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Want to help Museum build historic log cabin replica? Austin Town Historical Re-enactment 2004 being readied for Oct. 30 opening

By BRUCE R. TAYLOR-HILLE

Planning for *Austin Town* has begun, and it looks like we are going to have a great re-enactment again this year!

Volunteer applications and school reservations are flowing in, and the site preparations are well under way.

Austin Town is a historical re-enactment of life in 1832 Texas. It is open for school groups only on Friday, Oct. 29 for \$2 per child.

Austin Town is open to all visitors on Saturday, Oct. 30 and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Sunday, Oct. 31 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission prices are \$5 for adults and \$3 for children under 12 and senior citizens.

Visitors must park at the Intermedics Facility; free shuttle buses will transport you to and from the *Austin Town* site. Bring your family!

While I am getting ready for this year's *Austin Town*, I

also am planning for future events. Austin's Colony was well-known for the log cabins that dotted the Brazos River, from Velasco up to San Felipe.

Most of these cabins were small, 10- to 12-foot square, with dirt floors and "mudcat" chimneys. Very few structures from Austin's Colony remain, and the ubiquitous log cabin is the rarest of them all.

As such, I want to reproduce one of these cabins at the *Austin Town* site. The cabin will be a single-story, twelve-foot square log structure.

The cabin will be built by participants in a Museum workshop on log cabin building.

If you would like to participate in this workshop/project, please contact me at the Museum by telephone at 979/864-1208 or via email at programs@bchm.org.



Two re-enactors play checkers at Austin Town.

Brazoria County's Greatest Generation(s)

The following article was written by Museum Volunteer David Pettus.

Dave died in a Houston hospital on Aug. 10, 2004, after a fall in his Houston home. Although he lived in Houston, Dave made the trip to the Brazoria County Historical Museum two or three times a week—first as a researcher and then as a volunteer. He was a geologist by profession, but it was his love of history that brought him to the Museum Library.

Over the past four years, Dave assisted with many Museum projects such as creating an index for the Perry Papers, helping to teach the summer archaeology program, and visiting other libraries to make copies of Brazoria County related materials for our files. In the past year, he was very active in the Museum's oral history program, having conducted about 60

interviews since his first one in June of 2003.

David's hearty laugh and pleasant, easy-going personality won him many friends in Brazoria County. His dedication to historical research and to the projects of this Museum won our sincere respect. He quickly became a member of the family here at the Museum. We miss Dave so very much, and in so many ways.

By DAVID PETTUS

Tom Brokaw published a book in 1998 entitled *The Greatest Generation* in which he identified the generation that grew up in the Great Depression and came of age in World War II as "the greatest generation." I have been privileged through the Brazoria County Historical Museum's Oral History Program to meet many members of that generation as well as their

predecessor generation. The oral history interviews with these individuals have been among the most interesting experiences of my life. It is one thing to read of those now long-past events and times or to see them on the History Channel, but it has much more impact hearing it from the people who live through them.

Through the oral history interviews I have conducted, you can hear about life in Brazoria County before paved roads were common, when many children were in one-room schools, and

the Democrat Party ran everything in the county. The Great Depression of the 1930s was as difficult in Brazoria County as elsewhere, and through oral history you can begin to see how people coped with the hard times. If you needed some money to add a few amenities to life, you could trap



David Pettus

skunks, raccoons, squirrels, or other fur-bearing animals and then sell the fur to Sears, Roebuck & Co. Skunks brought the best price, but had their own problems for the trapper. Women could get employment in the fig and pear canneries in

Angleton, Alvin and Pearl and. Freeport Sulphur Co. provided jobs for county residents as well as supported home gardens and home canning kitchens for employees and their families. Rice farming was a major agricultural business. Cattle were grazed on open range and gathered in annual roundups at Rosharon. The Agricultural Experiment Station at Angleton was a world-class facility for research on figs and cattle diseases.

World War II was the second major influence on Brokaw's *Greatest Generation*, and interviews from veterans are fascinating to hear and read. County residents were at the Normandy invasion, The Battle of the Bulge, Anzio, the invasion of Southern France, aircrews on B-17s bombing Germany, stationed in the Aleutian

(See Museum Page 2)

Terrific time had by all at Father of Texas Banquet

Supporters of the Brazoria County Historical Museum gathered at Columbia Lakes on Saturday evening, Sept. 11 to fete Beverly Nixon, Buster Curry and Glenn Heath for their respective contributions to our community.

Good food, good friends and good cheer marked a wonderful evening for both the honorees and attendees. The Museum is grateful to the following individuals and organizations that supported the Awards Banquet, the organization's primary annual fundraising event:

Gulf Coast Tables (\$1000)

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Banquet guests

Evelyn & Jim Clawson with Linda Formet-Heath were among the dozens of guests at the Museum's Father of Texas Banquet.



Brazoria County's Greatest Generation(s)

(Continued from Museum, P. 1)
Islands, in northern Italy, and aboard ships in the Pacific. Civilian contributions to the war effort are also to be found in the interviews. Learn how the Dow Freeport operations provided the raw materials for synthetic rubber used to make tires for the military.

One civilian worker now living in Angleton was present at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. His account of the Japanese attack and subsequent salvage of ships sunk in the attack is unique. Have you heard of German prisoners of war in Angleton?

Some of them worked on farms in the Angleton area. One farmer's son later met

one of these prisoners in England after the war.

After interviewing about fifty of the World War II generation, I have concluded that they are a distinct group: less self-absorbed than later generations, more focused on getting the job done, and with a better idea of what life is about.

They were the foot soldiers of World War II and people who created the world we have lived in for the past 50 or so years. Those of us who are younger could learn a lot from them if we would only take the time. They, themselves, do not seem to subscribe to the "greatest generation" idea. They were

just doing what needed to be done to survive and get ahead.

Those of us in the subsequent generations have not had our say yet, although we think we are pretty great, too. The members of the "in-between generation," those who were too young for World War II, had our own challenges. We were the foot soldiers in the Korean War and the Cold War. The members of the Baby Boom generation were the foot soldiers in Vietnam, and their children were in Desert Storm and the Iraq War. If these veterans do not talk about their experiences, their children and grandchildren are unlikely to under-

stand exactly what they face in their future.

The Brazoria County Historical Museum can be contacted by anyone interested in giving an oral history interview or helping by being an interviewer. The Museum is interested in hearing from all residents, whether or not you were in the military. Accounts of life in the county are very useful for students of local history. We want to know your experiences. How did you come to live in Brazoria County? Where have you worked? Did you see the Surfside whale(s)? Have you endured a major storm? Let us know about your life...we care!

Important Austin Town dates

The Brazoria County Historical Museum's annual Austin Town Historical Re-enactment will be held October 30-31, the last full weekend of the month. Following are the dates and times for some upcoming Austin Town events, meetings, and workshops. New volunteers are always welcome! If you need additional information, please call the Museum at (979) 864-1208.

September 28 - Steering Committee Meeting, 6:30 p.m. at BCHM

October 12 - Steering Committee Meeting, 6:30 p.m. at BCHM

October 26 - Steering Committee Meeting, 6:30 p.m. at BCHM

October 30-31 - Austin Town Historical Re-enactment

Preservation News

By **JAMIE MURRAY**

Many old house lovers have long admired the interesting architecture of the brick house that is next door to the Maxey House on Magnolia Street in Angleton.

I grew up just a couple of blocks from it myself, and I knew that it had once belonged to a lawyer named Louis Wilson. I also knew that my father, Jack Giesecke, had hauled brick to that site when he worked summers for Faickney Lumber Co. in the early 1930s.

What I did not know is that the house began as a wood

frame structure similar to the Sweeny-Rust house located one block to the north of it. While I had assumed that the Wilson home was built in the

1930s of brick construction, I had not realized that under all that brick stood an older home that had been built in 1900. I learned this from the



Sweeny-Rust house dates back to 1900.

current owners of the home, Carolyn and Elo Buenger.

When the Buengers bought the Wilson home in August of 2001, they began to restore it. Like all such projects, they found that far more work needed to be done than they had first imagined. In the three years since they have owned it, they have done extensive work on gas lines, wiring, and plumbing, as well as painting and refinishing walls, woodwork, and floors.

The Buengers have become very interested in the history of the house and in the Wilson Family. In her research, Carolyn has

learned that the Wilsons originally owned the entire block on which their house stood. Like many Angleton families around the turn of the century, they had a farm lot, where they kept their animals. It was just west of their home, where E.L. Boston's 1950s ranch-style pink brick house is now located. Carolyn also discovered that the cow of local legend that once ended up inside the high school building (on the second floor) was the Wilson's cow. I seem to remember hearing the name of Jimmy Phillips (later our state senator) associated with at least one instance of the cow-in-the-school prank, though I suspect this joke may have been pulled off more than once in the history of Angleton schools. As I recall, perpetrators had no trouble getting the cow up the stairs, but she refused to go down them after the prank was discovered. Now there is a story to research for another day!

Louis Wilson, the lawyer who originally owned the Buenger's house, had deep roots in Brazoria County. He was the son of Eugene Wilson, one of the first lawyers in Brazoria. Louis' grandfather had come to Brazoria County about 1840 and was also a lawyer. Louis' mother was the granddaughter of

(See Museum Page 4)

Mystery item identified as early day electric hair clipper

By **MICHAEL BAILEY**

Congratulations, Brenden Collien of El Paso, Texas... you won the Mystery Item contest! You can pick up your \$10 gift certificate for use at the Brazoria County Historical Museum Bookstore anytime within the next 90 Days.

The item pictured is indeed an electric hair clipper. This model is a cable-driven barbershop clipper, powered by a fractional horsepower universal motor that runs on 115 volts.

The item has several components made by different manufacturers. Race made

the cutting heads, while Brown and Sharpe made the body. The Racine Universal Motor Company of Racine, Wisconsin, manufactured the motor in the 1920s.

The motor is what makes this item so interesting and marks it as an item of its time.

Chester Beach developed the motor in the early part of the twentieth century while he was working at U.S. Standard Electrical Works in Racine, Wisconsin as an advertising manager. The motor is small, safe, and able to operate on direct and alternating electrical currents.

This makes it perfect for

adaptation to many household gadgets. Chester Beach teamed up with Louis Hamilton and in 1910 created their first item for market, an electric handheld massager. Within a short time, Hamilton-Beach became a well-known name across the nation.

The company's success led to many other producers of these small engines to be formed in the Racine area. From the 1920s and to the early 1950s, Racine was known as the "Small Electric Capital of the World." These companies produced more universal motors than any other in the world.

Manufacturers began using

these small motors in anything they could think of: kitchen mixers, blenders, fans, electric knives, drills and saws to name a few. In homes, people started putting these small motors on all kinds of tools such as retrofitting treadle sewing machines, workshop tools such as grinding wheels, and blowers of forges.

Many children watched with fascination, and mothers in horror, as fathers would take apart equipment once operated by hand and try to replace parts with these small engines that were bought cheaply or often scavenged from other parts.



1920s hair clipper.

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By ROSEMARY DUKE

Twelve miles northwest of Columbia in Brazoria County was a place so remote and safe, that a famous Mexican General was kept prisoner there.

Today there is nothing left of Orozimbo Plantation but the many memories. Under huge oak trees stood this gracious and stately plantation of Dr. James Aeneas E. Phelps. Dr. Phelps, a surgeon, moved from Mississippi to Texas in 1824 after receiving a land grant. It is said that he named his plantation after a Native American chief called Orozimbo.

After the battle of San Jacinto, General Santa Anna was taken to Velasco. However, this was not a good place to keep him. At Velasco, the General was too vulnerable to assassination by patriots or could easily have escaped himself. For a brief time, he was moved to the

Patton Plantation. While at this plantation, there was an incident involving a beautiful Spanish woman and a dropped glove.

She had brought him delicate edibles and a fine, but poisoned, wine. Major Patton, who owned the plantation, had intercepted the note she had for the General, telling him of an escape plan. Santa Anna had drunk the wine and became ill. Major Patton drove him immediately to Dr. Phelps at Orozimbo. Santa Anna remained at the Phelps plantation under heavy guard by 20 of General Houston's most trusted men. This was the final stage of Santa Anna's imprisonment in Texas.

Stories abound about attempts to assassinate or free Santa Anna, but the one I like best is a wonderful ghost story that Catherine Munson Foster wrote about in *Ghosts Along the Brazos*. According to the story, one night a planned effort was made to release the General. Wine was given to the guards with a sleeping potion in it. "It was a dark, overcast night, a little rain beginning to fall. As it grew later, the guards consumed all the wine and, one by one, fell into a drugged sleep. When all was quiet the

watching men began to creep towards the house where the prisoners, having been alerted earlier, waited. At that moment the stillness was shattered by the barking of dogs. A deep baying chorus with one shrill keening lament rising above all the rest." The household was aroused almost immediately, and as the light from the house began to shine through the windows, the would-be rescuers fled. Once again Santa Anna's escape plans were foiled, this time because of barking dogs. The only problem was that the Orozimbo Plantation had no dogs, nor were there any

dogs on the surrounding plantations. Where did these barking dogs come from?

Some say that the dogs belonged to a brave man who died at Goliad, at the hands of Santa Anna. When he left to fight for Texas' independence, his dogs refused to eat and roamed in the wild. There are many stories about the General's confinement and even though some may seem a bit far-fetched, no one disputes the story of the barking dogs at Orozimbo. Sometimes on a moonless night, driving the back roads north of Lake Jackson, if you dare stop the car and listen very

carefully to the night sounds, you may hear the howling of those very same dogs who are looking for their master who went off to war and never returned.

This story and others are told in *Ghosts Along the Brazos*, which is sold in the Museum's Windows Book & Gift Shoppe. Stop by and browse the store, and see what special items we sell. Bookstore hours are from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, and from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays. Visa and MasterCard are accepted, and we will ship for you.

Mystery Photo

This photo was given to us by the Velasco Museum with no identification other than the fact they are wearing aprons that must be Masonic aprons. Please call the museum with any details you may have about the photo and the identities of those being pictured.



Preservation News

(Continued from Museum, P. 3)

John Sweeny, Sr., who settled in Brazoria County in 1830.

Louis Wilson was born in Brazoria in 1874, the second of nine children. In 1900, he married Josephine Weisiger, the daughter of a doctor in Quintana. Josephine was related to the Munsons, the Bryans, the Mastersons, and the Smiths of Brazoria County.

Josephine and Louis had no children. He served as President of First National Bank in Angleton and also was active with the Brazos River Harbor Navigation district that developed the Freeport harbor. When he died at his home on Magnolia Street in 1942, his funeral service was conducted there by the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. Josephine Wilson survived her husband by many

years. She died in 1976, and both are buried in the Angleton Cemetery.

Louis Wilson was a history buff and collector of historical material. One prized item in his collection was a copper printing plate inscribed with a drawing of the 1839 courthouse in Brazoria. Recently, a local lawyer representing a descendant of Louis Wilson contacted the Museum and arranged to donate this very special copper plate for the collection. He also provided contact information for a Wilson descendant who has provided some of his memories of the house and of the Wilson family.

It was exciting to find that the files of the Adriaance Library contain information about this very image of the courthouse. There in the file labeled "1839 Courthouse" is a two-page document, "First Courthouse

Built by Brazoria County," written by none other than Louis Wilson and dated April 28, 1941. In it, he tells the story of the construction of the first Brazoria courthouse and says that in 1882, Commissioners' Court hired a man named William Ahlbrecht to make repairs and alterations on the building for the sum of \$3,000. He goes on to say that the "etching made by Bernhardt Wall represents the court-house as it looked after the alterations and repairs made by William Ahlbrecht and as it looked until it ceased to be the court-house. Mr. Wall made the etching from a photostat of a picture taken in the eighteen hundred and eighties, probably soon after the work done by William Albrecht."

The Museum photo collection already contained a photo of the etching, and thanks to the generosity of the Wilson

heirs, it now has a copy of the original 1880s photograph from which the etching was made, in addition to the original copper plate used to print the etching. When added to Louis Wilson's article telling about the creation of the etching, a story is told.

The items in the Museum's collection are like pieces of a puzzle. Related items donated by different donors at different times sometimes come together to tell us yet another story from Brazoria County's rich and interesting history.

We are so grateful to the heirs of Louis Wilson for their gift of this special artifact and related photograph for the Museum's collection and to Carolyn and Elo Buenger for their careful restoration of the Wilson home. All are doing their part to help preserve the history of Brazoria County.

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