WATERFOWL HUNTING AUTHOR TO PRESENT APRIL PROGRAM
Friday April 12, at the Woman’s Club, 6:30 pm

R. K. Sawyer, author of the new book, *A Hundred Years of Texas Waterfowl Hunting*, will give an illustrated talk, entitled, “Stories of Aransas and Copano Bay Waterfowl Hunting, 1880s-1940s,” for the spring meeting of ACHS on Friday, April 12, 6:30 pm, at the Woman’s Club at the Rockport Harbor.

An avid waterfowl sportsman, Rob Sawyer lives in Sugar Land, and is on the staff of the Thunderbird Hunting Club in Matagorda County.

The program is free and open to the public.

Newsletter Celebrates its Tenth Year with Special Issue

This issue begins Volume Ten of the ACHS Newsletter and thus marks its tenth anniversary.

During this time, the Newsletter has covered items of historical interest, programs and activities of not only ACHS but of other historical organizations. It also has included several nice historical articles.

This special 8-page issue includes two feature articles on Aransas County history.

David Murrah has edited the newsletter nine of its ten years and designed the current format. He has been on the ACHS board since February 2003, and is the longest serving member!

He and his wife Ann moved to Rockport in 2000, and sing in the choir at First United Methodist Church. David likes to fish, and he and Ann have now traveled to all 50 states and 34 countries.

David holds a Ph.D. in history and is retired from Texas Tech University and Southwest Museum Service in Houston. He has written or edited six books related to Texas history and more than forty other publications. He is a Fellow of the Texas State Historical Association and a past president of the West Texas Historical Association and the Society of Southwest Archivists.

He has done a fabulous job of laying out and editing the ACHS newsletter! Thank you, David, we appreciate you very much!

---Kam
ACHS: ANNUAL MEETING HELD IN FEBRUARY

ACHS held its annual membership meeting in February and re-elected two of its trustees for new three-year terms—Norinne Holman and Patsy Parr. The election came after a recommendation from the nominating committee, which consisted of Dolly Close, chair; Diana Harrington, and Sara Walvoord.

After the election, members heard a presentation on the Heritage Signage Project which has placed 16 historical signs in Rockport and Fulton. Speakers were Sara Walvoord, Pam Stranahan, David Murrah and Kam Wagert, all of whom participated in the project in research and writing.

BOARD ELECTS NEW OFFICERS

At its February Board meeting, the ACHS Trustees elected a new slate of officers for the coming year. Janie White was named as president, Marsha Hendrix, vice president, Norinne Holman, secretary, and Patsy Parr, treasurer.

RETIRING TRUSTEES

Also, three ACHS board members retired after the end of their terms in February. These were Jerry Brundrett, Carol Keller, and Jo Ann Morgan. They were valuable assets to our board, and we thank them for every thing they did for the ACHS. All three are long-time residents of Aransas County as were their families before them, and they have been so helpful in adding to our identification of historical places and people. In addition, Jo Ann is a wonderful cook, and her cookies and cupcakes, which she would bring to the ACHS Lab on Wednesdays from 2-4, are so very tasty. All three of these folks have promised to stay active in the ACHS, and we’re so glad for that. In fact, we spotted Jo Ann at the Lab just last week with cupcakes and brownies in hand! If you want a special tasty or historical treat, stop by the Lab at the Old Rockport School on Wednesday afternoon.

RAY MCLESTER NAMED NEW TRUSTEE

New to the Board is Ray McLester, who also has a long family tie to the area. Ray recently moved from Denton, Texas to Rockport where he worked in engineering design with the City of Denton and with a private firm.

“My family is from this area,” Ray said, “and I have many happy childhood memories of playing at the Rockport beach and in the woods around my grandmother’s home. I am currently working on restoring the family cemetery, McLester Cemetery, and remodeling my grandmother’s home. My long term goals are to put in an orchard, make improvements to the family cemetery, to include a genealogy building, and become involved with local groups.”

Ray indicated that he also enjoys art, film, and dogs. “I was very happy to find that Rockport has a wonderful off-leash dog park and I take my dogs every day. Well done Rockport!”, he said. Welcome to Aransas County and the ACHS Board. We are glad to have you.

—Kam Wagert and David Murrah

FROM THE LAB: A Message from Retiring President Kam Wagert———

My book club is reading “Lonesome Dove” by Larry McMurtry, the 1985 Pulitzer prize winner. I consider this to be one of the best books ever written. There is a conversation in the book that Gus McCrae has with Lorie and he says, “If you want any one thing too badly, it’s likely to turn out to be a disappointment. The healthy way to live life is to learn to like the every day things like a sip of good whiskey in the evening, a soft bed, a glass of buttermilk, or a feisty gentleman like myself.”

The older I get, the more I appreciate the every day things we have in Aransas County, such as the sunsets over Copano Bay, a flock of white pelicans in Salt Lake, the mounds of bluebonnets and coreopsis which appear each spring in the Rockport cemetery, and the cry of the gulls as they circle returning shrimp boats in Fulton harbor.

This is my last column as president of the ACHS, having served two years. I would like to thank Pam Stranahan who was a great vice president; Janet Taylor who has been the treasurer and kept our finances in terrific order; and Sally Reynolds who as secretary typed up the minutes just a few days after our board meetings. I also thank David Murrah who has put out all of the publicity for the ACHS, which includes the newsletters, postcards about events, and ads in the newspaper. And of course, I thank YOU, the members, for continuing your interest in the rich history of Aransas County through your support of ACHS.

—Kam Wagert
Thanks to several years of fundraising success by ACHS, the Society was able to make two major grants to other local organizations. On March 14, your Trustees voted unanimously to donate $5,000.00 to the restoration of the Fulton Mansion State Historic Site and $5,000.00 to the Preservation of the Bruhl-Paul-Johnson House as the History Center for Aransas County.

The decision came after both organizations had made requests for funds and after careful review of the ACHS budget. Because ACHS has had two years of fundraising success through book and calendar sales, it was in a position to make the donation. The funds were raised primarily through calendar and book sales, especially of the following titles:

- *Taking the Tide* by John Jackson as told to Sue Hastings
- *Queens in the Kitchen: Tested Recipes from Rockport Housekeepers Compiled by the Parent Teacher Association, 1927, Rockport, Texas* reprinted by ACHS from the original copy owned by Dolly Close
- *Rockport: A Childhood by the Sea* by John D. Freeman

All of these books, the calendar as well as the book, *Aransas: The Life of a Texas Coastal County*, are all available at the ACHS Lab.

Thank you all for your support.

— Janie Collier White, President

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**Blue Crab Resides in Rockport Once Again**

The iconic big blue crab returned to Rockport-Fulton this winter, thanks to the dedication of a small group of individuals, most of whom are members of the ACHS.

On March 4, under the sponsorship of the history committee of the Aransas Pathways Steering Committee, the crab was created and installed near the entrance to the Beach Park. A nearby sign explains the significance and history of the original crab, which originally sat on top of the Del Mar Grill (1957) on Austin Street from 1957 until it deteriorated in 1976. In 2003, a group established the “Bring Back the Big Blue Crab” drive, spearheaded by Diana Harrington, David Herring, and Kam Wagert. They sold crab novelties and solicited donations for erecting the big crab. After funds were secured, local artist David Allgood spent nine months creating the replica out of aluminum rods, tubing, screen, resin, and fiberglass.

The crab has attracted both local and regional attention and has become a popular photo spot. It is owned by the Aransas County Navigation District.
FEATURE: Vigilante Justice (?) Accounts for Two of Rockport’s Oldest Graves

By Jo Ann Morgan

[Editor’s Note: Jo Ann Morgan submitted the following article, based upon a newspaper clipping that probably came from the Corpus-Christi Caller Times, dated January 14, 1958. The clipping recounts the eye-witness account of the murder of two men named John and Crockett Choate, who are now buried in the Rockport Cemetery. The violence occurred in the summer of 1869 when a large party of state-sponsored vigilantes swept through the area under the command of Jack Helm. According to The Handbook of Texas, “they carried on a reign of terror in Bee, San Patricio, Wilson, DeWitt, and Goliad counties. The Galveston News reported that they killed twenty-one persons in two months and turned over only ten to the civil authorities.” For additional information, see the article on Jack Helm in The Handbook of Texas Online.]

The historic Rockport Cemetery holds a lot of secrets, but there is hardly a better story than that associated with two of its oldest graves. These are conspicuous concrete vaults above the ground, located side by side and bear the name Choate. One account said the two were brothers and another reported they were cousins. From information on the gravestones, John Choate was killed “at his residence in San Patricio Co.” and Crockett Choate was killed “at the residence of his cousin.”

Both were killed on August 3, 1869 in a shootout with vigilantes in San Patricio County at a ranch located about 10 miles south of Sinton.

Thanks to an old newspaper clipping of an interview with an elderly man by the name of James Huckman, Sr., we find some of the details of the shootout. In 1869, Huckman was a boy of 18 years of age. He had arrived in Rockport on the steamer Reindeer in 1867, one of the first to arrive at the new port at a time when the town had only a half-finished house. He soon found work as a cowhand at the small ranch of brothers Pick and Moe Terry, in southern San Patricio County.

After the incident, Huckman remained in South Texas and later worked for the Southern Pacific Railway and at one time made his home in Kenedy. He was 89 when he gave the interview, probably in 1939. He would often visit his daughter, Mrs. Lee Gravett, who lived in Rockport at one time. Mr. Huckman died at age 90 in February 1941.

The following is Huckman’s account of the frontier vigilante violence he witnessed.

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It was early August and I was sleeping on the front porch when Mary, the cook, came up and pulled my foot about 3 o’clock in the morning. She said I had better go over to the Choate’s place as something was wrong over there. The Choate’s place was just a short distance through the brush from our place. I went on up the trail until I got to the little gate at the fence of the Choate’s house when someone behind me called to me and told me not to go in there. About six fellows gathered around me and took me down the fence to the big corral. On the way I saw a lot of horses tied to the fence and knew then they were the vigilantes I had heard about.

(Continued on following page)
One of the men suggested hanging me but the leader told them to leave me alone, that I was just a kid. About that time Pick and Moe came up the trail. Before they got very close, three vigilantes rode toward them. Pick saw who they were and he dropped on one knee, pointed his rifle at them and told them to keep their distance. He and Moe slipped off into the brush. No one dared to follow them into that thick brush.

When it started getting daybreak I could see vigilantes all around. I counted over a hundred of them. They were looking for two men who had killed a deputy over at Gonzales and they thought the men were in Choate’s house. Lots of different kind of people used to gather at the Choate’s ranch but the Choates were good people and good to me.

About daybreak the vigilantes ordered John Choate to give up the three men and when no answer came, the shooting started. They threw fireballs on the roof but it never caught fire. During the shooting Crockett Choate tried to get away on a horse. They put a bullet clear through him as the horse cleared the fence. The shooting kept up for a while and then John Choate, Crockett’s brother, came out with his wife in front of him.

There was one man in the gang with a United States officer’s uniform on. John said that he would give up to a United States officer but not to a gang. About six men came forward then and when they got close they pulled John away from his wife. John shot once with his shotgun and they started shooting him. He was already shot up bad and after the shooting was over, I counted 17 bullet wounds on John. He died a few days later.

Frank Skidmore was in the house, too. He hadn’t been in on the trouble but was just passing through with several hundred head of horses and stopped over for the night. Frank was shot twenty-eight times and lived to tell about it.

That night the vigilantes ate supper in the corral and Crockett’s body lay right close to where we were eating. A young man went to Rockport to get old Doc Downs and we later sent the women on to Rockport. Only me and a Mexican was left. John died and we had to send to Corpus for coffins for him and Crockett. We buried John under a mesquite tree and Crockett nearby. Some time later they moved the bodies to the Rockport Cemetery.

Sometimes later the leader of that vigilante gang [Jack Helm] was shot and killed by [John] Wesley Hardin in a small town near Cuero [probably in Albuquerque, Texas]. I was standing several doors down the street from where it happened. He was killed just like the vigilantes used to kill the men they caught. Wesley ordered him out of a saloon and told him to start running. Hardin says,”If you got any prayers, sing out!’ He broke and run and the dust jumped up around his feet. Just after a short distance he fell dead.
wonderful natural configuration, and here a child may bathe unattended without the slightest danger. With two large public bath houses and a number of private ones, we have ample facilities for bathing.

INLAND WALKS AND DRIVES

When one tires of the grandeur of magnificent distances, there are inland walks and drives, beautiful groves of majestic oaks, tennis and ball grounds. There are miles and miles of smooth surfaced shell roads for the enchantment of the pleasures of moonlight motoring parties as a diversion from moonlight boating parties on Aransas Bay.

Various members of the finney tribe afford the sportsman an opportunity to test his luck with rod and reel. The waters of Aransas Bay abound with game fish including Spanish Mackerel, Silver King and that wily denizen of the deep—the Tarpon which has made Rockport famous as a fishing ground the world over. Fishing boats and fishing piers are numerous; the former can be rented by the day for a nominal sum, and the latter are free.

AMPLE HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS

We have ample hotel accommodations, from the best with service unexcelled anywhere, to the moderate-priced private boarding house. Large cool rooms and broad verandas overlooking the ocean and fanned continually by the invigorating salt laden Gulf breezes. Rooming houses, restaurants, furnished rooms and furnished cottages. Those wishing to while away their hours in quiet (continued on following page)
will find places here where no sound may be heard except the lullaby of the waves as they tumble, and toss, and break upon the silvery sands of the shore.

VERY FEW MOSQUITOES

From the fact that there are no rivers or fresh water lakes here Rockport has very few mosquitoes. There is plenty of wholesome drinking water. The nights are cool with breezes fresh the broad expanse of the Atlantic, which insure plenty of peace and rest. For catarrhal diseases there is no place where you will find greater relief than here and in time the affection [affliction?] completely disappears.

COME ON DOWN HERE

Begin your plans now and come to Rockport where you get the greatest and most valuable returns, both summer and winter, for the least expenditure.

The Bay Side Inn was located on South Water Street and was once of several fine hotels in Rockport in 1914 when the newspaper article was published. It was destroyed in the 1919 Hurricane. Photo courtesy Kam Wagert.
Friends of History Center Continue Building Campaign

The Friends of the History Center continue to seek funding to help renovate the Bruhl-Paul-Johnson house, which is now at its new location at Cedar and Church.

The organization needs to raise $65,000 in order to match a grant from Aransas Pathways. Plans call for the house to be renovated to include a parlor setting, gallery, library, office and kitchen. ADA restrooms and ramps will be added.

To date, the Friends have raised 65 percent of its needed funds, including recent grants from ACHS, the Margaret Sue Rust Foundation, and South Rockport Neighbors. Other donations were made by Bill Wise, Mack Watson, as well as a challenge pledge from Paula Dean and Cindy Duck.

If you are interested in this historic preservation effort, contact Jackie Shaw, President of the Friends, at 361 790-4199 or Pam Stranahan, Development chair, 361 727-1766. More information is available at the Friends’ website, www.aransashistorycenter.org.

---Pam Stranahan

Aransas Pathways News

Aransas Pathways continues to play a strong role in promoting Aransas County History projects. Recently, on February 16, a tourism sign for the Hagar Rockport Cottages was dedicated at First and Church streets. Pathways chair, De McLallen, and Betty Baker, president of the Friends of Connie Hagar, provided appropriate remarks.

Another sign commemorating the Big Blue Crab was celebrated March 4 (see related story on p. 3).

Both of these signs were paid for by the Aransas Pathways project in an effort to enhance the Pathways defined for the county, with research and writing provided by the heritage tourism committee chaired by Kam Wagert.

Many other projects are on the drawing board for Aransas Pathways, including a plan for a kiosk and bridge at Historic Shellcrete Square at Tule Pond to be developed by a project committee including interested citizens. In addition, birding sites, Ivy Lane and Castro Nature Sanctuary, will be dedicated as trails are complete. Plans for kayak launches are also under development.

A smart phone app, "TourRockportFulton," is available to see projects. You may also pick up a map at the Chamber of Commerce or view it online at www.aransaspathways.com.

---Pam Stranahan

COURT APPOINTS NEW HISTORICAL COMMISSIONERS

The Aransas County Commissioners’ Court recently appointed Collin Jackson, Letha Kieffer, Lonnie Matthew, Carol Pena, Sarah Solis, Aransas County Commissioner Betty Stiles and Sue Travis to the Aransas County Historical Commission (ACHC).

Those re-appointed for a second term are Carolyn Cauley, Diane Dupnik, Sandy Garrison, Greg Harlan, Dora McKelvey, and Janet Taylor. Officers: Carolyn Cauley, Chair; Greg Harlan, (Vice Chair) replacing Kathy David; Janet Taylor (Secretary) replacing Linda Garcia; and Letha Kieffer (Treasurer) replacing Dora McKelvey.

—Carolyn Cauley

WELCOME NEW ACHS MEMBER!

Ed Hegen is the newest member of ACHS. Welcome, Ed!

—Carolyn Cauley