By: Kolkhorst H.C.R. No. 71

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The State of Texas has customarily recognized a variety of official state symbols as tangible representations of the state's historical and cultural heritage; and

WHEREAS, The Burton Cotton Gin & Museum, in Burton, Washington County, is home to what is believed to be the only restored gin of its time period in the United States that remains in its original building, on its original site, and that operates with equipment that was in the facility when the gin closed; beyond its uniqueness, this plant represents a significant chapter in Texas agricultural and economic history; and

WHEREAS, First grown in Texas by Spanish missionaries, cotton became an important source of income in the state in the 19th century and has remained a significant part of the state's economy; Texas has led the nation in cotton production in almost every year since 1880, and the state's annual cotton harvest today constitutes approximately a quarter of all the cotton raised in the United States; the largest cash crop in Texas, cotton has been designated the official State Fiber and Fabric; and

WHEREAS, Beginning in the 1870s, cotton culture in Texas expanded dramatically: between 1869 and 1879, the number of bales produced in the state rose from approximately 350,000 to more than 800,000, and by 1900 the number of bales reached more than 3.5 million; this soaring volume placed a heavy strain on the existing gins and their mode of operation; even if steam engines were used

instead of animals to power the gin machinery, manual labor was still needed to shift the cotton from one operation to another, and as cotton harvests increased, impatient farmers were forced to wait in ever longer lines at the gin; and

WHEREAS, To cope with the upsurge in production, Robert S. Munger, of Mexia, devised a radically new process that became known as system ginning; over the period from 1883 to 1892, he created pneumatic technology that would move the cotton in a continuous manner, directly from the wagon to the gin stand and then to the baling press; modern-day cotton gins still use the process that he pioneered; and

WHEREAS, Though highly successful, Mr. Munger's technology was too expensive for a single individual to install, and so local farmers would establish associations to build system gins; in 1913, a group of Burton agriculturists, most of them German Texans, incorporated to construct and operate the Burton Farmers Gin; designed by the Lummus Cotton Gin Company, the gin relied on Mr. Munger's pneumatic system, together with special air-blast equipment to doff lint from the gin saws; and

WHEREAS, During the 1920s, the mechanization of cotton harvesting necessitated the addition of still further machinery at the Burton gin, in order to remove the increased volume of trash from the seed cotton; the total power requirement then exceeded the capacity of the gin's original steam engine, and the latter was thus supplanted in 1925 by a Bessemer Type IV diesel engine with 125 horsepower; after that engine failed in 1963, it was replaced by an electric motor, though the diesel engine was repaired and kept as a

standby power source; and

WHEREAS, The Burton Farmers Gin operated from 1914 to 1974, by which time cotton production in the area had almost wholly given way to the raising of livestock; efforts by local citizens to preserve the gin and return it to its 1930s condition began in 1986; as part of the initial phase, the complete gin records, which chronicle cotton production and sales by area farmers as well as the history of the physical plant, were indexed and archived; later, staff from the Smithsonian Institution assisted with the restoration of the gin's Bessemer engine, the "Lady B," which is considered to be "the largest operating internal combustion engine of [its] vintage in the southern United States," and one of the "few, if [indeed there are] any, engines of this age and horsepower in operation outside of a museum"; and

WHEREAS, Today, the Burton Farmers Gin constitutes the main structure in the nine-acre complex known as the Burton Cotton Gin & Museum; the gin itself is open for tours year-round and is activated twice a year, during the Cotton Gin Festival in April and the First Bale Celebration in October; listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Burton Farmers Gin has also been designated a Texas Historic Landmark by the Texas Historical Commission and a National Historic Engineering Landmark by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers; and

WHEREAS, A key element of the cotton industry, gins were once a fixture in countless rural Texas communities and a fundamental part of their local economy; today, the Burton Cotton Gin & Museum evokes that earlier time and offers a rare window into a critical

technological advance, one that continues to benefit the Lone Star State; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the 81st Legislature of the State of Texas hereby designate the Burton Cotton Gin & Museum as the official Cotton Gin Museum of Texas.