

BHA Banner Newsletter

Brownsville Historical Association

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Brownsville Historical Association

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BHA Archives

Stagecoach routes in South Texas...the end of the line.

Early stagecoach routes in Texas stretched along a series of stopping points where drivers could hitch on a fresh team of mules in 10 minutes and be on their way again. On some routes passengers on the stagecoach could get a hurried meal and long-haul stages tended to run 24-hours-a-day. Some stage stops featured overnight accommodations, lavatories and a place to dine. The distance between stops varied depending on the terrain and the availability of water but 15 to 30 miles apart was the norm.

Though the stagecoach era in Texas essentially ended by the mid-1880s with the widespread availability of faster and more comfortable travel by rail, stagecoaches endured as a means of transportation in the southern part of the state. A stage line from Alice to Brownsville remained the only form of public land transportation to the Rio Grande Valley until rail construction began in 1903. Pulled by a horse team, the stage left Alice at 6 a.m. every day. With a change of horses every 10 miles, the trip to the southern tip of the state took 36 hours and cost about \$27.

The Alice-Brownsville stage line was still operating in 1902 when the Truitt family left Corpus Christi in mule-drawn wagons for the Valley. South of King Ranch headquarters, they watched as the driver changed horses, then the stage was on its way..."We watched until they were out of sight," Lee Truitt said, "and could see the stagecoach for a long way until it finally became only a tiny black speck on the horizon."

As the Truitt family watched the stagecoach vanish in a cloud of dust, it was already a relic of the past. In two years, this last stage line was shut down when the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexican Railway — the "Brownie" or the "Lott Line" — reached Brownsville. With the coming of the long-prayed-for railroad to the Valley in 1904, the stagecoach era in Texas came to a dusty end.



From the Executive Director...

The celebration of the New Year is always exciting and often fills our minds with new ideas and new possibilities. The BHA had a very busy and very productive 2015. Staff worked hard on special events and on a variety of programs. The Walking Tours, Ghost Hunts, Garden Talks, book signings and Historical Happy Hours bring a great number of visitors through our doors. We look for ways to truly serve our community by engaging students and families in telling the rich story of Brownsville's past and by providing numerous programs free of charge.

I hope that in the coming year, the BHA will continue to stimulate visitation to our facilities and encourage outreach through our website, social media, news publications and the most effective way - word of mouth! This year please read our program calendar (part of this newsletter) and visit us soon. Best wishes and Happy New Year!

Tara Putegnat
Executive Director

NEWSLETTER

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The Goings-on...

This past year, was a great time to be a member of the Brownsville Historical Association. There were many changes done quietly behind the scenes, like: adding new inventory to the La Tienda gift shop, the installation of a new point of sale system, Wi-Fi access at the museum, the return of this newsletter and increased programming at both the Heritage Complex and the Historic Market Square. Another great addition is our newly-designed website (www.brownsvillehistory.org) - which saw almost 1,000 hits the first week it was launched!

For the upcoming year, we have even more developments planned for visitors and BHA members.

We now offer a Winter Texan membership level and start our Winter Walking tours. "A Sweet Taste of History" is a new lecture series sponsored in part by Krispy Kreme. We have also partnered with RGV Paranormal Investigators again and will be continuing our ghost hunts throughout the year.



In March, we will be having our annual "Taste of Texas" fundraiser - join us! For more information on programs or if you would like to sponsor a program, please call 956-541-5560.

Craig Stone
Education & Program Coordinator



From the Vaults...

In November, the City of Brownsville approved to award a contract for the Market Square Revitalization Drainage, Pavement and landscape improvement project. Along with the approval of the "green space", funds have been allotted for the restoration of the Market Square cupola and roof repairs to the building. The schedule is tentative but construction should begin sometime in early 2016.

As beneficial as these projects will be in the future, they will temporarily hinder access to the building, limiting BHA research requests, viewings of the *Into the West* gallery area and future rentals in the Mercado Event space. Please bear with us as we work around the construction!

Ayla Jaramillo
Collections Manager



New Old City Cemetery Projects

RESACA REVITALIZATION PROJECT – As of the 26th of October, engineers have been combing the resaca frontage at the rear of Old City Cemetery, making way for the November 21st arrival of the heavy equipment that would be utilized in the clearing of the heavy brush that lines the bank of this resaca. This activity marks the activation of the third step in P.U.B.'s Resaca Revitalization Project as it unfolds upon cemetery grounds. Phase #1 involved the dredging of several set zones of the resaca (Feb. 2013), Phase #2 was marked by the development of a Master Plan (Jan. 2014 – April 2015) that would study the creation of a park and recreation area which would be situated at the rear of Old City Cemetery, and Phase #3 involves addressing a resaca bank stabilization for this zone. This project is set to be completed in mid-January 2016.

This last phase has made a visible impact on the landscape in that the dense clusters of "canizzo", or river cane have been completely scalped away, revealing a clean shoreline for further development. An environmentally-friendly herbicide was applied to further



aid in the eradication of this invasive species. The final touch, from reports by P.U.B., is to sculpt the bank area into a more aesthetically-pleasing landscape format and then introduce a controlled growth of soil-retaining plants to stabilize the shoreline. All of this is part of a \$476,772.00 project cost for this phase.

COMPREHENSIVE LAWN MAINTENANCE PROGRAM –

The second worthy project for our historic cemetery has been in development over the past eighteen months and is a collaboration between BHA Cemetery Curator, Eugene Fernandez and the Parks & Recreation Department of the City of Brownsville. It entails:

- 1.) The establishing of a higher priority on grounds maintenance than has been exercised in the past, and
- 2.) Initiating a plan whereby the physical obstructions that have occluded the "alleys" (walkways between the rows) within the cemetery would be systematically removed or placed within the legal limits or confines of the individual deeded plots that pertain to such articles. There are generally three classifications of articles to be spoken of:
 - a.) Prayer Stoops, or small rectangular concrete slabs that extend outside of the rightful bounds of the given plots into the common area (which is city property). These slabs are generally at a higher grade than the ground surrounding them and hence, they are a severe hazard to mechanical mowers;
 - b.) Concrete or stone vases; and finally,
 - c.) Funerary Monuments. The last two categories will be gently returned into the plot zone.

Eugene Fernandez
Cemetery Coordinator

IN MEMORIUM Chula Griffin - 1927-2015

There are those who's biography might take no more than a page or two, at the most, but Rose (Chula) Griffin was surely not among that group. She was "larger than life", mainly due to



the degree of dedication that she gave to life itself. Her childhood friends all recount of a child who was full of energy toward happy things. She was indeed fun to be around; never wavering in her pursuit of a wonderful, playful curiosity. An early account by Junie Mauldin recalls how she and Chula would spend so much time bareback riding on Chula's white horse, and interestingly enough, she remembers those rides often would aim toward Old City Cemetery. One could count on finding tall grass there for a hungry horse, and Chula obviously took a page from those memories to address in her "Clean-up Campaigns" of later life.

In the 1940's high school life was like a sketch out of a Norman Rockwell artist's drawing pad; full of good, clean fun, and as Frank Parker said, "All of us were very close friends through high school, and it was Chula's house that we would gather at so often for parties and little get-togethers, drinking punch and snacking on simple food".

After Chula's school years came Sam, and her feet didn't touch down very often, even as the Griffins began their family in Houston. There was much less of a respite once Sam took to traveling in the oilfield business. Chula could be counted on to send her friends letters and postcards from places that had names that couldn't be pronounced.

Brownsville should have had a brass band at the airport to greet her and Sam in 1980 when they came back "home" to settle. I say this because from that time onward, the manner by which we placed emphasis on our local historical heritage, our architectural preservation, our protections toward our old cemetery, and the gracious nurturing of her beloved Episcopal Church, all slipped into another, higher gear.

I know that our paths must have crossed many times throughout my childhood, due to the closeness of our families and our ties to the church, but the first memory that I had of Chula in modern times was one summer morning in 1988 – as I walked up to the "ringleader" of a group of volunteers that were building up a sweat in Old City Cemetery, carrying out a clean-up. I said, "I'm Gene Fernandez", to which she replied, "I know, Gene, and I'm Chula Griffin".

God bless you for your dedication, and we missed you long before you had gone...

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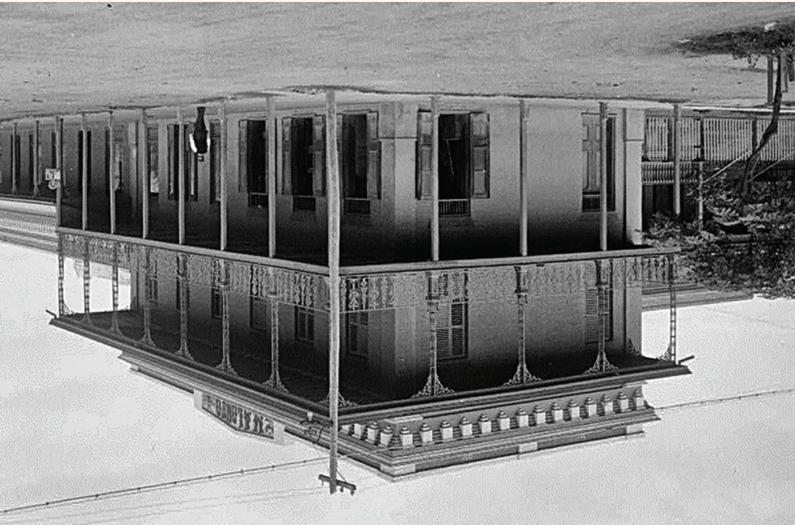
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probably came from the Crescent City itself.
 Today, the Alonso Building is the perfect venue for weddings, receptions, anniversary parties, holiday celebrations, charity balls, fundraisers and other events. The building is at its most beautiful when it is filled with the goodwill of people who are gathered to promote a worthy cause or celebrate a loved one's good fortune and happiness. Entrusted with the care of this historic building we are honored to be part of the meaningful moments in our guests' lives and strive to be an effortless part of the happy memories created here. For rental information, please call 956-554-4965 or visit our website at www.brownsvillehistory.org.



New Orleans served as the closest major port-of-call for shipping to Brownsville, which in turn brought many New Orleans residents to Brownsville. It is for this reason that many of the early Brownsville buildings resemble architecture you would find in the New Orleans French Quarter. The cast-iron railing of the Alonso building balcony most



Historic Alonso Building - Did you know?

EST. 1877
Alonso
 THE HISTORIC