



In Search of El dorado

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

Hello to Family & Friends

Tuesday, February 2nd 2021 Day 17



My last museum in Corpus Christi. I was the first patron in the door today and I only saw about four others during my five hour visit.



I was a little disappointed in my first areas of discovery, the Science and special exhibit areas of the museum. For instance – This fantastic model of an oil refinery, it must be twelve feet by 5 feet, all behind glass, very detailed. Unfortunately, the information was behind the glass also, the perfect size print to be too small to read without my glasses, but too far away to read with my glasses. I took a picture of one section so I could read it on my phone, but the rest was way too much info to keep photographing and reading on my phone.

Dendrochronology

I had never heard of this science until last year while watching *The Curse of Oak Island*, a great show on the history channel. I mentioned tree rings a few days ago in the Aransas NWR newsletter. The Redwood below is about six feet top to bottom.

California Redwood

Sequoia sempervirens
California
898 years old



These giant trees can be as old as 2,000 years, while their enormous relatives, the Giant Sequoias, can live twice as long. This example, cut down in 1920, began growing in the year 1022. It eventually reached 6 feet across by adding an average of 0.08 inches in diameter each year. However, bigger does not always mean older. Notice the Bristlecone Pine cross-section. Although 2,800 years old, it is much smaller than this massive slab of Redwood.

Bristlecone Pine

Pinus longaeva
White Mountains, Nevada
2800 years old



- 1 1022 44 years before the *Conquest of England*
- 2 1098 the Crusades began
- 3 1492 Columbus arrived in the *New World*
- 4 1620 the Pilgrims landed on *Plymouth Rock*
- 5 1776 American Independence was declared
- 6 1860 the American Civil War began
- 7 1920 the "Roaring Twenties" began

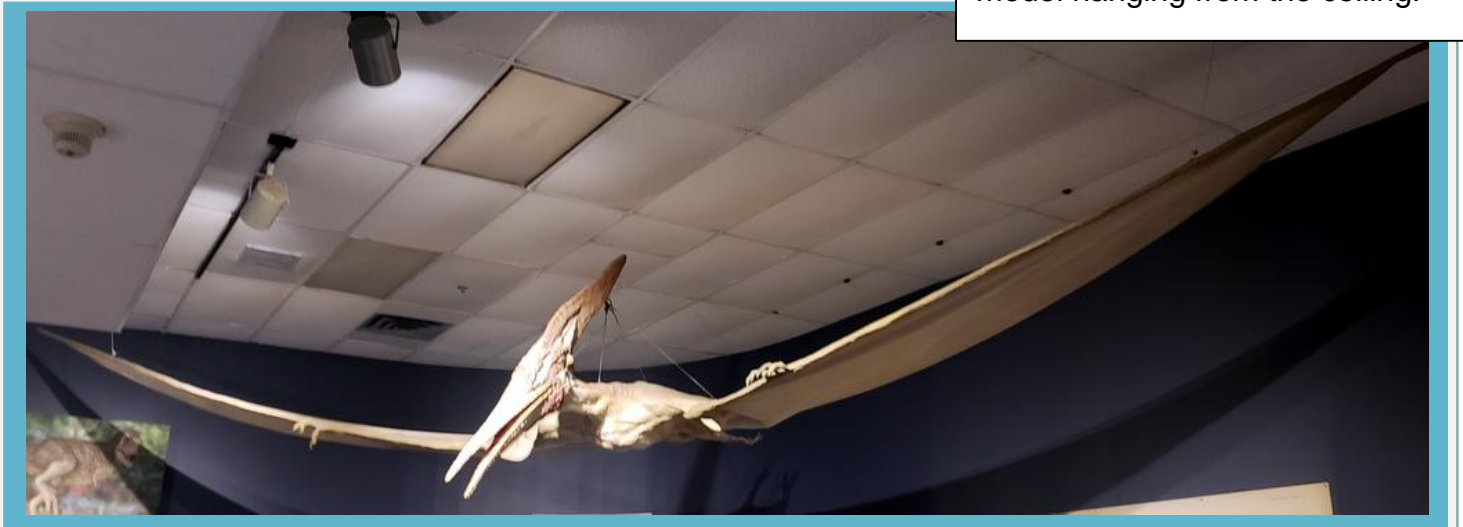


PREHISTORIC PREDATORS & PREY

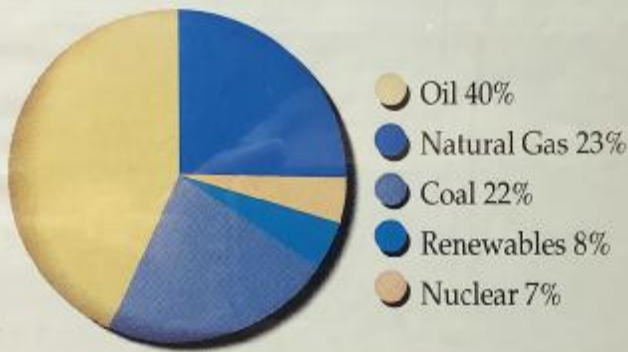


I am going to assume this is a fossilized T-Rex skull, there was no information other than the sign in the background.

The plastic figurines I played with as a kid would have labeled this fellow a Pterodactyl, but nowadays there are many others as well. Again, no info, just the model hanging from the ceiling.



U.S. Energy Consumption, 1990



Renewables accounted for about 8% of the energy consumed in the United States in 1990.

Seriously? The best they can do are thirty year old statistics? It took me 30 seconds to pull up the 2019 pie chart on my phone.

Oil is down to 37%
Natural Gas is up to 32%
Coal was cut in half to 11%
Renewables at 11%
Nuclear increased to 8%

I think they need to do some updating.

WAR AND PEACE ON THE RIO GRANDE

1861-1867

A TRAVELING EXHIBIT



Way too much information in this exhibit, it would have added another hour to my visit, and one third of it was below my knees.

LIFE AT SEA



Sorry for the poor lighting. That was another issue throughout the entire museum, enough light to read the info. Some plaques I just couldn't.

Entering the History section. Now we're getting somewhere. Huh? This ship replica is pretty cool. Maybe to mimic the original conditions, the lighting onboard was dim?

The Santa María de Yciar



What's for Supper?

Sounds just like breakfast at
Golf & Gulp

“Men, women, youths and old people, the dirty and the clean, all are ... jammed one against the other; and thus jammed together one belches, another vomits, another breaks wind, another discharges his bowels, all while you eat breakfast....”

Medical Hazards and Treatments

"A more befouled hospital...can hardly be imagined."



The sight of this enormous syringe approaching in the hands of a sailor/medical officer probably sent the sick patient into a deeper state of shock.

AS SOON AS THE SHIPS BEGAN TO SAIL from harbor, the travelers “became so deadly seasick that nothing in the world could induce [them] to move....” The ship’s doctor (if one happened to be aboard) had no remedy for this most common illness suffered aboard ship. Fortunately for transatlantic travelers, scurvy, the serious disease caused by a lack of vitamin C, usually struck only on longer voyages when the last of the fruits and vegetables had been eaten months before.

Doctors optional

ANYONE WHO HAD EXPERIENCE with amputation could serve as ship’s doctor. No wonder mariners had a saying that “the ship’s doctor doesn’t know how to cure on land.” The good doctor had to combat mass vomiting, infectious diseases carried by vermin, scurvy, syphilis, indigestion from eating rotting food and injuries from falls and exploding artillery. His equipment? Hammer, saws, pliers, butcher cleavers, syringes as big as cake decorators. His medicines? Common herbs like dill and chamomile, and more exotic potions like scorpion oil and ox tongue conserve.



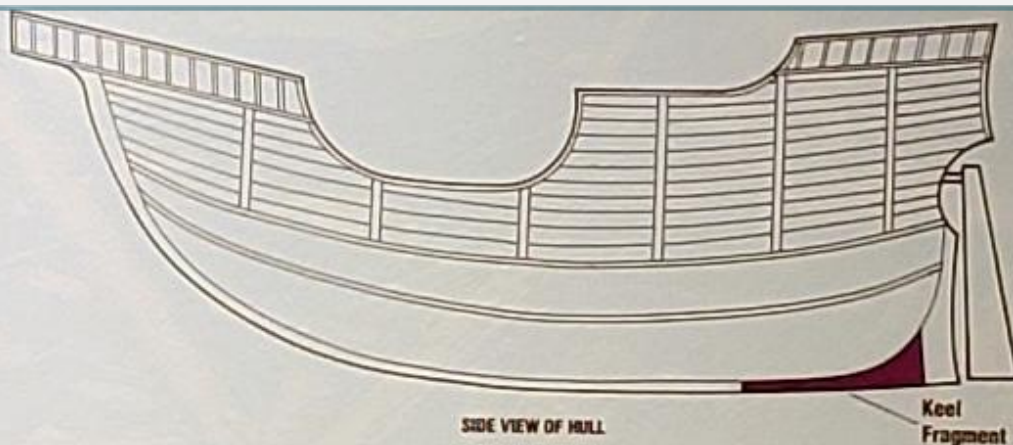
Keel of the San Esteban



The *San Esteban* was an armed nao, or merchant vessel, sailing in the New Spain fleet which left Sanlúcar in 1552. She arrived in Vera Cruz in early 1553 and sailed for home via Havana on April 9, 1554, in company with three other treasure ships. On April 29 three of these ships including the *San Esteban* were driven aground on Padre Island in an equinoctial storm.

The *San Esteban* is the oldest thoroughly scientifically investigated shipwreck in the Western Hemisphere. The remains of her keel and stempost were recovered in archaeological context and were the only surviving structural members of the hull or wooden fabric of the ship. The nao is, of course, an extinct class of ship, and this is one of the few

remaining fragments of such a ship currently available.



The area highlighted in this diagram shows the position of the keel fragment. Because this wooden piece survived, we have hard clues to the *San Esteban's* structure.

There was a very good video of the rise and fall of North Beach, the area of Corpus Christi where the Lexington and Aquarium currently reside. I expected there to be more photos of that era in the local history section, but I was sadly mistaken. Next was a history of the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs, a section on the history of disease (touched on that below), but since I am touring Texas I will try and keep the focus of the newsletters on Texas or what affected her (or what I may deem to be of interest). Almost forgot, a section on the history of the plains.

The Devastation of Disease

With Columbus's second voyage in 1493, the pristine Caribbean began to be transformed. Soon after Columbus landed on the island of Hispaniola, an outbreak of coughing, nosebleeds, and high fever struck the local people; within a few months, thousands died. The outbreak spread to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica.

*Native populations decline 90% between 1492 and 1900.
Threat continues today among isolated groups.*

The Lure of Gold

The prospect of gold led Cortés to challenge the mighty Aztecs. It lured Francisco Pizarro to the high Andes to seize the riches of the Incas.

and it spurred adventurers of many nations to search for the elusive kingdom of El Dorado.

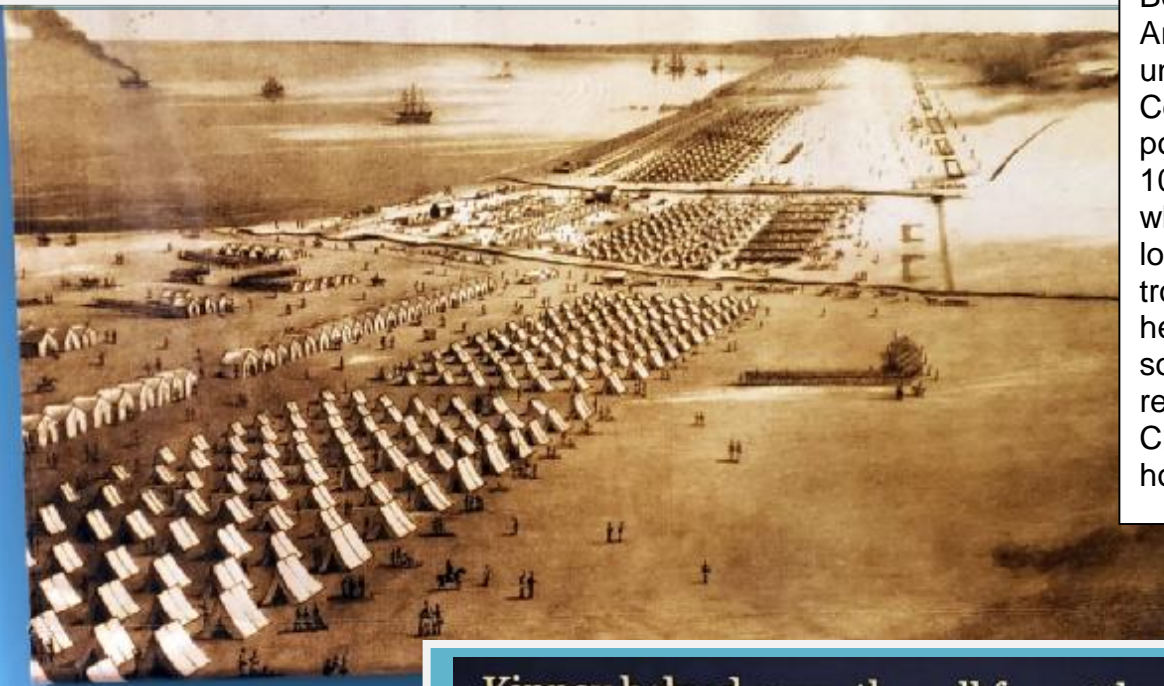
Conquistadores reported seeing temples with gold-plated walls, rulers carried on golden litters, nobels adorned with dazzling headdresses and jewelry.

El Dorado? Have I found it? Nope, gold is not my Eldorado

Henry L. Kinney

What follows is a synoptic view of the first 190 years of Corpus Christi.

Henry L. Kinney came to the area around 1838 and established a fort-like trading post, called Kinney's Rancho, on a site previously known as the "Old Indian Trading Grounds." He made his living trading with Native Americans and smuggling for Mexican Federalists. Kinney's business boomed with the arrival of General Zachary Taylor's army. As war approached, Kinney enlisted in Taylor's army and served until October 1846. Upon returning to Corpus Christi after the decampment of the army, business was slow. He turned his efforts to bolstering the image of the city to attract new residents.



Before the arrival of the American soldiers under General Taylor, Corpus Christi had a population of about 100. Left is a sketch of what the waterfront looked like with 4000 troops encamped on her shores. Many of the soldiers stayed or returned to Corpus Christi and made it their home.

Kinney helped carry the call for settlers all the way to Europe. He circulated a handbill in England, including descriptions of Corpus Christi has a wide expanse of fertile land, ready for settlement. Although the land was far from what Kinney described, settlers flocked to this new land.

The Golden Fleece

Sheep ranching grew in popularity throughout the Coastal Bend as the size of ranches increased. W. W. Chapman, a Mexican War veteran who stayed in Corpus Christi after the war, created a new breed of sheep tailor made for South Texas. He bred the Merino, famous for its soft wool, with the hardier Mexican sheep to create wool some called the "golden fleece of Texas."

Soon wool production in Nueces County had increased so greatly that one third of all United States wool exports came from Corpus Christi.

The Texas sheep industry reached its height in the early 1880s, but by the end of the century, disease and the lack of available land spelled the end of the industry's reign in South Texas.

Mifflin Kenedy

Rancher and entrepreneur Mifflin Kenedy (1818-1895) and Richard King were partners in several business ventures, including the Santa Gertrudis Ranch, part of the King Ranch, until Kenedy sold his share to King.

Kenedy purchased Los Laureles Ranch near Corpus Christi, and in 1869, was among the first Texas ranchers to fence his land with smooth-wire fence. He sold the ranch in 1882 to the Texas Land and Cattle Company and bought 400,000 acres in what is now Kenedy County and named it La Parra Ranch. Kenedy organized the Kenedy Pasture Company and in 1876 became a financial backer of Uriah Lott and his efforts to bring a railroad to Corpus Christi.

I plan to visit the Kenedy Ranch tomorrow.

Petra Vela Kenedy

The wife of Mifflin Kenedy, Petra Vela Kenedy (1825-1885) was a local ranching matriarch and philanthropist. Born into an upper class Mexican family, she married Luis Vidal in 1840 and bore him six children before she became a wealthy widow. She married Mifflin Kenedy in Brownsville in 1852, and bore six children and adopted a seventh. As was typical of most 19th century women, she dedicated most of her life to the domestic responsibilities of the family and ranch.

In 1869, the Kenedy family moved from Brownsville to establish Los Laureles Ranch near Corpus Christi. Here Petra oversaw a large work force including more than twenty families. The Kenedy home was an Italian villa-style home on the bluff in downtown Corpus Christi.

The Cotton Road

During the Civil War, a major strategy of the United States Navy was the blockade of southern ports in an effort to cripple the Confederacy. One of the South's major exports was cotton, most often shipped to Europe. With the inability to ship from southern ports to Europe, southern planters needed to find a new way to move their product so it did not rot in fields across the South.

Soon the cotton road was established. The road was a trail that wound its way through South Texas, across the Rio Grande, and into Mexico, where cotton could be safely loaded onto ships and sent around the world. Both Banquete and King Ranch were major stops along the Cotton Road, and brought prosperity to those smart enough to cash in. It is rumored that one six month contract to the King Ranch for running cotton was \$300,000.

Bombarded & Blockaded

Part of the Union's strategy during the Civil War was to blockade Southern ports to prevent the export of agricultural products in exchange for war material. Texas was the main source of supplies for the Confederacy.

Corpus Christi was included in the blockade and the war reached the city in 1862. From August 12-18, the United States Navy and Confederate forces fought a land and sea engagement in and around Corpus Christi Bay.

Building the Railway

Railroads began to crisscross the United States in the 1800s, connecting cities and bringing about a new age. Before the Civil War, Corpus Christi residents began working toward bringing the railroad to the city.

The dedication of local businessmen, who invested their own wealth in the major project, eventually allowed Corpus Christi to run railroads through town, letting Corpus Christians travel the country and ship their goods all over the United States.

The Best Football Team in History

To keep the morale up at Camp Scurry, the Second Texas Infantry formed a football team; the team was made up mostly of men who had played on Southwest Conference teams while in college.

The team built a practice field at Santa Fe and Booty streets and played other military teams from around the country. During the 1916 season the team was undefeated and in its eight games, outscoring opponents 432-6.

Spanish Flu

As WWI was coming to a close a new deadly threat to the world population was on the horizon. In early 1918 the Spanish Flu began to spread in the close quarters of military installations in Europe and the United States. The outbreak quickly spread around the world, causing an estimated 20-40 million deaths, more than the total casualties in WWI.

In October 1918, the flu came to Corpus Christi. On October 18 in an attempt to stem the spread of the disease, the mayor closed public places throughout the city, including schools, movie theaters, and some restaurants. Since it was believed the soldiers stationed at Camp Scurry and on North Beach were carriers of the disease, both camps were quarantined. On November 16, just days after the signing of the European Armistice, Corpus Christi's quarantine was lifted and the city celebrated the end of the Great War.

The Storm of the Century

In the early Twentieth Century, the North Beach area of Corpus Christi was the Atlantic City Boardwalk of Texas – Beaches, a Ferris wheel, roller coasters, salt water pools, dance halls. People came from miles around to spend the day.

In 1919, towns on the South Texas coast were thriving. The hurricane of 1916 gave Corpus Christians a false sense of security, as they believed the barrier islands would protect the city from major hurricanes.

When stories of a hurricane in the Florida Keys reached Corpus Christi in September 1919, neither the local citizens nor the Weather Bureau focused on the possibility of a Texas landfall as all indications pointed as the storm curving into Louisiana.

Then, the Weather Bureau lost the hurricane...

Late morning

Wires to Port Aransas fall, isolating the City of Corpus Christi. Rockport receives several more advisories—the last before they lost communication was:

“This is the worst hurricane in history.”

The Numbers

Wind: 110 mph+

Flooding: 11.5 feet downtown

Wave height: 16 feet

Debris height: Over 15 feet downtown



North Beach, being only 2-3 feet above sea level, was devastated. The photo left is the only building remaining.

The Toll

Oil tanks in Port Aransas were breached, leaking crude oil into the bay. The oil covered debris, buildings and people. Though damaging to the environment, the oil caused less decay of bodies and inhibited the spread of disease, which typically ravaged cities of the time after major disasters. This allowed people to put their energy toward recovering from the \$20 million in damage—an incredible toll for that time.

The casualty list published in the September 28th Corpus Christi Caller reported 157 identified dead, 188 unidentified dead, and 275 missing, for a possible total of 620 victims. Jewelry from the unidentified dead was placed on display in the downtown storefront of R. H. Bingham. For some, recognizing a piece of jewelry meant identification of their loved one, and the ability to bury them. For others, that store front with unrecognizable jewelry was a source of sorrow that their loved one was likely swept away to sea.

All those who were swept out to sea did not become casualties, though—87 survivors were washed seven miles across Nueces Bay onto Whites Point. It took days of searching before these survivors were reunited with their family, friends, and neighbors.



Robert Simpson

Being that a portion of my livelihood depends on hurricanes, I found this very interesting.

“A lot of what I saw frightened me, but also supplied a fascination that left me with a lifelong interest in hurricanes.”

Robert Simpson (b. 1912) grew up in Corpus Christi and survived the 1919 hurricane when his family sought shelter in the Nueces County Courthouse alongside many others. His fascination with weather led him to study physics in college, leading to his career with the United States Weather Bureau. He led the National Hurricane Research Project, followed by the National Hurricane Center.

Simpson, a meteorologist, worked with Herbert Saffir, a structural engineer, to perfect a scale to describe the likely damage a storm will cause. The Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale rates storms at a Category 1 for storms with lower winds, to a Category 5 for the most severe storms. This scale gives emergency personnel guidance on issuing evacuation orders, no doubt saving lives each time a hurricane hits the United States.

A Deepwater Port

But Corpus Christi rebuilt North Beach. It did not completely return to its former glory, but with the addition of the port and the new Bascule Bridge, North Beach began to thrive again. Until.....

It was designated a Foreign Trade Zone in 1985, and the Port's exports are diverse. After several expansions to add additional cargo docks and dredge to a greater depth, the Port of Corpus Christi grew to be the fifth largest in the nation.

Crossing the Bay

With the opening of the Port came the new Bascule Bridge. This drawbridge was a marvel of engineering but proved an inconvenience as the bridge rose to allow ships to pass, leading traffic to backup. Corpus Christi's economy grew, as did the ships she needed to support her industries. The tiny drawbridge did not allow larger ships, and soon a new bridge was needed.

The 1959 Harbor Bridge opened Corpus Christi's port to the world by accommodating larger, more modern ships while also allowing the free flow of traffic over the bridge.

With the growth of the energy industry in South Texas, the Harbor Bridge meets the same fate as the Bascule—replacement in order to meet Corpus Christi industry's current needs.

....1959 and the opening of the Harbor Bridge. The new bridge, needed to allow larger ships into port, spelled disaster for both North Beach and the north side of downtown Corpus Christi. The new bridge, being taller (I had photo of it in Sunday's newsletter), started much farther south and ended on the very north side of the island, virtually bypassing downtown and North Beach. Within years businesses closed, for sale signs went up, continual flooding drove business owners and patrons away, hurricane damaged buildings were torn down rather than repaired or rebuilt.

The addition in the 90's of the USS Lexington and the Aquarium brings in over 800,000 tourists every year, but those tourists have to drive past boarded up buildings and vacant lots, not leaving the best impression of the best Corpus Christi has to offer. Now another, bigger, higher bridge is needed (photo also in Sunday's Newsletter) and part of the design is creating easier access to North Beach and Downtown.

The Solution? The San Antonio River Walk is the number one tourist attraction in Texas (I was nine years old when we visited San Antonio and the River Walk always remained a fond memory). Corpus Christi is spending \$40 million to revitalize North Beach with a canal that will drain the land and keep it free from flooding, essentially creating a Canal Walk and returning North Beach to its glory days.

All of this info comes from the very good documentary and not from any museum exhibits or plaques. The concept animations looks amazing. I hope it works.

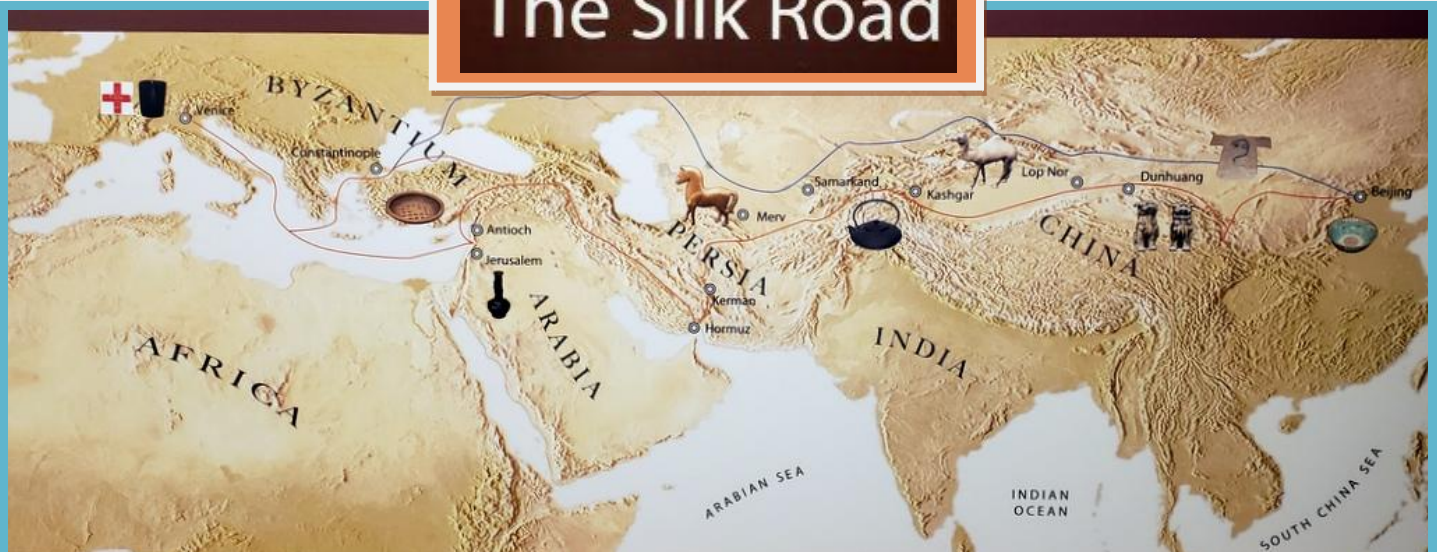
I bypassed the history of the Aztecs, the central plains and the Kenedy antiques. They seemed to have a little more in-depth coverage of the Karankawas and the La Belle, but we've covered all of that until I get to Austin.

The Longoria Affair

Private Felix Z. Longoria (1920-1945) was born in Three Rivers, between San Antonio and Corpus Christi. He served honorably in WWII and was killed in action in 1945. His remains were returned to his widow, Beatrice, in January of 1949, and she contacted the funeral home in Three Rivers to plan a wake. The funeral home director, Tom Kennedy, denied access to the funeral home to Private Longoria because he was Hispanic. He instead felt the wake should be held in the Longoria home, which was located in the segregated area of the community.

The Longoria Affair was a unifying event in the Mexican American civil rights movement. Although this discrimination was not an isolated event, its coverage on a national level, brought on by the involvement of the newly organized American G.I. Forum, drew attention to the issue. U.S. Senator Lyndon B. Johnson (D-Texas) investigated the Longoria Affair, and offered to have Pvt. Longoria's remains reinterred at Arlington National Cemetery. Private Longoria, born and raised in South Texas, was buried there with full military honors on February 16, 1949.

The Silk Road



The Silk Road stretched from China to Constantinople [present day Turkey]. It was not a road at all but a series of trade routes traveled by caravans or ocean vessels during three major time periods. These periods saw a unification of great empires: the Persian Empire under Alexander the Great (c. 400 B.C.), the Han and Tang Dynasties of China (c. 200 B.C. to 700 A.D.), and the Mongol Empire under Genghis Khan (1100-1300 A.D.).

The two principal land routes are shown.

Major trade goods included:

Spices, Silks, Porcelains, Jade, Gold and Silver Work.

Marco Polo traveled in the East during the period of the Mongol Empire. The Silk Road disappeared after the collapse of the Mongol Empire, but tales of riches in the East provided a stimulus for Europeans to look for other land and sea routes to the fabled and prosperous lands. When Columbus sailed West in 1492, he was hoping to find another "Silk Road" to the riches of the Orient.

Columbus planned to find the East by sailing West. His idea was not new. As a cartographer and bookseller in Portugal, Columbus had access to ancient works as well as contemporary maps and theories of the day. He relied on the maps and geographical theories by Ptolemy first published in the 2nd century A.D. to calculate [incorrectly] the distance to Asia. Marco Polo's written accounts of his travels in the East in the 13th century provided details of the types of riches to be found. Contemporary maps and geographical theories by Pierre d'Ailly (1410), Toscanelli (1471) and the world globe produced by Martin Behaim (1492) suggested a western sea route to reach the landmass – and riches - of the East.

From The Log of Christopher Columbus, Friday, 12 October 1492

"At dawn we saw naked people, and I went ashore in the ship's boat, armed, followed by Martin Alonso Pinzón, captain of the Pinta, and his brother, Vicente Yáñez Pinzón, captain of the Niña. I unfurled the royal banner and the captains brought the flags which displayed a large green cross with the letters F and Y at the left and right side of the cross. Over each letter was the appropriate crown of the Sovereign. These flags were carried as a standard on all of the ships."



Captain's Ensign carried by Columbus' Ships

Ensign containing the initials F(Fernando) and Y(Ysabel), with a green cross between the initials and a gold crown above each initial.

You may be wondering a couple things right about here like, what does Columbus have to do with Texas? Or, what about those replicas of Columbus' ship? I think I mentioned the replica some time ago as my reason for visiting this museum. Well hey, I was wondering the same thing, so I asked. It turns out that salt water was damaging the hulls and the city could not afford the upkeep or repairs, so they were sold for scrap. I just read a news article about it. There it is again, don't believe everything you read on the net.



Demon of Corpus Christi

Thanks to Roadside America.

We were creeped out and impressed at the same time! That is one BIG devil! We got the story on it from the current owner.

This Devil was originally part of a "rotor-type" amusement park ride, which we believe was patented and built by the "Velare Brothers," who were instrumental in building many amusement rides in the '40s and '50s. The ride was called the HELL HOLE, and featured the large, fiberglass devil as the center icon at the entrance to the ride (we are uncertain if the Velares owned the name Hell Hole or just the mechanical patent). I emailed every amusement park I could find and, I believe this ride to have spent most of its time at Conneaut Lake Park in Conneaut Lake, [PA](#). Coney Island had a similar Hell Hole ride with the same devil on the front, though it was painted silver/grey in every photo I can find.

The man who currently owns the devil spent many years as an amusement ride technician, building, scrapping, renovating and engineering them. He acquired the devil around 1995 or so, when his uncle (with whom he worked) went up north and dismantled the ride, bringing it down to central Texas, where it remained in storage for many years. Sometime after that his uncle started a recycling/metal salvage business in Corpus Christi, TX, placing the devil by the street to draw attention.

And thus ends my four days in Corpus Christi. Not bad for a town only a little over half the population of Milwaukee. I bypassed the Heritage Park homes. Every time I drove by I never saw anyone there. It never looked alive. Plus, it's just a bunch of old houses.

I spent five hours at the Science and History Museum. If I was to read all of what they have it would take me twice as long at least. My legs can't take standing that long. Some parts of it were good, some parts needed work, and some parts are outdated. Overall it wasn't too bad. I am really tired though.

The Demon of Corpus Christi - Kind of ironic to find such a large demon in a city named for the body of Christ.

I believe I'm parked at a Circle K truck stop in Kingsville. There is a WalMart down the street that does not allow parking, but I need to stock up there in the morning.

I am beginning to have doubts about my research. I was under the impression it was a tour of the Kenedy Ranch. This is one of the largest in Texas with a rich history. The website is mostly about donating money to their philanthropic ventures with a museum as a side light. They raise thoroughbreds there also and I think that would be fun to see.

I guess I will find out tomorrow.

A final note on the new harbor bridge that's under construction. As I ate lunch in the RV I noticed that there seemed to be no construction going on. The cranes sat idle. So I looked it up. The original construction company had one of their bridges collapse in 2017 I think, killing six people. The bridge project was already two years behind schedule, but the city fired them, and the search for a new firm is underway. What a kick in the pants that is.

I know, there was a lot of reading in this one. I hope you made it through and learned something new. Corpus Christi is probably not on a lot of people's bucket list, at least those in Wisconsin, so maybe it's a chance to see something you probably never will.

Until next time.....