

# BHA Banner Newsletter

Brownsville Historical Association

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## Inside this Issue:

Brownsville World War II Veterans 1	
Executive Director	2
Pan American Round Table I of Brownsville Celebrates 85 Years	2

## Brownsville Historical Association

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## Brownsville World War II Veterans

**D**r. Joseph “J.B.” Coulter has been a longtime resident of Brownsville, Texas. He practiced veterinarian medicine for decades and also served in local politics.

As a senior in high school, Dr. Coulter had been duck hunting with Bob Hunter when they heard about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The next day, Brownsville superintendent Ben Bright called an assembly, addressed the student body, and informed them to forget about college and join the military to become avengers!

Dr. Coulter soon thereafter volunteered for service in the U.S. Navy and joined the submarine service after completing boot camp. His first venture was to Dutch Harbor,

Alaska, and then to Oahu, Hawaii. He noted that submarine service was dangerous, but paid double wages. Twenty percent of World War II veterans who served on subs did not return. J.B. further added that life on the submarine could only be described as “packed.” There were 65 men, but only 40 bunks. While some soldiers were attending to their duties, others were sleeping. The mission of his crew was to support efforts in retaking Pacific Islands that had been captured by the Japanese. J.B. ran the diesel engines onboard the sub and remembered one day being knocked in the head when a crew member above accidentally kicked a water can into an open hatch. At night, the crew would listen to the radio program “Tokyo Rose” or play cards. Later, his submarine crew saw action near Australia.

At the end of the war, he received \$17, enough money to travel from Houston to Brownsville. The discharge process was an all-day affair. After the service, he received the G.I. Bill which allowed him to enroll at Texas A & M and eventually earn his degree in veterinarian medicine.

Longtime Brownsville resident Frank Maldonado also served in World War II as a medic and spent time in the Philippines and New Guinea. He had an interest in biology early on, and had



*Frank Maldonado and J.B. Coulter, World War II Veterans.*

*Continued on Page 2*

## From the Executive Director...

As this newsletter goes to print, the Board of Directors, staff and volunteers are busy planning for the 4th Annual Paella Festival Cook-off Competition taking place October 21 at the Historic Laureles Ranch House Museum. We are grateful to our sponsors for their support and the hard-working cooking teams that make our event one-of-a-kind. I hope that our members attend this fundraising event and enjoy the friendly competition and live flamenco entertainment from Spain and Mexico. Please call 956-548-1313, for more information.



Also in October, we host our annual Haunted History Tours and Ghost Hunts in partnership with RGV Paranormal Investigators, our talented volunteer tour guides and the Brownsville Independent School District. In addition, we look forward to hosting the Texas Historical Commission in partnership with the Brownsville Convention and Visitors Bureau at the end of October. Over the next few months, several exhibits will be on display at our museums, including a new collection of a miniature Holiday Village gifted to the BHA by the Gloor family. Enclosed in this newsletter is our calendar of events and programs. I hope to see you at our museums and programs soon.

I truly appreciate your membership with the Brownsville Historical Association. It is with your support that we are able to continue to serve the Brownsville community. Please consider a contribution to the Association at year's end and visit our gift shops while shopping this holiday season.

Have a Happy Thanksgiving and Blessed Christmas!

Tara Putegnat  
*Executive Director*

some training in first aid prior to the onset of the war. After joining the service, Mr. Maldonado received basic training at Camp Barkeley in Abilene, Texas, and then at Fitzsimons Army Hospital in Colorado. He remembered going overseas in an old captured German ship from World War I. Leaving from San Francisco, Frank recalled passing under the Golden Gate bridge and hearing the song, "I'll Be Seeing You!" It was August 1944, and he was nineteen years old. After a difficult landing on the coast of Leyte in the Philippines, with Japanese Zero's and allied P-38's battling it out overhead, Mr. Maldonado settle in, working at headquarters.

He also had two cousins from Brownsville that were killed in World War II, as well as two brothers that served in the war and made it back home. His oldest brother Tony served as a flight instructor, while his other brother was an aerial photographer.

Mr. Carl Chilton was born in 1923 and served in World War II as a bombardier, which included flying missions over Germany. He joined the military at age nineteen and volunteered for the Air Force. He was first sent to Washington, D.C. and then to Miami, Florida, where he received basic training. He finished his flight training by 1944 and was later assigned to a B-26 Bomber. From France, his crew flew thirteen bombing missions over Germany where he encounter several narrow escapes from anti-aircrafts weapons.

In October 1945, he was discharged from the service, but stayed active through the reserves until 1952. Mr. Chilton also taught at Texas Southmost College and later opened an accounting office in Brownsville where he worked for 37 years.

James Mills

## Pan American Round Table I of Brownsville Celebrates 85 Years

*By Isabel G. Vezzetti, PART I Immediate Past State Director*

The history of the Pan American Round Table I of Brownsville would not be complete without reviewing one of the key factors that influenced its formation. This was the Pan American effort that was a direct result of the Monroe Doctrine. Even though Spanish dominance in the Americas had been defeated in 1826 by the leadership of such Generals as Simon Bolivar, Jose San Martin, and Garibaldi, Spain and the other European monarchies, it had remained a constant threat to the newly founded freedom. It was then that United States President James Monroe intervened to protect all the Western Hemisphere and issued the Monroe Doctrine, which intended to prevent any other foreign powers from ever seizing or invading any of the nations of the Americas. Pan Americanism was born. It was the joining of all the peoples in the Western Hemisphere for a common goal of freedom. However in 1890, the role of Pan Americanism took on a different face. Instead of using conflict to insure freedom, more peaceful means to achieve the same goal were sought. This led to the first Pan American Conference in Washington, D. C. with the purpose of preserving peace among all the nations of the Americas. Resulting from the conference was the establishment of the Pan American Union in 1910. Its goals were to promote friendship and cooperation among the nations of the Western Hemisphere.

Also, during 1910 to 1916, politics in Mexico were in an upheaval which resulted in destruction, banditry, and the displacements of many Mexican citizens. Many women and children made their way across the Rio Grande to escape the perils of revolution, only to become helpless refugees in San Antonio. This deeply troubled Mrs. Florence Terry Griswold. She wanted to

*Continued on Page 3*



Members of the Pan American Round Table I posed in costumes to stimulate interest in Charro Days. Circa 1938

help in any way she could, taking many of the women and children into her own home to feed and shelter them.

Drawing on the philosophy and mission of Pan Americanism and her own life experiences, Florence Terry Griswold, created the Pan American Round Table Movement in October, 1916 in San Antonio, Texas. The first meeting was held at the historic Menger Hotel on the 16th of October, 1916.

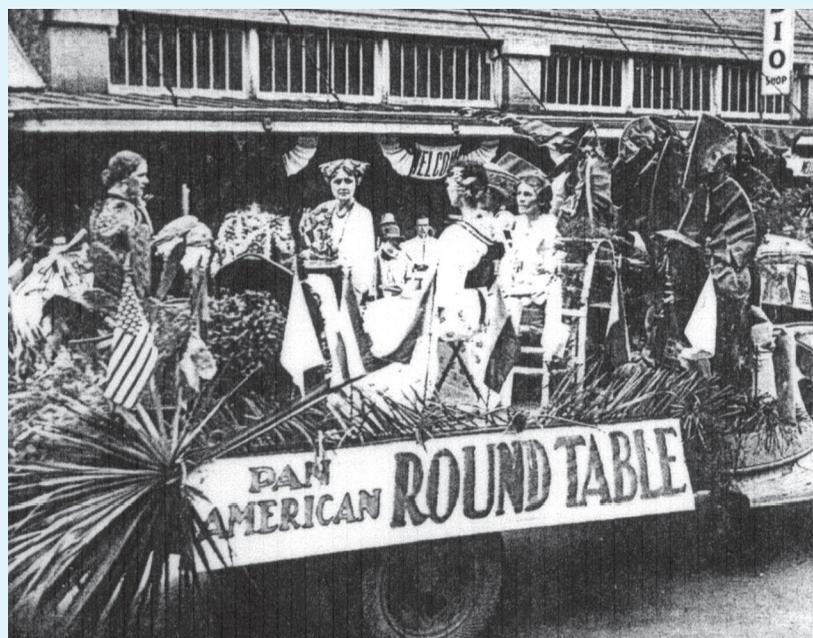
The creation of the Pan American Round Table was modeled after the Medieval Round Table, where the members were all equal. Each country in the Western Hemisphere was represented on the table. A circle, that had no beginning and no end, symbolizing unity, was adopted as an insignia. At the base of this circle, were the flags from the different represented countries. The Mission of the Pan American Round Table Movement was to study the countries of the Western Hemisphere so that this knowledge would lead to understanding and eventually to friendship.

The Pan American Round Table Movement began to spread quickly. Other Texas' cities followed and organized their own Round Tables, Laredo and El Paso in 1921, Austin in 1922. Also in 1922, a state organization was formed and a convention was held. In 1928, a member of the San Antonio PART moved to Mexico City and organized a Round Table in Mexico City. The latter would play a vital role in the Pan American Round Table Movement in our own city of Brownsville, Texas.

The Pan American Round Table I of Brownsville was founded in 1932 by Mrs. Bessie Kirkland Johnson. She had belonged to the PART in Mexico City and upon her move

to Brownsville, she was named honorary member of that same Table. In organizing PART I, Mother Johnson, as she was affectionately called, brought with her many life experiences that helped promote the philosophy and ideals of Pan Americanism and the PART Movement. Born in Houston in 1874, she moved with her family to Tuxpan, Veracruz, Mexico and spent most of her "growing up" years in Mexico. She married George W. Johnson at age 18 and they settled in Oaxaca, Mexico and later moved to Mexico City. Bessie Johnson fell in love with Mexico, its people, its customs, and its dress.

It was then that she began her collection of authentic Mexican costumes and handicrafts and became one of Mexico leading authorities on that country's folklore and native dress. In 1932, the Johnsons moved to Brownsville with Pan American Airways. Bessie brought with her the rich love for Mexico and her knowledge of the Pan American Round Table Movement. Together with a group of interested women, they met at the El Jardin Hotel and organized the Pan American Round Table I of Brownsville. The Brownsville Herald of October



First Charro Days 1938.

1932 states: "Mrs. Volney Taylor, well known club woman, presided as temporary Chairman, Mrs. J. L. Rentfro, acting as temporary secretary for this meeting. The luncheon table was appointed in pink with bowls of pink rosebuds,

*Continued on Page 4*

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## Pan American Round Table I of Brownsville Celebrates 85 Years

*Continued from Page 3*

I also brought the State Convention to Brownsville five separate times. PART I was the fifth Table to be organized in Texas. It has helped, through the years, to organize other Tables both in Texas and throughout the Americas. PART I is probably best known for its unique costume collection. This collection is now housed in the PART I Costume of the Americas Museum and is owned by the Costume Corporation. These costumes were modeled for many years during a Charro Days "Merienda" The latter was always attended by hundreds of people who marveled at the beauty of all the costumes. The costumes were also modeled upon request for schools, other Tables, and conventions. The latter are still occurring today. Mrs. George R. Lipe in writing about the history of PART I stated it best "The unique geographical location of Brownsville, with Mexico beside it, the consulates here, for years the army post and a major headquarters for Pan American Airways, all have given this Table many outstanding opportunities to meet, greet and help host distinguished celebrities and to be of service to the community. Through these contacts and the intense interest and activity with costumes, this has always been and continues to be a strong and very active Table."

corona vine and fern forming the center adornment. Mrs. F. W. Johnson, Sr. was elected director with the following other officers: first assistant director, Mrs. Volney Taylor; second assistant director, Mrs. Pedro Chapa; recording secretary, Mrs. G. W. Johnson, Jr.; Treasurer, Mrs. John Holler; corresponding secretary, Mrs. Gridler Perkins; parliamentarian, Mrs. Willa A. George and historian, Mrs. Albert Fernandez."

Pan American Round Table I became very active in civic and community affairs. They helped in the organization of the first Charro Days, educated the community on the textiles of the countries of the Western Hemisphere, and awarded many scholarships to graduating Brownsville students so that they may continue their higher education. Since its formation in 1932, the Pan American Round Table I of Brownsville has been very successful due to the hard work and dedication of many women that came before us. These women gave unselfishly of their time never expecting praise and monetary rewards. They were dedicated to the ideals of Pan Americanism and believed in the principles and dreams of our Founder, Florence Terry Griswold. From this Table came five State Directors. PART