

MUSEUM OF SOUTH TEXAS HISTORY

Self-guided tour, non-school groups

August, 2012

We would like to welcome you to the Museum of South Texas History. We hope you will enjoy your time here and will learn something about the history and heritage of the area in which we live.

- I. **The Butterfly/ Native Plants Garden:** As you move toward the mesquite entry doors, we hope you notice the flowers on the west side of the walkway. They are examples of the flowers and plants native to this region that attract butterflies and birds. You pass several types of Lantana, as well as Butterfly Weed, Manzanita, Spring Mist Flower, and Vara Dulce.

- II. **The Grand Lobby:** The Grand Lobby, like the Museum building itself, echoes the “Spanish Colonial Revival” style that became widely popular in the early 20th Century. (Many original buildings in this style can still be found in the Valley.) Tile patterns in the floors, admission area, and Grand Stairway recall the heritage of Spain and Mexico. The Great Tower rises over 60 feet from the floor. Suspended from it by a hand-forged chain is a chandelier, hand-crafted of steel and copper. South Texas animal motifs decorate it. How many can you identify? There are more animals (8) worked into the metal archways across the hallway and in front of the store. Notice the metal railings, mounted in the recessed arches 12 feet above the floor. These came from the old Hidalgo County Courthouse in Edinburg. (It opened in 1910, and was torn down after the present courthouse opened in 1954.) The Grand Entry doors and the Reception Area/ Admission Area counter tops are made of mesquite wood. This native tree has become a symbol of the South Texas brush country. (Mesquite, actually, is a kind of thorny shrub, kin to Africa’s acacia tree.)

- III. **The Museum Store:** If you are interested in reading about the history, flora or fauna of our area, the books you are looking for are here. There are also cookbooks and craft kits for those who love to stay busy. Many souvenirs including jewelry, postcards, and stuffed toy animals representing South Texas' wildlife (including prehistoric!) are also available.
- IV. **The Heritage Courtyard:** As you leave the store, walking south down the long hallway and turning right (west) you will find the entrance (double glass doors) to the Heritage Courtyard. Opened in 1993, it contains native plants, fountains, and a walkway of names that represent the people and ranch brands of South Texas. Memorial stones and named-brick pavers are found here also. Engraved bricks and stones may still be purchased through the Museum Office. The **water pump** can be used if first primed (pour water into the handle opening on top of the pump to wet the leather valve covers, so it can pull water into the pump cylinder when you pump the handle-you might have to do this a couple of times to get it to work). This used the muscle power of the people (usually the children of the family had this job).
- V. **Will Looney Legacy Park:** Leaving the courtyard, you will enter the park by the southeast gate. To get the most from this area you will need to be alert to all the things around you (look up, down, and all around)...They represent our Legacy (something that is handed down or remains from a previous generation or time). The first thing you should notice is **plants**. They are native plants. Past generations did not just use them just for lunch, they used them for medicines, shelter, and of course tools. You will notice the historic marker on the south wall of **the jail building**. It is (along with all other historic markers) a reminder of our past...the building materials and architecture that were used by previous generations. Notice are the **animal footprints** that we will be walking over (*They include in order: armadillo, quail, javelina*). The wild life of our area is unique and we want to preserve it so it will not become extinct (to vanish or be destroyed). The metal cow that can be used to practice roping. Roping is a skill that is important to our ranching/vaquero traditions. Notice next, **the statue** of an older woman (grandmother, Margaret Looney) and a young man (grandson, Will Looney). Reading the inscription on the statue will tell you about another type of Legacy. If you have experienced visiting a ranch with friends or family, you realize there

is a legacy that a family cares for that land. (*Animal footprints near the statue are the roadrunner and coyote*). **The sundial** (*deer footprints*) uses renewable energy from the sun/shadow to tell us the time. Please notice the **wind mill** too, using the renewable energy of the wind to pump water (*racoon footprints near the west door of the jail/archive building*). If you continue north on the sidewalk (*quail and bobcat prints*) you will see the cypress tank (*racoon, deer, wild turkey footprints*) another pump at the base of the windmill (*bobcat and jackrabbit footprints*) and the **leña fence**.

- VI. **The Old Jail:** Iron bars, stout walls, and its roof of Spanish tile identify the Old Jail. This building, seen to your left as you enter the Heritage Courtyard, was the original Hidalgo County Jail in Chapin/Edinburg. Like the old courthouse, the Jail opened in 1910. Both buildings were “Mission Revival” style, the fore-runner of the true Spanish Colonial Revival. In later years, the jail served as the City Hall and Fire Station. The Old Jail housed the Museum when it opened in 1970. Despite much growth since then, the historic old building remains an integral part of the Museum complex. On its upper (accessible by stairway and elevator) floor and ground floor are small galleries for changing exhibits. The second floor is where you will also find the notorious hanging room with its original steel trapdoor. A prisoner was executed/hanged there in 1913. **The Old Jail building is undergoing repairs, and is closed to touring guests.**
- VII. **Freddy Gonzalez Exhibit (relocated, please ask):** Sergeant Alfredo Gonzalez was a young man who grew up in Edinburg in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Freddy went to Edinburg High School where he was on the EHS Bobcat football team. After graduating in 1965, he joined the United States Marine Corps. He was sent to fight in the Vietnam War. In 1968, his platoon was among the Marines sent to combat the Communist takeover of Hue (whey) City. While on their way to the city Freddy was wounded, but rejected medical attention, for the sake of those more severely hurt. Freddy was put in charge of the platoon in the absence of his regular commander. The battle progressed to the Joan of Arc Catholic School where the platoon was attacked with machine-gun and rocket fire. Freddy then launched a one-man assault with several rocket launchers. Though he destroyed several enemy strongholds, he himself was hit by a rocket launcher and died. In 1969 Freddy Gonzalez was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest

award an American can receive. In spring, 1995, the United States Navy named a Naval Destroyer the U.S.S. Gonzalez. Other memorials to Freddy are F. Gonzalez Elementary, Freddy Gonzalez Blvd. and F. Gonzalez Park in Edinburg.

VIII. The Archive: Built onto the Old Jail is the wing housing the Margaret H. McAllen Memorial Archive – a vast collection of reference books, documents, maps, and photographs that chronicle the region’s history. With its diverse and unique holdings that are constantly growing, the Archive is gaining renown across the United States and Mexico as a center for borderlands research. The Museum also does much of its exhibition research here. If your interest is regional history, then you should start here. The Archive has a newly-opened Reading Room and Information Center, just inside the door from the Courtyard. The Archive name honors Mrs. Margaret H. McAllen, who was instrumental in founding the Museum in the 1960’s. She maintained a lifelong interest in preserving the history and heritage of South Texas. Mrs. McAllen was of the long-established ranching family for whom the city of McAllen was named.

IX. The Main Exhibit Gallery: On the Museum’s second floor is the main exhibit gallery. You can reach it by way of the Grand Stairway or by the Visitors’ Elevator, behind the stairway in the Grand Lobby. Entitled *RIO GRANDE LEGACY*, this dramatic “walk through time” tells the story of South Texas and Northeastern Mexico, as it happened along the lower Rio Grande. There are three main sections:

1. **The River Frontier** -- the formative era, when the sea, the land, and the river were born; a time of prehistoric beasts, and later, of Indian cultures, conquistadors, and Spanish colonists.
2. **The River Highway** – the turbulent 19th Century, when nations fought to control this region; a time of battle smoke, steamboats, international trade, and the “cattle kingdom.”
3. **The River Crossroads** -- the mighty 20th Century, when railroads, canals, farming, and city growth changed the lower Rio Grande from a river highway into a crossroads of cultures, commerce, and heritage –

punctuated by world-shaking events and technologies that shaped the modern Rio Grande Valley.

The *River Frontier* and *River Highway* sections are open upstairs, in the main exhibit gallery.

The *River Crossroads* section is open downstairs.

A. **The River Frontier**: From geological origins to 1820

1. The **mosasaur** (a sea reptile) lived in the sea that covered this region many millions of years ago. Mosasaurs may have been the ancestors of snakes. The skeleton seen here was cast from an original found in Arkansas. It is about 21' long. Mosasaurs could reach 40' or more.
2. **Mammoth herds roamed the ancient Valley.** Bones, teeth, and tusks turn up along the Rio Grande. In the wall display, you will find the fragments of a mammoth found in China (CHEE-nah), Nuevo Leon, on a ranch owned by Mr. De la Cruz of Edinburg. He remembers sitting on mammoth teeth as a child. Valley soil doesn't preserve ancient bones well. The *Columbian Mammoth* skeleton displayed here was cast from a nearly-complete specimen found in Florida. Other Pleistocene animals of South Texas included giant bison, camels, saber-tooth cats, and horses. For reasons still unknown, all became extinct.
3. **Paleo-Indians** were the first-known people in the Americas. They appeared in the region of Northeastern Mexico and South Texas about 12,000 years ago, hunting with "darts" thrown with an *atl-atl* or throwing stick. Except for projectile points, the Paleo -Indians left few traces behind. These "shadow people" may have hunted mammoths and other ancient beasts in South Texas.
4. The **Coahuiltecan** (kwo-WEEL-teh-kans) were the Indians who lived and traded in the Valley. The name "Coahuiltecan" is derived from Mexico's State of Coahuila. A term used by anthropologists, it refers to the common language group shared by the region's Indian peoples. In

reality, the Indians had their own names, noted by early Spanish missionaries. Here's a sample. Try pronouncing some of them!

Unpuncligut

Perpepug

Samacoalapem

Coospacam

Comecrudo

Clancluiguyguen

The camp scene shows how a family might have lived near the Rio Grande. The background was painted by Jan Vriesen, a world-renowned diorama muralist.

5. **Nueva Espana** (nu-EH-va es-PAHN-ya), "New Spain", was the name given to what is now Mexico and the southwestern United States. For three hundred years it was part of the Spanish empire. This region – the lower Rio Grande – was a frontier of northeastern New Spain. Spanish mariners explored the coast as early as 1519. Ships carrying treasure and other cargoes, and armed with cannons, sailed the Gulf of Mexico, the "Spanish Sea." Many were wrecked on Padre Island. A fleet of three ships, wrecked near today's Port Mansfield in 1554, yielded artifacts displayed in this area.
6. The "**stars**" in the dome represent the night sky off the mouth of the Rio Grande, as they would have appeared to Pineda's sailors in the summer of 1519. Navigating by the stars was essential in the era before radio and global-positioning satellites. Could you sail from Spain to New Spain using only the stars and knowledge of winds and currents?
7. **Horses** came to New Spain by ship. This scene shows how they were carried below deck. In this way the Spanish re-introduced the horse into the New World, where Ice Age horses had died out long before. The horse mannequin depicts a "barb," a popular Spanish breed.

8. The **tile floor design** in the round Spanish Exploration area is a “wind rose.” The wind rose was used on early maps as an aid in navigation. The original of this one appeared on a map of the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico made around 1550. A copy of it is displayed in the case with the shipwreck artifacts. The three large **ship models** in the center depict the basic types used in the Spanish Sea – the *caravela* and the *nao*. Pineda’s exploration fleet of 1519, and others, included ships like these. The models were hand-crafted and donated by Mike Walsh of Pharr, who designed yacht interiors for movie stars including John Wayne. Raul Guzman Jr., a teacher in McAllen, built and donated the carrack ship model in the “Intruders in the Spanish Sea” exhibit. Used widely in the 1500’s, carracks were the largest ships of their day.
9. The **jacal** was the common frontier house in New Spain. The Spaniards adopted it from native Indian huts. *Jacales* were still being built in the Valley in the early 1900’s. The thatched palm-frond roof on this reconstruction was made on the San Vicente Ranch in Hidalgo County.
10. **Joseph (or José) de Escandon**, a Spanish soldier and governor, colonized northeastern Mexico and South Texas in the late 1740’s. His colonists founded the first towns and missions along the lower Rio Grande, including Camargo and Reynosa. (All of this happened some 25 years *before* the American Revolution began in the British colonies.) Escandón named the province after his home city of Santander, in Spain. A new film about Escandón will soon be shown in the Spanish Ranch House Theater.
11. At the **dress-up area**, there’s an opportunity to handle replica Spanish armor and weapons, and to try on colonial-style garb.
12. The **Ranch Compound**: This area represents a Spanish frontier ranch compound, somewhere near the Rio Grande, in the late 1700’s. Defensive walls, with heavy gates and parapets to shoot from, surround a 2-story ranch house or *casa mayor* (“great house”). Its thick stone walls give protection from Indian attacks. During such raids, ranch workers living nearby in *jacales* take refuge in the fortress-like house. Notice the exposed

blocks. These are actual stone building blocks, or *sillares* (see-YAR-rays), from an old *casa mayor* in Starr County. They were donated for use in this exhibit.

13. The **horno** was a stone “beehive” oven, descended from those of Moorish North Africa and Spain. Most frontier ranches had an *horno* for baking. This one was modeled from one shown in a photograph, dated 1904, taken on the San Juanito Ranch in Hidalgo County.
14. **Oxcarts** traveled in caravans for protection. They carried goods to and from the Rio Grande’s frontier towns and ranches. One important cargo was salt, dug from Valley salt lakes, like La Sal del Rey. Oxcarts were the “18-wheelers” of colonial days.
15. **Father Miguel Hidalgo**, a most unlikely rebellion leader, started Mexico’s struggle for independence from Spain, in 1810. His shout or *grito* is echoed today on Mexico’s Independence Day, September 16.

B. **The River Highway**: From 1820 to 1900

1. **Republic of Mexico** area: The **two-story building** with arches was based on early-1800’s structures in Matamoros, Monterrey, and elsewhere in northeastern Mexico. Balconies were favorite places to relax in the evening. Cast-iron railings often came by ship from New Orleans and Baltimore.
2. **From Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, this Commemorative Bell** is dated **March 6, 1836**, the same date that the Alamo Mission was defeated by General Santa Anna. It was discovered in 1986 in a salvage yard in San Juan, Texas. The inscription indicates that it was dedicated to the life of a woman named Doña Maria Guadalupe de Meléndez Pedro Beato.
3. **Commerce and trade** on the Rio Grande, in the 1820’s and 1830’s, brought merchants from Ireland, France, and Italy to this area. In this same era the city of Matamoros grew into an important trade center and port.

4. **Frontier Defense-** Lipan apaches, Comanches, and others strike ranches and villages, running off horses, burning *jacales*, killing and kidnapping. Defense lies with the settlers. Colonists agreed to be their own militia, and now, as then, cavalry units seldom patrol from scattered presidios. For frontier families, courage and good aim are still the main defenses.
5. **Texas's war of independence** came in 1835 and 1836. After Mexican victories at the Alamo and Goliad, the "Texians", or Texans, defeated Santa Anna's army at San Jacinto. The Mexican army that marched on Goliad assembled at Matamoros before crossing the Rio Grande. Later, Santa Anna's defeated troops returned to Mexico along the same route.
6. **Republic of Texas** area : Large herds of wild horses and cattle – runaways from Spanish and later Mexican ranches – roamed the country between the Rio Grande and the Rio Nueces, the "**Wild Horse Desert.**" The new Republic of Texas and the Republic of Mexico both claimed this large, arid region. When Texas joined the United States, the boundary dispute caused trouble between the U. S. and Mexico. This helped ignite the Mexican War.
7. **"Manifest Destiny"**: Lands belonging to Mexico lay between the United States and the Pacific Coast. A popular idea – "Manifest Destiny" – declared that the U. S. would inevitably expand to the Pacific, taking all lands in its path. Refusing a buy-out offer, Mexico prepared to fight.
8. **Mexican War** area: The war between the U. S. and Mexico began in 1846 near today's Brownsville, with the battle of Palo Alto. Lasting 18 months, the conflict involved land and naval forces, and spread from the Rio Grande to California and south to Mexico City. It ended with the U. S. gaining what are now the states of New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado. Mexicans' anger at what they saw as an unjustified war and land-grab burned for decades afterward. (Memories of the "War of North American Aggression" doubtless still affect Mexico's relations with the U. S.) The war placed the **permanent boundary** between the U. S. and Mexico along the Rio Grande. Extended Mexican

families had members living on both sides. Those on the north side had to become U. S. citizens or go to Mexico, leaving behind their lands and homes. This caused much hardship and bad feelings among Mexicans. Resentment smoldered, and would flare up over and over again in the decades ahead.

9. **Soldier Camp:** This scene suggests an army “encampment” in a town in northeastern Mexico, during the Mexican War. Women known as “camp followers” often went with the troops of both sides, cooking meals, doing laundry, and tending the sick. (Many more soldiers died from sickness than from fighting.) The Mexican War’s most famous camp follower was Sarah Borginnis, who accompanied Zachary Taylor’s army from the Rio Grande to Monterrey. She stood over 6’ tall, and reputedly could out-fight most soldiers! For her physique, this Irish lass was nicknamed after the biggest ocean-going steamship of the time – the *Great Western*. The campfire tripod in this scene is said to have actually been used in the Mexican War. The camp follower mannequin was modeled after a woman who participated in a Mexican War re-enactment at Brownsville in the 1990’s.
10. **The Steamboat:** This exhibit recreates the front, or bow section, of a typical Rio Grande steamboat, of the late 1850’s. On board is a theater showing a film about steamboats on the Rio Grande. Steamboats brought modern technology to the people along the Rio Grande in the mid -1800’s. The boats carried cargoes of all kinds, along with news, culture, and ideas. It was the steamboat that turned the Rio Grande into a “river highway.” Most Rio Grande steamboats were built on the Ohio River, and sailed down the Mississippi River and around the Gulf Coast. The first “wave” of boats came in the Mexican War, when the Army used them to carry troops and supplies. Commercial “steamboatin’ ” followed, in the 1850’s. The last steamboat, *Bessie*, made her final run around 1900. During that half-century, over 90 steamboats plowed the Rio Grande (though not all at the same time!) On the re-created steamboat’s deck are **cotton-bales**, and

crates displaying typical weapons and other artifacts – including a **miner’s pick and “gold pan.”** Did you know that the Rio Grande played a role in the California gold rush? Gold was discovered in California in early 1848 (even before the Mexican War was over.) By early 1849, thousands from the U. S. and around the world were going to California. Many of the first “ ‘49ers” went across northern Mexico, starting their trek by going up the Rio Grande on steamboats, then heading over land the rest of the way. Hostile Indians and bandits made this route very dangerous. (Later gold-seekers went across southern Mexico, across Panama, or around South America by ship. Many others traveled by wagon train across the territories newly acquired from Mexico.) Also note the re-created **boiler front**. The boilers were long iron tubes, in which water was boiled to make the steam that powered the engines. How would you like to stoke the blazing hot boilers with wood, all day long, on a summer day? On the deck above is the all-important **pilot house**, with its big steering wheel (or “pilot wheel”.) Steering a steamboat took a lot of strength : the pilot had to contend with the Rio Grande’s twists and turns, and its powerful currents. A big steering wheel acted like a lever, allowing the pilot to steer the boat with less effort. A **steamboat model** shows how the actual boats looked. This one is a “stern wheeler,” with its paddle wheel behind the boat. “Side-wheelers” had two paddle wheels, one on either side. The steamboat featured here is the *Ranchero*. That boat was involved in a battle between the forces of Juan Cortina and the U. S. Army, at La Bolsa Bend in 1860.

11. As you leave the steamboat, step onto the **wharf**. Steamboats tied up at wooden wharves at Brownsville and possibly other Rio Grande towns. In the busy 1850’s and ‘60’s, wharves and river banks were piled with cargoes. The freight arrived from ports in the U. S., such as Charleston and New York, and from Europe. Much of it was sold in the Valley, but mostly it went into northern Mexico.

12. The **cotton gin**: Displayed on the wharf is an original cotton gin from the 1880's. Machines like this were brought upriver by steamboat, for use along the river or in Mexico. Invented by Eli Whitney in 1793, the cotton gin reversed the decline of Southern slavery, and helped bring on the Civil War.
13. The **Rio Grande (Miller) Hotel**: This two-story structure adjoining the wharf recreates a typical river-front hotel of the steamboat era. It is patterned after Miller's Hotel, a well-known Brownsville "hostelry" of the mid-1800's. The "windows" on the ground floor hold exhibits about the Civil War and the French Intervention along the lower Rio Grande. Both events happened in the 1860's.
14. **French Intervention in Mexico**: To regain a French empire in the Americas, Emperor Napoleon III invaded Mexico in 1861, as the American Civil War was raging. Six years of warfare followed, as Mexican loyalties divided between the invaders and the forces of Benito Juarez. Juarez finally triumphed, and ordered the execution of "puppet" emperor Maximilian I. Many former French Imperial soldiers, and Mexicans who had sided with them, escaped to take up residence in South Texas. An early victory by Benito Juarez against the French took place on May 5, 1862. Mexicans and Mexican-Americans still celebrate the battle on "El Cinco de Mayo."
15. The **Cotton Trade**: On the Rio Grande, the Civil War's chief issue was international trade – mainly, trade in cotton. The South depended on exports of "white gold" to pay for its war effort. The Union's naval blockade was meant to stop the exports by closing Southern ports. As the blockade tightened, cotton growers discovered a "back door" – on the Rio Grande. Across it lay the port of Bagdad, which became a major trade center for cotton. Southern cotton poured across the Rio Grande into Bagdad, where it was loaded onto foreign ships. Since Mexico was a neutral country, the U. S. Navy could not interfere with the trade. War supplies and other cargoes poured into Bagdad from overseas, bound for

the Confederate war effort. The “cotton trade” went on until the war ended in the spring of 1865. The big ship model in the “Cotton Trade” case depicts a schooner – a type of sailing vessel used widely in taking cargoes to and from Bagdad. Schooners could actually sail into the Rio Grande itself. Some even reached Brownsville and Matamoros!

16. Most of the **American Civil War**’s fighting took place “back east.” Yet the “blue and gray” fought in the Valley also. Mostly, this occurred when the Union forces invaded the coast in late 1863. They had orders to seize the north bank of the Rio Grande and shut off the cotton trade. At first, Confederate troops withdrew from the Valley, while the “Yankees” occupied Brownsville and places upriver. The “Rebels” – including Mexican-Texans – returned in 1864, driving the U.S. troops back to their camp on Brazos Santiago Island. Months of “stand-off” followed, until May of 1865, when the war’s last land fight took place near Brownsville, at Palmito Ranch. The “Rebs” won, but the war itself was already lost. **Mexican-Texans**, or *tejanos* (tay-HA-nohs) fought on both sides in the American Civil War. The Union forces occupying the Valley recruited *tejano* cowboys or *vaqueros* as cavalymen. They rode on long-range patrols, and some of their old campsites have been found on local ranches. A picture of one of these troopers, Private Patricio Perez of Hidalgo County, is seen in the exhibit. A road in western Hidalgo County has been named for him. *Tejanos* also rode with Confederate forces. Among them were the Benavides brothers of Laredo.
17. **Leña fence:** At the exhibit’s entrance is a re-created corral fence and gate. Although the early Spanish and Mexican ranchers didn’t have barbed wire, they could build good, strong enclosures for livestock. These were called “corrales”. Today we know this pen as a corral. They were built of leñas or lengths of native tree limbs. The gate and the leña fence on display were built on the historic San Juanito Ranch by Jimmy McAllen using period wire and old staples to show the type of fence used at the time.

18. **Cattle Kingdom:** This exhibit area tells of South Texas ranching and ranch life, in the decades after the Civil War. For many, this is the most familiar era in all of American history-the glory day of the cowboy, the trail drive, and the open range. The cycle of ranch life kept an unhurried pace. Vaqueros and cowboys became folk heroes. Vigilante groups and Captain L. H. McNeely's Texas Ranger force were the law of the land.
19. **The Santa Fe Ranch** is depicted in the mural scene (painted by Jan Vriesen) with hoof prints and cow patties compliments of their cattle. The wagon contains the "Chuck Box", which was the kitchen on wheels for vaqueros and cowboys. At night, with its campfire, the chuck wagon was a place to tell tales, hear old songs and wrap up in blankets and bedroll to sleep. The chuck box on display here came from the San Juanito Ranch in Hidalgo County.
20. **Longhorns:** A cow skull from Hidalgo County hangs on the Ranch House wall. These famous cattle were the "building blocks" of the South and Central Texas Cattle Kingdom. The longhorn, an ancestor of Spanish cattle, was a hardy breed, but lanky. Today many ranchers in South Texas raise longhorns cross-bred with other beef cattle. The result is an improved beef cattle breed that costs the rancher less to raise.
21. **Texas Rangers:** In the late 1800's South Texas was a refuge for outlaws of all kinds. There were cattle and horse thieves as well as Juan Cortina making ruthless raids across the Rio Grande. The Texas Rangers were sent in by the Governor to handle the situation. "McNelly's Rangers" believed that the only way to end the trouble was to mete out swift justice. Some of their weapons, including the famous "Colt Peace-Maker," are displayed in the case next to the ranch house.
22. **Ranch House:** This building suggests a typical South Texas ranch house around 1880. This house is built of lumber, which may have been carried by steamboat down the Rio Grande. Inside you will view many of the "modern conveniences" of the nineteenth century.

23. **Wells and windmills** brought water to the ranches and their inhabitants. Ranch life now included modern conveniences such as mill-ground flour and a wagon shed. Cattle brands are now registered and barbed wire is used to fence pastures.

As you leave the exhibit area, please stop and visit our Reading Ranch. You may look out the window to the east to see a bird's eye view of the native plants below. From south to north you may recognize the Huisache Tree, Potato Tree, Spanish Dagger, Wild Olive, Desert Yaupon, Brazilian Pepper Bush, Honey Mesquite Tree, Mountain Laurel, Agave, Huisache Tree, and Cenizo/ purple sage.

C. **The River Crossroads**: From 1900 to 2000

1. **The Magic Valley Era** [Ca. 1904 – 1941] They call it the Magic Valley! Its rich soil grows almost anything, if you just add water! Agriculture booms! Newcomers pour in! Modern times arrive! But the new, Anglo-dominant social order mostly discriminates against native Mexican-Texans or *tejanos*—sometimes violently. Their long struggle to regain equality begins. Mexico's revolution triggers "bandit raids" and draws American troops. Border troubles subside; the soldiers leave for World War One. The 1920s bring Prohibition, rapid growth, and a citrus industry. Harder times mark the 1930s, as war clouds gather. The formative era ends with World War Two.
2. **July 4, 1904**: Amid fireworks and brass bands, the first train of the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico Railway rolls into Brownsville. The "B&M" is the Valley's long-awaited rail connection with the rest of the United States. Its coming spurs a mammoth land-development boom. By trainloads, the machinery, equipment, tools, lumber, and people needed to build canals, farms, and cities arrive from the north and pour into the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The Anglo-American 20th Century has arrived.
3. **Land Seekers**- With the railroad, come "land excursions" – sales tours conducted by land development companies. Each winter, potential buyers arrive by the trainloads, mostly Anglo-Americans from the Midwest.

Shepherded by company agents, they view canals, farms, crops, and towns. Many buy land on the spot; some realize, later, that salesmen could leave out certain details. Thorny brush often blankets new farm tracts; irrigation-water service can be irregular; rattlesnakes buzz underfoot. Some land-seekers (or “land suckers,” to many locals) give up. But most newcomers endure, planting a strong agricultural heritage in the Magic Valley.

4. **The Key to the Valley’s “Magic”-1904:** Big-scale agricultural irrigation begins with the railroad’s coming. Trains haul in heavy equipment and pumping machinery. Private companies begin building the early canal systems. Pumping stations dot the Rio Grande’s north bank from Brownsville to Mission. Canal networks extend across the Valley. Sales of irrigated land attract more Anglo-Americans to the “Magic Valley.” By the ‘teens, financial problems plague many canal companies. Valley farmers buy out most of the companies and establish “irrigation districts.” These member-owned organizations will regulate Rio Grande water distribution into the 21st Century.
5. **Canal Building-** Men, mules and muscle build the early canals. Survey crews map routes through mesquite and cactus. Axe-wielding brush crews hack out rights-of-way. With mule-drawn plows and earth scrapers, construction crews break the soil and build canal embankments. The first canals are open-top, partly above ground; later, many are put underground to cut evaporation loss. With the “earth movers” come other crews, installing gates and valves. Meanwhile, still others build the pumping stations. Before long, steam engines turn, pumps spin, and water flows!
6. **Bringing the Water-** Valley canal systems use pumps to lift Rio Grande water over natural embankments, or terraces, along the river’s north side. Beyond each step-like rise, the land slopes gently away, enabling water to flow by gravity. At each terrace stands a pumping or lift station. The first lift draws water from the river and into the main canal. Other stations lift water over successive terraces and into the next canal segments. Valves

(gates) direct the flow to side channels (laterals) and then through smaller ditches to fields and groves.

7. **Controlling the Flow**-To control and direct water flow, canal builders install valves or “gates.” Along the early main canals are wooden “check gates,” used to regulate the volume of water. Smaller metal gates direct water into side channels. From these laterals, the water flows through ditches into fields and groves. But open canals lose water through leakage and evaporation. Many are later concrete-lined and buried, their paths marked by concrete pipes sticking up across the landscape. Bigger pipes contain gates. Smaller pipes vent air to help keep water flowing.
8. **Early Farm Life**-Farm families, mostly from the Midwest, pour into the Magic Valley. Finding land covered in thorny brush, many hire Mexican laborers to help clear it. Newcomers live in tents or *jacales*; frame houses and barns come later. Mule-drawn plows turn the soil. Families contend with floods, heat, rattlesnakes, rats, and insects. Some go broke; others give up. Most “tough it out,” forging an agriculture-based society that will long dominate the region.
9. **1904:** The upper Valley’s big-scale development starts with the railroad. Track-laying west from Harlingen begins that summer. Canal-building and land developments follow quickly. As farming spreads, new railroad towns spring up – La Feria, Mercedes, Donna, McAllen, Mission, and others. Founded mainly to serve the farmers, the towns grow, attracting still more people, businesses, and capital.

By 1910, farm lands near the main rail line are mostly taken. “Farm to market” roads are far in the future. A new railroad is begun – the San Benito and Rio Grande Valley – to serve outlying farms and more towns: Rio Hondo, Progreso, Monte Christo, San Perlita, and others. Its network of tracks earns the line a nickname – the Spider Web.
10. **Garage and Model T/ Horseless Carriage**- Truly, the automobile is a revolutionary invention: a personal, self-propelled vehicle that gives unprecedented mobility to the average person. From a spindly horseless

carriage, it becomes by 1910 a modern machine. The Valley feels its growing impact. New cars arrive by train—Fords, REOs, Chevrolets, and other makes. More farmers, ranchers, and town folk buy autos and trucks. Blacksmith shops become garages. Stores sprout curbside gas pumps. Street paving begins. Service stations and tourist courts appear. By the '20s, South Texas, like the nation, becomes a culture on wheels.

11. **Town Life/ Towns and Changes** [Ca. 1904 – 1920]

A frontier look with false fronts and wooden sidewalks marks new Valley towns. Hotels, saloons, and businesses line dirt streets. Houses, schools, and churches rise. Stores sell goods for farm and city folk. Chugging autos weave among horse-drawn wagons. Victrolas play scratchy songs. Telephone lines are strung. Trainloads of produce roll northward. Daily, more newcomers arrive. With boundless enthusiasm, they impress the life, culture, and values of 20th Century mainstream America onto the region and its older Mexican-Texan and Anglo-Texan society – and plant the seeds of future problems.

12. **Powder Keg** [ca. 1904 – 1915] - For many Texans of Mexican descent, the Valley's Anglo-American influx brings traumatic changes. As ranch lands become irrigated farmlands, numerous Mexican-Texan (*tejano*) ranch workers lose their ancestral homes and livelihoods. Some impoverished *tejanos* cross into Mexico. Others, remaining in the Valley, often must compete for menial jobs with immigrant *mexicanos*, drawn by the development boom. In addition, many Anglos discriminate against Hispanics, limiting their opportunities for employment and education. By 1910, among displaced *tejanos* on both sides of the Rio Grande, resentment smolders like a lighted fuse on a powder keg.

13. **The Revolution Era: Overview** - Mexico, 1910. Revolution! Francisco Madero's revolt ends decades of Porfirio Díaz' iron rule. Elected President, Madero soon faces new uprisings. In 1913 his army commander, Huerta, still loyal to Díaz, overthrows Madero. Huerta becomes President, but rebellions against him break out across Mexico.

Opposing Huerta are Constitutionalist leaders, among them Zapata, Carranza, Villa, and Obregón. They march on Mexico City in 1914. Forcing Huerta out, the strongmen struggle for dominance. Years of civil war ravage Mexico; thousands die. Refugees flee to the US, including the Valley. Finally the chaos subsides. Zapata is ambushed. Villa retires. Carranza is President for a time, until forced out. When Obregón becomes President in 1920, modern Mexico begins to emerge.

The Great War: Onset [1914-1916]

14. **Summer, 1914:** An assassin kills an Austrian archduke, and tangled alliances drag European nations into war. The Central Powers – Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey – confront the Allies: France, England, and Russia. Fighting begins in August. By 1915 the war’s tentacles reach overseas, even to the Americas. Aware of American sympathies toward the Allies, Berlin hopes to prompt a US-Mexico war to divert Yankee attention and military strength away from Europe – allowing a German victory. Soon, Texas newspapers tell of German agents near the border, and rumors fly that Berlin’s intrigues lie behind the Plan of San Diego and the bandit raids. Along the border the fear and suspicions simmer for months, until, unexpectedly, a secret message reveals German intentions.
15. **May 7, 1915:** Bound from New York to Liverpool, the British liner *Lusitania* approaches England. Among her 2,000 passengers are US and Mexican citizens. Without warning, a German submarine, or U-boat, torpedoes the ship. In 18 minutes the *Lusitania* sinks. More than 1,100 men, women, and children perish. Amid clamors for war, President Wilson protests the sinking in stern “diplomatic notes” – but nothing more. With neighboring Mexico in turmoil, and unsettled border conditions (punctuated by the recently-uncovered Plan of San Diego), Wilson is reluctant to enter the European war. The *Lusitania* furor recedes. Two years later, a German intrigue with Mexico helps stir the U.S. to take action.

16. **The Zimmermann telegram**, January 1917/Late 1916: In Europe the entrenched armies are deadlocked. The Allies hope for US involvement; the Central Powers fear it. But Uncle Sam stays out of “the Great War.” Concerns closer to home, including a Mexico in turmoil and US troops on the border, outweigh those in Europe. Nevertheless, rising American sentiments favor the Allies. US intervention may come soon. So Germany makes a fateful move. January 1917. British intelligence intercepts a coded German transmission, proposing to Mexican President Carranza an alliance against the US. Carranza considers the offer, but postpones a decision. In March, Pershing’s expedition leaves Mexico. With a key incentive for war thus removed, Carranza declines the German proposal. Meanwhile, disclosed to Washington and published nationwide, the Zimmermann Telegram stirs national outrage. Coupled with the Germans’ resuming unrestricted submarine warfare, the telegram prompts the US to join the Allies in April 1917. The deadlock breaks, and Germany surrenders in November 1918.
17. **Sky Ways, 1929**. Commercial air service arrives in the Valley. On March 9, Brownsville opens its Municipal Airport with fanfare and celebrities, such as Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart. At the new airfield, a major hub for Pan American Airways, railroad passengers from “up north” can embark on flights into Latin America aboard the Ford “Tri-Motors” of PAA and its Mexican affiliate, Compañía Mexicana de Aviación. In the 1930s, Braniff and Eastern add Brownsville to their domestic routes, while Pan Am reaches the Far East and Europe – a sky network linking the Rio Grande Valley to the nation and the world.
18. **1920s and 1930s - Packing Shed**
1920s: The Magic Valley, like the rest of the country, basks in prosperity. Agriculture thrives; the citrus industry matures. Land excursions roll in. City life improves. Prohibition is the law, but booze is plentiful across the Rio Grande. *Tejanos* strive for a better economic position and for political equality. 1930s: An agriculture-based economy and border location

temper the Great Depression's local impact. People seeking work arrive from the States and Mexico. Prohibition ends. New Deal projects improve the infrastructure. Highways and air service expand. The Port of Brownsville opens, spurring more international trade. Links to the nation and the world grow ever stronger. Meanwhile, overseas, war clouds gather again.

19. **Prohibition:** The 18th Amendment becomes law(January 16,1920), prohibiting the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages in the US. Most Americans support Prohibition at first, but later ignore it. Liquor smuggling thrives, with a main corridor through South Texas. Mule trains cross the Rio Grande, laden with fiery Mexican *tequila*; fast cars take the liquor to San Antonio and beyond. Brush-country battles occur between *tequileros* and lawmen. Meanwhile, *yanquis* flock to bars across the river at Río Rico, Matamoros, and elsewhere. When Prohibition is repealed in 1933, smugglers turn to other contraband, including narcotics.
20. **The 1920s: Citrus becomes a major Valley industry.** Grapefruit is foremost. Groves of white and pink Florida varieties cover thousands of acres. 1925: A red-pulp fruit appears. The “Ruby Red” becomes the Valley’s best-known product. Nationwide demands for citrus rise; Valley production of grapefruit, oranges, and limes increases. Growers organize exchanges to improve control of harvesting, shipping, and marketing. Packing sheds line railroad sidings in many Valley cities. Within the sheds, men and women, including many *tejanos*, sort and pack citrus and other produce, then load it into refrigerated railroad cars bound for northern markets. Despite a post-war recession, the 1920s mostly bring continued growth. Northern newcomers pour in. Vegetable farming expands; citrus production becomes an industry. Research farms open at Weslaco and elsewhere. Urban life improves. Businesses and civic clubs flourish. Autos, trucks, and paved roads multiply. Electric and telephone services expand. A radio station opens, and airline service begins. Higher education arrives, with colleges at Brownsville and Edinburg. Tourists

come to enjoy the tropical setting and sample Mexican culture. As elsewhere in the US, it is a prosperous decade. Though not for everyone: many Mexican-Texans (*tejanos*) and Mexican nationals feel discrimination by the Anglo-dominant society. Segregation is widespread. But voices are being heard. Leaders of the emerging *tejano* middle class demand to know why those whose labors help support the Magic Valley are denied its benefits and treated as inferiors. In the years ahead, they will band together and bring change. In the late 1920s giddy prosperity continues. Americans play the soaring stock market in a trading frenzy. Bank loans increase recklessly; warning signs go unheeded.

21. **Great Depression /October 29, 1929:** Disaster strikes. The stock market starts to crash, and across the country banks and businesses begin to fall like dominos. The Great Depression arrives. Nationwide, many see jobs and life savings vanish. Factories close. Foreclosures devastate farms. Searching for work, thousands migrate, many to the Rio Grande Valley. 1933: Franklin D. Roosevelt becomes President of the United States. His New Deal policy strives for national recovery. Government-sponsored programs put people back to work and help farmers. By the late 1930s the Depression's grip loosens. It will end, finally, with the US entry into World War Two. The Great Depression brings harder times in the Magic Valley. But the region's farming economy and border location temper its impact here. Farm production and marketing rise, while experimental farms advance agricultural science. Farm jobs draw workers, including many from Mexico. Oil and natural gas production grows, along with air service and international trade. The Port of Brownsville opens. Cities expand; more roads are paved. Electric utilities and telephone lines extend further. Radio stations go on the air. By 1941, the formative era wanes as the modern Rio Grande Valley emerges.
22. **Black Gold -Oil!** In the 20th Century, black gold and its products, especially gasoline, are increasingly vital and profitable. Only dry holes mark the first attempts to drill for Valley oil. But in 1920, the region's

first producing oil field is discovered in Starr County. Through the '20s and into the 1930s, more oil wells are drilled in Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron Counties, and elsewhere in South Texas. The oil boom draws workers and boosts the region's economy. As pipelines are built and refineries take shape, the Valley and South Texas help to fuel the nation's growing 20th Century might.

1940-As war looms again, the U. S. strengthens its defenses. The Army Air Corps starts building new bases, including the Valley's. North of Mission is Moore Air Field: there pilots transition to advanced trainer and actual fighter planes. At Harlingen Army Air Field, airmen train as machine gunners and bomber crews. From Brownsville's air base, pilots fly gunnery-practice missions and patrol offshore waters. Engine noise and gunfire shake the Valley's wartime skies year round.

23. **World War II**

Pearl Harbor/Sunday Morning, December 7, 1941. Japanese naval aircraft attack the sprawling U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. In a "sneak attack" they sink or damage eighteen vessels, destroy nearly two hundred Army and Navy airplanes, and kill over 2,000 military personnel and nearly one hundred civilians. As stunned confusion gives way to seething anger, the United States declares war.

Rationing- With a global war to fight, American military forces require increasing quantities of food, fuel, clothing, and armaments. Domestic production cannot fulfill military and civilian needs equally. In 1942, the Federal government imposes nationwide rationing. Rationed materials include rubber, cotton, leather, and many others. Gasoline is rationed to cut tire use. Food is also rationed. To supplement their groceries many people grow vegetables in home "Victory Gardens."

Scrap Drives -Scrap drives gather vital waste materials to recycle for war production. Valley citizens join the nationwide effort. To government-operated depots they bring tons of scrap iron and steel, copper and brass, aluminum and lead. Drives also collect waste paper, rubber, old shoes,

motor oil, and cooking fats. (The glycerin in fats goes into explosives.) Government collection depots are established around the Valley. Civic clubs, scout troops, and others conduct drives, viewed as patriotic duty. Children have incentives, too: some theaters give movie passes to kids in exchange for scrap!

Agriculture Goes to War-Its fertile soil, irrigation, and year-around growing make the Valley a wartime food factory. The chief products are vegetables and citrus fruit. Agricultural production soars, aided by increasing mechanization and crop dusting. Refrigerated produce rolls north in trainloads, while Valley canning plants send processed vegetables and citrus juice overseas. Meanwhile Valley cotton goes into military uniforms and accoutrements. Despite labor and equipment shortages, Valley farmers and ranchers provide tons of produce and beef that help feed U. S. and Allied troops worldwide, along with home-front civilians. Valley citizens, like all American, adapt to rationing, using government-issue stamps to buy rationed goods. But the border itself provides some relief: gasoline, sugar, shoes, and other rationed items are available in Mexico.

24. **The Bracero Program-** For Valley farmers, Mexican workers provide a vital solution to wartime labor shortages. Drawn northward, many rural *mexicanos* cross the Rio Grande. The *mojados* (“wet ones”) are crucial to Valley agriculture. But as illegal immigrants, they are subject to deportation. In 1942 a US – Mexico agreement enables Mexican workers, or *braceros*, to cross legally for limited time periods. The *bracero* program will continue long after WWII.
25. **Civilian Defense** Measures take effect. Invasion fears seal the border for weeks. Valley residents participate in air-raid drills, fire-fighting drills, and first –aid instruction. In the summer of 1942 German submarines prowl the Gulf waters off South Texas and Tamaulipas. Their objective is to disrupt the flow of oil from Mexican to American ports. Tankers and

freighters are torpedoed. Mexico is still neutral, but the Germans sink her vessels anyway and Mexico declares war on the Axis.

26. **Aztec Eagles** -Under a joint U.S.-Mexico program, *Escuadro Aereo 201*, pilots train at Brownsville and other bases. They depart for the Philippines flying P-47 Thunderbolts and carry out ground attacks in support of Allied forces. They are the only Mexican military unit to see combat in WWII.
27. **Horse-Mounted Calvary**- During WWII the last American wartime use of horse-mounted cavalry is on the Lower Rio Grande. From Forts Brown and Ringgold the 124th Cavalry patrols the border country with horses, as well as armored cars and jeeps. They keep alert for possible enemy infiltration across the Rio Grande. In mid-1944 the troopers turn in their horses and head overseas for India. They help to drive the Japanese from Burma and re-open the important “Burma Road,” supply lifeline for China.
28. **Atomic Bomb/August 6, 1945**- A lone American B-29 appears over Hiroshima, Japan. Moments later a searing blast wipes out much of the city-the first wartime use of an atomic bomb. It culminated the “Manhattan Project” the three-year secret effort to develop the bomb. Among thousands who work in the project are four South Texas Graduate students. Reeling from two atomic bombings (the second at Nagasaki), plus Russia’s declaration of war, Japan gives up, ending the largest and costliest war in history.
29. **Khaki Revolution**- For *tejanos*, WWII brings the turning point in their struggle to regain equality. Thousands of Mexican-Texans serve in all military branches, around the world. Many are decorated for gallantry. The American G.I. Forum, a *tejano* veteran’s organization formed in 1948 works to end discrimination at all levels. Within two generations after WWII, *tejano* goals of more political representation and greater social equality are finally attained.

After the War, a spirit of optimism is in evidence as Valley people anticipate renewed growth and development. Valley cities take steps to encourage growth by expanding city services and making other improvements. New subdivisions are laid out. Builders see the demand for more housing, but are held back somewhat by the lingering war-time scarcity of building materials and restrictions on building. Lumber is imported from Mexico to alleviate this shortage. Low-interest loans through the G.I. Bill allow many families to buy their own homes. In 1950 the population of the four-county Valley area stands at 537,811. Growth is slow for the next two decades, but begins to take off in the 1970s.

30. **By the end of the century**, 978,369 people call the Valley home. Urban growth since World War Two has been at the expense of farmland and wildlife habitat. The pace of encroachment has accelerated in the last decades of the century.

It has been said that the Valley is neither American nor Mexican. For generations, each culture has absorbed elements of the other. Local traditions seem in danger of going by the wayside as the Valley becomes less distinct from the rest of the world, and some mourn the loss.

Traditional, close-knit families cope with the pull of far-flung opportunities and non-traditional values. Mexican immigrants, like all immigrants, feel the pull toward assimilation. However, the closeness of Mexico, and often the presence of extended family across the border, serves to preserve many traditions. Family ties are still important.

We hope you have enjoyed your time in the museum. Thank you and we hope you will come to visit again soon.

