

# Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association

Volume 2, Issue 11

PAPHA Newsletter

November 2008

## Come See!

Come one, come all ... PAPHA friends and supporters are invited to a Housewarming Shower to inaugurate the Port Aransas Museum.

Thursday, Dec. 11, from 5 – 8 p.m., we will all gather at the Community Center for refreshments as we wait our turn to tour the museum.

There will be Museum Docents available to take small groups on a tour of the museum through the evening.

### Registry for needed Housewarming items:

- #10 envelopes
- Adhesive tapes and dispensers
- Air freshener for bathroom
- Bathroom trash receptacle
- CDR and CDRW discs
- Cleaning supplies, windex, toilet cleaner, etc.
- Computer paper, multi-purpose, case or ream
- Computer photo quality paper
- Digital camera, prefer 7-10 megapixel
- Electric pencil sharpener
- Floor dust mop
- Hanging file folders
- Manila folders and envelopes
- Notepads
- Packaging tape and dispenser
- Paper clips, in holder

There will be no entrance fee, but a Housewarming Gift would be appreciated. A list of things we need is listed below for your selection. Of course, cash is always welcome, too.

On Wednesday evening from 4-6 p.m. a special preview for old Port Aransas founding families will be held.

They will also gather in the Community Center for refreshments and to join a guide for the museum tour.

- Pencil holder
- Pens and Pencils
- Postage Stamps
- Printer cartridges
- Pump soap for bathroom
- Ready to print labels
- Rolling office chair
- Ruler and t-square
- Scissors and shears
- Stapler and staples
- Stepstool
- Three drawer tall filing cabinet
- Toilet paper, Paper towels
- Under-desk trash receptacle - 2
- Vacuum cleaner w/attachments
- Wet mop and pail

**COMING SOON** ... watch your December newsletter for the on-line auction web site where you can **"Bid For Good"** for the Port Aransas Museum, the newest jewel in the Port Aransas crown.

## Nancy's Notes

--a message from the museum interim director

Port Aransas Museum (PAM) Docent Coordinator Mary Hammond-McKnight has recruited more than 30 docents who will perform a variety of tasks, such as guiding tours of the museum, working in the gift shop, and helping with outreach programs at the schools and other venues.

Their activities began with a training session held Sept. 25 in the Cline's Landing Dolphin room. The morning began with Pat Golden-Burrow, docent director of a museum in Mission, guiding all in our new endeavor.

Then all were treated to a sack lunch provided by Miss K's Catering before getting into the afternoon session.

In the afternoon Marcy Mathews Ward Thomas began her talk about early life in Port A by pointing out that

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**PAPHA**  
**361-749-3800**  
**www.portausa.com**

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### Wanting more

These two docents in training, from right, Jan Novak and Kay Culpepper, enjoyed the stories told by Marcy Mathews Ward Thomas that they followed her home and shared some libation.

# Progress, progress, progress

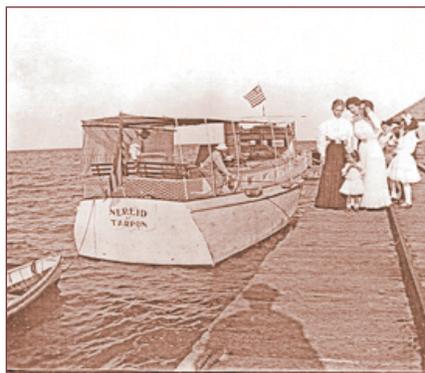
BY PAPHA PRESIDENT SHARON STRICKER

Another exciting and fruitful month for PAPHA. Work on the museum continues at a torrid pace in preparation for our public showing, tentatively scheduled for early December. Keep an eye on the South Jetty for details. Under the watchful eye of Kathy Reynolds, the Garden Club is putting the finishing touches on the fountain and landscape. If you haven't seen it, you owe it to yourself to stop by. It is especially impressive at night. Bruce Reynolds continues to coordinate the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the interior.

The bead board has been installed in the back portion of the museum, the floor has been repaired, the painting of the exterior and interior continue, new floor tile has been installed in the restroom and the fixtures will soon follow. The air conditioner and electrical work continue and we now have new exterior porch lights and new interior lighting. The construction of the gift shop is almost complete with Herb Lancaster donating the countertops. Nancy Phillips is busy scouting unique articles to be stocked in the gift shop. It will definitely be the place to shop. Once all the interior painting is complete, the floor will be sanded, stained, and sealed by Jack Carter of Show Room Shine Tile Restoration Company.

Boo and Meta Hausser hosted a fundraiser at their lovely home in San Antonio. It was well attended by San Antonio residents, many of whom have

homes in Port Aransas. We are now raising funds required for the design and installation of our display fixtures. Any and all contributions are appreciated. The attendees were asked to be prepared to discuss their memories of early visits to Port A and bring photos if possible. Lisabella's donated dinner for two for the oldest photo. This was awarded to Allison Gates for an early 1900's photo of her family members dressed in their finest white linens with petticoats and parasols waiting for a ride aboard a boat



moored in Tarpon, TX. You can see this photo and others at our museum. Copies of our photos are available for purchase on our website [www.portausa.com](http://www.portausa.com). Many fun, interesting stories were shared, some by second, third, and perhaps fourth generation visitors to our town. Fascinating. Scott and Cindy Rubsman shared a story about an incident in the early 1940's when the

families handymen were attempting to repair the porch light on their gulf front cottage. Their repair attempts caused the light to flash off and on sporadically. Soon, the Coast Guard arrived suspecting that subversives were attempting to communicate with enemy craft cruising off shore. Stories and details of early island life too numerous to tell here were swapped and will be available in the museum.

Boo provided statistics regarding the contribution tourism makes to the economy. The tourism industry is the second leading industry in the nation, creating an increase in jobs, businesses, and property values. Well developed tourism programs improve the quality of life and instill pride in communities. Tourism is the third largest industry in Texas and the Lone Star state is the third most visited state in the country. Travelers spend more than \$113 million dollars in Texas every day. Without tourism, each Texas family would pay an additional \$650 in taxes each year. Heritage tourism enables the tourist and locals to learn about, and be surrounded by local customs, traditions, and local history. Heritage tourism benefits everyone, both Port Aransas citizens and part-time Port Aransas citizens and yes, if you own property and pay taxes in Port Aransas but live elsewhere, you ARE a citizen of Port Aransas.

The Museum Design Committee has completed the interviews of four very accomplished museum design companies. Three were from Texas and one from Virginia. All the companies made a trip to Port Aransas and received a very well guided tour by Betty Bundy. The Committee then visited with each company for about two hours. All companies have submitted a proposal for the design of the displays. The committee has narrowed the field to two. Visits will be made to organizations in San Antonio, Austin, Houston, and elsewhere that have used their services. If necessary, the committee can add a third company and visit a museum they have designed.

Thanks to everyone for working so hard and contributing so much to make our dream a reality.

## More input needed, collecting ongoing

**STORIES, PHOTOS, MORE, ABOUT MUSEUM HOUSE ARE NEEDED**

Anyone with memories and or memorabilia of any of the families who lived in the building housing our new museum are asked to contact PAPHA as soon as possible.

With "Whose house was it?", the history of the house, chosen as the first exhibit, museum opening committee is seeking input from everyone still living who has an opinion about the past of the museum building.

Anyone with a memory or a theory, with or without fact to back it up, is asked to contact committee chairman Rick

Pratt at 361-749-3193 or [camric@the-i.net](mailto:camric@the-i.net).

The exhibit will begin with the arrival of Robert Ainsworth Mercer to the island in 1863, and continue to the present which sees this early 1900s kit house saved from the wrecking ball. Lastly it was moved down the street to its new home complementing the newly restored (courtesy of the City of Port Aransas, Port Aransas Boatmen Inc. and the public) Community Center, to provide a "Gateway to Old Town," the new crown jewel of Alister Street.

# PLEASURE BOATING IN A HURRICANE

## or: *“Never trust the government weather radio”*

BY PAPHA BOARD MEMBER RICK PRATT

Hurricane Brett was a big mean storm and it looked like it was coming to town.

We spent the requisite thirty hours straight getting the light station ready for its visit, and were still behind early on the day of its arrival.

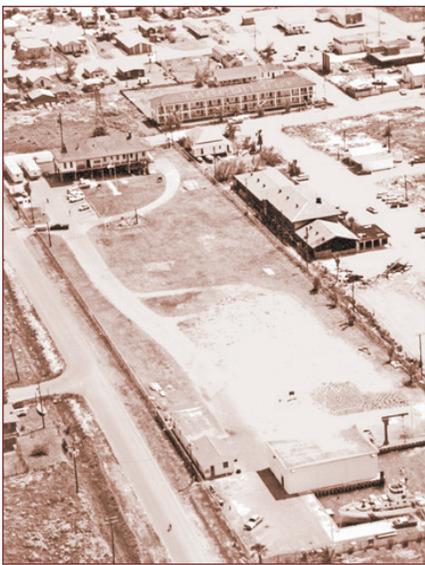
The weather radio, run by NOAA, told us the big boy was due to come ashore somewhere about one o'clock the next morning, and we based our efforts on that, with the goal of being ready to go twelve hours before.

There is so much to do when you live at a light house on a tiny island, population two, and a hurricane is coming, that, if you look at the whole job all at once, you'd swear it was impossible and just leave.

We had reached the point where we had about two hours left to the finish line with about three hours work left to do, so we felt pretty good about it all.

NOAH weather radio, with its strange electronic voice, told us the storm was still not expected until after midnight.

Then the upper band of the hurricane hit us.



PAPHA archives  
Coast Guard and Tarpon Inn

The winds, which had been building for the last few hours, suddenly increased to fifty with gusts near sixty, and the rain started coming down in buckets, sideways.

We had both boats loaded with all of our most precious items. The things you figure you can't live without. The idea was to get them both to town, tying up one and hauling the other along with us so we could get back to the station in case the storm destroyed the dock.

But the rain was so hard the engine on the small boat refused to start. There was just too much water in the air for internal combustion to happen.

We had to change plans. We quickly tied the now crippled little boat off across the creek with enough scope for it to swing with the shift and ride the predicted huge tides.

The winds were so high and the rain so hard that this simple task, about twenty minutes work normally took nearly an hour. The noise of the wind was so great, we couldn't shout above it and had to use hand signals to communicate.

Soaked and exhausted, we cast off the big boat and headed to sea.

The surface of the channel was invisible, hidden by spindrift, a six foot high wall of spray created when the tops of the very big waves were blown off by the high winds, now steady at nearly sixty. We were traveling through a cloud of water head high. Breathing was difficult for both us and the engine.

The winds were pushing us toward shore with such force that even with forty degrees port helm, we were still being set to starboard in the gusts.

The engine began to fail, choking with a rattling death cough, then catching its breath again and coming back to life. We avoided looking at each other...maybe it would go away if we didn't acknowledge it was happening.

With each stagger, I looked shoreward to figure where we would fetch up if we lost the engine, and make plans for getting back to the light house on foot. We knew every inch of this shoreline well under normal circumstances, but it was a strange and forbidding place now.

At last we entered the ship channel. If the power went away now, there would be no getting back to the light or to town.

That quarter mile took forever to cover, but we made the harbor jetty, and surfed in through a confused mass of spray and foam.

We reached the dock and were tying up just as the slip roof started to blow away.

The wind noise was now nearly deafening, but it was silent compared to the wild crashing of that tin roof flapping like a flag above us. It is a strange feeling to see something not behaving like it should, and we stared at the now flexible roof in fascination.

We got the boat tied off accompanied by the heaving of the roof and an amazing chorus of groans coming from the dock timbers and at last, with all our most precious belongings loaded in the truck, left town.

The town had been evacuated the night before and the ferry had closed early, so the island road was the only way out, if it wasn't flooded.

As we reached the city limits everything stopped. The wind, the rain, everything. Like a switch had been thrown.

A commercial FM radio station informed us that the storm was now making landfall at Ricardo, forty miles south of us. Had we listened to them instead of the Government Weather Radio, we would have never left the light house.

But then, we would never have known what its like to go pleasure boating in a hurricane.

# Catalog Houses Here and There

BY JOHN FUCIK

It's pretty well acknowledged that our soon-to-be Port Aransas Museum was originally one of two catalog houses that came to Port Aransas via barge somewhere around 1913 or 1915. What we have not been able to document for certain is if the two houses were from a Sears Roebuck catalog or some other supplier. Nonetheless, nationally, interest in Sears catalog houses and their often colorful histories is very high.

In 1918, for example, Standard Oil established the Carlinville (Illinois) Standard Addition with nine Sears home models of 5 to 6 rooms each. The homes, built primarily to house local coal miner families, were shipped into town via a special spur of the Chicago and Alton railroad. The houses' construction was supervised by one Elizabeth Spaulding who surveyed her domain on horseback. Lore has it that men she hired in the morning she fired at noon if their work displeased her. Standard Oil also carried the mortgages on the homes... 10 years with monthly payments of \$30 to \$40. With World War I still being fought, coal was in high demand, and the town's population boomed. However, when the war ended, so did the boom. Seven years later, when Standard Oil left the area, many of the miners simply abandoned their homes and moved elsewhere. Standard eventually auctioned the homes off for \$400-500 each. No bail out package then!!!

Currently, Carlinville resident Laurie Flori is on a crusade to save and restore the Sears catalog houses in the old Standard Addition. When some old timers refer to the Addition as a slum area, Florie wrinkles her nose and says, "I set out to change that. A Sears home is something to be proud of."

Northaways, in Wisconsin, Jim Draeger, deputy state historic preservation officer has become a Sears catalog house fanatic. So far he's documented over 200 of the homes in Wisconsin. He says even though the designs were fairly standard, homeowners "personalized" the houses by adding porches, extra rooms, special trim, etc.. This, plus time, can make identification of an original Sears catalog

home challenging. For clues, Draeger says he looks for telltale numbering on lumber in attics and basements. While Sears records of its catalog houses were destroyed long ago, its estimated over 100,000 of the homes were sold. The fact that Sears also financed their homes with 10 to 15 year mortgages was the key to

their success in the boom years of the '20's but also spelled the end of the catalog house era when the hard times of the Great Depression forced foreclosures on many of their loyal customers' homes.

History seems bound to repeat itself. Here we are 75 years later with a different chapter but same verse.

## November board meeting notes

**Nov. 3** - Board members Betty Bundy, Marilyn Cook, Mark Creighton, John Fucik, Nancy Phillips, Rick Pratt, Bruce Reynolds and Sharon Stricker attended.

October meeting minutes were approved with minor corrections

**Treasurer's report:** Oct. income: \$2,343.98; expenses: \$16,026.95 (\$15,163.60 was for museum renovation). Treasurer Bruce Reynolds briefed Board on Museum progress: electrical costs could be billed through city, renovations should be completed by early December; estimated \$209,431 needed to complete museum furnishings, displays, operation through 2008, gift shop items, etc.

**Museum:** Informal open house in early December for limited number of invitees; initial displays will be locally produced and feature photo displays and pioneer family histories.

**Grants, Fundraising:** San Antonio fundraiser's initial response was about \$30,000, but more could be forthcoming; responses to grant applications to Trull, Rachal, and Coastal Bend foundations expected in December; donations of \$25,000 or more could rate naming or special recognition privileges;. Online Auction rescheduled for early March; Betty Bundy provided advertising flyer and donor registration form.

**Programs:** Thursday, January 29, 2009, will be a benefit Band Concert; General meeting in January to be announced; Mark Creighton and Guthrie Ford will do program on jetties to include new found cache of photos. Port Aransas Ghost Tour (partnered with Parks and Rec. Dept) had around 40 participants.

**Old Town Festival:** Scheduled for March 7, 2009; still needs general coordinator.

Bruce Reynolds distributed proposal outline for involving more Port A. merchants in PAPHA activities and Museum operations. He also noted public should be made aware that the Museum and PAPHA's operations are supported through private donations and contributions and NOT with tax money.

## Notes

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she was born on the island. She's proud of that fact, and used it to get back at her girlhood friend, the late Eva Mercer Westmoreland, when at the first of school Eva could count to 100 and Marcy only to 10.

A second training session was held Friday, Nov. 7, with Museum Opening Chairman Rick Pratt bringing the docents up-to-date on the proposed opening, museum building story and how history is made. It ended with a tour of the newly painted museum.

Many events to prepare the docents for their duties lie ahead. Hopefully most will be as fun as the first.

Docents include Barbara Behrens, Tammy Bundy, Maudine Butler, Marilyn Carhart, Nancy Cinfici, Carol Clark, Tonya Clay, Betty Crawford, Kay Culpepper, Donna Dey, Jack Dreessen, Mary Lou Duckworth, Helen Garrett, Pam Greene, Jim Hagans, Lu Hagans, John Heinen, Marla Heinen, Arlene Hughes, Betty Hurst, Phyllis Lane, Karen Larson, Debra Le Blanc, Gail Marshall, Bess Mitchell, Karen Murray, Marvin Murray, Jan Novak, Joan O'Rourke, Jo Ann Page, Pepper Pendzinski, Rosemarie Ricks, Richard Safford, Vernet Safford, Darlene Secich, Dee Sims, Marie Stiewig, Fran Strength, Marcy Mathews Ward Thomas, Joyce Williams, Linda Zahn, Johnie Whisman.