

Old Town Brazoria played many important roles in early Texas history. The port of Brazoria was vital to the colony; the **Mills brothers** of Brazoria acted as bankers and operated a postal service for the colony long before those services were officially established; and by April 1832, Brazoria was the capitol a large area known as the **Municipality of Brazoria**.

Early Brazoria was also home to many people who placed important roles in Texas history. **John Austin**, founder and first *Alcade* of the Municipality of Brazoria; **Henry Smith**, educator, provisional governor and first Secretary of the Treasury for the Republic of Texas; **Jane Long**, "The Mother of Texas"; **Dr. Anson Jones**, the last President of the Republic of Texas all lived in Brazoria. When the eccentric and colorful **Brit Bailey**, a "Texas Sooner," who became one of South Texas's best known ghosts, went to town—that town was Brazoria. At the time of his death, Bailey was building a home in Brazoria.

Stephen F. Austin considered his sister's plantation at **Peach Point** near Brazoria home and many of his letters indicate he intended to settle there. **Col. James Fannin** lived on the *San Bernard* four miles west of Brazoria. Travis was a frequent visitor and many other heroes of the Texas Revolution lived in or near Brazoria.

As the home to many "*War Dogs*" and "*Crazeorians*", Brazoria played a pivotal role in the history of Texas. "The War Dogs" frequently gathered at Jane Long's boarding house on Main Street to plot Revolution. An outbuilding at the boarding house hid gunpowder and the cannons used in the **Battle of Velasco** which was fought—and won—three years before the Revolution officially began!

Brazoria was founded in 1828 by **John Austin**, a survivor of the **Long Expedition's** unsuccessful attempt to free Texas from Spanish rule in 1819 and 1820. On 4 March 1829, **Stephen F. Austin**, who would come to be known as the Father of Texas, wrote in a letter to **W. C. Carr**:

Brother James has a son a few weeks since, he lives at a new town we have laid off on the Brasos river [sic] 15 miles from its mouth called Brasoria, a name which I gave it for the single reason that I know of none like it in the world. I shall remove below myself as soon as I can get a divorce from colonizing perplexities...I am weary of them, a Small farm, a moderate independence and a wife would render my life much happier...

The name *Brasoria* (later spelled *Brazoria*) was obviously derived from Brazos, the river that forms its eastern boundary. When I was growing up in Brazoria I was told that Brazoria was named for the Brazos River—I was never told why or by whom it was named. When I discovered the passage cited above, I immediately looked up Brazoria in the largest World Atlas I could find. Austin was right. While there were many entries for almost every name in the atlas, Brazoria, Texas and Brazoria County, Texas were the only entries for Brazoria in the entire book.

Brazoria's history is as unique as its name. Navigation of the Brazos to S.F. Austin's capitol, *San Felipe de Austin* was usually impossible, so Brazoria quickly became the major port for Austin's colony. By the early 1830's Brazoria was a bustling center of commerce—according to some sources it was the busiest port west of New Orleans. As such it served the entire colony in many ways. It provided mail service to the colony. It had the colony's first bank and first insurance agency. In *THE AUSTIN PAPERS*, S. F. Austin mentions a cotton gin his brother **James "Brown" Austin** was building in 1826. Although the first newspaper in Austin's Colony was printed in San Felipe, by 1831 that paper had moved to Brazoria. In Brazoria the paper was called the *Texas Gazette and*

Brazoria Commercial Advertiser. Accounts by early Texas visitors **Mary Austin Holley** and an anonymous visitor (thought to be **Fiske**) indicate that by 1831 Brazoria had a blacksmith, a gunsmith, carpenters, masons, two doctors, several lawyers, a shoe cobbler, a boot and saddle cobbler and a weaver. There was a tannery a bit downwind of town, two general mercantile stores, a steamboat landing and a hardware store. Brazoria did not impress Stephen F. Austin's European cousin, but it was a full service town.

With the background its founder, **John Austin**, it is not surprising that Brazoria became the home of many leaders of the Texas Revolution. When the Mexican government decided to replace the 1824 constitution, **Henry Smith** and **Sam Houston** formed the "*War Party*" to seek independence from Mexico. They and other "War Party" Colonists were known as "*War Dogs*" or "*Crazeorians*" for their actions. Although I have not seen direct evidence that "Crazeorians" is a play on Brazorians, the similarities are striking. Brazoria was certainly the "*hotbed of discontent*" in which the Texas Revolution was conceived. At a meeting in Brazoria on June 20, 1832 approximately 100 men signed up to form a militia; two days later they were on their way to *Anahauc*. On June 26, they met unexpected resistance at *Fort Velasco* where they fought and defeated the Mexican troops. **John Austin** was the leader of the group. Many of the planners and fighters of this battle and many other battles of the *Texas War for Independence* were Brazorians.

The first Masonic Lodge in Texas was organized in Brazoria. This was practically an act of treason under Mexican rule, but in March of 1835 (some sources say December of 1834) **John A. Wharton, Asa Brigham, James A. E. Phelps, Alexander Russell, Anson Jones, and J. P. Caldwell** met near Brazoria to petition the *Grand Lodge of Louisiana* for a dispensation to form a Lodge. [The oak tree where these conspirators met has survived many hurricanes and two lightning strikes. It is showing its age, but buttressed by artificial supports, it still stands in the **Masonic Park** in Old Town Brazoria. The **Masonic Oak** is one of few tangible reminders of Brazoria's early history.

Hurricanes, floods, termites, apathy and even dynamite have destroyed most tangible reminders of Brazoria's rich history. Without those tangible reminders, it seems to have been easy for historians to write Brazoria out of the history books. This is totally unacceptable. Today we have an opportunity to build a prosperous future by recapturing Brazoria's past and ensuring that Brazoria is written back into the history books-- especially those that are used in our classrooms.

Jane Long's Tavern

Jane Herbert Wilkinson Long (1798-1880) who is called “the mother of Texas” opened a boarding house at this site in 1832. Jane Wilkinson married physician and soldier **James Long** (c. 1793-1822) in Natchez in 1815. In 1819 Jane first followed her husband to Texas where he was involved in the ill-fated **Long Expedition**, an early attempt to establish a Republic in the then Spanish territory. By 1820 the Longs were headquartered at a rough fort at Point Bolivar. Jane remained at the fort well into 1822 enduring near isolation, cold and many hardships awaiting news of her husband. Her 3rd Daughter, **Mary James**, was born on 21 December 1821. The birth was unassisted as her maid was extremely ill and they were alone. She finally left Bolivar in 1822. After learning her husband had been killed, Jane left Texas briefly with Mary James, her one surviving child. After her return to Texas, Jane was granted land in Austin's colony.

Long’s boarding house was originally a tavern managed by **William T. Austin**. As the busy port of Brazoria grew, Long’s tavern became a popular center of Anglo political activity. Here Jane hosted a benefit for **Stephen F. Austin** in 1835, upon his release from Mexican prison, and a ball in October, 1836. [President Sam Houston](#) and the adjourned Congress attended this ball. Jane Long moved to Richmond in 1837 to operate a popular hotel there. Richmond is located on part of the league of land she was granted in 1827.

John Austin’s Home site

John Austin, the founder of Brazoria, was a member of **Long's Expedition** in 1819. He was a pioneer settler in Austin's colony, **Alcade** of Brazoria, 1832, Commander at the Battle of Velasco, signer of the [Turtle Bayou Resolutions](#). He died in the cholera epidemic of 1833.

Red, the Texas Longhorn

The **Texas Longhorn** is a breed of [cattle](#) known for its characteristic horns, which can extend to 7 feet (2.1 m) tip to tip for steers and exceptional cows, and 36 to 80 inches (0.91 to 2.0 m) tip to tip for bulls. Horns can have a slight upward turn at their tips or even triple twist.

The early Texas settlers obtained [feral](#) Mexican cattle from the borderland between the [Nueces River](#) and the [Rio Grande](#) and mixed them with their own eastern cattle. The result was a tough, rangy animal with long legs and long horns extending up to seven feet. Although this interbreeding was of little consequence to the makeup of a Longhorn, it did manage to alter color. The varieties of color ranged from blue through hues of "yellow"; browns, black, red and white. The colors range from cleanly bright to dirty-speckled.

Masonic Oak

On March 1, 1835, **Anson Jones**, who was to become the first Grand Master of *Texas Masonic lodges* and the last President of the Republic of Texas; **John A. Wharton; Asa Brigham; James A. E. Phelps; Alexander Russell;** and **J. P. Caldwell** met secretly beneath this tree to petition the *Grand Lodge of Louisiana* for a dispensation to form a Lodge. Secrecy was important because the Masonic Order was outlawed by the Mexican government.

The group became bolder and by December they had secured a meeting room in the courthouse. On December 27, 1835, **Dr. Anson Jones** was elected *Master of Holland Lodge #1*. When the Mexican forces marched through Brazoria on April 22, 1836, they spared most of the town, but destroyed all records, books and jewels of the Masonic Order. The Charter, however, had just been delivered to Dr. Jones. It was carried in his saddlebags at the *Battle of San Jacinto*. Many of the leaders of the Texas Battle for Independence were Masons and the Masonic Oak is still revered by Texas Masons

The oak tree where these conspirators met has survived many hurricanes and two lightning strikes. It is showing its age, but buttressed by artificial supports, it still stands here in the Masonic Park of Old Town Brazoria. The Masonic Oak is one of few tangible reminders of Brazoria's early history.

Brazoria Courthouse Square

In 1832 Brazoria became the capital of the *Municipality of Brazoria* which included an area much larger than present day Brazoria County. Under the Republic and later the state of Texas, Brazoria served as the county seat of Brazoria County. Until 1838 Brazoria County included the mainland portion of what is now Galveston County and parts of what are now Matagorda and Fort Bend Counties. Even now Brazoria County is larger than the state of Rhode Island.

Around 1894 a group of land speculators offered land "in a more central location" for a new courthouse. They called for an election. Alvin, hoping for an eventual division of the county that could result in Alvin's becoming the new county's county seat, voted against the move from Brazoria and Brazoria remained the county seat. The elated citizens of Brazoria hired **J. Riley Gordon** to build a magnificent courthouse - which cost a reported \$90,000. The idea was that with such a fine, attention-getting courthouse - Brazoria would retain its status as county seat.

In 1896 the promoters called for a new election and this time Brazoria lost. The seat of government, and with it many of Brazoria's most prominent citizens, moved to the new town of *Angleton*. Many of Brazoria's old-timers claim Angleton felt threatened by the existence of the Brazoria Courthouse and always objected to any proposed use. It was used briefly as a school. It was even used as a skating rink, but the beautiful building fell into disrepair. When it was damaged in the 1932 storm, the commissioner's court ordered it destroyed. After futile attempts to destroy it by more conventional means, it was dynamited in 1934.

Old Brazoria Cemetery

Site given to Brazoria in 1827 by government of Mexico as cemetery for Catholics and thus was open to all residents as all Austin Colony settlers were required to be Catholics! Many colonists, however, did not take this requirement seriously. By 1930, this cemetery was full, and new cemetery opened. Most pioneer families have members buried here.

Dr. Sofie Herzog

Dr. Sofie Herzog was probably the first woman surgeon in Texas; and, according to newspaper articles from her time, the first woman Railroad Surgeon in the world.

Sofie Delia or **Deligath** was born on February 4, 1846. Tradition gives her birthplace as Vienna, Austria. At the age of 14 she married **Dr. Moritz Herzog** and over the next twenty years she gave birth to 15 children including three sets of twins. Eight of the children died in Vienna and only four of her 15 children survived her.

Dr. Sofie received some of her medical training in Vienna and some in New York. She practiced medicine in Hoboken, NJ for 9 years before following her youngest surviving daughter, **Elfriede**, to Brazoria in the mid 1890's. Dr. Sofie practiced medicine in Brazoria for almost 30 years and the lady doctor with her split skirt, mounted deer heads and rattlesnake skins, stuffed alligators and bullet necklace became a legend in the area.

By the time that the *St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad* began construction through Brazoria (around 1905), Dr. Sofie had gained the respect of the people in her adopted town. She was often called to treat injured workers. In 1907 the line asked the local officials to hire a surgeon, so they hired Dr. Sofie. When the executives back East discovered that their new Chief Surgeon was a woman, they asked for her resignation. Dr. Sofie refused. "I expect no concessions because of my gender," she told them. "If ever I fail to do the job, you can fire me." She kept the job until she suffered a paralytic stroke on February 1, 1925--just 3 days before her 79th birthday. She died on July 21, 1925 and was buried in the Catholic Cemetery in Old Town Brazoria. At her request, her bullet necklace was buried with her.

Old Union Church Parsonage

The house was part of a hotel in **Velasco**. It was badly damaged in a storm before the 1900's. Like several buildings in Old Town Brazoria, it was brought from Velasco on a barge on the Brazos River. The house was pulled up the steep bank of the river by horse and mule and was used as a Union Church parsonage for years. This house was most recently known to many of us as "*Bro. Stewart's house*".

Brazoria Triple Truss Bridge

In 1912 a bridge was built connecting Brazoria and East Columbia. In the 1930's this wood-decked bridge fell into the Brazos. Due to politics, this bridge was not replaced until 1939. The large circular structure upstream from the 1939 bridge is all that remains of this first bridge. Local labor, county bond money, and funds from the Public Works Administration were used to build the new bridge. After it was built, commissioners discovered that the WPA money used was only available for Farm to Market Roads! The Farm to Market Road program had not yet been implemented in Texas. After deliberations, Commissioners and government officials reached an agreement and the first *Farm to Market Road* in Texas, **FM 521**, was built.

Before FM 521 was built, the 1124' concrete and steel bridge with three Parker through truss spans was called the "*Bridge to Nowhere*". This 1939 bridge is supported by concrete-filled caisson and concrete pilings and approaches composed of 14 concrete-supported I-beams with steel guard rails. The bridge is an important example of its style. BHF and other groups are working with Commissioner's Court and hope to save the bridge and convert it and the surrounding area into a park now that the third bridge has opened.

Mills Brothers (later Smith Brothers) Mercantile 1831

Andrew and **Robert Mills** were in business in Brazoria before 1832. The brothers operated a mercantile business and bank; provided postal services for the colony; and had the first insurance agency in Texas. Their business was located at the corner of Market and Main. The back of the building was built over the river and served as a steamboat landing.

During the Texas Revolution the Mills brothers supplied provisions and money for the Texas army. While their worth once exceeded \$5 million, they were bankrupted by the Civil War.

Later **Smith Brothers Mercantile** was located at this site for a number of years, but moved to the new town after the railroad was built.