



# The Window Pane

## Brazoria County Historical Museum

100 East Cedar Street  
Angleton TX 77515

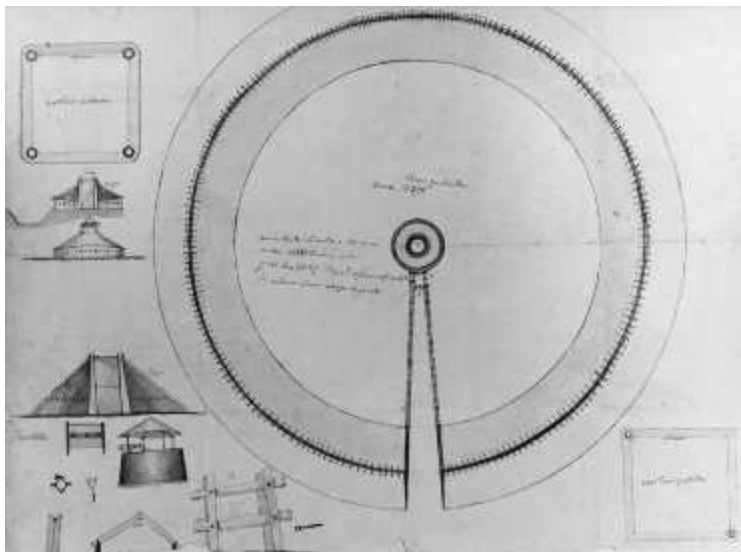
## The Battle of Velasco

The Brazoria County Historical Museum opened a new exhibit entitled Battle of Velasco on January 13, 2006. The exhibit explores one of the early battles that were a precursor to the Texas War for Independence.

Built in or near the present-day village of Surfside, Fort Velasco served as a customs port and also as a means of controlling the emergent stream of Anglo settlers from the United States. Fort Velasco was one of several strongholds proposed and designed by Manuel de Mier y Terán. Completed in 1832, the fort was manned by Mexican troops under the authority of Domingo de Ugartechea.

In June of that same year Fort Velasco became a focal point in the Texas Revolution. When troubles arose in Anahuac, Texians gathered at Brazoria under the command of John Austin and Henry Smith and took possession of the schooner Brazoria, arming it with cannon from the ship Aria. In order to make their way to Anahuac, the Texian militia had to travel past the Mexican fort at Velasco.

The Texians launched a nighttime attack on the fort by both land and sea. The militia won the battle when Ugartechea and his men were forced to surrender after their ammunition had been exhausted. Unfortunately the schooner Brazoria had been damaged to the point that it could go no further, thus ending the Texians' attempt to aid their compatriots in Anahuac. Interestingly, the Brazoria Texians did not know that the situation in Anahuac already had been resolved prior to the battle. The exhibit Battle of Velasco will be on display through June 2,



February 2006

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## Battle of Velasco

exhibit open  
through

**June 2006**

## Prairie Restoration at Austin Town

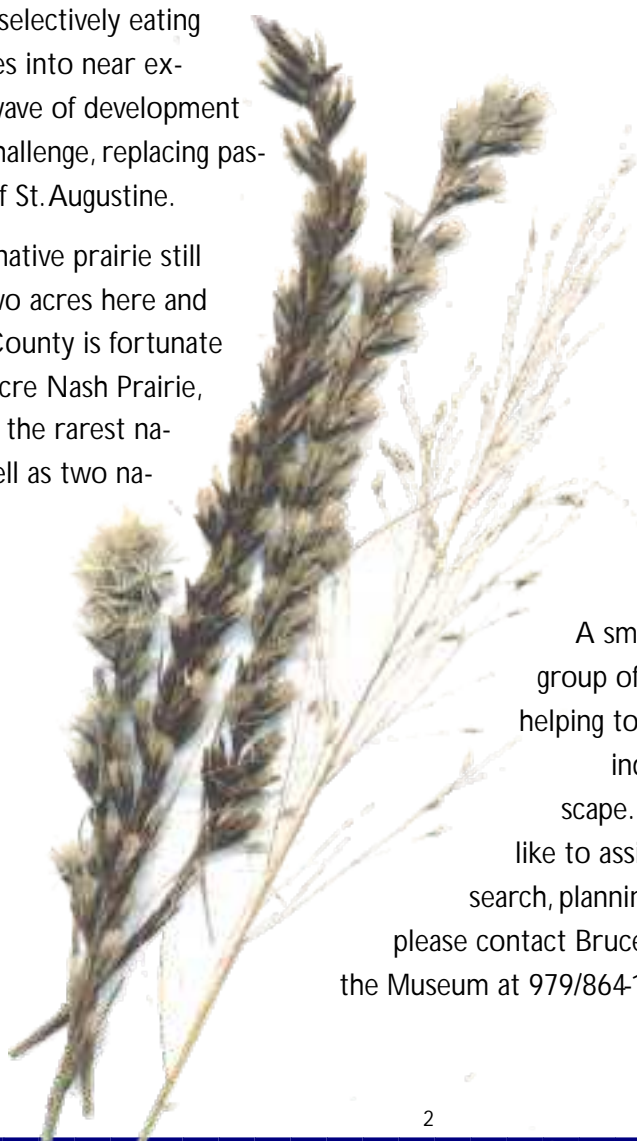
January 20th, 1835

*Moderate - not warm. The prairie across the Bernard is on fire. The effect tonight is beautiful. Nearly the whole horizon in that direction is a sheet of fire, with an immense body of smoke. One can imagine it to be an irruption of Vesuvius. It is sublime. Lasted 2 or 3 days; only visible at night. -Mary Austin Holly*

Cows and plows have taken their toll on the native prairie that used to blanket much of Brazoria County. The vast grasslands that settlers encountered were burned and tilled under to make way for corn, cotton and sugar. What was not planted was grazed, the cows selectively eating the tastiest grasses into near extinction. A final wave of development adds one more challenge, replacing pasture with lawns of St. Augustine.

Small pockets of native prairie still remain, one or two acres here and there. Brazoria County is fortunate to have the 300-acre Nash Prairie, home to some of the rarest native grasses, as well as two national wildlife refuges. These refuges can provide visitors with a glimpse of what the landscape might have looked like for the first colonists who came to this strange wilderness.

In an effort to recreate the appearance of this primal landscape at *Austin Town*, the Museum staff has begun to plant a section of the property with rare native grasses and flowers. This plot will be carefully tended and managed over the next few years until it can replenish itself. Visitors to *Austin Town* will be able to see some of these plants such as Rattlesnake Grass, Inland Sea Oats, Texas Coneflower and Texas Prairie Parsley. These may be the same of those same odd plants that reminded Mary Austin Holly of Vesuvius as they burned that January evening, 171 years ago.



A small, dedicated group of volunteers is helping to recreate this indigenous landscape. If you would like to assist them in research, planning or planting, please contact Bruce Taylor-Hille at the Museum at 979/864-1208.

## Museum Staff

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

## Adriance Library & Research Center

The memories that I want to share are those of Gladys Wertz Clark, who moved to Brazoria County as a child in February of 1898. Gladys was 10 years old at the time of the move, but turned 11 that July. In 1937, at the age of 50, she began to write the story of her life. She devoted several very interesting pages to the 5 years the Wertz family spent in Brazoria County. I want to thank her granddaughter, Bonnie Schuster of Missoula, Montana, for sending a copy of Gladys' memoir to the Museum Library.

Born in Nebraska in 1887, Gladys moved with her family first to California and then by train to Alvin, Texas. Upon arrival, the Wertz family was met by two of Gladys' uncles, Ben and Olie Wertz, who lived at Chocolate Bayou. She remembered that much of the 6 -mile trip to the Wertz farm was made in water that was "hub deep" on the wagon wheels. Perhaps this experience gave the family some portent of things to come. Gladys' first impression of Brazoria County was one of desolation. In recalling that day, she wrote, "Even I could feel the despair and futility of a life in that country --and so it proved to be."

Gladys remembered picking ripe strawberries in February while living with the Chocolate Bayou relatives. Soon after, her family moved temporarily to a 2 -room house on Austin Bayou. Her mother named it "Flea Hollow" because it was infested with those pesky little creatures. No doubt, everyone was happy when the family moved into the new house built nearby by Gladys' father and grandfather.

What little money the family possessed quickly went to purchase "lumber, food, cows, farm equipment, horses and mules." The Wertz Family had "little variety in food and practically no new clothes," but there was some social life to enjoy. Gladys wrote of "play parties where the young gentlemen would 'carry' the young ladies out for stand -up coffee and cake along about ten o'clock." This is a custom I do not remember hearing of before, and I would like to know more about it. I wonder if anyone reading this can add anything more to the story of the "stand -up coffee and cake" events that Gladys described. When reading memoirs and oral history transcripts, questions always come to mind. Sadly, there is often no one left to ask.

According to Gladys, both the old and the young attended the parties where there was singing and the playing of music. The Wertz Family also enjoyed picnics and family get -togethers,

which "eased the tension and despair..." of daily life. For entertainment at home, the novels of Charles Dickens and Jane Austen were read aloud.

Gladys wrote of attending a little country school on Austin Bayou, where she learned about Texas history. She recalled the roaming herds of cattle on the prairies and told of being chased by a bull while walking home from school. Gladys and her sister also briefly attended "a small normal school" that had just opened in Angleton. That was most likely the University of South Texas, also known as Noblett's College, which was not a university as we use the term today. It was a boarding school attended by children of all ages and was first located in the 100 block of East Myrtle Street, about where Times Printers is today. The school soon relocated to a new building west of town, but it was destroyed in the 1900 Storm and never reopened.



Gladys Wertz wrote, "Our five and a half years in South Texas was literally jammed with poverty, calamity, sickness, and death. Nearly every phase of human suffering was experienced there." Her grandparents, Bradley and Miranda Ransom, both died of a fever in the spring of 1900 and were buried in the little cemetery at Chocolate Bayou. Gladys remembers seeing her mother weep many years later when recalling that "both of their graves were entirely washed away during the storm of 1900."

In the next newsletter, I will share Gladys' very vivid memories of the 1900 Storm. You also will learn what it was about Brazoria County that she recalled fondly. Even after those 5 difficult years the family spent here before moving away in 1903, Gladys remembered one "fine thing" about this area that transcended all the unhappy memories. *Jamie Murray*



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Historical Museum

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Angleton, Texas  
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Happy Valentine's Day !

## Art As History

The Brazoria County Historical Museum will open an art exhibit featuring, in part, the works of local artists. *Home Grown Art II* will open on January 27, 2006, and run for six months. Works in the exhibit are two- and three-dimensional in nature and include drawings, paintings and photographs as well as craft and folk art. A Museum committee selected which works of art to exhibit and gave priority for selection to artwork that reflects Brazoria County people, places or history. Additionally, the exhibit will showcase selected pieces from the Museum's Collection.



Painting of Gene Jackson by Quillan Garrison.