

# Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association

Volume 2, Issue 4

PAPHA Newsletter

April 2008

## If This Old House Could Talk

BY BETTY BUNDY

The floor today in the 21st century should belong to a venerable old house in Port Aransas.

Many names have graced the old girl. It has been called the Mercer house lastly after the original owners, as the

members of the Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association wait for it to house an historical museum for Port Aransas. It was briefly called the Sears house before that, because it was a kit house and thought to be bought

from Sears. Before that, it was the Neblett house after the last family to live in it permanently. Other families who lived there included Loomis, Gaulding and Harris. It also served as the Aransas

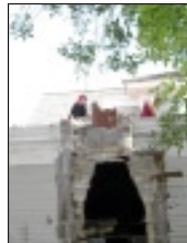
See 'Old house talks' on Page 4



Above and below, workers demolish garage and breezeway of the Mercer house, and the materials go in the trash. Mr. Lara helps run rod under house as they start the preparations to remove the back portion.



Below, the fireplace is taken off. Cutting off the bedroom and bathroom begins, then a beam is placed underneath during the separation.



**Inside this Issue:**

*Nancy's Notes* ..... Page 2  
*Financials* ..... Page 2  
*Markers* ..... Page 2  
*Highs and Lows of Island*..... Page 3  
*Pennings by Pam* ..... Page 4

### From the President

BY SHARON STRICKER

Moving the Mercer House is moving ahead slowly but sure. I remarked several years ago while in Israel that I could not be part of an historic exca-

vation team since they use small hand tools and brushes, and I would like to use a back hoe. I feel the same way

See 'President' on Page 3



# President

Continued from Page 1

about the house. I want to attach a chain and get the house moved. But, we must go about it very methodically so it will safely arrive at its new location in short order. This is a very exciting time for our organization. We are busy working on the next stage, getting the home ready to accept you, our visitors to the museum.

Jane Gnazzo, a PAPHA Board and Trustee member, will work with The Honorable Betty Turner and Gary Wilson, President of Texas State Bank, who are both Board of Trustee Members to organize a major fund raising event to be held this summer. More will be announced as plans for the event are finalized. I hope everyone will participate.

Our initial display will be the history of the Mercer House. If you have stories, photos, etc of this historic home, please provide them to us so they can be incorporated into our story.

PAPHA is always looking for interesting stories to be shared with our members through the newsletter. If you have stories, remembrances, etc. you would like to share, please send them to Pam Greene at [rattraxx@centurytel.net](mailto:rattraxx@centurytel.net) or P. O. Box 677, Port Aransas, TX 78373. We are always interested in input from our members.

The response to our brick pavers has been most rewarding. We have had locals and short-term and long-term visitors request their names be added to this unique way to decorate the pathways at the Museum and Community Center.

The Board is currently working with Texas Sand Sculpture to host the Raffle Tent at the Twelfth Annual SandFest to be held April 18-20. PAPHA will share in the profits from SandFest with three other non-profits in Port Aransas. We will also be raising funds through a raffle drawing to be held in our tent. We have many, many valuable, interesting, and exciting gifts to be given away. Please stop by.

[www.portausa.com](http://www.portausa.com)



Flats looking south on Trout St. - Gulf Gas, Bucks Mogley Drugs, Tarpon Inn - after 1945 hurricane (PAPHA Archives)

## Highs and Lows of Island History

BY JOHN G. FORD

The cycles of social/economic expansion and contraction on Mustang Island are interesting and informative. The cycles provide a succinct chronology of island history, and some historical contraction factors are relevant today. In a two-part article, I will summarize these topics (full research in my *Island Times* book). The parenthetical numbers are years of cycle duration.

The pioneering expansion begun in 1855 ended when Federal invasions forced evacuation of the island (8). The Reconstruction cattle economy was contracted by the great trail drives to northern railheads (12), and the subsequent—late 19th century—export of waterfowl for table fare terminated when the state banned market hunting (25). The Harbor Island seaport of Port Aransas (our namesake) brought brighter times in 1912 when the export of cotton created a maritime economy, but World War I shipping restrictions and two hurricanes degraded this port,

and the 1926 Corpus Christi ship channel closed it altogether (14).

The start of tourism in the early 20th century was stymied by the poor access the motoring public had to the island. New 1920s roadways finally allowed the tourist industry to expand, but due to the Depression and WW II gas rationing (16), it soon contracted. The booming postwar economy—the perennial party on the flats—was swept away in 1961 by Carla (15). The next expansion, led by condo construction and White Marlin Inc., was setback by CEO Plumlee's poor health and 1970 Celia (8), and consequent developments were pulled back sharply by the deep 1980s recession (12). Island expansion was renewed by the great bull market, bringing us to current times: namely, despite some hiccups, still riding the expansion crest of the ninth cycle. (The island's average E-C cycle is 13.75 years, meaning that statistically, a major contraction is nigh.)



Munsell buildings damaged in 1942 storm (PAPHA Archives)

# Old house talks Continued from Page 1

Life Saving Station, the precursor to the U.S. Coast Guard Station.

The early 1900s house is in the process of raising her skirts to move down the street and assume yet a new name, "The Port Aransas Museum."

In the very act of moving, it is expected that more facts of her past and those of her once small settlement which like the house has had many names may be revealed. From where did she come, how did she get here? What was it like to find herself nearly alone on a desolate ravished beach after the horrendous 1919 hurricane? Did she feel abandoned in those first days of calm after the storm?

But no, the people came back and at last, after another period of abandonment she is to be in a position of honor ready to receive and tell the stories of the brave and resourceful people.

The last two years have been hard with no one living or laughing within her wall, threats of demolition swirling about her rooftop. It seemed that perhaps no one cared for her or the history of those who struggled to hang on to the sand dunes while searching for a way to grow and prosper. Only those determined PAPHA people alerted by Naomi Fucik seemed to care what happened to her now. But they did care and now the whole community cares not only that her life be preserved but also that she can become a new center for everyone, a place that keeps them from forgetting who they are and how they got here in the first place.

Skillful men are scurrying around underneath her floors pushing those huge I beams underneath her, raising her up, putting wheels under her and ready to pull her down the street and slide her on to a new platform. They even are bringing that nice room which one of the families had added. The movers told



Separation complete.

her and everyone who would listen that she, and the addition were really well built. Glue, nails and screws to withstand the storms secured the addition. Thank goodness, it will be put back in place securely too.

As The Port Aransas Museum (how great that the new name chosen was worthy of her dignified new position), it is clearly being made known who she belonged to for the next millennium. She and those PAPHA people want everyone, far and wide, to know that the next year is not going to be easy. The metamorphosis from an abandoned building to the guardian of the community's life events and accomplishments, past, present and future would not be possible without much effort and much help from each person who loves Port Aransas.

## *House set to be on the road Monday, April 21*

The plans for the interior interactive exhibits are nearly complete, the budget is big, the need is great for your volunteer labors and for your voluntary gifts of money and bits of history that you have stored in your attics.

All members, friends and visitors, come join us in the regular monthly meeting in May (Watch for e-mail and listing in the *South Jetty* for day and time.)

The plans for the "old house" PAPHA saved will be discussed. Vice-President and Senior Historian of Southwest Museum Services of Houston David Murrah will give an exciting presentation to set the stage for upcoming events in the life of Port Aransas. The memories of who we are and why it is such a great place to live will come to life as he finalizes the story line and exhibit plans.

Dr. Murrah served as archivist at Texas Tech for 25 years. His major exhibit projects for Southwest Museum Services include The National Museum of the Pacific War, The Stanzel Model Aircraft Museum, Mission Dolores, Texas and Pacific Railroad Museum, Santa Fe Depot Museum and the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, Houston Branch. He has authored or edited six books related to Texas History and is currently writing a centennial History for the Northwest Conference of the United Methodist Church.



Above, the house addition is separate and sits ready to be wheeled to its new home. Below, the old house more closely resembles its original structure without the additions.



## Pennings by Pam

It's time to step up to the plate and show what Port A means to you by volunteering in some capacity to help the Port Aransas Museum get off the ground.

If Mayor Claude Brown has the pilings in place, the Mercer house will be sitting next to the Community Center before May Day.

Mr. Lara said it will be on the curb Monday, April 21, and he can move it as soon as the pilings are ready for it.

The community has been helping with the Community Center renovations and I hope this trend continues.

PAPHA has made huge strides in the 5 1/2 years it has existed and the best is yet to come. Visit the PAPHA website for contact information of board members and help!

[www.portausa.com](http://www.portausa.com)