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Bullock Museum highlights the intersection of religion and U.S. westward expansion in the 19th century with new exhibition

Exhibition features art, artifacts and interactives that bring to life the rapidly changing West

APRIL 3, 2025 (AUSTIN, TX) — [*Acts of Faith: Religion and the American West*](#), a new special exhibition organized by The New York Historical, will open at the Bullock Texas State History Museum on Saturday, April 5. The exhibition explores the interaction of religion and U.S. westward expansion in the 19th century through stories of preachers, pilgrims and visionaries.

"As people came to Texas from all corners of the world over generations, integral to their approach to resettlement was their fundamental religious beliefs," said Margaret Koch, Director at the Bullock Museum. "One of the things that makes this exhibition so special is that visitors will be able to read the motivations of those hoping to make a new life, yet preserve their traditions in their own words."

Acts of Faith: Religion and the American West seeks to answer questions such as, "What did religion have to do with U.S. expansion and the American West?" and "How did westward expansion change America's religious landscape?" *Acts of Faith* takes visitors beyond the mythologized "Wild West" of popular culture to present a fuller picture: a West populated by preachers, pilgrims, and visionaries and home to sacred grounds and cathedrals from the woodlands of New York to the valleys of California. The narratives in *Acts of Faith* display how religion has and continues to shape identity, drive community, organize society and serve as a source of strength and resistance. The exhibit highlights accounts of Native American religious movements, Protestant missionaries and Catholic communities, African American migrants who were formerly enslaved and started new lives in the West, Jewish traders, Latter-day Saints bound for Utah and Chinese immigrants honoring their ancestral religious practices.



The exhibition features thought-provoking artworks, cultural artifacts and immersive displays that highlight pivotal historic stories. Among the highlights of the exhibition are Robert Weir's portrait of the famous Seneca chief Sagoyewatha, or "Red Jacket," and a *bulto* (wooden statue)

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of San Ysidro Labrador from 19th-century New Mexico on loan from the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe. There are also several interactives in the exhibition, including a covered wagon where visitors will view various artistic impressions of the journey westward based on the “pilgrimage diary” writings of Sarah Royce during her journey to California in 1849. Media elements include visualizations of the Latter-day Saints exodus to Utah and an immersive recreation of a Native American boarding school classroom.

The Museum will echo the themes in the *Acts of Faith* exhibition through a display of artifacts in the Texas History Galleries. The Texas Art Gallery on the second floor of the Texas History Galleries showcases artworks depicting religious buildings in Texas ranging from historic Catholic missions in and around San Antonio that still stand today to a watercolor study of Our Mother of Mercy, Fort Worth’s first Black Catholic church. Additional artifacts aligning with the exhibition’s themes of faith and immigration will be on display in the Statehood gallery on the second floor. The artifacts include soapstone blocks from Marienkirsche, the St. Mary’s Catholic Church’s original tower in Fredericksburg, Texas, and a Bible belonging to Benjamin F. Parker, who came to Texas with his family to start a Primitive Baptist community in 1835. The Ranching section of the Texas History Galleries on the third floor will also present four paintings that speak to the theme of westward expansion.

The Bullock Museum will run a full program of events centered around the exhibition, including Bullock Member events. On April 6, the Museum will celebrate the exhibition at H-E-B Free First Sunday with free exhibit admission from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and community art-themed activities from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Acts of Faith: Religion and the American West is on view at the Bullock Museum April 5 through August 24, 2025. The exhibit is presented in English with Spanish translations available using the Bloomberg Connects app. For more information about the *Acts of Faith: Religion and the American West* exhibition and the accompanying artifacts in the Texas History Galleries, visit TheStoryofTexas.com.

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Ernest Smith (Seneca, 1907–1975), *Progress*, 1935, Oil on canvas, Courtesy of RMSC, Rochester, NY

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H-E-B Free First Sundays presented by H-E-B.

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ABOUT THE BULLOCK MUSEUM

The Bullock Texas State History Museum, a division of the State Preservation Board and an accredited institution of the American Alliance of Museums, illuminates and celebrates Texas history, people, and culture. With dynamic, award-winning exhibitions, educational programming for all ages, and an IMAX® theater with one of the largest screens in Texas, the Museum collaborates with more than 700 museums, libraries, archives and individuals across the world to bring the Story of Texas to life.

About The New York Historical

Experience 400 years of history through groundbreaking exhibitions, immersive films, and thought-provoking conversations among renowned historians and public figures at The New York Historical, New York's first museum. A great destination for history since 1804, the Museum and the Patricia D. Klingenstein Library convey the stories of the city and nation's diverse populations, expanding our understanding of who we are as Americans and how we came to be. Ever-rising to the challenge of bringing little or unknown histories to light, The New York Historical will soon inaugurate a new wing housing its Academy for American Democracy as well as the American LGBTQ+ Museum. These latest efforts to help forge the future by documenting the past join The New York Historical's DiMenna Children's History Museum and Center for Women's History. Digital exhibitions, apps, and our *For the Ages* podcast make it possible for visitors everywhere to dive more deeply into history. Connect with us at nyhistory.org or at @nyhistory on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#), [YouTube](#), and [Tumblr](#).