

Los Laureles Ranch House Museum

(The History of Los Laureles Ranch House)



Los Laureles branding Iron symbol

Charles Stillman in Mexico by 1828

Francis Stillman, Charles' father, was a shipping merchant from New England who did business along the Gulf Coast and Mexico. In 1828 Charles arrived in Matamoros at the age of sixteen and operated a store for his father in Durango, Mexico where he learned the Spanish language and polite customs of Mexico. Only twenty years later he began a series of entrepreneurial ventures.

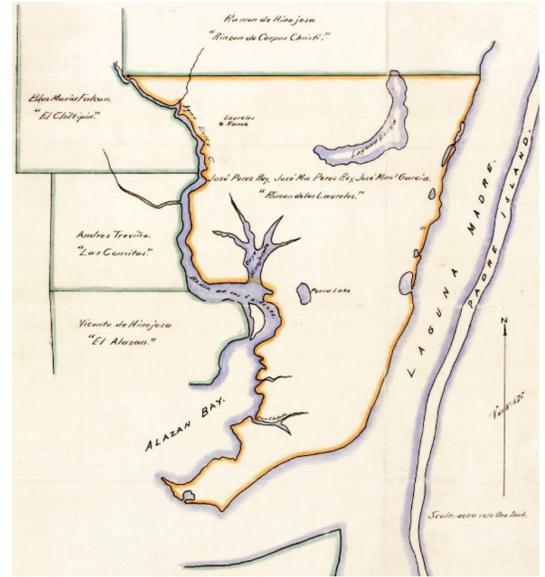
Stillman founded a successful river boat company with Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy. In addition to his cotton brokerage business, real estate firms, silver mines in Mexico, warehousing and transportation interests, he also helped establish textile mills in Monterrey, Mexico with José Morell. Much of his wealth was gained by supplying ranches and mines in Mexico.

By the late 1840's, with partners Samuel Belden and Jacob Mussina, he founded the Brownsville Town Company to establish Brownsville, which was named after Major Jacob Brown who defended the fort during the Invasion of Mexico.

Los Laureles Ranch House c. 1850

Charles acquired significant land holdings in South Texas. He purchased land for "El Rancho de Los Laureles" near "El Rincon de Corpus Christi" from the Jose Perez-Rey family in 1848.

The Laureles home is a late Georgian Greek Revival style ranch dwelling with large overhanging eaves and wrap-around porches for outdoor leisure. Because several roman numeral carvings were spotted on main support joists during its renovation, it is believed that materials for the house were shipped from New England ports in prefabricated form by ship's carpenters to be assembled once they arrived at the ranch.



Land survey map of Los Laureles



House arriving in Brownsville by Steven R. Bailey 2012

Home Away from Home

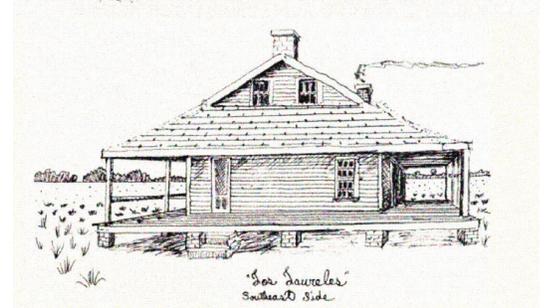
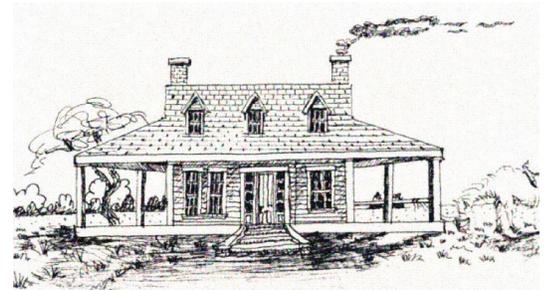
Stillman raised cattle, horses and sheep and transported beef hides through his shipping business. During the Civil War, Stillman entered the cotton trade and earned huge profits with his partners. Los Laureles was a place he could escape the confinement of his business.

By the war's end, Charles had survived two strokes and sensed the inevitable, so he transferred his interest in the ranch to his brother Cornelius in 1864 who operated the ranch another four years before selling it to Mifflin Kenedy.

Charles Stillman joined his family in New York, where he lived another ten years until his death in 1875.

Stillman enjoyed the outdoors and warm climate of South Texas. He had one day hoped to live on the ranch for his retirement but outbreaks of cholera and yellow fever probably convinced his wife Elizabeth not to remain in Brownsville, Texas, with their children.

Thanks to private donations through the auspices of the Brownsville Historical Association, our city has a ranch house built around 1850 to typify the ranch history of families such as the Kings, Yturrias and Garcias that settled the region for raising cattle and building cities in the Rio Grande Valley.



Sketches of Los Laureles ranch house by Alexander Stillman 2006