

History Mystery

Barrier islands (Part 1) When was San Jose Island settled?

By PAM STRANAHAN
Friends of the History Center

The island of San Jose was named and mapped by the Spanish. Many Spanish ships sailed into Aransas Pass and Copano Bay as they built their missions in Texas.

In the 1840s a village called Aransas was established on the south end, bay side; later the town was known as St. Joseph. From 1851 to 1861 Captain Peter Johnson carried the U.S. mail from Indianola to Corpus Christi. Mail and passengers were transported by boat from Indianola to Saluria at Pass Cavallo. From Saluria they went overland by stage along Matagorda Island to Cedar Bayou where they crossed on a ferry. The route continued along the beach of St. Joseph's Island to St. Joseph settlement. Lastly people and goods went by boat to Lamar, Copano, St. Mary's, Aransas City and Corpus Christi. Johnson erected a two-story building on the bayside of St. Joseph's. The ground floor was a warehouse and commissary. Upstairs was lodging for the family and passengers who waited for the stage or boat. Union forces destroyed this settlement in the 1860s. After the war, Captain Peter Johnson lived in Lamar and sold his schooner Frances to Captain Theodore (Charlie) Johnson who sailed it until 1898.

During the Mexican War campaign as troops were staged, the US flag was planted on the island by Gen. Zachary Taylor who later set up camp on north beach near Corpus Christi. A warehouse was built on St. Joseph for 1845 operations. A U.S. Light Station was built on the south end of San Jose in 1855. Families who lived on St. Joseph included Ballou, Benson, Blutworth, Brundrett, Clark, Collins, Johnson, Little, Mercer, Paul, Plummer, Roberts, Stephenson, Thompson and Wells. Dr. Joseph Austin Seward and his wife Eliza learned to dig shallow wells for fresh water.

During the Civil War the Confederates establish Camp Semmes on Mustang Island. Other fortifications were on Shell Bank Isle and Fort Washington (later Fort Esperanza) on Matagorda Island. In the spring 1862 the Union set a blockade along the Gulf of Mexico. They conducted raids on the islands and shelled the wharves and homesteads. By the summer of 1862 the island was deserted. Few families returned after the war.

Around the turn of the century, R.H. Wood and his sons, Tobias De Cantillion Wood and Will Welder Wood, established a ranch. In advance of the storm of 1919 Will crossed the bay with power boats and a cattle barge and transported all the ranch hands and families to the mainland. The storm wiped out R. H. Wood and sons – only 350 head of 6,400 head purebred Hereford were left. This loss was devastating to Wood and sons.

In 1922 Wood sold to Cyrus B. Lucas who in turn sold to Giesecke & Frost of San Antonio in 1930. In 1936 Sid Richardson of Fort Worth bought the island. Richardson ran 2,000 head of cattle, kept a hunting reserve, and built a landing strip. His nephew, Perry Bass who later inherited the island, built a house. In 1973 the name of the island was officially designated San Jose by the Texas Legislature.

To learn more about San Jose Island, view the "Barrier Islands" exhibit at the History Center for Aransas County, 801 E. Cedar St. You are invited to the exhibit opening on April 27, 10:00 AM. The Center is open on Saturday 10 AM-4 PM and Sunday 1-4 PM. FMI call 361 727-9214 or visit www.thehistorycenterforaransascounty.org.



Bass complex on San Jose Island

Friends of the History Center to open barrier islands exhibit

The Friends of the History Center for Aransas County will present the opening of a new exhibit entitled "Barrier Islands: San Jose and Matagorda" at 10 a.m. Saturday, April 27 at the History Center for Aransas County, 801 E. Cedar St.

Featured speaker, Rick Pratt, served as a lighthouse keeper at the Aransas Light Station and as Director of the Port Aransas History Museum.

The event is free to the public and light refreshments will be served.

The exhibit will run from April 27 through Aug. 4, 2019.

The exhibit will tell the story of the islands from the days of American Indians and explorers through early settlers, the Civil War, the geology of land movement, and the 20th century. Art works by Steve Russell will set the stage for the stories. Maps, photographs, and videos will further illustrate the various facets of life on the islands.

Programs will be held on Sunday afternoons while the

exhibit is open at 2:00 p.m. The following topics will be presented:

May 5 - Early Settlers by Jerry Brundrett.

May 19 - Managers by the San Jose Cattle Company.

June 2 - Island Tales by Steve Russell.

June 16 - Early Settlers by Jackie Shaw.

June 30 - Collector's Corner.

July 14 - Settlers by the Hawes family.

July 28 - John Jackson.

In June, two educational cruises aboard Captain Tommy Moore's Skimmer boat will take participants from Fulton Harbor to the Lydia Ann Lighthouse Channel. The cruise will visit significant historical areas and landmarks along the route with commentary and narrations offered by historical staff. Registrations will be limited to 35 people per cruise. The cost is \$50 per person.

For more information, visit www.thehistorycenterforaransascounty.org or call 727-9214.

people



This week in Texas history

By Barte Haile

'The Whirlwind' rid raiders

In a joint resolution on Apr. 11, 1882, the Texas legislature praised Lt. John Lapham Bullis for his heroic service "in behalf of the people of the frontier of this State, in repelling the depredations of Indians and other enemies of the frontier of Texas."

Bullis was born and raised in western New York not far from the shores of Lake Ontario. His Quaker upbringing in that serene setting did not prepare him for the Civil War or years of fighting raiders along the Rio Grande.

Rejecting the pacifism of his fellow Friends, who included his entire family, Bullis enlisted at age 21 in the 126th New York Volunteer Infantry in August 1862 four months after Fort Sumter. The very next month, he was wounded and captured by Confederates at the Battle of Harper's Ferry.

Released in a prisoner exchange, Bullis returned to active duty only to be wounded and captured again at Gettysburg the following July. This time the conditions of his incarceration were much harsher at the infamous Libby Prison in Richmond, a three-story brick warehouse with a notoriously high mortality rate.

Finally freed in a second POW swap, Bullis got through the rest of the war without being shot or taken prisoner. Choosing to make a career of the army, he returned to Texas where he had been stationed during the first phase of the post-Appomattox occupation.

Bored by the dull routine of his duties on the Gulf Coast, Bullis requested a transfer to the recently formed Twenty-Fourth Infantry composed of white officers and black enlisted men. Unlike most white officers, especially West Point graduates, the New Yorker did not turn up his nose at having ex-slaves under him. Sent to the Lower Rio Grande, he saw more action with the occasional Indian raiding party and cattle rustlers.

While stationed at Fort Clark in the border county of Kinney in 1873, Bullis was offered command of the so-called "Black Watch," a company of Black Seminole scouts created three years earlier. Familiar with their reputation as unequalled trackers "who could follow the trail of a lizard over rocks," Bullis eagerly accepted the new assignment.

The Black Seminoles were the descendants of escaped slaves that sought sanctuary in the swamps of Florida, where they were accepted as members of the Seminole tribe. The Black Seminoles were part of the forced relocation of the "Five Civilized Tribes" to the Indian Territory, but many soon fled to the Santa Rosa Mountains in northern Mexico.

It was there the U.S. Army cut a deal with the exiles that must have sounded too good to be true. According to a 2006 article by C.F. Eckhardt, "Agents were sent to them promising them land of their own, permanent enlistment in the army, food for themselves and their families and a chance to strike back at the Indians" tormenting them in Mexico.

The exploits of Lt. Bullis and his Black Seminole scouts, who called their leader "The Whirlwind," over the ensuing nine years, were the subject of campfire tales that grew into frontier legend. Here is a memorable example of one of their many daring deeds.

In April 1875, Bullis and three scouts found telltale signs of 75 stolen horses being driven toward Mexico. The soldiers followed the trail for eight days before sighting the thieves and their four-legged loot above Eagle's Nest Crossing on the Rio Grande.

Though outnumbered better than seven to one, the fearless foursome attacked with a ferocity that stunned the band of Lipan Apaches. Bullis and his men seized control of the horses only to relinquish it in an epic gunbattle on horseback that went on for 45 minutes.

Almost out of ammunition, Bullis and the scouts were forced to retreat but did so unscathed. For their heroic actions on that April afternoon, each of the Black Seminoles was awarded the Medal of Honor.

Maybe the closest the Black Watch ever came to annihilation was in the summer of 1876, when Bullis, 20 scouts and a like number of infantry were caught in a deathtrap on the wrong side of the river by 250 Mexican cavalrymen. But the last-second arrival of four companies of Stars and Stripes cavalry made it a fair fight, and that was something the Mexicans wanted no part of.

By 1881 Bullis and his scouts had rid the borderland of raiders and opened Big Bend and Far West Texas to settlement. This incredible feat was accomplished without the loss of a single Black Seminole.

The next year, the Black Watch was disbanded by order of congress, which also saw fit to renege on every promise made to the Black Seminoles. Although a few hung around Fort Clark, most rejoined their families in their mountain stronghold in Mexico.

As a going-away gift, the grateful citizens of Kinney County presented Bullis with two engraved ceremonial swords, one silver and the other gold. Today those historic mementos are on display in the Witte Museum in San Antonio.

John Lapham Bullis retired from the army in 1904 with the rank of brigadier general and a wealthy man thanks to a profitable partnership in a Big Bend silver mine and a slew of shrewd investments. A final honor came in 1917 six years after his death, when Camp Bullis outside San Antonio was named for him.



Weempes earn yard of month award

The Spanish Wood Estates April Yard of the Month award goes to the home of William and Cheryl Weempe (120 S. Sierra Woods Dr.). They have done a fabulous job spiffing up the yard since they moved into their home last fall. Nominations for the award can be sent to gallarcj@yahoo.com.

Contributed photo

AgriLife Extension Service news



By Megan Glidden
FCH County Extension Agent

Happy and healthy spring

As the wildflowers begin to bloom and the first days of Spring arrive, the spirit of renewal and momentum of the season can inspire us all to begin again and better our health.

But how are we supposed to do that when there are family gatherings of all kinds with the most delicious food and a forest of chocolate and/or marshmallow creatures appear at every grocery store?

Maybe the spring should be called "Holidays 2.0" (check your grocery store's seasonal/candy aisle for proof). Let's then fan the flame of our natural desire to be healthier with some of the same tricks from those cooler seasons.

Bye-Bye to Beverages

Maybe it's not hot cocoa in April, but beverages are always something to be aware of as part of your health goals. Soda, juice (100% fruit juice or fruit drink), powdered drink mix, fruit punch, iced-tea with sugar, lemonade with sugar, and frozen drinks, are all high sugar drinks in small amounts, like 4-8 ounces. The rare occasional drink is not going to curtail efforts to lose weight, but we should think about how often these are consumed and how big the serving size. Everyday consumption is likely to make weight loss efforts more difficult even with some time spent in the gym.

Water is best but if we are not used to it; you may require more flavor. Add fresh or frozen fruit to water...lemons, limes, oranges, and berries, on their own or any combinations thereof, can add a wonderful flavor to water. Cucumber and basil are other additions that also make a really refreshing and cool drink.

Portions for Protein

A constant for our family gatherings during spring is a main dish of beef, chicken, lamb or pork, also known as animal protein.

It's helpful for our goals to remember that the serving size for protein is 3-4 ounces; that is about the size of a deck of playing cards. This amount is often shockingly small to most people, but there is good reason for it.

Aside from butter, and bacon, and lard ... animal protein is likely to be your best sources of saturated fat. Remember that that is not all that is on our plate ... this amount of protein along with vegetables and whole-grains is very filling. If you are very active with exercise, then yes, you need more protein, just like you need more of every nutrient. But for those of us for which weight loss would be beneficial, keeping that deck of cards around would be a good idea.

Tiny for Tasting

When you are at a family gathering, it's natural to want to taste every dish, if only to please all of your aunts. Enjoying our favorite foods on special days is important, but we need a plan. Choose our "deck of cards" of protein and half a plate of veggies and whole grains (low-fat), now you have about half a cup of favorites from which to choose. These should be the recipes with sugar, cream, mayo, bacon, or lard. You can savor your favorites and appreciate them and still have a balanced meal.

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