

Celebrating 30 Years of Preserving Our History!

ARANSAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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ACHS NEWSLETTER

Volume 12 Issue 1

September 2015

Calendar Premiere Set for Sept. 15 Photo Contest Winners to be Announced

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ACHS Officers & Trustees (year term expires)

- David J. Murrah, President (2016)
- Marsha Hendrix, Vice Pres. (2017)
- Jo Ann Morgan, Secretary (2016)
- Janie White, Treasurer (2016)
- Donna Dickinson (2018)
- Dolly Close (2018)
- Gloria Davis (2017)
- Sandy Garrison (2017)
- Norinne Holman (2016)
- Ray McLester (2018)
- Pam Stranahan (2018)
- Jeanie Schindler (2018)
- Janet Taylor (2017)

The Premiere of the 2016 Calendar—*Aransas County History in Photographs*--will be September 15 at Estelle-Stair Gallery at 6:30 pm. The occasion has always been a great party, and the 2015 Historical Photo Contest winners will be announced. In addition, all photographs entered in the contest will be available for viewing. Each picture helps to tell the story of Aransas County.

There is no admission charge and the event is open to the public. The new calendar will be available for purchase.

The 2015 ACHS Historical Photograph Contest, which provides us with photos for the 2016 calendar, was one of the best yet. We had 22 people enter for a total of 53 photographs. Our judges this year were James Fox and John Speck. The judges' work was difficult, but they made excellent selections, all of which will be announced at the Premiere Party.

The Calendar Committee worked with those selections to make sure they were placed in appropriate months and selected the cover photograph. The committee also researched the photographs in order to write appropriate captions. The Committee, our sponsors, and contest entrants are listed on page 3.

Our annual calendar is ACHS's major fund-raising project. Your dues and the proceeds from the calendar provide for our four quarterly programs, newsletters, collection development, and community outreach.



The Estelle Stair Gallery last hosted the Calendar Premiere Party in 2013, and a large crowd was on hand to enjoy the photos and refreshments.

Except for an occasional grant we do not receive funds from any source other than membership, donations, and calendar and book sales.

We are located in the historic Rockport School at 619 North Live Oak, Room 15. If you don't make it to the Premiere, come see us any Wednesday afternoon between 2:00 and 4:00 PM. Don't forget that the calendar makes a great holiday gift, or a very nice item to send to out-of-town friends and family.

-----Janie Collier White

FROM THE LAB: A message from the President

ACHS recently received an anonymous letter from a disgruntled member, complaining about a lack of knowledge of some folks participating in an activity downtown that was supposedly sponsored by ACHS. Normally, we pay no attention to anonymous complaints, but this one became somewhat of a burr under the saddle to us because it may reflect some of the public's misunderstanding as to what ACHS is and what it is not.

The Society was established thirty years ago, in 1985, for the sole purpose of collecting and preserving Aransas County history. Our programs, newsletters, collections, and publications all reflect the singular theme of Aransas County history.

We have many history-related organizations in the community, and, from time to time, there is going to be some confusion as to who does what. Some are theme or structure specific, such as the Fulton Mansion, the Maritime Museum, the Fulton Schoolhouse Museum, and the History Center for Aransas County.

For many years, ACHS was confused by many to be the County Historical Commission, but the two are completely separate organizations. The Commission is a politically-appointed body that is legally charged with overseeing the state's historical marker program and receives its funding through the county. The Society receives no outside funding, except for an occasional grant, and depends on its revenues through the sale of the annual calendar, books, and



At the ACHS program in April, professor Debra Chronister of Victoria College gave a fascinating program on firepots that were **discovered in the wreckage of LaSalle's ship, the LaBelle**. Her research has revealed that the pots were used much like modern hand grenades in warfare.

membership dues. We are grateful to have a home in the historic Rockport School, provided to us by the school district.

We support other historical activities in the community in a number of ways, including giving recognition in this newsletter in our "History News You Can Use" section. We also made substantial cash gifts to both the History Center and the renovation of the Fulton Mansion. But, primarily, we just go about our business by collecting and preserving photographs and other material, compiling information, and sharing what we have through publications and timely programs.

As a member, you can help ACHS by keeping the public informed as to who we are and what each organization does. We thank you for your continued interest in preserving our history.

Unfortunately, there is someone out there--who signed the letter as "A Former Benefactor" who has failed to comprehend what is going on, as indicated by addressing his or her grievance to the wrong organization at the wrong place and for the wrong reason. And, that's probably why we should pay no attention to anonymous letters!

A personal note--I recently had the privilege of attending on a hot August 4 the dedication of a marker at the State Cemetery in Austin commemorating the 150th anniversary of the death of my cousin Pendleton Murrah, who was governor of Texas at the close of the Civil War in 1865.

Already ill with tuberculosis, Murrah fled to Monterrey, Mexico to escape imprisonment, but died there August 4, 1865. His gravesite is unknown, but thanks to the efforts of the General Land Office and the Sons of Confederate Veterans, his service was recognized with this tribute.

The ceremony included a Civil War era military band from the Dallas area, a 20-man honor guard composed of Confederate Army reenactors, and remarks by two historians, Jeff Murrah of Wimberley, and Rob Jones of Austin, formerly with the General Land Office.

---David J. Murrah

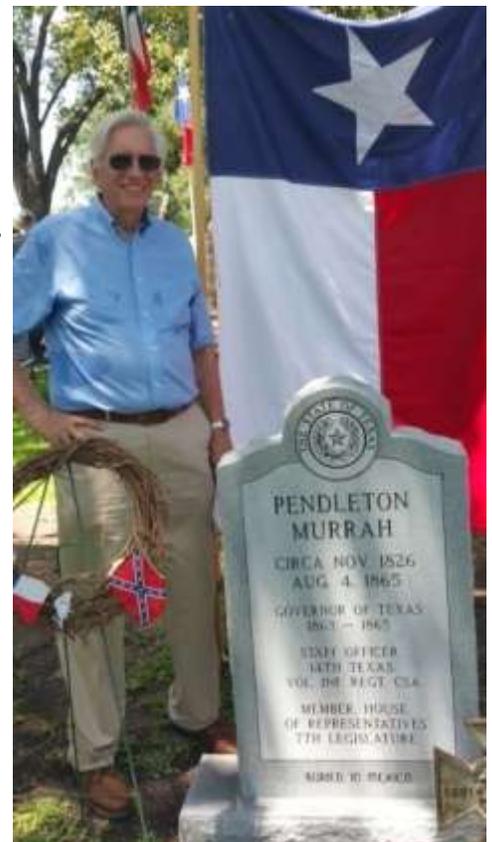


Photo courtesy Mark Murrah, Houston.

The 2016 Aransas County History in Photographs Calendar makes a great gift. You can order calendars by mail, and, if you include a list of addresses, we can mail them directly to your list. Enclose \$12 for each calendar (price includes tax and mailing) and send to ACHS, Box 702, Rockport, TX 78381.

ACHS wishes to express its appreciation to all those who entered the 2015 Photo contest. They include the following: Gloria Dye Davis, Rusty & Jennifer Day, Donna Dickinson, Fred Lyle Diedrich, A. O. Freeman, Jr., Gary Freeman, Bart Haynes, Bobby Dietrich Hopper, Frances L. Iles, Nan Jackson, Julia Kunse, Susan LeBlanc, Jo Ann Morgan, Jo Anne Newton, Patsy McLester Parr, Jessie Wilson Parrish, Richard & Marian Robertson, Nancy Swingle, Joan Truelove, Darlene Evans Varner, Wayne White, and Ro Jean Williams.

We also want to thank the Calendar Committee for its hard work in making the 2016 Calendar, especially its chair Janie White. This year's committee also included Gloria Davis, Donna Dickinson, Norinne Holman, David Murrah, and Jean Schindler.

Thanks also go to our Calendar Sponsors, many of which have supported us year after year on this project. They are listed below.

**Look! Up in the sky!
It's a bird, it's a plane.
It's a crab?**

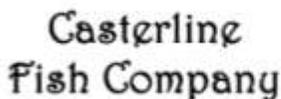


Aransas County History in Photographs
2016

**It's the new
Aransas County Historical Society's
2016 HISTORICAL
CALENDAR!**
with all "new" historical photos

Please come to the
PREMIERE PARTY
TUESDAY, SEPT. 15--6:30 PM
at the historic Estelle Stair Gallery
in downtown Rockport

Photo contest winners to be announced! *It's Free!* *Refreshments!*



A DAY TO REMEMBER: GEN. WAINWRIGHT'S VISIT TO ROCKPORT

by

Robert Albin, Sr.

[Editor's Note: When I was a kid growing up in the upper Texas Panhandle, a famous World War II general, Curtis LeMay, came to our town in the early 1950s to hunt pheasant. His visit caused quite a stir, just as that of General Jonathan Wainwright's trip to Rockport, as told below by long-time Rockport resident and ACHS member Bob Albin.]

On a sunny and windy day, as it often is in late April here on the coast, my father, Gene Albin, and I had the privilege of taking General Jonathan Wainwright and his aide fishing. The year was 1948, and I was just about to graduate from what was then Rockport High School.

My dad and Bill Blevins were the local dealers of Steelcraft cruisers, and we used one of their 26-ft. boats for this special fishing trip. Mr. Blevins' family was the owner of Palm Village, which at the time was one of Rockport's finest tourist cabins complex. It was located on Fulton Beach Road where Allegro North stands today, and my parents were the managers. Dad and Mr.

Blevins flew anti-submarine patrol together off the Texas coast in World War II, but that's another story.



A Steelcraft boat

As you may recall

from history, if not actual memory depending on your age, General Wainwright was well-known for defending the fortress of Corregidor in the Philippines until overwhelmed in May 1942 by the Japanese, and then after being captured, was, along with his 70,000 troops, forced to march many miles in the heat with minimum food and water and subject to torture. This was the infamous Bataan Death March. Wainwright was imprisoned by the Japanese for the duration of the war. There, he won the respect of his men because he suffered alongside them. At war's end in 1945, he was liberated and was onboard the battleship *Missouri* to witness the Japanese surrender.

I mention this because even in 1948 the General still appeared to be somewhat frail, but in good spirits.

Back to our fishing trip. We boarded the Steelcraft around 7:00 AM in Fulton Harbor and pro-

ceeded south into choppy waters. At Port Aransas we motored through the jetties into the Gulf, where the chop and swells were quite a challenge. We began trolling as Dad hoped to put the General on some kingfish, but after a half hour of abuse by the waves, the party thought it best that we return to the calmer waters of the bay. So we cruised north into Lydia Ann Channel and anchored near a derelict ship which had been torpedoed in the Gulf, towed into Lydia Ann, and sunk.

There, we rigged our lines for trout but none were to be found. However, several nice-size skipjacks took the bait and provided some excitement with their line-pulling and jumping. We broke out the snacks and drinks and had a grand time visiting with General Wainwright and hearing tales of his war experiences. One thing he got a kick out of was dipping pieces of bread in hot sauce and tossing them to the gulls. This didn't seem to hurt them, but as soon as they took the bread they dived straight to the water.

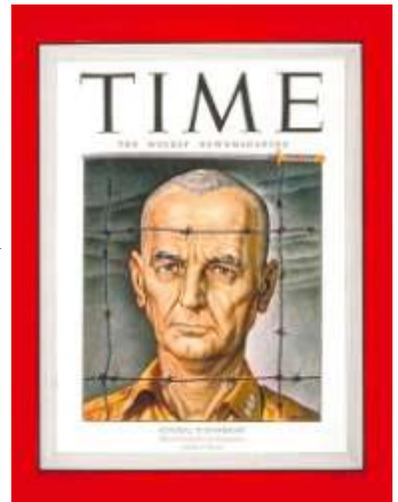
After awhile we up-anchored and headed back to Fulton, and that's when the trip really became an adventure. The wind had picked up and the bay was quite choppy, but Dad had put me on the helm so that he could go below and visit with our guests. Thankfully we were traveling in the same direction the seas were running.



A family home movie captured General Wainwright's reaction to the fishing trip. Photo courtesy Robert Albin, Sr.

After rounding Mud Island and entering Aransas Bay, it became more difficult for me to control the boat. I struggled with the wheel for a time, and then decided to head east into calmer waters along St. Joseph Island. Suddenly, before I could make the turn, a large wave caught our stern quarter and threw the boat almost over on its port side, yanking the wheel from my grip. Fortunately, the boat righted itself and the passengers all came topside, somewhat ruffled, but unhurt.

[continued on next page]



Time Magazine noted General Wainwright's second anniversary in a Japanese prison camp with his picture on the cover of its May, 8, 1944 issue.

HISTORY NEWS YOU CAN USE

The Fulton Mansion

On October 24th, the community will finally get to have their mansion back. While the restoration work is still to be completed, the staff and volunteers of the mansion are moving forward with plans to host a Victorian spiritualism festival, entitled *Stories, Spooks, and Spirits: The Awakening of the Fulton Mansion*. in conjunction with the grand opening ceremony.

Spiritualism and pseudo-sciences were at their height after the Civil War with millions of followers; the most famous being Mary Todd Lincoln who invited mediums to the White House. Orson Fowler invented the *faux* science of Phrenology, or reading the bumps on one's head. The Mansion owns George Fulton's Phrenology reading, and in their letters, George and Harriet relate their experiences with spiritualism, proving they were like many Victorians fascinated by the mystical world.

Community partners will be providing activities such as a costume contest, fortune telling, and Victorian games. Special guests include three longhorn steers that will be available for photo ops. The schedule for the event is below:

Grand Opening Ceremonies: 3:00 – 4:00pm
 Spooky Stories Contest Awards: 4:30 – 5:00pm
 Victorian Spiritualism Festival: 5:00 – 8:00pm

-----*Marsha Hendrix*

Save St. Peter's

On St. Andrew's Day, November 30, 2015, St. Peter's Episcopal Church will have served the people of Aransas County for 144 years. Sixty-two of those years have been on the current site. Now it is time for the congregation to move from the little old building to a new Center for Ministry that will fill the needs of the congregation in the 21st century.

We need your help to preserve the old home of St. Peter's located at Live Oak and Mimosa. This little church building is the last example of the early churches built in Rockport. It is an important part of Rockport's heritage and a major

contributor to the Rockport Heritage District. The Hoopes House, Fulton-Bruhl House, Leopold Bracht Home (now Angel Rose Bed & Breakfast), the 1867 Wood House (now being restored), the A. L. Bracht House (next door to St. Peter's), and the Sorenson building (Estelle Stair Gallery) are all historic properties within easy walking distance of the historic St. Peter's Church Building.

This area truly puts the word heritage in the Rockport Heritage District. We hope we can count on your help! If you are interested, please contact Janie Collier White at P.O. Box 179, Rockport Texas 78381 or by email at jc-white@swbell.net.

----*Janie White*



Aransas Pathways

Aransas Pathways honored volunteers at a BBQ lunch on May 9. Volunteers for bridging, kayaking, history and trails were thanked for their dedication to the many projects that have been accomplished since Pathways inception in 2011.

Tropical Trail (THC)

Tropical Trail Partners visited Rockport in April. Around 45 folks toured the History Center and heard discussion of early settlements on the bays. After lunch at Rusty's Tropical Grill, the group took a History Cruise on the Skimmer. Narrators were Jay Tarkington and Pam Stranahan.

-----*Pam Stranahan*

A DAY TO REMEMBER, **[continued from previous page]**

After we all calmed down, Dad took the wheel and we headed north almost to Long Reef where we turned toward Fulton and across the still choppy water into Fulton Harbor. The General was most gracious and thanked every one for an adventure.

I am sure for him that it was just another day, but for us, what a great thing it was for us to get to host him, and how fortunate for me to have to have been invited along. It was indeed a day to remember.



General Wainwright, standing behind General Douglas MacArthur, was placed in a position of honor to oversee the surrender of Japan at the solemn signing ceremony on board the battleship *USS Missouri* in Tokyo harbor in September 1945. Wainwright had been liberated from a prison camp only a month before by a Russian Army unit.

DO YOU HAVE A STORY FOR THE NEWSLETTER?

The Newsletter of the ACHS welcomes ideas or feature stories for future publication. An article should be from 450 to 550 words and should include one or two photos. Please send your entry or idea for a story to the Newsletter editor, David Murrah, at davidmurray@sbcglobal.net, or call him at (361) 729-6858.

Your story should be of broad interest to the public and deal with the history of Aransas County. Share your knowledge!

Fulton Schoolhouse Museum / Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT)

The Fulton Schoolhouse Museum has recently received two display cases donated by Eleanor's of Fulton which will be installed during the month of August.

We have also received this month a beautiful picture and numerous books from Patsy Parr. Amanda Martin also donated a set of Texas history books. During this month we have constructed new bookshelves to create a small library from the many kinds of books that have been donated. These books are available for use at the Museum, but they do not circulate. A friend, Earline Arnold, helped to install shelves. We also have recently set up our website with the help of Ray McLester. Our website address is fultonschoolhouse.wordpress.com.

Jeanie Schindler is currently president of the DRT chapter. If you are interested in joining, please contact the current registrar, Jackie Shaw, at 361-729-3691.

-----Jeanie Schindler

Genealogical Society

The Aransas County Genealogical Society will start its monthly meetings again on Monday, September 28th at 3:00 pm at the Texas Maritime Museum. The program focus on "What We Did on Summer Vacation". The organization is open to anyone interested in learning more about their families. The Genealogical Society meets the 4th Monday of each month. Please come and check us out.

History Center for Aransas County

The spring exhibit – *History Flags of Texas* – featured the collection of Richard and Marian Robertson. The Robertsons spoke at the opening March 21 where they



Marian and Richard Robertson (left) share stories about their flag collection with Joan Fisher at the History Center.
Photo courtesy Pam Stranahan.



The Fulton Schoolhouse Museum is located at 205 7th St. in Fulton and is open on Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 4 PM, or by appointment. For appointments call the Fulton City Secretary at 361-729-5533.

also displayed their Six Flags kite. Other programs offered included "Making Historic Flags" and "Zen Doodles."

On August 22, the History Center opened its *Connie Hagar* exhibit will open with new material on display. Her story is related in posters, a timeline, artifacts and standups. On August 29, a panel discussion, entitled, "In Connie's Footsteps," was held.

On Saturday, September 12, at 10:00 am, the program will be about the "Connie Hagar Cottage Sanctuary."

The History Center is also a Hummer Home and many feeders will adore the garden especially designed for butterflies and hummers. A monthly Plant Exchange is held every first Saturday at 10 am.

For additional information, please see the Center's website, www.aransashistorycenter.org

County Historical Commission

On July 11 the historical marker for the Smith-Brundrett house was dedicated at the home of Peter and Karen Murray. Around 40 people heard remarks by Kitty Angell, marker chair. The Murrays and Commissioner Bubba Casterline unveiled the marker.

Several markers will be dedicated in the fall including Jackson Family Maritime Businesses October 9, 4:00 PM; October 17, Rockport Volunteer Fire Department; and TBD, Hynes-Balthrope House.



The Smith-Brundrett House received a Texas Historical Marker on July 11. Home owner Ken Murray (above) helped Commissioner Bubba Casterline unveil the marker. Photo courtesy Rockport Pilot.

-----Pam Stranahan