

# Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association

Volume 2, Issue 3

PAPHA Newsletter

March 2008

## Good Month For Green

### ... Spring, St. Patrick's Day and Preservation

BY JOHN FUCIK

One doesn't immediately link going "green" with historic preservation, but, in terms of recycling, sustainability and reutilization, preservation of historic structures and sites may well have been THE vanguard of the green movement. The January/February issue of "Preservation", the National Trust for Historic Preservation's bimonthly publication dubbed "The Green Issue", says "This special issue of the magazine is devoted

to the convergence of preservation and sustainability – how preservation cuts energy use by upholding historic building and communities..."

It's fairly easy to understand that the costs associated with a office building constructed in 1910 or 1920, were considerably less than present day costs for a building of comparable size. Even adding inflationary factors, however, the older building probably cost much less

per square foot than a modern building. Plus economists say these costs have already been amortized out, making the cost of the old structure "0" on the accountant's books. Even with remodeling and updating costs, the older structure usually proves to provide the least expensive space. In addition, the amount of construction waste produced, energy expended, and reduction in CO<sub>2</sub>

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Photo from the PAPHA archives

## Rebuilding

Tarpon Inn damage after a storm with wood water tower at left and the Mercer House (boxed) in center.

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## From the President

BY SHARON STRICKER

Things are changing rapidly. Thanks to countless hours of hard work with few rewards, everyone who has dedicated time to PAPHA will soon be rewarded. A few short years ago, we had virtually no money, no structure for a museum, and very little to wrap our arms around. Through generous donations from the locals, those who

visit our town, and foundations, we now have a sizeable bank account, a

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### PAPHA Financials

As of Feb. 29:

\$2,210.96 in operating account

\$58,483.36 in Building account



## Progress

The hardie plank siding on exterior of the Community Center has almost been finished.

Photos by Pam Greene



# Corpus Christi is Site of Texas' 2008 Historic Preservation Conference

The Texas Historical Commission's (THC) 2008<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference will be held May 1-3 in Corpus Christi. The theme this year, "Explore the Sites and Stories of Texas" will feature workshops and sessions on heritage tourism. Specific emphasis will, of course, be given to the history of Corpus and the Coastal Bend. Events will include a special dinner aboard the Lexington and tours of the Museum of Science and History, the Corpus Christi Cathedral and Centennial House. Headquarters for the event will be at the Omni-Bayfront Hotel in Corpus. Attending a THC event such as this is both informative AND interesting... and it won't get much more convenient! For more information and registration call 512-463-6255 or visit [www.thc.state.tx.us](http://www.thc.state.tx.us).

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 beau-

tiful 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 piec-

*"All of you please join us on moving day!!"*

## Good month green

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generated during the older buildings rehab is considerably less than that for contemporary construction. According to one green "Preservation" article the amount of operating energy expended for a 1920 building would have been 80, 127 BTU's while that for the same sized 2000 building would be 70,703 BTU's. Almost the same, but NOT the cost of that energy!!

Another article features the rehabbing of a whole neighborhood of historic Chicago bungalow houses to provide affordable housing. Built in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century 'teens and '20's these homes qualify for special loans and grants administered by The Historic Chicago Bungalow Association. So far 9000 people have certi-

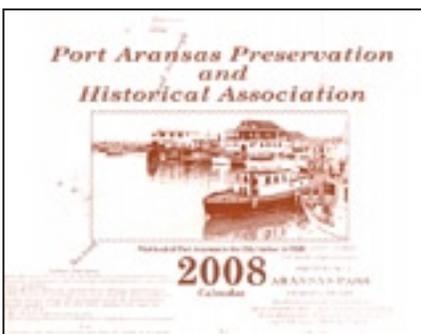
es of that history and lovingly prepare them to make the character of the past come alive for our peers, our children and grandchildren. A generation cut off from its history has no foundation on which to build its future, no tiller to steer their course, no sense of place, no secure rock to cling to 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.

fied their bungalows with 4000 having taken advantage of the special loans and grants. One of the surprising aspects in the rehabbing of these homes, was finding, through use of modern day testing and evaluation techniques, that many features of the homes are quite energy and functionally efficient, the original, deeply recessed windows build of old growth lumber, being one example.

Other articles in this issue mention how the installation of roof gardens, solar water heating panels and upgrading worn out electrical, plumbing or heating systems have put older buildings with their thick walls, storm windows and other "green" features models for not just keeping but keeping up!



The 2008 PAPHA 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.

## Nancy's Notes

--a message from the  
museum interim director  
Nancy Phillips

It's about to become a reality, our museum. Now we need to begin thinking about how we can enjoy it the most. One of the first things that comes to my mind is that we need volunteers for many tasks, but especially as host and hostesses when we open.

This will be an important job, yet one that will be fun for the host. It's a way to meet new people, visit with friends and enjoy the new museum.

It won't be long now until we're open, three or four days a week at first, and only in the afternoons. Before we're ready to open we'll have a brief get-together where we go through procedures in use at the desk and in the gift shop.

If you'd like to be one of the hosts, or docents, at the museum let us know and we'll soon have a training session. We'd love to have young and old, permanent and temporary residents to get involved. Call Nancy Phillips at 361-749-0321 if you'd like to help.

## Pavers, blocks are still available

Memorialize a loved one, or recognize a business, an organization or your family for all of time.

Blocks measuring 16-inches by 16-inches are now available along with the 4-inch by 8-inch brick pavers.

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

The blocks cost \$75 each and hold up to 12 lines with 30 characters each line.

The pavers include three lines of laser engraving limited to 14 characters on each line and cost \$45.

The bricks will line the path to the new historical museum soon to be in place in Port Aransas.

The profits will be used to help get the museum started and is an on-going project for PAPHA.

**Brick paver** and **block order forms** are available on the PAPHA Web site, [www.portausa.com](http://www.portausa.com), or by contacting **Betty Bundy** at 749-3406.



## Port Aransas Days: The essence of 'Port A' and much more

BY GERRY WETTERSTEN

Port Aransas Days originated to raise funds to match a Texas Parks and Wildlife grant of \$750,000 for development of Roberts Point Park. The festival, held from 1987 to 1995, was also a city-wide party, a reward for local residents after the summer tourist season.

We first attended in 1989 accompanied by our daughter who was visiting from New York City and her German friend, Stephen, who knew nothing of the United States.

The focus of his trip, his passion, was to discover everything typically American. He was quick to apply that label to whatever he saw: supermarkets, automobiles, newspapers, even though we urged him to wait for a wider sample.

Of course, we all went to the parade and on to the park for the festivities. A fire truck opened the parade. A little boy, probably the son of a volunteer firefighter, grinned from the passenger window, glorying in his exalted position. Four Coast Guardsmen carrying the flag followed the truck. The "Coasties" looked young, like teenagers, but they marched with a properly martial air. Behind them children on bicycles fluttering crepe paper streamers

zigzagged across the street to match the parade's slow pace. BFI sent a garbage truck, a nice clean one. Dogs, or toddlers, or dogs and toddlers were pulled in coaster wagons.

A group of five or six sitting near us on the bleachers by the softball field knew most of the people passing by. They did a lot of jumping up and plopping down while yelling "Hi" to the participants. The woman next to me explained, "We're doing the "wave." And through it all Stephan murmured happily, "A typical American parade."

At the park we bought beer and hot dogs from booths run by civic organizations. We watch the "wiener dogs" (typical German dogs) race. And we watched the queen of the festival ride by in a convertible. When I asked an acquaintance why that pleasant gray-haired lady was queen, she explained, "She's the only one in town who owns a tiara." Made perfect sense.

The day was not typically American, although we never convinced Stephan. But it was typical of Port Aransas: unpretentious, full of fun and affection, food and beer, and scented by salt waves, warmed by the sun.

PAPHA President Sharon Stricker, right, signs the final papers completing the Mercer house transfer as attorney Jim Atwill, from left, Betty Bundy, Pam Greene and Rick Pratt witness it.

Photo by Mary Hammond South Jetty photographer



## Mustang Island as a Pioneering Place

By JOHN G. FORD

Indians, adventurers, and pirates had trod the Mustang sand for centuries, but not until 1855 did people come to the Island with the express intent to settle it. These hardy pioneers were members of the Robert Ainsworth Mercer family.

At first glance, treeless Mustang Island appeared an inhospitable frontier, but in fact it gave the Mercers an accessible water table, abundant grass for livestock, and plentiful driftwood for food fires and some construction. Robert and his family built a homestead they named El Mar Rancho (sea ranch). Beef and dairy cattle provided meat and butter, greens sprouted in a garden, and of course there were abundant oysters and waterfowl. (Fish were not a staple for early settlers because they did not know how to catch or net them.) So successful were the Mercers in carving out an existence that soon a dozen houses dotted the sand hills on the head of Mustang Island.

Did the Pioneer Period include a dollar-and-cents economy? With the following

exception, the only bucks the Mustang settlers sought were those whose venison added to the food stores. Money was acquired by the bar pilot enterprise. Living next to the Aransas Pass, some men became expert in navigating this dangerous waterway, and for a fee a Mustang pilot would guide a ship through the pass.

A healthy and happy settlement was rolling right along, and even the news of war in Spring 1861 did little to change life; after all, what were the odds that this Eastern based conflict would ever reach an obscure little Texas island. Reality appeared on the horizon about a year later in the form of a U.S. Navy vessel taking station off Mustang to blockade the Aransas Pass. Federal sailors were soon commandeering livestock and water and eventually torching people's homes, one of which was El Mar Rancho. The Island was abandoned to the Yankees, and Mustang Island's Pioneer Period came to a traumatic and abrupt end.

## Pennings by Pam

As I stepped off the board of directors last month, I felt a sense of loss.

Though it was my choice to leave, I had been a part of it since its inception. (Okay, anyone who knows me knows how much I fight change.)

I want to thank everyone who has helped further the mission of PAPHA and ask you

to continue to keep doing so. I know I will, even if I'm not a board member.

The board, the members and many others have worked tirelessly for no pay, only the reward of helping to keep a part of the Port Aransas we fell in love with.

# President

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historic home to be used as a museum, a board that is actively engaged in providing a first class museum, and countless number of people willing to volunteer to further our cause.

I am looking forward to serving this next year as President of PAPHA. We will have a busy year ahead of us, starting with moving the Mercer House from Roberts and Oleander Streets to next to the Community Center on Alister Street. Once the move is completed, our next major task will be to make the inside suitable to house the many displays we are designing, the thousands of photographs we have in our possession, and other artifacts that people have said they will donate once we have a place to display them.

I look forward to working with our current board, the many volunteers we have, and those who are yet to volunteer but will be joining our ranks to help with the tasks ahead.

We continue to need funds so if you have fundraising capabilities, ideas, or money you want to donate, please feel free to contact me or another member of the board. We are always looking for fresh ideas.

My husband, Norris, and I first drifted into Port Aransas in our motor home in the winter of 1995. We did not want to leave but since we had a business in the north, we did not have much choice. However, in 2002 we finally were able to make our move to Texas a permanent one. We have certainly never regretted our decision to make the move. We have a daughter and a son that continue to live up north and we only visit them in the summer or early fall. I have a Bachelors degree in Business and an Associates Degree in Computer Programming. I have 20+ years in the business community, mostly self-employed.

I look forward to meeting and working with each of you. Thanks for your support. If you have questions or concerns, just let me know. You can reach me via e-mail at the2ofus@stx.rr.com.

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