: Wow, I am definitely going to check that out. Well, how is the Texas State Library and Archives Commission participating in America250 commemorations?

MICHELE: So the biggest project that we've done, that we started more than a year ago, is distributing 700 sets of the Texas America250 traveling exhibit to public libraries, schools and museums across the state. The traveling exhibit highlights historically significant Texas Treasures from our collections, including historical records from the State Archive. We also provide a media kit to assist participating locations in promoting the exhibit.

We have many printable posters, bookmarks and other materials on our website that libraries are printing and sharing with their patrons.

ALICIA: Amazing. So anyone across the state can access those resources online. I love that!

Can you walk us through the Texas America250 Reading Challenge? What is it, who is it for, and how does someone participate?

MICHELE: The Texas America250 Reading Challenge is a program of the Texas Center for the Book. We are encouraging Texans of all ages to participate and thousands of people are already doing the challenge across our state.

So here's how it works: from January 1 to December 31st of this year, we invite Texans of all ages to log 2,500 minutes (which is about 41.5 hours) of reading, state parks visits, and service activity, in honor of our nation's 250th anniversary.

So, people can log their time:

- Reading books and/or listening to audiobooks. We especially encourage reading about Texas and American history, as well as Texas and American nature, wildlife, and space exploration topics.
- You can attend library storytimes or other library events.
- Volunteer in your local community.
- Visit a Texas State Park.

So far, we have more than 305 libraries that have officially registered to participate. In addition, our [Reading Log Map](#) (which is now available in [Spanish](#) as well as English!) has been downloaded 4,901

times as of this week, and all of our free Texas America250 self-print pieces have been downloaded a total of more than 14,000 times!

So these two programs, the traveling exhibits and the Reading Challenge, have so far received more than 500 mentions on TV, in newspapers and on social media.

So personally, I just love the wide age range of participants. So starting in January, we're hearing about elementary schools doing the challenge, and little kids would go to storytime and then color in their reading log map. Older students are working on it. One school had a kind of hot chocolate and popcorn party for the kids who had completed the challenge. I know there are some retirement communities participating... So it's really fun to see all the photos and hear from all these libraries. So, for example, the public library in Crowley is partnering with a local restaurant to promote the reading challenge—there's just a lot of fun and creative ways that libraries are promoting this program.

ALICIA: Wow, I love to hear those anecdotes about real places and real communities across Texas that are leaning into the reading challenge and making it their own. Thank you for sharing those.

So, reading about Texas and American history is especially encouraged, as you mentioned, along with topics like nature, wildlife, and space exploration. What's behind that thematic focus?

MICHELE: So, since TSLAC is the state archives, of course we wanted to encourage Texans to read about Texas and American history. And we have so many wonderful natural spaces in Texas. So

one of our Texas America250 partner agencies is Texas Parks and Wildlife—that’s why you can count visiting a Texas state park toward your Reading Challenge hours and why we encourage reading about nature and wildlife. As for space—I know many families in Texas, including mine, were thrilled to follow the latest Artemis Mission, and are proud that Mission Control for NASA is at the Johnson Space Center in Houston.

ALICIA: You’re absolutely right. I am a huge fan of space exploration as well, and it’s so fun to follow along. And there are so many great books that include space or nature as a theme or topic.

The challenge runs the full calendar year and is self-reported. What advice would you give to someone just now hearing about it who wants to jump right in?

MICHELE: So the first thing is to visit your local library to get a reading log map, or you can download one and print it from the TSLAC website. And you have lots of time! So if there’s a library event you regularly go to, say you regularly attend storytime with your family, or you go to craft hour at your local library, you can count that time on your reading challenge log. If you take a trip to a state park, a weekend at a state park is an easy way to log time towards your total.

So if you start in July, that’s a little less than two hours a week of reading books, or listening to audiobooks, volunteering or going to library programs before December 31st to hit the total.

Participating libraries can print a completion certificate for you once you’re finished that’s signed by Governor Abbott. People are keeping their completed reading logs and their certificate as keepsakes. And

I've seen a lot of photos of people posting pictures of themselves, y'know, with the certificates and their personalized reading logs. There've been a lot of beautiful designs that people have done with like colored pencil and different paints on their reading log. The maps themselves—the reading log maps themselves—are beautiful. Our graphic designer Gabe Herbig designed them and it's just really fun to see how people are adding their own artistic flair to those.

ALICIA: Wow, yeah, so there is a lot of incentive to participate in this reading challenge and get out there, explore Texas Parks and Wildlife state parks across the state... Thank you so much for being here with me and telling all of our listeners about these amazing initiatives for America250. We're so happy to have had you Michele!

MICHELE: You are so welcome, and it was fun talking with you!

ALICIA: Now, I am thrilled to welcome Peggy Price, Education Outreach Coordinator, to tell us a bit more about the Texas America250 Lobby Exhibit, at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

Hi Peggy, how are you?

PEGGY: I'm great, thanks for having me!

ALICIA: Of course! So excited to learn more about the Texas America250 lobby exhibit. Can you describe the exhibit? What is it, and what was the vision behind it?

PEGGY: Well, we knew that this major milestone in American history was coming up in 2026 and discussed how our lobby exhibit could be integrated into TSLAC's programming for this commemorative

event and become a tangible feature of our Texas America250 celebrations.

So in a nutshell, the Texas America250 exhibit in our lobby here at TSLAC celebrates the contributions of our state to the history of this country. Texans like to remind people that we were once our own country, but the reality is that our story has become a significant part of what people think about when they think about the United States. Cowboys and ranching are associated with Texas, for example, as is the great Western landscape depicted in movies and television shows. In addition, our state has been involved with and the location for the great oil boom of the twentieth century, advances in technology and Space exploration and medicine.

Some achievements are familiar to people around the country and even the world, as many are aware that Houston was the site of Mission Control for the Moon Landing. Other significant contributions may not be as widely known but important nonetheless, such as the medical research and treatment at the MD Anderson Cancer Research Center in that same city.

So, whether it has been through culture like our Tejano Music and writers like Larry McMurty or those individuals who became national figures in politics and even presidents like LBJ and the Bushes, we were answering the question, what does Texas bring to this birthday party?

ALICIA: Wow, I love that, especially when you mentioned some of those maybe lesser known or lesser celebrated elements, like the medical research at MD Anderson. Actually my brother was a patient at MD Anderson, and he is now in remission from cancer, so

they did a fantastic job. And I love hearing about all of the other, y'know, iconic Texan things, like cowboys and ranching as well.

So, what kinds of materials from the State Archives are featured, and how were items selected for display?

PEGGY: Well, our exhibit team identified the areas to highlight, created the topics for each exhibit case, and selected the items from our archival and library collections to tell the story of that case.

Those on the team work with the collections all the time, some primarily as processors and others mainly on reference duties, so they were able to delve into the topics and pull out specific items, like a brochure for the first South by Southwest Festival for example, or a press release announcing that the state has given to the United States the land that will be developed into Big Bend National Park to illustrate their concept. So we have a large number of photographs, archival documents, maps, publications, and even three-dimensional artifacts on display.

ALICIA: Wow! I really want to go see that artifact about Big Bend National Park. I've been there several times and it's such an incredible park.

So, is there a particular document, photograph, or artifact in the exhibit that you find yourself coming back to, something that really stops you in your tracks?

PEGGY: Well, a few! First, it is impossible to not be awestruck by the stunning photographs capturing the big mountains of Big Bend. So, even though the area is so remote and many of us, unlike you, have never been there in person, that imagery just says, "Texas," to me. And there's another photograph from a small town in Texas and it's

just covered in oil derricks. A small city block with a church just surrounded by these derricks that symbolize something just quintessentially Texan.

ALICIA: And for those who might not have been in Texas their whole life— um, an Oil Derrick— those are the sort of oil rigs, right, that drill into the ground?

PEGGY: These are the ones that look like a tower.

ALICIA: Ah, okay, yes, I'm with you, I'm with you.

PEGGY: Right, not the ones going up and down but the ones that just look like towers made of metal.

ALICIA: Okay, that is quintessentially Texan, for sure.

Well, what do you hope visitors take away from the exhibit about Texas's role in American history?

PEGGY: Well, while we were not part of those original 13 colonies that formed what would become the United States 250 years ago, this exhibit offers a kind of highlight reel of what Texas and Texans have brought to American history in the decades and centuries since. So what would America be without Texas?

ALICIA: Hmmm, you're very right. And for those who can't visit in person, is there a way to experience the exhibit remotely or online?

PEGGY: Yes! All of our lobby exhibits are available on our website where we have scanned the items and even include audio and visual components not always possible to display in a static case. So visit: www.tsl.texas.gov/texasamerica250exhibit to view this exhibit online.

ALICIA: Wonderful! That's such a great resource that anyone can access.

Are there any stories behind specific items in the exhibit that listeners might not expect, things that challenge a common assumption about Texas or American history?

PEGGY: Well, I haven't mentioned that we also have on display original materials documenting the annexation process. We all know that Texas joined the U.S. but there are those who say that Texas was given the right to secede, for example, or that the idea of annexation wasn't very popular. So what we're able to do with an archival exhibit is go directly to the source and pull the document with the vote on annexation, show the publication with the terms of the agreement spelled out in print. So to me, presenting documentary evidence about events of the past really is the heart of archival exhibits.

ALICIA: Wow, I'm recalling back in school when we learned about primary sources. And it seems like this is the most primary you can get! We have those original sources to tell us a part of our history. I love that.

Well, what's one thing you'd like every Texan to do in connection with America250 this year?

PEGGY: I would say, reflect on what all those Texans who have come before us have brought to the American story and think about what of the present day should be preserved for the next big celebration.

ALICIA: Yes, because there will be more celebrations to come, and we are all a part of writing that history. So, Peggy, thank you so much for being here with me, I really appreciate it!

PEGGY: You're very welcome, thank you!

ALICIA: Alright, well, that is the end of this episode on Texas America250. I hope that all of our TBP Voices listeners enjoy the 4th of July holiday, and the celebrations that will continue all year as we celebrate this historic anniversary. Thank you, and we'll see you on the next one!