



THE WINDOW PANE

Brazoria County Historical Museum

DISCOVER WHERE TEXAS BEGAN

Land, Race & Class in Brazoria County

The story of Varner-Hogg is the story of land, class and race. It is also the story of many of the historical mainstays of Brazoria County--plantations, prisons, and even petrochemical sites. When we refer to slavery, we do not often speak in terms of class. Yet when we look to the testimony from that time, we see the distinctions are not simply black and white. Class distinctions were more fluid than we might expect and were of grave concern to Antebellum residents of Brazoria County.

Careful examination of court records, oral histories, census records and other archival materials reveals a community constantly working out a social and racial order, an order that they renegotiated with each dramatic shift in land use and economy. Make no mistake, in Brazoria County White landowners held the strings, and African-American laborers, enslaved and free, worked so others could profit. However, each economic upheaval from cotton and sugar to ranching and then to the oil boom,

created cracks in an order that African-Americans like Mike Ford, Rachel Patton and Charlie Brown finessed to their advantage.

In our discussion on February 17, Toni and I will address the prevailing historical conditions of slavery, sharecropping and racism in Brazoria County. But we also will discuss remarkable stories of ordinary people and ordinary stories of remarkable people. Our guiding philosophy for our research is that every story counts and matters, including yours. And our hope for our talk is that will encourage others to take an active role in pursuing their history and that of their community.

Tony Cherian, Guest Lecturer

Toni Hill-Kennedy's research and much of my own work focuses on the African-America men, women and children who lived and labored at Varner-Hogg Plantation, also known as the Patton Place. Our understanding of Brazoria County grows out of our study of Varner-Hogg.

Tony Cherian and Toni Hill -Kennedy will present their latest research on "Land, Class and Race in Brazoria County" at the Museum on Thursday, February 17, 2005 at 6:30 pm. Free Admission.

February 2005

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Brazoria County Historical Commission's Annual Used Book Sale

on
February 9, 10 & 11,
from 8 am to 5 pm,
and on February 12,
from 9 am to 3 pm,
at the
Brazoria County
Historical Museum.

For more information,
call 979/864-1393.

Windows Book & Gift Shoppe

I just returned from visiting my in-laws and the old homestead. It brought back some fine memories of Ms. Lillie. One of Ms. Lillie's daughters, Aunt Opal, is in her 90s and still does things that Ms. Lillie taught her to do as a child. While I was in the kitchen, I noticed a block of soap wrapped tightly in muslin and stored in an old crock jar. I asked Aunt Opal about it, and she told me how she learned to make soap when she was a child.

Her family saved the hickory wood ash and fat scraps of suet during the fall and winter. Come early Spring, Ms. Lillie would pile her wood ash into a trough-like box with a spout leading from the bottom. She would line it with corn husks to keep the ashes and liquid from leaking out. A large jar or crock was placed under the spout to catch the drippings. Ms. Lillie would pour a bucketful of water at a time over the ashes until lye began to drip out. She continued to do this until she had several gallons of lye. Next she heated the lye in a large iron pot over an open fire in the back yard. For each gallon of lye that was poured into the big pot, two pounds of rendered suet was added. To make the rendered suet, Ms. Lillie would chop the fat and cover it with water and boil it until it melted. She then cooled it and skimmed the fat from the top. This was then added to the lye mixture. The lye mixture and rendered suet was stirred with wooden paddles as it came to a boil and continued to cook until it was a thickened frothy mass of just the right consistency. This would take about six to



Library of Congress, Soap Making in Henryville, Pa

eight hours. Ms. Lillie would then pour the soap into a storage container. When the soap hardened, she would cut it into bars then wrap the bars and store them in the barn. Aunt Opal says that lye soap is great for getting spots out of clothes, and great for flea and tick bites. I asked her about using it as a shampoo, and she said that as a child she did, but she prefers to use store-bought bluing shampoo on her white hair now.

Many customers come into the Book & Gift Shoppe to buy some lye soap and recant stories very much like the one above. If you have never tried lye soap, then come by the Shoppe and pick up your very own bar. The Book & Gift Shoppe is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm and on Saturdays from 9am to 3pm.

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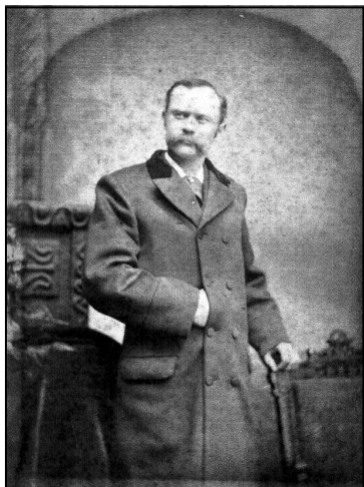
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The Museum Staff also can be reached at the following:

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Mystery Photo



In November of 2004, Bruce Smith of Houston donated eight photographs from the Masterson family. One of these photographs bears only the inscription "For Mary". We do not know for sure if this well-dressed gentleman was a member of the Masterson family or if Mary, the recipient of the photograph, was perhaps a Masterson.

A check of the Masterson family genealogy in the Library family files reveals that a Mary Masterson was born in 1866, and would have been 24 in 1890. According to the family record, she never married. The name Mary is a popular one in the Masterson family and was repeated in every generation. Most likely the unnamed young man was an acquaintance of Mary Masterson's. If anyone can identify him, please contact Jamie Murray in the Museum Library



Thanks to Killum Pest Control for their donated services to the Museum.

New & Renewing Museum Members

Recent renewals:

El Comandante

George & Anita Rau, Angleton

El General

P. G. Bell, Houston

Estelle Brubaker, Lake Jackson

Mr. & Mrs. Jack Buice, Lake

Jackson

Harold Crone, Lake Jackson

La Familia

Mr. & Mrs. James A. Allan,
Freeport

Mr. & Mrs. Danny Cook, Angleton

Mr. & Mrs. Bill McDaniel,
Angleton

Deneise Slaydon, Lake Jackson

Dolyne Stevens/Cradle of Texas

DRT, West Columbia

Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Snow, Angleton

Mr. & Mrs. Irving Zelade, Lake
Jackson

El Tejano

Larry Buehler, Angleton

Clifton Dusek, Lake Jackson

Harriet Hems, Lake Jackson

Eleanor Vaughan, Lake Jackson

Senior

Juanita Henry, Angleton

Mary Eloise McNeill, Brazoria

Irma Phillips, Brazoria

Jack Reid, Lake Jackson

Mrs. C. R. Steffler, Lake Jackson

Adriance Library & Research Center

The Cemetery Committee in Transition: An Update

Committee Chairman Cathy Nash called the first meeting of the Brazoria County Historical Museum's Cemetery Committee in June of 1998. Since then, the original goals of locating and recording the cemeteries of Brazoria County and of cleaning up the historic Sandy Point Cemetery have been met. Committee member David Roberts has created a database listing over 20,000 names of those buried in Brazoria County. This database is searchable on the web by visiting the Museum website at www.bchm.org and clicking on the link for cemetery information.

Cemetery members have drifted in and out of the meetings over the past six years, but there is a core group of very dedicated members who have rarely missed a meeting. One of these is Nancy Howard for whom the care and preservation of Brazoria County's cemeteries is a very high priority. Her interest in them led her to apply for a 501(c)(13) non-profit status that will enable the cemetery group to expand its range of projects. The name of the new organization is the Texas Cemetery Guardianship Association (TCGA). Its primary focus will be the cemeteries of Brazoria County, but the more general title allows for assistance to cemeteries in other areas, if desired. Nancy will act as the first president of this new organization. Bobby Kenning has agreed to be the group's secretary. Roy Karl has recently resigned as treasurer, so this position has not yet been filled. The TCGA held its first meeting on November 20, 2004.

This group is no longer officially associated with the Museum, but Jamie Murray will continue to work with the group. To avoid confusion, the Museum has created the Brazoria County Historical Museum Genealogy Committee, which will now handle the locating and recording of the County's cemeteries, research requests concerning cemeteries, and the collection of information regarding cemeteries and their history. Correcting and updating the Cemetery Database also will be a project of the Genealogy Committee as will the oral history project that has been in progress at the Museum for years. Plans are also in the works to publish some memoirs and out-of-print books that are in the Adriance Library files.

The TCGA will have some powers that the original Museum Cemetery Committee did not have. In addition to cleaning up abandoned and neglected cemeteries, the new group can now hold the deed to a cemetery if a landowner wishes to transfer ownership of a cemetery to the TCGA. This group can approach fundraising in a more vigorous way than was possible under the museum "umbrella." Also, the non-profit organization can pursue cemetery access problems and other situations that involve litigation.

With the addition of a few new powers described above, this organization will continue to pursue the goals it has had since its inception. The group has evolved to a new level, but the mission is still the same: to locate, record, preserve, and protect the cemeteries of Brazoria County, and to advise and assist groups in other areas with the preservation of historical abandoned and neglected cemeteries. The Texas Cemetery Guardianship Association is made up of many of the same energetic and dedicated individuals once associated with the Museum's Cemetery Committee.

The Brazoria County Historical Commission founded this Museum in the early 1980s and later "cut the strings" when the Museum could stand alone as a county facility, separate and apart from the Commission. In the same way, the Museum created and nurtured the Brazoria County Historical Museum Cemetery Committee and has now stepped back to allow it to operate on its own as the non-profit Texas Cemetery Guardianship Association.

The TCGA hopes to follow the lead of a similar group in Parker County whose fund-raising efforts over several years now pay for professional clean up of over 20 cemeteries in that County. The Texas Cemetery Guardianship Association is now in a position to accept donations to build up a similar fund, and the money it raises will continue to help preserve and protect the abandoned and neglected cemeteries of Brazoria County. The TCGA is a direct result of the cemetery project begun by this Museum in 1998. Please continue to support it as its goals and its dedicated and enthusiastic members have not changed.

Jamie Murray



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NON PROFIT BULK

MAILING PERMIT

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Angleton, Texas

77515

HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY

NEW EXHIBIT OPENING

The Brazoria County Historical Museum is scheduled to open a new exhibit on February 4th entitled "The Road to the Promised Land: Martin Luther King, Jr. & the Civil Rights Movement—Perspectives in the 1990s." As the long title suggests, the exhibit serves a two-fold function. It not only tells the story of the modern civil rights movement from the mid-1950s to 1968; it also traces situations, actions and actors up to the present day, in effect asking: "What has become of the civil rights movement since the death of Dr. King? The exhibit was organized by the Texas Humanities Resource Center in Austin, and its presentation has been made possible in part by a grant from the Texas Committee for the Humanities, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities.



The first half of the current exhibit was organized by the Texas Humanities Resource Center in 1981 as a survey of events between 1955, when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the Montgomery city bus, to 1968, when Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis. Titled "Martin Luther King, Jr. & the Civil

Rights Movement," it consists of 65 classic photographs from the movement, quotations from the speeches of Dr. King, and summary narratives of significant actions in the drive for equality. The second half, "The Road to the Promised Land—Perspectives in the 1990s," was produced over a decade later to bring the original stories up to date, documenting them with 36 additional photographs and drawings that reflect how greatly some things have changed and how stubbornly others have resisted change.

"The Road to the Promised Land" will be on display in the Museum's lobby February 4-25, 2005. Interested persons wishing to secure more information or to schedule a class or club visit should contact the Museum at 979/864-1208. Admission is free.

Michael Bailey