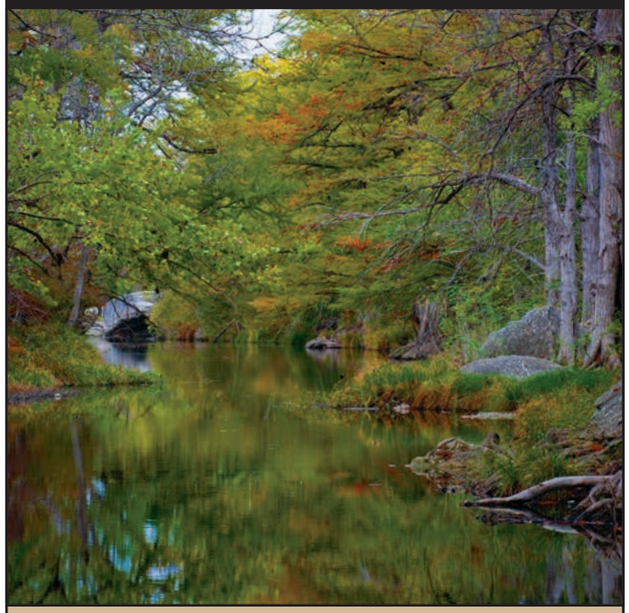

WELCOME TO AN URBAN OASIS JUST MINUTES FROM DOWNTOWN AUSTIN. THE COOL WATERS OF ONION CREEK FLOW OVER LIMESTONE LEDGES, CREATING FALLS THAT BECKON SOLITUDE SEEKERS AS WELL AS WILDLIFE. REMAINS OF AN EARLY TEXAS HOMESTEAD AND AN OLD ROCK SHELTER REVEAL AN AREA RICH IN HISTORY WITH VAST CONNECTIONS TO NATURE.

McKinney Falls State Park is just 13 miles from the state capitol. Hike or bike the winding trails through the Hill Country woods or relax by the falls. Enjoy fishing, camping or wildlife watching. Discover pieces of the past, and create history by making your own memories.

FUTHER READING

Margaret Sweet Henson, *McKinney Falls*, Texas State Historical Association, 1999.

James Wright Steely, *Parks for Texas*, University of Texas Press, 1999.

The Handbook of Texas Online
https://tshaonline.org/handbook

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Interpretive Guide to:

McKINNEY FALLS

STATE PARK

DRAWN TO THE LAND

While the beauty and recreational opportunities along Onion Creek and the falls draw visitors today, this area has actually attracted people for thousands of years.

Hunter-gatherer bands found abundant food and water along the banks of Onion Creek, and limestone outcroppings provided stone used for both tools and shelter. From the late 1600s to the early 1800s, a portion of El Camino Real de los Tejas ran through what is now the park. This vital road system connected missions, trading posts, towns and settlements between Mexico and Louisiana. But it's perhaps the park's namesake who had the biggest impact on what is now the park.

Kentucky-born Thomas Freeman McKinney headed to Texas as a young man on a business venture and settled in San Felipe de Austin in 1830 as one of Stephen F. Austin's first 300 colonists. McKinney played key roles in Texas history, such as helping found the city of Galveston and providing supplies and funds to the Texas Revolution. In 1839, he purchased 39,852 acres of land, part of which now comprises McKinney Falls State Park. Between 1850 and 1852, McKinney built a two-story limestone home, gristmill and dam. His slaves developed his ranch, where he raised cattle, sheep and thoroughbred horses. You'll find the remnants of McKinney's homestead, horse trainer's cabin, gristmill and stone walls in the park today.

The pink lines highlight the path of El Camino Real in the park.

McKinney's limestone house can be seen from the Homestead Trail.

LEAVING A LEGACY

Thomas McKinney passed away in 1873 in his home. Though he was deep in debt, his peers remembered him fondly and gave him an elaborate funeral service on the steps of the capitol. Following McKinney's death, the James Wood Smith family purchased the land. They farmed the land until 1973, when they donated it to Texas Parks and Wildlife so that others could enjoy the land they had come to love.

McKinney Falls State Park was officially opened in 1976. Today this urban gem offers beauty, solitude and recreation.

Thank you for being park stewards as you enjoy the park. Your efforts help us protect the park's geology, nature and history for future generations.

FROM THE GROUND UP

As you stand on the limestone ground of McKinney Falls State Park, you are on the bed of an ancient sea that existed approximately 80 million years ago. It was formed from the accumulation of organisms that lived in that sea, and this fossil-rich area gives us a glimpse into that prehistoric world.

The waters of Onion Creek flow over the uneven drops in the ancient sea floor, creating the main park attractions, the Upper and Lower falls. Volcanic ash scattered in the limestone reveals the story of Pilot Knob, a now dormant volcano that sits outside of the park boundaries. This rich soil and the waters of Onion and Williamson creeks provide ideal conditions for a variety of plants and animals, including bald cypress trees, red Turk's caps, white-tailed deer, armadillos, raccoons, coyotes and bobcats.

"Old Baldy," one of the oldest bald cypress trees on public land in Texas, is estimated to be more than 500 years old.