

Velasco
Captain Jeremiah Brown Residence, ca. 1838, Block 13, Lot 10

Captain Jeremiah Brown House, ca.1838, Block 13, Lot 10

Chain of Title

1838 Captain Jeremiah Brown Residence

Captain Jeremiah Brown probably obtained this property by being a partner in the Velasco Association as no deed transaction could be found. He died at his residence September 9, 1838. Probate records indicate the house and lot were valued at \$4500. Though his estate tried to sell this lot several times in the 1840's no transaction could be found. Structures are located near this area in both the 1852 and 1858 topography maps. The 186? Tipton Walker map also has a structure located near Lot 10. The hurricanes of 1875 and 1886 probably destroyed any structures in the area.

Captain Jeremiah Brown Store House, ca. 1838, Block 13 Lot 3

Chain of Title

1838 Captain Jeremiah Brown

M: 437 January 18, 1871 Mary Caroline MacGreal to John H. Herndon

U: 11/12 September 6, 1881 John H. Herndon Estate to Robert A. Shappard

No deed transaction has been located for this property though it is listed in Jeremiah Brown's probate record as a lot with frame structure valued at \$1500. In Captain Brown's probate case is a bill for several structures built by John Hoskins in 1838. Brown and I. C. Hoskins appear to also be in the wholesale business in addition to owning the American Hotel in Block 11 based on receipts from I. C. Hoskins & Co. John H. Herndon obtained the property from Mary Caroline MacGreal January 18, 1871. How she became the owner has not been determined. His estate sold the property to Robert A. Shapard in 1881.

Jeremiah Brown came to Texas from Rhode Island in February 1830. In 1832, Brown was the captain of the *Sabine*, a schooner owned by Edwin Waller that carried the first cotton produced in Gulf Prairie to market from the Brazos River. On May 10, 1833 he married Rebecca B. Spraggins, daughter of Thomas Spraggins, an early Brazoria County plantation owner.

I. C. Hoskins & Company, a partnership between Isaac C. Hoskins and Jeremiah Brown, was operating a tavern, called the American Hotel, in Block 11 of Velasco as early as 1835. In 1835 Brown was also the pilot for the harbor giving notice in *The Texas Republican* published in Brazoria, July 4, 1835:

NOTICE TO SHIP-MASTERS

THE undersigned takes this method of informing the public that another flagstaff has been erected at the mouth of the Rio Brazos and as the bar is very often too rough for boats to board vessels, they might be deceived by seeing both flags flying and in range together; therefore the following signals will be exhibited:

At high water will be hoisted at the flagstaff a white flag with a *Mexican Eagle, in black*, in the middle. If it is half tide or low water the same will be hoisted at half mast only—should she not be boarded and there be plenty of water on the Bar the following rule may be observed:

When the vessel is near down to the Bar the flag on the flagstaff will be hauled down and two smaller flags erected at a suitable distance from each other these flags will be a black Ball on a white ground—and are the range for crossing the Bar without a Pilot. In running down should it be too rough for boats to come out you should lay off and on, taking care not to get to the Westward of the Bar as there is generally a strong current setting in that direction, and unless your vessel sails well it will be almost impossible to come in. Vessels with good ground tackle need not be afraid to anchor off the Bar taking care to anchor in 4 ½ fathoms water in rough weather, and in fine weather they can anchor safely in 3 ½ fathoms. When vessels are off the Bar in bad weather, a fire will be made on the beach every night. I shall still conduct the Pilotage as usual and so do my duty at the hazard of my life.

J. BROWN, Pilot

Mouth of Rio Brazos, May 23 1835.

Mary Austin Holley recorded in her diary in 1835 her visit to Velasco. Her drawings of the coast line at Velasco illustrate the skyline of the town and the signal staffs which were used to signal the incoming boat captains.



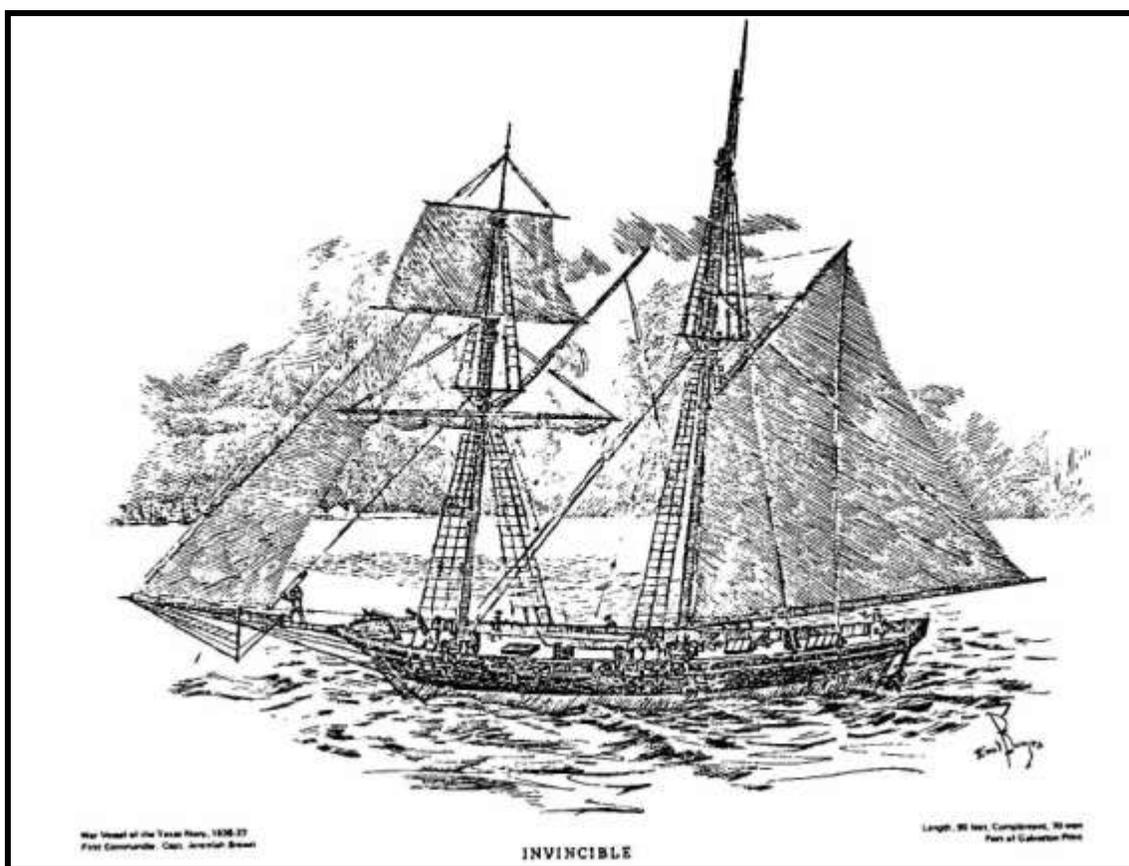
On March 12, 1836 Jeremiah Brown was given command of the schooner-of-war *Invincible* in the Republic of Texas Navy. Although Commodore Charles E. Hawkins is said to have placed Brown in irons immediately after taking command of the Texas fleet at Matagorda, he nevertheless retained command of what was reckoned the finest ship in the Texas Navy. On patrol at the mouth of the Rio Grande near Matamoros Brown ran aground and wrecked the Mexican brig-of-war, *Bravo*, April 10, 1836. The same day he seized the American owned brig *Pocket* out of New Orleans. April 8, 1836 Brown arrived with his prize in Galveston turning over the contraband cargo of flour, rice, lard, biscuit, and 300 kegs of powder. News of the

¹ Bryan, J. P., ed., *Mary Austin Holley The Texas Diary 1835-1838*, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas, 1965, p. 16.

victory of San Jacinto reached Brown via Robert Calder, later sheriff of Brazoria County, while he was anchored in Galveston harbor:

In the harbor were the armed Schooners *Independence*, Capt. Hawkins; *Invincible*, Capt. Jere Brown; and *Flash*, Capt. Falvel. Also in port was the steamboat *Yellowstone*, which had been brought round from the Brazos to avoid capture by the Mexicans. A few cannon brought from the Brazos (were) mounted. The *Yellowstone*...had brought a number of refugees from the Brazos to Galveston, and had been dispatched up the bay to secure information concerning the Texas Army. The messengers had a hard time, the water was rough. They started early in the morning of the fifth day (after the battle), and a few hours rowing brought them alongside the schooner-of-war *Invincible*, Capt. Jere Brown. Through his speaking trumpet, Brown hailed: "What news?" When I told him, his men literally lifted us on board, and, in the midst of the wildest excitement, Brown took off his hat, gave us three cheers, and threw it as far as he could into the bay. He then shouted to his men: "turn loose Long Tom!" After the guns had been fired three times, he suddenly stopped, and said, "Hold on, boys, or old Hawkins will put me in irons again."²

The *Invincible* sailed to New Orleans to refit and there the crew was charged with piracy. Brown surrendered to authorities and was released only after Thomas Toby, a merchant friendly to the Texas cause, purchased the *Pocket* and paid all the claims against the crew.



² Thrall, Homer S., *A Pictorial History of Texas*, N. D. Thompson & Co., St. Louis, Missouri, 1879, pp. 519-21

³ Deveraeaux, Linda Ericson, *The Texas Navy*, Ericson Books, Nacogdoches, Texas, 1983, p. 10a.

The *Invincible* went back on patrol in the Gulf and on June 1 the captured General Santa Anna was brought on board at Velasco. Initially Brown was ordered to take Santa Anna to Veracruz, however, with the arrival of General Thomas Jefferson Green and a group of new recruits from New Orleans sentiment changed and orders were issued to bring Santa Anna ashore. From Green's diary:

“Accordingly, the next day, he (David Burnet) issued an order to Captain Jeremiah Brown, of the *Invincible*, to bring the prisoner on shore. Santa Anna returned for answer that he would never leave that vessel alive...

Three o'clock, P. M.—We arrived on board the *Invincible*, where we found the prisoner in a state of extreme agitation, lying in his berth upon his back, alternately raving like a madman and crying like a child; now denying that he had any agency in the massacre at Goliad; anon, threatening to take away his own life sooner than go ashore, to be delivered up to what he called the new army from the United States, which he believed to be bent on his destruction. The prisoner continued to act this strange part for about two hours; stating, meanwhile, that he had taken largely of opium, and would soon die...All this time the prisoner continued lying upon his back in his berth, and his respiration seemed to me exceedingly difficult. After waiting some minutes longer, I called the surgeon of the *Invincible*, and requested him to feel the prisoner's pulse, and report his true situation. He complied with my request, and reported his pulse to be perfectly healthy in its vibrations, when I again intimated to the prisoner the necessity of going ashore. He begged twenty minutes longer respite; upon which, I announced to the captain that it would be necessary to send forward his master-of-arms, and have him ironed without delay. When the irons were brought within his view, the prisoner immediately jumped up, adjusted his collar, put on his hat, and stated his readiness to accompany us...I took his arm, desired him to be composed, and conducted him to the captain's gig-boat, into which we descended, in company with Mr. Hardeman, Colonel Almonte, and Captain Brown, and rowed for shore...⁴

The *Invincible* rode at anchor off Velasco until July 4, 1836; then sailed to aid the *Brutus* off Matagorda. Chasing the Mexican cruiser *Vencedor del Alamo* south, the *Invincible* blockaded Veracruz for several days. Captain Brown returned to New Orleans, where Commissioners to the United States, Branch T. Archer and William H. Wharton boarded, sailing to Galveston on July 13. Returning to Velasco the *Invincible* was ordered to blockade Matamoros. In August Brown was ordered to New York for refitting. Brown returned to Galveston in April 1837 and was relieved of duty ending his career in the Texas Navy.

On May 19, 1837, President Sam Houston appointed Captain Jeremiah Brown collector for the district of the Brazos. Brown appointed I. C. Hoskins as deputy collector, George J. Johnston as chief clerk, and Charles Plitt as permanent inspector. As collector, Brown was authorized to collect ad valorem duties and all imports had to be listed with manifests and invoices:

⁴ Green, Thomas Jefferson, *Journal of the Texian Expedition Against Mier*, Steck Company, Austin, Texas, 1935, pp. 484-485.

A dispute arose over the location of the custom house as soon as Brown took over as collector. The towns of Velasco, Quintana, Brazoria, and Columbia all wanted the distinction of having the customs collector at their location. While Brown was given discretionary authority to locate his office, a contract was given to Samuel Williams and Thomas McKinney to construct the customs house at Quintana. The Velasco Association built a customs house for \$2000 on Block 14 Lot 1. This lot belonged to Jeremiah Brown, who on several occasions professed his neutrality, but stringently objected as soon as the Quintana location was selected.

On September 9, 1838 Jeremiah Brown passed away. His probate case lists Block 13 Lot 10 valued at \$4500 and Lot 3 valued at \$1500. John Hoskins billed Brown for building a house 16 by 16 ft, one 16 by 20 ft with a shed, and one 17 ft by 32 in February 1838:

Velasco February - 1838

Mr. Jeremiah Brown to
John Hoskins Dr

To building a house - 16 by 16 ft one 16 by 20 ft
With a Shed 8 by 25 ft - all 10 ft between
Sills, one 17 ft by 32, furnishing Shingles
for one room - 2000.00

To furnishing Nails & Hinges - 50.00

To furnishing Posts and putting
up 200 Panel fence - 200.00

To furnishing a hand 12 days
feeding the same. Getting Pickets 40.00

To cash lent in June & July - 112.00

To furnishing 1000 Bricks. Standing
Mason and Board - 50.00

\$ 2452.00

approved, 1st of March 1839
by H. B. Brown Administrator
J. Hoskins

⁵ Jeremiah Brown Probate Case No. 39, Brazoria County Clerk's Office, Angleton, Texas

The same year Arad Sheldon built a kitchen and back house, while James Pirie built a 17ft chimney and hung the hearth:

Valasco Sept 20th 1838
 Capt J. Brown Dr
 Arad Sheldon Dr
 To building kitchen - - - \$159.64
 To one back house - - - 70.00
 To woodwork for house - - - 200.00
 To fixing in - - - 185.11
 1838 Credit - 3 By cash paid to - 30 - 3 \$524.62
 Issues " " 20 - 20 - 20 - 3 110.00
 " " 20 - 20 - 20 - 3 621.00
 Appraised by
 Philo Hoodley

Quintana, Aug. 16th, 1837
 Capt, J. Brown, Dr
 To, James Pirie
 To building Chimney 17 feet
 high and one clother and pipe
 creates for foot \$25.50
 To hanging hearth - - - 200
 To labring work 18.00
 \$45.50

⁶ Ibid.

Dr. G. Booker submitted a bill to the estate of Captain Brown after his death listing the medication used prior to his death. While emetics caused vomiting, cathartics evacuated the bowels, venesection letting of blood, and blisters were used to clear chest congestion, it is not completely clear what caused the death of Brown other than the treatment.

1838			
Lerminck Brown			
To G. Booker D ^r			
Sept 3	To two vials Emetica & cathartica	7	00
4	do do & cathartica	6	50
6	do do & venesection	8	50
7	one do & oil	3	50
8	five vials Blisters & pills	16	50
			<u>42 00</u>
Released Nov 2 1838			

P. (Philo) Hoadley built the coffin, outside coffin, and bier for the coffin to rest upon:

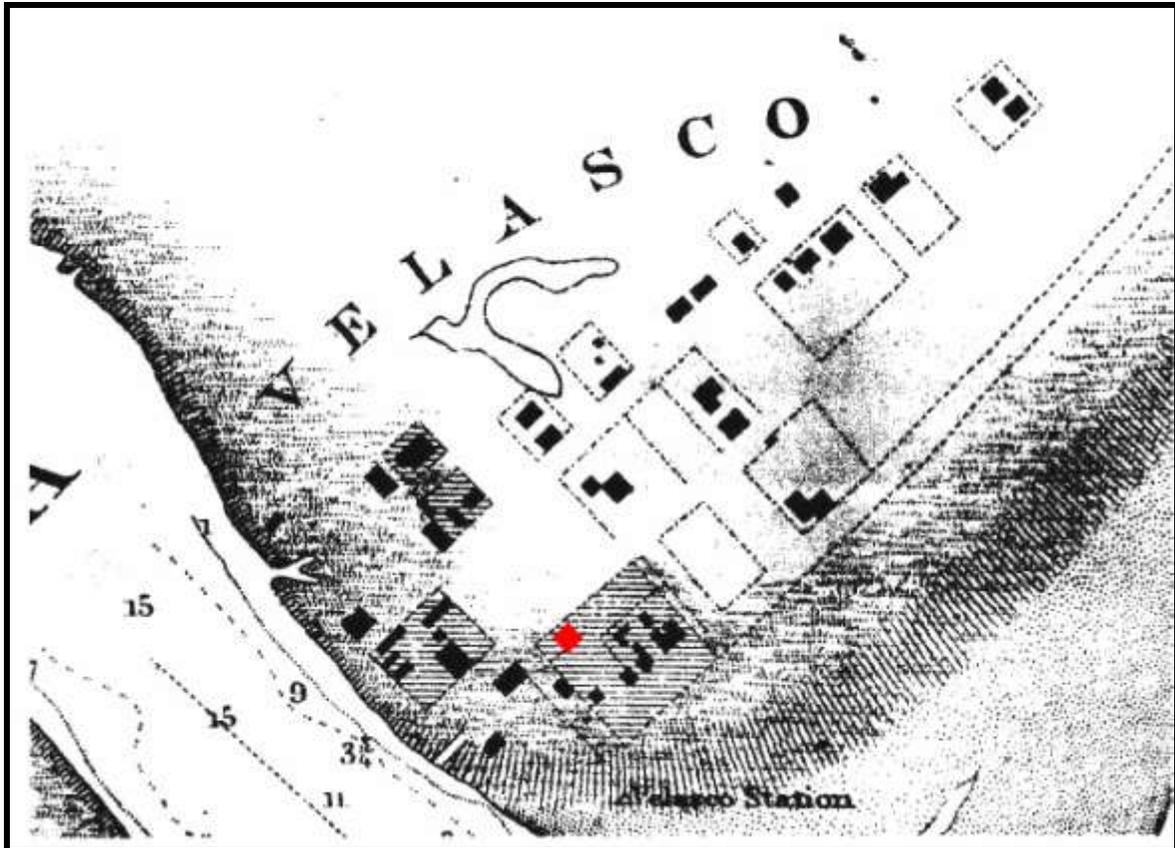
Released June 26 th 1839	
G. Brown Estate To P. Hoadley	
Sept 10	To Making Coffin & Lumber \$50.00
	To Outside Coffin & Lumber \$45.00
	To Making Bier & Lumber \$10.00
	<u>\$105.00</u>
	65 Dollars for 2 Bills
	W. F. Letto

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

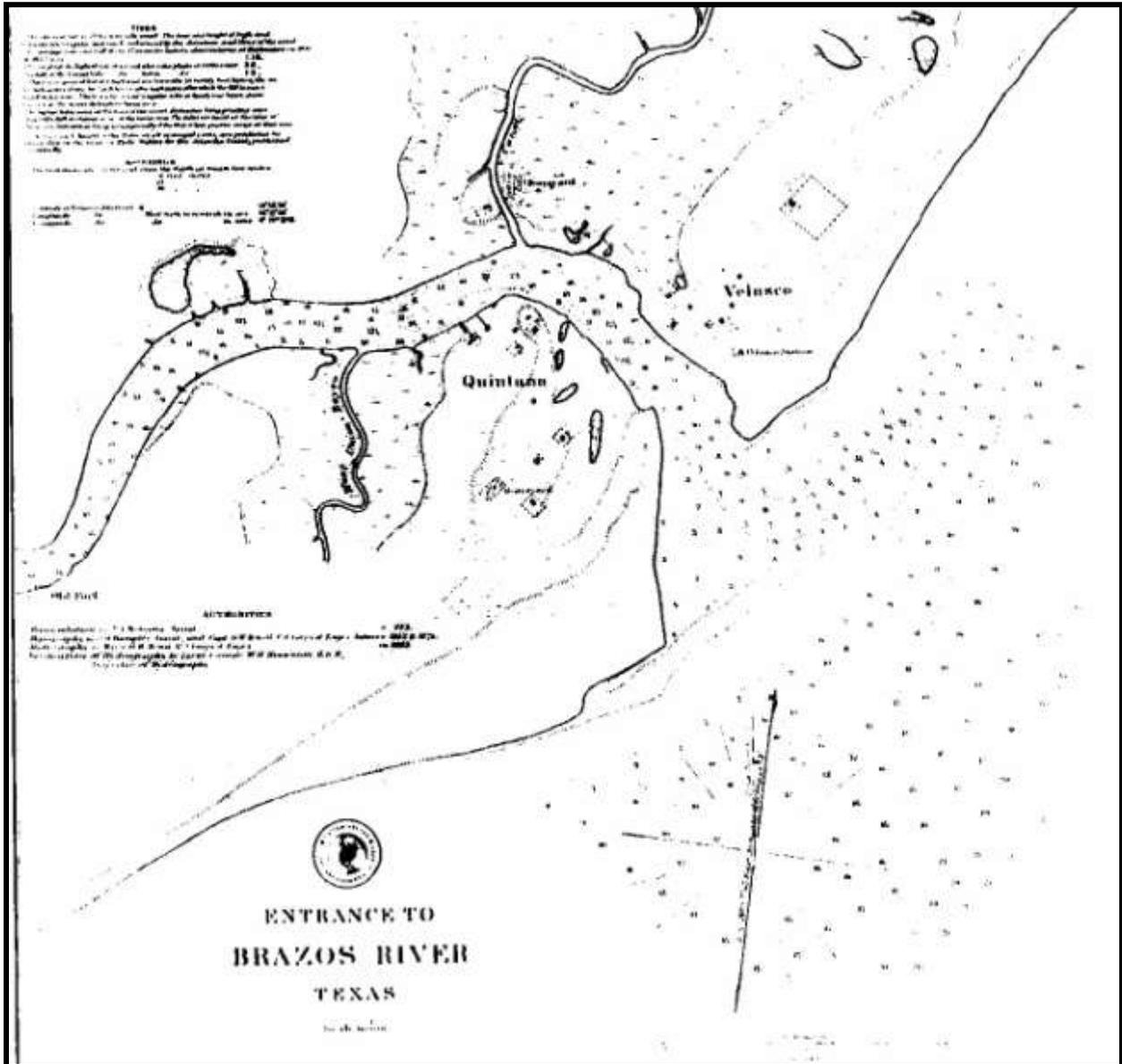
After the death of Jeremiah Brown Colonel William T. Austin became the customs collector at Velasco and resided at the home of Brown in 1839. His widow Rebecca moved to Richmond in Fort Bend County and as administratrix of the estate tried to sell the home on several occasions. The last time the property was appraised was April 1843 at \$600. No transaction for the property was located. It is possible this home had been destroyed.

The topography data in the 1852 and 1858 maps indicate a structure still in the possible area of Lot 10 Block 13, but is more likely in lots 8 & 9. This would have been in the vicinity of the James T. Shannon property



Portion of “Preliminary Chart of Entrance to Brazos River” topography drawn 1852 (Bache 1858)

In the 1888 topography map a structure in the general vicinity of Lot 10 is probably not the original home of Jeremiah Brown due to the violent hurricanes of 1875 and 1886.



Lots 9, 11, and 13 Block 568 of current day Surfside may contain some remnants of the Jeremiah Brown home. These lots are owned by the Velasco Navigation District.

Velasco
Lewis Lapolean-James T. Shannon Residence, ca. Pre-1856, Block 13, Lots 8 & 9

Block 13 Lot 2

Chain of Title

6 209/11 March 1, 1842 John Trussell Estate of John Ward to Francis J. Haskins

B 517 March 17, 1845 John Trussell to Nathaniel Rudder

O 81 March 9, 1872 R.F. Haskins to A. C. Herndon

Appears Lot 2 never had a structure on it.

James T. Shannon House, ca.Pre-1856, Block 13, Lots 8 & 9

Chain of Title

B 226 June 8, 1838 President Velasco Association Thomas J. Green to James H. Gholson Lot 9

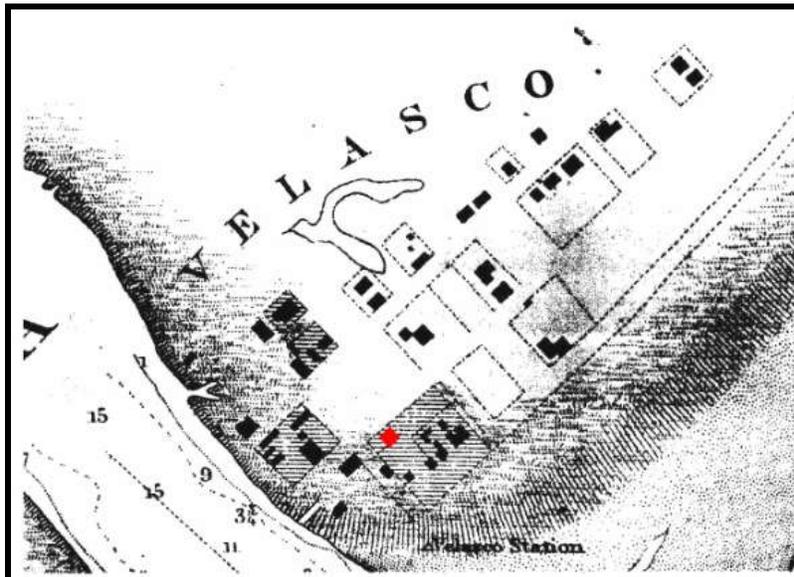
G 631 May 31, 1856 Lewis Lapolean to James T. Shannon Lots 8 & 9

G 636 May 31, 1856 James T. Shannon mortgage to Lewis Lapolean

M 437 January 13, 1871 Mary Caroline MacGreal to John H. Herndon Lots 3 & 8

James T. Shannon purchased the lots for \$275 which included a house but did not specify which lot the house was on. The title to Lot 8 to Mary Caroline MacGreal has not been located.

When James Thompson Shannon bought Lots 8 & 9 in Block 13 for \$275 in 1856 from Lewis Lapolean, there was already a wood frame house on the property.⁹ James T. Shannon first married Charlotte Waterman Follett¹⁰ November 11, 1852. They would have two children, Anna Louise Shannon and William Shannon.¹¹ James T. Shannon worked as a blacksmith.



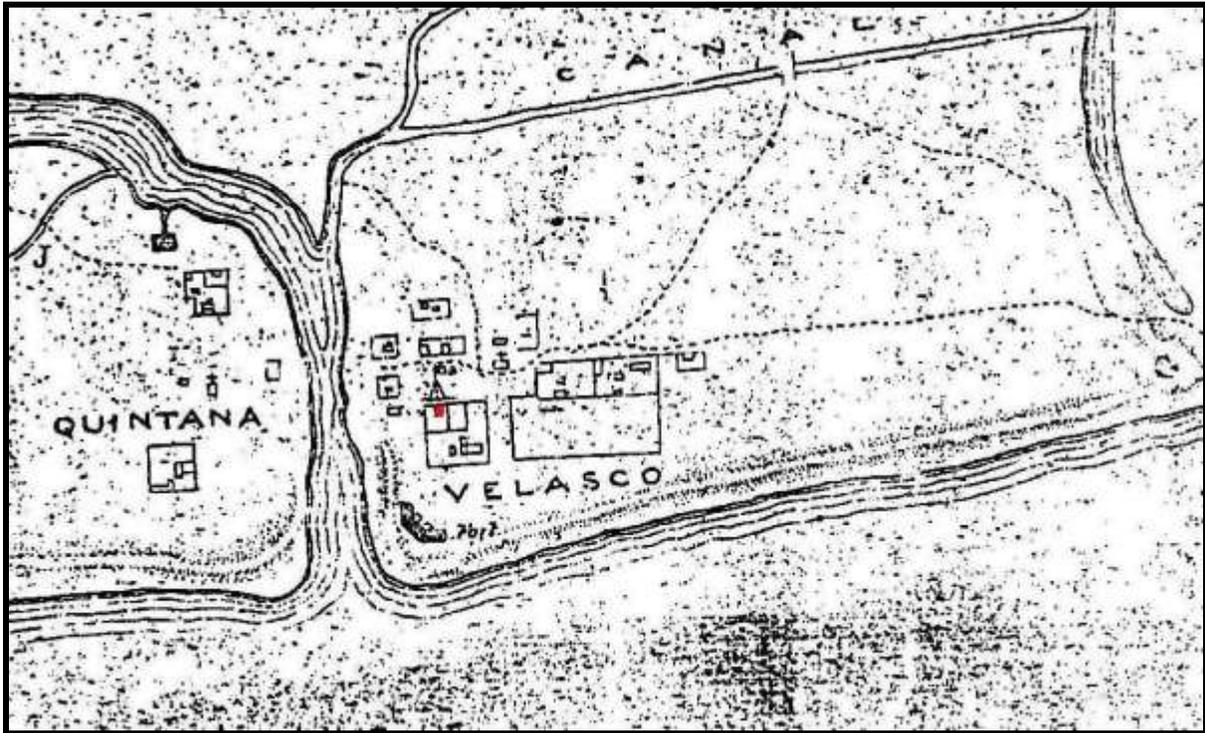
Portion of "Preliminary Chart of Entrance to Brazos River" topography drawn 1852 (Bache 1858)

⁹ Brazoria County Deed Records: G 631 & G 636

¹⁰ Charlotte Waterman Follett was the daughter of John Bradbury Follett and Anna Louise Fowns born in Charleston, Massachusetts.

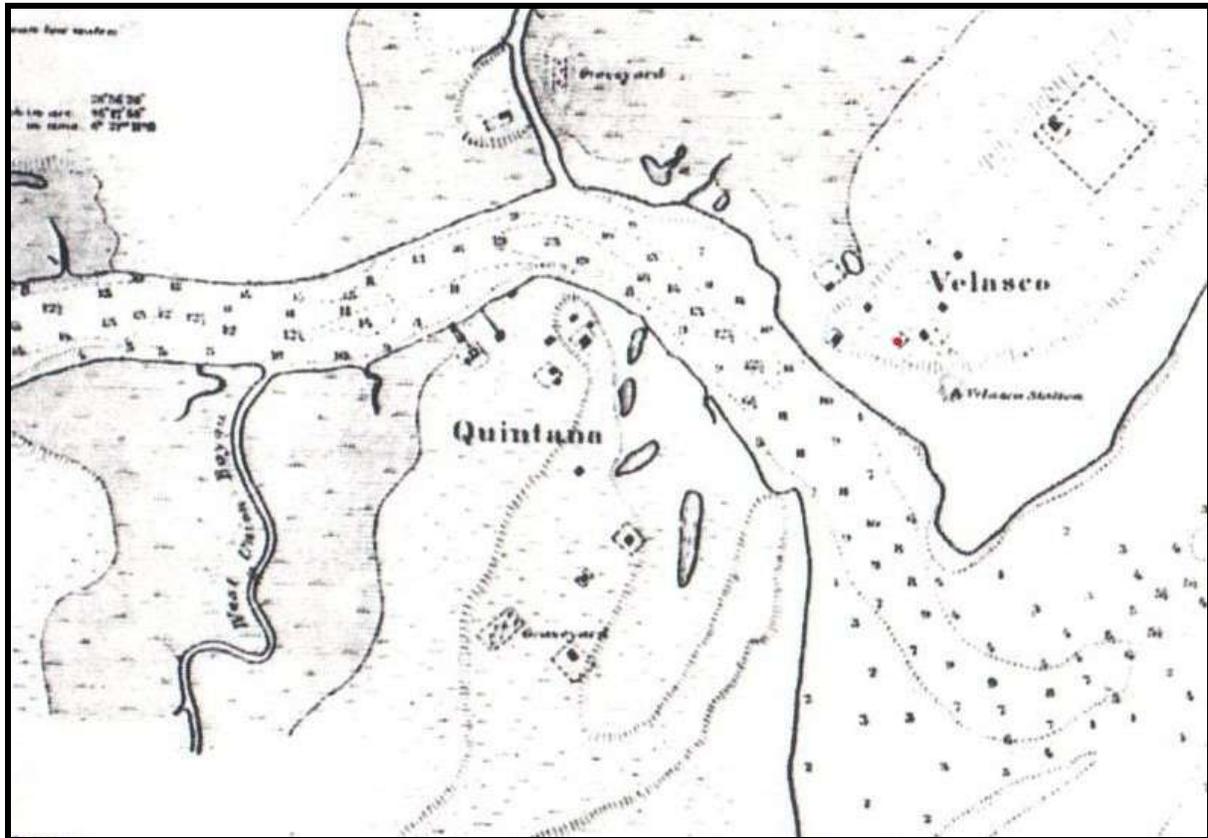
¹¹ Anna Louise Shannon born 1853 and William Shannon born 1859.

After the death of Charlotte, August 27, 1860, James T. Shannon married Ellen Adele Wilcox June 12, 1862 whose parents had been living in Velasco since 1837. Ellen A. Wilcox had been born in Velasco October 20, 1841. Her parents Henry C. and Pamela Wilcox ran a boarding house in Velasco for many years. The Shannon's lived in Velasco until August 1863. There would be ten children born to their union.



Tipton Walker Civil War Era Map National Archives

The Shannon family returned to Velasco in 1867. Before their departure James T. Shannon had often called his wife's attention to one of the posts or upright logs of the Mexican fort with muskets stuck in it. James T. Shannon died December 6, 1883. Mrs. Ellen A. Shannon related to Adele B. Looscan that her present home marked the site of the old fort. After the 1886 hurricane the Shannon's had built a new home. Mr. A. G. Follett Sr. also stated that the Mrs. Ellen A. Shannon's home built in 1887 marked the location of Fort Velasco. The home standing in 1888 was possibly not on the exact same location as the home in 1862.¹² It is also not understood if their original home withstood the 1875 hurricane which wreaked havoc on Velasco also taking out most of the homes on the beach.



Entrance to the Brazos River 1888 Survey Map

¹² Looscan, Adele B., "The Old Mexican Fort at Velasco", *Texas Historical Association Quarterly*, July 1897-April 1898, pp.282-284.

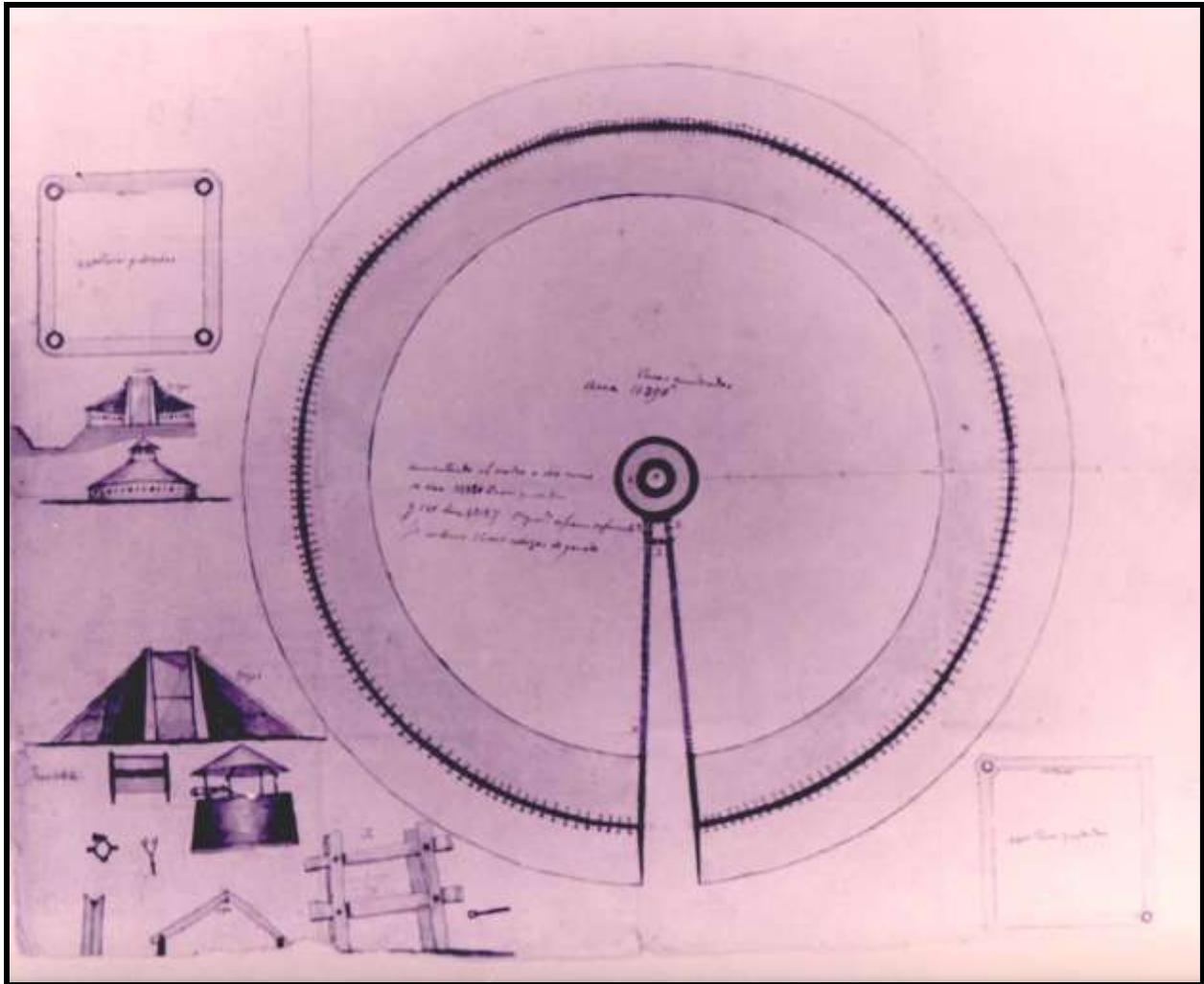
Ann Fox et al gave the following map as an estimation of the Mexican fort location and the locations of the residents living in Velasco in 1890 based on the Sir John Goode maps. John H. Herndon should not have property in 1890. The author was not able to locate a copy of the Goode series maps



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¹³ Fox, Anne A. et al, *Cultural Resource Survey Freeport Harbor, Texas Navigation Improvement Project Brazoria County, Texas*, Center for Archaeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 1981, p. 37.

Notes on the following drawing indicate Province of Texas Stephen Fuller Austin with a radius of 100 varas or 277.78 ft.



Potential Drawing of the Original Fort Velasco
Copy courtesy of Brazoria County Historical Museum