

Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association

Volume 3, Issue 7

PAPHA Newsletter

July 2009

Creighton recognized for preservation

PREPARED BY JOHN G. FORD

On June 25th, Mr. Mark Creighton of the PAPHA was recognized by the Nueces County Historical Commission. J. Guthrie Ford, an officer of the Commission, presented Mark a distinction plaque which reads, "Nueces County Historical Commission Recognizes and Commends Mark Creighton for His Preservation of the Coastal History of Nueces County." Now that warrants a bit of "Mark Creighton" history!

Mark hails from Sea Isle City, New

Jersey. After graduating from Cornell University, he did a stint in the Army. In 1982, Mark and Georganna left the Jersey shore for the Texas coast, settling in Port Aransas. The Creightons were engaged in the retail sector until 1994, when, with Mark in the field and Georgie at the accountant's desk, the couple engaged the building contractor business. Mark is currently semi-retired, allowing him and Georgie to spend their summer months with grandchildren and tending to family matters from coast to coast.

Mark's first effort to preserve Island history was to sponsor the re-printing and re-issue of the Edna Mae Roberts book, *The Stubborn Fisherman*, an anecdotal history of Port Aransas. Of course Mark's greatest preservation effort comes as the PAPHA archivist. That activity began soon after the start of the Association when Mark offered his computer expertise to digitize some townfolk's historical materials. Once the word got around about the man with the past-preserving machine, the "image" flood gate opened, and old photographs and postcards began pouring out of chests and closets onto Mark's busy



scanning machine. To date, Mark has digitized and catalogued more than 6,000 discrete historical images.

In addition to his archival activities, Mark has assembled impressive visual programs to accompany his (and other's) scholarly history presentations, as well as providing an old Island ambiance for numerous functions and the Port Aransas Museum. But Mark's talents go beyond the mouse and keyboard; for instance, you can find him at the museum fixing a stuck door, while at the same time regaling visitors with the history of the jetties or early 20th century tarpon fishing.

Mark Creighton finds joy in being a scholar of history and a doer toward its preservation; and both things contribute so positively to those seeking to compile and celebrate the history of Mustang Island and its erstwhile little fishing village.



PAPHA President Nancy Phillips recently broke her ankle, had surgery and is doing well in Rehab. Cards can be sent to Nancy @ Holmgren Health Care Center 317 North Carancahua Street Corpus Christi, TX 78401.

Nancy's local address is Cline's Landing 100 North Station Street Port Aransas, 78373.

Nancy will be at Holmgren till the end of the month. Please keep her in your thoughts and prayers for a speedy recovery.

Inside this Issue:

<i>Taming the Channel</i>	Page 2
<i>Historical Marker</i>	Page 2
<i>DAR check</i>	Page 3
<i>WW II last segment</i>	Page 3
<i>Fundraising</i>	Page 3
<i>Karankawas</i>	Page 4
<i>Off the board</i>	Page 4



Taming the Channel: An Epic Story

The upcoming exhibit tells the story of the taming of the Aransas Pass channel, a struggle that took more than fifty years and six attempts by private groups and the United States Government.

In the beginning, the pass moved steadily southward at a rate of over 200' per year. That did not bother the Karankawas, the first island residents at all, they just moved with it.

When the Spaniards arrived to explore the vast lands they had "discovered", it became important to keep track of this snaking moving channel, but capturing it was not an option or a big concern.

It was not until The Aransas Pass Light station was built in 1856 that making the pass behave became a major desire. With the pass shifting constantly away from the light house, navigation was tricky. Just as important, it was impossible to have any sort of permanent settlement on Mustang Island, because the pass would roll over it, leaving it under water. (This may have been the fate of the Confederate Fort Semmes).

The first attempt to capture and tame the pass was undertaken in 1858 by a group of business people in Rockport, which was the major seaport for our area back then.

Two years later, the Army Engineers surveyed the area and found "no trace" of the 6000' long rock jetty, the pass had left

it behind and sand had covered it.

Obviously, the forces here were greater than first thought to be. Stronger efforts were needed.

It wasn't until 1880 that the next attempt was made. The U.S. Government built a single 5,500' jetty on the Mustang Island side of the pass that projected northeastward toward San Jose Island. This structure, called the Mansfield Jetty or the "old government jetty" slowed the



pass down considerably to about 70' per year but did not deepen the channel at all. They were on the right track, but more needed done to really catch the pass.

Enter a private consortium of big thinking folks, the Aransas Harbor Company formed in 1891.

The list of players included Thomas Benton Wheeler, ex-lieutenant governor of Texas and a civil war hero, the son of President Henry Harrison and a flock of financiers and developers mainly from the east coast.

Shares were sold for inclusion in the

scheme to develop a major seaport. (Keith Guthrie summary here)

They hired a professor and engineer, Lewis Haupt and H. C Ripley to design a revolutionary new breakwater. After spending half a million dollars, they went broke. The unique and revolutionary jetty failed to do the promised job.

Now the Us Government was coaxed into taking over the job in 1899.

The job was now much harder since they now had to deal with one failed jetty and one that was falling apart and to make matters worse...the two all but intersected.

To make the pass right, the "old government jetty" would have to be removed and the new but inadequate jetty, the Haupt, would have to be redesigned and rebuilt. Only the U.S. Army was big enough to do this one.

And they did.

In 1910 the job was initially finished and the pass at last was opened to ocean going ships.

Our town, then called Tarpon Tx, took the name Port Aransas and what we now call Harbor Island became the first major seaport for our area. The first ocean going ship to dock here was the Brinkburn and the celebration lasted for a week.

For the rest of the story, and there is a lot of it, visit the museum in August.

Coast Guard Historical Marker Dedicated

The history of the Port Aransas Coast Guard command and the United States Coast Guard on Mustang Island was

celebrated with a state historical marker dedication on Thursday, June 25, at 10 a.m. in Roberts Point Park in Port Aransas.

The marker is the result of research conducted by Dr. John G. Ford, a Mustang Island historian and head of the Texas historical marker programs in Nueces County.

Anita Eisenhauer, president of the

Nueces County Historical Commission, led the dedication. Honories shown in the photo at right below, from left, included Mayor Claude Brown, Nueces County Judge Loyd Neal and Chief Michael Pollack, Officer in Charge, Station Port Aransas. Pollack is shown in the photo at left with the new 45-foot Coast Guard response boat in the background between him and the marker.



PAPHA Benefits from DAR Good Citizen Award

PAPHA Board Trustee Betty Turner gladly turned over a check for \$1,200 to PAPHA on Thursday, June 25, as shown in the photo below. PAPHA President Nancy Phillips accepted it.



The check was presented by the Corpus Christi Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in honor of Betty Turner of Port Aransas, Betty was the recipient of the DAR Good Citizen Award presented at the Valentine Silver Tea where the funds were raised.

The presentation was made by Nueces County Historical Commission President Anita Eisenhower of the DAR shown in the Port Aransas Museum at right. Anita pulled double duty on this day, going

from the historical marker dedication to this presentation.

She preferred the cool air in the museum to the hot sun in Roberts Point Park.



Joyful Drop-in and Fiery Evidence: The Human Side of Port Aransas During World War II[©]

BY JOHN G. FORD

The war meant jobs, which meant wages, which meant the stranglehold of the Depression could finally be broken by good ole American consumerism. But for folks at home, the war put a fly in the consumer ointment. Basic staples like sugar, silk, tires, and gasoline were severely rationed so those commodities could be abundantly consumed where they were most needed: in the Pacific, North Africa, and Europe. On the home front, any legitimate relief from rationing was time for rejoicing...

When the airplane released the sock over Port A, the town excitedly took voice: *Sock coming down! *Honey, hand Mama

Fundraising

BY PAPHA BOARD TRUSTEE
KRISTI GOLDSTON

You've heard the expression, "when it rains, it pours." Well, the Museum and Port Aransas have not received any appreciable rain this year.

We have, however, received a \$4,000 grant from the Coastal Bend Foundation to purchase a binding machine. This enables the Museum to further communicate the history of Port Aransas in the production of brochures for exhibitions, docent training, and education. PAPHA extends its appreciation to the Coast Bend Foundation for its continued support of its mission.

Back to the expression, "when it rains, it pours;" we are currently looking for any rain producing grants – please contact the editor immediately.

her big sewing scissors. *You need a big piece Ed; I owe Elda Mae from last time. *Eva, take Marcy and get a good yard of that sock for the school play costumes; now run along girls.

That round of activity was followed by a strange sight: When the great sock lay on the ground like a crumpled Chinese new year dragon, flashing scissor blades devoured it until nary a scrap was left. What in the world was going on in wartime Port Aransas?

The object in question was a target sock, a tool for learning aerial gunnery. A tug plane towed the sock which was shot at by aspiring fighter pilots. When students had been particularly inaccurate—putting few holes in the target, the tug pilot generously dropped the sock on the little fishing village on Mustang Island. The reason the townsfolk grabbed their scissors was because the sock was silk, a prized but restricted commodity. More than a few tablecloths and pieces of clothing came from a free, and legal, rationing relief which was literally heaven sent. Meanwhile on the waterfront...

The two Port Aransas boatmen were happy to advise, and even help, the crew of the Navy crash boat in draining the vessel's fuel tanks so they could be inspected and refilled with fresh gas. The boat chief repaid that kindness by giving the Port A men two 55 gallon drums full of purged gasoline. Giddy that this liquid treasure might see them through the entire war, the fellows secreted the drums away in an old barn. But unable to contain himself, one

of them blabbed, and soon people were making midnight runs, siphoning off four gallons here, six gallons there.

The pilferers were soon found out in a most embarrassing way: their vehicle engines burst into flames—invariably right in the middle of Alister Street! What no one had considered was that the Navy boat's powerful V-12 engines used high octane aviation gasoline, which burned so hot that it started a fire in the carburetor of the average car.

That "damn Navy gas" was the rare instance when relief from rationing created more problems than it solved.

(This is the final installment of the Port Aransas During WW II Series.)

[John G. Ford is a local, award winning history writer. His book, A Texas Island, is offered at the Port Aransas Museum.]

Docents Clean; Share Talents

A Museum cleaning day was held Saturday, June 27. Those in attendance were Rick Pratt, Docent Coordinator Mary Hammond-McKnight, Pam Greene, Linda Zahn, Karen Larsen, Nancy Cinfici and Rosemarie Ricks. The museum was gleaming, inside and out when we finished.

Local artisan Linda Hansen will be at the next docent meeting, July 21, telling how she makes her jewelry and how she got into designing and making jewelry. Linda has several beautiful pieces for sale at the museum gift shop mhm

Karankawas: Our First Winter Texans??

BY DR. JOHN FUCIK

According to an Internet article written by R. Edward Moore, the Karankawa Indians who lived in small groups, not tribes or camps, would migrate to the barrier islands in the winter because their principle food source at that time was fish. Using dugout canoes and probably just wade fishing they would catch redfish and trout in the shallow waters of the bays and estuaries along the coast.

During the winter, the water here was warmer, and evidently the fish would move to these shallower waters in response to temperature.

During the summer, when the fish would move to deeper waters the Karankawa would move inland where other game plus berries, and other edible vegetation would make up their "warm weather" diets. There's some evidence that to ward off mosquitoes and other pests that plagued them inland, they would smear grease and mud onto their bodies. I imagine that after a few weeks, mosquitoes weren't the only things that were repelled.

And speaking of diet, the Karankawas got a bad rap for allegedly being cannibalistic. More accurate documentation, however, suggested

that if the Karankawas might nibble on a particularly powerful or revered conquered enemy, they did so believing it imparted some of their adversary's strength and power to the snacker. It was reported they were astounded and

dismayed when learning that facing starvation; the "savage" Frenchmen of LaSalle's expedition actually ate some of their fellow campers.

Obviously, this was WAY before Whataburger came to town.

Off the Board Doesn't Mean Off the Job

BY BETTY BUNDY

Though no longer on the Board, as PAPHA committee member I can still get a word in edgewise.

Like everyone else, I visit museums a lot as I travel. During a recent vacation, I visited places in Fort Worth, Arlington, Irving, and Corsicana.

I spent an hour or more visiting the offices and workshops of Lari and Teri Brown who are part owners of Museum Arts, one of the design companies we are considering working with one of these days to get some really interactive displays worthy of the 21st century competition. I also visited a couple of museums that included exhibits that this firm has done. One was the Flight Museum near Love Field, the other, the Civil War Museum in Corsicana. I was able to get a good feel for their talents and style which the photos I took will illustrate.

The visit I enjoyed most was to the Meadows Foundation where I met face-to-face a gentleman who had been always helpful in getting grant money for me when I was Director of a couple non-profits in the Rio Grande Valley in the 80's. We had kept in touch and though I knew Meadows was not funding anything but the greater social need caused by the bad economy this year, I felt he could give me some advice and I just wanted to meet him in person instead of always over the phone. Though very busy, he made time to see me and was very helpful. We had fun reminiscing. He was also encouraging, in that he said if we could raise at least half of what we needed for exhibits that they might

be able to help us next year. SO, YOU SEE, WE REALLY NEED SUPPORT FOR THESE PROJECTS FROM ALL OF OUR MEMBERS, FRIENDS AND BENEFACTORS. LET'S MEET THE CHALLENGE!

The other pie in which I still have a finger is the BRICK PROJECT. I have just received 12 small bricks and one 16 x 16 block paver back from the engraver and plan to send another batch as soon as I get one final approval. Once here, more than 25 will only have to await Mark Creighton's return to find their resting place in the pathways of the grounds so beautifully landscaped by the Garden Club. We still have many linear feet of walkways to fill, so get yourself an order form and order a brick to become part of the Port Aransas Museum heritage and help fund our museum work. With help from Chris Shanklin, a map of the project is underway and all who have a brick will soon be able to find it more easily. The time between purchase and placement in the walk is longer for some who purchase, but we send the orders out in batches of ten or more. Then there is a wait in line at the engravers, and sometimes wait time for my San Antonio friends who pick up the bricks and deliver it for us saving shipping costs, They transport them to my door and help inventory them as we unload. The last wait is for wandering Mark to come home to get them laid.

I ask our supporters to be patient with the process. The end result is worth it. Thank you for being part of the Museum development and growth.



Taddy McAllister, left and her mother, Edith McAllister, right pose with Museum Director Rick Pratt with a painting they are loaning to the museum for copying. The painting is of the 'new' Port Aransas Coast Guard Station, the one that was built after our museum building was used by the Coast Guard. This station was replaced by the current station building. Edith sponsored one of the rooms in the museum with a donation before it was opened.