



# In Search of El dorado

A daily journal of my travels and adventures in my.....Search for Eldorado

## Hello to Family & Friends



A little before 9:00 this morning, the sun came out. Yeah! It was sunny all day and hit 83 degrees.

Port Lavaca has a couple sights to see, the first being the Half Moon Reef Lighthouse to the left. At first I thought this is just what was salvaged, normally lighthouses are tall, but this is the entire lighthouse. It was 100% over water on stilts and still 70 feet high.

It is now on the grounds of the visitor center – closed due to Covid.



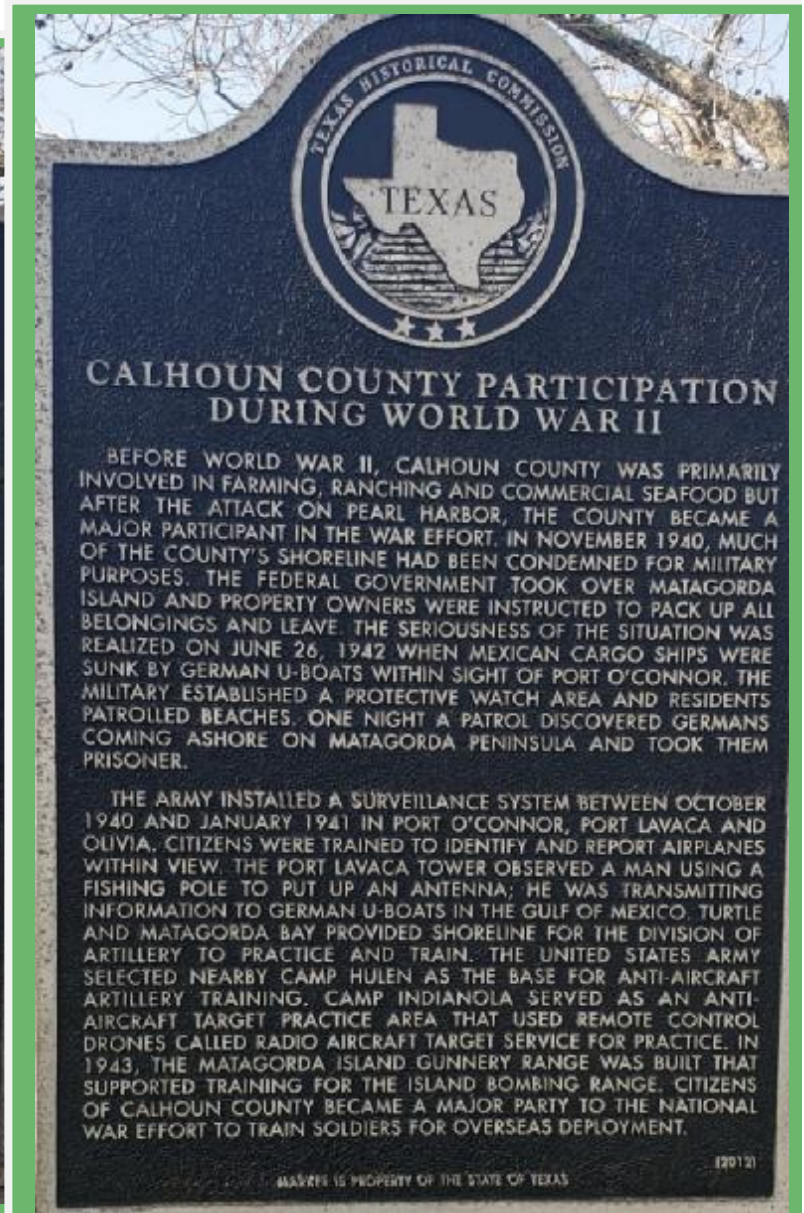
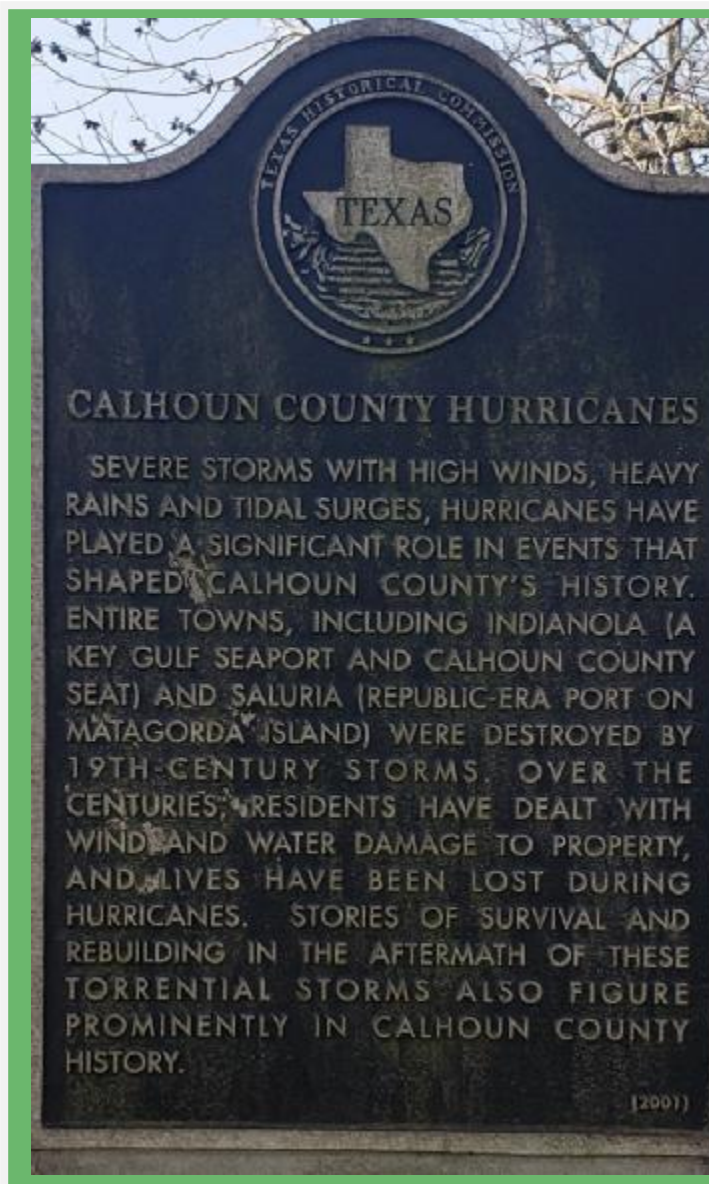
One of the lighthouse keepers raised 5 children in this structure. Children were not allowed, so when supplies were brought out twice a year, or someone visited, the children would hide.





I arrived at the museum about 10 minutes early, so I decided to walk over to the courthouse. As I drove past I'd noticed some info plaques out front and wanted to see if they were interesting enough to show you.

Two of them were. I was surprised to find out that Germans were captured on American soil.





## *The La Salle Odyssey*



Yes, I know it's probably not normal procedure, and I would like to think that it was my magnetic personality, it was probably because I was the only one in the place, but Vicki was with me through the entire museum, giving me all sorts of information not available on the placard next to whatever I was looking at. My own personal docent. All my questions were answered on the spot. This made for a wonderful museum experience.

As you can see, the La Salle shipwreck figures prominently in this museum also, read the info below to find out why.

## *The La Salle Odyssey*

*René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, established a colony on the Texas Gulf Coast in 1685. Although his venture ultimately failed, La Salle forever altered the balance of power in North America between the colonial empires of France and Spain. The exhibits in this museum focus on the rivalry between the Spanish and French for Texas.*

*As Part of the La Salle Odyssey, the Calhoun County Museum shares the story of the La Salle Odyssey with six other museums in Bay City, Corpus Christi, Edna, Palacios, Rockport and Victoria. Each of these museums tells a different part of the La Salle story, so be sure to follow La Salle's Odyssey from museum to museum.*



## European Claims to the New World

Based upon Christopher Columbus' historic voyage of discovery in 1492 and the subsequent conquest of Mexico by Cortez in 1521, Spain claimed much of North America. By the 1540s, two separate Spanish expeditions into what is now the southern part of the United States solidified that claim. However, because the expeditions failed to discover gold and silver mines, as they had in Mexico, the Spanish did little to settle the interior of North America until they felt threatened by a French intrusion led by La Salle in 1684.

French fishermen began making annual trips to Newfoundland in 1500. Quebec was founded in 1608, and from there French fur traders worked west into the interior. Louis Joliet explored the upper reaches of the Mississippi in 1672, and in 1682, La Salle ventured down the river to discover its mouth and lay claim to the vast region of its watershed, a land he named Louisiana.

## European Contact with Texas

In 1519 Alonso Álvarez de Pineda commanded a Spanish expedition that sailed along the Gulf of Mexico coastline from Florida to Vera Cruz, becoming the first Europeans to explore and map the Texas coastline. However, his report made no description and it is doubtful that he explored any of the interior of Texas. That task fell to Cabeza de Vaca and three companions, who were shipwrecked in 1528, probably on Galveston Island. The four survivors wandered through Texas before reaching a Spanish outpost in Mexico. Their tales of golden cities led directly to the Coronado Expedition into Arizona, New Mexico and Texas in 1540-41.

Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, immigrated to Canada in 1666, discovered the Ohio River, and later explored the western Great Lakes before returning to canoe down the Mississippi in 1682. On April 7, 1682, he claimed all of the lands drained by the river for France and named the territory Louisiana in honor of King Louis XIV.





These pots were featured in the documentary I watched at City By The Sea, so it was neat to see one of them in person. There were several other artifacts, but none I found as interesting as this one.

Below - Gee, look what I found again. This is a very nice handmade model. This is where Vicki told me about the 5 children.



**SMALL COOKING POT, French, 17<sup>th</sup> century**  
Brass

The brass cooking pot was found as part of a box found in the starboard side of the main hold. The box contained several items, including candlesticks, a colander, three kettles, and a ladle.



**Mineral/Soda Bottle**

Circa 1870's, this uniquely shaped bottle was designed with preservation in mind. Its torpedo shape was intended to keep the bottle laying on its side so that the cork top would not dry out, helping preserve the contents of the bottle. The contents of the bottle was an early form of soda or mineral water.

Donated by Tammy Stelman

soda bottle is a (U) allowed for the wire closure. The round designed to do the bottle bases and end was laid on its side down cork would not contents to loose can evaporate. This bottle flattered area on the it to stand upright.

Donated by Rob Hamm





This lens is from a different lighthouse. Note that it is almost 8 feet high.

**MATAGORDA ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE**

**Location:** West Side of Pass Cavallo on Matagorda Island  
**Date built:** 1852  
**First lit:** New Year's Eve, 1852  
**Height:** 79 feet  
**Material:** Cast iron tower  
**Lens:** Third Order Fresnel Lens  
**Lamp:** Whale oil was used then acetylene then electricity  
**Mechanism:** The revolving, flashing light was powered with clock-like counterbalanced weights. The weight was cranked up to make the light rotate and had to be reset approximately every 6 hours.  
**Distinction:** First lighthouse to be completed and go into service in Calhoun County  
**Original Paint:** Red, black and white horizontal stripes  
**Attendants:** The first lighthouse keeper was Capt. James Cummings and the last was Arthur Barr who retired in 1966  
**History:** The original light was extinguished by the Confederate Army during the Civil War. The tower was damaged and the lighting apparatus was buried in the sand near the tower. It came back into service in 1867 with a fourth order lens on a temporary tower. The present lighthouse is located approximately one and one-half to two miles further inland from the original site. It was built on a black iron tower with a third order Fresnel lens. Its light began to shine again on September 1, 1873. This lens was removed by the Coast Guard and is now on display at this museum.

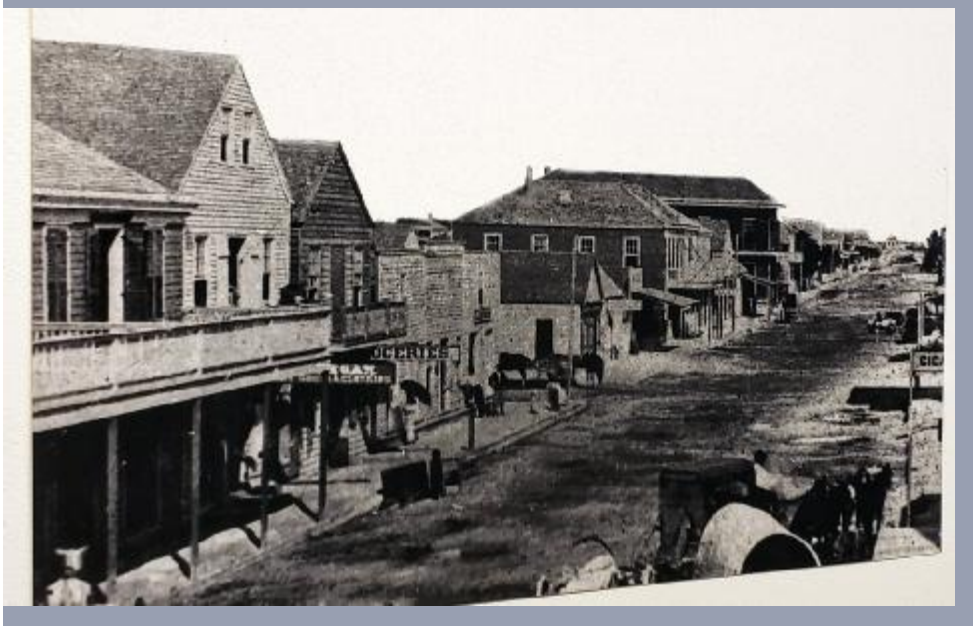


They had the best display so far on the Karankawa Indians, They disappeared sometime in the early 1800's. In 1840 only about 100 Karankawa were left. On the eve of the Civil War in 1860 the Karankawa had completely disappeared. The only evidence that they ever existed comes from early accounts of explorers and settlers, plus the artifacts that have been excavated at their campsites.





A couple of ladies side saddles. Vicki opined that women were the best horsemen. Having been married at one time, I made no comment.



I'm not sure if I mentioned Indianola in an earlier newsletter or not. Maybe I just remember my research, but in the 1870's, Indianola was in the process of rivaling Galveston as the biggest port in Texas. Then they were hit by a devastating hurricane. They were able to rebuild when, a few years later, they were hit by another. A fifteen foot surge inundated the town. All that remains now are some foundations visible at low tide.



**CARP SHAPED VASE**, undated  
Caught, by Harry Ray Carpenter, with a rod and reel in Powderhorn Lake, ca. 1994-95. Possibly went into the lake during one of the hurricanes in this area.  
Donated by Mrs. Sharon Carpenter Buhrts

Right. Like anyone would believe that fish story.





In the next few days I will visit the actual site of Fort St. Louis, so I won't say anything about it here.

I thanked Vicki for the personal tour and hit the road for Victoria.



Quite a haul from the Victoria Visitor Center – Brochures, stickers, a coozie, pocket sanitizer, a pen, lip balm, Texas refrigerator magnets, and a T-shirt. I had already planned to spend a couple days here as there is a lot to see.

As I ate lunch I planned my route for the Old Victoria Driving Tour, only my version is the Old Victoria Biking Tour. They have about 80 houses/buildings that are historically significant either to Victoria or are just nice to look at.

Since I'm riding the bike I will do the tour in reverse order, that way I am mostly on the opposite side of the street, offering a better photo opportunity.



As I passed the first few homes I came to realize this was not quite like my architectural biking tour of Coronado Island in San Diego, or my biking tour of stars homes in Palm Springs. These are homes in a much smaller community. For that reason (and lack of time, and I don't want to REALLY bore anyone) I am going to bunch them together. If there is something I like I will elaborate.



Hauschild Opera House  
1893/94

Julia Teal Murphy House  
1899



Robert Hughes Welder House 1916. I had a hard time finding this one in the tour guide since it has been remodeled since that photo was taken. The upper porch roof used to be on the first floor level, over the front entry.

Edward Power House 1894 – His daughter Helen (one of five) married Robert Hughes Welder from the house above in 1912. Divorced in 1921.







Herman Fischer House – 1900 – This one is now a small business, but I think it has the best landscaping.

D H Regan House – 1883 – One of several houses dismantled and moved from Indianola after the 1875 hurricane.



Hmmm, this one's not in the tour guide. I guess I thought it looked interesting.

B F Williams House – 1909.







Jules C Leffland House – 1900

Leffland was an architect who designed many of the homes on the tour. This one he designed for himself.

Webster Chapel – 1889

This church was founded for the newly freed slaves after the Civil War. Huh? Newly freed in 1889? I thought slaves were freed about 25 years earlier.



Palestine Baptist Church – This church was built in 1953, but the congregation was founded here in 1869.

Frank Alonzo House - 1908







Max Bettin House – 1908  
Russian emigrant, grocer,  
Jewish services were held  
here

John Sigmund House – 1902  
Carpenter. Built it himself and it is still in  
the family. This is one of the better  
ones.



O'Connor Proctor Building  
1895



Mitchell School – 1901  
Originally had three floors but a fire in  
1921 partially destroyed the third floor. It  
was partially restored but another fire in  
1935 again destroyed the third floor. It's  
in pretty rough shape today.





George Edwin Jordan House  
1885



This one was not in the tour guide so I had to look it up on the net. The link is a very good article from the newspaper. It's kind of a sad story if you're interested.

[https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/news/business/the-john-james-welder-mansion/article\\_1482af33-d3ff-5a50-a656-b4c7538dff97.html](https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/news/business/the-john-james-welder-mansion/article_1482af33-d3ff-5a50-a656-b4c7538dff97.html)

I think you might have to copy and paste this one, it's pretty long.







Memorial Square – Set aside for burial grounds, prior to May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1846, many bodies were buried in home yards as was the custom. An 1846 law was passed requiring burial in public grounds or be fined \$25. The space was soon overflowing and land for a new cemetery was purchased. Identified remains were moved; however over 230 individuals are still interred here in unmarked graves.

Abraham Levytansky House – 1898  
A polish emigrant and jeweler, his stock was the finest in the area.



I can't find this one in the tour guide, but it looks pretty nice.

Proctor-Austin-Vandenberg House  
1893







M L Potash House  
1906

Not in the tour guide, but I think it should be. It takes up a whole city block.



Another one I can't find. You can't see the for sale sign, but they are asking \$650,000.00

John Donaldson House – 1937  
I am disappointed this photo turned out so poorly. This is a rare stone house for Victoria.







Joe and Ella Mae Pickering House  
Unknown



Victoria County Courthouse – 1892  
Worth a larger photo



DeLeon Plaza – Part of the original city plan from the 1840's as a gathering place with a well. Renamed in 1941 for the city founder.

Bandstand – 1885 at another location then moved here in 1923. In 2003 Hurricane Claudette destroyed the original bandstand and a new, slightly larger version, was built on the same site.





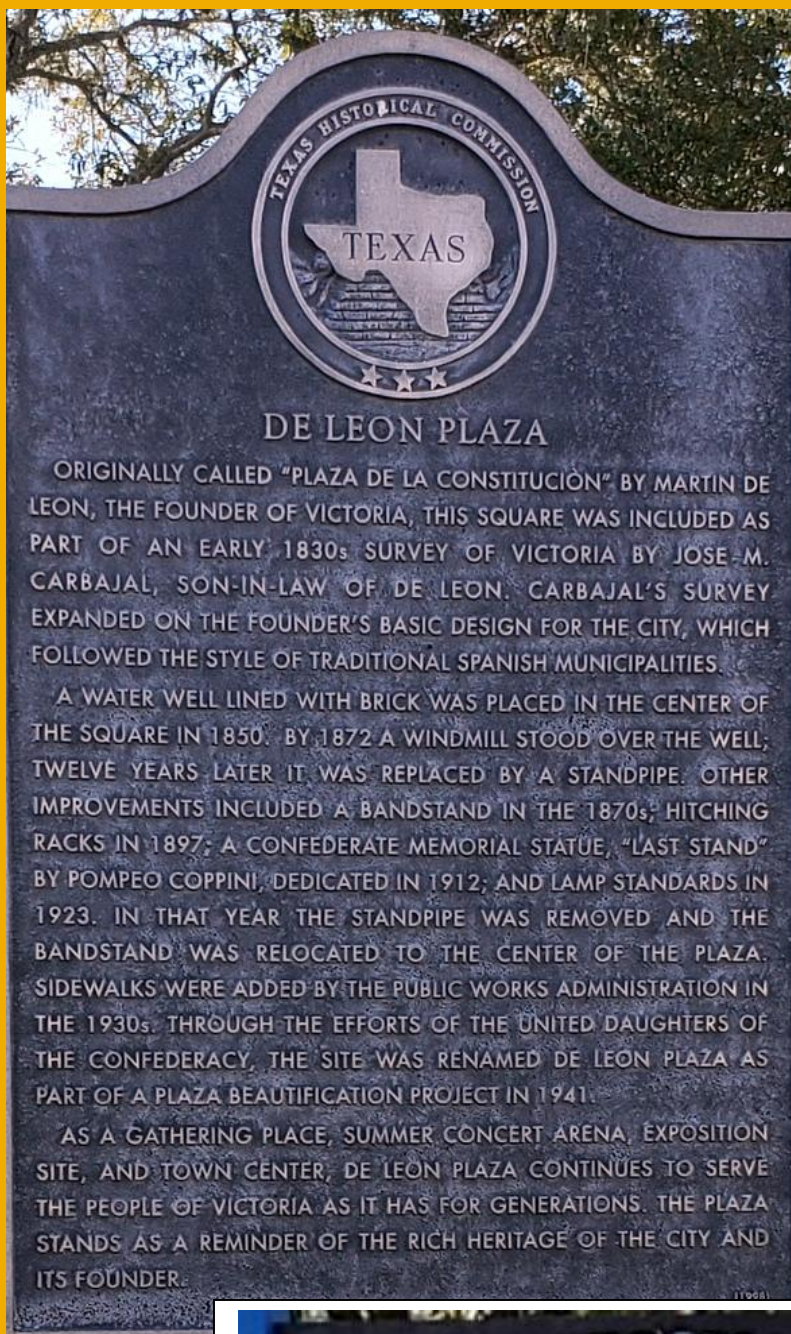
J D Mitchell House – 1893  
Among other accomplishments, he was one of the founders of the local public school system, Mitchell School earlier is named after him.



This is a twofer. From the steeples on the left to the right is the Old Nazareth Academy- 1904 – Built to house the convent school of the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament. Isn't that a mouthful. The design is called Alsatian.

Under the steeples to the left is St Mary's Catholic Church – 1904 – Built on the site of Victoria's first church.





I thought it would be easier to include these items at the end rather than mess up the four houses per page pace I was on.

The signs below are called Victoria's Trail Through Time. The info on them was just too much to include from all 12 boards, not to mention I could only find five of the seven that are in the downtown area.

I can't find them on the web, so if you really want to read them, let me know, and in the immortal words of my dearly departed Mother, I'll tell you to go jump in the lake.





# Mitchell School

Est. 1902

In 1902, the building was completed and named Central High School.

In 1899 the Victoria Independent School District began the search for a location to build a new school. The block they chose, however, was the site of Victoria's first public burial ground, Memorial Square. The Victoria Independent School District petitioned the City Council for the use of Memorial Square as the site of the new school and "The Battle for the Cemetery" ensued. After much confusion, name calling, circulation of petitions, and threats of law suits, the trouble was solved. School officials withdrew their request and looked across the street, finding an entire block to suit their needs. This site was purchased and today Mitchell School stands in the middle of the block.

VISO employed Jules Letland as architect on the building in 1901, with Bailey Mills of Victoria awarded the contract to build it. The three-story structure was erected on the site of the old Female Academy, or Case School. In 1902 the building was completed and named Central High School. It had a much different appearance than today and until 1935 the rest rooms were in a separate building just to the rear of the school.

The first of several fires occurred at Central High on March 8, 1921. About the only result of this fire was the enforcement of a city curfew. Everyone under age 18 had to be in company of an adult if on city property after 8 pm.

The school was renamed in 1922 to honor J.D. Mitchell (1848-1922), one of the school district's first trustees. Mitchell was also a former City Council member, legislator, and a renowned scientist.

Another fire occurred on December 17, 1925, which did a great amount of damage. This one started in the third floor auditorium causing so much damage that entire floor was abandoned and closed off to students.

The worst fire occurred in 1943, resulting in the heavy tin and slate roof and the third floor ceiling caving in. The building was again repaired but the third story was removed and the structure was remodeled into what we see today.

Joseph David Mitchell  
Photograph Collection,  
Victoria College/Ch-Victoria Library



"Mitchell School"  
Original Illustration by Tom Jones

Note how you can see what the third floor used to look like before the fires.

Est. 1824



# Memorial Square

Many Victoria pioneers were laid to rest here.

Early Spanish colonization requirements dictated that land be set aside as public burial grounds. However, the location of home burial "Sacred and the "Old Cemetery", now Memorial Square, was seldom utilized during the era of Martin de Luna, Victoria's founder. That changed in 1846 when a city government ordinance required that the dead be buried in public burial grounds. Those defying the ordinance were fined \$20 for each offense.

Many Victoria pioneers were laid to rest here, along with immigrants who never reached their destinations. During the Texas Revolution, members of Faneur's Galois command were brought to Victoria for burial. Also interred were soldiers from General Zachary Taylor's army who died while camped in Victoria en route to the Mexican War. Many of Victoria's sons fell during the Civil War came to rest here as well. During Reconstruction, Union occupation troops stationed in Victoria desecrated the cemetery, spreading and destroying headstones. Those remains which could be identified were re-interred at Evergreen Cemetery.

Throughout the centuries Victoria has been a crossroads, and not just for people. Gnomes were the epicenter of diseases that periodically swept through the town. Victims of these outbreaks quickly fled the "Old Cemetery" in a particularly horrifying and horrifying episode. Oldman Macey recalled that German immigrants arriving at Victoria in 1846 contracted cholera from drinking brackish water. Boarded for the Texas Hill Country, hundreds of them died along the way. In Victoria they died so rapidly there was no time to construct coffins or give victims decent burials. Bodies were wrapped in burlap sacks or blankets laid at each end and buried in mass graves. As many as twenty-three bodies were removed from one house. Wholes and caskets rained the cemetery at night, floating over the road. That howling added to the horror. During this time a man known as "Black Peter" was contracted by the city to bury the dead. The pay for his gruesome work - \$2.50 and a quart of good whiskey per corpse.

As new burials gradually ceased, the grounds came to be used for other purposes. Since 1889 it has been known as Memorial Square. The decomposed remains of more than 230 individuals are interred here in unmarked graves.



"Gnomes and Gnomes"  
Original Illustration by Tom Jones







So that's it for another day. I have a couple more things to see here tomorrow, including the museum, one of the seven sharing the La Belle memorabilia.

The weather is supposed to go back to not good the next couple of days, the reason I did the bike ride tour today. I put on about 6-7 miles.

One of the big things down here is the Coastal Texas BBQ Trail. I have a recommendation from the visitor center lady. Sounds like a good place to spend Sunday afternoon with the Packer Game.

I stopped for water at the city RV park and then drove a few miles to Sam's Club for the night. Near me is another RV. He is 64 and a full-timer for the past 7 years. His rig is only a little larger than mine.

There is another guy here from Iowa. He's been driving down here for 21 years to escape the Iowa winters from January through March. He sleeps in his car every night. Yeah, I can't believe it either.

Until next time.....