

Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association

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PAPHA Newsletter

May 2010

PAPHA Earns THC Award of Excellence in Preserving History

By Kristi Goldston and John Fucik

Friday, April 23, 2010, was a grand day in the annals of history for the Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association (PAPHA). On this day, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) honored PAPHA for its significant contributions to the understanding or preservation of Texas history. Specifically, PAPHA was recognized for its achievements in preservation planning, historic site identification, preservation of significant archival or artifact collections, and research that leads to a greater understanding of state or local history.

Rick Pratt, museum director, and Herb Lancaster, PAPHA board member, accepted the award

at THC's annual conference in Houston. Just the day before, Mr. Lancaster was honored separately by the THC for his magnificent restoration of the DeWitt County Courthouse - a double

win for our wonderful little town.

Sheri Shelby Krause, THC Commissioner, said in her congratulatory note to PAPHA, "This award represents an outstanding accomplishment on your

part and reveals the tremendous effort you have put forth to further the cause of preserving the history of the great State of Texas. I thank you for your craft, and best wishes for a bright and satisfying future."

Our town's historical association is young, by historical standards, less than ten years young. Lest we forget how significant our accomplishments have been in our first decade, and what made us a candidate for this award, here is a recap of the Association's history:

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Best of the Best

Showing off the award are THC Deputy Director Terry Colley; Museum Director Rick Pratt, PAPHA Board Member and THC Chairman Jon Hansen.

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2002 – PAPHA is created by a small group of earnest citizens intent on preserving the fishing village atmosphere of Port A.

2005 – PAPHA was named one of the Visionaries in Preservation (VIP) City. VIP cities were given help and resources from the THC. PAPHA members began the process by developing VIP action plans for our historical preservation. For the next 18 months staff from THC worked with PAPHA and Port A citizens in developing Port Aransas' VIP Action Plan. Following completion of the plan, a survey of Port Aransas buildings and sites was conducted to identify and catalogue our town's historic structures and places.

2006 – PAPHA added a Board of Trustees to assist with fund raising.

2007 – Mercer house was acquired by PAPHA with plans to relocate it to a new site and renovate it as a Museum

2008 – City provides land adjacent to the Community Center for Mercer house and the house is moved. Extensive renovations are completed on house, thousands of pictures are catalogued, and the Port Aransas Museum opens in December 2008 for visitors with our first exhibit, "Who's house Was This?"

2010 – Donation is made by Dr. Carol Woodfin to establish a permanent fund for the support of the Museum.

New Exhibit
Coming in June
Sport Fishing and
Hunting

More than 3,000 visitors have been to the museum and the museum lecture series.

Also during our first decade, the Mercer Family bequeathed to the Museum the valuable Mercer Logs (1860's and 1870's), a record of everyday life on the island before there was a Port Aransas. Volunteers began the task of transcribing these handwritten documents so that all may share them.

One can readily see from this list of accomplishments why PAPHA was a candidate for this award. Many, many people can add their names as contributors against these accomplishments – too many to place in this article. There is one name, though, which bears mentioning as this person played an instrumental role in PAPHA's receipt of this award – Albert 'Boo' Hausser. Boo remains PAPHA's biggest fan, and we are most grateful.

So it was with great pride that PAPHA accepted THC's award for planning the preservation of our island, identifying historic sites (including Mercer house), and preserving thousands of pictures, stories and the Mercer logs. As Port Aransas moves into its 100th year as a town with this name, PAPHA and the museum will continue to chronicle Port A history.

Summer is fast approaching and we hope that your vacation plans include a visit to our small fishing village and that, while you're here, you will visit us. We invite you to see the Sports Fishing exhibit which opens in June and we want to personally show you the award we received from THC (we are just a little proud of it).

Note: The Texas Historical Commission is the state agency for historic preservation. THC staff consults with citizens and organizations to preserve Texas' architectural, archeological and cultural landmarks. The agency is recognized nationally for its preservation programs. It offers a variety of awards to recognize worthy accomplishments and exemplary leadership in the preservation of Texas' heritage.

French Rotarians Check Out Museum

By Rick Pratt

Here is a group study exchange who visited the Port Aransas Museum on Monday, May 3.

The GSE is initiated each year by Rotary International between two districts of different countries. Each member of the team has the opportunity to meet local professionals and compare with local professionals doing the same job as them. Nearly in the same time, a team of Texan people went to north of France for the same purpose. All visitors live in the north of France, close to Belgium (same latitude as Vancouver or Praha).



Having a look

Above from left are Lucille Delmarre, architect from Dunkerque, François Broux, engineer building wind farms from Lille, Museum Director Rick Pratt, Fabien Ducloy, railway coordinator in Gare du Nord from Paris, Philippe Manière, professional photographer, team leader and Rotarian and Elodie Beckelynck, executive assistant in a public transportation company from Lille. Below, Rick shows part of an exhibit.



Port A Centennial
Old Town Festival
Saturday,
Oct. 16

Community treated to information

Rotary Club Presentations

The PAPHA recently made a good showing at the Port Aransas Rotary Club. Mark Creighton presented, "I Betcha Didn't Know This About Port A," a collection of little known historical facts (like townies working on the concrete ships in 1918). Guthrie Ford followed a couple of weeks later with a presentation geared to this Centennial year; he spoke to hot town news items in 1910, plus several red letter events in the past 100 years.

For example:

"The great FDR myth is he stayed at the Tarpon Inn. In fact, he did not set foot on Mustang Island. Can anyone guess why?"

The original settlers, the Mercers, had not the faintest idea of how to fish.

Port Aransas used to build concrete ships. What type of ship is that?

Our town is certainly not a seaport, so why is it named Port Aransas?

If you would like someone to speak to your group, contact Dr. J.G Ford at 361-215-7911.

May is Educational Outreach Month

On May 21st, Mark Creighton will give the 6th Grade Class of the PAISD Middle School a history tour of the Chapel on the Dunes. On that same day, Guthrie Ford will present "The Economic History of Port Aransas" to Seniors in an Economics class.



Coloring book in early stages

By Pam Greene

The Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association has partnered with the Art Center for the Islands on a new centennial project.

Museum Docent and Art Center member Arlene Hughes has been working with art students at the Olsen Elementary School in the creation of a coloring book. The book will be sold with profits split between the Art Center and the Port Aransas Museum to help in operation of both non-profit entities.

Arlene has students in Gay de Montel art classes making outlines of places and things that represent Port A. The outlines will be bound together to make the coloring book. Included are ferries, beach, gulf creatures and more.

The book will be available for purchase later this year at both places.



Famous Shipwrecks at the Aransas Pass[©]

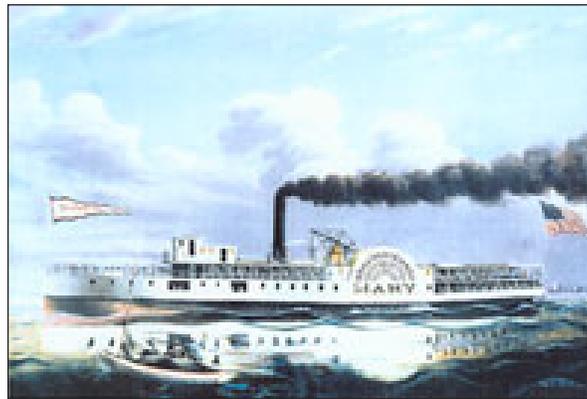
By John Guthrie Ford

Aransas is from *Aránzazu*, a Basque word connoting a dangerous place; and as the site of maritime mishaps, the Aransas Pass could not have been more aptly named. In fact, this perilous pass warranted a state appointed Wreck Master, who initially was Robert A. Mercer, the man who settled Mustang Island. I will describe four wrecks at the Aransas Pass; three are remarkable because they occurred back-to-back, and the fourth is the most famous shipwreck at the pass.

In April 1834, the captain of the schooner *Wild Cat* tried, imprudently, to cross the stormy pass. The journal of passenger John Linn recorded that “a heavy swell threw her from the channel and she became unmanageable....Another heavy sea struck her and completely washed her desks...[lifting] the vessel into shallow water, where she was permanently fixed.” The *Wild Cat* “withstood the warfare of the elements wonderfully well,” however the waves breaking over her “played havoc with our culinary department, and the cook announced that it would be an impossibility to get supper. We therefore contented ourselves with bread and cheese and passed the night quite comfortably under the circumstances. In the morning, we discovered the schooner had taken water in the hold, and the leak

was increasing. The weather remained tempestuous.”

The next morning, two vessels were seen approaching the pass. *Wild Cat* signaled the freighter *Cardena*, carrying a cargo for San Antonio, about the dangerous seas at the pass, but the effort was disregarded. Mr. Linn observed “*Cardena* struck with her broadside to the sea and wind...[and] succumbed



to the surf and gale and went to pieces. Most of her cargo was lost.” The other vessel, *Sea Lion* with Irish colonists aboard, stood off the pass until the seas moderated, at which point the captain put on all sails and came through the pass with such speed that the ship ran permanently aground in the shallows just inside the pass. Fortunately, the crews and passengers of all of these sequential shipwrecks survived (and

Mr. Linn became a notable in the Texas Revolution).

The fashionable passenger steamship *Mary* (shown here) was standing off the Aransas Pass in November 1876. Just as she proceeded to enter the pass, a norther roared in and high waves struck the vessel with such force that passenger Sara Miller described, “I noticed water in my room. Next the room began to crash and pull apart.” The captain, desperate to find a lee from the hellish blow, steered his cripple into the pass channel; but Lady Luck was not with him, and *Mary* was swept into a buoy, opening her hull to the sea.

As the vessel foundered, a pilot boat arrived and managed to put a plank over to the dying ship. When Mrs. Miller was crossing it, *Mary* surged away, and down the woman went into the cold and turbulent water, desperately wrapping herself around the plank. Mrs. Miller wrote that she “bobbed up and down as each wave struck it [the plank]. It seemed to me an eternity before the sailors caught hold of it and I was helped into the rescue boat.” Passengers and crew were transported to the pilot house where they were comforted by a roaring fire and hot vitals. Soon, the once proud *Mary* was picked clean by salvagers.

Aránzazu.

Docent Doings by Bess Mitchell

PAPHA docents met for a potluck dinner meeting on at the museum on April 21st and discussed a wide range of topics. Docents were reminded of the Port Aransas Centennial this year, and the effort and enthusiasm needed to make this a great success. This will involve our entire local community and surrounding areas as well and, for many, will be a once-in-a-lifetime celebration in Port Aransas.

Tour for members of the PAPHA Board

of Directors was set for May 1, at the museum. Many members of the Board will be getting familiar with the museum for the first time. Docent Coordinator Mary Hammond-McKnight requested that docents who can be available come to assist with this special tour.

Tours of the Little Chapel on the Hill continue to be scheduled by visiting the museum or by calling 749-3800. Tours are given the third Friday and Saturday of each month with a limit of ten people

on each tour. Beginning in June, tours will be held the first and third Friday and Saturday of the month.

Bess Mitchell is a Port Aransas Museum docent, has a bachelor's degree in journalism at the University of Missouri at Columbia, was inducted into the University of Missouri's Gold Medal Society in recognition of her years of experience in the print media. She worked as a reporter and spent 30 years in Austin politics. Bess retired 11 years ago and moved to Port Aransas in 2004.