

# BHA Banner Newsletter

Brownsville Historical Association

Volume 4, Issue 4

October 2018

## Brownsville Southern Pacific Depot Celebrates 90 Years



BHA Archives

When discussing any topic in a municipality's history, geography plays an extremely important role in what decisions are made in relation to the growth or sustainability of the town. Brownsville, located near the Gulf of Mexico and bordering the Rio Grande River, has a unique geographic location. It can be said that Brownsville lies at the crux of significant crossroads.

Brownsville's early years saw an economic boom from international commerce. The city's proximity to Mexico made international transportation and commerce a straightforward and logical process. Shipping and receiving goods on a world-wide platform were established being that a deep-water seaport was built in the early 20th century. New technology provided solutions to supply the need for a way to be able to move goods and people faster and easier than ever before.

Due to the invention and development of locomotives, moving sizeable and burdensome loads over land became much easier. Brownsville was once the hub of three different railroad stations: Rio Grande Point Isabel, St. Louis Brownsville Matamoros, and the Southern Pacific; they all served in distinctive roles. The only remaining building in Brownsville that once served as a passenger depot is the Southern Pacific Railway building located on Madison Street.

The Southern Pacific Railroad was well established in Texas at the onset of the twentieth century, although the company had yet to make

their way into the Rio Grande Valley. After Southern Pacific acquired the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway in 1925, along with waiting for an additional two years for permits to be granted, they were able to expand their railway into Brownsville in 1927. This expansion was done under the auspices of helping the agricultural business that was so prominent in south Texas.

The first Southern Pacific train that arrived in Brownsville did so on November 10, 1927. The first service trains were operating as freight trains and not transporting people. Passenger trains were soon to come and with that, a passenger depot was needed. The completion of the Southern Pacific Railroad passenger depot occurred in 1928 which was built on the "southwest end of blocks 126 and 139 of the original town site of Brownsville."

The architect that is credited for the design of the building is R.W. Barnes however, there have been some oral histories that attribute

this specific passenger depot, along with three others from the Rio Grande Valley, to Leonard B. McCoy. Regardless, this picturesque example of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture is still observable today and serves our community as the Historic Brownsville Museum. This year marks the 90th year anniversary of this historic depot.

Eric Gonzales  
*Collections/Media Archivist*



## From the Executive Director...

After another hot south Texas summer, many of us happily welcome cooler temperatures this fall. I hope that each one of you had an enjoyable summer.



The BHA would like to express a warm welcome to all of our new members. Your membership allows us to continue our important mission in preserving local

history; thank you for joining us!

This fall, we have planned our popular ghost hunts, Haunted History tours, and Murder, Mystery, Mayhem tours. Please see the calendar insert for more details on all of the exhibits and programs we have to offer this quarter. We have lots in store this holiday season.

Continued financial support from the City of Brownsville, Alexander Stillman, the Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation, and other sponsors throughout the year make it possible for the BHA to provide the public with quality programming, various local history exhibits, and significant historic building restoration projects. The BHA staff and board of directors work hard to implement important projects and move forward with our mission, but we can't do it alone. As the close of 2018 fast approaches, please consider making an end of the year donation. Your gift is tax deductible and so beneficial to our local history museums. Visit our social media pages and website for more information.

I wish you and your family a safe and happy holiday season!

Tara Putegnati  
*Executive Director*

## BOOK SPOTLIGHT

Lali Serna Castillo is a new independent author, and "Twice Upon a Time" is her debut novel.

From the author: "I have always loved to read but the love of writing came as a pleasant surprise."

"One day I was asked if I was the protagonist in my own life story. I knew the answer to the question but decided I wanted to know why not. So, I began writing about my childhood and my teen years looking for clues. I got sidetracked, and with a little bit of serendipity and a lot of imagination this novel was born and so was my love of writing."

"I was born in Brownsville which is located at the southern point of Texas. On the Border by the Sea. I now live in Stafford, Texas which is just outside Houston, with my husband, Ed."



**Book Signing:** Twice Upon A Time, Author Lali Serna Castillo  
**When:** Thursday, December 6, 2018 @ 5:30 pm  
**Where:** Historic Brownsville Museum, Mary Yturria Education Center  
 641 E. Madison Street  
**Cost:** Free and open to the public / For more info. call: 956-548-1313

## IN MEMORIAM



### Mary Evelyn Corely Simmons (1931-2018)

Mary Simmons served for many years as a BHA Board member and Brownsville preservationist. She completed many projects, including the Recorded Texas Historical Landmark designation for Sacred Heart Catholic Church on Elizabeth Street. In 2012, she was honored by the BHA with the Legacy Award for a life-long commitment to the preservation.



### Sarah (Sherry) Ward Grider McNair (1928-2018)

Sarah (Sherry) McNair, a descendant of the pioneer Celaya family of Brownsville, passed away peacefully at her home this July. Born September 22, 1928 to Elmore Starr Grider and Laura Celaya Grider, she spent her lifetime in Brownsville. The McNair family's commitment to local history and historic preservation has made a great impact in the City of Brownsville.

The Brownsville Historical Association truly appreciates the support and kind contributions from Mary Simmons and Sherry McNair over the years. We thank those who made donations to the Association in their name.

## Welcome! NEW BHA MEMBERS

Allan Araiza	Tom & Bernadette Howard	Franceli & Moises Gonzalez
Martha & Taylor Blanton	Gregory A. Lagerstam	Ana Clounga
Nathan Burhart	Arturo Mancias	Elisa Hernandez
Bridgett Collis	Zachary Ramsey	Karen & Alex Benavente
Maribel De Ponce	Ana Rivera	Jesus (JD) DeLeon
Nicolas De Ponce	Gloria Sanchez	Jose Hernandez
Andrew Garza	Jasmin Santibanez	Frida A. Leija
Gilbert Hernandez	Andrea Stove	

**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.brownvillehistory.org](http://www.brownvillehistory.org) for more information.

## CURATORS CORNER: KEEPING HISTORY

As a cultural institution, the Brownsville Historical Association has upheld its mission through the display and collection of historical artifacts. For the institution, these artifacts assist in promoting the history, culture, and heritage of Brownsville. Over the course of recent years, there has been a shift towards incorporating historic preservation to assist in the development of a comprehensive local history. Historic preservation has allowed the Brownsville Historical Association to incorporate local landmarks as artifacts for the community for veneration, pleasure, and education. Today, the Association has successfully completed and maintained various historic preservation projects, some of which are: the Stillman House, Los Laureles Ranch House, the Historic Alonso Building, and the Market Square Research Center. The distinct meaning of the terms associated with preservation (restoration and rehabilitation) must be grasped in order to communicate the importance of our preservation efforts:

Restoration is defined as the act or process of accurately recovering the form and details of a property and its setting as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of later work or by the replacement of missing earlier work.

Rehabilitation is defined as the act or process of restoring a property to a state of utility through repair or alteration that makes possible an efficient contemporary use, while preserving those portions or features of the property that are significant to its architectural and cultural values.

The BHA continues its work in restoration and rehabilitation as part of its mission and vision for the future.

Aubrey Nielsen, Collections Manager

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

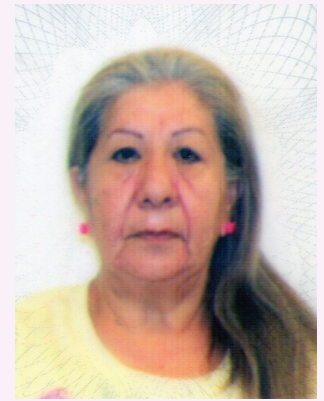
We are excited to proudly highlight a staff member in each newsletter and introduce you to our committed team.

We are proud to introduce you to Esther Ramirez, Maintenance Technician for the Stillman House, Heritage Museum, Market Square building, Old City Cemetery Center and the Laureles Ranch House Museum.

Esther began working for the BHA in 2001; when Kino Camarillo (long-time caretaker) was still living in the apartment adjacent to the Stillman House. Today her responsibilities include preparing for public programs, caring for the Stillman House gardens, assisting in exhibit assembly and directing volunteers. Thanks to Esther's high work standards and pleasant demeanor, she has made the work environment at the Brownsville Historical Association a great one for all staff members.

Esther is a great cook and helps prepare most of the food for our monthly Historical Happy Hours and public programs. She has also presented for some of our public programs featuring arts & crafts. Her contributions to our Día De Los Muertos exhibits have become renowned throughout the years. Esther is a valuable member of our team!

And next time you stop by one of our museums, you might ask her if ghosts have made appearances at any of our properties... she certainly has a story or two to tell you!



**Esther Ramirez**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Historical Happy Hour: "Stranger Things" Halloween Costume Party

**When:** Friday, October 26, 2018 – 5 to 7 pm

**Where:** La Carcel (Old County Jail) 1201 E. Van Buren St.

**Cost:** Free for BHA members, \$5 if you RSVP and pay before the event, \$10 at the door.

If you want Justice for Barb then come dressed as your favorite "Stranger Things" character. (Halloween costume) Prizes will be awarded to the best dressed and best dressed Stranger Things character. This month's happy hour is sponsored by our friends at L&F Distributors. Check our Facebook Page for this month's featured beers. Attendees must be 21 years & older.

### Charles Stillman's Birthday Celebration

**When:** Saturday, November 3, 2018 – 10 am to 4 pm

**Where:** Historic Brownsville Museum, Heritage Museum, & Stillman House Museum

**Cost:** Free museum admission for all visitors

Born in Wethersfield, Connecticut in 1810 to Capt. Francis Stillman and Harriet Stillman (née Robbins), Charles Stillman arrived in Matamoros in 1828, Tamaulipas, Mexico and established himself as an entrepreneur. He was involved in cotton brokerage and real estate, in addition to silver mines in Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Today we celebrate his 209th birthday with free museum admission. *Free coffee and birthday cake.*

## UPCOMING EXHIBITS

### *Remember Me: Celebrating El Dia De Los Muertos,* Exhibit Opening

**When:** October 16, 2018 @ 5:00 pm

**Where:** Brownsville Heritage Museum, Vezzetti Room  
1325 E. Washington Street

**Cost:** Free and open to the public

Join the Brownsville Historical Association, in partnership with the Consul of Mexico at Brownsville, for the exhibit opening of *Remember Me: Celebrating El Dia De Los Muertos*. A variety of hands-on craft activities celebrating El Dia de los Muertos, will take place which include: decorating sugar skulls (\$1 fee), designing Papel Picado, crafting paper flowers, and mask decorating. Traditional Mexican-style foods like, pan de muerto and other treats will be served.

### *Christmas Tree Forest Exhibit*

**When:** December 4, 2018 – January 5, 2019

**Where:** Brownsville Heritage Museum, Vezzetti Room  
1325 E. Washington Street

**Cost:** Exhibit is included with paid museum admission.

The Brownsville Historical Association is proud to present the first annual *Christmas Tree Forest Exhibit*, on display from Tuesday December 4, 2018 to Saturday, January 5, 2019. The exhibit is a great way to creatively showcase your personal talents or an organization to scores of people who come in to view the beautiful display of Christmas trees.

**Brownsville Historical Association**  
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Brownsville, TX



Cyclobia Family Bike Ride



Author WF Strong book signing



Museum Gift Shop

## Historical Happenings



Historical Happy Hour: "Game Night"



Yoga at the Los Laureles Ranch House



Ghost Hunt at the Historic Brownsville Museum