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JUNE 2003

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## Who killed Mrs. Seitz? The Masterson House saga

By JAMIE MURRAY

In the May newsletter, I wrote about the Masterson House, which once dominated the lot in Angleton that is now occupied by Masterson Park. In talking with folks about the house since the article was published, I have come to the conclusion that it must have been demolished in the early 1970s. I remember attending a party there about 1959 or 1960. Karen Barrow reminisced about one Halloween in the late '60s when she is sure that the house was vacant but still standing. I feel reasonably convinced that it was gone by the time I moved back to Brazoria County in 1973. If anyone else can shed more light on exactly when the Masterson house was torn down, please contact me at the Museum Library.

I appreciated a call from Darrell Schwebel of the Cradle of Texas Conservancy. He called to say that it was the Masterson family and not the



Fred Burrige in 1928

City of Angleton that had the Masterson House torn down. He said that when the lot was made available to the City for a park, the Family already had demolished the house. I have heard of the Cradle of Texas Conservancy and was pleased to learn a little about the group from Darrell. He explained that it is a local land trust working to preserve historic properties like the Coveney House and Bates Park, which are among the properties that the Conservancy has helped to save. I am so glad to know that such a group is working in this area. The preservation of old structures and of historic sites is an important endeavor and one that requires a concerted effort. There is certainly a need for such a group, and we are fortunate to have it functioning in Brazoria County.

If you read the article about the Masterson house in the June newsletter, you may recall that I alluded to a murder that involved the house and property. My source for information on this event comes from oral history interviews that I recorded with early Angleton residents in the 1960s and '70s. The tapes and transcripts of these interviews are in the collection in the Adriance Library.

Two of the interviews were with Mr. Fred "Sonny" Burrige of Angleton, one recorded in 1976 and another in 1978. Both tapes include information on the murder. Another source for this story was a 1966 interview conducted with Mr. Joe "Pop" Jamison.

He gave his recollection of the same incident and added more information not covered in the Burrige interview.

According to Mr. Burrige, a long-time Angleton merchant, a Mr. and Mrs. Seitz moved to Angleton and were staying at the Taft Hotel. The Taft was a two-story building owned by Mr. James Turner. As Mr. Burrige recalled it, Mr. Turner was in real estate and he built the hotel to house "home seekers" so that they would not have a chance to talk to local land owners and cause him to lose a land sale. He said that Mr. and Mrs. Seitz moved here

(See Museum Page 2)

## Dance pistol on TV show stirs interest

Last year a Dance gun was featured on the "Antiques Road Show." In the next few months following that episode, several researchers contacted the Museum Library for photos and more information on Dance pistols. These guns were manufactured during the Civil War, first by the Dance Family in Columbia and later near Anderson in Grimes County.

While I can send photos and information on the Dance gun, authenticating a pistol as a genuine Dance model is a job for the experts. I refer researchers on this subject to Tony Gajewsky, who has produced replicas of the Dance gun in recent years. One researcher called recently to let me know that he had contacted Tony as suggested, and met with and showed him the gun in question. Tony verified that it is indeed a genuine Dance .36 caliber Confederate revolver, serial number 176.

The researcher was excited and so was I. He was very grateful for the assistance provided, and I am grateful for the feedback. We handle many research requests here in the Adriance Library (over 600 per year at last count) and researchers do not always let us know if the answers we give them have been helpful. A number of those who contact us do take the time to report successful research outcomes. It is always nice to hear from them and to learn about a happy ending to a research quest.

I expect that publicity from the "Antiques Road Show" will result in the discovery of additional Dance guns. Do you have an old pistol among the family heirlooms? Take another look at it. One feature of the Dance gun is the absence of a recoil shield. Compare it to the photo shown here. If you think you might have a genuine Dance pistol, contact the Museum Library. I will put you in touch with Tony. Who knows? Maybe you have a genuine Dance model and do not even know it!



## Map exhibit open

The Brazoria County Historical Museum opened a new exhibit entitled *You Are Here* on June 2. The exhibit features maps taken from the Museum's collection and will be on display for six months.

The mapping of the area known today as Brazoria County began with the early Spanish and French explorers. The fluid coastline, the many rivers and the land forms of the County all are continually being altered by both natural occurrences and human development. The technology used to survey land also has changed dramatically over time as well. Where once a simple measuring chain and compass, such as Stephen F. Austin used, were enough to create maps, now a more comprehensive lay of the land is obtained using lasers, satellites and high-altitude photography.

## Mission Possible: Spy a Good Book

During the summer months this year, the Brazoria County Historical Museum will be participating in the Brazoria County Libraries Summer Reading Program entitled *Mission Possible: Spy a Good Book*.

To compliment this year's theme, the Museum will present a one-hour long program entitled *Digging up Bones*, which will focus on archaeology. This program is interactive and will include hands-on activities about archaeology and making a mummy. This program will be held at public libraries throughout the County and is open to the public free-of-charge. Because of the large number of attendees, some libraries require an advance ticket for their programs.

Please find below a listing of the dates, libraries, and times where the *Digging up Bones* program will be held.

For more information about the Museum's Summer Reading archaeology program, *Digging up Bones*, contact Ace Filipp at the Brazoria County Historical Museum at 979/864-1208 or via e-mail at programs@bchm.org.

For more information about the 2003 Library Summer Reading Program *Mission Possible* and other summer reading programs, please contact your local library.

Tuesday, June 24 at the Alvin Library at 2 p.m.

Wednesday, June 25 at the Danbury Library at 2 p.m.

Thursday, June 26 at the Clute Library at 10:30 a.m.

Thursday, June 26 Freeport Library at 2 p.m.

Friday, June 27 Manvel Library at 10 a.m.

Thursday, July 10 Brazoria Library at 2 p.m.

## The Masterson House Saga

(Continued from Museum Page 1)

because she had a heart ailment and the low altitude was supposed to be good for her. He described her as a small woman, always neatly dressed, and he thought that Mr. Turner had known her in St. Louis.

Sonny Burrigge went on to say that one morning about 1913, he was

walking to town around six o'clock in the morning to open up his store when he saw Mr. Seitz go into the alley behind the Masterson house.

When Sonny's brother, Willie, came along in the delivery wagon a few minutes later, he also saw Mr. Seitz, who told him he had just discovered the body of his wife in the alley. She was fully clad, and the only thing that was missing was her shoes.

Sonny said that a man named Joe Durfee worked for Mr. Masterson. Sonny described Joe as an ex-convict and an expert cook. "Angleton wasn't no angel of a town..." he said, "...so without a trial, they took old Joe and hung him upon that tree....A man is not convicted until he is found guilty, is he? Just like I tell you, they used to hang them right now."

The story does not end there. Mr. Burrigge continued, saying that Mr. Seitz had a friend who ran a candy store on the corner of Myrtle and Velasco in the building that

later became Mrs. Ehler's store. It was not too long after Mrs. Seitz's murder that her husband ran away with his friend's wife. They went to Oklahoma and just before Mr. Seitz died, "he owned up that he had murdered his wife." In 1917 or 1918, the sheriff in Oklahoma wrote to Arthur Lee, the

Justice of the Peace, and told him that Mr. Seitz had confessed to killing his wife in Angleton. He had murdered her and brought her body to the alley behind the Masterson house in the middle of the night so he could "dis-

cover" her in the morning. Joe Durfee had been an innocent man.

Joe Jamison's account of the Seitz murder adds more information to the story. He gives Joe Durfee's age as 25 to 30 years old and says that Judge Masterson had gotten Joe released on parole so that he could work for him in his home. The story goes that Mr. Seitz came back from a business trip, and finding that his wife was not at home, he began to search for her. He found her the next morning behind the Masterson place. She had been stabbed and her head had been crushed with a rock. Joe Jamison gives the year of the murder as about 1906 or 1907, instead of 1913 as

suggested by Sonny Burrigge.

Part of the evidence given against Joe was this: When asked that day what the commotion was about, he told the neighbors that a dead woman had been found. At the time, he was standing quite a distance from where the body had been found and "he had not been up the alley since the body was discovered."

In Joe Jamison's account, Joe Durfee was sentenced to hang, but the sentence was commuted to life. When the townspeople learned this, some went to the jail and took

Seitz's shoes were found in the fireplace of the Masterson home. Remember Mr. Burrigge's remark that her shoes were missing? To me, that always sounded like a case of planted "evidence." For what reason would Joe Durfee have removed the murdered wom-

about to hang the man in her front yard. She ran from the house brandishing a broom. "Not in my yard," she cried. "Get on down the road!" The mob continued north on Airline Road. Bennie Daugherty once pointed out the "hanging tree" as the oak near the corner of Valderas and Kyle Street, on the east side of Valderas.

Virgie Glass' sister, Rae Glass Smith, whom I interviewed in 1976, also recounts a version of the Seitz murder story. It is interesting to compare all of these accounts to see the similarities and the differences between them. No doubt there are other versions of the event elsewhere in the Adriance Library. I



Joe "Pop" Jamison at age 86.

Joe out of his cell. They took him up Valderas Street, which was called Airline Road at that time, and hung him from a tree "that was growing in the middle of the street then." Mr. Jamison said that he served on the grand jury immediately after the hanging, and at the time, "there was no one who wanted to report it to the grand jury. The fact of the matter was they all considered the hanging as justice to the society."


I have talked with these folks and others about this event over the years. Someone -- I wish I could remember who -- once told me that additional evidence against Joe Durfee was that the eyelets of Mrs.

an's shoes and burned them in the fireplace of the Masterson home?

My father's older brother, Irwin Giesecke, told a family story concerning the lynching. He was born in 1908 and had no firsthand knowledge of the event, but he remembers hearing his mother, Virgie Giesecke, tell about it. She and her husband Johnny, who married in 1905, were living in a house on the corner of Airline Road (now Valderas Street) and Miller Street at the time. On the night that Joe was removed from the jail by the lynch mob, she heard a commotion outside and was horrified to see that they were

will keep looking with the hope that we will be able to pin down the date of the murder. Can anyone else provide more information on this story? Is so, please contact me at the Museum.

Better yet, come up and look around in the Museum Library and help us piece this story together. If you dig deep enough, you can always find a few more relevant references in the Adriance Research Center. The Adriance Research Center is open Tuesday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. until 5 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. It is an interesting place to browse.

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## News from the Cemetery Committee

Thirteen members gathered at the Museum for the May meeting to hear reports and discuss projects.

David Roberts informed the group that the database now has 20,826 entries and has been visited 2,560 times during the past month. Since the database was first posted four years ago, it has been visited 41,770 times. Recently, David has entered information on the Wharton and McNeel families. Alice Royalty has been checking the database for duplications.

News of the cemetery database and of the work of this committee is spreading. The Museum Library has received several emails from researchers who express gratitude for the database and appreciation to the Committee for creating it. Genealogists are making use of it to locate family members buried in Brazoria County. The historian for the Texas Historical Commission's cemetery project also has discovered the database and has praised the work of this Committee. The work we have done will make the Brazoria County portion on the THC's RIP Project proceed much more quickly and easily here than in many other Texas counties.

Several members brought copies of the recent article about member Nancy Howard that appeared in the Houston Chronicle on May 12. The article mentions the Museum's Cemetery Committee and the database, and also gives the web site address <www.bchm.org> where the database can be accessed. The Museum got yet another mention that was spotted in the June issue of Texas Highways by Committee member Alice Royalty. At the con-

clusion of an excellent article on genealogy by Lana Robinson is a list of museums, cemeteries, fairs, and festivals of interest to genealogists. Brazoria County Historical Museum and the Adriance Research Library are at the top of the list, along with contact information and the Museum's web site address.

Other Houston Chronicle articles brought to the May meeting included one on Oakwood Cemetery in Hempstead and another on early Harris County documents stored at the Harris County Records Center. Jamie Murray reported that an archivist working with the Harris County documents already has contacted the Museum about some Brazoria County school records that have been found among them. Steps are being taken to return those records to Brazoria County for inclusion in the Museum's collection.

Members are making progress at Sandy Point Cemetery. Work sessions there are scheduled for Thursdays from 5 p.m. until dark. If you plan to attend any of these Thursday sessions, contact Jamie Murray in the Museum Library. Cleaning and repairing gravestones will be the main project at Sandy Point this summer, in addition to basic maintenance of the grounds. The restoration of the brick mausoleum will be postponed until the fall to avoid the high temperature of the summer months. Nancy Howard will be asked to inquire about a possible donation of weed killer that she discussed earlier with the manager of a business in Brazosport.

Members who can help clean stones at Sandy Point are encouraged to assemble a tool kit containing a natural bristle scrub brush, an old toothbrush, a car wash sponge, and a piece of old carpet for scrubbing. The Museum will provide workers with a special non-chemical soap called Orvus. In cemeteries like Sandy Point that are remote and have no water supply, the crew will need to take along a large container of water. Information on the proper cleaning and repair of old gravestones is available in the Museum Library and on web sites

like that of the State of Indiana.

The Committee plans to purchase an official THC marker for Sandy Point Cemetery as soon as the \$500 fee can be raised. Anyone who would like to express interest in the Sandy Point project through a donation for this purpose is invited to mail the donation to the Brazoria County Historical Commission in care of Marie Beth Jones, 200 E. Locust street #8B, Angleton, Texas, 77515. Checks can be made to BCHC. Please note on the check that it is intended for the Sandy Point Cemetery marker.

There was no report on Island Cemetery except that the descendants of those buried there have decided that a lawsuit is the only way to resolve the access problem there. In other reports, Pioneer Cemetery was mowed recently by Sampson Thompson, and Roy Karl stated that his crew has completed the inventory of Resurrection Cemetery in Pearland. Roy is interested in locating the Tom Jamison Cemetery. He also would like for anyone who knows the location of a cemetery on CR 2611 near Sportsman's Span to contact the Museum. He has been told of a cemetery in that area, but has not been able to find it. In addition, he wants to locate one in Old Ocean reported to have been behind an old Methodist Church. Roy is in contact with the caretaker at Eilerslie Plantation site and is attempting to get permission from the landowner to visit two cemeteries reported to be on that property. He also is making plans to look for a cemetery he has heard of in Alvin near the Alvin City Hall.

Nancy Howard has been lending her support to endangered cemeteries in Fort Bend County. She is working to prevent development there from encroaching on New Home Cemetery and cemeteries at Hodges Bend and Walnut Bend. She is working to gain not-for-profit status for a cemetery group that will provide maintenance for neglected cemeteries, but has not yet received word that the request has been

(See Museum Page 4)

## Archaic Period Word Search

From the word list, find and circle the words in the puzzle. They can be found forward, backward and diagonally.



ARCHAIC CLIMATE LECHUGUILLA MIDDEN OVEN PLANTS  
POINTS ROCKART SOTOL SPEAR

## Mystery item identified

Philip Spray of Amarillo, Texas identified the Mystery Item this time.

It is a kitchen tool that is quite common and came in various sizes. This vegetable slicer or mandoline, made of wood with a fluted metal cutting surface, is the smallest one in the Museum's collection.



the book Opera dell'arte del cucinare written by Bartolomeo Scappi (1540-1570) and published in 1596 by Alessandro Vecchi, in Venice. Scappi, who was a cook for Pope

Pius VI, also was known for being one of the first people to write about risotto. He called it "Rice from Salerno or Milan,"

in his recipe for "Minestra di riso alla Damaschina" (Damasquine Soup with rice). Scappi, also proclaimed, "a kitchen must, above all else, have a kneading-trough to knead several kind of pasta."

The cooking implement was called a mandoline because when the cook used it he looked like he was playing the musical instrument. This was because the slicer did not have a folding stand on the back. The cook would simply hold it pressed against his chest and slice the vegetables directly above the dish. In 1949, Jean Bron made the first metal version of the mandoline, thus bringing a centuries-old kitchen aid into the modern era.

While this type of tool has been in use for quite a while, the first recorded image of it was seen in

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## Windows Book and Gift Shoppe

By ROSEMARY DUKE

A while back a gentleman came into the Bookstore. I cannot remember what our original conversation was about, but he mentioned that he had some old bricks that came from the Oakland Plantation.

I never had heard of that plantation, so I was very interested in what he knew and about the bricks. A few weeks went by and the man came back in with some bricks, two of which he gave to me. They are used as part of a display in the Bookstore with a sign stating that slaves made them on the Oakland Plantation. At that time, I inquired about the plantation with several of the Museum personnel. I was told that, yes, there was a plantation by that name but was not given any other details. Something else took my attention and some how I let a year slip by without digging up further information about the place.

The Oakland Plantation was located just 3/8 of a mile off of what is now Highway 36, near the Clements Prison. Henry William Munson, who settled the Oakland Plantation, was born in Mississippi

in 1793, and came to Texas around 1813. Munson first landed in what is now Liberty, Texas. We know that he was wounded in the Battle of Medina and named one of his sons Mordello after the Mexican Officer who saved his life. In 1828, he and several of his family members packed up their household items and, with 19 slaves, traveled down the Trinity River on a barge into the Gulf of Mexico. They then proceeded up the Brazos River where they purchased land on Gulf Prairie from Stephen F. Austin. Here Munson established a plantation called Oak-

land Plantation where he grew an abundance of Creole cane sugar and cotton.

The plantation home was a wooden, two-story house with tall columns across the front to support the high roof. He, along with James S. Perry, hired a contractor to construct a schoolhouse in *Gulph* (Gulf) Prairie in December of 1830. This school was necessary as Mr. Munson and his wife, Ann Bynum Pearce Munson, had eight children of their own. It is believed that Munson's last words on October 16, 1833 as he was dying were

"please educate my children." After he died, Ann married James Peckham Caldwell in 1835. The widow and her new husband continued to operate the Oakland Sugar Plantation. In 1844 a church was added to the plantation. It is recorded that in 1852 the Oakland Plantation produced 200 hogshead of sugar. Mr. Caldwell's health was declining, so he moved to San Marcos in 1855, where he died in 1856 of yellow fever.

One of the sons, Gerald Munson, stayed behind to run the plantation. In 1864, he caught a Civil War soldier stealing some of his hogs. As Gerald was trying to take the soldier back to the Army camp, the man shot and killed him. Oakland Plantation has remained in the possession of Ann Munson Caldwell descendants. At some point, a live shell from a Civil War-era Eureka cannon was found on the property.

All that remains today of the plantation is a pile of bricks and two old cisterns that mark the location of the old mansion. There also are some brick remains of the sugarhouse and kiln. I want to thank the gentleman who brought those bricks in to the Bookstore. Not only do I have an interesting display, but also I now know a little more history of Brazoria County. Most of the above information was acquired from the Research Library located here in the Museum. Some was taken from *A Narrative History of Brazoria County*, and *The Portable Handbook of Texas*, both of which are sold in the Bookstore.

The Bookstore is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The Bookstore accepts Visa and MasterCard. Members receive a 10% discount on most items sold in the Bookstore.

### News from the Cemetery Committee

(Continued from Museum Page 3)

approved.

Alice Royalty expressed an interest in visiting D'Arcy Cemetery, but Bobby Koenning said that it is so overgrown we will not be able to go there until the vegetation dies down in the winter. Another visit that will have to be made in the winter is one to investigate a report of gravestones in the woods in Clute, near Restwood Cemetery. It is hoped that these might be some stones that are missing from the old Wharton Family Cemetery that was at Eagle Island Plantation. Also on the list of winter visits is the Ducroz Cemetery located on Rattlesnake Island, near the mouth of the San Bernard. Any volunteers for this one?

Several genealogy workshops are being presented this summer in Southeast Texas. Information on these seminars is posted in the Museum Library. On Friday, June 20, the Texas Historical Commission is hosting a free workshop on the St. John Colony, an African American community near Lockhart, with tours of the Rosenwald schools in that area on June 21. Contact the Museum Library or visit the THC web page for more information. Debra Bess told committee members about the Juneteenth gathering at Mims Cemetery planned for June 19.

The next meeting of the Cemetery Committee is scheduled for Saturday, June 28 at 10 a.m. in the Museum auditorium. In July, the meeting will be on July 26. All who are interested in this Committee and its projects are invited to attend. Those who cannot make it to the meetings can still participate in clean up and inventorying cemeteries. Courthouse research also is needed. If you would like to be involved in the work of this Committee, contact Jamie Murray at the Museum.

### Recent Museum membership renewals

#### El Empresario

ConocoPhillips, Sweeney

#### El General

Janice Arimendi/TDECU, Lake Jackson

Beth Griggs, West Columbia  
Mr. & Mrs. Spike McKinney, Angleton

Carla Olsen/Jr. Service League, Lake Jackson

A. J. Reixach, Jr., Port of Freeport  
Jeff & Katie South, Angleton

James & Janie Stevens, Lake Jackson

Ben B. Turner, Jr., Houston

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Quinton & Lee Anderson, Lake Jackson

J. W. Featherhoff, West Columbia  
Mr. & Mrs. Joe Fenn, West Columbia

Mr. & Mrs. Tom Fowler, Lake Jackson

Hon. & Mrs. Garvin Germany, Angleton

James Glover, Angleton  
Dr. & Mrs. Jack Harris, Pearland  
Laura Ingraham, Houston

Mr. & Mrs. Leland Kee, Angleton  
Glenn & Ruby Marken, Alvin  
Dr. & Mrs. John Moorman, Williamsburg, Va.

Mr. & Mrs. Don Parish, Angleton  
Johnney & Sandra Pollan, Lake Jackson

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Clifton Dusek, Lake Jackson  
George Easterling, Angleton  
Sue Gross, Lake Jackson  
Marie Beth Jones, Angleton  
Earl Roberts, Bay City  
Tom Scott, Midland

Mrs. C. R. Steffler, Lake Jackson  
Barbara Stevens, Lake Jackson  
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