

THE TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

# MEDALLION

WINTER 2018



## BATTERED BUT NOT BROKEN

Gulf Coast Museums Continue  
La Salle's Odyssey After  
Weathering Hurricane Harvey

PLUS La Rancheria Grande | Tuscania Shipwreck | Friends of the THC Capital Campaign



ON THE COVER: Rockport's Texas Maritime Museum weathered Hurricane Harvey. Photo: Patrick Hughey.

**PAGE 6** This issue's featured medallion is in Victoria, highlighted in our heritage travel article.

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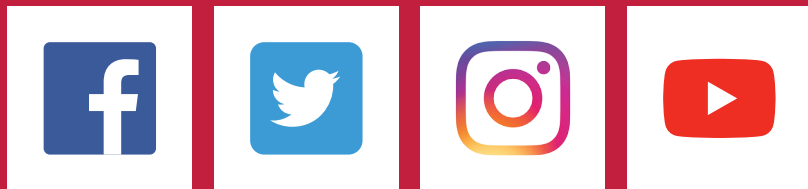
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## TEXAS REPRESENTATIVE TODD HUNTER LEADERSHIP LETTER

Dear Friends,

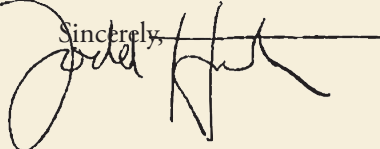
Texas House District 32, which I'm extremely proud to represent, was one of the areas severely impacted by Hurricane Harvey last August. It's been nearly six months since that devastating event, yet we still have a long road of recovery ahead.

Although our district's communities have remained strong and undeterred in these efforts, much remains to be rebuilt and repaired. Among these resources are many historic buildings and heritage sites, which are unique to this region of the Coastal Bend.

One of the most-impacted communities in HD-32 was Port Aransas, also part of the Texas Historical Commission's Texas Tropical Trail Region. Port Aransas is known for its travel and heritage tourism destinations, including the magnificent Tarpon Inn, which dates to 1886. It is now serving as a beacon of hope and resilience as it undergoes restoration efforts.

Sites like these and others in the Texas Tropical Trail Region are important economic engines and contribute to Texas' \$7 billion heritage travel industry. Efforts to assist with their recovery at the local, state, and national levels are equally important.

I encourage all Texans to learn about the rich history of this region and to continue efforts to rebuild the significant structures—old and new—along our state's Gulf Coast. I look forward to our continued recovery as we forge ahead with our significant heritage and dedicated citizenry as our foundation.

Sincerely,  


Rep. Todd Hunter  
Texas House District 32

# LA RANCHERIA GRANDE, DONDE VIVIA

Central Texas Site Was Home to 22 American Indian Groups and El Camino Real



Text by Andy Rhodes, photos by Patrick Hughey

The bumpy drive in a 4x4 cart to the historically significant Rancheria Grande site doesn't feel particularly historic. It's careening (and fun), but the past doesn't catch up until you arrive at a panoramic clearing, surrounded by ridgetops that once housed bands of American Indians at a busy destination for commerce and socializing.

Now home to pastoral ranchland in Milam County northwest of College Station, the Rancheria Grande site is far from bustling. But its importance becomes increasingly apparent as experts point out natural landmarks and share tales of American Indian interaction with European settlers on the fabled Camino Real de los Tejas, which traversed the site.

According to Steven Gonzales, executive director of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association, 22 American Indian groups once occupied the surrounding ridges, where they held strategic views of the surrounding landscape and interacted to strengthen their bonds and alliances.

"There was a massive colonization around here. The Rancheria was a place where these groups came to gather—from East Texas, such as the Caddo, to bands from Mexico, to groups from the Trans-Pecos Region," Gonzales says. "They'd come here for seasonal farming, to trade goods and services, and even to inter-marry. This was *the* meeting place."

He adds that some of the artifacts discovered in the area date to the Paleoindian period nearly 10,000 years ago, although most are associated with the Camino Real's peak in the 16th and 17th centuries. Funding from the Texas Historical Commission's Texas Preservation Trust Fund and local matching grants helped archeologists investigate the site and identify cultural remnants on the landscape, including trail swales and American Indian village sites within the Rancheria.

"They found some old post holes with ceremonial objects right where we're standing," says property owner Eugene Baumann. "The Indians weren't living in teepees—they were using willow tree limbs from down near the creek and bending them around to make thatched huts."

Adjacent landowners Joyce and Mike Conner explain that the Rancheria stretched for miles and included a nearby natural landmark now known as Sugarloaf Mountain. The views from atop the peak were vast, and it served as a signpost

for travelers along El Camino Real. It also became a source of conflict when a former landowner destroyed part of the landmark in search of a rumored Spanish gold treasure.

"The Tonkawa see it as part of their creation story, so they got pretty upset about all that digging and put a stop to it," Mike Conner says.

According to Gonzales, the Spanish occupied an adjacent mission complex known as San Xavier. Like other missions in Texas, they were intended to protect Spain's colonial interests and convert native populations to Catholicism; when this failed, the missions were shuttered in the mid-1700s. Regardless, Rancheria Grande remained a busy destination for the many cultural groups drawn to the area from across the continent.



Opposite, from left: Steven Gonzales of El Camino Real de los Tejas, Milam CHC Chair Lynn Young, and property owners Joyce Conner and Eugene Baumann discuss artifacts found at the Rancheria Grande site. Above: Now pastoral ranchland, the Rancheria site was once a busy destination along El Camino Real.

"We think the Rancheria was a peaceful place, mainly because the various groups were coming together for trade and to inter-marry and solidify relational bonds, not to fight over territory," Gonzales explains. "They respected the rules of the Camino Real, which were pretty strict. Each group had to send two representatives so there would be witnesses and no ambushes."

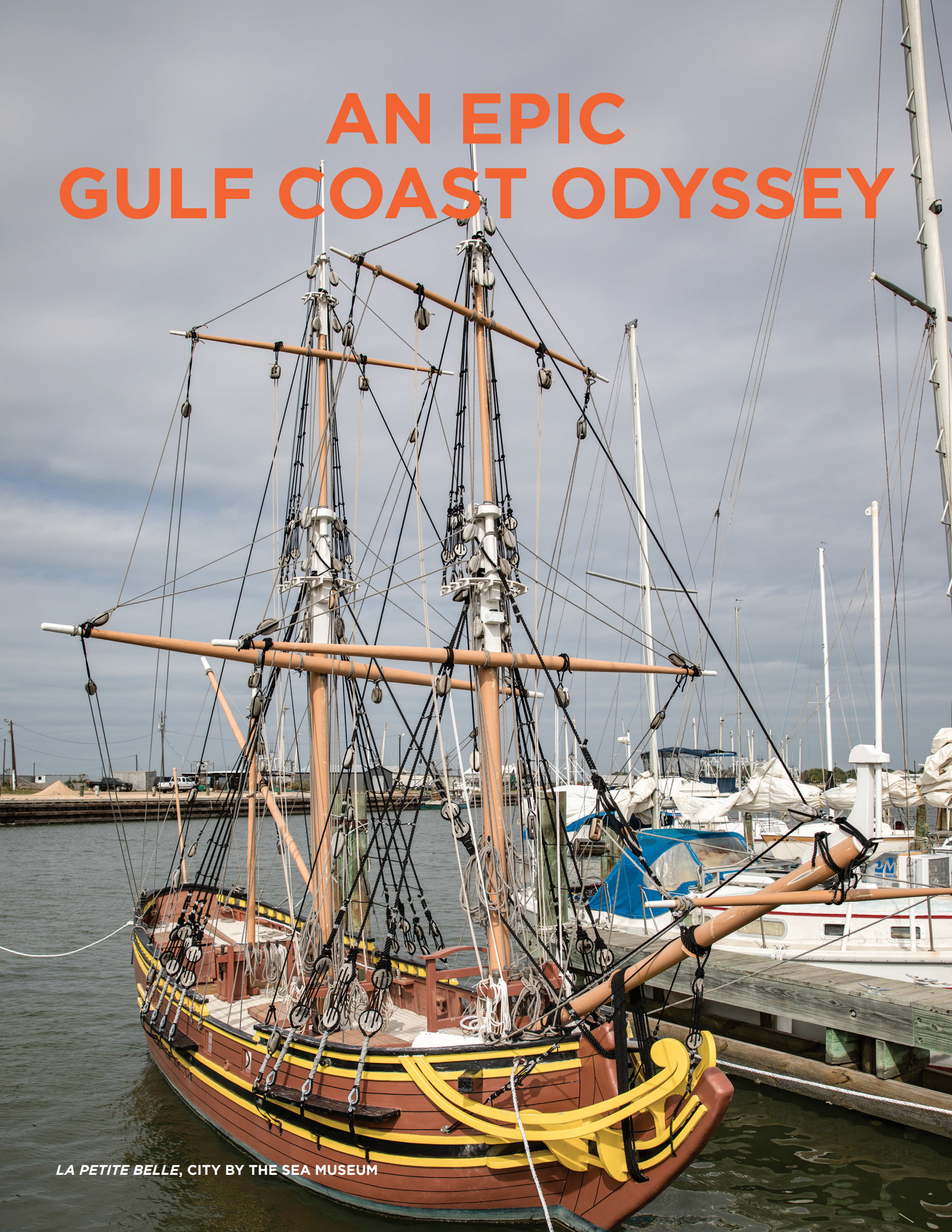
Gonzales adds that discovered artifacts reveal a diversity of cultures and eras. One of the most interesting items appropriately represents a melding of two groups.

Baumann describes a "metal arrowhead" found on his property comprised of 95 percent iron; coincidentally, the metal barrel straps used by European settlers at the time were also made of 95 percent iron. According to Lynn Young, chair of the Milam County Historical Commission, artifacts like these are available for public viewing at the Milam County Museum in nearby Cameron.

"We hope Rancheria Grande inspires people all across Texas to research their own history by working through the proper archeological channels like this," says Dr. Lucile Estell, a Milam County historian. "We're excited to help tell Milam County's part of the Camino Real story and leave a legacy to benefit future generations."

**For more information about Rancheria Grande or El Camino Real, please visit [elcaminotrail.org](http://elcaminotrail.org).**

# AN EPIC GULF COAST ODYSSEY



LA PETITE BELLE, CITY BY THE SEA MUSEUM

# Relive 17th-Century French Colonial Texas at La Salle Odyssey Museums

*It was impossible to see in the murky water of Matagorda Bay. Divers searched for clues, hoping something would lead to the 1686 French shipwreck La Belle, long associated with the area. But on that overcast afternoon in 1995, the cloudy bay water obscured a visual confirmation by the Texas Historical Commission's marine archeologists.*

Instead, the divers had to rely on their sense of touch. One of them reached into the bay sediment and felt an ornate curved object, suspected to be a dolphin-shaped handle, common to historic cannons of the time. If there was a similar one adjacent to it, the centuries-old mystery might be solved.

As soon as he discovered the other handle, triumphant cries emerged from the crew. The cannon was raised and later confirmed as *La Belle's*, setting into motion a series of events that would make this region of the Texas Gulf Coast the epicenter of maritime history for years to come.

Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle's epic journey—including the *Belle* shipwreck and his ill-fated Fort St. Louis Colony—is the focal point of the THC's La Salle Odyssey, a series of exhibits in seven Coastal Bend museums. Each museum tells a different element of the story, allowing heritage travelers to immerse themselves in this fascinating aspect of 17th-century Texas history.

Although most museums weathered Hurricane Harvey's impact in late August 2017 (see page 8), one facility was directly hit by the eye of the storm. Rockport's **Texas Maritime Museum** ([texasmaritimemuseum.org](http://texasmaritimemuseum.org), 361-729-1271) suffered extensive interior water damage, but maintained its structural integrity. Restoration efforts are underway, with hopes that the museum will



be open to (much-needed) visitors by March.

According to Curator Phil Barnes, the Texas Maritime Museum joined the La Salle Odyssey project in the early 2000s with a focus on daily life aboard *La Belle*. Artifacts that draw the most interest are a navigation device known as a nocturnal, personal belongings and medical instruments from the late 1600s, and a large model of the ship.

“The La Salle Odyssey is an important project because it tells a part of Texas history that a lot of people don't know about. Once visitors start putting everything together with France's presence here and the Spanish defense

of the area, they start to realize the deeper roots of our state's heritage,” Barnes says. “Our museum's focus on maritime history helps put things in perspective. Many people don't realize how important the coast has been to the settlement of Texas.”

If the Maritime Museum's reopening schedule goes as planned, visitors will be able to experience this history via several upgraded and reimagined exhibits dedicated to daily life for the French sailors and their approach to sea navigation at the time. Children will find the popular ship wheel and interactive touch screens have returned, along with the museum's traditional exhibits dedicated to sea-based commerce and life along Texas' Gulf Coast.

For those interested in geographical proximity to La Salle's shipwreck and the THC's subsequent excavation, head to Palacios' **City by the Sea Museum** ([citybytheseamuseum.org](http://citybytheseamuseum.org), 361-972-1148). Located in a former downtown mercantile store now listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the museum is within miles of *La Belle's* final resting place.

“People come through here on tour of all the Odyssey museums—they really enjoy hearing about the excavation and shipwreck site,” says Museum Coordinator Edith Gower. “I even tell them about the time I got to go out into the bay and peer over the edge of the



CALHOUN COUNTY MUSEUM, PORT LAVACA

cofferdam. I've never seen anything like that before or since. It was a very unique experience—who gets to look into a hole in the water?"

The City by the Sea Museum's distinctive offering to the Odyssey project is *La Petite Belle*, a half-scale replica of the original ship. The fully functioning vessel was built by volunteers and based on historical records of La Salle's ship. *La Petite Belle* sets sail occasionally throughout the year for private and public activities, including an annual living history event reenacting La Salle's nearby landing on the gulf shore.

Another Odyssey museum adjacent to a significant La Salle-related site is Port Lavaca's **Calhoun County Museum** ([calhouncountymuseum.org](http://calhouncountymuseum.org), 361-553-4689), located mere miles from the former Fort St. Louis site. The colony started in 1685 with nearly 150

inhabitants, but dwindled to about 40 by 1687, when LaSalle departed with 17 men in search of a French fort in the Great Lakes region.

colony," says Museum Director George Anne Cormier. "We have a model of the fort and display cases with plates, pots, trading supplies, and weapons. This is where they were planning to live, so we help tell that story of day-to-day life in the 17th century."

Cormier adds that one of the museum's most popular artifacts is an object used aboard ships like *La Belle* to detect the foundation and depth of the sea floor. A museum display describes how sailors used sounding leads to help determine if they were over rocks or sand to select anchoring locations.

inhabitants, but dwindled to about 40 by 1687, when LaSalle departed with 17 men in search of a French fort in the Great Lakes region.

"Our part of the story is exhibiting the everyday items that would have been used at the

Cormier says that other exhibits also draw visitors' attention—including a diorama dedicated to the Karankawa Indians and a mesmerizing glass lens once used in the Matagorda Island lighthouse—but they are ultimately captivated by the La Salle Odyssey objects.

"Many people have told us they saw the *Belle* exhibit in Austin at the Bullock Museum and decided to come down here to visit the other museums," Cormier says. "We give personal tours and try to make a connection with visitors by relating the artifacts to their lives."

For those interested in delving deeper into the story of Fort St. Louis, head about 20 miles north to Victoria's **Museum of the Coastal Bend** ([museumofthecoastalbend.org](http://museumofthecoastalbend.org), 361-582-2511). This welcoming



MUSEUM OF THE COASTAL BEND, VICTORIA

## Harvey Recovery

Nearly six months have passed since Hurricane Harvey ravaged Texas' Gulf Coast. Most of the region has recovered—including the La Salle Odyssey Museums featured on the previous pages—with the exception of the Rockport-Fulton and Port Aransas communities. In fact, Rockport's Texas Maritime Museum experienced Harvey's full wrath.

"We're less than 50 feet from the harbor and just 100 yards from Aransas Bay," explains Phil Barnes, the museum's curator. "At one point, the storm's epicenter was directly over us. We were right in the center of the eye."

It's a harrowing image, yet it remains a reality for cultural institutions, businesses, and residents on the Gulf Coast during hurricane season. Fortunately, many buildings, including the Maritime Museum, were constructed to withstand hurricane-force winds. Barnes says that his

building was designed to sustain 150-mph winds (Harvey's reported high speed in Rockport), which allowed the walls and roof to remain in place.



ROCKPORT

The unexpected factor was an ill-placed skylight in the roof, which ripped apart and ultimately resulted in thousands of gallons of water entering the facility and impacting portions of the exhibit space. Barnes reports water also damaged part of the building via leaks in the sheetrock, and portions of the copper roof were ripped off by the high winds. Most of the artifacts were salvaged due to pre-storm removal and protection procedures.





facility—which recently received the THC’s John L. Nau, III Award of Excellence in Museums—immediately greets visitors with its most-impressive artifacts: eight cannons discovered by the THC at the original fort site.

“Our cannons are a major attraction—they represent an important part of La Salle’s story and we’re proud to be able to share this part of Texas history,” says Elizabeth Neucere, the museum’s exhibits and collections manager.

She adds that the cannons were originally used at the fort to defend the small colony, which maintained a presence for several years before falling to the Karankawas in 1689. The museum features exhibits and photos related to the fort and its excavation, along with an engaging temporary exhibit dedicated to *La Belle* with interactive displays, new artifacts, and shipwreck-related trading cards.

“Visitors are sometimes surprised to learn about the rich history of Victoria County and La Salle,” Neucere says. “They don’t always realize the things that happened here had a major impact on the story of Texas and the entire nation.”

The La Salle Odyssey experience is complete at three other Gulf Coast museums and Austin’s **Bullock Texas State History Museum** ([thetoryoftexas.com](http://thetoryoftexas.com), 512-936-8746). The **Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History** ([ccmuseum.com](http://ccmuseum.com), 361-826-4650) explores the origins of La Salle’s journey through exhibits about French shipwrights and the political climate in the Old and New Worlds. Just up the road at Edna’s **Texana Museum** ([goo.gl/NceKSR](http://goo.gl/NceKSR), 361-782-5431), several modest displays focus on the Karankawa tribe and its interactions with La Salle that would ultimately doom his colony. Finally, the **Matagorda County Museum** in Bay City ([visitbaycity.org](http://visitbaycity.org), 979-245-7502), located in a stately former post office, showcases the cofferdam excavation and features artifacts discovered at that time, including the original 800-pound bronze cannon lifted from the murky waters of Matagorda Bay.

As of January, Barnes and museum staff were working diligently to get the facility restored for an anticipated reopening in March. Most of the museum’s popular exhibits will return, along with several upgraded displays and a new round of events such as school programs, movie nights, and lecture series.

“We’re going to look at the positive by taking this opportunity to tweak some of our exhibits and make some minor changes we’d been wanting to implement for awhile,” says Barnes, adding that the museum has a PayPal fundraising account on its website ([texasmaritimemuseum.org](http://texasmaritimemuseum.org)) to assist with recovery efforts. “Every little bit helps—we appreciate any assistance people provide. We’re really looking forward to getting that new copper roofing installed so we can be the shiny penny on the Gulf Coast.”

Just up the road, the THC’s Fulton Mansion State Historic Site is also undergoing recovery. The site sustained severe roof and interior water damage, which is currently being repaired and restored. Although a reopening date hasn’t been set, the site’s visitors center is open for heritage travelers and community events.

“We’re still wrapping our heads around the extent of the damage and realizing how much assistance we received from volunteers and the community,” says Site Manager Marsha Hendrix. “This whole region is resilient and hopeful that in the near future we’ll be back on our feet and stronger than ever.”

**For information about donating to the Fulton Mansion’s recovery fund, please visit [thcfriends.org](http://thcfriends.org).**



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For more stories, photographs, and videos, please visit [thc.texas.gov/blog](http://thc.texas.gov/blog).

# A TEXAN ON THE *TUSCANIA*

## Irvin Sims Was on the First American Troopship Sunk in World War I

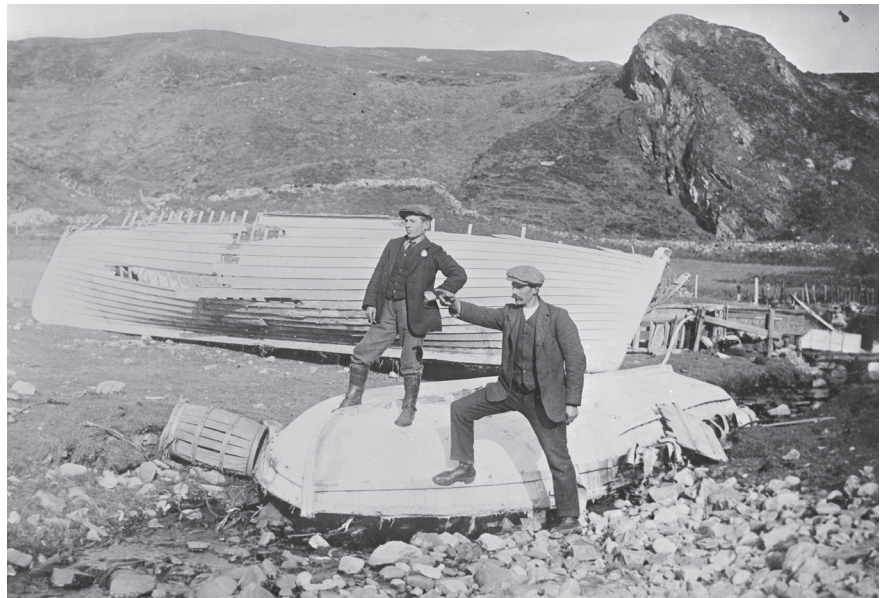
Irvin Sims was working at an East Texas sawmill when America entered World War I. He registered for the draft, and immediately departed for training and service at the start of the war. Sims would go on to serve in the 20th Engineer Corps until February 1918, when he and dozens of fellow Texans met an untimely death.

After training, Sims traveled to Hoboken, New Jersey, to board the transport ship *Tuscania*. The *Tuscania* left for Halifax, Nova Scotia, to join a convoy of 12 ships heading for England. It was transporting 2,013 American troops—mostly engineers with a specialty in forestry—to join the war efforts in Europe. Not two weeks after it set sail from Halifax, the *Tuscania* sighted the island of Islay near the coast of Scotland. It was late in the afternoon on February 5, 1918, when the ship was rocked by an explosion on its starboard side.

A torpedo from the German submarine U-77 struck the boiler room of the *Tuscania*, causing an immediate blackout and launching shards of wood and metal into the air. The *Tuscania* became the first ship carrying American soldiers to be sunk in World War I. Of the 2,013 soldiers on board that night, more than 200 died. Forty-eight of those soldiers were from Texas, including Sims.

Most of the 200 servicemen who died that night were buried in temporary graves on the island of Islay. Many of the soldiers' remains were later returned to their families to be buried in local cemeteries, or reportedly sent to Arlington National Cemetery. However, Sims and three of the other Texas soldiers were interred in a different location. The four bodies were sent to be buried at Brookwood American Cemetery in England's Surrey County after their loved ones opted to have them interred and permanently cared for overseas once the war ended.

“At Brookwood Cemetery there are five Texans who died in Islay, Scotland, in 1918—four off the ship *Tuscania*, and one American off the HMS *Otranto*,” said cemetery Superintendent Craig Rahanian in a recent interview with the Texas Historical Commission.



Top: A 1918 photo shows the scene of the shipwreck and cemetery on the island of Islay, Scotland. Above, from left: John Woodrow and Robert Morrison were heroes of the *Tuscania* rescue efforts.

Rahanian adds that Brookwood American Cemetery was already serving as a temporary burial site for soldiers who died off the western coast of England during the war, but was later selected as the grounds for a permanent cemetery and memorial to soldiers who died in the British Isles.

“General Pershing had the vision to ask family members what they would like the United States government to do with their soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines,” Rahanian said. “In 39 percent of cases, the family stated that they would like their family member to be buried overseas in an American military cemetery in perpetuity.”

According to the THC's Military Sites Program Coordinator Lila Rakoczy, Sims' legacy is also honored locally in Houston County, where he worked before shipping out overseas. Along with nearly 30 other Texans, his photo appears in a display dedicated to Houston County heroes who gave their lives in the Great World War.

The American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) installed permanent headstones at Brookwood American Cemetery and later constructed a chapel to honor the soldiers whose remains were never recovered. The ABMC dedicated Brookwood in 1937, and it continues to serve as a memorial to the fallen troops of World War I.

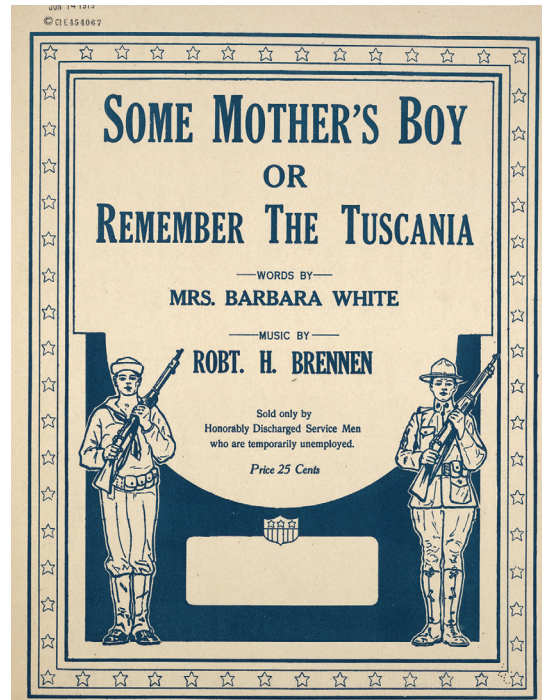
"Brookwood American Cemetery is probably one of a kind," Rahanian said. "It's physically located in the center of the largest Commonwealth War Graves cemetery in the United Kingdom, which is also located in the largest civilian cemetery in Western Europe."

On May 4, 2018, the community of Islay in Western Scotland will honor those lost aboard *Tuscania* and HMS *Otranto*. The Scottish government and WW100 are overseeing the commemorative event, which includes

performances by local choirs and bands, the sharing of stories, and a wreath-laying at the nearby American Monument, built by the Red Cross in 1920. For the ceremony, Islay quilters are recreating the Stars and Stripes, which was hastily created

by local seamstresses for the funeral of the American *Tuscania* victims. The original flag was presented to President Woodrow Wilson and later donated to the Smithsonian.

For those interested in learning more about First World War naval history, there's a great resource closer to home: Battleship Texas State Historic Site in La Porte. Battleship *Texas* saw action in both world wars and features permanent displays on its history and the growth of U.S. naval sea power in the 20th century. Beginning March 1, visitors will be able to see a remarkable temporary exhibit, *The War Illustrated: Scenes from the Great War*. Using images from a British war magazine of the same name, *The War Illustrated* offers a unique visual glimpse into World War I.



Sheet music for a 1919 piano composition. Library of Congress.

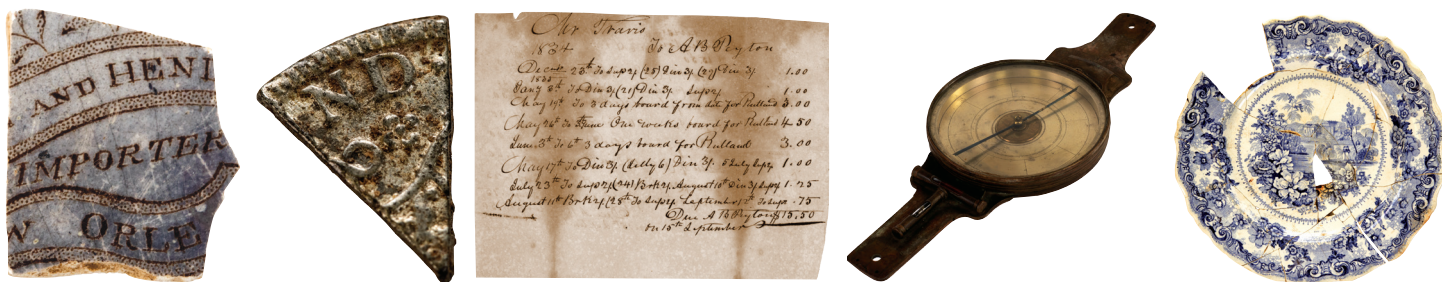
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Text by Anjali Kaul Zutshi and Katie Cukerbaum, Friends of the THC



# 'THE EPICENTER OF THE TEXAS REVOLUTION'

## Friends of the THC Hosts Campaign for New San Felipe de Austin Museum

Texans and visitors have traditionally viewed the revolution story through a narrow prism. This vantage point often focuses on the seven months of battle and political upheaval that began at Gonzales in October 1835 and culminated in victory on the San Jacinto battlefield in April 1836.

But the people and actions that set the Texas Revolution in motion were part of a larger and longer story—one that can be traced to the early 1820s at the headquarters of *empresario* Stephen F. Austin's colony, San Felipe de Austin. The former community is now one of the Texas Historical Commission's 22 state historic sites.

The story of San Felipe de Austin is not only the story of Mexican Texas, but also the vital missing piece in the larger chain of events that led to the rise of the Lone Star Republic. From the first call to the people of Texas to convene in 1832, through the third representative convention three years later, San Felipe de Austin stood at the epicenter of the Texas Revolution.

To elevate understanding and appreciation of the significance of San Felipe de Austin, the Texas Historical Commission and Friends of the Texas Historical Commission launched a campaign for the development of a museum at San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site. The \$12.5 million project is now nearing completion, and the museum is slated to open in spring 2018. The site will offer Texas citizens and visitors new insights into the events leading to the creation of the Texas Republic through educational programs, archeological exhibits, and fascinating galleries of artifacts and interactive displays.

You can be a part of history by supporting the completion of this important project. To donate or learn more, please visit [thcfriends.org/sanfelipemuseum](http://thcfriends.org/sanfelipemuseum).

**For more information, contact the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission at 512-936-2189 or [info@thcfriends.org](mailto:info@thcfriends.org).**



Top: Artifacts from San Felipe de Austin are displayed at the site's new museum. Above: Rendering of the new museum at San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site.

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# SITE MANAGER TO THE RESCUE!

## Varner-Hogg Plantation's Chris Elliott Assists Community in Hurricane Aftermath



Chris Elliott.

An extreme downpour from Hurricane Harvey in the West Columbia area last August resulted in an outpouring of neighborly help from an unexpected source—Texas Historical Commission staff member Chris Elliott, site manager for Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Site.

Located on the banks of Varner Creek and less than two miles from the Brazos River, Varner-Hogg

Plantation was once a sprawling 19th-century sugarcane plantation, and later home to a significant oil boom in the 1920s.

Across the plantation's back gate and encompassing the property's original sugarcane fields lies the subdivision of Columbia Lakes, a community of more than 700 homes. As continuous rainfall from Hurricane Harvey caused record flooding, Elliott sprang into action. He opened the back gate to allow local officials to bring in supplies and dump trucks to repair a breached levee, supply portable toilets for workers, and allow evacuated residents to check on their homes.

Elliott then worked with local officials around the clock for an almost two-week period to help protect the community from catastrophic flooding. Elliott also provided residents with daily updates on evacuation and flood conditions, and even helped spray the area for mosquitoes.

"We didn't save the community of Columbia Lakes—they saved themselves through all their hard work on the levees," Elliott said. "We just helped where we could by facilitating the arrival of equipment and materials to the area."

The efforts by Elliott and his concern for the neighboring community have helped forge a level of appreciation for Varner-Hogg Plantation that many homeowners did not even realize existed over the back gate.

### Vacation at Varner-Hogg Plantation

Nestled among pecan orchards, magnolia trees, and generations of Texas history, visitors often spend a leisurely morning or afternoon exploring the sprawling estate. Now that Harvey's aftermath is mostly contained, visitors can spend the night there, too.

For the first time, Varner-Hogg Plantation is offering the Ranger's Cottage as a rental. Built in the 1920s during the height of the site's oil boom, this cottage features a first-floor bedroom and bathroom master suite, with one additional bathroom and two guest rooms upstairs. The two-story rental cottage sleeps up to eight people.

Guests can enjoy the tranquil scenery of Varner Creek while relaxing in the cottage's front porch rocking chairs. A night's rental of the cottage includes a free tour of the plantation house for cottage guests, as well as free use of the site's rental bikes. Guests may also bring fishing poles to use along the banks of Varner Creek.

To make an overnight reservation, call 979-345-4656 (ext. 24), email [varner-hogg@thc.texas.gov](mailto:varner-hogg@thc.texas.gov), or reserve online at [thc.texas.gov/rental-cottages](http://thc.texas.gov/rental-cottages).

**For more information about Varner-Hogg Plantation, go to [visitvhp.com](http://visitvhp.com).**



Top: Varner Creek threatened the Varner-Hogg Plantation. Above: The recently renovated Ranger's Cottage.



# NEWS BRIEFS

## **Casa Navarro to Participate in Tricentennial Party**

The Texas Historical Commission's Casa Navarro State Historic Site will play a significant role in San Antonio's year of celebrations in 2018. This year marks the 300th anniversary of the founding of the civilian settlement of Villa de San Fernando de Béjar.

José Antonio Navarro's 223rd birthday celebration—to be held on February 24 from 10 a.m.–4 p.m.—is an official Tricentennial event. Held at Casa Navarro with the Friends of Casa Navarro, the party will include historic demonstrations, a storyteller, birthday cake, and an ambrotype photographer taking photos for visitors.

For more information about the Tricentennial, visit [sanantonio300.org](http://sanantonio300.org). To learn more about Casa Navarro, go to [visitcasanavarro.com](http://visitcasanavarro.com).

## **Celebrate African American Heritage with Free Travel Guide**

February is African American History Month, and the Texas Historical Commission offers numerous travel resources to help Texans journey and discover these untold stories, including the updated African American heritage travel guide.

*African Americans in Texas: A Lasting Legacy* features dozens of sites that are significant to the African American experience in Texas. More than a travel guide, the publication also offers the stories of these key sites.

The updated, full-color travel guide includes nine new site entries and is lavishly illustrated with photos, timelines, and maps. A mobile app version of the guide is also available for free download. Part of the Texas Time Travel Tours app, the mobile tour offers a rich blend of images, videos, first-person interviews, maps, and other useful visitor information for exploring African American culture and heritage in Texas.

For more information about heritage travel opportunities in Texas, visit [texasimetravel.com](http://texasimetravel.com), where you can download or order a free copy of the THC's *African Americans in Texas: A Lasting Legacy*.

## **Diversity Internships Available from the Texas Historical Commission**

Applications are open now through March 16 for the THC's Preservation Scholars Program, supported by funding from the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission.

The Preservation Scholars Program builds interest and awareness in historic preservation, specifically among students from underrepresented cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. THC Preservation Scholars will work with THC staff and programs, gaining valuable professional experience related to historic preservation, historic sites, community development programs, heritage tourism, and communications.

Preservation Scholars will complete a rotation among all divisions headquartered in Austin and then complete a special project in a division of their choice. Interns will receive a \$5,000 stipend provided by the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission for a full-time, eight-week internship.

Undergraduate and graduate students interested in history, preservation, architecture, landscape architecture, archeology, downtown revitalization, and heritage tourism can apply. The only requirements are U.S. citizenship, current enrollment in junior year or higher (in a Texas college or university or a Texas resident attending an out-of-state school), and 3.0 or higher grade point average. Preference may be given to a candidate from a disadvantaged socioeconomic background. Prior recipients are ineligible.

For more information or to apply for an internship, visit [thcfriends.org/thc-diversity-internship](http://thcfriends.org/thc-diversity-internship).



Rachel Denny Clow/Corpus Christi Caller-Times

## Aransas County Historical Commission Keeps Focusing on the Future

Nearly three months after Hurricane Harvey crashed into the Texas Gulf Coast, residents of Aransas County—which took a direct hit from the eye of the storm—were still getting their bearings. Debris pick-up, brush collection, and structural repairs topped priority lists for locals, including appointees of the Aransas County Historical Commission (CHC).

“Things are still tough around here, especially in Rockport and Fulton,” said Carol Thompson, Aransas CHC chair. “We’re just helping each other out however we can.”

According to Thompson, the county’s historical resources were bruised but not battered. In fact, she reports that most of the county’s historic properties suffered minimal damage, with the CHC’s biggest issue being historical markers.

Thompson and other members of the commission surveyed damage after the storm and documented several missing and damaged markers. The CHC also used a historic properties survey it developed as part of the Texas Historical Commission’s former Visionaries in Preservation (VIP) program.

“That VIP survey ended up being a real important resource—it provided a checklist for us to review each of those properties we’d previously documented,” she said.

Thompson adds that the CHC appointees’ approach to recovering from Harvey has been to focus on what it’s always done best: preserve local heritage by researching history and educating locals about its significance.

“We felt it was important to carry on and keep doing the important work we’ve always done, like getting those markers written, hosting the tour of homes, and organizing the spring symposium,” she said. “It helps us stay on track and make sure we’re keeping our history alive.”

For example, Thompson notes that the CHC is continuing to assist with the History Center of Aransas County, which features outdoor and indoor exhibits that tell the stories of the real people of Aransas County. The museum is housed

in the Bruhl-Paul-Johnson house, a late-1800s Queen Anne-Victorian cottage that received virtually no storm damage.

The Aransas CHC will also continue to contribute research and information to Aransas Pathways, a cultural website ([aransaspathways.com](http://aransaspathways.com)) highlighting local history and recreation-based destinations.

“Pathways is a unique project supported by the venue tax—promotion of many historic sites is part of the Pathways map and publicity,” says CHC appointee Pam Wheat Stranahan, who also authored the teacher’s guide *La Salle in Texas* after serving as education coordinator for the La Salle project in the 1990s.



Friends of the History Center for Aransas County

Top: The Aransas County Courthouse, built in 1956 and recognized by the Texas Historical Commission, was damaged beyond repair. Above: History Center of Aransas County.

In the coming months, Stranahan and Thompson plan to focus on helping fellow residents with recovery and eventually getting the CHC back on track to handle its regular responsibilities.

“We want to keep doing what we’ve always done to preserve Aransas County heritage,” she says. “We’re just going to dig out and move ahead—one way to help us do that is to focus on our past. It keeps us on track to preserve our history for future residents of this county.”



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## WHERE ON EARTH...IN TEXAS

**Know Your Texas History?** Put your skills to the test by identifying the pictured site! The first three people who correctly identify the location will receive a prize and be named in the next issue of *The Medallion*. Send your answer to: *The Medallion*, P.O. Box 12276, Austin, TX 78711-2276 or email [medallion@thc.texas.gov](mailto:medallion@thc.texas.gov). Limit one prize annually per contestant.

**Need a Clue?** Located in the Texas Independence Trail Region, this 1904 structure is considered the first major building of its kind in Texas according to the National Register file.



**Answer to the photo from the last issue:**

The photo at left is the circa-1935 Taylor Motel in Van Horn. Located on the Bankhead Highway, the still-operating motel is one of the few remaining historic motor lodges serving weary travelers in Far West Texas. Congratulations and prizes go to the first three readers who correctly identified the site: Eugenia

Gilley of Canyon, Joe Morales of Van Horn, and Mable Wilke of Fredericksburg. Thanks to all who participated!

