

VELASCO
in
TEXAS HISTORY



originally prepared by the
**BRAZORIA COUNTY
CENTENNIAL CLUB**
for Centennial Day, May 14, 1936

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FOREWORD

This little folder is given you in order that you may better appreciate the significance of the events which we are celebrating today. Read it carefully and try to recreate for yourself the atmosphere of the time when these scenes were enacted. And if your time will permit, spend a day or more visiting other spots in Brazoria County that have become hallowed through their connection with important events or illustrious men in the history of Texas. Visit Peach Point, only a few miles up Highway 36 from Freeport, where Stephen F. Austin made his home with his sister, Emily M. Perry. Visit the cemetery there where the remains of Austin reposed until they were recently removed to the State Capital. Here also you will find the well-tended graves of many of the Bryan and Perry families and other relatives of Austin. Continuing up Highway 36 beyond Peach Point you will pass through the Clemens State Farm where the famous old McNeel Plantation once flourished and where Robert and D.G. Mills also operated plantations. Further on see the old town of Brazoria, commercially and historically important in the early days, where the first Masonic Lodge of Texas was organized and where the company was formed that went down the Brazos to fight the Battle of Velasco. Here also was delivered the speech of Stephen F. Austin upon his return from Mexico, which ranks as one of the great political speeches of history. The home of Governor Henry Smith was also near Brazoria, but is not easily accessible. Continue up Highway 36 to West Columbia where was located the first Capitol of the new Republic of Texas, and the home of Josiah H. Bell and other prominent men. Drive up the Manor Lake road from Columbia to the Orizimbo Plantation where Santa Anna was kept a prisoner for some months while his fate was under discussion. And on Highway 19, about 10 miles north of Angleton, pause a moment at the stone by the roadside marking the home of General Albert Sidney Johnston. See the Historical Pageant at Freeport tonight, and the one to be given in West Columbia on October 3rd, both showing in dramatized form interesting episodes in the history of our county that helped make the history of our State. These celebrations are all sponsored by the citizens of the County through the Brazoria County Centennial Club for the purpose of commemorating the noble deeds of the past that have made possible the glorious present. It is also the hope of our club at the end of the Centennial Year to form what will be known as the Brazoria County Historical Association whose purpose will be to collect and preserve the valuable Historical Data and Relics within the County, and we will appreciate any aid in this undertaking.

Brazoria County Centennial Club
F. K. Stevens,
President

Angleton, Texas
May 4, 1936



Velasco in Texas **History**

The monument dedicated today is on the site of the old town of Velasco, and the tablet thereon has on it the following inscription:

**“The Lively, first vessel with
emigrants to Austin’s Colony, landed
here December 23, 1821.**

**The Battle of Velasco was
fought here June 26, 1832.**

**Public and Secret Treaties of
Peace between the Republic of Texas
and General Santa Anna were signed
here May 14, 1836.
Dedicated May 14, 1936.”**

It is contemplated that later another tablet with the names of the colonists who fought at the Battle of Velasco on it will be placed on the other side of the monument, but it is desired that the list of names be as complete and as accurate as possible before this is done. It will be appreciated if any one having information regarding the participants in the Battle of Velasco

will send the same to Mr. F. K Stevens, Chairman, Angleton, Texas.

The Velasco frequently mentioned in Texas history should not be confused with the present town of Velasco. The original or old town of Velasco was at the mouth of the Brazos River, on the Eastern side thereof, and on the Gulf of Mexico, and was a place of importance in the early days of Texas. The present town of Velasco, on the eastern side of the Brazos River, about four miles from the Gulf of Mexico, was laid off in 1891, at about the same time a town called Surf Side was laid off on the site of old Velasco and adjacent land.

THE LIVELY

It is well known in Texas history that upon the death of Moses Austin, his son, Stephen F. Austin, undertook the carrying out of his father's purpose to colonize Texas, and in pursuance thereof, Stephen F. Austin purchased, at New Orleans, the Schooner *Lively*, a vessel of thirty tons burden, at a cost of \$600.00. *The Lively*, laden with tools, provisions, seed, and seventeen or eighteen emigrants, sailed from New Orleans toward the end of November, 1821, with instructions to sound the coast of Texas from Galveston Island to the Guadalupe, and to land at the mouth of the Colorado River. It sailed past the mouth of the Brazos River on December 3rd., 1821, and on December 23rd. returned to the mouth of the Brazos River and there landed its cargo and passengers. On a second voyage from New Orleans to Texas it was wrecked on the Western shore of Galveston Island, with a total loss of the cargo. The passengers were taken off the Island by the Schooner General Motley and landed at the mouth of the Colorado River. One of the misstatements made by some writers on Texas history is that when the *Lively* sailed from New Orleans on its first voyage above mentioned, it was never heard of again.

THE BATTLE OF VELASCO

The Anglo-American colonists who settled in Texas became citizens of Mexico, and as such were entitled to certain rights under the laws of Mexico and the colonization contracts under which they came to Texas. The Mexican Constitution of 1824 guaranteed a federal or republican form of Government. Bustamente, the Vice-President of Mexico in 1829, having headed a successful revolution, assumed arbitrary powers and developed the characteristics of a Military Despot, and under a decree issued by him April 6, 1830, military garrisons or forts were established in Texas, including one at Anahuac and another at Velasco, at the mouth of the Brazos River. Col. Domingo Ugartechea was placed in command of the fort at Velasco and John Davis Bradburn, an American who had entered Mexico in 1816 or 1817, was placed in command of the fort at Anahuac, both Ugartechea and Bradburn being adherents and partisans of Bustamente. In furtherance of his general plan of oppression, Bustamente decreed that the troops at these forts should be supported by receipts from the custom houses and other tributes laid upon the country to be enforced by military power and by the depreciation of the civil authorities. Bradburn, at Anahuac, soon began a system of annoyances, indignities and oppressions toward the colonists, followed by the arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, in the spring of 1832, of prominent colonists, among whom were William B. Travis, Patrick C. Jack and others. Efforts were made by William H. Jack, brother of Patrick C. Jack, to secure the release of Patrick C. Jack and his fellow prisoners, or their transfer for trial to the civil tribunals of the country, but without success. The only offense of these prisoners was their refusal to sustain Bradburn in his arbitrary course. A number of the colonists assembled near Liberty, organized and marched to Anahuac to make further efforts by negotiations with Bradburn to secure the release of

these prisoners, and failing, decided that it would be unwise to attack Bradburn without artillery. The colonists, therefore, withdrew to Turtle Bayou, resolved themselves into a mass meeting, passed a series of resolutions know as the "Turtle Bayou Resolutions," reciting the tyrannical acts of Bustamente and his minions in Texas and the subversion of the Constitution of 1824, and pledging their support to Santa Anna, who was then supporting the Constitution of 1824. John Austin and others were sent to Brazoria to secure reinforcements and several pieces of artillery at that place. A meeting was held at Brazoria and three companies were organized, one company being of marines. The Schooner Brazoria, then at Brazoria, where its cargo had been unloaded, was pressed into service, and the artillery placed on it. John Austin, as senior officer, was selected to command one company, Henry S. Brown to command another company, and William J. Russell to command the marines. The marines were placed on board the Schooner Brazoria which sailed down the Brazos River to Velasco. Col. Ugartechea, the Commander of the Mexican Fort at Velasco, refused permission for the Schooner Brazoria with the artillery and marines to pass the Fort on its way to Anahuac. The two other companies marched overland down the Eastern side of the River to Velasco for also to secure and place in enduring form the names of those dauntless 'pioneer-farmer-heroes' who first punctured the arrogance of Mexican despotism and gave a foretaste of the grand achievements yet in store for the knightly chivalry destined to win Texas from barbaric misrule to peaceful civilization." Henry Smith, one of the colonists who participated in the Battle of Velasco and was one of the wounded, and who afterwards became the Provisional Governor of Texas, in the "Reminiscences" in giving his version of the affair at Anahuac and the Battle of Velasco, said: "We had declared in favor of Santa Anna, not that we had any choice in names for we had no more confidence in one Mexican than another, but we had been sworn to support the constitution and were willing to redeem our pledge. The fact is we were determined to protect ourselves from insult and injury. We could not be called rebels, because we were

battling for our constitution and, too, under Mexican flag which we had nailed fast to the mast head, with Constitution in large capital letters upon it, so that it could not be mistaken...Our remonstrances, though courteous and respectful, were bold, manly and calculated from our bold and dignified manner, to show the Mexican Nation that our constitutional and vested rights should not be infringed with impunity and that if we were not respected by them, that we at least respected ourselves as freemen." A replica of the Mexican flag which Henry Smith says they "nailed fast to the mast head" of the Schooner Brazoria at the Battle of Velasco is flying above us today.

THE TREATIES OF PEACE

A few days after the Battle of San Jacinto President Burnet and members of his cabinet who were at Galveston at the time of the battle, repaired to General Houston's camp at San Jacinto, and were made acquainted with the convention entered into by General Houston with Santa Anna. The preliminaries to a treaty were discussed at San Jacinto. General Houston, on account of his wound, proceeded to New Orleans, and President Burnet, with members of his cabinet, and Santa Anna and most of the Mexican officers who had been captured at the Battle of San Jacinto, embarked on the Steamer Yellowstone for Galveston, and finding an entire lack of accommodation at Galveston, they removed to Velasco. At Velasco, on May 14th, 1836, two treaties - one public and the other secret - were signed, by the first of which Santa Anna agreed not to take up arms or use his influence to cause them to be taken up against the people of Texas during the present war of independence; all hostilities on land and water were to cease; the Mexican troops were to evacuate the territory of Texas; no property was to be taken by the retreating army without indemnification, and captured private property was to be restored; the Mexican army was to prosecute its march without delay, etc.; and that Santa Anna would be sent to Vera Cruz as soon as it should

be deemed proper. In the secret treaty the same stipulations were reiterated, and in the third article Santa Anna solemnly pledged himself to so arrange matters in the cabinet of Mexico that the mission that would be sent thither by the Government of Texas should be well received, and that by means of negotiation all differences might be settled, and independence that had been declared by the convention might be acknowledged, etc. In fulfillment of their engagements, the Texas authorities, on June 1st., placed Santa Anna and his suite, consisting of Col. Almonte, Col. Nuñez, and his Secretary, Ramon Martinez Caro, on board the Invincible, a vessel of the recently acquired and equipped Texas Navy, for their transportation to Vera Cruz, but before the Invincible had sailed the Steamer Ocean arrived from New Orleans with 230 volunteers, and when the volunteers landed and became informed of the action taken by the government, their exasperation knew no bounds. The feelings of the citizens of Velasco with regard to Santa Anna's release were also those of intense dissatisfaction, but no violent demonstration had been made. Public meetings were held and inflammatory speeches made. As a result President Burnet issued an order to Captain Brown, of the Invincible, to send Santa Anna and the other prisoners ashore. Santa Anna refused to obey, and Thomas J. Green and others were deputed to go aboard the Invincible and bring him off, and as a result Santa Anna and the others were brought ashore on June 4th and to insure their better security from violence they were landed at Quintana, a town on the other side of the Brazos River and opposite Velasco, where Santa Anna was placed in the custody of Captain Wm. H. Patton, by whom he was removed to Velasco, and thence on June 11th to the neighborhood of Columbia (now called West Columbia), and from there he was later taken to Orizimbo, the home of Dr. J. A. E. Phelps, above the present town of Columbia, where he was held as a prisoner until the fall of 1836.

The foregoing articles compiled from historical sources by
LOUIS J. WILSON
Angleton, Texas

A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE OLD TOWN OF VELASCO

By ERNEST DEAN DORCHESTER

It is interesting to note that this Centennial year is bringing to light so much of Texas history; that were it not for the presence of a few of our older people whose forebears actually participated and handed down these memories through them, not even a mute reminder would remain to tell the tale.

It has been the privilege of the writer to have lived among those who still paint memory pictures of the past, and it is through them that I hope to preserve for posterity some of the happenings of those early days. No attempt has been made more than to relate the events, as told me, when Velasco played its part in the early history of Texas.

At the mouth of the Brazos River there were two towns lying opposite each other on either bank, Velasco and Quintana, each named for Spanish generals in the days when the Spanish flag waved over Texas. Their first appearance in history is when Mexico became independent of Spain and furled her flag here. Three customs ports were established along the gulf coast - one of which was at Velasco. A fort was built here and garrisoned by Mexican troops. It was here that the Battle of Velasco was fought on June 26, 1832, in which engagement the Mexicans were defeated and abandoned the town and marched away.

Many years before this, Stephen F. Austin began his colonization of Texas, some of which were attempted without success. When Mexico became independent of Spain, colonization was greatly favored, impresarios were granted liberal concessions. Austin was appointed Alcalde at Brazoria, having jurisdiction of the San Felipe de Austin district. Every boat that landed at Velasco brought settlers and by 1835 from 25,000 to 30,000 came to Texas.

Immediately after the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836, which terminated in the surrender of Santa Anna, and an armistice had been agreed upon, President Burnet moved his capitol to Velasco, bringing Santa Anna and several of his officers with him as prisoners. On May 14, 1836, the Treaty of Velasco was signed by President Burnet and Santa Anna, and shortly thereafter, arrangements were made to return Santa Anna to Vera Cruz where he could have this treaty confirmed. Unfortunately, this was never done because Santa Anna was out of favor. However, when he was about to sail for Mexico, several hundred Americans from New Orleans came into the harbor and demanded punishment of Santa Anna. President Burnet was helpless to control the situation and yielded the prisoner into their hands. He was taken far up the river and put in chains on the old Phelps plantation and confined there until liberated by General Houston and sent back to Mexico.

The writer, shortly after the 1900 storm, ran across an old hair trunk which had been placed in a brick building in the present town of Velasco for safe keeping. In this trunk he found a map of the original town of Velasco of Stephen F. Austin's day. Evidently, the town had become Americanized and newly laid out. It may be interesting to note the names of the streets and to lament that the vicissitudes of time have left nothing but this map in mute evidence of their former existence.

The town was laid out fronting on the Brazos River at its mouth, and extended up the river to the present intra-coastal canal. Fronting on the river was Front Street. Parallel are First, Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Streets. Cross streets, beginning with Gulf shore are: Gulf Street, Fort Street, Custom House Street, Salt Street, Middle Street, Exchange Street, Congress Street, Market Street, Ferry Street, and Canal Street. There are blocks named Pall Mall, Promenade, Monument Square and College Square. After peace had been established, this town became quite a summer resort. The representative families from the large plantations came here and built homes. In order that this sketch may go down in history, these families should be mentioned as a heritage for their posterity. Those families most familiar and outstanding even

today are the Herdons, Whartons, Archers, Graces, Munsons, Caldwells, Porters, Dances, Winsteads, Pattons, Underwoods, and many more might be mentioned.

The town boasted of a hotel, The Wilcox House. In Quintana was the Hill House. A pavilion, Pool Hall and dance hall were the places of amusement. Gaily dressed women gathered and had their functions here - and society thrived. There was also a seminary, both for young ladies and young men, taught by Oxford graduates. In the fall of the year, after the crops had been harvested, everybody went to the race track, which was located about a mile up the river on the big bend. There was a pavilion for people, fine horses competed, and much money changed hands. This immediate section became immensely popular and continued year after year. Many vessels entered the port from New Orleans and North Atlantic cities. Ice even came in from Boston, and while cargos of cotton and molasses were shipped out, manufactured articles so badly needed in this country were shipped in to find their way to the distant plantations.

With the building of the Canal, connecting with Galveston Bay about 1856, fewer vessels used the port. Stern-wheel steamers of shallow draft used the new canal and brought the cargoes from Galveston that formerly came through the port of Velasco, distributing them all the way up the Brazos River as far as Columbia, discharging and loading at the many plantation landings. These boats also carried passengers, giving access to the outside world. Oyster Creek at that time had many plantations and small craft handled their business. The home life of these rich plantation owners was almost feudal. All labor was performed by slaves, open-house hospitality was general and there was much entertaining. The young men had their fine horses, their pack of hounds, and in season indulged in hunting and fishing. Everybody had his negro servant. During the winter months, relatives and friends from the old states came to visit, and some married and remained. With the opening of the Civil War and slave labor abolished, conditions everywhere brought on great domestic changes. To the rising generation never accustomed to work, it

brought hardships. Time honored institutions faded away. The fine old homes lacked repairs and gradually disappeared. The rich plantations quickly re turned to wilderness, and even today no trace of their former glory remains. So completely has the old town of Velasco disappeared that not even a record remains, all having been destroyed by the 1875 storm. The town of Surfside now occupies this old location.

The writer is indebted to Mrs. A. F. Shannon of Velasco whose people were among those who lived in the old town of Velasco for much of this sketch. She is still painting memory pictures of those old days.

EARNEST DEAN DORCHESTER

Velasco, Texas, April 15, 1936.



The following are quotations from various publications and reminiscences relating almost wholly to Velasco in its early days.

**From the Quarterly of the Texas
State Historical Association.
Vol. IV July, 1990**

“Reminiscences of Judge Edwin Waller,” pages 33 to 40.

“Velasco was the Boston Harbor of the Texas Revolution, and the scene of the first chapter in its history. There, too, taxes and duties, unjustly demanded by the government, were the cause of the ‘emeute.’

“In 1832 Velasco was a Mexican post, garrisoned by near two hundred and fifty men, who were in a fort of circular form, having in the center a mound or raised plateau of earth, whereon the artillery was placed, on barbette, so as to fire over the outer wall, and command a range on every side. This outer wall was surrounded by a fosse or ditch, and perhaps with something intended for Chereaux-de-frise, or abattis. There were at that time several vessels trading between Velasco and New Orleans, and

which were engaged in exporting home articles and bringing in supplies for barter. Among these vessels was the Sabine. Up to this year, no duties or customs had been demanded by government officials, but it coming to their ears that the commerce was becoming profitable, their attention was aroused. The commander of the Velasco fort notified the captain of the Sabine, Jerry Brown, that he must pay certain duties, and procure a clearance for his vessel from Col. Bradburn, then commanding at Anahuac, before he would be allowed to sail. This was demanding impossibilities, as there was no land communication with Anahuac and the embargo thus laid prevented intercourse by water. Not being able to come to satisfactory terms it was decided to 'run the blockade' which was done without much damage to the Sabine. This was the first 'overt act' of resistance to Mexican authority.

"This occurrence was really the detonating spark which fired the train of revolution; this was, in fact, the bud of the Texas revolution, as Boston had been before the revolt, the secession from England. Soon after this, a meeting was held at Brazoria, with Col. Wm. H. Wharton as chairman and he earnestly advised decisive measures. That American citizens had been unjustly confined at Anahuac, and the unfriendly attitude of the Mexican authorities demanded some action to combat it. This terminated in the Battle of Velasco. After a fierce conflict with many casualties on each side, the Mexican garrison surrendered. They were allowed to retain their side-arms and personal property, and some were sent by water to Matamoros.

"This battle occurred during the supremacy of Bustamente, who was succeeded by Santa Anna, who, soon after his accession to power, dispatched five vessels of war, heavily laden with troops and munitions, to retake the Fort of Velasco. This armament, with colors flying, and with grand display, sailed up the river and anchored off Velasco. Wild rumors sent runners in every direction, a convention was held in Brazoria, Col. Wharton, as chairman was sent down to Velasco to confer with the Mexican authorities and endeavor to stay the threatened destruction. This gentleman, so distinguished for his wise diplomacy temporized

with the enemy - that Texas had ever been loyal to the Mexican government, especially to Santa Anna; that the capture of Velasco was 'only a party movement' against Bustamente, to show their deep devotion to the cause of Santa Anna; and that the whole affair originated in their admiration of him, and was but a pleasant way they adopted to show their loyalty. The Mexican officers allowed themselves to be persuaded, and accordingly came up to Brazoria, where they were feted and entertained and finally departed happy in the belief that the Texans were a most loyal people and Col. Wharton a particular friend of Santa Anna."

**From Holley's Original Narratives of Texas
History and Adventure. Pages 121-122.**

"Velasco, a small town at the mouth of the Brazos River in Austin's Colony, is celebrated for its salt works which are very notable. It is a small town but well established, and is in a flourishing state. A collector of customs resides here.

"Velasco is the resort, in summer, of a great number of visitors from the north of the Colony, who come to enjoy the delightful sea-breezes, sea bathing, and the comforts with which they are everywhere surrounded. Excellent accommodations can be obtained at boarding houses, which, among the other attractions, are always furnished with supplies of oysters and fish of the first quality. Mosquito bars are not often needed here, and altogether, it is one of the most delightful places in the country. A Mexican garrison was formerly stationed at Velasco. At present it is a rendezvous of the patriot troops."

**MAIL ESTABLISHMENT
From Holley's Original Narratives of
Texas History and Adventure.
Pages 188-189.**

"The general council of Texas, in session last fall at San Felipe, taking in consideration the necessity of having facilities

of communication established throughout the country, accordingly organized a Post office Department and appointed a Postmaster General under whose directions the following mail routes have been established. Velasco was on Route No. 4, which started from San Felipe, by Fort Bend, Orizimbo, Columbia and Brazoria, to Velasco 98 miles weekly, leaving Velasco every Tuesday at 1 o'clock P. M. and arrive at San Felipe every Friday at 7 o'clock P. M."

From "Thus They Lived"
"Social Life in the Republic of Texas"
By J. W. Schmidt, S. M.

The New Orleans Weekly Picayune carried this story in 1838.
Page 121,122-123, and 124.

"The citizens of the neighborhood Republic pay considerable attention to the improvement of their blooded stock. Fine horses are raised, and the sports of the turf are to be enjoyed in their full vigor.

"One of the famous tracks was at Velasco, near Houston.

"The races over the New Market Course, at Velasco, are to come off in the first week of May. The Club comprises some of the most eminent names of the country - among whom we see that of Dr. Archer as President; the Hon. W. H. Wharton, Gen. Felix Huston and Gen. T. J. Rusk, as Vice President; and Col. Wm. Ryon, as Secretary and Treasurer. The purses to be run for all liberal in their dimensions; the arrangements for the accommodation of visitors will be of the most ample nature that the newness of the country will afford; and, from the level face of the country, we presume that the track will be highly favorable to the sport. The town is situated immediately on the sea-coast, at the mouth of the Brazos de Dios, and it is at all times a place of great resort from all parts of the Republic. It is only from two to three days run from this city - so we may expect to see crowds going down on the Columbia and other vessels, to enjoy the pleasure of the trip, together with the excitement and interest of attending the New Market Races in Texas.

“The Texas papers carried many announcements about Velasco and other races; ‘splendid and refined amusement’ was promised to those who would attend. Branch T. Archer, President of the Club, invited Dr. Smith to attend the races at Velasco by saying: ‘We shall have one week of racing and frolic in this town (commencing on the twentieth of next month). I will ensure you a display of fashion and beauty.’ If this did not bring Smith, then maybe General Thomas Green’s additional ‘Many fine women and horses are in attendance already’ - did.”

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Historical Museum.

The museum is operated solely by volunteers and supported wholly by contributions.