

Kit house home to Port Aransas Museum

The story goes that the old house, now home of the Port Aransas Museum, has been moved at least three times originally, and was a kit house that was purchased and shipped to Port Aransas around 1910 when the jetties were first under construction.

The house has endured storms, social upheavals, boom times and depression, and has borne witness to the history of Port Aransas from its beginning in 1910.

The museum has old Mercer family logs in its collection, thanks to the late Eva Rae Mercer Westmoreland.

The Mercer house now sits next to the Community Center, 408 N. Alister St. Museum hours are 1 to 5 p.m. Thursday through Saturday.

According to a written history of the house, it was a kit house, but the brand is unknown. It very likely arrived by train at a loading dock at the Morris and Cummings cut, then was loaded onto a barge.

Where it was first located is unknown, as the only photos of it show sand dunes and dune vegetation in the background.

The house was moved to a location near the Tarpon Inn before the 1919



hurricane hit, and it soon came into use as the U.S. Lifesaving station after the old one was destroyed by a 1916 storm.

The Loomis family opened the first mercantile store in town, and they moved it for a second time to Oleander Street.

The Gaulding family then purchased the house and the Port Aransas Mercantile - the house was part of the bargain. There are no known photographs of the Gaulding family.

The Allens were next in line. Bea and Sam Allen purchased the store and the house and raised their kids

in Port Aransas. They broke with tradition when they sold the house and kept the mercantile.

Buddy and Ruby Harris were the next owners. When he retired from the real estate business, they sold the house to Georgia and Duncan Neblett, who moved to Port Aransas from Houston.

The Nebletts raised their three children in the house, and he continues to serve as municipal judge and justice of the peace. She served as a mayor and as a school board member, and currently serves as program coordinator (executive director) for the Mission Aransas

National Estuarine Research Reserve System, a component of The University of Texas at Austin's Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas.

The Nebletts sold the house to the Robert Morrison family of San Antonio.

The Morrisons then donated the house to the Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association, and the house was moved to its current location. It has been enhanced by \$833,000 worth of renovations (including the price of the house) and now the interior walls display old photos and other artifacts that

tell the story of Port Aransas. The museum also houses a gift shop that showcases items that are unique to the city.

"The house is a vehicle that we're using to tell the history of Port Aransas," Rick Pratt, director of the museum, explained.

The Port Aransas Garden Club donated and installed \$32,000 worth of landscaping.

The museum is part of the preservation association's larger aim to restore the city's "Old Town" to its former glory, possibly with the foundation of a historical district.



Long-time resident Bubba Milina illustrates a story at the museum's official opening in March.

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