

# BHA Banner Newsletter

Brownsville Historical Association

Volume 2, Issue 3

July 2016

## Inside this Issue:

- The Coming of the Railroad 1
- Executive Director 2
- Market Square & City Hall 2
- Coming of the Railroad 3
- Market Square Update 3
- Brownsville Raid 4

## Brownsville Historical Association

1325 E. Washington Street  
Brownsville, Texas 78520  
956.541.5560 Fax: 956.435.0028  
Email: info@brownsvillehistory.org  
www.brownsvillehistory.org

## SPONSORS:



Gilberto Velasquez  
& Associates

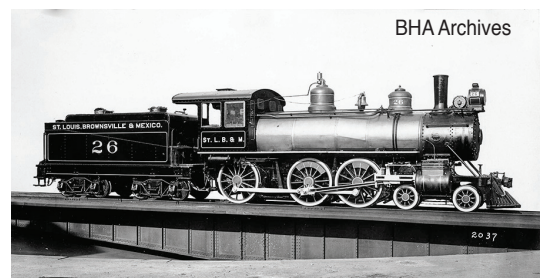


BHA Archives

## The Coming of the Railroad

On July 4, 1904, the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico railway steamed into Brownsville beginning, arguably, the modern era of this community. On that historic date, Brownsville became connected to the outside world by rail via Corpus Christi. Townspeople lined the tracks for miles. Despite recent heavy rains, a parade, complete with floats, fireworks, and a band, greeted railroad officials and dignitaries, including Uriah Lott, president of the railway and the visionary driving force that had made it all happen.

The coming of the railroad to the Rio Grande Valley began the wholesale transformation of the region from a predominately ranching economy to one of farming. To make the sale of lots and parcels of land more attractive, the area began to be referred to as the "Magic" valley, a reference to the rich soil of the area, as well as to the nourishing waters of the Rio Grande, of which one promoter compared to the Nile in Egypt! An aggressive irrigation project, including an intricate canal system, was built to carry the river water throughout the region. New crops were introduced, including citrus, which were in turn transported to distant markets.



Continued on Page 3



## From the Executive Director...

Over the next few months, BHA Board of Directors, staff, volunteers and interns will be busy planning two major events. The first event, scheduled for August 5th and 6th we commemorate the 110th anniversary of the Brownsville Raid. On Friday, August 5th, the BHA is hosting a presentation and walking tour of downtown Brownsville by UTRGV Professor, Jim Mills. The tour is free of charge and open to the public - attendees will follow in the footsteps of where the shots were fired that fateful night. Then, on August 6th, we are hosting a panel discussion, book presentation and dinner at the Alonso building with our guest speaker and historian, Harry Lembeck. I strongly encourage all BHA members to attend these weekend programs and become engaged in our local history.

In September, we partner with the Historic Brownsville Museum in hosting the annual Paella Festival. This year, it will be held at the Laureles Ranch House Museum located in Linear Park. Our fundraiser will raise much needed funds to support BHA/HBM projects, exhibits and various programs. Join us for this fun-spirited paella cook-off competition! Enjoy delicious food and wine, Flamenco dancers and Spanish music. Please call us for sponsorship information or to register a team.

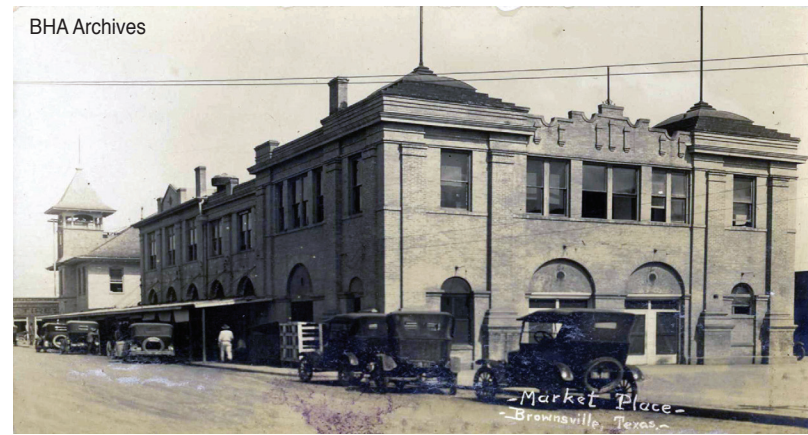
It is with our member's support that the Brownsville Historical Association continues to provide quality programming, a variety of primary resource information for researchers, and fulfill our responsibility to the preservation of historic buildings. I always look forward to seeing you at the events listed on our calendar and we truly appreciate your support for our local history.

Best wishes for and safe and relaxing summer.

**Tara Putegnat**  
*Executive Director*

## Market Square and City Hall

Prior to the move by the Brownsville City Government to the former Federal Courthouse, the City Hall at Market Square was believed to be the longest-serving city hall in Texas. The structure came into existence primarily due to the need for a public market for the sale of meat, produce, etc. On October 31, 1850, the Committee on Public Buildings of the Common Council reported receiving "an offer of dedication of 75 feet in depth on alley portion of lots on block 87," and the Council voted unanimously to accept. This was the site upon which the original building would be constructed. Charles Stillman and William G.



Hale provided a quit claim to the property dated 1871, although others may have provided portions of their own property or rights.

The first version of the market building was a two-story, stucco-over-brick structure with a pitched roof topped by a wooden cupola. A steep flight of 30 steps led from the small front plaza to the second floor City Hall. Tall open arches on all sides of the first floor provided access and ventilation for the market stalls inside. A bell procured from Presbyterian missionary Hiram Chamberlain was installed in the cupola and served to regulate market hours and play a role in community life.

City Hall took a hit during the killer hurricane of 1867 as the cupola was destroyed and the second floor badly damaged. The repaired building emerged with only a half second story. A cupola and new bell were added in 1875. That same bell was restored to the cupola 99 years



BHA Archives



BHA Archives

later after service elsewhere. In 1912 after the overthrow of the Jim Wells regime at City Hall, extensive repairs included restoration of the second floor and construction of the fountain memorial to Jacob Brown.

The present-day version of the building is the result of an “extreme makeover” in 1948. The market function came to an end as the open arches were closed and the first floor became city offices. The exterior took on the mission-revival style appearance that it retains today. It should be noted that the building served at times as home to both fire and police departments as well as the Texas Café.

As the military function of Fort Brown fades from local memories, so too does the role of the market in the lives of Brownsville’s citizens. For many decades the market bell announced the opening of the market at 4:00 am and its



BHA Archives

closing at 10:00 am, reopening at 4:00 pm and closing for the night at 8:00 pm. The bell also rang for police shifts, fire alarms, and to summon the city council. In the dark of night ox carts began to arrive, laden with meat, produce, charcoal, wood and live animals and birds. Soon shoppers began to arrive, exchanging polite greetings and gossip as they entered the ground floor through the open arches. For many years the shoppers were men only.

Meat and vegetables could be purchased for a few pennies per pound in the late 19th century. A dozen eggs

and a gallon of milk cost 2 cents each. Merchants rented stalls and tables by the day; revenues from the market supported several city departments.

When the 1948 remodeling closed the market, it brought to a close a major economic and social function of Brownsville.

The municipal government function continued until 2000, when the city acquired the old Federal Building as the new city hall. Even in “repose” the market square building remained one of Brownsville’s crown jewels. In recent years the Brownsville Historical Association has undertaken the restoration and new utilization of this iconic structure.

Tony Knopp

*BHA Board Member*

## Market Square Update!

As per the City of Brownsville, the Market Square Landscaping project is expected to be completed by February 2017. The landscaping project has left us with limited access to the Market Square building which has forced us to temporarily suspended all future research requests. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause. Questions or concerns can be sent to [info@brownsvillehistory.org](mailto:info@brownsvillehistory.org)

## The Coming of the Railroad, *continued from Page 1*

The rail line to Brownsville and the valley brought in new residents to the area, increasing the demand for a variety of services and boosting the economy. The coming of the railroad marked the end of the declining steamboat era and that of the stagecoach. It was an exciting time for Brownsville and the magic valley.

Jim Mills

*BHA Board Member*

## NEWSLETTER SPONSORSHIP

Your advertising and sponsorships help make our newsletter possible!

Please call us at 956-541-5560, to inquire about newsletter sponsorship ad space.

Sixth page size is  
3.667" w x 3.2" h - (\$100)

**Brownsville Historical Association**  
 1325 E. Washington Street  
 Brownsville, Texas 78520  
 956.541.5560 Fax: 956.435.0028  
 Email: info@brownsvillehistory.org  
 www.brownsvillehistory.org

Non-Profit Org.  
 U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
 Permit No. 47  
 Brownsville, TX

**The Brownsville Historical Association**  
 PRESENTS  
*Brownsville*  
**RAID**



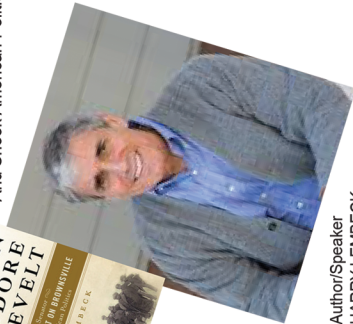
The Brownsville Raid of 1906, also known as the "Brownsville Affair," in Texas resulted in the largest U.S. Army dismissal in the history of the military branch.

On the 110th Anniversary of The Brownsville Raid the Brownsville Historical Association is sponsoring a 2 Day Event to revisit the events of that day.

- **Panel Historic Discussion**
- **Raid Site Tour**
- **Harry Lembeck author of "Taking on Roosevelt" invited to speak.**
- **Book Signing**
- **Event Dinner**



**Taking on Theodore Roosevelt**  
 How One Senator Defied  
 The President On Brownsville  
 And Shook American Politics



Author/Speaker  
 HARRY LEMBECK

SPONSORED BY THE BROWNSVILLE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

**AUGUST 5 & 6, 2016 • THE HISTORICAL ALONSO BUILDING**