

# Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association

Volume 2, Issue 2

PAPHA Newsletter

February 2008

## If Old Houses Could Talk As Much As Old Ladies!!

Finally, the day is approaching when our new museum will escape the wreck-er's ball and be trundled down the street in dignity to take its place beside the Community Center as **OUR MUSEUM**. This small piece of land, to be landscaped by the local Garden Club, and graced by its newly restored Community Center and the new Museum, will become the Crown Jewel of "Old Town".

Those of us who call Port Aransas home all year long are blessed to be able to save part of the community heritage; its bits and pieces that tell the story. We have been given the mandate to store and preserve them in a place that will become an oasis of peace and remembrance in our increasingly helter-skelter impersonal lives. We invite all of our visitors to join us in the effort. I was told when I was first a stranger in town that Port A had no history; that it had all blown away. Nonsense! History is everywhere if you take time to look for it and the more you look the more amazing the history of this once tiny community becomes.

If this old house could talk, what stories it could tell. Stories of the men and women who first settled the island and

their children and grandchildren, those who built the house, the laughter of the children who have lived there, the bravery of the young men, the Life Savers who put out to sea in row boats to save

men and women who they did not even know. We would hear of the courage of the women who awaited them on land and treated the survivors as they came

See 'Old House Message' on Page 3



Photo from the PAPHA archives, courtesy of Georgia Neblett

### Early days

The flag flies over the Mercer house before it had close neighbors.

**PAPHA WEBSITE: [www.portausa.com](http://www.portausa.com)**

## Another way to honor

***Block sale option added to pavers; both will line walkways to museum***

An additional way to memorialize a loved one, or recognize a business, an organization or your family for posterity has been added by PAPHA.

Blocks measuring 16-inches by 16-inches are now available along with the 4-inch by 8-inch brick pavers that have been sold since last fall.

The bricks and blocks will line the walkways to the new museum and the newly renovated Community Center.

The blocks will be sold for \$75 each

and will hold up to 12 lines with 30 characters each line.

See 'Walkways' on Page 4

### Inside this Issue:

<i>Shifting sands</i> .....	Page 2
<i>Moving Day</i> .....	Page 2
<i>Significant storms</i> .....	Page 3
<i>Pennings by Pam</i> .....	Page 4
<i>Walkways/ block order form</i> .....	Page 4
<i>New board/officers</i> .....	Page 4

### PAPHA Financials

As of Jan. 31:

\$2,044.89 in operating account

\$57,977.14 in Building account

### The Oval (or awful) Office

John Fucik stepped down as president when new board members were elected and new officers named in January. Sharon Stricker was selected as the new leader and will take over the President's column in March. It may or may not be The Oval (or awful) office column anymore, just depends on how Sharon decides it is for her.

# Sifting the sands of our island's times

BY JOHN FUCIK

It wasn't about getting the latest dirt so much as examining the oldest. That's what our PAPHA/ Port Aransas Parks and Rec. Department's archeological event was on Saturday, Jan. 26.

The small, but eager pre-diggers that assembled in the Pollock Center Saturday morning received an overview and indoctrination to the science of archeology that was totally top-notch.

Our leader/instructor was Pam Wheat of Rockport who's currently secretary of the Texas Archeological Society. From an outline she distributed to everyone, she covered points like identifying the signs of the past (potential dig sites); laying out a dig site, excavation techniques, photographing, evaluating and reporting your finds. She noted that much of the science of archeology is like solving a mystery which is based largely on studying ancient civilizations' or communities' dump sites. To support this idea, Pam handed out bags of stuff that typically might be salvaged from some current garbage cans. She then challenged us to list some characteristics or facts about the person or family that dumped the garbage. Result? Garbage reveals an awful lot about the garbager(s)!!!

After our learning session, we all reassembled at the Mercer House property on Oleander where we laid out our grids, made maps of our dig sites and

proceeded to dig still under Pam's expert eye and guidance. We outlined our grids with stakes and string to into 2 ft. square sections. We then removed and sifted through ¼ inch hardware cloth sieves the top 8 inches of soil—well, sand in Port Aransas. Then we dug down another 8 inches, 16 inches deep in all. My fellow diggers did four squares in all, two in the back yard and two adjacent to the front porch. What did we uncover?? No bones, coins, or arrowheads, but what we did find was informative. The nails, screws and related hardware that showed up on the screens suggested the house had been reroofed fairly recently AND judging from the rust on the nails from the 16 inch deep layer, that more extensive repairs or remodeling had been done quite a few years ago. Unsolved as to origin or purpose was the one piece of porcelain we recovered.

While our contribution to Texas' archeological riches was miniscule, our learning curve, group spirit and digging-in-the-dirt fun was big time max. If another archeological workshop is scheduled, I'd say ya'll sign up and "Dig in!!!"



## Circus on island

The White Marlin Porpoise Circus was located in Port Aransas in Enco Marina in 1966. The marina was located where the University of Texas Marine Science Institute marina at the end of Channel View Drive is today. The grandstands for the circus were in the southwest corner of the marina, where a gazebo now exists. The porpoise in this photo was Polaris Pete.

## Moving Day Approaching

The Mercer house moving process is tentatively set to begin Tuesday, Feb. 26.

First on the agenda, the house will be raised by the movers. Next, Mayor Claude Brown will inspect the underside of the house to be sure exactly where to place the pilings for the foundation on the new site beside the Community Center. He has

made preliminary plans on where to set the poles, but has not been under the house to be sure.

After the mayor has determined the exact location, creating the foundation will begin.

The pilings will be set and the move will start.



The 2008 PAPA calendar with pages suitable for framing, has been **discounted to \$5**. Order one at [www.portausa.com](http://www.portausa.com), or pick up one at Gratitude Gift Shoppe, Family Center IGA, the *South Jetty* or call Pam Greene at 361-443-4683.



Photo by Pam Greene

## Moving ahead

The Community Center work is steady, and workers are making huge strides toward finishing the renovation.

# Historically Significant Storms

BY

JOHN G. FORD

Mustang Island lies in a warm salty soup that can brew-up some mean weather. Of course the greatest weather-terror on the coast is the hurricane. This is the account of five tropical cyclones having particular historical significance.

The first hurricane recorded by Islanders swept ashore in 1875. Mustang was cattle country then, and drowned beeves constituted the economic impact. The 1919 hurricane was extraordinary: Structures not protected by the fore dunes simply vanished; and so great was the storm's fury that many survived only by clinging to plants growing on the leeside of the dunes! Destruction of a seaport on Harbor Island was a significant, and history changing, loss for Port Aransas.

The emplacement of coast artillery canons—what became the famous dune guns—was delayed by a powerful August 1942 storm. Luckily, the delay did not see a U-boat ingress the Aransas Pass to attack the Harbor Island petroleum complex.

A category four hurricane, Carla, slammed Port "A" in September 1961. Despite massive destruction, in the long run Carla was an economic blessing: Contractors saw that correctly built structures could survive a major storm, and four years the first condominium opened its doors. The town was on the road toward dedicated economic development.

Celia was a slow moving category three storm that blew-in during August 1970. The flood from the great tidal surge wrecked structures, but again something good was achieved: So damaged was the lighthouse complex that Mr. Charles C. Butt was moved to renovate and subsequently maintain it, saving a great Texas coast icon.

Islanders are asked how they live under the annual hurricane threat. I like the answer of *vigilant realism*. No denial or magical thinking allowed: the next big one is a matter of "when," not "if."

Make preparations, stay vigilant, and don't fret over the inevitable...relax and go wet a hook.



Photo from the PAPHA archives

## Channel and flats

The ferries shown are Nellie B, Estelle and Ruby. Mathew's Place is evident where Virginia's by the bay now stands. The Port Aransas Mercantile is now Souvenir City. The pharmacy building now houses The Big Kahuna. The Tarpon Inn remains the same. The old Coast Guard Station at the corner of Cotter and Station has been replaced by the current station at Channel View and Station Street.

## Old House message

Continued from Page 1

in soaking wet and cold with nothing but the shirts on their backs. They were followed by men of the newly formed US Coast Guard who protected the coast line in war and rescued those whose ships broke up on the bar.

In Port Aransas, life was both beautiful and harsh, easy going and often physically demanding. Children grew up self reliant, strong and curious. The community was uniquely laid back and non-conforming to the outside world; determined to find success as they were buffeted by the seas and blown hither and yon by the external winds of change of the developing west. Not least in that history follows the story of the four families who have lived there, raised children been leaders in the community and in some cases died there. A rich fabric of history awaits preservation.

**We will soon have the building in its new location...THEN THE REAL JOB BEGINS!** We must make the dream come true, create the most exciting, if small, 21<sup>st</sup> century museum in all of Texas. We must put words, pictures and stories in the house, the visitors; the men, women and children who made the history. We

must together, gather the bits and pieces of that history and lovingly prepare them to make the character of the past come alive for our peers, our children and grandchildren. A generation cut off from its history has no foundation on which to build its future, no tiller to steer their course, no sense of place, no secure rock to cling to when the inevitable storms of life threaten their world.

Please join the dedicated members of PAPHA, each one of you, in all ways possible: joining the membership, volunteering, giving as you can, sharing talents. Each of you will make our "New Jewel" shine more brightly. Hands joined, we will build the museum and strengthen the community as we go about it. In big jobs every person and every penny counts. A recent gift of a coffee can of pennies added many dollars to the Capital Fund for development. Sweep up your pennies! Your children and grandchildren will reap the benefit and thank you for it.

PAPHA would like to thank all who have been part of the effort to reach this point.

**ALL OF YOU PLEASE JOIN US ON MOVING DAY!!**

