

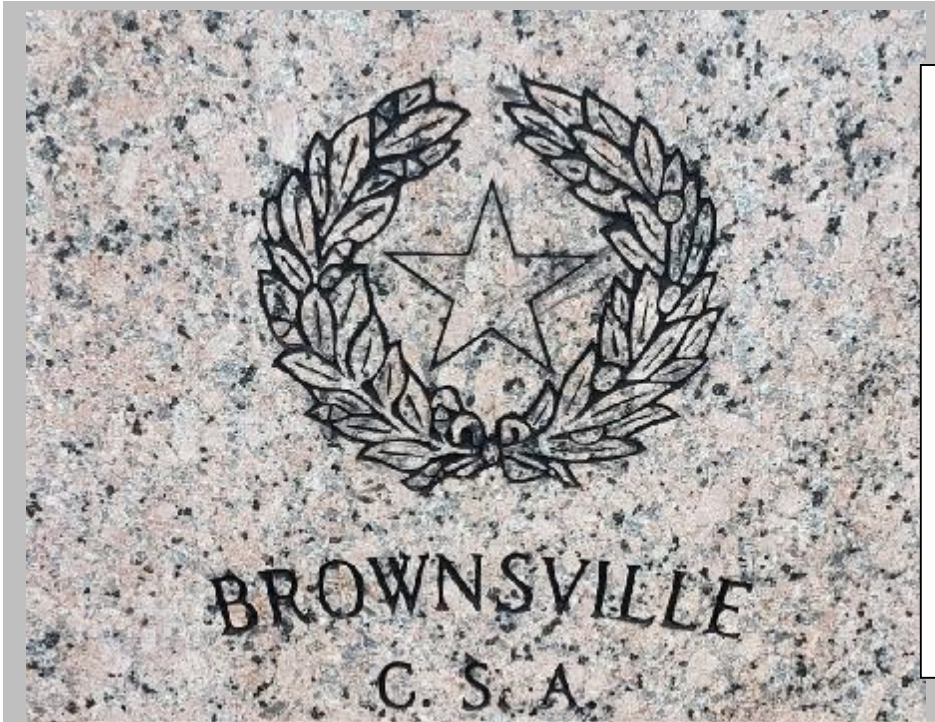


In Search of El dorado

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

Hello to Family & Friends

Monday, February 8th 2021 Day 23



The birds were all gone this morning, having flown off to who knows where.

I did a little more research and added several items to my list for Brownsville. Since it was only a mile or so away, I decided to try the visitor center. They are open, but the sign out front says to text them and they will deliver your info curbside, just like a fast food restaurant or a retail store. So I typed in my list of sights, asked if they were open, then requested brochures. This was at 11:05 a.m.

A MAJOR CENTER OF ACTIVITY FOR CONFEDERACY. CHIEF DEPOT FOR WAR MATERIAL AND SUPPLIES IMPORTED FROM EUROPE THROUGH NEUTRAL PORT OF BAGDAD, MEXICO. TERMINUS OF COTTON ROAD, POINT OF ENTRY AND DEPARTURE FOR IMPORTANT PERSONAGES OF SOUTH IN INTERCOURSE WITH OUTSIDE WORLD. OCCUPIED BY LARGE FEDERAL EXPEDITIONARY FORCE NOV. 6, 1863 AFTER CONFEDERATES HAD DESTROYED FT. BROWN, COTTON, COMMISSARY STORES AND SUPPLIES AND HAD WITHDRAWN. BECAME TEMPORARY SEAT OF UNION STATE GOVERNMENT WITH TEXAN A. J. HAMILTON MILITARY GOVERNOR

(SEE OTHER SIDE)

No reply to my text. I decided to have a look around since I saw the granite marker above and some historical markers. Then I called the number and received a recorded message telling me to send a text.

WHEN CONFEDERATE FORCES REOCCUPIED
BROWNSVILLE JULY 30, 1864 IT RESUMED
ITS IMPORTANCE AS SOUTH'S SUPPLY
SOURCE AND TERMINUS OF COTTON ROAD
COTTON EXPORT THROUGH BROWNSVILLE AND
OTHER RIO GRANDE POINTS MEANS OF
SURVIVAL OF CONFEDERACY WEST OF THE
MISSISSIPPI. IMPORTS FROM EUROPE AND

MEXICO FORMED ALMOST ENTIRE SUPPLY FOR
MILITARY AND CIVILIAN. GEN. MAGRUDER,
GEN. BEE, COL. "RIP" FORD AND OTHER
PROMINENT CONFEDERATE OFFICERS
HEADQUARTERED HERE. CENTER OF
INTERNATIONAL INTRIGUE THROUGHOUT WAR

A MEMORIAL TO TEXANS
WHO SERVED THE CONFEDERACY
ERECTED BY THE STATE OF TEXAS 1964

A little more research and I found out that most of the museums, the fort, the battlefield, the zoo, etc., are closed on Mondays. Ah well, I found a couple places that might be open, so let's go check them out.

Remember the bag of brochures I picked up on the sidewalk in front of the Harlingen VC? Among those was a local newspaper with an article about the Giant Montezuma Cypress trees on the old Jagou Plantation.



It was very difficult to find an address for the plantation, but I parked on the grass of La Posada Park and walked towards the trees and some brick ruins.

There are no signs for either the plantation or the cypress grove, but a grass-roots effort is underway to preserve these giant beauties. Eugene Fernandez, director of the South Texas Center for Historical and Genealogical Research (that's a mouthful), has devoted years to trying to save these dying trees.

In the early years of the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) they were used as fuel for the steamboats, building before the Civil War, and rebuilding after it. Right now there are only about thirty left. The trees stand along the now empty Resaca de la Palma, the city's infrastructure and water issues have left this bank dry for too long. The Resaca is pictured above as I crossed over an old brick bridge.



I started down the trail above with the Resaca on my left, which looks to be in pretty good condition.



Unfortunately, the ditch to my right, was not.

It was difficult to find any of the cypress discussed and pictured in the article. They are supposed to be 100 feet tall and draped with Spanish Moss, but I could only get these lower portions.





Reversing my footsteps and taking the opposite trail from the bridge, I did find this Montezuma Cypress. That root structure is quite impressive.

Around 1872, a Frenchman by the name of Celestine Jagou bought the plantation and started planting. Not yet knowing what would grow, he tried a little bit of everything. Mangos, Cork Trees, wine grapes and, of course, Montezuma Cypress. This earned Jagou the title of 'The Father of South Texas Agriculture'.



*Through the Fence, Over the Levee
... No Passport Needed!*

OPEN DAILY. 7AM - 5PM
CLOSED WEDNESDAYS

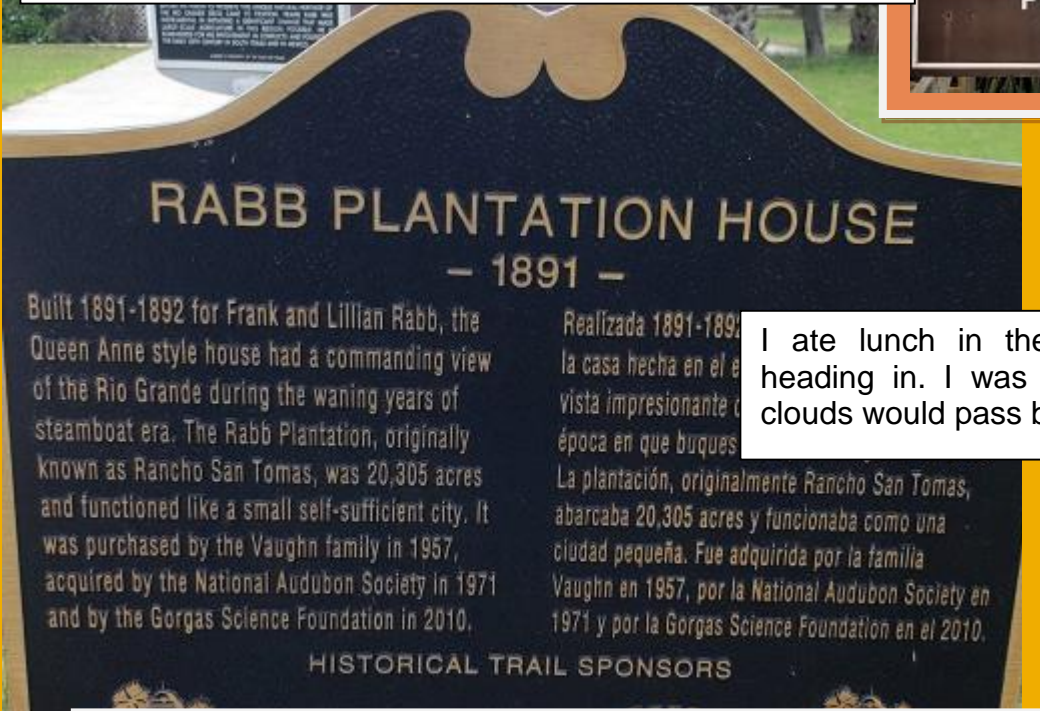
956-541-8034

When it says 'through the fence' it means the border wall like the one below. The Sanctuary is on the other side of the wall. If you look at a map of south Texas, you will see that the U.S. / Mexican border, the Rio Grande River, makes big looping turns and has left its share of oxbow lakes as the main river channel moved on a regular basis. This wall is heading north but curves to the left and along the river.



Needless to say, there was a Border Patrol vehicle sitting at the open fence, no gate, and at the top of the levee.

Huh, funny story I just realized. Next to the Jagou Plantation was an urban garden with several people working in and around the plants. The song playing as I walked by on my way out was *American Pie*, you know, 'drove my Chevy to the levee but the levee was dry'. How ironic.



I ate lunch in the parking lot before heading in. I was hoping that the rain clouds would pass by and leave me dry.



Nice place. Inside was nicely furnished with period antiques. I should have taken some photos at the time, but it was just antique furniture.

FRANK RABB

FRANK RABB (1866-1932) WAS BORN IN CORPUS CHRISTI TO TEXAS RANCHING PIONEERS JOHN AND MARTHA RABB. AFTER MARRYING LILLIAN STARCK, GRANDDAUGHTER OF RANCHING NEIGHBOR MIFFLIN KENEDY, FRANK AND LILLIAN SETTLED AT SAN TOMAS ON 20,000 ACRES. EXCEPT FOR A FEW SMALL PLOTS, AGRICULTURE IN THE AREA WAS SCARCE UNTIL THE LATE 19TH CENTURY WHEN THE INTRODUCTION OF STEAM PUMPS AND IRRIGATION SYSTEMS OFFSET THE HARSH CLIMATE. RABB WORKED TO DEVELOP ONE OF THE FIRST IRRIGATION SYSTEMS IN THE AREA THAT ALLOWED FOR PROPERTY TO BE FARMED AND IRRIGATED IN AREAS AWAY FROM IMMEDIATE RIVER BANKS. RABB WAS ALSO A CHARTER MEMBER OF THE CHATFIELD IRRIGATION CO., AN EARLY ATTEMPT AT WIDE-SPREAD IRRIGATION. IN ADDITION, RABB AND OTHER GROWERS LOBBIED VIGOROUSLY TO HAVE RAIL LINES EXTENDED TO THEIR REGION TO TRANSPORT GOODS AND EXPORT PRODUCE. BY 1904, WITH THE COMING OF THE RAILROAD, IRRIGATION CANALS AND FARMLAND SALES BECAME A MAJOR ENTERPRISE.

I broke up the sign this time, hoping that would make it easier to fit on the page.

IN ADDITION TO AGRICULTURE, RABB ALSO BECAME A LEADER IN THE SOUTH TEXAS PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRAT MACHINE AND WAS INVOLVED IN THE TURBULENT MEXICAN REVOLUTION. FOLLOWING THE HEATED ELECTION OF 1914, RABB LEFT POLITICS AND RETURNED TO RANCHING, FARMING AND REAL ESTATE INTERESTS. IN 1917, RABB OFFERED A 200-ACRE SABAL PALM GROVE TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT TO ESTABLISH A NATIONAL PARK. IT WOULD TAKE ALMOST 60 YEARS BEFORE HIS VISION TO PRESERVE THIS UNIQUE NATURAL HERITAGE OF THE RIO GRANDE DELTA CAME TO FRUITION. FRANK RABB WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN INITIATING A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE THAT MADE LARGE-SCALE AGRICULTURE IN THIS REGION POSSIBLE. HE IS REMEMBERED FOR HIS INVOLVEMENT IN CONFLICTS AND POLITICS OF THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY IN SOUTH TEXAS AND IN MEXICO. (2012)

MARKER IS PROPERTY OF THE STATE OF TEXAS

Five dollar admission, so not too bad. It's a good thing there was the plantation house to see, I have a thing about paying to hike a trail. They had about three miles of trails, of which I did about half, with very little to see. It was worth my time however as you will find out below.

RABB PLANTATION

TODAY, COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS THE RABB PLANTATION, THIS WAS ORIGINALLY KNOWN AS RANCHO SAN TOMAS AND, THEN, SAN TOMAS PLANTATION. IT ENCOMPASSED 20,353 ACRES STRETCHING NORTH FROM THE BANKS OF THE RIO GRANDE TO THE ARROYO COLORADO. IN 1885, MIFFLIN KENEDY CONVEYED SAN TOMAS TO HIS STEPDAUGHTER, MARIA VICENTA STARCK. IN 1892, AFTER THE MARRIAGE OF FRANK RABB TO HER DAUGHTER, LILLIAN, MARIA VICENTA STARCK TRANSFERRED 1/2 UNDIVIDED INTEREST IN SAN TOMAS TO FRANK RABB. THAT SAME YEAR, THE RABB AND STARCK FAMILIES BUILT A QUEEN ANNE STYLE HOUSE THAT SERVED AS THE WORKING HEADQUARTERS OF THE PLANTATION. IT REPRESENTED THE LIVING STYLE AND UPWARD MOBILITY OF THE ENTREPRENEURS AND POLITICAL ELITE OF SOUTH TEXAS AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY. ITS VICTORIAN ARCHITECTURE SIGNIFIED A SHIFT FROM THE SPRAWLING SOUTHWEST RANCHOS AND "BORDER BRICK" TRADITION, AND IS THE ONLY EXAMPLE OF ITS TYPE IN CAMERON COUNTY. THE RABB PLANTATION ENCOMPASSED NUMEROUS OUTBUILDINGS, INCLUDING A BRICK OUTHOUSE, FOREMAN'S HOUSE, STABLE AND WORKERS' BUILDINGS. MANY OF THESE BUILDINGS HAVE DISAPPEARED.

AT SAN TOMAS, RABB FOLLOWED THE LEAD OF THE NEIGHBORING BRULEY PLANTATION AND EXPERIMENTED WITH IRRIGATION SYSTEMS, AGRICULTURAL CROPS AND NEW LIVESTOCK BREEDS, TRYING TO ADAPT THEM TO THE SOUTH TEXAS CLIMATE. THESE BEGINNINGS HELPED PROPEL THE AGRICULTURAL BOOM THAT EMERGED IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY. FRANK RABB DIED IN 1932 AND THE LAND AROUND THE HOUSE PASSED TO HIS ESTATE, AND THEN TO HIS SECOND WIFE, MARGARET MCCORMICK RABB. IN THE 1970s, THE ACREAGE AROUND THE HOUSE WAS CONVEYED TO THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY AND ESTABLISHED AS A SANCTUARY FOR WILDLIFE. IN 2010, THE HOUSE WAS CONVEYED TO THE GORGAS SCIENCE FOUNDATION.

RECORDED TEXAS HISTORIC LANDMARK • 2012
MARKER IS PROPERTY OF THE STATE OF TEXAS

There was no trail map included, but each trail intersection had a copy posted with a number showing where you were. Very well done. Each trail was named and there were a couple boardwalks over the wetlands (drylands in reality), and some blinds/observation buildings overlooking a pond.

As you know from past experience, I like to go counter to the normal flow. So I started at number twelve and worked my way down. Just imagine standing on the deck below and watching steamboats ply their way up the Rio Grande.



Old Rio Grande Rio Bravo Antiguo

In 1890 this was still the main channel of the Rio Grande. If you had been standing on the bank of the river during this time, you could witness the slow throb of a steam powered river boat, belching smoke from a boiler fueled by mesquite and ebony as it slowly fought its way upriver against the current. Between the 1830s and 1902 a large number of river steamers plied the Rio Grande up as far as Rio Grande City. In those days, although the river was the border, it also acted as the “highway” that tied together all the isolate towns, ranches on both sides.



That's a lot of Spanish Moss for one tree.



I have to tell you that this is one of the most serene, tranquil, spots I have ever been. You can just see the white heron in the tree almost dead center. There is another wading bird, black, in the bushes to the right which you cannot see here. A nice breeze, very quiet, ducks in the water, no people. I must have stood here for almost ten minutes. It was mesmerizing. The last time I was someplace that was this calming was about 2015 on the boardwalk of Congaree National Park in South Carolina. Beautiful.



The forest trail. It looked a lot just like the other trails.



Ok everyone, welcome to the Rio Grande River, give a wave to Mexico.



Remember that text I sent to the VC at 11:05? My response came in at 11:43. "We apologize for the inconvenience, we were out to lunch. There is someone at the office until 5 pm." By this time I was finishing my hike by the cypress trees. Since I was heading past the VC on my way back to WalMart I knew I would stop by, so I didn't reply.

I pulled into the VC lot and texted my request for info again. She sort of answered my questions, but made no effort to bring me any brochures or a map.

Deciding that the VC parking lot was better than WalMart to cook the steaks I bought yesterday, I pulled to a better spot, set up the grill and my chair, and had a cookout. As I was waiting for the grill to cool the VC lady walked up and asked "You don't plan on parking here overnight do you? You're blocking the handicapped spot (only one of them) and the curbside pickup spots". "But you're closed now anyways, right? I'm just waiting for the grill to cool" I told her. Unbelievable. What is the issue, I might disrupt the afterhours activities of the 'oh so helpful' visitor center? Give me a break.



The birds are back, thousands of them. Great tailed Grackles. Every wire you see has birds on it as well as the sign and in the trees.

I drove through the WalMart lot looking for a garbage can to put my garbage in. Not a one in sight. Then I realized the most likely reason, the birds. They probably make quite a mess digging through the garbage if there is any.

While I was waiting for the grill to cool I made my plan for tomorrow.

My reason for visiting the zoo is that they have a Komodo Dragon. I'm not sure I have ever seen one in person so I'm looking forward to it.

The War with Mexico will continue tomorrow also.

Until next time.....