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# ACHS NEWSLETTER

Volume 12 Issue 2

February 2016

## Noted Artist to Speak at Annual Meeting All Members Encouraged to Attend on Feb. 25

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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)

ACHS members have another great meeting coming this month.

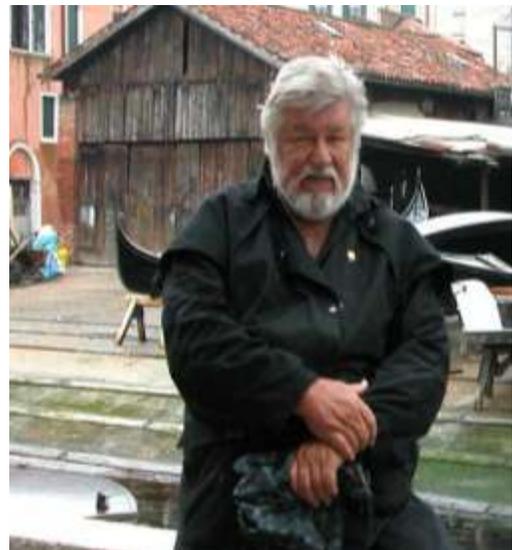
Rockport artist Steve Russell will be the featured speaker at the Annual Membership Meeting of the Historical Society.

The program will be **Thursday, February 25, at 6:30 pm** at the Woman's Club Building located at the Rockport Harbor area. There is no admission charge and a light meal will be served.

Steve Russell grew up in Rockport and authored a book, aptly titled, *Notes by Texas Painter Steve Russell*.

Steve's presentation will give an artist's view of Rockport's historic landscape, and is entitled "A Different Look at Rockport Past."

Unlike the four spring and fall



Rockport artist Steve Russell. Photo courtesy Steve Russell.

public meetings of ACHS, the February program is for members of the Society and their guests. Annual dues may be paid at the door.

A short business meeting will precede the program to elect new trustees.

## FROM THE LAB: A message from the President . . . . .

### Remembering Raulie Irwin, Jr.

On November 12, 2015, Raulie Irwin, Jr. drove down to Rockport to help the ACHS celebrate its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. He gave a wonderful talk about the Society's early history and stayed around to visit with old friends.

The following week, he passed away, much to the shock of family, friends, and those of us who hardly knew him. He was only 66 years old.

At age 12, Raulie moved to Rockport in 1961 from Ingleside. His father, Raulie Irwin, Sr., was co-developer of the Palm Harbor subdivision, which he began in 1960. Jerry Brundrett, who graduated from Rockport-Fulton High School with him in 1967, recalled that Raulie learned his hard work ethic from his Dad as he helped him build Palm Harbor.

Jerry also remembered other things about his friend:

Raulie was in my wedding when Marsha and I were married in 1969 and he taught Marsha how to drive so she could get her license. He was a serious student and a very bright young man. He was successful in almost everything her undertook because he was driven to succeed. I think he received that from both his Mom and Dad who understood the principle of hard work. The measure of the success of a man can sometimes be seen in his offspring. His two sons reflect the character of the man Raulie was and his death was a great loss to us all.

After graduating from Texas A&M University, Raulie returned to Rockport and continued to work in real estate development. In the mid-1980s, he played a major role in saving the historic 1858 Stella Maris Chapel in Lamar from destruction, and at the same time helped to establish the Aransas County Historical Society.

At his presentation at ACHS's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration in November, Raulie told about the adventure of the moving of the chapel. A portion of that speech was recorded and is available at the ACHS Lab.

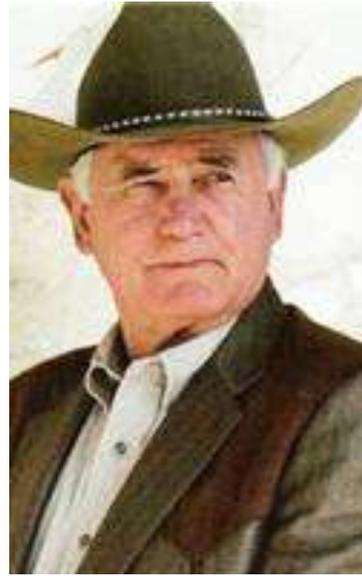
Before moving to Goliad in 2001, Raulie wrote 21 articles on Aransas County and Texas history, which were published in the Rockport Pilot from 1993 to 1999. These stories are also available at the Lab. One of them is reprinted elsewhere in this issue of the Newsletter.

As per the family's request, ACHS made a bequest to the Make-A-Wish Foundation, and is also planning to include a Memorial Page in its new pictorial history, slated for publication later this year.

Raulie Irwin's contribution to Aransas County history is immeasurable and unending. We should all be grateful that he made his home here for 40 years of his life.

Our thanks to Phil Albin, Jeanie Schindler, and Jerry Brundrett for contributing to this article.

---David J. Murrah



Raulie Irwin, Jr.  
1949 - 2015

GOLIAD - Raulie Irwin, Jr. passed away November 20, 2015. He was 66 years old. He was born January 26, 1949, in Corpus Christi, Texas, to Raulie Lee Irwin Sr. and Nan Kelly Irwin. He was a graduate of Texas A&M University, College Station, Class of 1972. Raulie was a very successful Real Estate Broker and appraiser in the Rockport area. In 2001, Raulie moved his family and his business to Goliad, Texas.

He is preceded in death by his parents.

He is survived by his loving wife, Georgia Anne Irwin of Goliad, Texas; sons, Nathan Irwin (Ronda) of Goliad, Texas, Zachary Irwin (Jennifer) of Liberty Hill, Texas; sister, Lenora Keas (William) of Portland, Texas; nephew, Mark Kurtz (fiancee, Laura Ann Gayle) of Norfolk, Virginia; four grandchildren, Kade, Barrett, Krayleigh, Keira, and twins on the way, and a very close clan of Kelly cousins.

The funeral service was held Saturday, November 28, 2015, at the Charlie Marshall Funeral Home in Aransas Pass, and burial was the Prairie View Cemetery in Aransas Pass.

Expressions of sympathy may be made to Make a Wish / Texas Gulf Coast, 12625 Southwest Freeway, Stafford, Texas 77477.

----Obituary adapted from Victoria Advocate, November 22, 2015

# ROCKPORT ON THE MAP

by Raulie Irwin, Jr.

*[Editor's Note: In the 1990s, the late Raulie Irwin, Jr., wrote 21 articles for The Rockport Pilot on various historical topics. This one was published on October 2, 1999. We wanted to include it as a tribute to Raulie, who passed away in November 2015.]*

**Every few years** someone arrives in Rockport with the great expectations of putting Rockport "On the Map." How many times have you heard such comments or stories. "Oh! We're going to build the premier development on the Live Oak peninsula that is going to finally put Rockport 'On the Map!'"

Well, I've heard it many times over the past five decades. Each person who has such a plan seems to think they are the first person to exclaim such an idea. Sorry! Men have been going to put Rockport "On the Map" since the 1880s. James C. Fulton and George William Fulton, sons of Col. George Fulton made such an announcement in 1889. The Ocean View Hotel Company was issued charter no. 4335 on Dec. 4, 1889, by the Secretary of State's office. They proposed to develop the Ocean View Hotel at an estimated cost of \$50,000, at the northern tip of Live Oak peninsula. The San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad had arrived in Rockport in July 1888, and business in Rockport was at a frenzy. The Fulton boys planned to push the railroad tracks to the very tip of the peninsula and deliver tourists from San Antonio and points farther north to the Ocean View Hotel. The 'Rockport Chamber of Commerce published a brochure announcing "Beautiful Rockport, The unrivaled Gulf Port of Texas, The Coming City of 200,00 People." A road bed for the railroad track was created along Railroad Avenue at the western edge of present day Fulton, but no tracks were ever laid. The hotel was never built.

Instead, the Aransas Hotel was built on Merchants Square in downtown Rockport by Col. Henry Traylor, former mayor of Dallas. This was the largest wooden structures south of Houston at the time of its construction. It was three stories tall and contained 50 rooms. Governor Warner Hogg held his second inaugural ball in 1892, in the dining room of this hotel. The grand Aransas Hotel was the place to stay and dine in the Gay Nineties; but by 1919, the hotel was abandoned and had fallen into disrepair. It burned to the ground on March 2, 1919.

On May 3, 1888, charter no. 3724, was issued to the Aransas Pass Improvement Company by the Secretary of

State's office. This company was formed to finish what the federal government had started, but did not finish, dredging a navigable channel at Aransas Pass (known today as Port Aransas). Meetings were held in Beeville, Rockport and Aransas Harbor, (Aransas Pass) to raise funds for the project. The Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company pledged 10,000 acres in its Brasada Pasture and purchased \$5,000 in stock in the Aransas Harbor Co. to help fund the project and maintain a depth of fifteen feet over the bar. A half million dollars had been raised by March 2, 1892, when work actually began. The venture was not successful and more money was needed.



The Aransas Hotel, later renamed Del Mar. Photo from Judy Sorenson Collier Collection, Aransas County Historical Society.

Col. Fulton died in 1893 and by 1900 Col. Bee of Beeville, Thomas Henry Mathis of Rockport and Captain A.S. Jones of Beeville, promoters of the project had all passed away. The dream of a deep water channel languished until 1910, when Gulf Coast Immigration Company announced a plan to build a railroad to Harbor Island and deepening of the channel. This again was a paper plan that never made it.

In 1921, Robert Kleberg of the King Ranch called a meeting of large land owners and area business men from all over South Texas to meet in Kingsville. The Deep Water Harbor Association was formed to lobby the Corps of Engineers to dredge a

channel to Corpus Christi. President Warren G. Harding signed a bill into law on Sept. 22, 1922, authorizing that a channel be dredged from Port Aransas to Corpus Christi. The port of Corpus Christi opened on Sept. 14, 1926, with a twenty feet deep channel, two hundred feet wide. Rockport had finally lost out to Corpus Christi for the deep water harbor.

In the 1980s, we saw and heard of all types of planned projects that were going to put Rockport "On the Map." Some actually got started, like Cape Velero, but most were just paper plans. If Col. Fulton and the Aransas Harbor Co. had succeeded in their plans to dredge a channel to Rockport in the 1890s, the 400,000 people that live in Corpus Christi and Nueces County would be living on Live Oak Peninsula today. I don't know about you, but I'm sure glad they failed to put Rockport "On the Map." As far as I'm concerned and I think the other 22,000 people living in Aransas County agree. Rockport has always been "On the Map."

## 2016 Historical Calendar Still Available--Free Mailing!

The 2016 Historical Calendar is out, and almost sold out, and it's time to start thinking about entering the 2017 Photo Contest.

The Photo Contest begins April 1 and ends June 30. It seeks pictures that are at least 25 years old. Cash prizes (\$100, \$50, and \$25) are awarded for the best photos, which will also be featured at a special premiere party in September and in the 2017 Calendar.

The 2016 calendar is still available for \$10. It includes photos from the 2015 Photo Contest. The top three prize winners are shown below. If you would like to order the calendar, please send \$10 for each, and we will mail it to you or any address you designate, for free! Just drop a check and note to ACHS, Box 702, Rockport, Texas 78381.

We are looking for volunteers to help with the 2016 Photo Contest and Calendar. If you are interested, please call Janie White at 729-2133.



From the Aransas County Historical Society Digital Photo Collection. Photograph courtesy of Fred Lyle Diedrich. All rights reserved.



From the Aransas County Historical Society Digital Photo Collection. Photograph courtesy of Darlene Varnar. All rights reserved.

Skeets Cafe on Highway 35 North - 1953

Skeets was owned by Preston "Skeet" McHugh. It was first a sandwich stand next to the service station at Highway 35 North and Broadway in Fulton. He added a second stand to sell oysters during oyster seasons. In the 1940s the two businesses were combined into Skeets Cafe. Rockport Bakery is at the same location today.

Second Place - 2015 Aransas County Historical Society Photo Contest

## Winners of the 2015 Historical Photo Contest

The 2015 Photo Contest produced some great photos, as evidenced by the three winning entries. At upper left is the first place photo, submitted by Lyle Diedrich, depicting a duck hunt with his father about 1942 at the Port Bay Hunting Club on the south shore of Copano Bay.

Second place (above) went to Darlene Varnar for her 1953 photo of Skeets Café, which was located in Fulton.

The third place photo (left) was taken at Rockport's first SeaFair in 1975 and captured Miss Texas, Mary Ellen Richardson, paying a visit to the Fire Department's shrimp sale. This picture was submitted by Joan Truelove.

The three winners were recognized at the Annual Calendar Premiere Party in September and are pictured on the following page in this Newsletter.



From the Aransas County Historical Society Digital Photo Collection. Photograph courtesy of Joan Truelove. All rights reserved.

Miss Texas Visits Rockport's First SeaFair - 1975

Edward Truelove greets Miss Texas of 1975, Mary Ellen Richardson of Waco, at the Rockport Volunteer Fire Department's booth. Coy Truelove and Elmer Redden can be seen on the left at the very back of the tent (their faces are in shadow). Merlin Moore, Jr. is on the right side (with his elbow behind the poster). Joan Truelove is in the white shirt on the left taking a photo.

Third Place - 2015 Aransas County Historical Society Photo Contest

**CALENDAR PREMIERE PARTY**

**“ . . . And a good time was had by all!”**



Photo contest winners were (L to R) Darlene Varner (2nd place), Fred Lyle Diedrich (1st), and Joan Truelove (3rd).

ACHS launched the 2016 Historical Calendar with a gala premiere party at the Estelle Stair Gallery in downtown Rockport in September. The Calendar Committee recognized each of those that submitted entries for the Photo Contest and awarded cash prizes to the winners, pictured at left.

There were more than forty entries for the contest. James Fox and John Speck served as contest judges.

These photos of the Premiere were taken and graciously provided to ACHS by Veronika Camehl.



Hosts and guests had a lot of fun and great visits at the Annual Calendar Premiere Party. Included were (above, left) Lisa Frederick, owner of Estelle Stair Gallery, where the party took place, and Dr. Marsha Hendrix, Vice President of ACHS.



ABOVE RIGHT: Welcoming guests were ACHS members (L to R) Jeanie Schindler, Patsy Parr, Donna Dickinson, and Janie White.

RIGHT CENTER: (L to R) Nan Jackson, her sister Molly Jackson McConville, visit with ACHS Secretary Jo Ann Morgan.



RIGHT: The new calendar was featured on a beautiful table decoration by Norinne Holman and other members of the ACHS board.

## Come Look at Our Photographs!

Come to the ACHS Lab on the second Wednesday of any month, 2-4 pm, and look at pictures with us!

We will be projecting our digital photograph collection and informally talking about what we all see. Our goal is to learn as much as we can about each photograph. You may just enjoy looking, but, more importantly, you may be able to add information about the photo. We will also be viewing the photographs that have been entered in the Historical Photo Contest. (Calendar photographs are selected from these.) We also have the priceless postcard collections of Gordon Stanley, Jim Moloney, and Wayne White. These photographs and postcards tell us a story that words cannot. Come look with us!

-----Janie Collier White, Collections Chair

## City Seeks Cultural Arts Designation

Rockport is seeking a Cultural Arts Designation (CAD) for the Rockport Heritage District from the Texas Commission on the Arts. If received, it would place Rockport among 28 other districts and acknowledge the wealth of cultural assets in the community.

The Rockport Heritage District Association (RHDA) has agreed to be the sponsor of the CAD, joining with a group of civic, business and creative citizens on a Steering Committee, including Jennifer Day, Chair, Luis Puron, Stan Armstrong; Kay Betz; and Susan Wax.

RDHA President Penny Hong, said, that the organization has been working with the community and the City since 2005, when the Rockport Heritage District was created by the City. "We're committed to helping revitalize downtown as a walkable community and foster smart growth," she noted. "Being designated as a CAD would leverage what we've done and make us eligible for additional state grants."



Come to the Lab and help us identify persons, places, things, and dates in our wonderful photo collection. The Lab is open every Wednesday from 2-4, and photo reviews will be on the second Wednesday of each month.

## Daughters of the Republic of Texas

Meetings are generally held on the fourth Tuesday at 5:30 PM in the Fulton Schoolhouse Museum, 205 Seventh Street. Registrar for new members is Jackie Shaw who will assist folks in establishing ancestral presence in Texas 1836-1845. Jean Schindler serves as chapter president.

## History Center for Aransas County

The History Center's new exhibit, "A Surveyor's Maps of Aransas County" opened January 30 and features maps from the personal collection of county surveyor, Jerry Brundrett, surveyors' tools and books, and memorabilia from Brundrett's predecessor Tommy Griffith. The exhibit runs through April 2. The History Center is open Fridays and Saturdays, 10 AM - 2 PM at 801 E. Cedar St. For more information visit [www.aransashistorycenter.org](http://www.aransashistorycenter.org).

On Saturday, February 27, 10 am, The Center is sponsoring a program, "Geo Caching in Aransas county," by Janelle Rand. This is a how-to on where to find Geo Caches locally. Bring your smart phone to learn more.

## AC Historical Commission

In 2016 The Commission will dedicate two markers for local historical sites, Casterline Fish Company and the Air Force Station. Its next meeting is February 17, 5:15 PM at the History Center, 801 E. Cedar St., and is open to the public. Carol Thompson will serve as chair in 2016 along with Collin Jackson, Vice-chair, Linda Garcia, secretary, and Letha Kieffer, treasurer.

## Aransas Pathways

The Connie Hagar Cottage Sanctuary, a venue partner with Pathways, recently received a grant for \$10,000 from the Ed Rachal Foundation for the restoration of the grounds and interpretative signage that will relate the story of Connie and her contributions to the community.

## Welcome to these new ACHS members!

Elizabeth Guth	Jessie Parrish
Jerry & Frances Iles	Steve & Shirol Russell
Gordon & Judy Island	Carol M. Thompson
Fayenell Harrell	Shirlee R. Thompson
Grady & Mary Kane	Sarah Sue Weir
Michael Wilson	