

BHA Banner Newsletter

Brownsville Historical Association

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BHA Celebrates 70 Years: Part 3

This year, the newsletter provided a series of articles commemorating 70 years of the Brownsville Historical Association. This portion concludes the series.

The building between the Stillman House Museum and the Preservation Resource Center was finally acquired in 2002 and completed the final portion of the Heritage Complex. This middle building was named the Brownsville Heritage Museum and opened to the public as a museum primarily as a showcase for the Association's extensive collection of historic photographs. In 2004, the collection space between the museum and the Preservation Resource Center was developed as a lecture hall and exhibition room and named for the long-

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From the Executive Director...

In April, I attended a gathering of museum professionals and an interesting question was posed to the group: "What makes us relevant?"



I believe we are relevant because we help people make sense of the past, we assist educators in showing their students our local history, and we facilitate the research materials necessary to discover historical facts. History museums like ours, teach independent thinking, research skills, validation of facts, awareness of biases, and other skills critical to a successful and productive life in the 21st century.

Furthermore, we are relevant because we serve as a catalyst for economic growth. People are drawn to communities that have preserved a strong sense of historical identity and character. Heritage tourism is an economic asset and an essential component of any vibrant local economy. Brownsville is a unique place to visit and is rich in history.

The BHA takes great pride and enthusiasm in our role as a history resource for the community and beyond. As a member of our organization, you experience firsthand the benefits of our facilities by attending our programs, visiting our exhibits and participating in our events. With your assistance, we continue our important mission and look forward to future projects with the historic sites in our care. Thank you for your support.

Have a safe and enjoyable summer!

Tara Putegnat
Executive Director

time Brownsville historian, Bruce Aiken. Mr. Aiken had served as the primary "resource" of the Resource Center for several years prior to his death.

All of the BHA facilities are now owned by the City of Brownsville and are operated by the Association under a nominal long-term lease agreement with the exception of the Alonso building and the Laureles Ranch House Museum. In late 2006, the City authorized the Association to establish an Old City Cemetery Center in the former baggage room of the Southern Pacific Depot. Shortly after, the Brownsville Historical Association negotiated a long-term lease with the City for the Old City Market/Market Square building to establish a multi-purpose facility at this historic site.

Accompanying the expansion of the facilities, there has been a dramatic increase in programs and exhibits ranging from frequent author's book signings, to lectures, to Historical Happy Hours and other annual events. More recently, the Historic Brownsville Museum was added to the list of buildings under the BHA's care. The catalysts for this growth has been a progressive Board of Directors and the employment of talented administrators and personnel. The chief administrator position evolved under various titles beginning with Don Clifford, followed by Rosalinda Gonzalez, Rita Krausse, Carmen Zacarias and Priscilla Rodriguez. The incumbent Executive Director is Tara Putegnat, now in her third year.

BHA members may justifiably take pride in the outstanding accomplishments of their organization on its 70th year anniversary!

Anthony Knopp,
BHA Board member

HISTORY CENTRAL *Your Single Source*

There are so many moments throughout our daily lives that one might have the occasion to call upon a historical perspective, whether it be delving directly into actual historical accounts, or perhaps drawing a comparison on what modern times may learn from our past. Where do you go for such information? To a degree, modern technology has made information on historical themes more accessible, but there is much more to this quest than the layman may be capable of navigating.

Considering the fact that history curriculums are all but stripped from our school classrooms, it is not all that easy to arrive at the qualifying questions that could even be "Googled". Every facet of history is extremely complex, because these passages are likely influenced by the basic divisions of: Politics, Religion, Human Drama, and so on. As applied to Deep South Texas, ever so much the more are the colorful, complex elements drawn together to form some very confusing story lines. Returning to the question, "Where does one go..." to unravel these mysteries, it's just like anything else that would require accurate treatment – you would seek out a specialist. If you wanted applied medical help, or a motor replacement for your car, you wouldn't rely on the internet. For history, you approach a historian, or a historical institution. To reiterate, the nuances of this field contain a billion different facets, and a life-long, trained historian is your best bet.

Consider if you would, please, that the Brownsville Historical Association possesses resources on a variety of levels that extend far beyond what the curious layman might have simple access to. Within the bowels of the BHA vaults, lay the artifacts that tell of South Texas heritage in its deepest tangible form. As a credible institution for approximately seventy years, this repository has been

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receiving, protecting, and deciphering the treasures that have been so generously given by area inhabitants.

Spanning the inventory of physical objects, consider that BHA has thousands of vintage photographs, a huge collection of rare books which cover all aspects of history for South Texas and Northern Mexico, Property Abstracts extending back to the formation of Nuevo Santander, extensive cultural artifacts which include Pre-Columbian Terracotta, the personal papers of historian A.A. Champion and Frank Cushman Pierce, the Genealogical Archives of Yolanda Gonzalez, the Chamber of Commerce Archives 1919 – 2000, and myriad other personal papers and documents. The crowning jewel of a historical library has just recently been surrendered into BHA guardianship, in the form of the John H. Hunter Memorial Collection, and is currently in the process of being cataloged into our inventory.

Our networking capabilities extend well beyond the environs of Cameron County. We maintain constant contact with other museums and historically-oriented institutions throughout the Rio Grande Valley, the state of Texas, and prominent national institutions as well. Our partnerships with the Texas Historical Commission and the museum/research community of University of Texas-Austin have been especially rewarding in yielding back qualified information to inquiring citizens.

Beyond the physical inventory, BHA has had a bold reputation of attracting very accomplished chroniclers of history, in the immortal names of Clarence LaRoche, Ralph Schmeling, Ruby Wooldridge, Bob Vezzetti, Bruce Aiken,

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Eddie Valent, Carl Chilton, and more. This legacy has never stopped with BHA. At present, we have very a capable staff, eager to address whatever questions that you might have, concerning local history.

The major point that is hopefully being conveyed by this article is that, whenever you are in need of detailed, authenticated information concerning Brownsville and its environs on the history aspect, the Brownsville Historical Association is the organization that you should automatically think of. Allow us to be your "History Central", if you wish, to provide you with accurate, in-depth historical data.

Eugene Fernandez
Old City Cemetery Coordinator/Genealogy Researcher
Historic Brownsville Museum Site Manager



2017 BCIC Recorded Texas Historical Landmarks Markers & Guided Tour

The Historic Preservation Office received a grant at the end of last year to improve the existing Texan markers to three buildings in Brownsville: two located at Fort Brown and one as part of the Main Street program. The purpose of the grant was not only to update the data and improve the markers, but to celebrate these structures through a ribbon cutting ceremony and a guided tour. Large subject markers will explain with more detail the following buildings: the Post Hospital, Commissary / Guardhouse at Fort Brown and the Stillman House. It will be a tribute to brick buildings that were built during the early years of Brownsville, and to the families that made it possible. It will be a tribute to TSC, not only for their contribution on the tax-exempt program developed and coordinated by the City of Brownsville, but for the care they commit to the historic buildings on campus. Also, this new marker will be in honor of the Stillman family, who still contribute generously year after year. By performing the guided tour in the Main Street district, we hope to encourage business in the downtown area as well. These added features to our buildings are a nice addition to our strong preservation efforts.

Juan Vélez
Historic Preservation Officer (Spanish Architect & Building Engineer, Escuela Europea de Madrid, España) and BHA Board member

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The Brownsville Historical Association Presents:
4th ANNUAL

PAELLA

**FESTIVAL COOKOFF
COMPETITION**

Los Laureles Ranch House Museum
1501 E. 7th Street at Linear Park
Brownsville, Texas 78520
6:00 to 9:00 PM

For Cooking Team Registration or Sponsorship Participation Call:
(956) 541.5560

