

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Today in Texas History

By Bandera Spirits of Texas
The Bandera Prophet

On this day in 1889, Liberal Hall, the Waco home of the Religious and Benevolent Association, burned to the ground. The association was chartered by a group of Waco citizens led by James D. Shaw in 1882 "for the worship of God, benevolent and religious works."

Membership was drawn from a cross-section of the population of Waco, including lawyer Edward J. Gurley. The association began to publish a monthly magazine called the Independent Pulpit in 1883. Edited by Shaw, the publication served as a forum for many of the members' freethinking views.

The introduction of such an association was bitterly opposed by churchmen across Central Texas. B. H. Carroll, a Baptist pastor in Waco, preached a sermon entitled "The Agnostic," in which no attempt was made to veil the animosity felt by many members of the community. J. B. Cranfill, editor of the Gatesville Advance, called the association the "Hell and Damnation Society," and told his readers that Shaw would turn them from the truth. He described the association as an "asylum for erratic thinkers on religious subjects."

Due to financial difficulties and the destruction of Liberal Hall the association faded away after 1889.