

August 24, 2018

Charles T. Sadnick III
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Texas Historical Commission
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Dear Mr. Sadnick:

The American Historical Association has learned that the Texas Historical Commission has postponed producing a historical marker relating to events at Porvenir, TX, in January 1918, a memorial that was approved by the Commission on July 27, 2018. Your professional staff had worked with historians since 2015 to generate text that meets the criteria for rigorous scholarship articulated in the AHA's [Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct](#). The AHA commends this level of professionalism and scholarly integrity on the part of the Historical Commission. We are concerned, however, about irregularities in the trajectory subsequent to that approval.

Production and installation of the Porvenir historical marker had apparently followed standard procedures, and preparations were on course for completion when the Presidio County Historical Commission objected to the text. The AHA considers public input essential to decisions about what aspects of history to commemorate, and how a community (in this case the state of Texas) chooses to frame that commemoration. But the requirements of professional historical scholarship must also be met. The historians involved in this process cannot engage the Presidio County Historical Commission's objections without a list of the errors that the PCHC apparently has identified. Historians work from facts and cannot serve the public effectively if objections to a given narrative are not presented openly for professional investigation.

The text that emerges from consultation among an official agency, the public, and professional historians, which in this case met the standards and requirements of THC procedures, should present a narrative that synthesizes a range of informed perspectives. Sometimes it cannot represent a "consensus" if some of the stakeholders bring to the table inaccurate data or narratives unsupported by available evidence. A historical marker is not a policy statement hammered out at a negotiating table; it is a narrative supported by evidence, crafted according to professional standards of historical scholarship, and sensitive to interpretive debate within the boundaries of those standards.

The AHA encourages the Texas Historical Commission to trust the good work done by its professional staff in consultation with historians who have a record of scholarship on this topic and its context.

Sincerely,



James Grossman
Executive Director