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 AransasCountyHistoricalSociety.org



ACHS NEWSLETTER

Volume 16 Issue 1

February 2020

ANNUAL MEETING TO FEATURE PUBLIC PROGRAM ON ROCKPORT'S EARLIEST CHURCHES

Presentations on Thursday, Feb. 27, 6:30 pm at Saltwater Pavilion

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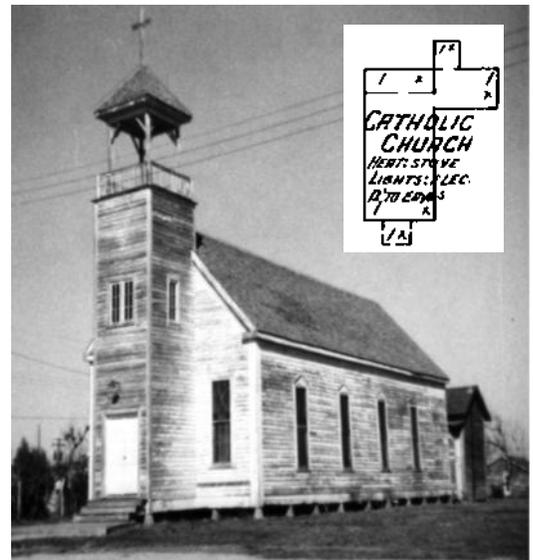
You will not want to miss the upcoming Annual Meeting of ACHS as we are celebrating the histories of Rockport's earliest churches.

In a departure from past annual meetings, this year's program is open to the public and members are encouraged to bring guests to hear presentations about Rockport's first churches.

Because of recent overflow crowds at ACHS programs, this meeting will be held at the newly re-opened Saltwater Pavilion at the Rockport Beach Park, at 6:30 pm on Thursday, February 27.

A brief business meeting will precede the program.

Presenters include Kathryn Albin (Baptist), David Murrah (Methodist), Janie White (Episcopal), Fred Gibbs (Catholic), and John Jackson (Presbyterian). They will also mention other churches, including Stella Maris's founding and the Magnolia Street Baptist Church.



Of the five original churches in Rockport, only the Sacred Heart Catholic Church remains on its original site as depicted by the 1914 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (inset). The first locations for the Methodist, Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches were in different locations than they are today. First Baptist was on its original site until 2002, which is now the location of the Church Unlimited still under construction.

Photo courtesy Fred Gibbs.

FROM THE LAB: A message from the President

Here we are starting a new year and decade and looking forward to a great 2020..

In November of 2019 ACHS presented a program titled “Gold Beneath the Trees” by Keith Petrus of Port Aransas and at the same time held the 2020 Calendar Premiere. We had a full house, a reminder we are outgrowing some of the venues we usually book to host programs. This year’s annual meeting and program will be at the newly renovated Saltwater Pavilion on February 27th.

In August of 2019 the presidents of the local history organizations and a few others were invited to meet and hear new information about the proposed plans for the Rockport Center for the Arts as well as a plan to relocate the Kline’s Café Building to a site on St. Mary’s St. near the corner of Magnolia St. in downtown Rockport. It was an informative meeting and it was good to hear what was being considered.

In September, Luis Puron, Executive Director of the Rockport Center for the Arts, and Monica Burdette, Texas Historical Commissioner, presented information to the ACHS Board of Trustees, which in turn voted unanimously to support the plan and enter into a Joint Statement of support with the other history groups if their approval was forthcoming, as well as the Rockport Center for the Arts. The statement was issued in November and included The Historical Commission, The Historical Society, the Rockport Center for the Arts, and Monica Burdette in her capacity as a concerned citizen of Rockport.

Some of you remember that the Historical Society was formed in 1985 to raise funds and secure a move in 1986 of the **Stella Maris Chapel** from Schoenstatt property in Lamar to a site next to the old Lamar Cemetery. The Chapel was built of shellcrete and is reported to be the first recorded church in Aransas County as well as the oldest building still in existence in the diocese. Seventy thousand dollars was raised for the move and preservation of the building.

Over the years, several buildings have been moved in Rockport to help in their preservation. See the article on page 4 of this Newsletter.

A public meeting was held on January 30th for the purpose of receiving input on construction of an Arts, Performing Arts, and Conference Center to be located 106 and 204 South Austin Street. A panel including David Richter of Richter Architects, Ron Meyeres of Upside Ventures LLC and Lily Wilkinson of RAM House Movers spoke about the plan to move the Kline’s building.

Audience members asked questions and seemed satisfied with the answers. There were 16 people from the audience

that signed up to speak and all gave supportive remarks regarding the new center and relocation of the Kline’s Café Building. The Public Comment period is open until March 1, 2020. Plans can be viewed at Rockport Service Center, 2751 SH 35 Bypass in Rockport and the Rockport Center for the Arts office 638 E. Market St.

There is no update from ACISD on repairs to the school or when we might have a space there again. Thanks to the Margaret Sue Rust foundation for a generous gift of \$2,500. This gift allows us to store our historical materials and photos in a temperature and humidity controlled secure storage space.

Since Hurricane Harvey, ACHS members have been meeting on Wednesdays weekly at Estelle Stair Gallery or the Dairy Queen. Our lease with the Estelle Stair Gallery ended in December. It was a wonderful space to meet weekly and for the monthly board meetings. For the months of January, February and

March ACHS Board of Trustees meetings will be held at the offices of Jerry Brundrett on Pearl Street. We appreciate the Brundretts’ hospitality. Weekly gatherings on Wednesday from 2 p.m. – 3:30 are now held at the Dairy Queen. Feel free to drop by and join us.

The 2020 Calendars are about sold out, and we will sell our few remaining one at our annual meeting on February 27th. There are only about 50 left so they are about to become collector’s items!

Please save this date: on March 26th the Historical Society and the Rockport Center for the Arts will co-host a presentation that will explore the works in the most historic home in Texas, the Governor’s Mansion. This is a great opportunity to learn about the Mansion collection and the early artists that are represented in the Executive Residence. This will be a 45-minute presentation and will be held during the day, a departure from our usual evening program. Erica Herndon, representing the Friends of the Governor’s Mansion, will be the presenter. More details to follow.

Don’t forget to check out new videos on our website aransascountyhistoricalsociety.org or ACHS1985.org There, you can watch Keith Petrus’ talk about his ancestors settling in the Copano area. Stephen Harrigan and Judge Ken Wise have an entertaining conversation about Harrigan’s newest book, entitled *Big Wonderful Thing*. It’s big weighing in at over five pounds and presents Texas history in a unique way, and lives up to the “wonderful” in the title. And, if you need a break from the pressures of life there’s a recording of Verlon Thompson and Shawn Camp singing a song written by Guy Clark and Verlon, *Boats to Build*.

—Cheryl Livingston



The historic Kline’s Café Building in downtown Rockport as it appears today. Rebuilt in 1942 after a fire destroyed the original building, it remains as one of the best examples of art deco architecture in Texas. It currently serves as the Rockport Center for the Arts. Photo courtesy Ty Husak.

AFTER THE GREAT STORM: ROCKPORT IN 1920

by
Janie White

Editor's Note: This is the first of three articles on Rockport in 1920. It was a pivotal year due to the destruction of the September 1919 Hurricane, and it marked the beginning of Rockport's rebuilding as a tourist attraction.

In 1920, citizens of Rockport were dealing with the aftermath of the devastating 1919 Storm. The Rockport City Council met on January 6, 1920 which included A. R. A. Brice as Mayor and aldermen E. C. McClary, W. C. Stevenson, William Mayer, and E. E. Jacobs. Isador Herzfeld was City Secretary.

Citizens were repairing structures damaged by the September 14 hurricane. Mr. R. A. Ezell requested that he be allowed to move a house from the south end of town to Austin Street. The request was granted. Other citizens were requesting that the fire ordinance be suspended for a period of 90 days. The owners of buildings within the fire limits wanted to rebuild or replace buildings that were destroyed or damaged. That request was postponed for the opinion of the State Fire Marshall. (I did not find the result in the City Council Minutes through March.) The City Fire Marshall was E. H. Norvell.

The City Council met again on February 3, 1920. A. L. Bracht petitioned the Council for permission to erect a galvanized awning in front of his store. The request was granted. Then, B. P. Bracht petitioned the Council for permission to repair and raise his Iron Clad building. He wanted to replace the wooden floor with a cement one. Permission was granted to make the repairs he requested. Also, William Mayer was given permission to replace the awning at the front of his bakery.

Meanwhile, a January 28 article in the *Paris Morning News* reported that a seemingly well-educated man of about 28 years old had wandered into Rockport. He seemed to have lost his memory after the hurricane, but seemed rational. However, he had a gunny sack containing bits of shell and proclaimed: "I have to keep this; it has all the evidence." Officials were trying to identify him from a list of missing persons. No outcome was reported.

Also, in 1920, the nation—and Aransas County—was on the cusp of the great automobile age, but its citizens had not caught the vision of it as yet. In December 1919, voters rejected a \$100,000-bond issue to build "good roads," and so in February 2020, the County Commissioners ordered another election to be held on February 10 to issue \$100,000 in bonds for good roads. This time, the measure passed, and set the stage for an improved road from Corpus Christi.

At the harbor the Heldenfels Brothers continued to work on fulfilling its contract to build ships. The barge *Jasper* was launched around January 21, the third of four ships to be built by Heldenfels for the Emergency Fleet Corporation. It originally was to be a Ferris type steamer, but was converted to a barge after the end of World War I. It also was to have been named the *Rockport* but was changed to



Downtown Rockport, c. 1920s. Photo from ACHS Photo Collection.

Jasper in honor of the county in East Texas that had been successful in a Liberty Loan drive. (Liberty Loan Drives supported the Allied cause in World War I.) Two of the four contracted ships, the *Baychester* and the *Zuniga*, were launched shortly before the September 14 hurricane.

A fourth ship, the *Kiawata*, was also launched as a barge in mid-March. This ship was sponsored by Miss Margaret Cullen of Austin with about 1000 people watching. Just after the *Kiawata*'s bow "cleared the cradle the ways collapsed, but no damage resulted." According to an article in *The Austin American*, this was the only launching that did not involve a fatal accident. The Heldenfels Shipyard then closed "all business with the government." Several contracts were already waiting the conversion to a private enterprise.

KEITH PETRUS PRESENTS FALL PROGRAM TO ACHS

Once again, a full house was on hand for the regular fall program on November 14, given by Keith Petrus (pictured below) of Port Aransas. Entitled "Gold Beneath the Trees," the presentation told the story of how his great-great grandmother Rosalie Hart Priour endured great hardship when the family immigrated to America with the Powers Colony in 1834. Photo from Ty Husak video at achs1985.org, where the full program is available for viewing.



TEXAS TROPICAL TRAILS RETURNS TO ROCKPORT-FULTON FOR 10TH TIME

On Tuesday, February 18, the Texas Tropical Trail Region (TTTR) will hold its 171st monthly Partner Event in Rockport-Fulton.

This is the the tenth time TTTR has visited Rockport-Fulton since beginning the monthly meetings May 2005. The first visit was in June 2006 and most recent was in June 2019.

Participants will visit the Fulton Mansion, the newly renovated Saltwater Pavilion, and the newly-re-opened Bay Education Center before a luncheon at the Fairfield Inn.

ACHS board member David Murrah will speak at 1:30 on the topic, “The Damnyankees Got All the Water: Rockport, Refugio, and the Fight for the County Seat.”

Reservations for the event were due February 14 and participation is limited to the first sixty registrants.

Local hosts/sponsors are the Fulton Mansion State Historic Site, Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce, Aransas County Historical Society, Aransas County Navigation District, Bay Education Center, Fairfield Inn and Anthony’s Bed & Breakfast.

HISTORY CENTER CONTINUES ITS HISPANIC HERITAGE SERIES

The History Center is hosting an exhibit, “Hispanic Heritage in Aransas County, and its Sunday lectures will continue through April 19. Upcoming lectures are as follows:

Feb. 23rd at 2pm- Villa Family History

Mar. 8th at 2pm- Hispanic Contribution to Military &

Dedication at Veterans’ Park

Mar. 22nd- Local Family

Apr. 5th- Hispanic Cultural Arts

Apr. 19th- Local Family

The History Center is open Fridays 10-2, Saturdays, 10-4; Sundays, 1-4 & Mondays, 10-2.

DRT TO MEET FEBRUARY 25

The Daughters of the Texas Revolution will meet on Tuesday, February 25 at 4: 30 pm at the Fulton School-house. The program will be by Kathy Wemer.

SAVE THE DATE!

On March 26, ACHS and the Rockport Center for the Arts will co-host a presentation on the Art Collection in The Governor’s Mansion in Austin.

The Mansion is the oldest governors’ residence west of the Mississippi River. It opened in 1856, nearly 30 years before the present State Capitol was built.

The time and place for the meeting has not been determined, but will be in the day time. Watch the *Rockport Pilot* or check our website for more details as they become available.



The Angel Rose B&B is one of the best examples of a successful move of a building in Rockport. Built in 1881 south of Rockport, it was purchased and moved in three sections by Leopold Bract to its present location in 1887. Photo from www.angelrosebb.com.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS THAT HAVE BEEN MOVED IN ARANSAS COUNTY

The pending move of the Kline Café building to a new site in downtown Rockport has prompted considerable discussion about whether it should be moved.

Over the years, there have been numerous other buildings in Rockport and Aransas County that have been moved and given new life and purpose. We are very proud of the role played by ACHS in the move of the **Stella Maris Chapel** in 1986 to its present home in Lamar.

In 1948 The **Woman’s Club of Aransas County** was moved in three sections by barge from Ingleside to Rockport. Prior to this move the Woman’s Club met in the old firehouse which was located on St. Mary’s St. in downtown Rockport where the Kline’s building will be moved.

Also, the **Angel Rose Bed and Breakfast**, built in 1881 as a home in the Oklahoma Subdivision, did not sell, and later was purchased by Michael Bracht, cut into three pieces and moved to its current location on Cornwall St. In the mid-1980s, the **Simon Sorenson home** on Water Street was relocated to 802 N. Live Oak to make room for the **Sorenson Place condominiums**.

In addition, the **Bruhl/O’Connor home**, which once stood where Holiday Inn Express in located, was moved by the **Rockport Center for the Arts** in 1983 to a new location near the harbor and served as its home until it was destroyed by Hurricane Harvey. And, just a few years ago, the building that is now **History Center for Aransas County** was moved by RAM Movers of Sinton from 910 Concho to its current location on Cedar Street.

These examples illustrate that relocation and renovation of buildings is one way to preserve and save them. —*Cheryl Livingston*

A membership in the Aransas County Historical Society makes a great gift!

Only \$20 for individual or \$30 for family. Send recipient’s name and address to us along with a check, payable to ACHS, and we will do the rest.

ACHS, BOX 702. ROCKPORT, TX 78381