BERNARD HARRIS' GROUNDBREAKING SPACEWALK
By Michael Hurd

FORGOTTEN WOMEN OF TEXAS HISTORY
By Clayton Maxwell

THE EL PASO TRAGEDY, ONE YEAR LATER
By Roberto José Andrade Franco

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BY JAC DARSNEK

NOVEMBER 2020
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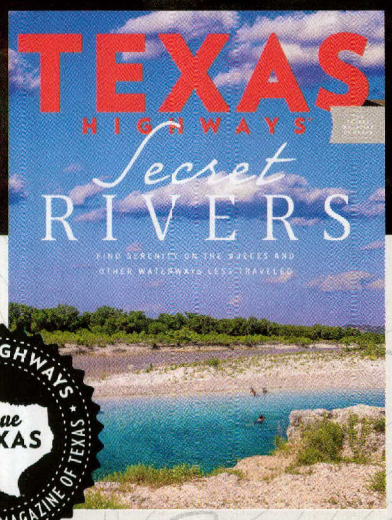

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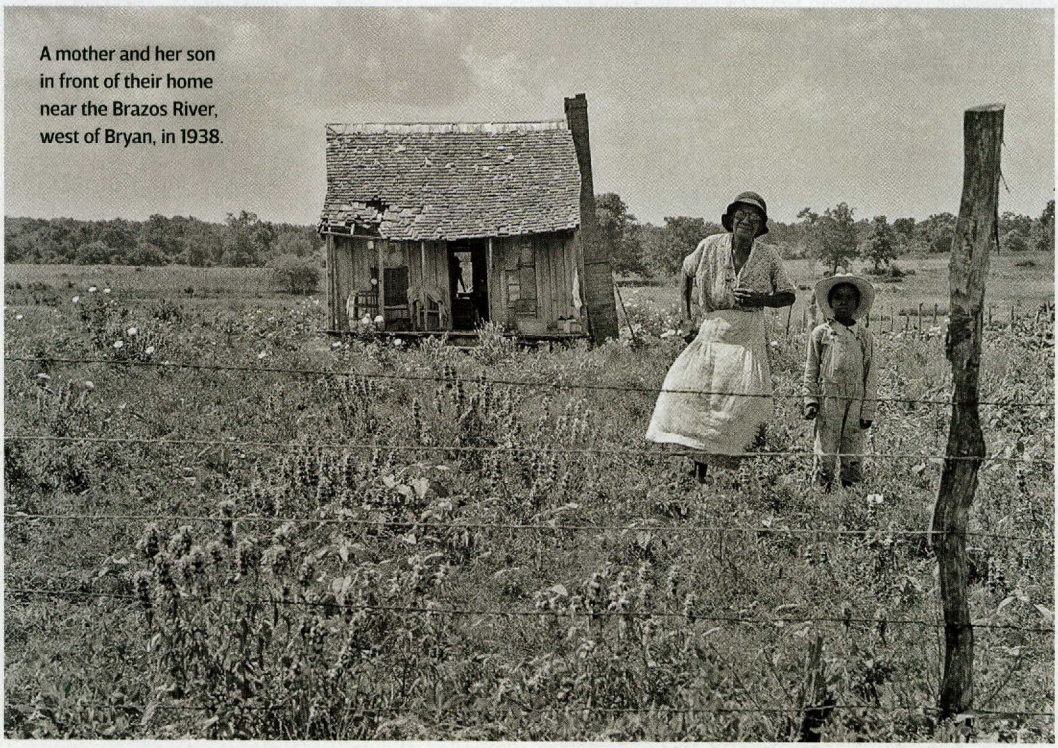
EDITOR'S

NOTE



A mother and her son in front of their home near the Brazos River, west of Bryan, in 1938.

Texas Tough

I've spent a lot of time this year thinking about the generations that have come before us. There are few things more comforting during hard times than hearing stories about people who survived even harder times. The photo above was taken by famed Depression-era photojournalist Dorothea Lange in June 1938. Her description of the photo is sparse—"wife and child of Negro laborer of the Brazos riverbottoms." While we don't know the details of their lives, we know enough about the time period to know their day-to-day existence must have been arduous. And yet they are surviving, standing strong and proud amid the wildflowers.

Our aim with this issue is to highlight the resilience Texans have displayed during some of the most difficult moments in our state's history. Our cover story, by Traces of Texas founder Jac Darsnek, shares powerful photos of Texans banding together and rebuilding after events like the 1930s Dust Bowl, the 1900 Galveston hurricane, and devastating floods. Elsewhere, writer-at-large Clayton Maxwell uncovers the stories of three tenacious Texas women who may not hold a prominent place in history books but whose impact on their communities reverberated across generations. And contributing writer Michael Hurd checks in with astronaut Bernard Harris Jr. 25 years after his barrier-smashing spacewalk, reminding us that Texans have often relied on inner determination to defy the odds.

What ties all of these stories together is the fortitude Texans have displayed no matter the obstacle and the way they prioritized taking care of their neighbors. I hope their stories provide comfort, strength, and inspiration to forge ahead.

Emily R Stone

EMILY ROBERTS STONE
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Photo: Dorothea Lange, Farm Security Administration, Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress

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SPACE SHUTTLE Discovery takes off for its STS-70 mission in 1995.

Photo: Courtesy NASA

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VOLUME 67 . NUMBER 11

NOVEMBER

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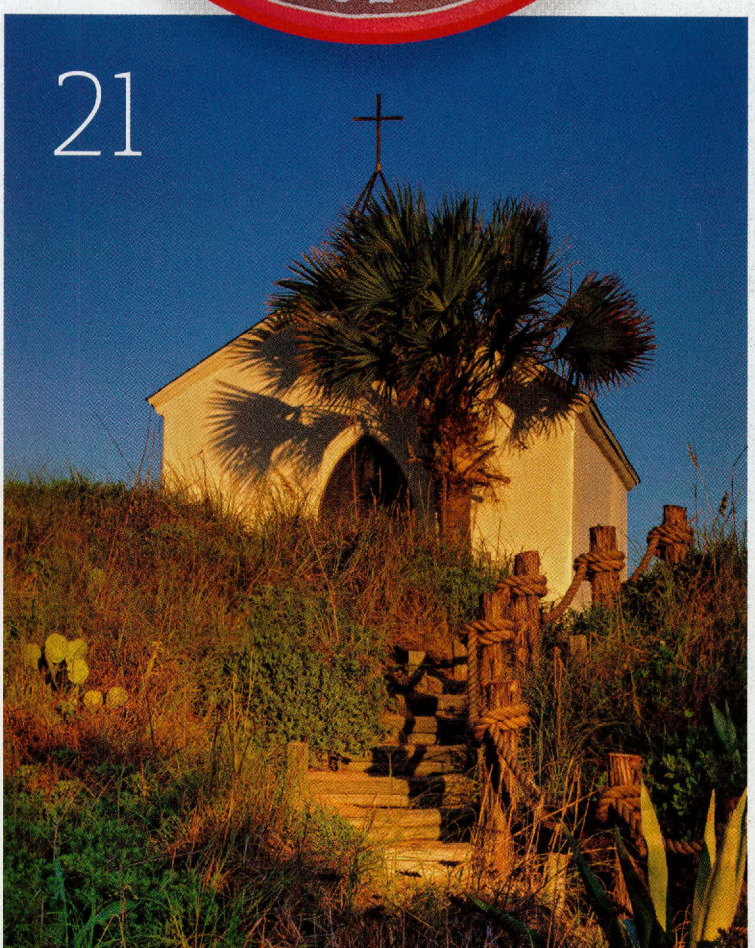

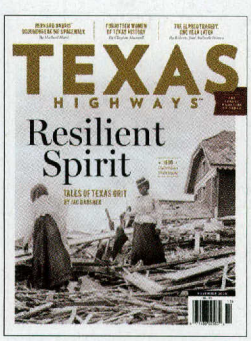

ON THE COVER
Photo by M.H. Zahner/Courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Photos: Nathan Lindstrom (top); Larry Ditto (bottom)

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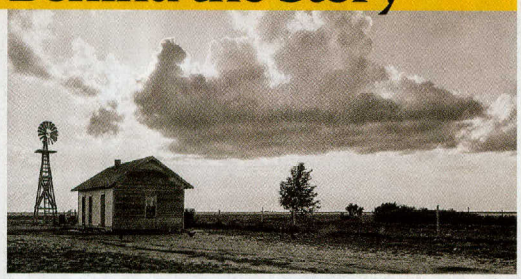
Behind the Story



For history buff Jac Darsnek, it wasn't hard to find images of past Texas hardships for "Tales of Texas Grit" (Page 38). He runs the popular Traces of Texas website and social media accounts, which showcase historic photographs. To choose the photos for the story, he dove into various public archives as well as his own to find characters who conveyed a message of resilience. "When I look at a photo, do I see a person who is rising up or a person who has been defeated?" says Darsnek, who started Traces of Texas in 2005. "I wanted to show that Texans rebuilt—that even in the face of terrific tragedy, Texans were making the best of it. Texans were banding together." In these images, the Austin-based photographer found a message of hope and a uniquely Texan mettle. "I really loved the photograph of the people in Fort Worth drinking coffee after the flood because it's just so prosaic," he says. "It's kind of like a thumb in the eye of the flood. 'Yeah, OK, you flooded us, but there's coffee to be drunk.'"

Featured Contributors

Roberto José Andrade Franco

The North Texas-based freelance writer, who was raised in the El Paso-Juárez borderland, wrote about his hometown for this month's essay, "The Desert Reclaims Everything" (Page 14). "I hadn't given much thought to growing up along the Texas-Mexico border until I moved to Dallas in 2014," Franco says. "I've always loved El Paso and Juárez. But from a distance, I've gained a greater appreciation for the cities and a better understanding of their complicated past and present." Franco has written for *ESPN*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Dallas Morning News*, *D Magazine*, and *Deadspin*.

James L. Haley

The award-winning author wrote "Divided Times" (Page 70), about the anti-secessionist movement in Texas, because he felt many Texans misunderstand the state's pre-Civil War history. "Secession was promoted by the plantation elite," the Austin-based writer explains, "but probably just as many Texans opposed it." Haley pitched the story during a lunch with *Texas Highways* senior managing editor Matt Joyce. "Matt and I won an award for our article on Texas independence in the March 2015 issue, and I was keen to work with him again," he says. Haley has authored more than 20 books, including *Sam Houston* and *Passionate Nation*.

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Photos: Dorothea Lange, Farm Security Administration, Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress (top); Mark Matson (bottom)


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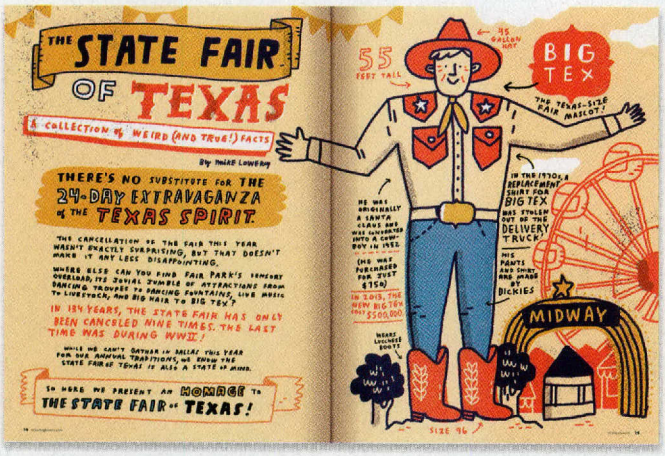


Your last few editions have been wonderful! This month's issue was special, particularly the cover story on pecan trees and the illustrated pages on the State Fair of Texas. How difficult it must be to think up new material for a travel magazine in a time when many of us are not traveling.

Norman and Patsy Davis, Paris

Sign Me Up
This story has a picture of the Tavern restaurant in Crystal City ["Beer Signs of the Times," October]. My Aunt Beth and Uncle Ben Gault ran the place in the 1950s and '60s.
John J. Tolbirt, Odem

Quilting Traditions
Oh, how beautiful ["The Fabrics of Her Life," October]! Quilting is one of those dying arts. I treasure my family-made quilts.
@bournetexan

Healthy Alternatives
I was good until the part about cauliflower gravy ["Clean and Crafty," October]. Some things are just sacred, y'all!
@ashseverance

The Barrow Gang

As a new subscriber, I was disappointed to see an article about murderers and thieves made out to be folk heroes ["Flipping the Script," October]. Bonnie and Clyde left a trail of death everywhere they went through several states. They carried a large arsenal with them at all times and had no remorse for killing anyone. The fact that they made a glorified movie about these murderers is a disgrace. The only heroes were the Rangers that killed them. They prevented uncountable deaths.

G H Ryder, Hawkins

Pecan-troversy

Your article on pecans (*Carya illinoinensis*) stated that they are the only nuts native to North America ["Deep Roots," October]. Not true! In Texas alone, there are also the black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) and the black hickory (*Carya texana*). And while the article did say that the pecan tree was the official state tree, it neglected to mention that the pecan itself is the official state nut and the pecan pie is the official state pie! As a Texas Master Naturalist, I usually include this information in a presentation I give on Texas trees. I was disappointed that you did not include it in your magazine article.

Cathy Hill, Buchanan Dam

TH: Well, nuts! Good catch. We checked with Texas A&M University and confirmed that Texas' native nuts and trees include walnut, beech, and hickory—one of which is the pecan.

Better Life Ahead

The essay in which Ms. ire'ne lara silva so poignantly described her childhood experiences brought back a lot of emotions and memories of riding from location to location following the growing and picking cycles ["A Place Before Words," September]. The people we met along the way and the experiences learned taught us that hard work and having a close family with shared experiences helped in the sense that there was a better life ahead. The literacy rate might not have been that great among the adults, but us kids, if it was written somewhere, we would read it.

Raul Gonzalez, Conroe

Texas Beauty

The September 2020 issue of your magazine is one of your best. It is a beautiful issue. Thank you for giving us this collection of Texas' wonderful sights and places to visit.

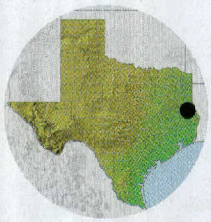
Carolyn Tasin Rampmeier, High Point, North Carolina

We want to hear from you! Send photos, feedback, and recommendations to letters@texashighways.com; P.O. Box 11009, Austin, TX, 78714-1009. Follow @TexasHighways on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest.

Photo: George W. Ackerman/U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

Yesterday's News

Photographer George W. Ackerman took this picture of a Coryell County farmer taking a break from the fields in September 1931. Ackerman worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, documenting rural life across the country throughout the early 20th century and the Great Depression. Though the subject's name was not recorded, he evokes the common agrarian lifestyle of the time. In 1930, Coryell County, which is in Central Texas, was home to roughly 3,000 small farmers, who mainly raised cotton, cattle, sheep, and goats, according to the *Handbook of Texas.*



San Augustine

Betty Oglesbee restores the architectural treasures of her historic hometown

By Gary Borders

BETTY OGLESBEE and the San Augustine Garden Club raised $657,000 to help restore the 1927 San Augustine County Courthouse.

Photo: Dave Shafer

Known as the "Cradle of Texas," San Augustine has a rich history predating the Texas Revolution. The Spanish built Mission Dolores along El Camino Real in 1719 to serve as an outpost among the native Ais tribe. In the 1830s and '40s, San Augustine was home to many influential Texans, including Sam Houston and James Pinckney Henderson, the state's first governor. San Augustine today is known for its historic architecture and a rural economy based on the poultry and timber industries. Lifelong resident Betty Oglesbee has had a hand in many of the town's restoration projects through her fundraising role with the San Augustine Garden Club. "I don't know how to not be involved," says Oglesbee, 86, who raised four sons here with her late husband, John Oglesbee. "I have to care. If I think there is something to do to help, I have to try. I feel like I have to stay busy."

Stories Everywhere

"Just think of the history oozing in every direction. Everything has a story behind it. We are putting together a self-guided tour of the Augustus Phelps homes [from the 1830s]. The soon-to-be restored Mission Dolores museum at the mission site on the Ayish Bayou is fascinating. If you're interested in genealogy, our library has an outstanding department. The jail museum contains a history of San Augustine law enforcement officers, plus the late Willie Earl Tindall's outstanding Texana collection. And you have to go to San Augustine Drug, on the square, and have a [nonalcoholic] grapefruit highball, invented by pharmacist Casey Jones in the late 1920s."

The Old Rock Gym

"I am working with the San Augustine school district superintendent, Virginia Liepman, to restore the old rock gymnasium. We raised more than $5,000 locally to put in new windows. The gym is a Works Progress Administration project from 1939. We're also working on replacing the doors. It's going to be used as a gym again. It still has gorgeous hardwood floors."

The Lobanillo Swales

"Since El Camino Real comes straight through San Augustine, it's worth driving out to the Lobanillo Swales, 10 miles east of town. This roadway was carved first by buffalo, wild horses, and deer, then continued by Spanish priests and soldiers, and their burros, oxcarts, and wagons, as they established the Spanish missions in the early 1700s. The El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association raised the money to purchase the tract five years ago. Interpretive signage, with maps, timelines, and early history, tells the entire story."

In the Pipeline

"The Mission Dolores site is now operated by the Texas Historical Commission. It hasn't happened yet, but if I can live long enough, we want to go to the Legislature and get funding to build a replica of the mission on the site. I really think that will attract visitors and school buses filled with kids. We received a $75,000 grant from Texas Parks & Wildlife and raised another $125,000 to build a children's park in town across from the law enforcement center. And we're working with TPWD for funding for a wetlands park on 10.5 acres along the Ayish Bayou, which runs through the middle of town."

Autumn in Deep East Texas

"Rural East Texas around San Augustine County is a sight to behold in all seasons, but particularly in the fall. In October and November, the region is transformed with the reds, golds, browns, and yellows of sassafras, red maple, sumac, hickory, oak, Chinese tallow, and sycamore. You can get brochures and maps at the chamber."

Rich in Spirit

"We have the best people here. We're a poverty-level county, but people are so generous. When we did the courthouse renovation, people gave because it's the 'People's House.' People would stop on the street to give the treasurer a $10 bill. We had to raise $657,000 to get the match from the Texas Historical Commission. We ended up with 30 or more pages, single-spaced, of people who gave to the restoration. I just think we have caring people here."

TOWN TRIVIA

POPULATION:
1,877

NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:
3

YEAR FOUNDED:
1834

NEAREST CITY:
Nacogdoches, 35 miles west

MARQUEE EVENT:
San Augustine Sassafras Festival, the fourth Saturday of October

MAP IT:
1919 San Augustine County Jail in the N.L. Tindall Building,

The Desert Reclaims Everything

A son of El Paso returns home a year after the tragedy

By Roberto José Andrade Franco

On the night of the first anniversary of the El Paso massacre, thousands of vehicles formed a line under the full yellow moon. Some drivers wore face masks and waited for more than an hour to enter Ascarate Park. As they slowly entered the park, whose southern border runs parallel to the Rio Grande and the rust-colored border wall demarcating the United States from Mexico, they drove past reminders of that beautiful sunny morning last Aug. 3, that turned dark in an instant.

Past the projected sign shining on a building that proclaimed, "Juntos recordamos. Juntos sanamos." *Together we remember. Together we heal.* Past the volunteers shining their flashlights across the asphalt to direct traffic. Past the construction site on a triangle-shaped median that will become the Healing Garden memorial, where victims' names will be emblazoned on a curved wall anchored by waterfalls. Past an "El Paso Strong" sign made of plywood that rests on a large rock. Past all that, deeper into Ascarate, some drivers dimmed their lights.

In the darkness, what seemed like thousands of luminarias glowed, lighting the way around the park. There were 23 floral sculptures placed along that same path. At the center of the park, 23 spotlights aimed toward the night sky. In the darkness, Ascarate Lake's calm waters reflected some of the lights.

The night felt heavy from the accumulation of the entire day, along with the weight of the past several days and months and year. It all still felt unbelievable. That a killer with the coldest soul drove hundreds of miles to target Mexicans. That 23 innocent lives ended for no other reason than they just lived here. Hard to believe that in the darkness, we were trying to find light.

That's the paradox of this place: El Paso, the city that's in the westernmost part of Texas but also feels separate from it. A place where on the night of the first anniversary of the massacre, driving at 5 mph beside a human-made lake where ducks swim—in the desert—I grieved alongside masked strangers with familiar faces. Strangers who, even if we mourned with a distance between us, understood what united us.

I've always loved this place. It's home. Even if I've tried to run away from it.

I was 17 years old the first time I left the El Paso-Juárez borderland.

It was a few months after graduating high school and a few weeks after I walked out of a job training to sell knives door to door, which felt like a scam. I walked home, in the middle of the beautiful El Paso desert, trying

Illustration: John Jay Cabuay

to figure out what I wanted. Trying to figure out how to escape from a place where I felt a subtle but unyielding desperation.

There's a restlessness that comes from living in the middle of the Chihuahuan Desert. Boredom comes with the realization that you're surrounded by nothing. It's seeing the wide-open spaces and imagining what could be there. It's knowing many desert daydreams are just fading mirages. That's why I wanted to leave. It's also why, when I left, no one asked why.

I didn't have to explain to the aunts, uncles, and cousins I'd see every day in El Paso and those I'd see every weekend in Juárez. Those who, regardless of which side of the river they lived on, lamented the lack of opportunities. "Aqui, no hay progreso," they'd say. Nor did I need to explain to my friends, some of whom were so desperate to leave, they joined the military. I didn't have to explain to teachers, some of whom looked like they were also ready to run away. No one asked why I was leaving. I imagined they understood the desire to escape from this place that, at least to me, felt more like Texas' forgotten dead-end street.

I can still see my mother, father, brother, and sister standing in the driveway, in the middle of another long, hot July day, waving goodbye to me. Sitting in the backseat of my cousin's car, I waved back, convinced I'd never return. My cousin and I then drove to Phoenix, where there was plenty of construction work for those who could tolerate the oppressive sun.

That wasn't the last time I left. A few times, I returned and then left again. Each time I returned, I felt disappointed, as if someone had dragged me back to this place I wanted to escape. Each time I left again, I hoped I'd finally gotten away from the place in the middle of the desert.

When I was a teenager, my mother worked for a few months as a seamstress at a factory that manufactured jeans. My aunt and cousin worked at that same factory for years. Before it went out of business, the manufacturer would give its workers free tickets to an amusement park inside Ascarate. Going there marked the beginning of another sunny summer.

Ascarate is one of the largest parks in El Paso County. Each year, the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department stocks Ascarate's 45-acre lake with bluegill, largemouth bass, catfish, and rainbow trout. Ascarate has a golf course, playgrounds, and picnic facilities. But until 1937, the park didn't exist.

The place that's now Ascarate Park was once a river loop within the Rio Grande, which divides El Paso from Juárez today. That division didn't exist until 1848, when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican War. Mexico lost just over half its territory to the United States, and the river that ran through what was once El Paso del Norte became the border that split the community.

Rivers aren't stable borders. They flood and shift, dry, evaporate, and all but disappear. When the Rio Grande did just that, for about a century, the U.S. and Mexico disputed land around El Paso and Juárez. In 1934, in an attempt to control flooding, the International Boundary Commission began a project to straighten the Rio Grande. In a boundary treaty between the U.S. and Mexico, El Paso was given 354 acres belonging to its southern neighbor. That land later became the start of Ascarate Park.

In May 1938, laborers from the Civilian Conservation Corps began constructing the park in the middle of the Chihuahuan Desert. They planted 7,000 trees and laid 160,000 adobe bricks. They removed more than 1 million cubic yards of sand—careful not to dig too deep or else their machinery would sink in quicksand. They then lined the bottom of that hole with clay. Ascarate Lake was born. Not even two years later, county officials were scrambling to find water to keep the trees from dying and the lake from drying.

The trees and lake survived. Ascarate Park thrived. On the eastern side of the lake, an amusement park, Western Playland, opened in 1960. "We plan to operate a first-class park," said Leo Hines,

president of Western Playland, to the *El Paso Herald-Post* in March 1960. "Later on, we hope to expand and make Western Playland one of the nicest, if not the best, in this part of the country."

For decades, Western Playland's roller coasters, bumper cars, and water rides illuminated the dark desert sky along the Rio Grande. Laughter and carnival music carried well into the night. It was one of the few things to do in the desert without getting into trouble. And then, in 2005, Western Playland left.

"This is another El Paso thing that is being taken away from us," Rosa V. Martinez, a Western Playland enthusiast, told the *El Paso Times* in September 2005.

In June 2007, Western Playland owner Pat Thompson gave a statement to the same newspaper, claiming the county had never been fair to him, remarking they "stabbed me in the back at every opportunity." The county said Thompson breached their agreement, and the closure was his fault.

There's a restlessness that comes from living in the middle of the Chihuahuan Desert. Boredom comes with the realization that you're surrounded by nothing.

Thompson took Western Playland and placed it in front of a casino about 15 miles northwest of Ascarate, across the Texas–New Mexico border. There, he saw the potential for growth, envisioning a hotel and entertainment center. Thompson considered Western Playland key to what could be "the entertainment spot for Southern New Mexico and El Paso."

Back in Ascarate, trash, broken buildings, dismantled rides, and toxic chemicals were the only reminders that an amusement park was once there. Weeds grew from the asphalt track where go-karts once raced. The sun, heat, wind, and dirt ate away at the abandoned signs once full of color.

Given enough time, the desert reclaims everything.

I was 25 years old when I met her, during the summer when it rained so much, so fast, the Rio Grande flooded.

On the Mexican side, where the river's called Río Bravo, the levee broke in multiple places. On the United States' side, the levee gates couldn't be closed.

They'd stopped functioning after years of ignored maintenance under the harsh desert sun. The front page of the *El Paso Times* called it a historic flood. The Texas Army National Guard evacuated Segundo Barrio, where my grandparents lived.

I met her that summer, in 2006, and told her I wanted to leave this place. Years later, when I said it again, she said she'd leave, too, even though she never felt the need to escape. So, we left.

I was 33 years old when we moved to Dallas, all trees, water, and grass. It might as well have been a different world. Together, we saw things we'd never imagined, had experiences we'll never forget. And each time we tried something new in this different world, we shared a look rooted in the unsaid feeling of *Oh my God, we got away*.

Ironically, this was around the time I began making peace with El Paso and Juárez. Living in Dallas after growing up in

I was 34 years old when I realized I could never escape the psyche born from living between two worlds, two countries, two cultures.

El Paso, I saw the Texas experience wasn't the same for all its residents. Texas—a Platonic ideal stereotyped by cowboys, barbecue, and Willie Nelson—has always been exclusionary. A place where even the most Mexican of names—Mexia, Refugio, and Guadalupe—lost their pronunciation coming off a white person's tongue.

Once the fascination of living in a different world fades away, it's easy to feel like an outsider. A sense that even if it's full of wonder, this different world isn't home. And there weren't enough restaurants and parks and tall, shiny buildings in Dallas to make me forget what I'd left behind in El Paso. Not enough distractions to help me ignore the existential concern that if I put too much distance between myself and my roots, I'd struggle to find my way back. Spend too much time here, I worried, and perhaps I'd lose the urge to correct those who ignored the last vowel of my first name.

Not wanting to abandon those roots, we visited El Paso as often as we could. I returned married to the woman I met during the summer when the river flooded. The next time, we arrived with a daughter in tow. Our trips to El Paso became the best part of each summer and Christmas. I came back and found a sense of peace that, at times, allowed me to

appreciate the desert's cool summer sunrise and colorful sunsets. Both helped me contemplate the idea of home.

I was 34 years old when I realized I could never escape the psyche born from living between two worlds, two countries, two cultures. A place where for every sign, car decal, and T-shirt reading "El Paso Strong," there's another claiming "El Paso Más Fuerte."

The borderland. Where for every person who called it the Rio Grande, another called it the Río Bravo. For every person who called it a massacre, another called it a *matanza.*

The processional at Ascarate Park was only one of many ways the 23 slain have been honored.

A few hours after the shooting, people gathered near the Cielo Vista Walmart, where the massacre occurred. Next to U.S., Texas, and Mexico flags, they left stuffed animals, flowers, handmade bilingual signs, and their tears and prayers.

El Paso city officials eventually collected some of the mementos. The El Paso Museum of History will display them in an exhibit, *Resilience*, which will open to the public after the pandemic. The rest of the makeshift memorial got moved to nearby Ponder Park. Even today, people stop to pay their respects in front of signs whose colors have faded from the harsh climate. One read, in gender-neutral Spanish, *Espero que sepas lx amadx que eres*, or "I hope you know you are loved."

The Cielo Vista Walmart reopened about three months after the massacre. Nine days later, the store unveiled the Grand Candela memorial, a 30-foot high, gold-colored votive in front of the store.

On the night of the first anniversary, a nine-person mariachi sang "Amor Eterno" there. In the hours and days and weeks after the massacre, it became the defining song of the matanza. "Yo he sufrido tanto por tu ausencia," the mariachis sang. *I've suffered much in your absence.* Behind them, Grand Candela helped illuminate the night. "Desde ese día hasta hoy, no soy feliz." *From that day until now, I haven't been happy.*

On the day of the anniversary, mourners gathered at Ponder Park, and on the growing makeshift memorial they placed orange ribbons—the color for victims and survivors of gun violence.

That night, the Star on the Mountain—an orientation point on the south side of the Franklin Mountains that for 80 years has symbolized hope, unity, and home—flashed 23 times.

I was 38 years old and visiting El Paso when the coldest, darkest summer came.

Months passed before I could sleep at night after an unthinkably evil person drove more than 10 hours from a Dallas suburb to El Paso, intent on killing as many Mexicans as possible. During those sleepless nights, I'd stare at my phone and read the citywide emergency text message from that day.

"Active shooter in Cielo Vista area. All El Paso City/County residents are asked to shelter." Sent at 11:56 a.m. on Aug. 3, 2019, about 75 minutes after a 911 operator answered the first call asking for help. The operator heard a woman crying as gunfire exploded in the background.

Some days, as I stared at that message—hours before the sun rose to offer relief from the night—I thought about deleting the text.

I thought about how, a few days after the massacre, when we left El Paso and drove back to North Texas, the goodbye hugs from my aging parents felt stronger than usual. They felt tighter, lasted longer. "Tengan cuidado," they told us—*be careful.* With bloodshot eyes, they stared at my then 2-year-old daughter.

At that point, I wanted to stay in El Paso. There was no place else I would have rather been. I felt like I needed to explain why I was leaving. I wanted to tell them I was sorry for once wanting to leave and never come back. Tell them I was old enough, at last, to know whatever I had tried to escape from had nothing to do with their home or even El Paso. Tell my mother I was sorry for all the times I had left and made her cry.

I never erased the text message warning of danger. It's still there. But because it's on an old phone, I don't stare at it anymore during sleepless nights. Now, during those nights—awake in a different world—I think of how the large star on the Franklin Mountains has become the light I walk toward. Because no matter how lost or confused I've felt in my life, I always returned to the El Paso-Juárez borderland.

It's where things make the most sense. Where it's easy to love, even if it's difficult to live. It's home, even if I still struggle against that instinct to escape.

On the day of the first anniversary of the El Paso massacre, my morning somberness lasted into the night.

I didn't expect to fight back tears driving through the path of luminarias. I thought I'd already cried enough. I thought I was fine, until I remembered the matanza.

The killer with the monstrous soul came and changed everything about how El Pasoans see ourselves in this world and at home. That's why the tragedy hurt so much. Why some still can't talk about it without their voices cracking even though whatever hurt we feel can never match the pain of those who lost someone they loved.

Despite the scars that not even the desert can bury, I miss El Paso. I miss Juárez, too. I spent the warmest and most loving summers of my life there. I now realize there's no place I'd rather live. No other culture in which I'd rather raise my daughter. But sometimes, to understand what home is, one has to leave.

So, I left, only to stare back at the middle of the desert and, from a different perspective, see its peerlessness.

See that the Rio Grande can flood the entire city and it still wouldn't be enough to wash away the blood from one of our saddest days.

See that there isn't a machine or man who can dig a lake deep enough in the desert to drown who we are. To drown that love.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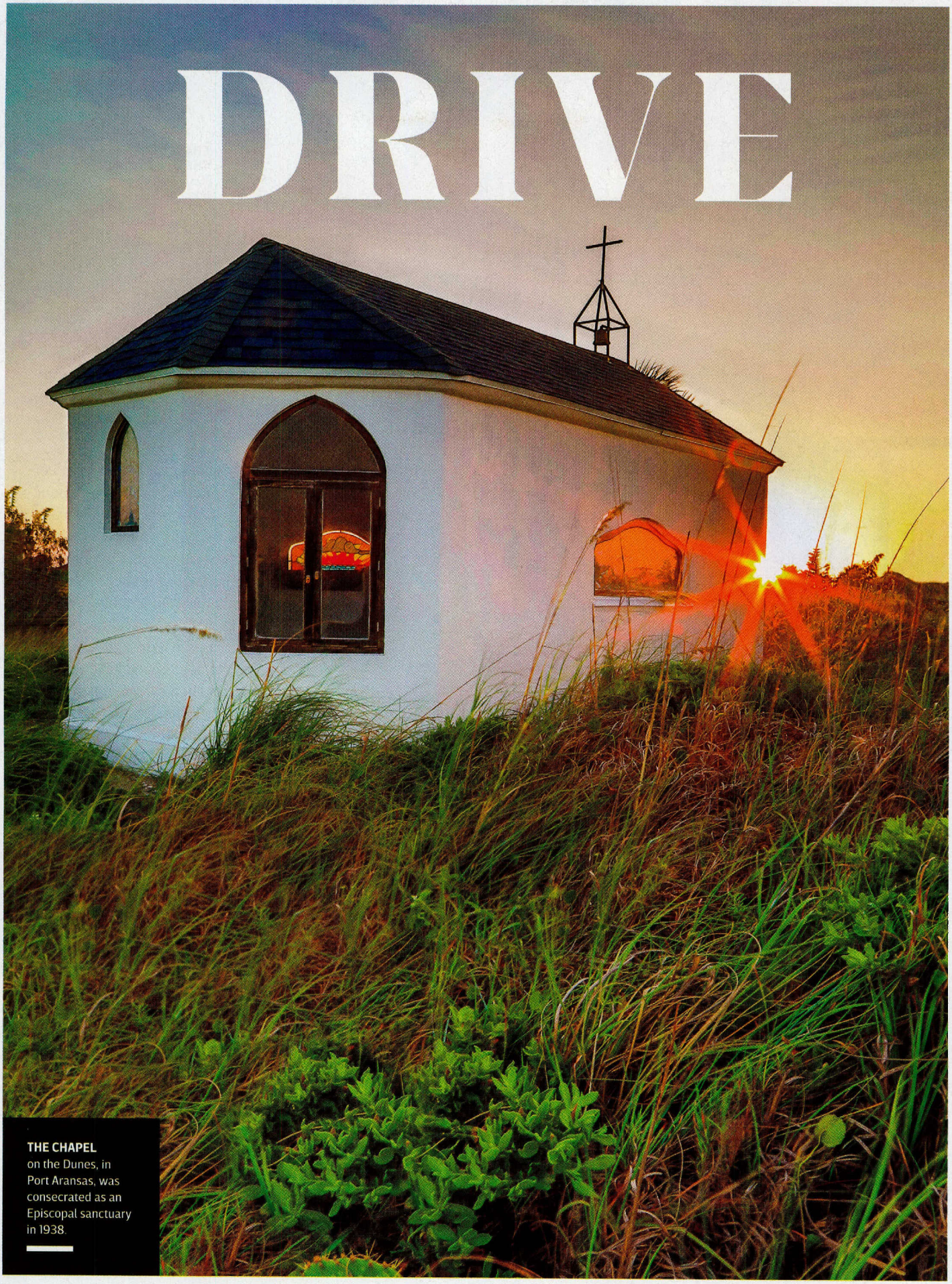
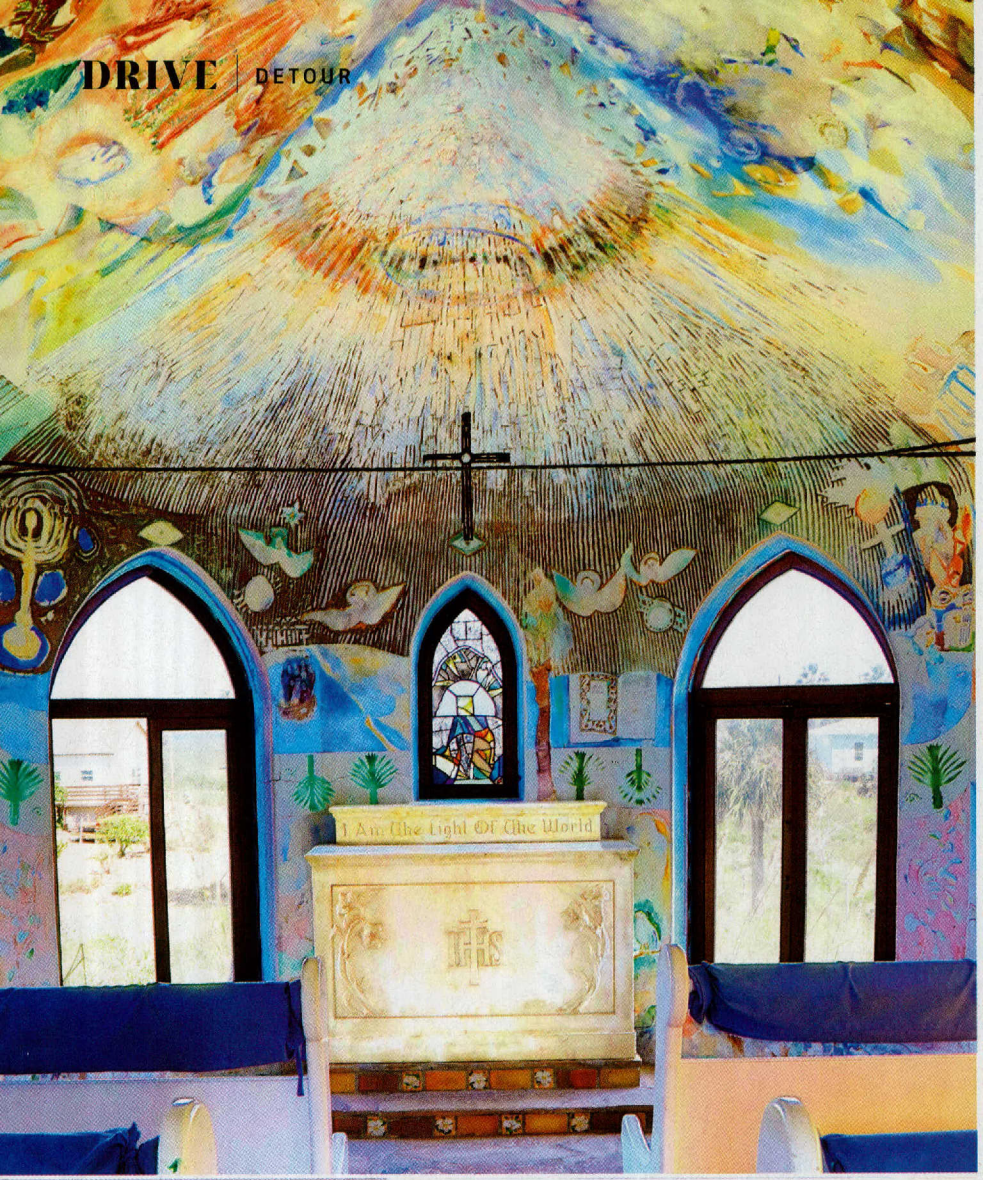


THE CHAPEL on the Dunes, in Port Aransas, was consecrated as an Episcopal sanctuary in 1938.

Photo: Larry Ditto



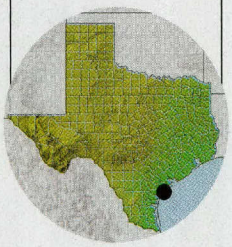
THE CHAPEL became an island mainstay when other religious institutions were destroyed in the 1919 hurricane.

Beyond the Sea

The Chapel on the Dunes is a beacon of hope for travelers seeking inner peace

By Sallie Lewis

CHAPEL ON THE DUNES
203 S. 11th St.,
Port Aransas.
chapelon
thedunes.org



High atop a sand dune in Port Aransas, a small white sanctuary overlooks the ocean. Seagulls glide in the salty air above swaying sea oats and flowering cacti. The Chapel on the Dunes is the oldest continuously functioning church on Mustang Island, and over the past eight decades, as visitors and hurricanes came through, it has become a symbol of strength and longevity in this coastal community. "It's like our own little Sistine Chapel," says Cliff Strain, executive director of the Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association. The group lists the chapel as one of its "Eight Wonders of Port Aransas," a collection of tourist spots including such institutions as Farley Boat Works and the Tarpon Inn.

The chapel, shaped like an irregular convex hexagon, was conceived by San Antonio native Aline B. Carter, a Renaissance woman whose wide-ranging interests included natural sciences, the arts, poetry, and music. Educational opportunities were very limited for women in the early 1900s, but Aline's father, Frank Badger, wanted her to have the best instruction possible. She studied at three schools in Boston, Massachusetts: the Eric Pape School of Art, Boston Conservatory, and Wellesley College, where she developed her love of astronomy. She later taught the subject to young students at San Antonio's Witte Museum and even added an observatory at the Maverick Carter House,

Photo: Larry Ditto

her historic home-turned-museum in the city's downtown.

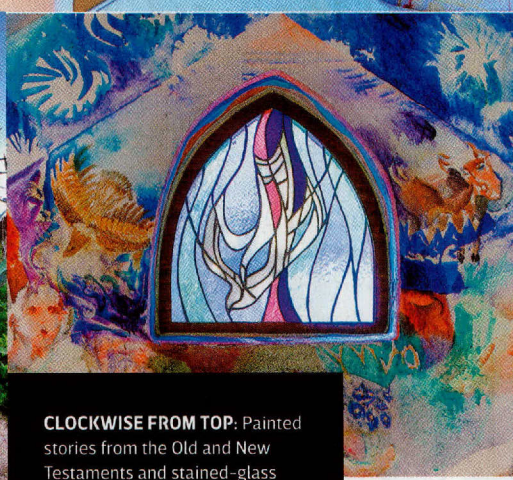
In those days, the journey south to Mustang Island from San Antonio could take up to eight hours by car, followed by a 25-minute ferry ride, which meant Aline and her family would stay for a month or more at a time. Aline had a chapel in her home in San Antonio, and she desired a similar sanctuary to complement her summer house, a 1937 structure made by combining two fishing cabins. The island, only 18 miles long, has had churches dedicated to Baptists, Catholics, and Presbyterians, but Aline wanted one that was open to all. "She was Episcopalian but had Universalist views," says Carter Brown, Aline's great-grandson.

Aline's "Chapel of Eternal Light"—as she called it in her letters—was completed in 1938, with the help of San Antonio artisan Ethel Wilson Harris. Aline conceived of the chapel's design and details, down to the carved flowers on the altar and the tile work, while Harris oversaw the construction. Many of the religious institutions on the island had been destroyed during the 1919 hurricane that ravaged the Gulf Coast. So Aline's chapel established itself as not only a place of weekly worship for the island, but also a destination for meditation, inspiration, and appreciation of the natural world. Following Sunday school, she'd serve ice cream and cake to the kids, who called her the "White Angel" for the flowing white dresses she frequently wore.

In 2018, the Carter family congregated at the chapel to celebrate the life of Frank Carter, Aline's son, who was lovingly called the "Chapel Keeper." Frank lived on the island and looked after the sanctuary beginning in the early 1970s. He took pleasure in sharing it with visitors up until his death at age 99. Though he's passed on, the family and the Port Aransas Historical Museum continue to look after the sanctuary. They've recently repainted the exterior, repaired

Grassroots

For Cliff Strain, executive director of the Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association, the tall, swaying sea oats surrounding the Chapel on the Dunes look like "proud feathery flags." This wild coastal grass is important to the stability of the dunes on Mustang Island. Their latticed root structure holds sediment and stimulates plant growth. Colonies are generally isolated as the weight of their seeds inhibits them from traveling far with the wind. "The fact that sea oats are not found everywhere makes them a unique attraction," Strain says. "To the eye and mind of a naturalist, they bring a feeling of beauty and strength in our local environment."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Painted stories from the Old and New Testaments and stained-glass windows make for a captivating viewer experience; The Chapel overlooks Port Aransas' Old Town neighborhood.

the walkway, and partnered with one of the original vendors, Voss Metal Works, to restore the windows and the door to their original 1930s design. Glass plating is also being added to the stained-glass windows to keep them protected from future storms.

"It has been through some of the worst direct-hit hurricanes, and it just comes out shining," says Marline Carter Lawson, Aline's granddaughter. The chapel even weathered Hurricane Harvey, with the exception of a few lost roof shingles and one broken window.

At 26 feet above sea level, the Chapel on the Dunes hovers high above Port Aransas' Old Town neighborhood, as if lifted in prayer. "When those sea breezes blow through the windows, it creates a very heavenly sight up on that sand dune," Lawson says. It's a picturesque vision, but like most things in life, it's the chapel's inner beauty that lingers in memory.

After Aline died in 1972, Austin-based artist John Patrick Cobb was commissioned to paint the history of Christianity on the chapel's interior walls. He removed the white paint from the stucco and painted stories from the Old and New Testaments on the north and south walls. Every stroke is a wash of kaleidoscopic color: pale peach, periwinkle, sage green, shell pink.

"Approaching Frank Carter about the hopeful restoration of the chapel was, essentially, done for my own redemption," Cobb says. "I was given a true freedom both from Frank and even from the creator to express the joy of life."

"It has been through some of the worst direct-hit hurricanes, and it just comes out shining."

Viewing the murals for the first time is a spellbinding experience, an unexpected discovery dripping with stars, symbolism, revelations, and seascapes. Inside, there are six white benches for parishioners and a carved marble altar bearing the biblical scripture *I Am the Light of the World.* The stained-glass windows on either side of the aisle actively absorb sunlight, casting rays of orange and gold onto the flagstone floors.

Over the years, people have visited the chapel to see Cobb's murals, to experience a piece of Port Aransas history, and to find peace in their own lives. Event rentals and free tours are available through the Port Aransas Historical Museum. "If there is any kind of spark that someone picks up, we are happy," Brown says.

Today, 82 years after its consecration, the chapel remains privately owned by the Carter family and is poetically positioned on one of the island's highest sand dunes—fitting, considering its originator served as the Texas Poet Laureate from 1947 to 1949. In 1948, Aline also co-founded Texas Poetry Day with Lucia Trent. Aline's legacy and love of the written word lives on in Port Aransas with the Aline B. Carter Chapel on the Dunes Poetry Prize for Young Poets, which is open to all students at Port Aransas High School and Brundrett Middle School. Awards are presented on Texas Poetry Day, celebrated annually on Oct. 15.

At 250 square feet, the Chapel on the Dunes may be small, but its importance to this community looms large. "To me it represents the unity of Port Aransas," Lawson says. "I think the island embraces it as its own."

Photos: Larry Ditto

And Nothing Less

Hardworking suffragists secured Texas women's right to vote

By Robyn Ross

Women in the U.S. now turn out to vote at a higher rate than men, a fitting tribute to the women who began fighting for the right to vote in the late 1800s. During that time period, Texas women formed suffrage clubs in cities like Denison, Taylor, Granger, Dallas, and Fort Worth. The Texas Equal Suffrage Association (TESA), headed by New Waverly native Minnie Fisher Cunningham, took the lead in 1915. Its members wrote letters to state and federal legislators, canvassed neighborhoods, marched in parades, and handed out literature supporting the cause. But it was behind the scenes of the 1918 gubernatorial race where Cunningham had the biggest impact.

The race for governor that year pitted former governor James Ferguson against incumbent William Hobby. Cunningham offered Hobby a deal: If he could get the vote for women, the TESA would back him over Ferguson, who opposed suffrage. Hobby called a special legislative session to discuss granting women the right to vote, and on March 26, 1918, he signed the bill into law. The measure applied only to primary elections so that the change would not require amending the state constitution; at the time, Texas was a one-party state controlled by Democrats, and the primary effectively determined the outcome of the general election.

The women kept their promise, securing Hobby the victory. They also urged the Texas congressional delegation and their state legislators to support the 19th Amendment. The Texas Legislature voted to ratify the amendment on June 28, 1919, making Texas the ninth state and the first Southern state to do so. It became law nationwide on Aug. 26, 1920. A century later, female candidates are running for every office from school board to vice president.

How to Lobby Your Representatives for a Vote

(According to the Texas Equal Suffrage Association, circa 1917)

"Be courteous no matter what provocation you may seem to have to be otherwise."

"Try to avoid prolonged or controversial argument. It is likely to confirm men in their own opinion."

"Do find opportunity to make notes on one interview before starting another. If necessary, step into the 'Ladies' dressing room to do this."

Images: Courtesy Texas State Library and Archives Commission

9th

Texas' order among the U.S. states to ratify the 19th Amendment

1918

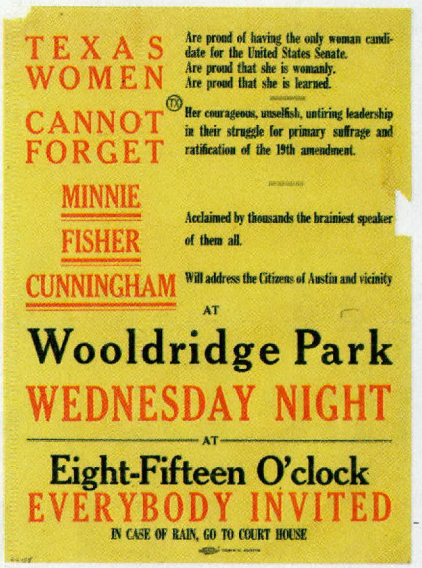
Year white Texas women got the right to vote in primary elections

386,000

Number of women who registered to vote in the 1918 Democratic primary

Unequal Access

Like other facets of Southern life in the first half of the 20th century, the suffrage movement was segregated. White women knew white men would not support any measure that allowed Black women to vote—or that encouraged interaction between white women and Black men at polling places—so they excluded Black women from their suffrage organizations. In practice, the 1918 law that allowed women to vote in primaries applied only to white women, as the Democrats who dominated the state limited primary voting to white people. Women of color gained greater access to the polls after the 1944 Smith v. Allwright decision abolished white-only primaries, and after the landmark Voting Rights Act signed by Lyndon B. Johnson was passed in 1965. The act declared election laws of states with a history of discrimination at the polls, like Texas, subject to federal review. The oversight continued until the Supreme Court struck down that provision in 2013.



Game-Changers

These prominent activists changed the way Texans thought about women's right to vote.

Minnie Fisher Cunningham, a pharmacist by training, worked on public health and city beautification projects in Galveston before leading the Texas Equal Suffrage Association. After Texas ratified the 19th Amendment, she helped organize the national League of Women Voters to educate women about their new right and encourage them to run for office. Cunningham ran unsuccessfully for Senate in 1928 and for governor in 1944, when she finished second among nine candidates.

Christia Adair collected signatures for pro-suffrage petitions in Kingsville, but after the movement's victory, she was turned away from the polls because she was Black. She decided to put her energy into racial-justice efforts and became a leader in the Houston NAACP, which in 1944 sued a local election judge for preventing a Black man from voting. The U.S. Supreme Court decided Smith v. Allwright in the voter's favor, declaring the practice unconstitutional and ending the custom of "white primaries" in Texas.

Jovita Idár was an activist for women's and Mexican-American rights in the early 20th century. As a journalist for Laredo newspapers, she supported women's suffrage and urged women to participate in the public sphere. In 1911 she and her family coordinated a conference where Mexican Americans organized to work for their civil liberties. The same year Idár founded La Liga Femenil Mexicanista, a feminist organization that focused on women's rights and children's education.

Illustrations: Sarah Walsh

These Are the Days of Our Lives

Stare into the heart of the pandemic at the Houston Center for Photography's online exhibition *Togethering*

By Jason Stanford

Photo: Suzanne Koett

When we all went indoors in March, Suzanne Koett went outside. A canceled vacation meant the Austin-based photographer and artist had a bunch of film and time on her hands. "I just decided to pop in on my friends and see how they were dealing with everything," she says.

She took their pictures—her outside, her friends inside. Many of her subjects bore serious, even grim expressions, but there was an exception: Chalimar Chieza, who was beaming with enthusiasm as her whole happy family posed while jammed into the window frame of their red back door. There was Tatenda Chieza, her soccer coach husband; Rubye and Solomon, her daughter and son; and Ezekiel, her new baby, whom Koett was seeing for the first time.

"I wanted to take a photograph of Chalimar's family because Chalimar was still teaching and trying to manage three kids with her husband, and it's just a circus," Koett says. "They were really happy about being home and getting to be with their kids, but it was also crazy trying to teach and get any other work done. They just love being together."

Koett's pandemic portrait of the Chiezas, titled "Day 11," is one of 173 photographs from 15 countries in *Togethering*, a virtual exhibition by the Houston Center for Photography. The show launched on the center's website, hcponline.org, on Sept. 15, and it will run in perpetuity. The photographs prove the coronavirus corollary to the *Anna Karenina* principle: Under quarantine, we're all in this together, but we're getting through this alone and in our own way. The photographs document virtual proms and graduations, the unraveling of a barricade around a playground, and a staged scene of someone reading a newspaper on fire.

"Conceptually, people approached things differently," says Ashlyn Davis, the center's executive director and curator. "It kind of delighted me. Part of it is the boredom. Like, what are we going to do today?"

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1846, by S. Augustus Mitchell, in the Clerk's office of the District Court of the eastern district of Pennsylvania.

UNCOVERING THE UNTOLD STORIES OF 3 MIGHTY TEXAS WOMEN

By Clayton Maxwell

Illustration: Daniel Baxter

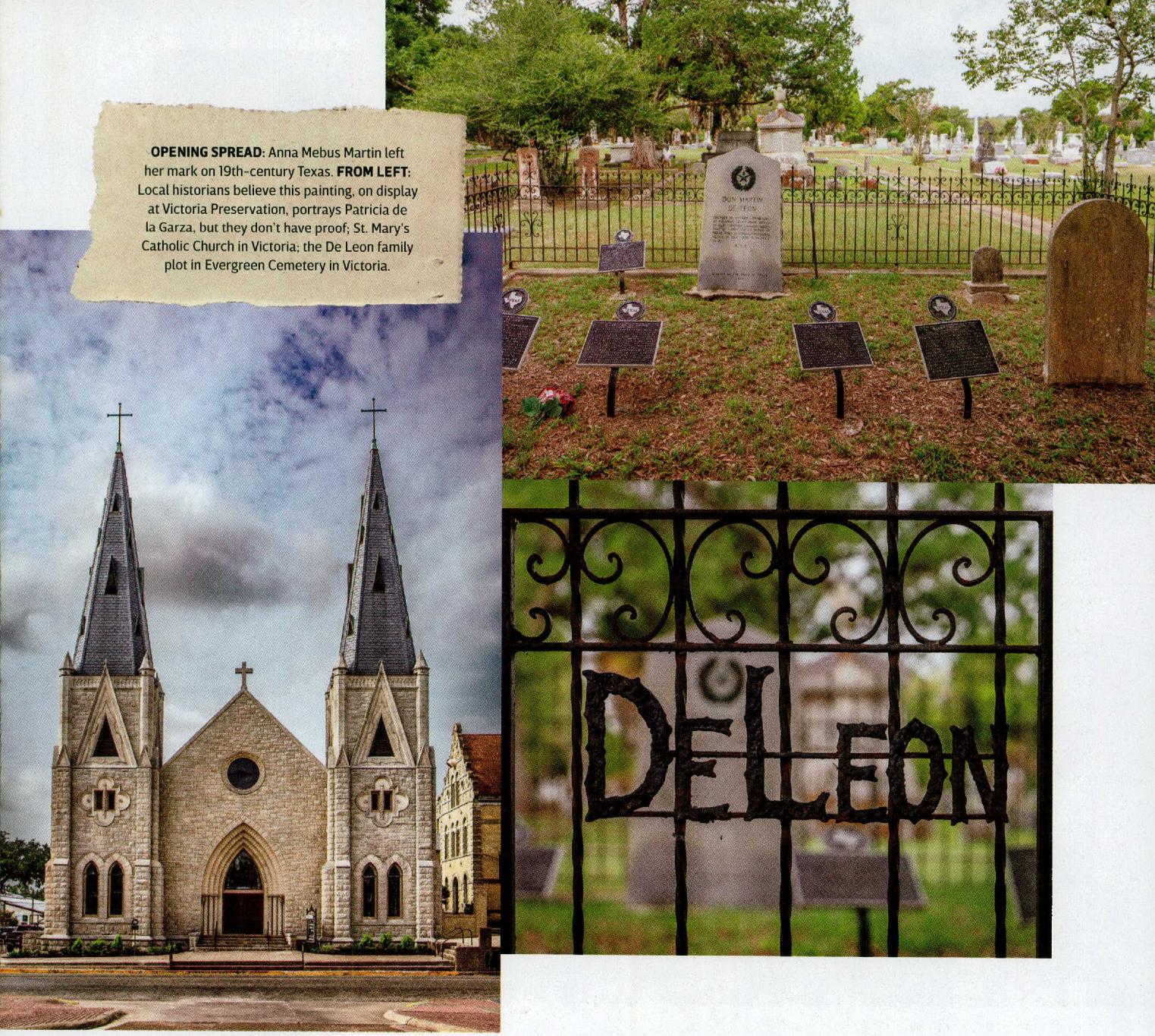
Although Patricia de la Garza de León was the co-founder of Victoria, the town where I grew up, I only recently learned her name. I knew of her husband, Martín de León, the dashing empresario who, in 1824, brought 41 families to the Guadalupe River to build this town, back before there was a Texas. When I was little, my sister and I roller-skated in the town square, De León Plaza, where a marker reminded us that Don Martín is the reason Victoria exists.

But it was a surprise to learn about De la Garza (1775-1849), a well-to-do woman from the Mexican state of Tamaulipas who forked over her dowry to finance the Mexican colony that would someday be my home. She hauled her family here to start afresh. Even though she lived on dirt floors, De la Garza got busy erecting the town's first chapel and school to educate her 10 children, and eventually, dozens of grandchildren. When Don Martín died of cholera in 1833, De la Garza held fast as the matriarch of her family and the town, overseeing social and religious life, making sure children were married and babies were baptized.

De la Garza was the backbone of my hometown. And yet, I'd had no idea who she was. The reasons for this are as twisted up as the times De la Garza lived in. The feminist wordplay from the 1970s rings true: Since history has been "his story," written by men recording the deeds, wars, and decisions of other men, we have overlooked *herstory*. Men didn't make history alone, and scholars, students, and the culture at large are tuning in to these omissions. Texas' past is full of forgotten people like De la Garza.

"History may get told a certain way, but it's almost never the full story," says Nancy Baker Jones, president of the Ruthe Winegarten Foundation for Texas Women's History, a nonprofit that researches the role of women in the state's past. "We have finally moved the stories of women more from the margin to the center in the history of the U.S. What that does is give everybody a more complete sense of who we are as a people. It's especially important for girls to understand that they have shoulders they can stand on, but both boys and girls need to know that women in the past have blazed as many paths as men have."

De la Garza certainly blazed a path. So did the first female Texas cattle baron, German immigrant Anna Mebus Martin (1843-1925), and the first Black Texan female novelist, Lillian Jones Horace (1880-1965). While modern influential women are more likely to get fair recognition—people such as Barbara Jordan, Kay Bailey Hutchison, Molly Ivins, and Ann Richards—historical figures often slip into oblivion. But each of them smashed barriers and bounced back from defeat to forge a life worthy of a feature film. They rose to the challenge that Martin once expressed in a letter: "I heard men say, O, she is only a woman, but I have showed them what a woman could do."



OPENING SPREAD: Anna Mebus Martin left her mark on 19th-century Texas. **FROM LEFT:** Local historians believe this painting, on display at Victoria Preservation, portrays Patricia de la Garza, but they don't have proof; St. Mary's Catholic Church in Victoria; the De Leon family plot in Evergreen Cemetery in Victoria.

Patricia de la Garza

It's a breezy June afternoon in Victoria, and I am walking through rows of headstones at Evergreen Cemetery looking for De la Garza's grave with the help of Gary Dunnam, a local history buff. He leads me to a fence surrounding a small family plot, tucked away behind a live oak. Here rest the remains of the De Leóns: Martín, Patricia, and three of their sons—Fernando, Silvestre, and Agapito. In lieu of headstones, state historical markers—placed here in 1972—top each grave. Over De la Garza's name reads the epitaph: "Pioneer Colony Co-founder and Texas Patriot." It's a welcome surprise to see the word "co-founder." In so many accounts of Victoria's history, she is absent, but here she gets equal billing.

Seeing the grave, I'm reminded of the words of historian Robert Shook, a retired professor from Victoria College. "Patricia de la Garza is a tragic character," he told me. "We can only infer what her life was like. Being female in those days, there's almost no primary source material about Patricia. That's a sad thing because women carried much of the weight, but no one ever bothered to put it in the records."

"I heard men say, O, she is only a woman, but I have showed them what a woman could do."

Photos: Courtesy Victoria Preservation, Inc. (left); Kenny Braun

Ana Carolina Castillo Crimm, a professor emeritus at Sam Houston State University, chronicles three generations of De Leóns in her 2004 book, *De León, a Tejano Family History*. She recounts how Patricia and her children were kicked out of Texas in a wave of anti-Tejano violence—despite their status as the founding family of Victoria. She writes in page-turning detail about their return and the successful court battles launched in 1847 by Fernando, Patricia's oldest son, to win back land that had been taken in their absence: "At last," Crimm writes, "a shocked and stunned crowd heard the judge rule in favor of Fernando de León against Andrew White. The precedent had been set. The judge's gavel came down again and again for Fernando."

But how did these legal battles impact De la Garza? Without any primary sources, like letters or journals, historians are left to piece together De la Garza's experiences through secondary documents. The nonprofit Victoria Preservation, Inc., for example, has a transcribed copy of a June 22, 1836, letter from Texas General Thomas J. Rusk to Captain Philip Dimmitt with "an order to remove" the De Leóns from Texas. And Dunnam visited the Texas State Library and Archives, where he found sworn testimonies regarding the treatment of the De León family. He read an account of how soldiers—emboldened by growing anti-Tejano sentiment after the Texas Revolution—tore jewelry from the De León women's earlobes as they were marched out of Victoria.

We know that De la Garza watched her sons risk their lives fighting against Santa Anna and yet the family was still evicted after the revolution. Even though she spent nine years exiled in Louisiana and Tamaulipas, De la Garza deeded her land on the Victoria town square to the Catholic Church before she died. It's remarkable that she gave to the town despite her trials, even donating a precious altar vessel that is still in the church today. But De la Garza's thoughts on these matters are sealed up in this cemetery plot.

Standing at the cemetery gate, Dunnam digs a document from his file and holds it up for me to see. "This tells a story that's not really told," he says. It's a copy of a handwritten affidavit, also unearthed from the state archives, that De la Garza filed in 1849 to recover her land and possessions after her return to Texas. He points to the last page, which bears De la Garza's name, written in elegant looping cursive with a spiraling rubric at the end. "There's her signature," he says. "Now you tell me that women didn't know how to write."

There, in distinguished handwriting that's just a bit shaky, is the most intimate physical record we have from De la Garza: her gorgeous curvy signature signed the

Photos: Kenny Braun

very year she died, indicating that she never gave up, not even toward the end. It is so personal, so human, that for a moment it makes her as alive to me as the breeze-ruffled oak tree we stand beneath.

Later that day, I walk through the nave of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Victoria. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, congregants have only recently been able to re-enter the church. A group of Latina women are spread spaciously among the pews, masked and taking turns reading out loud to each other from the Bible. I wonder if these women know, as I have only just learned, that we are right now quite literally standing upon the gifts of De la Garza, the land she reclaimed and then gave to the Catholic Church. The prayers of these women fill the sanctuary, making it feel outside of time, more mysterious than just a church on a corner on a Tuesday afternoon. It feels like Patricia de la Garza is still here.

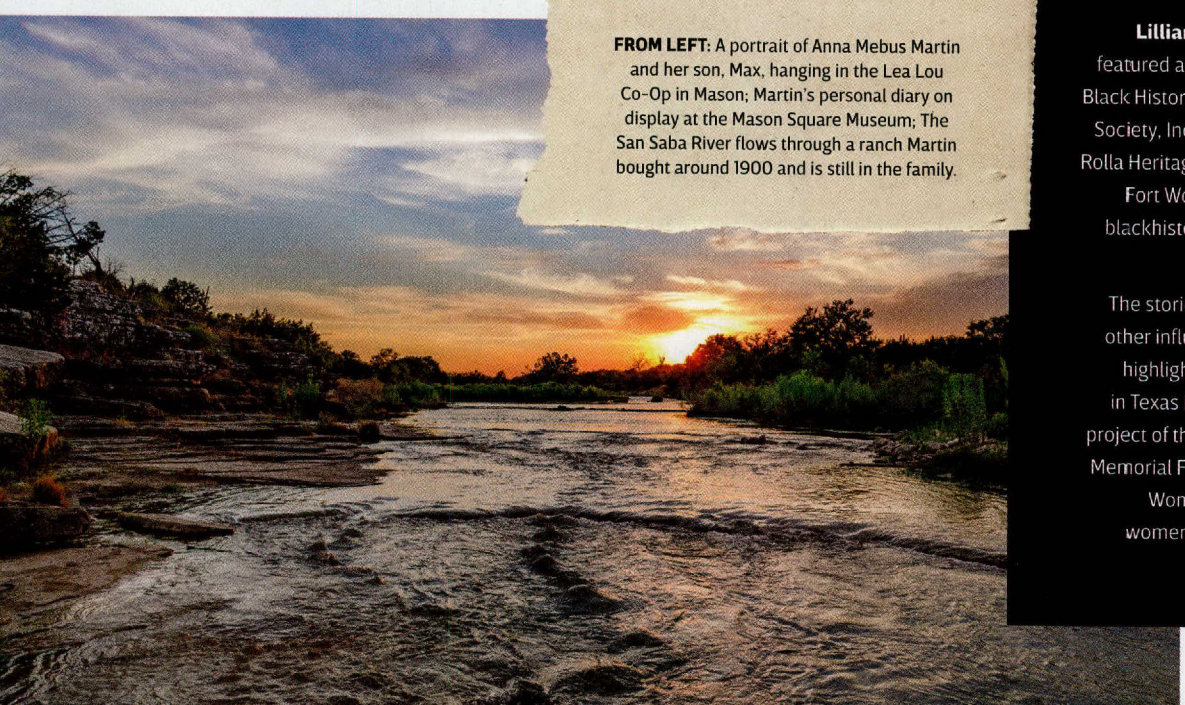
Anna Mebus Martin

Anna Mebus Martin sailed from Germany and landed penniless with her mother and five siblings at Galveston on Dec. 10, 1858—her 15th birthday. Her Uncle Louis picked the family up and hauled them on a two-week journey by oxcart to their new home in a dirt-floor cabin outside of Mason, a Hill Country ranching community on what was then the Western edge of the Texas frontier. Over the next six decades, that 15-year-old girl would amass 50,000 acres, become Texas' first cattle baroness, the first person in the region to make a fortune from the sale of barbed wire, and the first woman in the U.S. to both found and preside as president of her own bank. And because a man at a New York bank asked her how a woman could succeed in banking, in 1904 she wrote a short "sketch" of her life in reply. Her words are historical gold.

"It was horrible for a young girl, just growing into womanhood," she wrote of her early days near Mason, "who had seen all the nice things young girls had in Germany, and then taking it abruptly away, in the wilderness of Texas without any future." She writes of perpetual fear of raiding tribes, particularly on full moon nights. Of losing everything after the Civil War, when Confederate money was worthless. Of watching her husband, Karl Martin, a postmaster who also owned a small dry goods store, succumb to illness while she struggled to support their two sons.

Karl's death was a turning point for the 36-year-old Martin—a proving grounds for survival. "I had made up my mind that I would either be somebody in life or break down," she wrote.

She became somebody. She renamed the family store A. Martin & Sons and, with the help of her boys, grew it into a thriving business. She began trading with the travelers who came through, selling groceries, her knitting, lady's hat bands. But she had a knack for business and was soon selling cattle and serving free whiskey to her customers. Martin began loaning money to friends who were in a pinch. Her success as an informal banker grew into the Commercial Bank, which she founded with her sons, in 1901. The Commercial Bank is still



FROM LEFT: A portrait of Anna Mebus Martin and her son, Max, hanging in the Lea Lou Co-Op in Mason; Martin's personal diary on display at the Mason Square Museum; The San Saba River flows through a ranch Martin bought around 1900 and is still in the family.

TEXAS TRAILBLAZERS

Patricia de la Garza is among the historical figures portrayed by actors during Victoria Preservation's annual cemetery tours. Typically held in late October and early November, this year's event was postponed due to COVID-19. victoriapreservation.com

Anna Mebus Martin is featured at Fort Worth's National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame, where she was posthumously inducted in 2011. cowgirl.net

Lillian Jones Horace is featured at the Tarrant County Black Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc., within the Lenora Rolla Heritage Center Museum on Fort Worth's Southside. blackhistoricalmuseum.info

The stories of De la Garza and other influential women are highlighted on the Women in Texas History website, a project of the Ruthe Winegarten Memorial Foundation for Texas Women's History. womenintexashistory.org

there in Mason; a plaque on the building's corner salutes her.

"She was determined," says Andy Smith, Martin's great-great-grandson, who owns the Lea Lou Co-Op and Lodge in Mason and lives on a ranch that once belonged to Martin. "She came from aristocracy back in Germany, but for a while, when her husband had the little store on the Llano River, she starved. There were stories of her picking corn kernels out of horse crap just because of how poor they were. So, she worked hard. People like Anna, you can give them a little nugget to start, and they'll turn it into a multimillion-dollar empire."

Last June, I took my family to an exhibition about Martin at the Mason Square Museum. Relics including a shiny pistol and a violin bring Martin's life into view, along with a video the Texas Cowgirl Hall of Fame made when Martin was inducted in 2011. My favorite artifact is a poem written by her friend Eugene Frandzen. Titled "Ode to the Llano River," the poem's dedication reads, "To Miss Anna Martin, In grateful remembrance of many acts of kindness, this little effort is affectionately dedicated to you." The more I learn about Martin, the more I like her. Any woman who can wield both a pistol and a violin *and* inspire river poetry is my kind of gal.

Smith invites us out to stay the night on his ranch on the San Saba River, set on land that Martin bought when it was auctioned on the Mason town square. Other ranchers were going broke from an outbreak of cattle tick fever and had to sell. "Anna could buy it, because at that time, she was the only one around here who had any money," he says.

As evening falls, my family and I watch a full orange moon rise above the rocky ridge over the San Saba. I tell the kids how Martin had hated full moons because they were ominous preludes to the moonlit raids, when children were kidnapped. My kids are unmoved. The threat, just like the story of a German girl coming to this land in an oxcart, is a distant concept to them right now. But not to me. In this rough wilderness removed from cell towers and civilization, I can imagine the fear. I can also imagine, years after this once-poor widow had become a powerful banker and cattle baron, how Martin would have felt a deep satisfaction watching that fat moon rise.

Lillian Jones Horace

An archivist at the Fort Worth Public Library had just finished transcribing the journal of Lillian Jones Horace—the first female Black novelist in Texas—moments before Karen Kossie-Chernyshev walked in the door. Kossie-Chernyshev, who was researching Black Texan writers, says the timing on that day in 2003 was nothing short of providential. A history professor at Texas Southern University in Houston, Kossie-Chernyshev has since introduced Horace not just to her students, but, by publishing Horace's work and promoting it in academic circles, she has brought Horace to the world at large.

Horace, who was born in Jefferson in 1880 but moved to Fort Worth as a toddler, was a devoted Baptist and intellectual. Writing in the first half of the last century, a time when Texas' government mandated Jim Crow laws that enforced racial segregation, she was also a hardworking leader for the Black community, and for Black women in particular.

Her first novel, *Five Generations Hence*, published in 1916, is a Utopian exploration of a return to Africa for Black Americans. Her second novel, titled *Angie Brown* and written in about 1949, traces the heartbreak and victories of a young Black woman

finding her way in the Jim Crow South. "We see her using Angie's life to show that if you do things a certain way, you'll be OK in spite of obstacles," Kossie-Chernyshev says. Horace had no luck getting *Angie Brown* published in her lifetime; it was not until Kossie-Chernyshev published it in 2017 that the novel was available to the public.

Horace was a voracious learner devoted to the power of education. She received multiple degrees and was valedictorian at Prairie View A&M University. During the summers, she attended programs as far afield as the University of Chicago. In the early 1900s, as a teacher at the segregated I.M. Terrell High School in Fort Worth, she launched the first school newspaper and library. She also campaigned for Bob Thornton, the first African American to run for city council in Fort Worth.

Horace's journal, still in the archives of the Fort Worth Public Library, is a treasure. It's a portal into her interior landscape, and so full of self-reflection and questions about race and history that you can feel her curious heart beating through its pages. I can relate, with dizzying appreciation, to her desire to understand words, the world, herself, and to be a better writer. "I want to write realistically but constructively," she notes. "I must see the fineness even in the rogues." Her rough notes span from the philosophical—"All life is experiment"—to the practical—"I did achieve the big thing I planned, that we should possess our home free of all mortgages."

And then there are the sections of her journal that are heartbreakingly foreign to me, the pages where she works through her frustration over her everyday experiences as a Black woman. She ruminates on how her classmates at an integrated college, while friendly, still gave her funny looks. She records a painful experience at a Fort Worth department store. "The white woman steals shoes from me at Stripling's," she writes. "The floorwalker, Mr. Weed, hurts my feelings. I lie awake and suffer much of the night. I ponder what to do, I want to say things to him, not vulgar things but things to show how inconsiderate he was in a crisis. The first time I feel unpatriotic—just a dark face makes you the recipient of any insult." These jottings are a glimpse into the private, internal pains of racism.

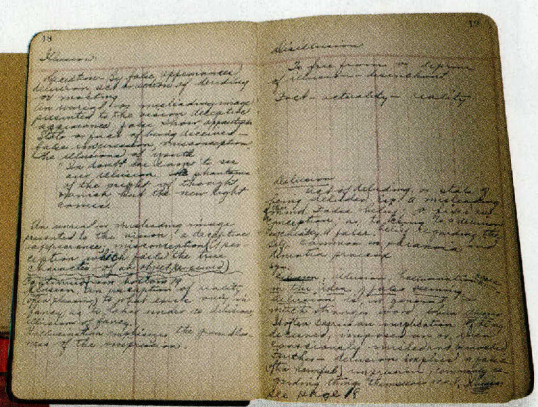
Horace was also a zealous and comprehensive list maker, recording everything from her Christmas gift shopping to civic duties on the World War II homefront. My favorite list, titled "What do I really want?" is a touching inventory of her desires: "I want sincere friends—all ages," and "I want more than any tangible thing to write a book worth the reading by an intelligent person."

"I do what I do in honor of her memory. Sometimes our answers come from people who are no longer here. She is a friend that I didn't know I had."

Kossie-Chernyshev has certainly furthered those goals. Not only did she publish *Angie Brown*, she also directed the republication of Horace's earlier work, *Five Generations Hence*, accompanied by critical essays from other scholars of Black literature and history.

"Perhaps my finding her archives was a response to a prayer Horace had that eventually her work would be appreciated," Kossie-Chernyshev says. "I do what I do in honor of her memory. Sometimes our answers come from people who are no longer here. She is a friend that I didn't know I had."

Kossie-Chernyshev says Horace's work has driven her to overcome her own challenges, and by bringing Horace back to life for a wide audience, she's sharing that inspiration with people like me. Perhaps that's the underlying message found in the stories of pioneering Texas women like Patricia de la Garza, Anna Mebus Martin, and Lillian Jones Horace. We see parts of ourselves in them, and we imagine how we too can rise above circumstance to live our own remarkable lives.



FROM LEFT: A 1916 photograph of Lillian Jones Horace; historian Karen Kossie-Chernyshev; Horace's diary is in the archives of the Fort Worth Public Library.

Photos: Courtesy Fort Worth Public Library Archives (left and top right); Kenny Braun (above)

TALES OF TEXAS GRIT

BY JAC DARSNEK

TEXANS ARE NO STRANGERS TO ADVERSITY. WHEN DISASTER STRIKES, WE RESPOND WITH CHARACTERISTIC TENACITY AND NEIGHBORLY SPIRIT.

Photo: Courtesy San Antonio Light Photograph Collection, UTSA Special Collections

THE 1950s TEXAS DROUGHT, 1951

Known as the most catastrophic drought in state history because of its length and widespread effect, the drought of the 1950s included the second-, third-, and eighth-driest single years up until that point. Sixty years later, 2011 would become the driest year in state history, surpassing the record set in 1917. Here, Sam J. Smith, a farmer in San Antonio's Belgian Gardens district, rejoices in the rain on Easter Sunday, March 25, 1951. *San Antonio Light* photographer Harvey Belgin received a Pulitzer Prize nomination for the photo.

All of Texas history seems to conspire to teach one lesson: Bounty and risk walk hand-in-hand across this land. Geography and climate combine to afflict the Lone Star State with nearly every variety of calamity known to humankind: hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts, floods, vermin infestations, wildfires, diseases, dust storms, rampaging insects, torrid heat waves in the summer, moaning cold snaps in the winter, allergens that lay grown men low, boll weevils, skunks, and regions of harsh landscapes filled with sharp plants that can put an excruciating hurt on you. "Being a Texan is a full-time job," my high school football coach used to say. He was right. Historically, living here has required 100% commitment.

I have been privileged to bear witness to the challenges and hard-won successes of the past as the founder of Traces of Texas. The online community devoted to sharing and preserving historic images of the state has grown from its infancy in 2010 to include 800,000 followers on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

It's terribly sad to be alive and aware and to look around at all that's being lost to COVID-19. The human toll has been devastating. To add to the heartbreak, venerable establishments are struggling, failing, and disappearing. Nobody knows what will have changed when dawn comes to the new paradigm. But history teaches us that Texans endure. We soldier on. An old farmer in Dimmitt once described his ancestors as "tougher than a sack full of hickory knots." That stuck with me.

Long-gone Texans are looking out at us across the decades, reassuring us that it's going to be all right and that, come what may, Texas will abide. We'll get through these challenges as we always have, with open-hearted kindness for our neighbors and by remembering the fortitude of those who came before.

DIME BOX TORNADO, 1922

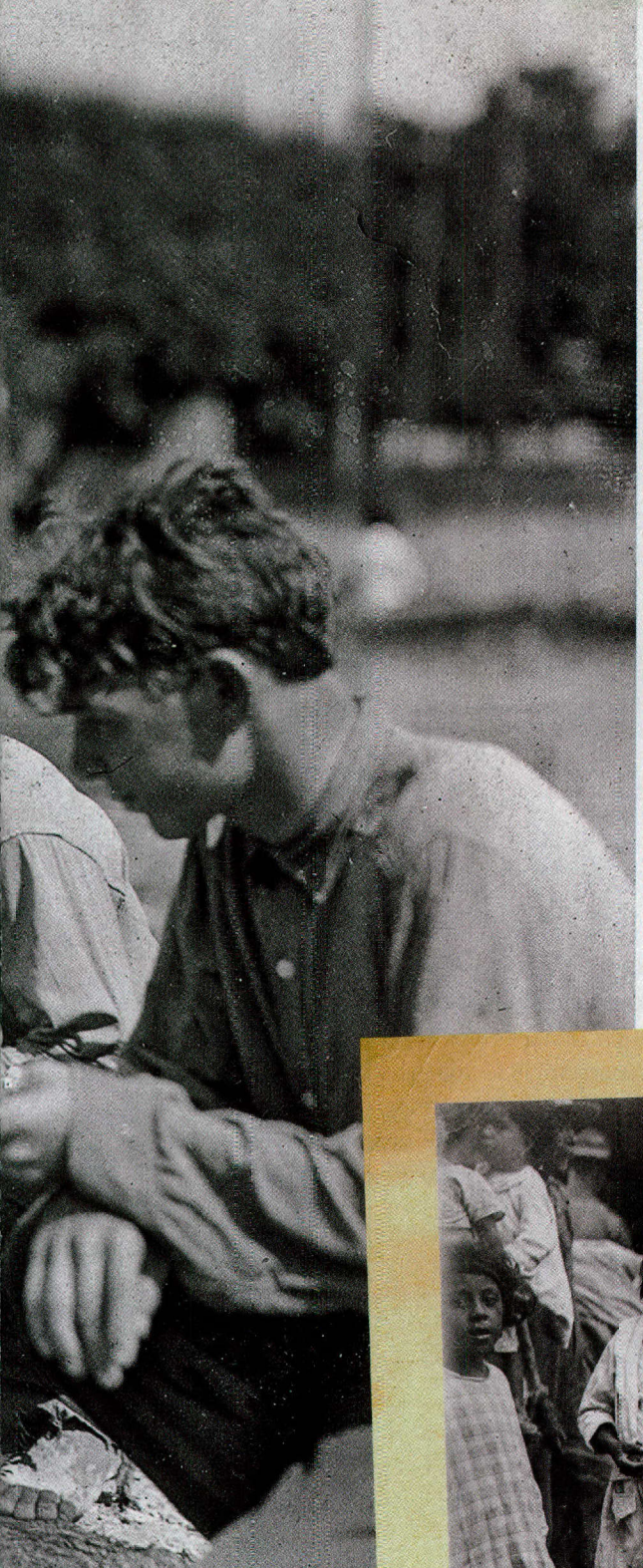
A tornado struck the Czech community of Hranice (near Dime Box, between Austin and College Station) on April 4, 1922. The natural disaster knocked over the Czech Moravian Brethren Church. Here we see three photos of the church: shortly after it was completed in 1911 (left), after the tornado struck, and upon the congregation's rebuilding of the church in August 1924. Tragedy struck the church again in July 1954, when a fire ripped through it. And yet the church was rebuilt a third time and is currently holding services at the same location on 8361 Farm-to-Market Road 141.

Photos: Courtesy Alana McCormick

KOSTEL
RATŘÍ V DIME BOX

TRINITY RIVER FLOOD, 1916

It's important in life to keep one's wits and priorities in order, especially when disaster strikes. That seems to be the advice of these Texans in Fort Worth when they decided to pause for coffee after the Trinity River flooded in 1916. The viewer can almost imagine the conversation: "Earl and I are going to pull down that wall over there, but first we're going to need a cup of joe." This flood tested the Lake Worth dam and levee systems, which were under construction at the time. Everything held up and no fatalities were reported.



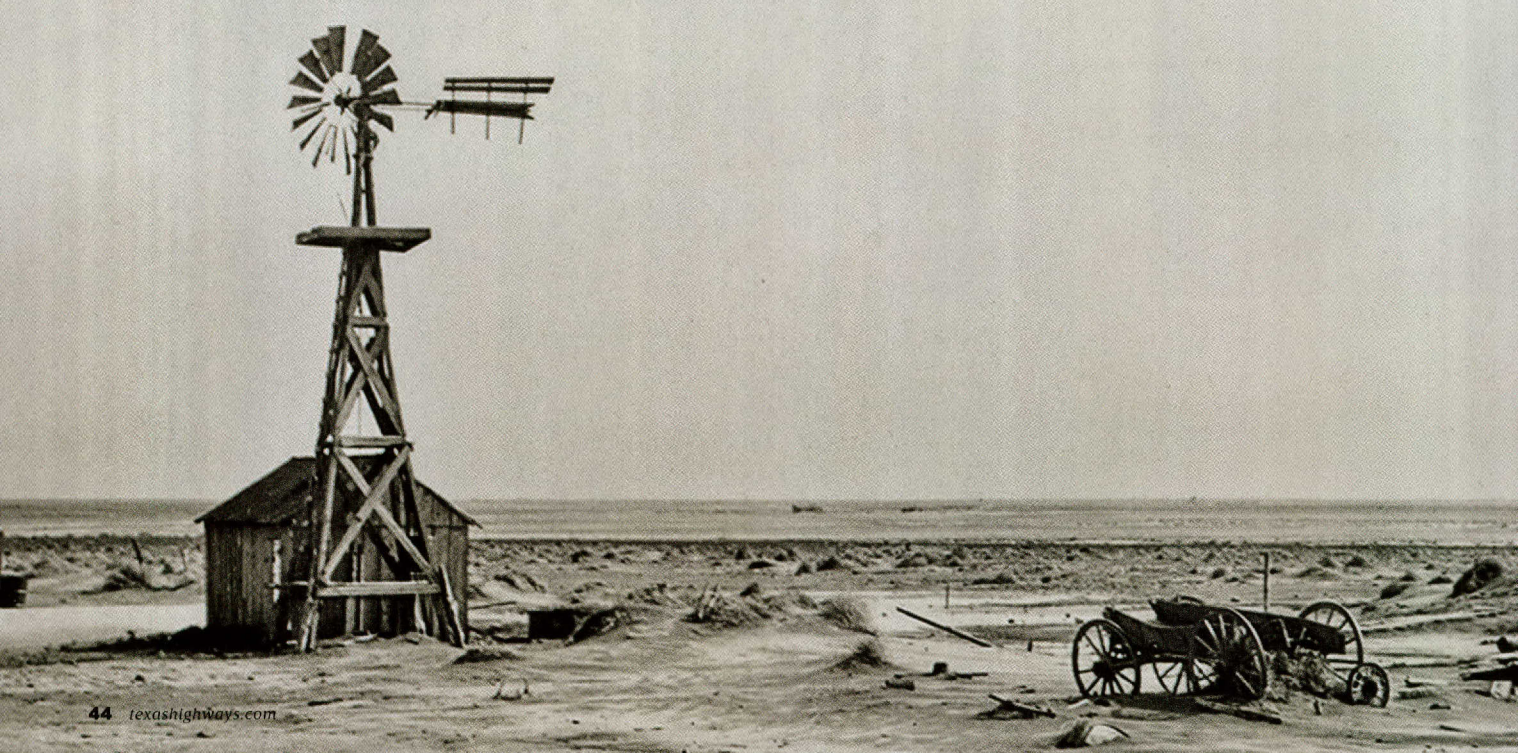
SAN ANTONIO RIVER FLOOD, 1921

Young girls find relief at a Red Cross station in San Antonio after the 1921 flood of the San Antonio River, which left at least 51 dead and 14 missing. The *San Antonio Light* wrote that water ranged from 10 to 30 feet high and "carried houses from their foundations, swept motor cars away, destroyed concrete bridges, tore down trees and poles and ripped up paving in the streets like ... pebbles." The community banded together, and 600 volunteer workers showed up to help. The tragedy caused the city to seriously consider flood control and resulted in the building of Olmos Dam and, ultimately, the River Walk.

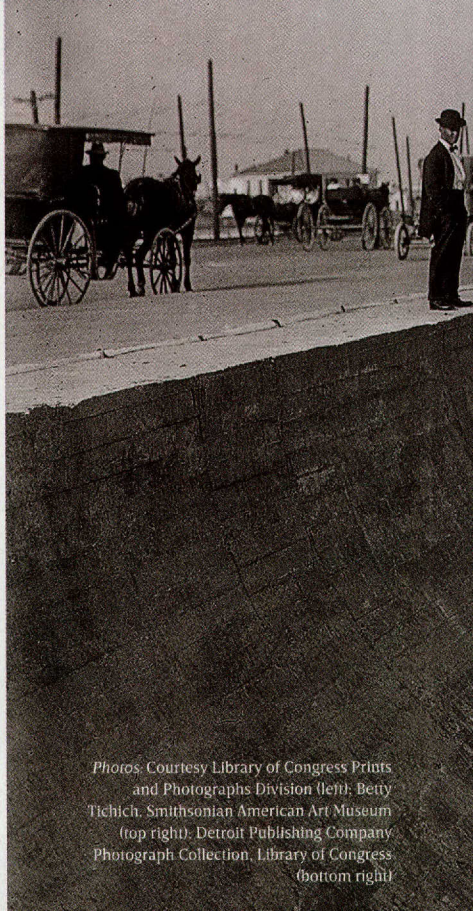
Photos: Courtesy Fort Worth Star-Telegram Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries (left); American National Red Cross Photograph Collection, Library of Congress (right)

THE DUST BOWL, 1930s

The Dust Bowl, a series of dust storms caused by severe drought and shortsighted farming methods like overgrazing and deep tilling, wreaked havoc on the Panhandle Plains in the 1930s. A farmer, perhaps taking a break from the rigors of rural life, smokes a pipe in downtown Stanton in 1937 (above). An automobile flees a dust storm near Amarillo in 1936 (top right). In 1937, a family on the road near Memphis travels with all their earthly belongings (bottom right). They told photographer Dorothea Lange they were bound for the Rio Grande Valley, where they hoped to pick cotton. Lange also photographed an abandoned farm (below) in the Coldwater District north of Dalhart in 1938.



Photos: Arthur Rothstein, Farm Security Administration, Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress (top left); Dorothea Lange, Farm Security Administration, Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress (all others)

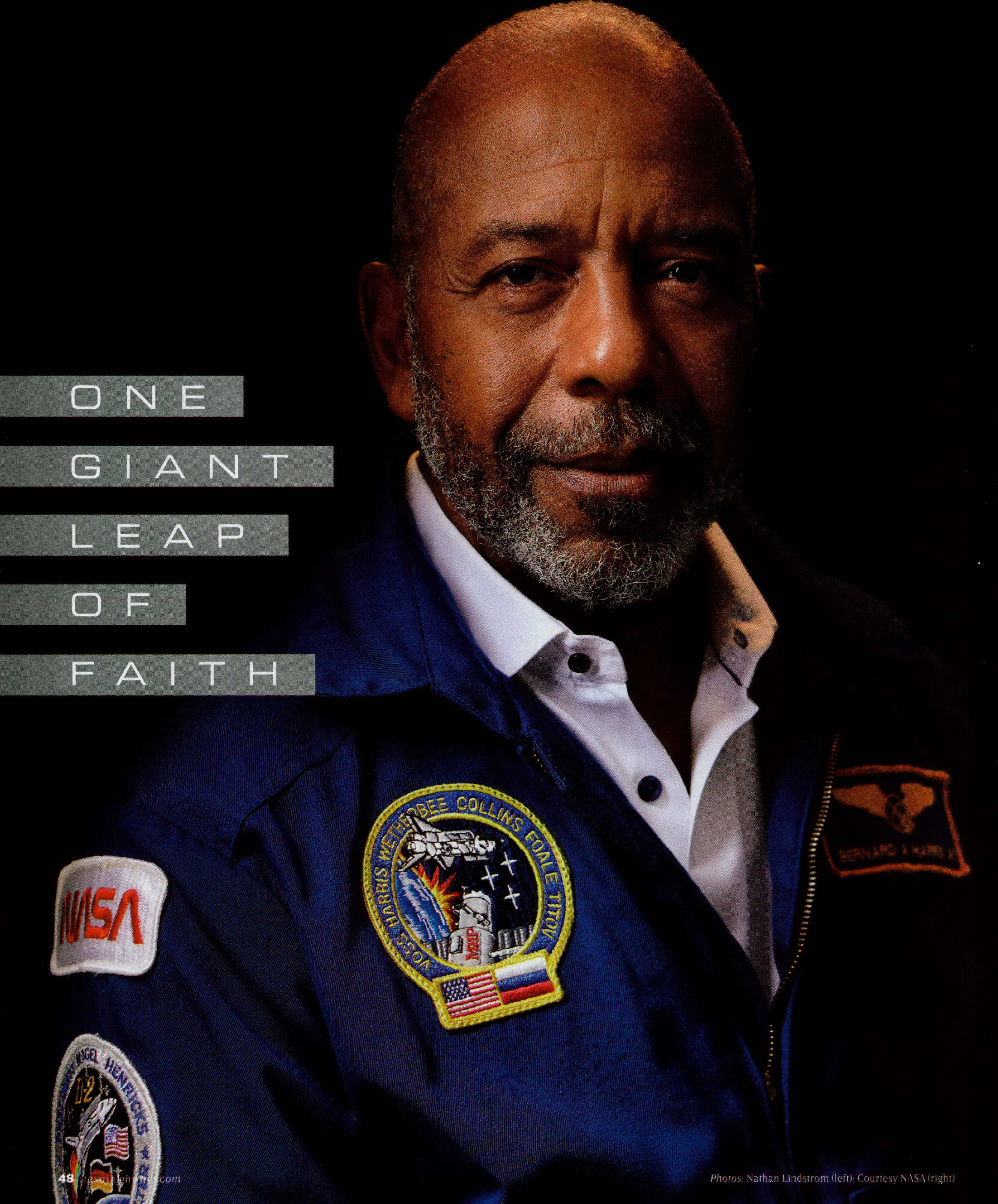


Photos: Courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division (left); Betty Tichich, Smithsonian American Art Museum (top right); Detroit Publishing Company Photograph Collection, Library of Congress (bottom right)

GALVESTON HURRICANE, 1900

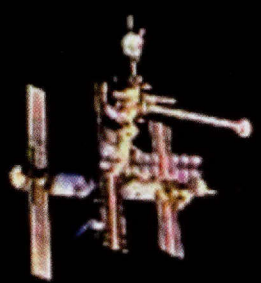
The hurricane that struck Galveston on Sept. 8, 1900, obliterated the town, destroying or severely damaging nearly every structure (bottom left). Amid the destruction, a young boy smiles as recovery efforts begin (top left). To mitigate future floods, Galveston built a sea-wall 17 feet high and 10 miles long (below, between 1910 and 1920). Nobody would have blamed the citizens of Galveston if they walked away after the disaster in search of less calamitous surroundings. Instead, the residents went to work rebuilding the city, and new businesses began popping up. In testament to the town's efforts to reinvent itself, immigrants Sebastian and Giorgia Mencacci and their family opened their grocery store at 21st Street and Avenue O ½ (above) in 1910. The couple arrived in the U.S. from Italy in 1901 and moved from Chicago to Galveston to open the store. They stayed in the city for the rest of their lives.

ONE GIANT LEAP OF FAITH



Photos: Nathan Lindstrom (left); Courtesy NASA (right)

ON THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF NASA MISSION STS-63, ASTRONAUT BERNARD HARRIS JR. REFLECTS ON HIS PIONEERING JOURNEY TO BECOME THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN TO WALK IN SPACE



BY MICHAEL HURD

TWO HUNDRED-THIRTEEN NAUTICAL MILES ABOVE THE EARTH, BERNARD HARRIS JR. HAD AN UNOBSTRUCTED CELESTIAL VIEW AS HE FLOATED OUT OF THE SPACE SHUTTLE DISCOVERY HATCH AND INTO HISTORY.

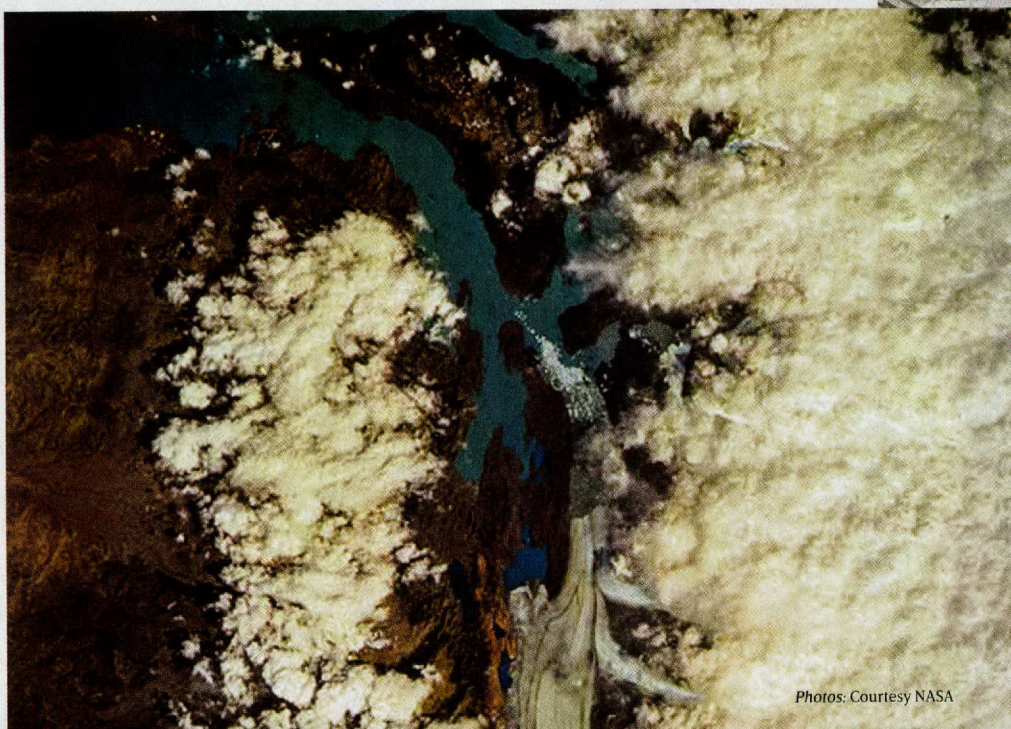
But his noticeable pause "for a little bit," as he recalled, prompted NASA's Mission Control to ask, "Why are you doing that?"

Harris was marveling at his surroundings, as space shuttle Discovery orbited at a dizzying 17,000 miles an hour, circling Earth once every 90 minutes. He gathered himself and quickly responded, "Oh, nothing."

But the unfolding event was very much something. Mission STS-63, which launched Feb. 3, 1995, broke ground in many ways. It marked the first rendezvous of the American space shuttle with Russia's space station Mir. Also on board, Eileen Collins, an American, became the first woman to pilot a space shuttle, and C. Michael Foale became the first British-born American astronaut to walk in space. And for payload commander Harris, who was on his second and final NASA mission, it was the improbable realization of a childhood dream, as he became the first African American to walk in space on Feb. 9, 1995.

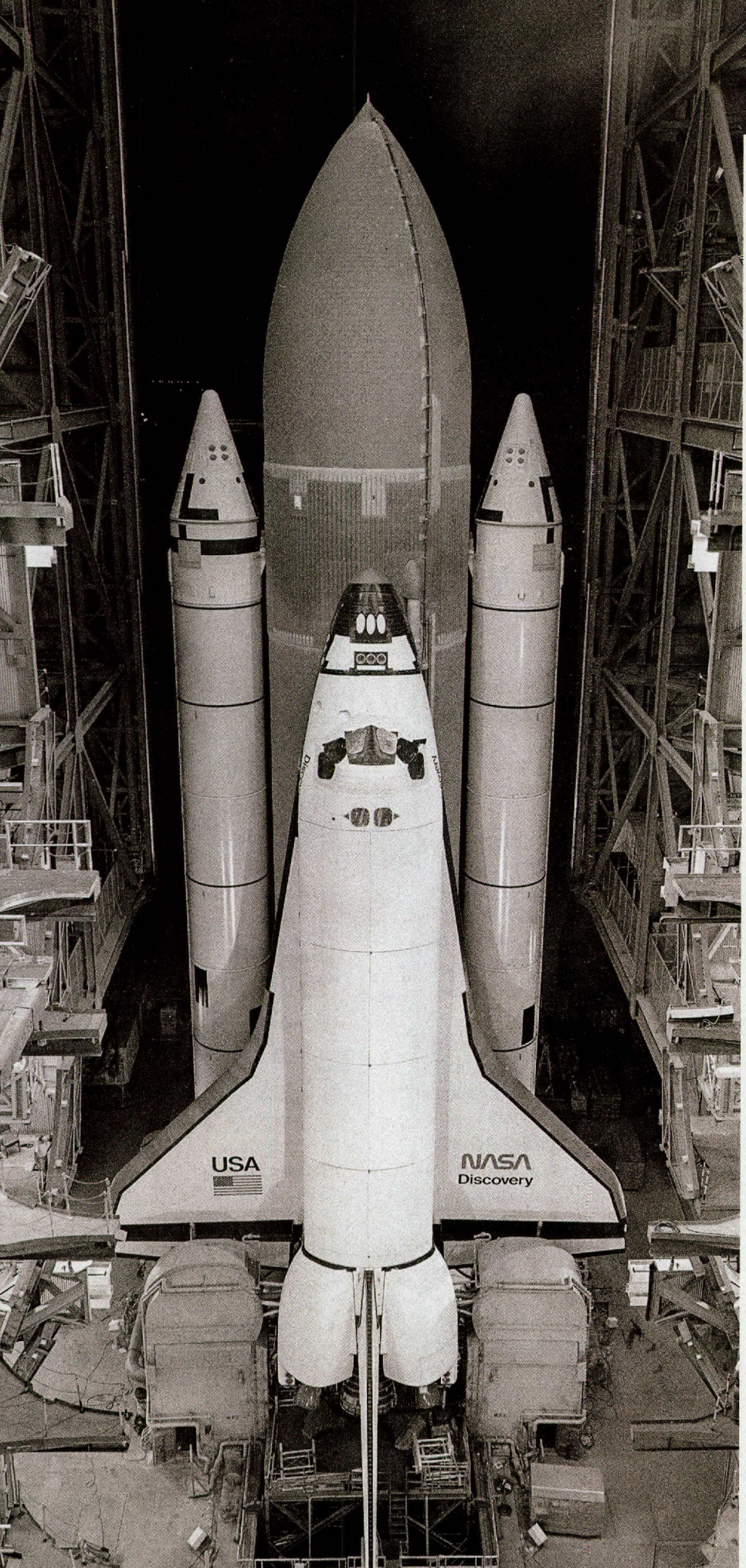
"The little boy who was forced to use the back door of a [Waco] diner in the sixties because of his race had triumphed in the nineties," he wrote in his 2010 memoir, *Dream Walker*. "It was my day and I was flying pretty high!"

Harris, born in Temple in 1956 and now based in Houston, grew up a big fan of all things science fiction, from Buck Rogers to *Star Trek*. The 1969 Apollo 11 spectacle was must-see TV for Harris, though a continuing social drama hovered in the background as Black Americans fought hard for civil rights. They marched, protested, sat in, and rioted—*Burn, baby, burn!*—for most of the decade that neared its end with Neil Armstrong setting foot on the moon. The watershed moment fully captured the world's imagination and instantly cemented



OPENING SPREAD: Bernard Harris Jr. in 2020, 25 years after walking in space; a scenic view of Mir during Mission STS-63. **LEFT TO RIGHT:** Looking down on mountains and a lake during STS-63; the first flight of Space Shuttle Discovery, Aug. 30, 1984.

Photos: Courtesy NASA



the career aspirations of 13-year-old Harris, despite the racial unrest he saw on TV and in his everyday life.

"I could see human beings accomplishing one of the greatest feats in the world, but I could change the channel and see our people being disgraced, dogs sicced on them, water cannons spraying them," Harris recalled in a 2019 *Houston Public Media* interview. "To decide, despite what I saw, that I wanted to be an astronaut, was a big leap of faith."

When I interviewed Harris earlier this year, he described his innate drive to succeed "in spite of the segregated and hostile racial climate of the '60s" as an inherited family trait. His mother, Gussie Harris, bolstered his dreams by insisting he could be whatever he wanted, no matter that he grew up poor.

Harris' family moved to Houston shortly after he was born. They lived there until he was 6, when Gussie and Bernard Harris Sr. divorced and Gussie took her three children back to Temple. She had a home economics degree from Prairie View A&M University and a desire to teach, but no local teaching offers came in. So, she uprooted the family and drove more than 1,000 miles to Greasewood, Arizona, to teach at a boarding school on the Navajo Nation Reservation. During the summers, the family would retreat to Texas, where Gussie met and married Joe Burgess, a police officer. Harris said his new father figure helped bring stability to a family set on accomplishing goals.

"There are certain characteristics you're born with, and mine was wanting to do things that people hadn't done before," Harris explained. "Once I had it in my mind that I wanted to go into space, I was not going to be deterred. Looking at television and seeing the box they were trying to paint us in as African Americans, I was saying, 'It's not going to happen here. That's not going to determine my dream.'"

Harris' experience growing up in the Heights neighborhood near downtown Houston, where "not a lot of kids made it out," proved critical to his character development. It instilled in him a determination to give back to the Black

community, especially kids searching for hope. Because Harris' biggest obstacle to realizing his space dreams was his race, he now works to help minority kids obtain STEM educations as CEO of the National Math and Science Initiative.

The Dallas-based organization operates programs designed to boost the number of STEM teachers, increase student access to Advanced Placement courses, and train existing teachers. Against the backdrop of the national dialogue on racial injustice, Harris spends most of his day now conversing with educational leaders and corporate executives who want to know how they can make the system more inclusive.

"I see this as an opportunity for those who didn't believe that systemic racism exists to see that it's been a black and white issue for a long time," Harris said. "Now it's in full color in their faces, and they see the issues that minorities have dealt with for all these years, particularly in the Black community. It's raised the awareness, and people are reacting in a positive way, saying, 'We've got to change.'"

"WE CHOOSE TO GO TO THE moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard," President John F. Kennedy said in a speech at Houston's Rice University on Sept. 12, 1962.

Seven years after Kennedy's imperative words pushing for a manned lunar landing, Harris sat rapt as one of the most important moments in all of history played out on his family's small black and white TV screen in Tohatchi, New Mexico, where they'd moved in 1967. Armstrong walking on the moon instantly inspired a young Harris, though he did not yet know the astronaut corps and NASA in general were all-white fraternities.

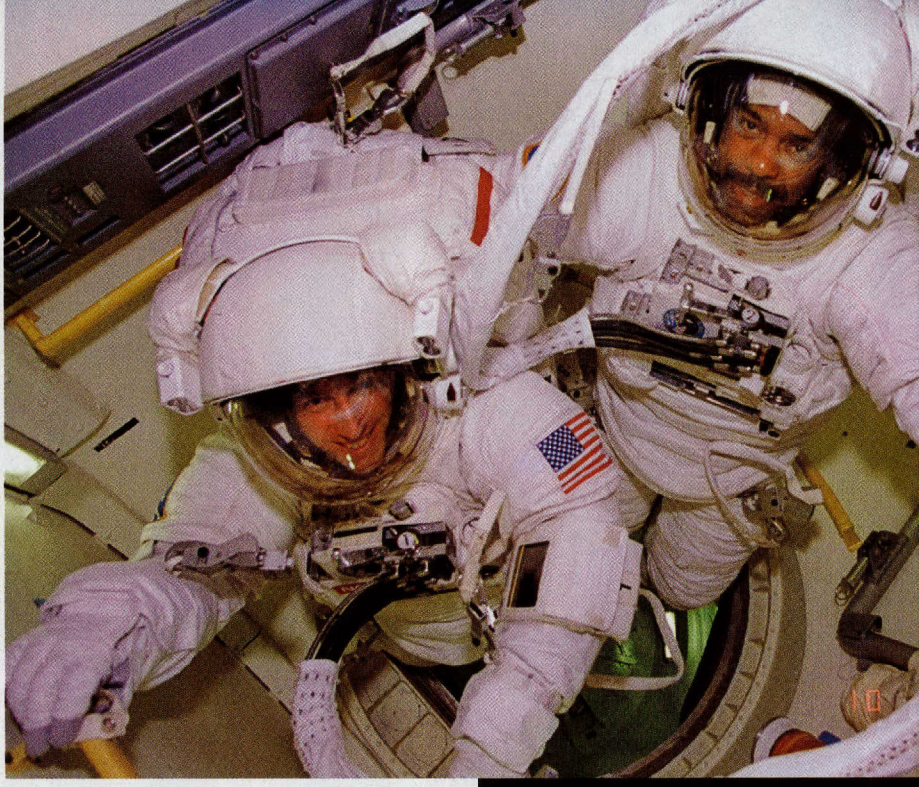
In 1961, Alan Shepard was the first American to travel into space. It would be 22 years before Guion Bluford would become the first African American astronaut to travel into space. Bluford was a member of STS-8, the third Space Shuttle Challenger mission, which conducted the first night launch and night landing. In between Armstrong's and Bluford's missions, Black community leaders—especially in Houston, where the Johnson Space Center is located—pushed NASA to hire astronauts of color.

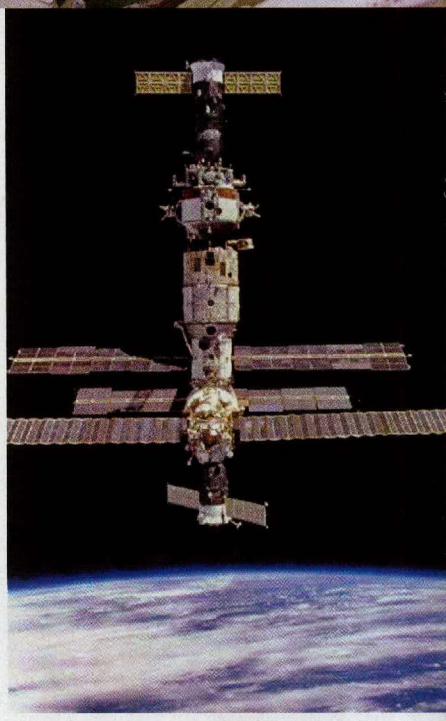
As a young Harris came to understand NASA's lack of diversity, he rarely mentioned his goal in public.

"Early on in the program in the '60s, we were, as African Americans, fighting just for the right to vote and to be included," Harris recalled. "So, the idea of sharing my dream meant having people tell you, 'There are no Blacks at NASA. What makes you think you can become an astronaut?' So, I held it closely to the chest."

That is until he attended the University of Houston, where his Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity brothers could see the stars in his eyes. His close friend Gerald McElvy, now a regent with the University of Houston System and former president of the ExxonMobil Foundation, described what they saw in the future spaceman.

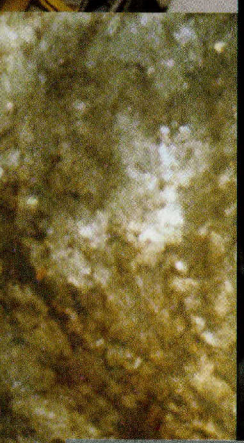
"He was very impressive and carried himself well," McElvy said. "He had very high aspirations, as did I, and we'd talk about doing something significant together in the future, though we didn't define it or know what it was. He distinguished himself as one of the more intellectual members of the group and at times would say something that flew over everybody's head. And one time someone said, 'Would you beam me up, Scotty?'"



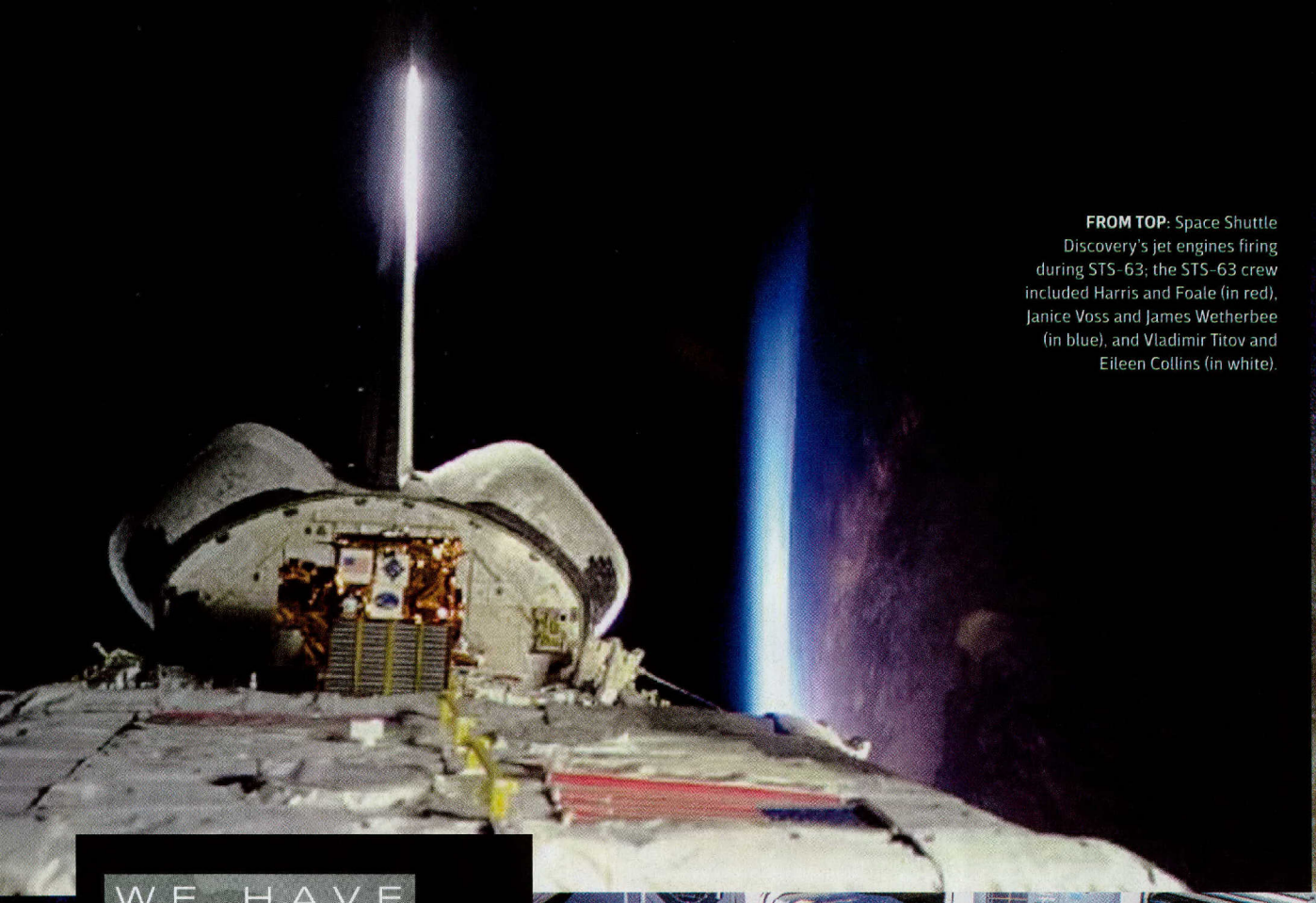


CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: STS-63 astronauts C. Michael Foale (left) and Harris (right) preparing to exit Discovery's airlock for a spacewalk; Harris and Foale handling the Shuttle Pointed Autonomous Research Tool for Astronomy-204 as practice for extravehicular activities; Mir as viewed from the Space Shuttle Discovery.

Photos: Courtesy NASA



ARMSTRONG WALKING ON THE MOON INSTANTLY INSPIRED A YOUNG HARRIS, THOUGH HE DID NOT YET KNOW THE ASTRONAUT CORPS AND NASA IN GENERAL WERE ALL-WHITE FRATERNITIES.



FROM TOP: Space Shuttle Discovery's jet engines firing during STS-63; the STS-63 crew included Harris and Foale (in red), Janice Voss and James Wetherbee (in blue), and Vladimir Titov and Eileen Collins (in white).

WE HAVE LIFTOFF

Space Center Houston, the official visitor center of NASA's Johnson Space Center, reopened in July after a temporary closure due to COVID-19. Masks and social distancing are required, and visitors can review the center's "Know Before You Go Guide" on its website for other tips on how to plan a visit and purchase timed admission tickets. New exhibits include:

- The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, the first rocket to be reused for a NASA supply mission to the International Space Station.
- The *Apollo 13: Failure is Not an Option* exhibit summarizes the "Houston, we've had a problem" mission.
- The Mission Exploration experience details the specific roles of astronauts, science officers, engineers, and flight controllers.
- Mission: Control the Spread explores how crisis sparks innovation, and details NASA's role in helping with the COVID-19 response.

Space Center Houston
1601 E. NASA Parkway, Houston.
281-244-2100; spacecenter.org

Following the University of Houston and Texas Tech Medical School, Harris got his first big break during a residency in internal medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. His first rotation was in rheumatology with Dr. Joseph Combs, who mentioned the clinic had created the field of aerospace medicine for the early space program. An eager Harris shared his NASA aspirations, and Combs introduced him to the head of the Aerospace Medicine program.

"I didn't know there was an Aerospace Medicine department there," Harris said. "This is why I always think that God takes care of you. I have this saying: 'If you hold something in your heart deep enough, the universe conspires to make those things happen.' This was one of those things."

Combs was one of many mentors for Harris along his arduous journey, but he credits Dr. Joe Kerwin as the one who paved his path to space. In 1973, Kerwin became the first American physician to work aboard Skylab, the first U.S. space station. There, Kerwin made the first medical observations about humans living in a microgravity environment.

"I saw that as an avenue for me to go to space," Harris said. "If I could become a physician, that would give me the credentials to do research at NASA, and eventually, if the stars aligned, I would be able to become an astronaut."

Harris chose bone research as his endocrinology specialty, which became his ticket into the astronaut program.

IN AUGUST 1990, HARRIS began a year of training and evaluation with 22 classmates at Johnson Space Center. Upon completion of the program, he was prepared to wait several months, perhaps years, before his first assignment. But three weeks later, he was selected first in his class for a mission. On STS-55 Columbia, he performed experiments in the multinational Spacelab. The launch, which included an international crew, would be aborted twice before the successful attempt on April 26, 1993. By then, Harris' emotions had leveled off from the range he'd experienced during the first attempt on March 22.

"On the appointed day," Harris wrote of the first attempt in *Dream Walker*, "I found myself strapped in tightly 150 feet above the ground along with my six fellow travelers, all of us sitting on top of enough rocket fuel to lift 5 million pounds into Earth's orbit. One side of my brain was thinking, 'This is great. I'm going to launch into space today,' and the other side was thinking, 'What in the world am I doing here?'"

Over his 10 years of service, Harris logged more than 438 hours and 7.2 million miles in space, and developed in-flight medical devices to extend astronauts' stays in space. His work in medical telemetry—measuring and transmitting data—would be his focus once he retired from NASA in 1996. He started Vesalius Ventures in June 2002 and serves as CEO and managing partner of the venture capital firm that supports and invests in early- to mid-stage healthcare technologies.

"I HAVE THIS SAYING: 'IF YOU HOLD SOMETHING IN YOUR HEART DEEP ENOUGH, THE UNIVERSE CONSPIRES TO MAKE THOSE THINGS HAPPEN.'"

His extraterrestrial mission had ended, but his "terrestrial" mission, as he calls it, had just begun: lifting kids through education. In the mid-'90s, Harris partnered with McElvy, as the two had planned back in college. Their youthful dream manifested in a science camp for minority kids in grades six through eight.

"I'm providing hope for them, and I believe one of the important solutions to address the social injustice in this country is education," Harris said. "We have not had the same level of socioeconomic prosperity in this country, and the way that can change, in particular for people of color, is through education."

The ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Summer Science Camp, held at more than 50 colleges and universities across the country, has become a huge success. It quickly spread from 10 camps in 2005 to 30 camps by its third year. And Harris is the face of the effort.

"Bernard visited every one of those camps, from Washington and Massachusetts to Texas and Alaska," McElvy boasted. "His appearing at those camps was exactly what those kids needed to see: people who looked just like them, who had actually flown in space."

More than 2 million kids have gone through his National Math and Science Initiative programs. The organization's educator training and materials are centered on racial equality and access, with support from the United Negro College Fund.

"The camps gave me a place to see how important it is, especially for students of color who don't have role models readily available to them and don't see themselves reflected in STEM, to bring these types of opportunities to them," said Mariam Manuel, a professor at the University of Houston and former curriculum coordinator and instructor for the camp.

The kids remind Harris of himself at 13. He tells them his story and declares that if a poor kid like him can make it, so can they.

Each time he tells his story, he sees a familiar spark in their eyes—the gleam of inquisitive dreamers determined to take their own giant leaps.

Photos: Courtesy NASA

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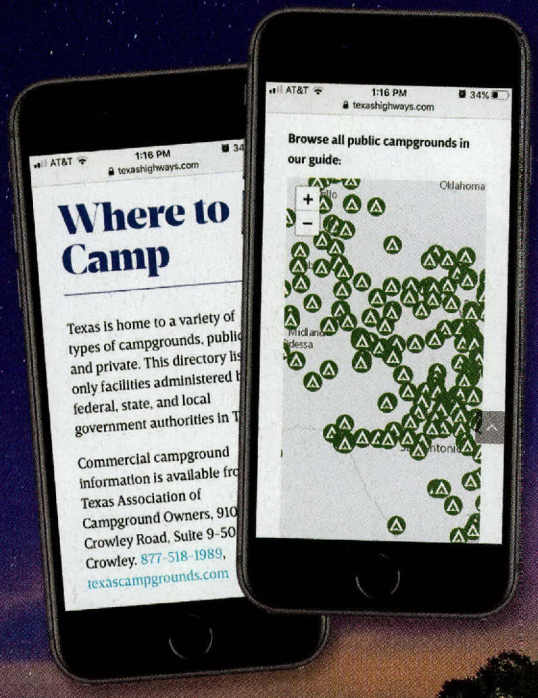
THE TEXAS HIGHWAYS

Camping Guide

Texans' love of the great outdoors has only grown this year, especially as it's one of the safest ways to travel during the ongoing pandemic. Thankfully, our state is home to a plethora of outdoor experiences that both newbies and seasoned pros can enjoy.

We look forward to hearing your tales from the trails!



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IN 2014, MAGGIE DIETRICK established Margrit Co. in Lorena, just south of Waco, with the idea of creating her own signature jewelry line. Her eye-catching earrings, bracelets, and pendants incorporate colorful pieces of recycled glass in geometric forms, which she frosts to look like sea glass and then artfully wraps in metal wire. Her casual-chic designs, produced in a range of hues, evoke summer days spent on the beach. "I had always planned to one day start my own business—it just happened sooner rather than later," she says. "I wanted to share my love for fashion and jewelry." As for inspiration, she doesn't have to look far for successful role models: Kendra Scott, Mica May, and Marcey Futris are all fellow Texans. "I love to see those women's creativity and passion for their own business, but also how they share that passion with other women and mentor other businesses along the way," she says. ***Shop more Magrit Co. products at shop.texashighways.com***

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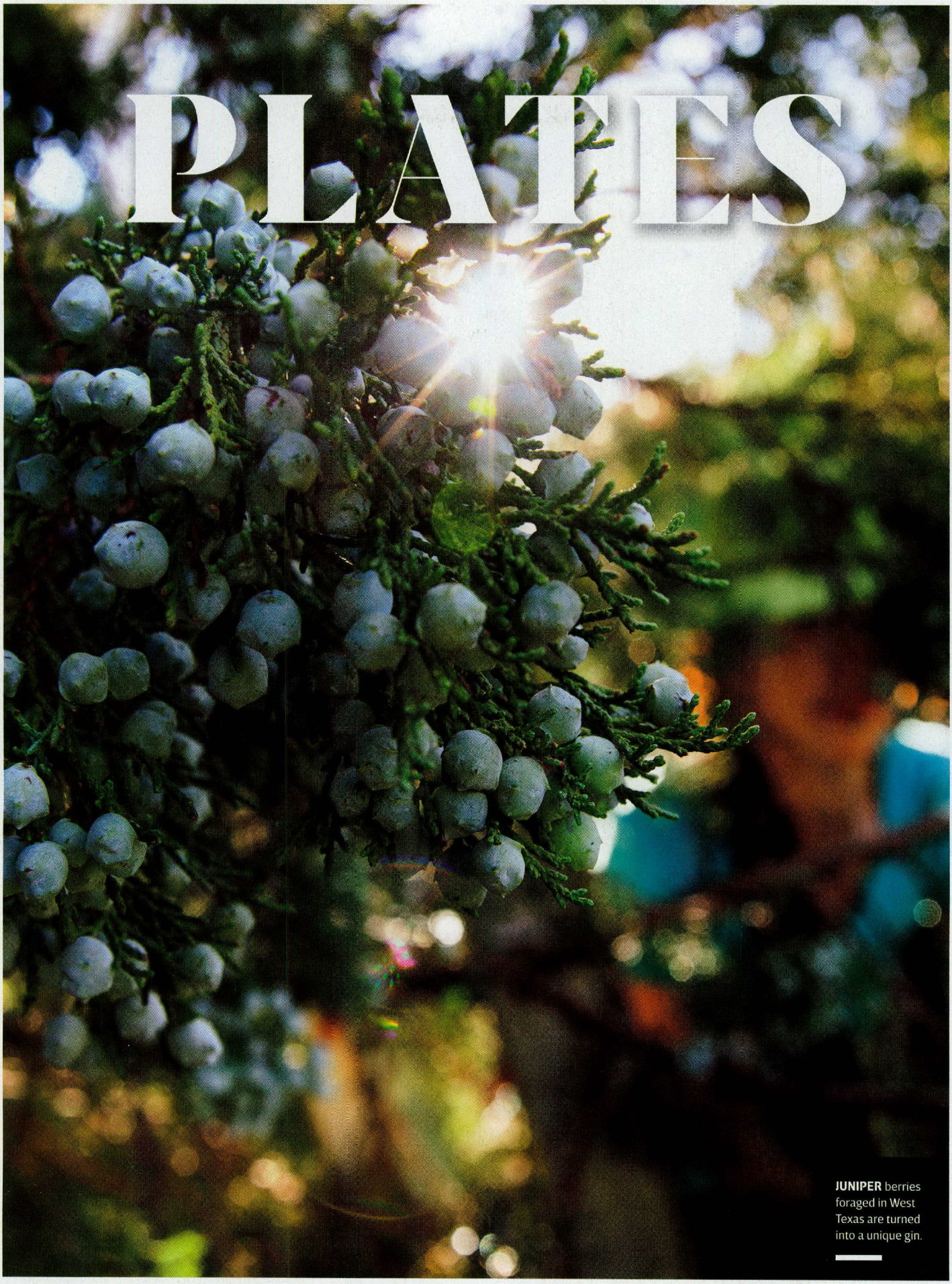
PLATES



JUNIPER berries foraged in West Texas are turned into a unique gin.

Photo: Erich Schlegel

MOLLY CUMMINGS collects alligator juniper berries for her WildBark gin in the Davis Mountains.

Spirit of the West

Juniper berries foraged exclusively in far West Texas are used to make a distinctive gin

By Laurel Miller

It's a late October morning in the Davis Mountains of West Texas, and Molly Cummings is atop a scaffold, foraging alligator juniper berries from a wild tree. With her feed bag over her shoulder, she gently grasps the branches, relieving them of their fragrant dusky green fruit. Her day's haul—between two and 10 pounds—should be enough to produce one batch of her WildBark West Texas Dry Gin.

Cummings, a University of Texas biology professor, founded Austin-based WildGins Co. in 2019. The spirits company produces two gins, WildBark and WildJune, which are both distilled from rye and malted barley and infused with juniper berries native to the Davis Mountains. "I knew that we have eight species of juniper in Texas, and I really wanted to create a product that used our native berries," she says. "Gin allows me to go on a foraging adventure in the mountains, but I also find it the most botanically interesting spirit. I feel a little bit like a pioneer when I'm out there harvesting."

Most gin distillers use common juniper, which has one of the most diverse geographic ranges of any woody plant. Juniper is what gives gin

Photos: Erich Schlegel

its signature piney, herbaceous flavor, although there are different styles of gin. London Dry is the best known (think Tanqueray or Bombay Sapphire) and is notable for its juniper-forward profile. Other traditional styles may have a predominant citrus flavor or sweeter profile. New styles like Japanese and Western make use of indigenous ingredients to create distinctive regional tastes.

When doing research and development for WildBark, Cummings traveled around Texas foraging different species of juniper. A fellow scientist told her where to find alligator juniper, also known as checkerbark, which grows above approximately 6,000 feet in the Davis Mountains. While she was collecting alligator juniper berries, she found another type of juniper that would serve as the backbone for WildJune. The plant, red berry juniper, is a rare species mainly found in parts of West Texas and the Panhandle, with the richest concentration in the Davis Mountains. It possesses juicy, sweet, and fragrant berries, which are combined with 10 other botanicals including white pepper, hops, angelica, and cinnamon to make WildJune.

Cummings forages exclusively on private land from August through the fall in partnership with several landowners near Fort Davis and Marathon. "It's an amazing community out there," she says. "They've really adopted me as their own and are proud that I'm making something so distinctive and indicative of where they live. They know it's a very special place."

Every bottle of WildGins lists the nickname of the tree that was used for the batch. "To my knowledge, WildGins are the only single-sourced spirits in the world," Cummings says. "It's a whole different level of regionality."

Find WildGins at your local liquor retailer or visit wildgins.com.

"I feel a little bit like a pioneer when I'm out there harvesting."

RECIPE

Legit Texas Quarantini

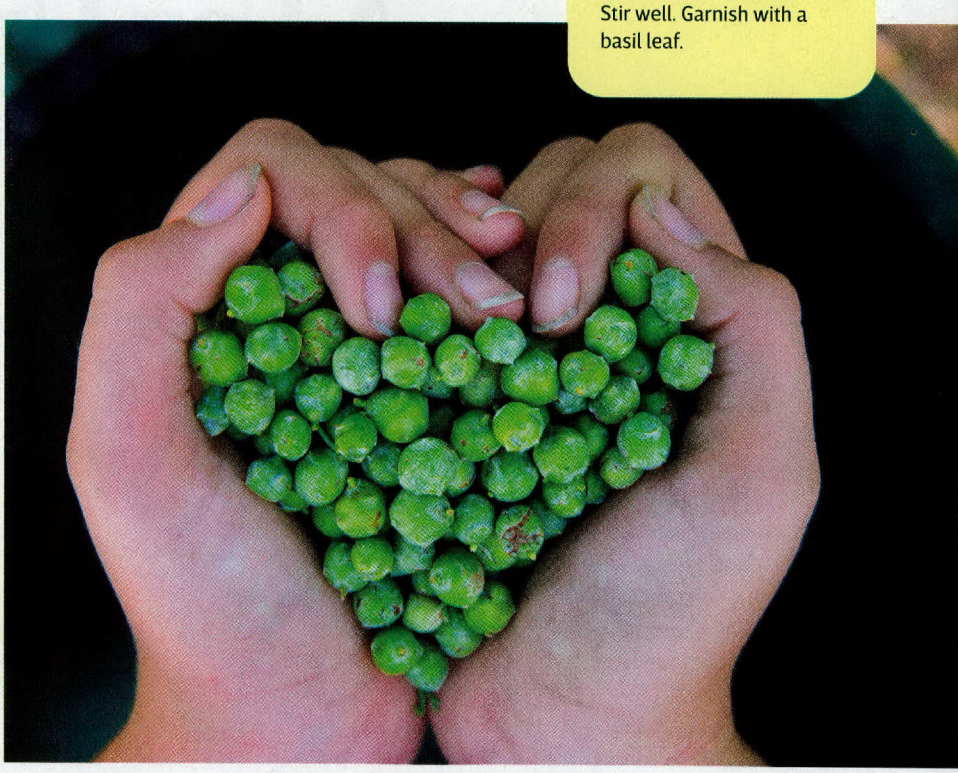
This cocktail combines WildBark, a London Dry-style gin, with Cummings' new product, a novel "cocktail enhancer" called Wild LB&J. The cocktail enhancer combines extracts of wild alligator juniper and lemon balm, which are purported to have antiviral and antibacterial properties. Makes 1 cocktail.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 ounces WildBark West Texas Dry Gin
- 1 ounce Wild LB&J Cocktail Enhancer
- Plain sparkling water of choice
- Basil leaf, for garnish

DIRECTIONS:

Pour gin and cocktail enhancer over ice into a rocks glass. Top with a splash of your favorite brand of sparkling water. Stir well. Garnish with a basil leaf.



NAKIA AND LYNN Price own Turkey Leg Hut in Houston.

A Leg Up

A Houston restaurant gussies up the humble turkey leg

By Heather Brand

Turkey can get a bad rap due to our collective memories of bland preparations from Thanksgivings past, but husband-and-wife team Lynn and Nakia Price are changing minds one turkey leg at a time. At Turkey Leg Hut in Houston's Third Ward, the Prices take turkey to a new level, serving tender, slow-smoked drumsticks stuffed with fillings like dirty rice, shrimp alfredo, and crawfish mac and cheese.

The Prices' creative combinations, which blend Cajun, Creole, soul, and Southern flavors, have attracted an avid fan base. A line of eager customers often stretches down the block, and the restaurant has its share of celebrity enthusiasts, including actor Kevin Hart and rapper Snoop Dogg. On good days, Turkey Leg Hut serves as many as 2,500 of its namesake dishes.

In spite of their phenomenal success, Nakia and Lynn have no formal culinary training. They never set out to be restaurateurs in the first place. In March 2016, while the couple was assisting Lynn's cousin's business—shuttling people to and from the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo—they realized they could capitalize on the crowds. With their shared love of cooking, they decided to start selling barbecued turkey legs and boudin—foods that were easy to prepare and serve in a parking lot near NRG Stadium. Nakia soon came up with the ambitious idea to stuff the legs with dirty rice. "After eating the same thing day after day, we thought, what if we added dirty rice to this?" she says. "Then we began to add mac and cheese and other foods we loved to take the original

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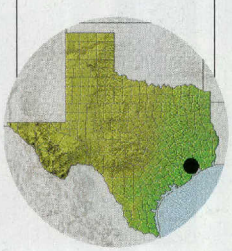


Photos: Nathan Lindstrom

On a good day, Turkey Leg Hut serves as many as 2,500 of its namesake dishes.

turkey leg up a notch." Soon, customers began posting pictures of their dirty rice-stuffed turkey legs on social media, and the positive response was overwhelming.

In April 2016, to meet the growing demand, they started serving their food from the kitchen of the Caddy Shack, a former neighborhood sports bar on Washington Avenue. They opened Turkey Leg Hut at its current spot on Almeda Road the following year. The location was supposed to open in August 2017, but Hurricane Harvey delayed the launch to December. Nakia was undeterred. "I don't let adversity get to me," she says. "I don't like people to underestimate me and tell me what I can't do. I think maybe that competitiveness comes from playing sports."

Nakia first came to the Bayou City on a University of Houston basketball scholarship, having spent her youth in Chicago and Phoenix. She fell in love with the city and decided to stick around. "Houston is a big melting pot," she says. "I love the fact that you have so many different cultures, people from all walks of life that coexist with each other."

Lynn, a native of the Third Ward, played baseball for Rice University. He, too, came from a family that valued cooking. Together, Nakia and Lynn developed the menu for Turkey Leg Hut based on their individual strengths. "Most of the recipes come from me," Nakia boasts. "But the crab boils, crawfish, and fried crabs come from him. Lynn's the dirty rice person. He made up the Cajun Bowl. I thought, This is nothing but a bowl full of carbs, but people love it. It's the best salad."

"Salad" may be a stretch. The hefty Cajun Bowl offers a pile of spicy dirty rice, smothered in Cajun-flavored crawfish mac and cheese, blackened salmon, and grilled shrimp swimming in alfredo sauce. Naturally, shredded barbecued

THE HENNESSY-GLAZED turkey leg is one of the most popular menu items.

THE INTERIOR of Turkey Leg Hut features bold yet personal décor.

turkey can be added to the mix for an additional charge. Turkey is featured in many of the other menu items as well, whether atop a heap of seasoned waffle fries, tucked into a baked potato, or mixed into a bowl of sweet-and-spicy beans. But drumsticks are the highlight, with meat so tender it falls off the bone. "The whole process of how we do our turkey legs was developed by trial and error," Nakia explains. "Now we have it down to a science. We use three different woods and cook them for hours at a time. We put a lot of love into it." The exact recipe is a closely guarded secret.

In addition to serving up good food, the Prices have made it their mission to cultivate a fun atmosphere. That means providing a live DJ to spin tunes, plus offering specialty frozen cocktails and hookahs with flavored tobacco. Under normal circumstances, customers can venture inside to perch at the bar or slip into a cozy booth. During the pandemic, however, the patio has been the place to be, since it allows for more social distancing. To adapt to reduced staff,

At Turkey Leg Hut in Houston's Third Ward, the Prices take turkey to a new level.

Turkey Leg Hut has shifted to a limited menu of favorite plates. Its fleet of four food trucks circulates throughout the city, picking up the slack and dishing out comfort food at a distance.

The Prices go to extra lengths at Thanksgiving, when turkey is in high demand. Turkey Leg Hut has a full holiday menu for pickup, including a Cajun-spiced bird filled with a stuffing of mushroom caps, spinach, sausage, crab claws, and shrimp—plus accompanying sides like Creole corn and red beans and rice—in portions large enough to feed a crowd. "The large stuffed turkeys are something you cannot get anywhere else," Lynn says. "We take our turkey legs to another level for Thanksgiving."

Photos: Nathan Lindstrom (left); Sean Fitzgerald (right)

Love Conquers All

After 20 years and nearly as many restaurants, Fort Worth chef Tim Love hasn't slowed down or sold out

By June Naylor

Tim and Emilie Love opened a tiny steakhouse in Fort Worth's historic Stockyards district in June 2000. Before its official debut, they scraped together enough money to pay for their plumbing by selling beer at a street party. Today, the pair owns 14 restaurants in Texas and Tennessee without the backing of a corporation or investors. Such a feat requires unusual energy and a never-say-die mindset.

"Tim sees an opportunity and says, 'Let's do it,'" Emilie observes. "He cannot sit still—he rarely sleeps."

Despite opening Ático, a Spanish-style bar atop the Springhill Suites by Marriott in the Fort Worth Stockyards, in January, Tim says this year may have delivered his biggest challenge yet. When COVID-19 ground the restaurant industry to a halt, many of his 400 employees were laid off for six weeks. As soon as restaurants reopened, Tim rehired everyone. He's launched a wellness program for employees, understanding that anxiety and depression caused by the pandemic are real issues for many.

In May, Tim joined a restaurant task force at the request of the National Restaurant Association and the White House. He and other influential restaurateurs met with the president and other policymakers to discuss Paycheck Protection Program revisions to

EMILIE AND TIM LOVE dine al fresco at their restaurant Gemelle in Fort Worth.

help independent businesses survive the pandemic. Tim is also a member of the Independent Restaurant Coalition, a nonprofit that supports the RESTAURANTS Act of 2020, a $120 billion federal grant proposal before Congress.

Tim began building his restaurant empire with the 2000 opening of Lonesome Dove Western Bistro. He was working as a chef at Fort Worth's famous Reata restaurant, which temporarily shuttered when a tornado tore through downtown in March 2000. Tim took advantage of the time off to find a spot to open his own place. With his new bride, then a manager down the street at Del Frisco's Double Eagle steakhouse, Tim pooled the couple's savings and remodeled the century-old building that would become the first fine-dining restaurant in the Stockyards. Locals and travelers suddenly had an alternative to the usual fare of chicken-fried steak and enchiladas. Now, there was roasted garlic-stuffed beef tenderloin, rabbit-rattlesnake sausage, and white truffle mac and cheese, along with a wine list offering several Champagne selections and exceptional Old and New World vintages.

"All I ever wanted was to have my own place," Tim says. Before coming to Fort Worth, he cooked in restaurants in Knoxville, Tennessee, and Breckenridge, Colorado, where he skied days, worked nights, and met Emilie. Coming home to Texas, the Denton native bided his time behind other stoves until he could afford his own. "We did all the work ourselves, sank every dollar we had into the place," he says. "We had no choice but to succeed."

Emilie kept her job at Del Frisco's, which was Lonesome Dove's competition, to help pay bills. Within a few months, a big story on Lonesome Dove—noted for its elegantly rustic space and small team of chefs wearing cowboy hats in a tiny kitchen—landed in *Bon Appétit*. Tim's brand took off from there, and Emilie quit her job to help him. Soon, they were sharing their cuisine at the esteemed Aspen Food & Wine Classic festival, where they became pals with culinary luminaries, including José Andrés, Rachael Ray, and the late Anthony Bourdain.

After opening several other eateries in Texas over 15 years, Tim felt drawn to Knoxville, where he spent summers as a boy with his dad, a doctor and farming hobbyist. He'd learned to cook, garden, and work cattle there. While attending the University of Tennessee, he worked in kitchens as much as 60 hours per week. "The adrenaline got to me, and I knew this was exactly what I had to do," Tim explains. "I loved learning what a perfect tomato was like, what fresh herbs should smell like." When he opened Knoxville

FROM TOP: Oysters from Tim Love's newest restaurant in Fort Worth, Ático; the interior of Ático.

"We did all the work ourselves, sank every dollar we had into the place," chef Tim Love says of his first restaurant. "We had no choice but to succeed."

Photos: Sean Fitzgerald

locations of Lonesome Dove and a burger joint called Love Shack in 2016, he got to reconnect with the people who'd helped him get started some 25 years before.

It wasn't the first time Tim had left Texas to take a chance on a project. In 2006, Tim and Emilie took their three toddlers with them to live in New York part-time while opening a Lonesome Dove location in Manhattan. It closed within a year. "Business is business," Tim says with a shrug. The experience, however, led him to his friendship with chef Juan Rodriguez, who worked for Tim in New York and now owns Magdalena's in Fort Worth.

"It was the best experience I could have had," Rodriguez says. "We worked really hard, but had a lot of fun, too. Tim taught me so much about the creative side—how to work photo shoots and how to market yourself."

The setback in New York proved to be a small blip in the career of a chef who averages one restaurant opening a year. "At first, I just wanted to have three restaurants, which was kind of unthinkable at that time," Tim says. "But I like to do things just to see if I can, and with passion."

Some of his restaurants are directly inspired by family members. He opened Queenie's, a steakhouse in Denton, in 2013 in honor of his mother—nicknamed Queenie—who still lives in the town. In 2019, he opened his first Italian restaurant, a bright and cheerful trattoria in Fort Worth called Gemelle—the word means "twin girls" in Italian—as a nod to his two daughters.

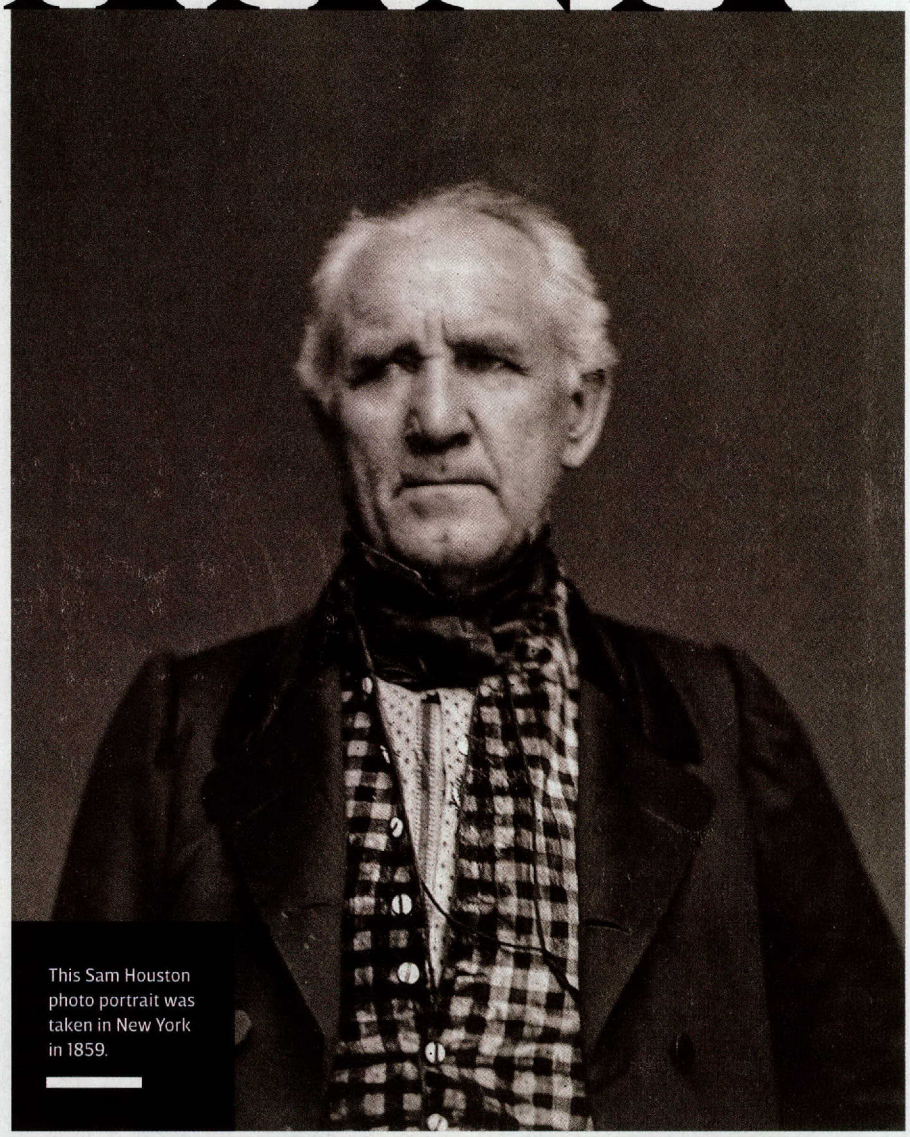
Though travel keeps him on the road much of the time, Tim still hangs his hat in Fort Worth, where Emilie assists with restaurant design and music. "Tim's the driving force behind all of this, but riding shotgun gives me such a good view," Emilie says of their 20-year adventure she hopes will continue for at least another two decades. "And though the journey takes us all over the country, the road always leads back home to Fort Worth."

TEXANA

Divided Times

The forgotten stories of pro-Union Texans in the runup to the Civil War

By James L. Haley



This Sam Houston photo portrait was taken in New York in 1859.

In March 1861, as the United States hurtled toward the Civil War, Texas Governor Sam Houston assembled his closest advisors late one night in the Governor's Mansion library in Austin. He read them an extraordinary letter from President Abraham Lincoln. If Houston would hold Texas in the Union, Lincoln would make him a major general with command of 50,000 troops. Upon his advisors' counsel, the 67-year-old governor burned Lincoln's letter in the library fireplace. Houston said if he were 10 years younger, he would've accepted.

Houston was the most prominent pro-Union leader in Texas, but he wasn't the only Texan who opposed the state's secession. The state Legislature had been so angry at Houston's lack of Southern fervor that it declined to reappoint him to the U.S. Senate in 1857. Two years later, however, Houston was elected governor on a pro-Union platform. The secessionists ultimately prevailed, but Texas was bitterly divided over leaving the United States. Traces of that history paint a more complete picture of the tumultuous time.

Of course, the crucial issue was slavery. In 1860, the 170,000 enslaved African Americans in Texas made up about one-third of the population. Cotton drove the state's economy, and plantations relied on slavery for profitability. But slavery was far less essential to the rest of the economy, and in fact, nearly 75% of Texas families did not own slaves. Most Texans were cash-strapped farmers who could not afford the $800 price of a field hand (equal to about $24,700 today). Others, like the thousands of German settlers in the Hill Country, found slavery morally repugnant. Even Texas courts could be ambivalent about slavery; there were cases of slaves suing their masters for their freedom—and winning.

"The status, and especially the legal status, of slavery in Texas before the Civil War had always been tenuous and polarizing."

Photo: Mathew Brady/National Archives and Records Administration

"The status, and especially the legal status, of slavery in Texas before the Civil War had always been tenuous and polarizing," explains Byron King, a historian and former tour guide at the Texas State Capitol. "It wasn't like a number of other soon-to-be Confederate states that developed fairly stable and politically secure multigenerational 'slavocracies.'"

But secessionists held the political momentum. Texas newspapers were generally beholden to the slave-owning planter elite, and most Anglo Texans had immigrated from Southern states and were ingrained in that culture. In January 1861, a majority of Texas legislators gathered for a secession convention and submitted a referendum to registered voters. On Feb. 23, 1861, Texas voters approved it, 46,153 to 14,747.

Those numbers are deceptive. Texas Supreme Court Justice James Hall Bell, an ally of Houston's, arrived at his polling place in Brazoria County and found it occupied by secessionist poll-watchers, one of whom handed him his ballot preprinted "For Secession." Bell scratched out "For," and penned in "Against."

"Judge Bell," said the presiding official, "I am very sorry to see you cast that vote, and you are going to regret it." Indeed, Bell was soon voted off the Court. Such intimidation artificially inflated the majority vote, and many Unionists did not risk voting at all.

Bushwhacked

Secessionist vigilantes also turned to arson and murder to make their case. Across Texas, several wells and caverns took on the nickname "Dead Man's Hole," where the bodies of "bushwhacked" Unionists were cast. Perhaps the most notorious was in Burnet County, where the corpses of 17 men, possibly more, were thrown down a 150-foot deep limestone cavity.

The questions of slavery and secession divided nobody more than the 50,000 or so recent German immigrants.

"The Germans who came here were not just looking to do better economically; they had political ideals," says

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Hamilton Pool, west of Austin; "Dead Man's Hole" in Burnet County; the library of the Texas Governor's Mansion in Austin.

Relics of Texas' Anti-Secession Resistance

The Governor's Mansion in Austin is where Sam Houston burned Lincoln's letter in the library fireplace and made the decision to give up the governorship rather than pledge allegiance to the Confederacy. The Union sword of Edmund Davis, a Brownsville judge who served as Texas governor during Reconstruction, is on display in the mansion's collection. tspb.texas.gov

Hamilton Pool Preserve, west of Austin, is where Congressman Andrew Jackson Hamilton, a Union sympathizer, hid before escaping the state. parks.traviscountytx.gov/parks/hamilton-pool-preserve

The Treue der Union Monument in Comfort is where the bones of German-Texan Union loyalists are buried. comfortchamber.com

Jordan-Bachman Pioneer Farms in Austin harbors the historic home of Texas Supreme Court Justice James Hall Bell, an opponent of secession. pioneerfarms.org

Dead Man's Hole in Burnet County is where vigilantes dumped the bodies of anti-secessionists, off Shovel Mountain Road (County Road 401), on a dirt road about 600 feet north of the intersection with Burnham Ranch Road (County Road 405).

The Great Hanging Monument in Gainesville memorializes 41 men who were executed in 1862 for not joining the Confederacy. It is located between Main and California streets, six blocks east of the county courthouse.

Warren Friedrich, a former board member of the German-Texan Heritage Society. "They were proud to be Americans, maybe even prouder to be Texans, and they took exception to Texas wanting to leave the Union."

Many in Central Texas felt it better to "go along to get along," and a couple of volunteer German companies formed in New Braunfels and joined the rebel army. West Texas was different: Union sentiment was strong, especially among the intellectuals, or *freidenker*, south of Fredericksburg. They had come to Texas to escape political repression, and they felt keen sympathy for those in bondage.

In 1862, between 60 and 70 of these "freethinkers" headed for Mexico, which was the usual escape route for Texas loyalists intending to make their way to the Union army. In the Battle of the Nueces, Confederate irregulars ambushed them near Fort Clark, killing 28. Another eight were killed in a second attack. After the

Photos: Will van Overbeek (left, above); Carol M. Highsmith/Library of Congress (left, below); Nicolas Henderson (right)

war, the victims' families gathered their bones and took them to Comfort, where they were buried with honors beneath the Treue der Union (True to the Union) Monument. To this day, an 1866 flag with 36 stars flies at half-staff.

Even this was not the high-water mark of vigilante violence in Texas. That distinction belongs to the so-called Great Hanging in Gainesville. In Cooke County, along the Red River boundary of Texas' northern border, locals had voted down the secession ordinance. After the Civil War broke out, Confederate irregulars rounded up suspected Unionists and draft dodgers. Tried for treason and insurrection, the defendants were condemned on simple majority vote, and some 19 acquittals were reversed by mob demand. In all, 41 men were hanged in October 1862. In 2014, descendants of the victims placed a monument in a small park near the site of the executions, six blocks east of the county courthouse.

Lone Voices

Houston's iconic stature afforded him some protection, but others weren't as lucky. A mob chased Andrew Jackson Hamilton, Austin's congressman, out of town for opposing the Confederacy. He sought refuge on his brother's ranch 25 miles to the west, where he hid out in a limestone sinkhole. Hamilton escaped the state, served as a Northern general, and returned as governor during Reconstruction. His hiding place is now known as Hamilton Pool, the scenic centerpiece of a 232-acre nature preserve.

First Lady Margaret Houston spent the night of March 15, 1861, in the Governor's Mansion library, listening to Houston pace upstairs as he wrestled with whether to swear allegiance to the Confederacy as the secession convention required him to do the following day. When he came down in the morning, he said, "Margaret, I will never do it."

Houston relinquished his office and moved with his family to Independence. But he was given no peace in retirement, called upon to give speeches defending his position. He delivered the greatest one in April 1861 in Galveston from the balcony of the Tremont Hotel, which still welcomes visitors today.

"Some of you laugh to scorn the idea of bloodshed as the result of secession, but let me tell you what is coming," Houston said. "Your fathers and husbands, your sons and brothers, will be herded at the point of the bayonet. While I believe with you in the doctrine of state rights ... the North is determined to preserve this Union."

The Civil War, of course, proved him right.

THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5

Palacios

Seize the bay

BY CHET GARNER

It takes tenacity to live on the Texas coast, and perhaps nobody knows that more than the people of Palacios (pronounced *Puh-lash-iss*). This bay front town, halfway between Houston and Corpus Christi, has weathered many storms in its day. It's not a town of crowds and kitschy souvenir shops. Instead, it's all sun, serenity, and bay side treasures.

City by the Sea Museum

At this museum located on historic Commerce Street, visitors can learn about local history from the native Karankawa tribe to Camp Hulen Army base, which brought 14,000 soldiers to town during World War II. Most impressive is the story of the French ship *La Belle* and how a team of experts excavated the 17th-century shipwreck from the depths of Matagorda Bay. If you pick the right day, you can even take a voyage on the museum's *La Petite Belle*, a half-size sailboat modeled after the famous ship.

Mike's on Main

Every town needs a tasty diner, and Mike's fits the bill. This quaint café serves up fresh omelets and baked goods for breakfast, incredible burgers and sandwiches for lunch, and a selection of house-made coffees and teas. When you're finished, grab a cone of Blue Bell ice cream for the road and visit the neighboring shops on Main Street.

Luther Hotel

There's no better place to unplug than in a rocking chair on what used to be known as the "Longest Front Porch in Texas." (A hurricane wiped out the original years ago.) This hotel has been a stop for weary travelers since 1903. During its 117 years of service, it's seen devastating hurricanes and raging fires. While famous guests including Lyndon B. Johnson and Shirley Temple stayed there, you don't need to be a guest to step into the lobby and feel the years of history rush over you like waves in the bay.

The Point

One of the best restaurants in Texas is inside a convenience store. Not only can you grab snacks and fishing gear from the shop, but you can fill up on the Tran family's Vietnamese food. Their versions of classic dishes like banh mi and pho are out of this world, and the fried shrimp wraps are the best you could ever hope to find in the "Shrimp Capital of Texas."

Pier Fishing at South Bay Park

Palacios has the reputation of being one of the best fishing destinations in Texas, so you've got to try your hand at reeling in a whopper. My favorite spot to fish is the public pier of South Bay Park in front of the Luther Hotel. At night, the hotel turns on bright lights that draw in fish from all over the bay, which is home to record-setting black drum and trout. On one night, I caught dozens of fish; it's just too bad none of them were larger than my hand.

So whether you follow my footsteps or forge your own path, I hope to see you on the road.

Chet Garner is the host of The Daytripper® *travel show on PBS. To view the Palacios episode visit thedaytripper.com. Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chettripper.*

'All Kinds of Colors, Dancing Everywhere'

Lauren Anderson, who broke ground as a Black ballerina in Houston, reflects on a career of movement

By Sabrina LeBoeuf

"I get to go in and teach kids, through movement, about life, learning, themselves, setting goals, and realizing that hard work helps them achieve their goals."

For ballet fans, the arrival of fall means *Nutcracker* season. It's a tradition Lauren Anderson holds dear. The retired Houston dancer has performed nearly every role in Tchaikovsky's enduring work, going back to 1972 when she was one of Mother Ginger's children in the Houston Ballet's first-ever production of the holiday classic. Upon joining the company in 1983, she played the lead role of Sugar Plum Fairy. Anderson's experience paid off when, in 1990, the Houston Ballet promoted her to principal dancer, making her the first African American to hold the position in the company.

Over the next 15 years, working with renowned choreographer Ben Stevenson, Anderson danced her way through *The Firebird*, *Swan Lake*, *Don Quixote*, and countless other works. After retiring in 2006, Anderson stayed with the Houston Ballet as the company's program manager of education and community engagement, providing dance instruction at disadvantaged schools.

While Anderson now focuses on teaching academic and life skills through the arts—and raising a son of her own—she has been recognized for her accomplishments in the dance world. In 2016, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., honored Anderson's career by enshrining her ballet shoes in its permanent exhibit. A year later, she received the Texas Medal of Arts Award in Dance.

Though COVID-19 forced the Houston Ballet to cancel its annual performance of *The Nutcracker*, the season remains a time of reflection for Anderson.

Q: What are some of your early memories of* The Nutcracker*?

A: The only time I wasn't nervous performing was my very first performance, which was *The Nutcracker* in 1972 at Jones Hall. I will never forget it. I didn't realize the magnitude of what I was doing until I got out there onstage. From then on, every time I perform, I'm nervous. That's just normal, right? I'll

Illustration: Tatjana Junker

never forget seeing my first Sugar Plum Fairy. Standing there, I'm looking through a stairway that's part of a set for the party scene. I remember looking through the rungs of that stairway into the light at the Sugar Plum Fairy and wanting to be her. So, I got to retire as the Sugar Plum Fairy. There's a picture of a Mother Ginger Child looking through the rungs of the stairway as I'm the Sugar Plum Fairy. I was just like, that was me 40 years ago.

Q: Why did you choose to join the Houston Ballet versus a company elsewhere?
A: I'm a native Houstonian. I love Houston. People are still trying to get me to go run stuff in different cities. They're still trying, but there's just something about Houston. All that said, I didn't think I was going to get in the Houston Ballet. I thought I was going to have to go to Dance Theatre of Harlem because that's where the African American people, the people of color, were dancing. I did know that Houston was hiring Black dancers because in 1976, Adrian Vincent James, who was the first African American in the Houston Ballet, was in the company. So it's not like I didn't know, but I just thought that I would have to go somewhere else. And then, in '83 when I auditioned, I got hired, and I just never left.

Q: Growing up, what was it like to dance as a Black ballerina?
A: It wasn't a thing until it became a thing. When you become an adolescent, you realize you don't look like everybody else. You want to look like everybody. You want to be like everybody. You want to fit in, and I just kind of didn't. However, I was never treated that way at Houston Ballet. But I felt like I didn't fit in. I saw Dance Theatre of Harlem when I was 9, and that's when I realized that I hadn't seen a Black ballerina before.

Q: How does it feel to be included in the National Museum of African American History and Culture?
A: It's an honor to be in a national museum. The museum starts with slavery and goes all the way up through successes, all kinds of achievements. Then you get to theater and music and dance. And like I said, I saw the Dance Theatre of Harlem when I was 9, and I'm displayed in the same case as the Dance Theatre of Harlem. I really think if I hadn't seen that company, I don't think I'd be dancing. So, I'm really honored to be in that case. My story is there at the bottom with a picture of me as the Sugar Plum Fairy. I'm on the wall. I'm there as the Firebird, and my name is on a little plaque. It's just a little overwhelming still. My great-great-grandkids can go there and say, 'That's my great-great-grandmother.'"

Q: How have you seen opportunities change for Black dancers, especially with ballerinas like Misty Copeland and Michaela DePrince now in the spotlight?
A: I think because of social media and television dance shows, more people are interested in dance. So the more people getting interested in dance, the more kinds of people you're going to have dancing. All that said, with Misty and Michaela [being dancers at major companies], all of that was already going on. That was going on 25 years ago with me, 10 years before that with Debra Austin, 20 years before that with Raven Wilkinson, 10 years before that with Janet Collins. We could just keep going back. The difference now is we have social media, and we can see it. And laws are different. People are different. Generations are different. People have more education. People aren't as ignorant on color and racism. Do we have a long way to go? Yes, absolutely. However, it's definitely better, and it's definitely different because there are so many dancers of color, not just Black, of all kinds of colors, dancing everywhere.

Q: What's it like to work with school kids in the company's education program?
A: Sometimes you have kinesthetic learners and tactile learners, so we get to figure out what they need and make it happen. We teach kids, through movement, about life, learning, themselves, setting goals, accomplishing goals, working their butts off without even knowing it, but realizing that hard work helps them achieve the goals that they want. We're trying to teach the complete child, so we add social-emotional learning into dance. It's arts integration.

Q: How would you assess the health of the ballet scene across Texas? How does it compare to other states?
A: We hold our own. I know we've got Ballet Austin, Houston Ballet. There are a few [companies] in San Antonio. So there's a lot of dance here. I feel the Houston Ballet, specifically, doesn't get the respect it deserves. We're one of the best companies in the world. I'm not saying it just because I'm there. I don't dance there anymore. I just think that the world thinks that Texas is "bang, bang, shoot 'em up," that we ride horses, and there's tumbleweed blowing around. Now granted, in parts of Texas there is tumbleweed blowing around—it's the terrain. But we can definitely hold our own in any industry, especially artistically.

Q: What are some of the biggest changes you've seen in Houston over your lifetime?
A: As a child, when I was in Houston Ballet's first *Nutcracker* back in 1972, I remember going downtown. I knew we were going to get to have pizza between shows. It was a big deal. There were two restaurants [in the Theater District]: Birraporetti's and Longhorn Cafe. Now, in that exact city block, there are, I don't know, six, seven, eight, nine restaurants. Then there's Midtown, the connection of downtown to the rest of Houston. The growth of the city is amazing.

COVID-19 prompted the Houston Ballet to cancel its production of *The Nutcracker* this year, but you can connect with the company and support its programs—including the online Nutcracker Market, Nov. 11–Dec. 11—at houstonballet.org.

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VINTAGE

BY JAC DARSNEK, TRACES OF TEXAS

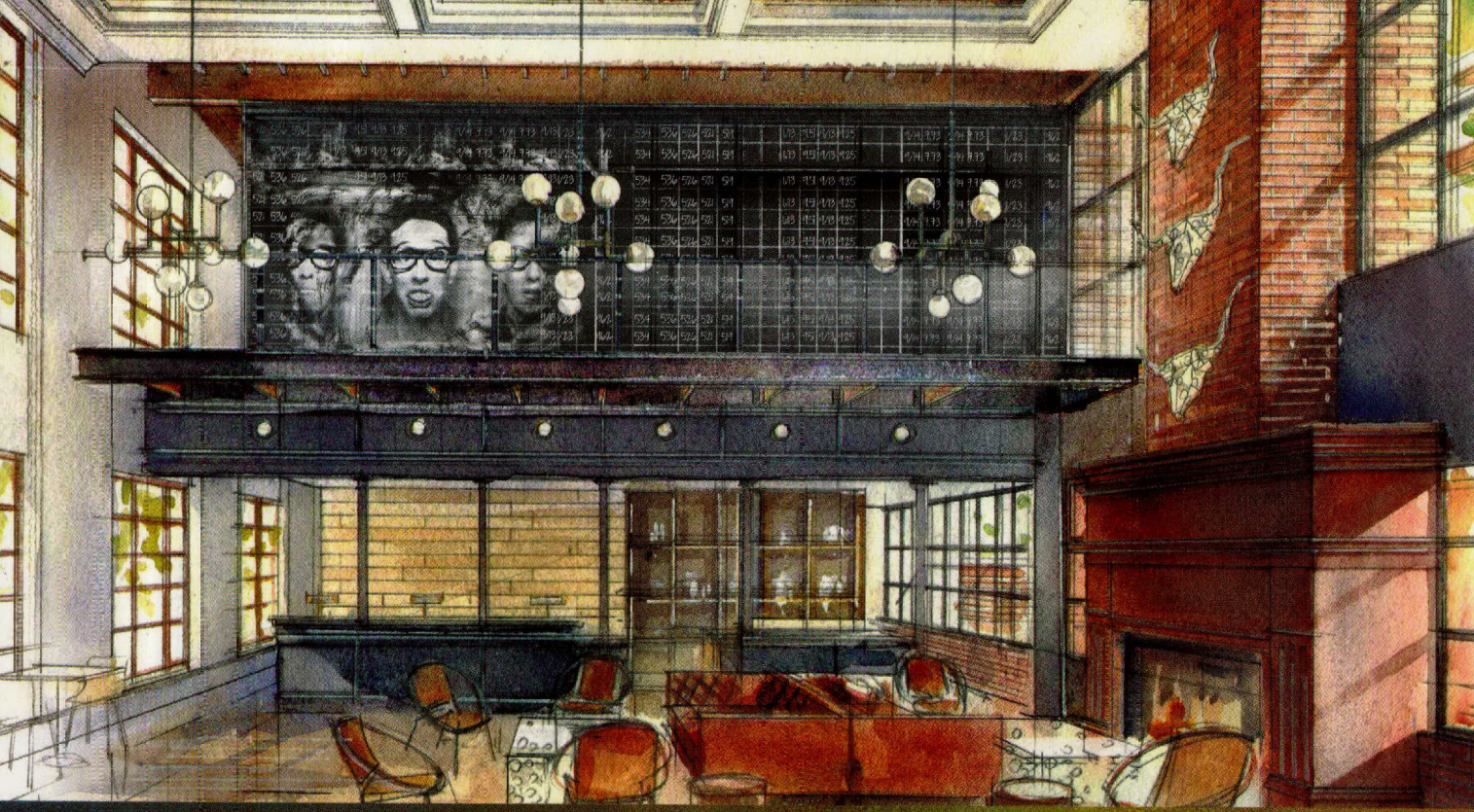
The Carrasco Sisters

CANUTILLO, CIRCA 1920

The Carrasco Sisters—Carlotta, left, and Esther—gained regional fame as a teenage musical duo in the 1920s in Canutillo, their small hometown just north of El Paso. Dancing and playing guitar and drums, they performed at the Julimes Theater, which was owned by their father, Fernando Carrasco. Fernando featured entertainers from as far away as Dallas, Houston, and Mexico, including Lorenzo Barcelata, a Mexican composer most famous for his song "Maria Elena." Donna Marie Miller, an Austin-based author, sent in this photo, which the Carrasco Sisters gave her when she interviewed them in 1990 for the *El Paso Times*. By then, Carlotta Villescas and Esther Heldt were in their 80s and widowed and divorced, respectively. They lived next door to one another in Canutillo until their deaths in the first decade of the 2000s.

Know of any fascinating vintage Texas photographs? Send copies or ideas to ***tracesoftxphotos@gmail.com****.*

Photo: Courtesy Donna Marie Miller



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