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MARCH 2004

www.bchm.org Your Monthly Museum Newsletter

'All the Livelong Day' exhibit features county's railroad history

The Brazoria County Historical Museum opened a new exhibit about the rail industry in Brazoria County entitled *All the Livelong Day*.

The exhibit was created using images, artifacts and archival materials from the Museum's collection as well as items on loan from the KES Collections. Based out of the Rosenberg area, KES Collections specializes in Texas Railroad memorabilia and uses these materials to educate the public about the State of Texas' rich rail history.

The Texas rail industry began early during the days of the new Texas Republic with the Texas Rail-Road, Navigation and Banking Company being granted the first rail charter in 1836, only 10 years after the first tracks had been laid in the United States. While the company never laid any track and failed shortly after its creation, its establishment demonstrated the forethought that investors had concerning the future of rail in the new republic's development. In 1850, the Buffalo Bayou, Brazos and Colorado Railway, was granted a charter. This company later became the Harrisburg Railroad & Trading Company, which had operational tracks by mid-1853. The Houston Tap and Brazoria Railway Company was created in 1856, and four years later had track operational from Houston to Sandy Point in Brazoria County. The exhibit will remain open through September 5, 2004.



Missouri-Pacific train wreck; which happened near the Angleton depot in 1929.

Mark Your Calendars

All the Livelong Day: This exhibit about the rail industry in Brazoria County opened Friday, March 5. Free and open to the public during regular Museum business hours.

The History and Mystery of Howard Hughes Sikorsky S-43 : Friday, March 19 at 6 p.m. Co-sponsored by the Brazoria County Historical Museum and the Brazoria County Airport, this program will be held in the Main Hanger of the Brazoria County Airport. Free and open to the public. RSVP required. Call (979) 864-1208 or email to programs@bchm.org.

Family Night at the Beach - The Karankawa Indians: Thursday, April 15 at 6 p.m. Co-sponsored by the Brazoria County Historical Museum and the Brazoria County Parks Department, this program will be held at the Quintana Beach County Park and includes activities for the entire family. Free and open to the public. BBQ sandwiches will be served for \$5; RSVP required for BBQ sandwich at (979) 864-1208 or by email at programs@bchm.org.

Prison Farms of Brazoria County: This exhibit will open Friday, May 21. Free and open to the public during regular Museum business hours.

Brazoria County Historical Museum presents The Lonestar Bluegrass Band on Friday, May 21, at 7 p.m. The performance will be held on the front lawn of the Museum so bring your blankets and lawn chairs and have a toe-tapping good time. Free and open to the public. For more information, call (979) 864-1208 or email to programs@bchm.org.

www.bchm.org

The Old Columbia Tap

By TEMPLE LEA HOUSTON (1860-1905)

(This homespun poem was made by a homely disciple of Homer)

Down in old Brazoria County where the Ice King never stays, But where time's revolving cycle brings us only summer days; Where a wilderness of flowers ever decks the old earth's lap, And the only thing for curses is the old Columbia Tap.

Torquinada never fashioned such an instrument of pain. Such a cruel mode of torment never entered Nero's brain; And the Roman gladiator would have surely lost his snap Long before he got to Houston on the old Columbia Tap.

Like the doors of the inferno, all their cars this legend bear, And say: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter there." Wicked demons seem to gather round the little boss' cap As he fathers up his tickets on the old Columbia Tap.

From the Brazos bank to Oyster Creek you'll say the speed is worse Than anything in Texas, unless it is the hearse; And if I ever asked to indicate the worst road

on the map I bet you'll put your finger on the old Columbia Tap.

And when for you old age has come with Agrepl at his side And bid you enter Cairon's boat to cross the Stygian tide, To your horror, you'll discover how the devil set his trap And he caught you when you traveled on the old Columbia Tap.

To call this thing a railroad is certainly a shame, But for those who understand it we have a better name With a splendid definition; for the old Columbia Tap From every kind of business will soon take out the sap.

To all industrious immigrants you open wide your door, They ride upon this railroad and are never seen no more; They are thoroughly disgusted and wouldn't raise a crap To ship on such a railroad as the old Columbia Tap.

In the bosom of their families back in some older state, Those of Brazoria County this story will relate;

(See Museum Page 4)

The Adriance Library and Research Center

Texas' fight for independence has many versions and several important dates

By JAMIE MURRAY

When you read this, Texas Independence Day, March 2, will have come and gone. Many Texans do not get a holiday from work to commemorate this event, and so for most it probably passes unnoticed.

Most Texans remember the Alamo, though many have forgotten the date of March 6, 1836. We will all be reminded after the fact this year, when the newest Alamo movie hits the screens in April. Texas history buffs eagerly await the release of this one, anxious to critique its accuracy of historical detail, and probably quite sure in advance that it will not hit the mark in telling the true story of the Alamo, whatever that might be.

Don Graham wrote a whimsical piece for the *Texas Monthly* in February of 2002. With tongue-in-cheek, he gave advice to the producer and the director of the new Alamo epic as soon as he heard that it was in the works. "As you will soon discover," Don wrote, "nobody knows exactly what...happened at the Alamo," and each of the four main figures, Davy Crockett, William B. Travis, Jim Bowie, and Santa Anna "resides uneasily in the half-light of the known and unknown."

Graham presented and discussed briefly a number of debated scenarios: Did Davy Crockett wear a coonskin cap? Did Davy die fighting or was he executed after surrendering, as presented in the much-publicized de la Peña diary? Did Travis really draw a line in the dirt? Did James Bowie die on his sickbed "surrounded by dead Mexican soldiers that he had heroically slain," or did he die "like a woman, almost hidden by covers," as one contemporary account stated on April 5, 1836, in the Mexico City newspaper, *El Mosquito Mexicano*? In reference to other Alamo movies of 1915, 1955, 1960, 1969, 1982 and 1987, Don gives his "solution to these and all other historical quandaries: Make it up. Everyone else has."

The age-old question still

haunts us: Why can't the Hollywood versions stick with history? It is hard enough to learn and remember the facts of history without being confused by visual images that never happened except in some movie. Part of the problem lies in the individual filmmaker's perspective and purpose. In most cases, a Hollywood movie-maker's motivation is to provide entertainment and achieve economic success, with a little creative and artistic expression thrown in for good measure. This accounts for the temptation to play fast and loose with the facts. Sometimes the facts are just not as important to them as the other considerations.

On the flip side of the coin is that historical research is not an exact science. The path to determining the truth of historical happenings is littered with conflicting accounts. Research is slow, and just when you think you have figured out how things went down, you run across another source that refutes your conclusion. Then it becomes a matter of comparing sources and weighing their credibility. This is what makes history so exciting! It is detective work. It is a puzzle with pieces to be found. The pieces are not conveniently together in a box, but scattered everywhere: in repositories, private collections, or in a trunk in someone's attic just waiting to be discovered. You might think that history would be static, since the events have already happened and therefore cannot change, but as new sources come to light our view of history evolves. While the history itself does

not change, our interpretation and understanding of it does.

This issue of the newsletter will be published after this year's anniversaries of Texas Independence Day and the fall of the Alamo, but the spring brings two additional dates for Texans to remember. April 21 is big on almost every Texan's list of important dates, but we also should not forget about March

lived to tell the tale. We have Shackelfords now residing in Brazoria County. I wonder if they are descended from this Dr. Shackelford? Have you ever noticed how the most interesting things turn up when you are looking for something else, and how research always raises as many questions as it answers?

In reading Dr. Barnard's account, I was struck by the opening lines

in which he explained how "news of the Texan revolt from Mexico reached our ears in the early part of December 1835... They had made a call for volunteers... I was instantly possessed with a desire of rendering my personal services, however insignificant they might be in their behalf. Accordingly, I hastily closed my business... and left Chicago on the four-

teenth of December in the company with two young men, bound for Texas."

That is amazing, is it not? Amazing that a doctor would quit his practice in a faraway state, and with no particular ties to Texans and their cause, would make that long trip into an unknown and precarious future. Dr. Barnard went to Texas because he perceived that the Texans "were in arms for a cause that I had

always been taught to consider sacred, viz; Republican principle and popular institutions. They had entered into the conflict with spirit, and were carrying it on with vigor."

Like Dr. Barnard and the two young men who accompanied him, volunteers heard the call and came to Texas from many states and foreign countries. The Texas State Archives has a list of 62 men from the New Orleans Greys that shows them to have hailed from Ohio, Maryland, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Virginia, New York, South Carolina, Vermont, Mississippi, Massachusetts, Maine, Kentucky, North Carolina, Illinois, Tennessee, New Hampshire, Germany, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, Nova Scotia, Canada, and England. They and others joined with colonists who formed the regular army and volunteer forces to fight against Mexico.

Reading the description of the Texan forces in the *Handbook of Texas* entry on the *Goliad Campaign of 1836*, one would despair that this relatively small force of soldiers - woefully short on supplies and communication - could ever hope to win. To step back in time and consider the odds, while taking a realistic and objective look at the situation in the spring of 1836, would likely lead you to put your money on Santa Anna. How could these Texans have beaten the odds to win? Yet win they did, ultimately, on the field of San Jacinto. It is a fascinating story that has captured and held the public imagination for 168 years.



27, for on that day is when 342 soldiers under Fannin's command were executed at Goliad. I am told that a very moving observance of this event takes place each year at Goliad. According to the *Handbook of Texas*, "only 28 escaped the firing squads, and 20 more were spared as physicians, orderlies, interpreters or mechanics..."

For a fascinating account of the entire Goliad campaign, read *Dr. J.H. Barnard's Journal From December, 1835, to March 27th, 1836, Giving an Account of Fannin Massacre*. I stumbled on a reprint of this journal in the Goliad file folder of the Library's information files just the other day while assisting a researcher. Dr. Barnard and another physician, John Shackelford, were spared at Goliad so they could be taken to San Antonio to treat the Mexican Army's wounded after the battle of Alamo. They eventually escaped and Dr. Barnard

A Note of Thanks

On behalf of the Brazoria County Historical Museum and the Adriance Library & Research Center, thanks to the Brazoria County Historical Commission for its recent donation of 30 books relating to Texas history for the Library book collection.

The Commission appreciates everyone who donated books for this year's Book Sale and those who came and bought books at the sale. The Historical Commission benefits from the sale of the books as do other local historical organizations, including the County Museum. By supporting the annual book sale, as a donor or as a buyer, you are helping to promote historical projects in Brazoria County.

Cemetery Committee Report: Ground penetrating radar helps locate graves

By JAMIE MURRAY

As reported in the February newsletter, Carl Pierce of the Geophysics Department at Texas A&M arrived at the conclusion of the January meeting to accompany members on a field trip.

The group planned to travel to Sanderson Cemetery on CR 1462 for a demonstration of Ground Penetrating Radar Equipment. This technology is being used with some success to locate unmarked graves. Carl had explained that the equipment does not work as well in wet conditions, so when the group arrived at Sanderson Cemetery, he found that it was far too wet there from recent rains for an effective demonstration.

West Columbia Cemetery is of particular interest because of oral history accounts of rows of white wooden crosses, no longer in evidence, that once marked the graves of Mexican War and Civil War soldiers. The area in which these graves are thought to

be also was found to be too wet to get accurate readings with the imaging equipment. Carl looked around the cemetery and spied an area of higher ground that had better drainage, and he proceeded to conduct the demonstration there.

The imaging pattern that resulted from the test area did indicate disturbed ground at an approximate depth of two to three meters. A pattern of this type suggests that there are burials in this higher area that are not designated by gravestones or other markers (see graph produced at the West Columbia Cemetery demonstration). Carl provided us with a copy of *Forensic Studies Using Ground Penetrating Radar*, a collection of diagrams and images that help explain the process. This material is available in the Adriance Library.

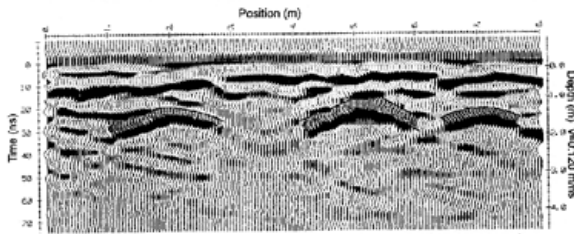
The committee plans to invite Carl to return to Brazoria County during a dry period so that he can test the equipment at Sandy Point Ceme-

tery. The cost of the Ground Penetrating Radar equipment is so great (about \$30,000) that the committee has no plans to purchase it, but it may be possible to apply for a grant to fund a special project using the equipment. A grant could allow us to hire Carl to locate unmarked graves in the cemeteries of Brazoria County and to determine the original extent of these cemeteries.

The next meeting of the Cemetery Committee is scheduled for March 27 at 10 a.m. in the Museum auditorium. Our guest at that meeting will be Woodrow Jones, who is the president of

Prairie View A&M's cemetery preservation project, *Project R.E.S.P.E.C.T.* He will make a presentation to acquaint the group with this project and also tell them about the Texas Institute for the Preservation of History and Culture at Prairie View A&M. The TIPHC's role is the "research, documenting, and preservation of Texas' African-American Cemeteries." The TIPHC will focus on the African-American cemeteries and will begin work with the Old Washington Cemetery in Washington County, the Olivewood Cemetery in Houston, and the Gonzales Public Cemetery in the City of Gonzales.

The Cemetery Committee invites anyone who is interested to attend the monthly meetings at the Museum. Those who cannot be present for the monthly Saturday morning meetings can contact Jamie Murray in the Museum Library to find out about cemetery workdays, research opportunities, and other related projects. If you want to hear Woodrow Jones' presentation about Prairie View A & M's cemetery projects, put Saturday, March 27 on your calendar. The program begins at 10 a.m. in the Museum auditorium with the regular business meeting to follow the program.



The above graphic is from *Forensic Studies Using Ground Penetrating Radar*, by Carl Pierce.

RAILROAD WORD SEARCH

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

- ANCHOR
- B F TERRY
- BRAZORIA TAP
- CABOOSE
- COAL
- CONDUCTOR
- CROSSING
- DEPOT
- ENGINE
- LANTERN
- RAILROAD
- TRACK
- UNION PACIFIC
- WHISTLE
- WRECK

A N C H C O R C A B O O C
 S D E E R O T C U D N O C
 B E N C O A C K O N A D I
 R P G U S C T O C L Y R F
 A O I C S R O S S A R N I
 Z T N N I D E P E O R T C
 O B E R N R A E S Z E T A
 R O R E G I A L O T T A P
 I E N T G I N T O E F U N
 A U N N I O N S B P B N O
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The Windows Book and Gift Shoppe

By ROSMARY DUKE

Last month, we celebrated President's Day.

I remember when I was a child that we celebrated the birthdays of both George Washington and Abraham Lincoln on two separate days. I also remember that several days before Washington's birthday we use to draw cherry trees and cut out hatchets and make funny looking hats. I recall the teachers telling us that a six-year-old George Washington received a new hatchet. According to my teachers, Washington cut down his father's cherry tree and refused to lie about it.

What I did not know back then was that George might not have laid hand nor hatchet on his father's tree. It seems that in 1800, Mason Locke Weems (a parson no less) wrote about the life of George Washington. The first four editions of the book did not sell

very well, which led Weems to embellish the next edition to include the story of George and his hatchet. Allegedly, while cutting down his mother's pea-sticks, Washington tried the edge of his hatchet on the body a cherry tree.

The next day his father questioned the children about the tree and the young Washington is supposed to have said "I can't tell a lie, pa; you know I can't tell a lie. I did cut it with my hatchet." After this new inclusion of text, Weems sold a total of 59 editions by 1850.

Young Abraham Lincoln is said to have had an unquenchable thirst for good reading material. Unfortunately, books were scarce on the frontier and libraries few and far between. This meant books often were loaned from one individual to another. While in Lincoln's possession, one of these borrowed books was left on the table in his cabin. A storm blew up, and water from a leaky roof ruined the book. "Honest Abe" is supposed to have split many rails to pay for the purchase of a new book. This book

was said to be *The Life of Washington the Great* by M. L. Weems.

Who exactly was Mason Locke Weems? He was born in Maryland in 1759. At a very young age, Mason decided to become a doctor, like his uncle. While only 14 years old, he left the colonies to study in Great Britain. Just three years later in 1776, Weems returned to Maryland as a doctor. His return voyage was on a British warship, where he served as surgeon. What he did not know was in those few short years he was away, America had begun to fight for its independence and he now was an American citizen. A few years later, Mason decided that his true calling was to be a minister. He became one of the first ordained priests of the Episcopal Church in America.

Now known as "Parson," Weems would preach wherever he had an audience. He supported himself by selling Bibles and other books across the original 13 colonies and even into other Southern territories. He also wrote pamphlets encouraging strong morals and well-known biographies of the day. In 1795 he married and eventually had ten children. The seventh of

these children was born in 1806 and was named Mason Locke Weems II. The lure of free land convinced this younger Weems to move to Texas. Mason L. Weems II not only was a doctor like his father, but he also served as Probate Judge and Chief Justice. In 1852, he and his family settled in Columbia, right here in Brazoria County. How interesting to know that a descendant of one of Brazoria County's more prominent doctors wrote the embellished story of George Washington and his father's ill-fated cherry tree!

The Windows Book & Gift Shoppe not only offers books for sale, but also a few gift items as well. We have begun to carry a small line of enameled masterpieces from NYCO, which would make wonderful Easter or Mother's Day gifts. Members don't forget that you received at Christmas a card for an additional 10% discount on a one-time purchase. This is still good until May 31. The Bookstore is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

We accept MasterCard and Visa and will ship anywhere in the U.S. for you.

The Old Columbia Tap

(Continued from Museum, Page 1)

Oh, what a dire calamity, oh what a sad mishap
To be cursed with such a railroad as the old Columbia Tap!
It is doing more than anything to keep good men away,
For they only run three trains a week, one every other day;
The management needs waking from its Rip Van Winkle nap
To make a decent railroad of the old Columbia Tap.

Now all ye old Brazorians, your prayers will, like my own,
Be for every one to gather the seed that he has sown,
Then Colonel Hays' hash will settle and his head get many a rap
Should the demons ever tempt him to ride upon the Tap!

Texas Almanacs needed

The Adriaance Library has a good collection of Texas Almanacs from years past, but there are some gaps.

There is a one-volume reprint of almanacs published between 1853 and 1873. After 1873, there are no more volumes in the collection until 1925. Since 1925, the Library is missing the Texas Almanacs for 1928, 1930, 1932, 1934, 1935, 1937, 1938, 1951, 1960, 1963, 1976-77, 1982-83, and 1986-87. If anyone has any Texas Almanacs for these years and would be willing to donate them to the Library, please drop them off at the Museum, or call Jamie Murray at (979) 864-1208.

Are you a member of the museum?

If not, then join the Brazoria County Historical Museum today! No matter which level you choose, your involvement is indispensable. Membership dues provide vital support for continuing research, collections preservation, exhibit development, and educational and entertaining programs for children and adults. In addition, membership contributions are tax deductible according to IRS rules. What better way to begin the new year than by becoming a supporting member of your County Museum. A heart-felt thanks to our renewing members and a warm welcome to our new members. You help to make the Brazoria County Historical Museum the county treasure that it is.

New Members

Senior
Earley T. Rhodes, Anacoco, Louisiana

Renewing Members

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Sharon Rogers, BASF, Freeport
El General
Gerald & Serena Andrews, Lake Jackson
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James & Patricia Allan, Freeport

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How to reach The Museum

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Mystery Photo Update

Nat Hickey of Freeport called to identify the drum major from Freeport High School in the photo circa 1934-35 as Johnnie Bell Vickers, who later became Mrs. Fred Wilder.

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