

Cradle of Texas Conservancy to build a replica of 1832 Fort Velasco Fund-raising is now underway

*Thermopylae had its messenger of death, but Velasco had none!*¹

Unlike other historic towns of Texas such as San Antonio, Goliad, Gonzales, even San Felipe and others, you may have never heard of Velasco. These other towns began to commemorate their role in early Texas history (especially the Texas Revolution of 1835-1836) during the early 20th century, often with magnificent art-deco monuments and museums during the Texas centennial of 1936. But, the strategic old port of Velasco had been reduced to a ghost town before 1900, having few if any residents in this same period, and there was no one to tell its story or build monuments about its role. We hope to change that now, as we near its bicentennial.

You see, the mouth of the Brazos River was the main (although not the only) seaport for Stephen F. Austin's empresario grant (called Austin's Colony) in the period of 1821-1836 – an especially vital link for commerce and supplies since overland travel was distant and difficult in those early days before roads. The Brazos had a large role in creating the rebellious Mexican province of the north called Texas in those short 15 years. Recognizing its strategic importance, and alarmed at Austin's success at colonization, Mexican General Manuel de Mier y Terán first built an outpost there in 1830-1831 on the left bank, and then a small fort named as "*Fortaleza de Velasco*" in 1832. Almost immediately, troubles at Anahuac caused a popular uprising there (known as the [Anahuac Disturbances](#)) but also in the valley of the Brazos. The militia of the Brazoria district rose up to help their fellow Texians around Galveston Bay, and had to overwhelm the new Fort Velasco, to bring artillery and militia by sea to Anahuac during the last days of June 1832, known to history as the [Battle of Velasco](#). An early harbinger of issues that would, just a few years later, boil over in the Texas Revolution, one historian wrote "*While the battle of Velasco has not received much of a place in Texas history there is no denying this was the same funnel-shaped war cloud that a few years hence was to sweep over the swamps of San Jacinto.*"² Along with similar skirmishes at Anahuac and Nacogdoches that summer, this caused the Mexican military to abandon east and southeast Texas until 1835, preferring to return home to fight either with or against an upstart rebel named Santa Anna, which would itself become an important precursor to later events.



A photo of a diorama for 1832 Fort Velasco once used at the Brazoria County Historical Museum

Soon after the 1832 battle, the fort was abandoned and the new town of Velasco grew up around the location, taking its name from the fort. It and its sister town of Quintana on the opposite bank grew into prosperous port towns in concert with other landings up and down the Brazos, up to and through the Civil War. And, it was here on 1-Sep-1835 where Stephen F. Austin landed back in Texas after two years in Mexico (most of it in prison), sailing right into a sea battle between Texians and a Mexican gunboat, now termed the [San Felipe Incident](#) – the first shot of the Texas Revolution. As he watched the battle from the beach, the “Father of Texas” came to understand that his long-held diplomatic policy of “*Fidelity to Mexico*” was no longer tenable, and he changed his mind for revolution on the spot. Eight momentous months later, just after the Battle of San Jacinto, the new government of the Republic of Texas convened at Velasco, treating with the captured Santa Anna, to create the public and private [Treaties of Velasco](#), and gain the independence of Texas. Thus, in a way, it can be said the Texas Revolution started and ended within yards of each other at Old Velasco. Other forts were built at Velasco during the Texas Revolution and the Civil War, but the seaside location began to decline in the late 1800’s due to hurricane damage and competition from deeper safer harbors such as Galveston and Houston.

In recent decades, the [Cradle of Texas Conservancy](#) (CTC) has sought a way to commemorate the location by building a historically-accurate replica of the modest 1832 Fort Velasco at the old mouth of the Brazos River (today known as Surfside Beach), and we now have a serious proposal and engineering plan for which fund-raising is underway. We hope the replica fort will tell not only the history of that first Fort Velasco, but also the town’s other contributions as hinted at (even if dramatized!) above. Within the context of and respecting the importance of the major conflicts of the Texas Revolution such as the Alamo, Goliad, San Jacinto and others, we hope to add some granularity to the story of this complex period, especially its antecedents in the early years. Please join us to bring this under-told story for all of Texas to know and visit!

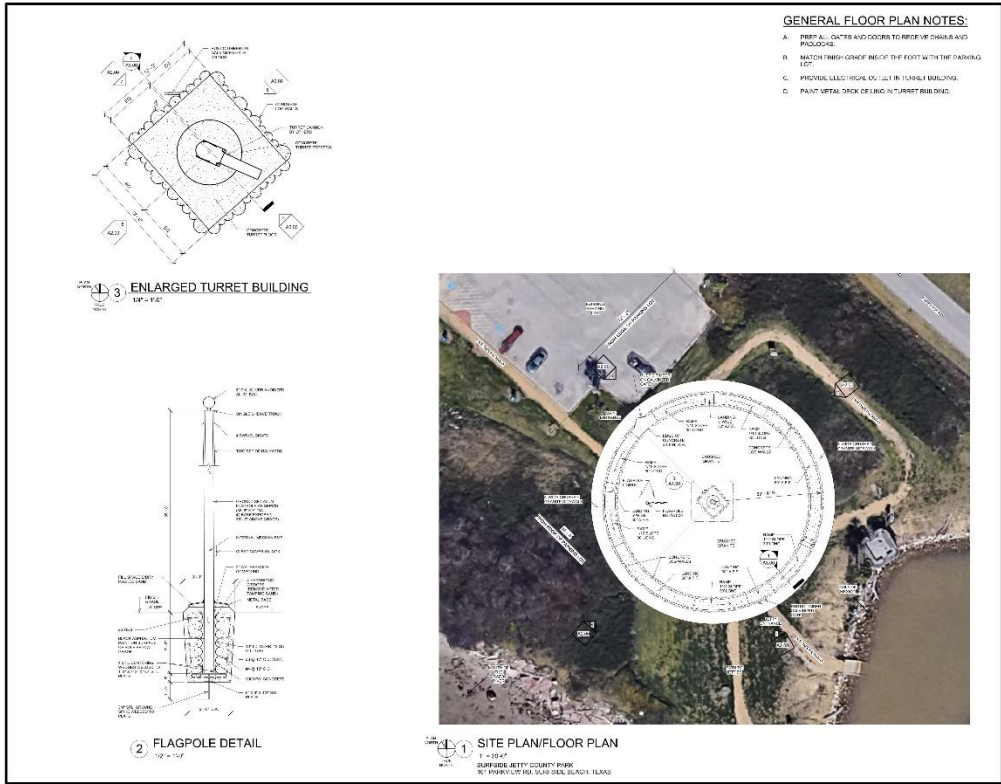
More details can be found about the story of Old Velasco and its forts here:

<https://velascohistoryarchaeology.weebly.com/>

Illustrated narrative:

<https://velascohistoryarchaeology.weebly.com/uploads/1/3/1/6/131682501/chronarchhistfortsvelasco.pdf>

Engineering for a sturdy hurricane-resistant modern replica structure is underway, to be placed in an open area of the current Surfside Jetty Park. The location was chosen to take advantage of its high elevation, existing infrastructure (such as parking areas, a bathroom structure, and access to utilities such as water & electricity), visibility to high level of traffic in the existing park, and its position relative to the beach and riverfront (more like the original). Two early drawings for such a structure are shown below.



- GENERAL FLOOR PLAN NOTES:**
- A. PREP ALL GATES AND DOORS TO REFUGE CHAIRS AND PROLOGUE.
 - B. MATCH FINISH GRADE BELOW THE FOOT WITH THE PARKING LOT.
 - C. PROVIDE SILLICOTONE W/ GUT IN TURRET BUILDING.
 - D. PAINT METAL SHOCK EXCISE IN TURRET BUILDING.

Cradle of Texas
Conservancy
Fort Velasco
Replica
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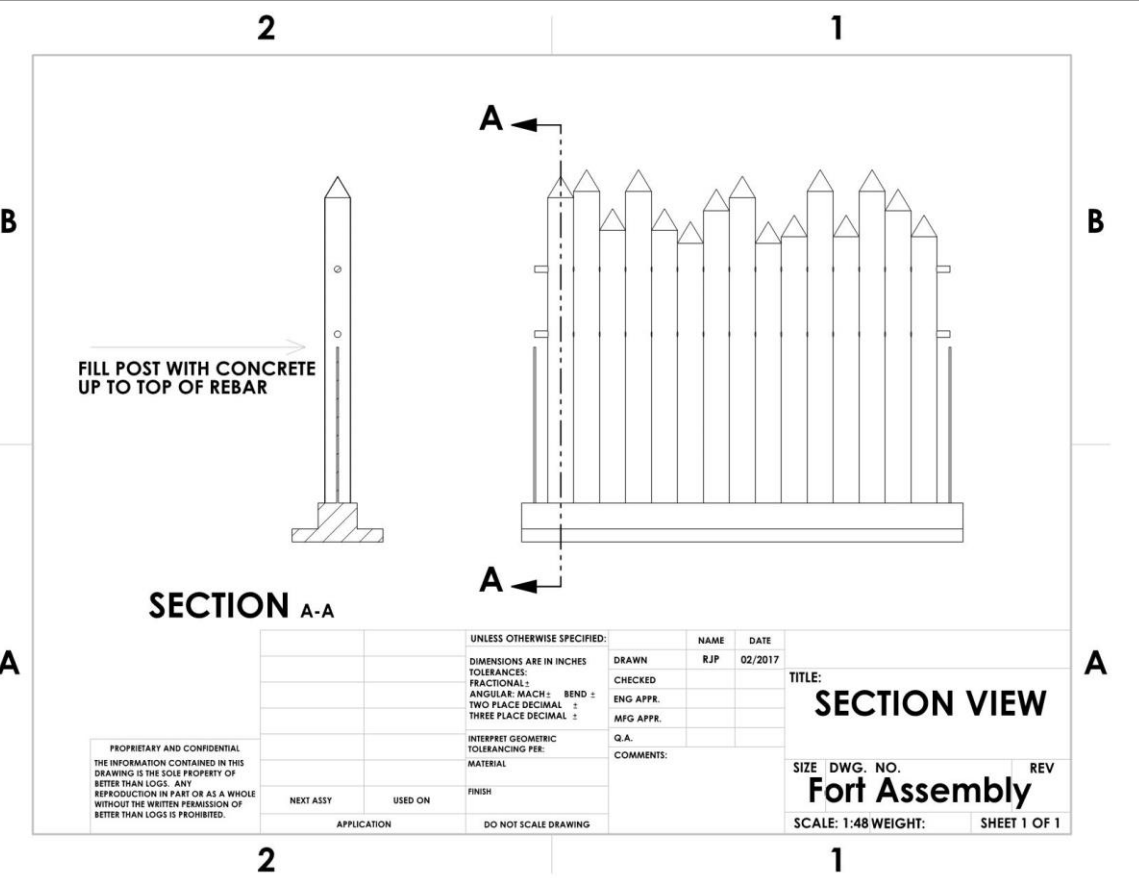
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AD PROJECT #	2017
PROJECT DATE	02/2017
PROJECT TITLE	CRADLE DEVELOPMENT SITE
PROJECT LOCATION	

SITE PLAN/FLOOR PLAN

A1.00

SCALE: 1" = 20'-0"
PROJECT: CRADLE DEVELOPMENT



FILL POST WITH CONCRETE
UP TO TOP OF REBAR

SECTION A-A

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DIMENSIONS ARE IN INCHES		DRAWN	RJP 02/2017
TOLERANCES:		CHECKED	
FRACTIONAL: ±		ENG APPR.	
ANGULAR: MATCH ± BEND ±		MFG APPR.	
TWO PLACE DECIMAL ±		Q.A.	
THREE PLACE DECIMAL ±		COMMENTS:	
INTERPRET GEOMETRIC TOLERANCING PER:			
MATERIAL:			
FINISH:			
NEXT ASSY	USED ON		
APPLICATION			
DO NOT SCALE DRAWING			

SECTION VIEW

SIZE DWG. NO. **Fort Assembly** REV
SCALE: 1:48 WEIGHT: SHEET 1 OF 1

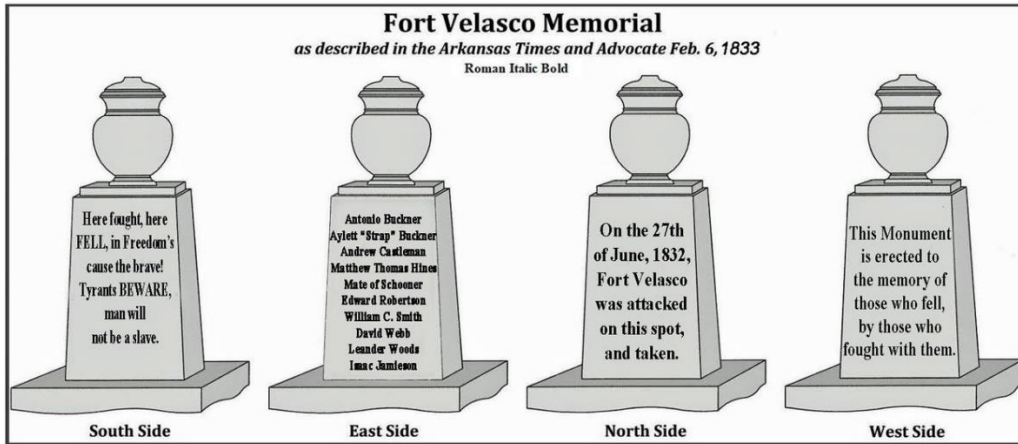
Other local groups are also working to add other elements of historical interpretation in adjacent areas of the old townsite of Velasco. For example, a temporary circular structure (called the Timeline Circle, built 2017-2018) is being used to mark the size and approximate location of the original 1832 fort (now quite distant from the beach due to accretion since the 1830's). Artist-painted panels along its interior walls show episodes of local history (often created by youth groups). In 2023, a cenotaph-type monument (Battle of Velasco Memorial) is being created near the Timeline Circle, in the area formerly known as Monument Square. In addition, new interpretive signs are being placed along a walking trail along the jetty line. The CTC is partnering with these groups to create a coordinated historical recreational zone in the area formerly occupied by Old Velasco, ultimately with a permanent hurricane-resistant replica as the centerpiece.



A photo of the Timeline Circle soon after its initial construction




View of portion of interior wall of Timeline Circle – April 2023



Battle of Velasco Memorial – in Monument Square area, near location of graves from the battle

The San Felipe Incident

An important cause of the Texas Revolution occurred right here on the beach at the mouth of the Brazos.




A topsail schooner resembling San Felipe

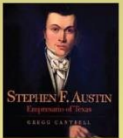
The **San Felipe** was a schooner of the Quintana trading firm McKinney, Williams & Company. Having foreknowledge of "Mexican cruisers" blockading the Texas coast in 1835, Captain William Hurd had armed it with two 6-pound waist guns, small arms for the crew, and armored its deck with bales of cotton, before it sailed from New Orleans for Velasco. On board was Stephen F. Austin, returning after two years (and twenty months in prison) from Mexico.

As the **San Felipe** approached Velasco on the afternoon of September 1, 1835, it was met by the Mexican sloop-of-war **Correo Mexicano**, which had just captured the American brig **Tremont**.

Due to favorable but calm winds, the **San Felipe** made port over the Brazos Bar, but Thomas McKinney (seeing his vessel would be the **Correo's** next target), unloaded Stephen F. Austin and loaded armed volunteers on the **San Felipe** and his steamboat **Laura**. Both ships went after the lightly armed **Correo** and, after a cannon duel and overnight sea chase, the **Correo** surrendered. ship and officers were sent to New Orleans to be charged with piracy. This incident was the last step in convincing Stephen F. Austin, one of the most influential men in Texas, in favor of revolution. As Austin's nephew recollected "... he walked the beach until late at night, hoping to hear or see something of the vessels. Next day the **Laura** returned with the intelligence of the capture of the **Correo**. Austin saw in this the beginning of trouble."




Steamboat resembling Laura on Buffalo Bayou near Harrisburg



Gregg Cantrell wrote about this incident in his biography of Austin: "But in his own mind he had already reached the most critical conclusion: Texas must be free from Mexico. ... The question was no longer one of ends, but of means." Some years later, Charles W. Hayes wrote about Thomas McKinney: "This was the first naval triumph, and was one of the principal causes that led to the proclamation of war, and its success is justly due to the boldness and daring of Col. McKinney"

Fortune Favours the Brave - The Story of the Texas Navy Learn more here:



One example of the historical interpretive signs being located at old Velasco

Footnotes:

1 – The original phrase was “*Thermopylae had its messenger of death, the Alamo had none*”, first used in a speech by [Edward Burlinson](#) but probably authored for him by [Thomas Jefferson Green](#) in the period of 1842-1844. See SWHQ **94**(2), Oct 1990, pp. 298-304. So, we hope their ghosts will not mind that we borrow their “*turn of a phrase*” to now help bring the story of Old Velasco out of the mists of history to a modern audience near its 200th anniversary.

2 – quote on p. 227 in the book by [Allhands, J. L.](#), *Gringo Builders*, privately published book (The Clio Press, Iowa City, Iowa, 1931)