

BHA Banner Newsletter

Brownsville Historical Association

Volume 5, Issue 2

April 2019

History of a Texas Battle Flag and its Restoration

The BHA is delighted to announce that a very significant artifact dating back to 1832 will soon be on permanent display at the Heritage Museum. The silk flag is a prototype of the Texas Navy battle flag that flew from the schooner, *Brazoria*, during the Battle of Velasco on June 25, 1832. The flag is printed on cream colored silk broadcloth material. The printing depicts an early Texas Naval flag flying on a staff, with hand drawn detailing. The staff is shown to the left heading side of the flag and the left half of the flag is comprised of a blue canton with a single 5-pointed white star in its center. The right side of the flag features 13 alternating horizontal stripes: 7 red stripes and 6 white. The far right end of the flag is drawn as a curved line to symbolize its movement as if it were flown on a staff. The artifact dates back to the first confrontation between Texas and Mexico that lead to the Texas Revolution.

Prior to the Battle of Velasco, Fort Velasco was built at the mouth of the Brazos River in 1831 out of concern that the United States would attempt to annex Texas, which at the time was a Mexican province. The purpose of the fort was to serve as a checkpoint to stop Americans who were migrating into Texas. Around the same time, tensions were building up in Anahuac against Col. John "Juan" Davis Bradburn who worked his way up into the Mexican Army as an American volunteer during the Mexican Revolution. Discontent with Bradburn grew from his enforcement of Mexican law that prevented Anglo-American immigration into Texas. In addition, he was ordered to inspect the licenses of Anglo-American lawyers and land titles. In May of 1832, following the arrests of William B. Travis and Patrick C. Jack, certain citizens in Anahuac demanded

their release from prison. When those demands were not met, plans were set into motion to secure their demands by force. In June of 1832, John Austin and Henry Smith, leaders of a group of early Anglo settlers known as Texians, traveled to Brazoria to take a number of cannons to use against Mexican forces in Anahuac. The cannons were placed on the schooner, *Brazoria*, to depart down the Brazos River into the Gulf, until Domingo de Ugartechea, Mexican commander at Fort Velasco, refused their passage. In response, an attack was ordered on the fort by the Texians. The attack occurred moments before midnight on June 25th and into the early morning hours of June 26th. Eventually, Ugartechea surrendered when his forces ran out of ammunition. The ship was completely demolished by cannon fire during the battle. It is believed that this flag is the only remnant of the *Brazoria* from around the time of the Battle of Velasco in 1832.



The Texas Naval Battle Flag in its current state.

Among the figures involved in the prelude of the Texas Revolution with ties to Brownsville is Captain William Jarvis Russell, who was first in possession of the flag. Captain Russell joined John Austin on the trip to Brazoria to obtain the cannons. Leading up to the battle, Russell was placed in command of the schooner, *Brazoria*. The Rentfro family of Brownsville are descendants of Captain William Jarvis Russell. They donated the flag to the Brownsville Historical Association (BHA) almost two years ago. Since then, the BHA was awarded \$2,625 from the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) to help pay for the restoration of the flag. That amount was matched by the BHA through funds from the 2018 Taste of Texas event.

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From the Executive Director...

This year's Taste of Texas fundraiser was a great success and served as an opportunity to show that we are true to our mission. Unveiled at the event was the silk flag prototype from the Battle of Velasco (1832). The flag came to us as a gift from the Rentfro family and we are so excited to see it fully restored and ready for permanent display at the Heritage Museum. I would like to thank all of the volunteers, staff, sponsors, vendors and board members who made our event possible.

In April, we partner with the Brownsville Independent School District for Autism Awareness Month in displaying a student art exhibit at the Historic Brownsville Museum. We also look forward to Park Day 2019 at Market Square in partnership with the National Parks Service and Texas Historical Commission.

Also, this spring, we get ready to celebrate Preservation Month in May and collaborate on programs with the city's Main Street Office and the Historic Preservation Office. We, at the BHA, are passionate about educating the public on the importance of preserving our past and rehabilitating structures in the historic district. As a member of our Association, you help our Board of Directors and staff continue our work as preservers of history.

I hope to see you soon at our programs and events!

Tara Putegnat
Executive Director

UPCOMING EVENTS

12th Annual Civil War Park Day 2019

When: Saturday, April 13, 2019 – 1 pm to 3 pm

Where: Historic Market Square, 1150 Market Square Street

Cost: Free to the public

The BHA will once again partner with the Civil War Trust, the Texas Historical Commission, the National Park Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife to clean up the area. For more information call: 956-548-1313.

Preservation Month: Lecture & Downtown Tour

When: Saturday, May 11, 2019 – 2 pm Lecture, 3:30pm Guided Tour.

Where: Heritage Museum, Vezetti room

Cost: Free and open to the public.

Limited seating for tour. Please R.S.V.P. by calling 956-548-1313 or email: rgarza@brownsvillehistory.org

Terri Myers, Architectural Historian, will present a lecture on methods of historic preservation and the do's & don'ts regarding those methods. The lecture will be followed by a guided tour of some of Downtown Brownsville's historic buildings.

Memorial Day at the Old City Cemetery

When: Monday, May 27, 2019

Where: Old City Cemetery, Corner of 5th Street and E. Madison Street

Cost: Free and open to the public

For more information call: 956-548-1313

Join us as we honor the veterans buried at the Old City Cemetery. Over 450 identified veterans representing wars from the Indian Wars through WWI & WWII and the Persian Gulf War are buried in the Old City Cemetery. Also, represented here are both Union and Confederate veterans and several from the Mexican Revolution of the early 1900s. A US flag will be placed on each identified veterans' grave.

UPCOMING EXHIBITS

BISD Autism Awareness Student Exhibit

When: April 6 – 27, 2019

Where: Historic Brownsville Museum 641 E. Madison Street

Cost: Exhibit is included with paid museum admission. Free for BISD students and teachers (with I.D.)

In honor of Autism Awareness Month, the Brownsville Independent School District Fine Arts Department in partnership with B.H.A., invite the community to celebrate their 7th Annual Autism Awareness Student Exhibit. Beautiful and original artwork by students of all age levels will be on display.

An Art Exhibit: Impressions from Brownsville

When: May 11, 2019 – July 29, 2019

Where: Heritage Museum, Vezetti Room, 1325 E. Washington Street

Cost: Exhibit is included with paid museum admission.

In honor of Preservation Month, Juan Velez, Historic Preservation Officer and BHA Board member will exhibit a collection of art work featuring historic buildings of Brownsville.

Welcome!

NEW BHA MEMBERS

Rolland L. Bailey
Arthur Stillman Brown
Gloria A Crixell
David Diaz
Isabella Escobar
Luis P Escobar
Luis & Melina Escobar

Joel Fernandez
Letty Fernandez
Rosalie Garcia Keszler
Ruth Ann Ragland
Patricia & Richard Ragush
Amit U Raysoni
Carroll Omar Sanchez

Ester A Valle
Henry Zamarron
Martha Jo Zamarron
Jesus & Veronica Arellano
Jan Reece
Amanda G. Clint

Sponsorships help make this newsletter possible! Please call us at 956-541-5560, to inquire about newsletter sponsorship opportunities, or visit our website at www.brownsvillehistory.org for more information.

History of a Texas Battle Flag and its Restoration *continued*

The BHA received the silk flag in poor condition. In its initial state, the material from the flag was malleable and not observed to be brittle. The left side of the flag containing the canton blue square with a white star, was poorly dismantled. The stripes were in a solid



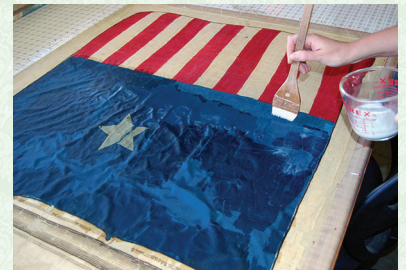
Original condition of the flag.

condition, though there were splits in the silk and numerous holes, especially in the center bars. The heading, particularly the far left side of the flag had splits and tears throughout, as did the section of the flag where the staff is printed. The flag had been previously hand stitched to a piece of blue cloth, which was not deemed to be historic, but rather a means to support the flag from its previous state of deterioration.

Given that the flag was tattered, torn, and made of silk, indicated that restoration of the flag would be a delicate process. This extensive process consisted of first, taking apart the flag in order to clean.

Then, the materials were dyed and coated with a special adhesive before mounting and framing the flag. This task was completed in December of 2018 by Jessica Hack Textile Restoration, located in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The restored Texas Naval Battle Flag prototype was unveiled at this year's Taste of Texas event, held on March 30, 2019. The BHA has begun work to permanently display the flag at the Heritage Museum for the public to view.



Photos of restoration process.

By: Olga Moya, Museum Intern & Marissa Casas, Museum Assistant

Historical Happy Hours

We have quite a few events but let's not forget BHA's Historical Happy Hours.

Cost: Free for BHA members, \$5 if you RSVP and pay before the event, \$10 at the door. Sorry no refunds. RSVP by calling: 956-548-1313

Friday April 26, 2019,

5-7pm at Stillman House Museum & Gardens 1325 E. Washington St.

Friday May 17, 2019,

5-7pm at Historic Laureles Ranch House Museum 1501 E. 7th St.
(Linear Park)

Friday June 21, 2019,

5-7pm at Historic Brownsville Museum 641 E. Madison Street

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

We are proud to highlight a staff member in each newsletter and introduce you to our committed team.

In this issue we introduce to you **David (Dave) Parsons**, Education and Membership Coordinator. Dave has been with the Brownsville Historical Association since September 2016. Dave works the front desk at the Heritage Museum and Stillman House Museum where he greets visitors and answers any questions they may have about the museum and the downtown area. He also helps guide tours that come through the museum and serves as our resident "IT guy".



Dave jokes that this is his ideal retirement job and that his favorite part about it is meeting people from various places and sharing with them knowledge about Brownsville. He says that as a result of working with the BHA, he has learned more about Brownsville's history than he's ever known in his 20 years of living in Brownsville. In addition, being part of the BHA has given him an exclusive look into Brownsville and all that it has to offer.

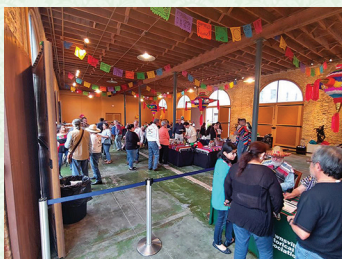
During his time here, Dave has contributed to the cataloging of the Old City Cemetery names and has worked diligently at various events. If you've ever been to any of our programs, chances are that you've been greeted by Dave on your way in!

Like all staff members of the BHA, we "wear many hats". David Parsons is a prime example of that and we are grateful to have him as part of staff.

Thank you for all of your hard work Dave!



Feria Artesanal - Market Square



Historical Happy Hour: Viva Order of the Brush! - Market Square

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