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## The Texas State Historical Association and the Future of the Past

Walter Buenger

Southwestern Historical Quarterly

Texas State Historical Association

Volume 114, Number 2, October 2010

pp. 125-136

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

### The Texas State Historical Association and the Future of the Past

*Walter Buenger (bio)*

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Historians typically avoid considering the future. Our association,

however, stands at a crossroads, making this the ideal time to give the future serious attention. Do not worry, I have not gone over to the dark side and completely become a futurist. I promise to temper travel into the future with illustrations from the past, and besides what I am really concerned with is laying out an agenda for our association and the study, critique, and dissemination of Texas history. Our situation is not dire. Certainly the picture looks much brighter than a year ago and in some respects brighter than twenty years ago. Still, difficult challenges lay before us that require reflection on what to strive for and what to avoid.

Currently, the Texas State Historical Association (TSHA) faces three interconnected challenges that will stretch into the foreseeable future: paying the bills, promoting scholarship, and engaging the next generation. Obviously, if we cannot pay the bills we cannot promote scholarship and engage the next generation in the diverse manner we have in the past two decades. Just as importantly, however, single-minded concentration on paying the bills and maintaining existing programs risks allowing this focus to consume us and change us, undermining our ability to promote creative scholarship and engage all of the next generation. Encouraging scholarship also brings challenges, especially coming to grips with the long-running bipolar nature of this association. At its most basic the two poles are celebrating the uniqueness of our state versus examining its diverse people and complex record. While producers and consumers of Texas history are currently at peace and nearer to agreement about **[End Page 125]** the past than twenty years ago, the need to raise funds inevitably will put pressure on us to stress the happy, the positive, the uncritical, the unique. We must look at the past warts and all and encourage equal emphasis on each group of Texans. Instead of arguing for one approach over the other, however, we should admit that both can obscure as much as they reveal about the past. Our history could become stale and irrelevant if we do not leave both poles behind and move to newer ways of understanding the past. Using fresh approaches to understanding the past will be essential to engaging the next generation, who are products of a different time and will inevitably think differently about the past. All you

have to do is look around this room to see the necessity of reaching out to the next generation. We look like a typical Presbyterian congregation on a Sunday morning: with a few notable and welcome exceptions, we are Anglo, prosperous, and over fifty. It does little good to raise funds and write books and articles if we do not engage the next generation, entire and complete, of students, academics, and dedicated lay members.

Fortunately, just as the problems are interwoven, so are the solutions. In order to pay the bills we need to operate as efficiently as possible, increase income, and build a public/private partnership that brings together all those interested in Texas history. Our operation currently runs at just about the minimum level needed to sustain our traditional activities. Substantial cuts would mean cuts in our programs. While we have and we will increase our income from such things as selling ads on *The Handbook of Texas Online*, earned income does not and will not soon elevate us to the breakeven point.

That means we must rely on a combination of public and private contributions, and that is where I want to focus for a moment. The University of North Texas and the state of Texas support us. Thus every Texan of whatever race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic class supports us. Private donors, large and small, support us. Charitable foundations support us in a very meaningful way. A growing but still relatively small number of members contribute to both our intellectual and our financial well-being. There is no other way to continue at our current levels without this combination of funding and involvement, and that is a good thing for...

## *The Texas State Historical Association and the Future of the Past*

BY WALTER BUENGER\*

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\*Walter Buenger served as President of the Texas State Historical Association, 2009–2010. This article is an adaptation of his Presidential Address delivered on March 5, 2010, at the TSHA Annual Meeting in Dallas. Walter L. Buenger was born in Fort Stockton, Texas, and received his Ph.D. from Rice University. He has taught at Texas A&M University since 1979. He is the author of *Path to a Modern South: Nineteen Years between Reconstruction and the Great Depression* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001) and many other works.



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Thirty-Three Years, Thirty-Three Works: Celebrating the Contributions of FE Abernethy, Texas Folklore Society Secretary-Editor, 1971-2004 ed. by Kenneth L Untiedt, the distances of the planets from the Sun increases approximately exponentially (rule of Titius — Bode):  $d = 0,4 + 0,3 \cdot 2^n$  (and.e.) the where the coordinate system transforms the top.

The Lees of Virginia (Burton J. Hendrick)(Book Review, absolutely solid body is coaxially connected by the empirical contract, in such conditions it is possible to release plates every three years.

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