

San Luis  
1838 to 1858

### The Saga of Bay Harbor

Bay Harbor Addition is located in an area at the tip of Galveston Island that is rich in historical background and "Folk Lore." I first learned of this from my mother from Oklahoma who spent a weekend with us at a family reunion shortly after we built our "cabana" on Fifth Street about fifteen years ago.

As luck would have it, a squall blew in during the night with high winds, sharp lightening and heavy thunder which reminded her of the years she spend as a young bride whom my father brought from Tennessee to Corpus in the late 1800's. As school teacher, he taught in several localities, and the saga of San Louie Pass was more or less a fact or legend as people chose to believe.

When Mr. Eddie Stobart of the Bay Harbor Improvement Association asked me to write a history of the addition, I felt that especially newcomers would like to know the interesting background of their addition.

In 1823 a number of settlers arrived in Galveston from Illinois, bringing cattle, household equipment and enthusiastically established the settlement of San Louis Pass. However, in the fall they were completely wiped out by a hurricane which left no reminders of the early town.

A Land Development Company from Philadelphia started advertising potentials of the location in 1838 and sold lots on the west end of the Island with the ballyhoo that they would build a port which would rival New Orleans and planned to connect the city with the rich cotton plantations of Brazoria and Matagorda Counties with a railroad and a canal.

Engineers had located a channel that they thought would be ideal, but failed to consider or did not realize the changes that could be caused by tides and storms. The land prospectors advertised the San Luis Pass City as an ideal place to live--practically a "Shangri-la," and sold lots at the Pass and also across the channel in Brazoria County, which was actually only a sand pit. These people looked forward to coming to a "Dream City," and had faith in the future of the town as advertised in the eastern part of the country and Europe.

The city was laid out by the "San Luis Stock Company of Proprietors of the City of San Luis," members of which were land speculators from Philadelphia who believed prospects for the new Republic of Texas were bright enough to warrant such an investment. Texans who had struggled through the war for independence and who had been born in the wilderness of the new country were more than willing to come to the new city to make their homes.

The harbor was considered far superior to Galveston, there being no bar at the entrance and it attained a depth of over thirteen feet even at low tide. "This harbor is unquestionably the best on the coast of Texas and perhaps superior to any on the Gulf. It has been examined by officers appointed by the government and vessels drawing ten feet of water may approach to within ten feet of the shore," was chronicled in the Topographical Description of Texas, published in 1840, which further stated that it was a "safe commodius harbor."

People flocked to the new city from the U.S. and many from Europe and in a few years it attained a growth of 2000 people with a 1000 foot wharf, a number of warehouses, several hotels, and two newspapers-- the San Luis Advocate and the Times. Shipping news reported as many as eight or ten ships in the harbor at one time. Vessels brought necessities and luxuries from Eastern U. S. and from Europe to the town and the affluent plantation owners in Brazoria and the surrounding counties, then loaded with cotton and other raw products for the return voyage. Small coastwise boats carried freight and passengers between the new city and Galveston. There were vessels from Liverpool, London and Hamburg, though the majority were from the U.S.

The first cotton compress in Texas was set up on the wharf by a Mr. Brown. It was equipped with a huge wooden screw and operated by mule power. The Advocate became very popular, lasting as long as the town. Mention of this paper was made in the Houston Telegraph and the Texas Register in 1840: "We were very agreeably surprised a few days since to notice among our exchange papers a new journal styled the "San Luis Pass Advocate," which in dimensions and quality of reading matter exceeds any of our excahnge papers within the republic."

To this new coastal town came many professional men of eminence among which were Drs. Richardson and Smith who stood high in their profession-- Dr. Smith wrote in Paris, France in 1832, a work on the "Cholera Spasmodica" and Dr. Richardson was a successful surgeon of which the country could boast, according to the Advocate. The two doctors edited a quarterly medical journal.

In 1836 the Follet family, originally from Boston, came to the New Republic from New Orleans and settled near San Luis Pass. For over fifty years they lived in this section and managed what was known as "Half-Way House." This was a hotel for travelers and mail carriers, and the two and one-half story building contained 15 rooms, was built of heavy timbers, and surrounded by beautiful grounds of flower and vegetable gardens. Oleanders grew so high they could be gathered from the third balcony. Roads were mere trails, there were few bridges over bayous, and traveling was difficult and dangerous so this resting place was much in demand. The country was swarming with outlaws and it was not uncommon for a man to permanently disappear in going from one town to another. Alexander Follet protected the lives of many travelers, often escorting them to their destination.

Hotel -

The first steamboat ever built in Texas was constructed by Bradbury Follet at San Luis Pass. It was small and crude, but sufficiently seaworthy for trips to Galveston and other points along the coast. Bradbury Hansbury was the captain and he also bore the dubious name of "La Fitte," which instantly arouses in our minds the idea that he was probably the famous, or infamous, pirate Jean LaFitte who sailed the Texas coast and many other places capturing and robbing vessels of their valuables, many of which are supposed to be buried on the Texas coast.

Alexander Follet also ran the ferry across San Luis Pass for many years, and operated a business where, it was advertised in a Columbia paper in 1859, "Persons traveling the Beach route to Galveston from Brazoria or adjoining counties can always find buggies to carry them to Galveston."

A Mail Route from the city of Galveston to the towns of Matagorda, and Texana by the way of Velasco and Quintana was established in 1838-- once every two weeks. Mail was carried by hack along the beach, crossing San Luis Pass by ferry. For many years a regular stage coach line carried passengers and mail between Galveston and San Luis, a day's journey, which was broken by lunch at Half-Way House. Many immigrants took this stage to find their future homes at San Luis and on westward along the coast or inland. During the Civil War the Inn was occupied by Confederate soldiers as the city of Galveston was blockaded, and this was the Confederate headquarters. Blockade runners were often forced to unload part of their cargo to outrun their enemies, and as this floated to the shore people of all ages were wading out up to their necks to get the valuable cargo of canned goods and clothing. They spread the clothing along the beach to dry and these supplies enabled them to survive.

However, the boom in San Luis turned into gloom as storms took their toll of buildings and lives. Residents discovered that the famous Pass so greatly advertised by the land developers was a treacherous waterway and it remains true to this date. Among the facts are that the rich plantations of Brazoria County and the fabulous amount of cotton they produced helped support the trade with Europe and Eastern U.S.A., and the Follet "Hotel Complex" boasted a lively trade, and even had a family burial ground that may have been washed away by hurricanes or yet remains to be discovered.

1858  
Due to ravages of the hurricanes, illness and discouragement, people began moving to more flourishing towns among which were Galveston, Indianola and other South Texas towns that had more to offer. The houses and business establishments were left to the fury of the storms, but the little deserted village of San Luis remained standing until 1858 when it was almost wiped out and no attempts were made to rebuild it as the enthusiastic dream had faded.

The fate of San Luis was common to boom towns in the early days of the Texas Republic. Among other cities for whose future great things were predicted and which were extensively exploited in the newspapers were Swartout on the Trinity River some distance above Liberty; Edwards Point located across the bay from Galveston, and Liverpool on Chocolate Bayou in Brazoria County.

The Pass used cisterns for water, which probably caused many deaths when people drank it without boiling, and a huge 60-foot cistern built of brick and used to furnish water for local businesses stood for many years as a memorial to the city.

Many of the well known names in Galveston annals belonged to residents of San Luis. The Folletts were among the few who did not leave and some of the family descendents still live in Brazoria County and in Galveston. Mr. Lobenstein operated a wayside Inn at the end of the Island where travelers could stay the night or get refreshments while waiting for the ferry, and later moved to Galveston as did many others.

Conceived with high hopes and bright dreams, there must be many facts of the almost forgotten city that we have failed to discover, but had it not been for the fact that my mother spent one stormy night at our cabin it is possible that we would never have known this part of our historical background.

The majestic Vacek Bridge which now spans the pass could be a fitting memorial to the brave, hopeful pioneers who lost their lives in a futile attempt to make their homes in the area.

Embryonic stages of the Bay Harbor Addition began to form when Harry Melcer made a down payment of \$6,000 on 220 acres on West Beach of Galveston Island to C. E. Nelson and other parties Sept. 22, 1947. The said 220 acres located in Division 1 of Survey 13 of the Hall Jones Subdivision on the westerly part of Galveston Isle of Abstract No. 121, Patent No. 1, Volume 1, dated Nov. 28, 1840. Mr. R. E. Smith paid \$30,000 May 22, 1954, making the total cost of \$36,000 for the 220 acres.

Dissatisfied with poor roads--sometimes impassible--drainage, and insufficient water supply, Bay Harbor Property Owners met June 23, 1960 in Houston and appointed a committee to meet with Messers Galceran, Thornton and Melcer (original owners) to determine what they would do, if anything, about the poor water supply and promises made to improve roads and drainage.

Members of the committee were J. T. Duncan, president; O. J. Tauber, C. L. Walser, R. L. Ingram, E. P. Cekosky, and O. R. Sherman.

After a meeting with the above owners and developers of Bay Harbor, E. H. Thornton Jr. made the following statement in a letter to Mr. Duncan: "It was my impression that it was thoroughly understood by all in attendance that neither Mr. Galceran, Melcer, Bay Harbor, Inc., Bay Harbor Utilities Co., Inc., nor myself felt that we had any responsibility, either singly or collectively, in connection with paving of streets, improving drainage, maintenance of harbor and channel or the installation of a more adequate water system."

After this denial of any responsibility to the residents, the committee hired Frank J. Metyko, a consulting engineer from Houston, to make a survey of the water system and determine the proper drainage, and voted to

Quote;

Carla - Sept, 3, 1961

5

levy 1/8¢ per square foot as payment on the maintenance fund by each property owner. E. B. Krohn from the U. S. Engineers in Galveston was hired to set the grades for the roads and ditches. Property owners on 1st, 2nd and 3rd Streets were asked to donate a five foot easement on the front of their lots in order to widen these streets from 20 to 30 feet. The Bay Harbor Improvement Assn., Inc., was organized obtaining a charter from the State of Texas as a non-profit organization, and also permission to construct new roads and properly maintain them with shell. Other existing streets, 4th and 5th were originally 30 feet wide.

1960

At this time Board Members were C. L. Walser, E. P. Cekosky, P. J. Christensen, L. W. Robbie, Jim Bettis, O. J. Tauber and W. E. Mannix.

When Bay Harbor was devastated by Hurricane Carla most property owners suffered severe losses. The storm hit Sunday and it was not until the following Saturday that roads were open to the addition. There was a road block at 61st Street turn-off and everyone had to show the title to his property before coming on. The beach and road were littered with debris, huge trees etc., and the route was sometimes on the beach and at times on the pavement where it wasn't washed out or covered with debris.

At Bay Harbor sand was washed in, there were sand dunes, roads were gone and one made the way to his residence "cross country." Handsome cabins on the waterfront and some on first street that were not on piling were gone. Roofs were damaged and everything under the cabins was gone-- bedding and furniture were soaked, refrigerators were opened and meats or seafood in freezers were wriggling with maggots. The entire scene was appalling. Carla lashed in on the Island September 3, 1961.

It was a colossal task, but roads were reconstructed, drainage ditches dug on each side and property owners were asked to furnish their own culverts across them to their property.

O. J. Tauber, president, cited accomplishments of the Improvement Association at a Property Owner's meeting in Bill Bennett's Grill, Houston, September 26, 1962, then turned the meeting over to Charles N. Royds who called for a standing ovation to the committee which had donated time, labor, and money to correcting the ravages of "Carla," with maintenance funds paid by a greater part of the property owners. They could ask for no help from the County as this would automatically open the addition to the public. It was voted to issue "Bay Harbor" stickers for autos of stockholders, to campaign for ALL property owners to pay the maintenance fee, to construct a launching ramp of concrete and install channel markers, restrict swimming to certain areas to avoid accidents, and establish a regular program of road maintenance as the First Priority.

Dredging the turning basin and building a bulkhead was approved as a second priority as was fencing and shelling the 200 by 200 foot area designated at the turning basin for Property Owners' Parking.

E. I. Walker, O. R. Sherman and G. C. Grimes were elected to the Board of Directors. Other officers on the 1963 Board were C. N. Royds, president; J. W. Bettis Jr., vice-president; J. T. Duncan, vice-president, Mrs. Sarah Ingledue, secretary, and Y. L. Salsgiver, treasurer.

O. J. Tauber and C. L. Walser were retained as advisors. Maintenance was placed at  $1/4\phi$  of one cent per square foot. It was also voted to place gates at the entrance to each street.

In 1963 the general meeting was held at Bill Bennett's Grill, Houston. The improvements voted in 1962 were carried out and 5th Street was shelled after grading. All gates were locked during weekdays and opened during weekends to keep intruders out and cut down on pilfering. D. E. Gosnell replaced E. I. Walker who resigned from the Board, and Ray Sanford was named to the Advisory Committee. Shell "humps" were placed on some streets approximately every 200 feet to prevent speeding. The gate to Second Street was left open and those entering were asked to check with Mrs. Rounsavall who lived at the entrance. A list of those who had not paid maintenance assessments was published, and despite requests and gripes from residents there was no improvement in the water situation.

Street maintenance, and keeping the launching ramp and channel markers were continued in 1964. Officers were Robert A. Neath, president; E. F. Horton and A. E. Stein, vice-presidents; Mrs. Harry Touchy, secretary; Polly Lindinger, treasurer, and V. E. Kleas, Joe Lindinger, and Harold R. Wilkinson Jr., Directors.

The assessment was lowered to  $1/8\phi$  of one cent per square foot in 1965 and improvements maintained. Officers were Milam C. Rowold, president; V. E. Kleas and Dalton, vice-presidents; Mrs. L. A. Miller, secretary; Mrs. Jan King, treasurer, and H. E. Hyerdahl, Charles L. King Jr., and Ray C. Lewis, Directors. The right to drill private wells to alleviate the water shortage was obtained by O. J. Tauber.

The maintenance assessment was again set at  $1/8\phi$  of one cent per square foot in 1966. Officers were Milam C. Rowold, president, Mrs. Lyle Oelfke, secretary, Ed. F. Heyne Jr., treasurer, and Milam C. Rowold, Charles L. King, and Ralph H. Settles, Directors. To make it easier to police the addition and cut down traffic into Bay Harbor resulting from opening the San Luis Pass Bridge, it was voted to lock the gates of all but 2nd Street, and keys would be obtained from Earl Galceran who has kept a watchful eye on the addition for many years.

Assessments collected improved in 1967 with more residents responding to help improve the addition for the good of all. O. J. Tauber announced that he planned to purchase 14 acres on the northeast bay area which would improve the marshy land, and would dredge several canals and establish a road running north and south for accessibility for wade fishing, and complete bulkheading of frontage to bay. Officers were voted a 2-year term and on the Board for 1967 were Joe Lindinger, H. H. Dancy Jr., Lyle Oelfke, G. D. Hays, and O. J. Tauber. The continuous struggle to obtain a sufficient water supply from the Water Co. was still underway!!

As a result of the 1968 meeting it was established that Bay Harbor Inc. would issue a statement of assessment to each new buyer; Bay Harbor, Inc. owns all roads in the addition. Any work on roads such as shelling,

Opening the San Luis Pass Bridge  
1965 for 1966

1967

drainage, cleaning ditches or installation of culverts must be cleared with them; the boat basin belongs to Bay Harbor, Inc. Any docks or wharves constructed must be approved by them. Officers were H. A. Hillendahl, president; V. E. Kleas and R. A. Neath, vice-presidents; Frank Redfield, vice-president and treasurer, and Brenda J. Holub, secretary.

The 1969 meeting was held at the Robertson Truck Lines Bay House and due to complaints about the drinking water a letter was read from the Galveston County Cities Health Department stating: "We have taken a monthly bacteriological sample of water from Bay Harbor since November 1968 and have found only one sample unsatisfactory."

Also in 1969, O. J. Tauber volunteered to have his surveyor survey the parking lot after discussion of the space and the lease obtained in 1957 for 25 years. President Hillendahl reported that Earl Galceran had promised to finish bulkheading at the boat basin started in 1968 and have a dragline dig out the boat basin. Assessment collections had improved, enabling this work to be done. New directors elected were Thad Schultz, Mrs. Thelma Maresh, and Yale Salsgiver. A "pick-up and clean-up" campaign was started for the beach and parking lot.

Officers for 1970 were: Yale Salsgiver, president; vice-presidents were H. A. Hillendahl, T. C. Harris, Mrs. Thelma Maresh, Pete Powell, and Thad Schultz. Frank Redfield was treasurer, and Brenda Howell, secretary. The boat basin and pier were constructed, after dredging the basin at a cost of \$2300.00, using materials donated by O. J. Tauber and a \$500 donation given by the Robertson Tank Co., through Mr. Redfield. Repairs were made to the streets, especially 1st, and the directors learned that Bay Harbor, Inc. would like to sell the waterworks.

In 1971 the Association decided to change the Charter to make it a non-profit organization, thus saving approximately \$500 per year in taxes. O. J. Tauber had his lawyer investigate the possibility and found that it could not be done until the end of the fiscal year. Mrs. Howell reported that out of a total of 187 assessments in 1970, 131 were paid which made a 71% collection. A committee was named to pursue a study with the possibility of purchasing the water works, and assessment of 1/6¢ per square foot was voted by members of the Association.

In further business, George D. "Gabby" Hays informed stockholders that Texas City was donating a pumper truck to the area as an All West End Island Project, and a volunteer fire department would be established, giving the first fire protection to the section. Hays also asked for volunteers, weekend or otherwise, to help man the truck.

New officers named to the Board of Directors were Robert "Bob" Neath, D. E. "Eddy" Gosnell, O. J. Tauber, E. I. Walker, and A. C. English. Thad Schultz was named president.

Harry Melcer discussed the water situation at a meeting in the Bay Harbor home of O. J. Tauber, September 4, 1971. O. J. Tauber, chairman of the Water System Committee, reported that the Association had 2 possibilities to pursue other than sue the Utility Company: Buy Bay Harbor Utility Co., or

convert to a water district. After discussion Bob Neath moved that E. P. "CY" Cekosky be added to the Water System Committee, and "Gabby" Hays moved that stockholders give a vote of confidence to the Committee to approve the solution to which they would arrive, and the motion carried. A. C. English, Jim Lingo, and Phyliss McQueen attended the Board of Director's meeting as members or special guests. The Board of Directors, Committee Members and other interested property owners gave much volunteer work and time to the rather hectic meetings and decisions which had to be made. Jim Lingo worked with the Board to help check the water well and other details.

Highlight of the Association meeting May 27, 1972 were that the Association as authorized at the 1971 meeting had come to the conclusion that purchase of the Waterworks was the best solution to the water crisis and had been made at a cost of \$18,900. In order to meet payments, water bills were set at \$75.00 per year, and new connections were set at \$75.00. Ben Blum, the Association's attorney, explained that in order to become a non-profit organization the Association would surrender stock issued and pay a membership fee of \$10, thus avoiding the annual \$500 tax. The Bay Harbor Improvement Association, Inc. was dissolved and a non-profit corporation formed in the name of Bay Harbor Improvement Association, Inc. with the present directors being the incorporators to execute the new charter and remain as directors for the first year of the operation. One of the rules to be followed was that "no excessive water use be made such as lawn waterings during periods of high occupancy such as summer weekends and holidays. L. W. Robbie was elected president, George Hays Mike Muskrella and O. B. Hallcom were voted into office for two year terms and E. A. Stobart to replace E. I. Walker for a one year term. The need for security checks and the fact that many vacant lots were in need of mowing was brought to the attention of the members.

Members of the Association Board of Directors, Officers, Committee Members and all who have contributed time, money, and energy to improve and maintain the addition, many of whom have not been mentioned in this report due to lack of complete records are worthy of the deepest gratitude of residents of the addition.

They have been faced with the continuous problems of keeping roads passable with grading, shelling, cleaning ditches, lack of sufficient water supply, cleaning or dredging the boat basin, and building and maintaining the launching ramp, bulkheading the boat basin, obtaining the parking lot adjacent to it, installing channel markers and lighting the area, policing the addition to keep intruders at a minimum and prevent pilfering, clean-up campaigns, maintaining a more or less amicable relationship with the original owners, and above all increasing assessment collections from property owners as they become aware of what the Association is doing for them.

Summary of 1960-1973