

# LEOH Trip

## The Heritage Society at Sam Houston Park

October 14, 2025



LEOH travelers arrived by Precinct One bus to 1100 Bagby,  
“where history comes alive in the heart of downtown Houston”.

**Sam Houston Park** was the first park in Houston, developed on 20 acres purchased by Mayor Sam Brashear in 1900.

**The Heritage Society** is a nonprofit founded in 1954 by Houstonians Faith Bybee, Harvin Moore, and Marie Phelps.

It was founded in part to rescue the 1847 Kellum-Noble house from demolition.

Its mission is to tell the stories of the diverse history of Houston and Texas, and is the only outdoor, interactive historic museum and park.



Our first stop on the tour was the Museum.  
Exhibit themes change periodically; the theme  
at the time of our visit celebrated  
***COASTAL COWBOYS.***







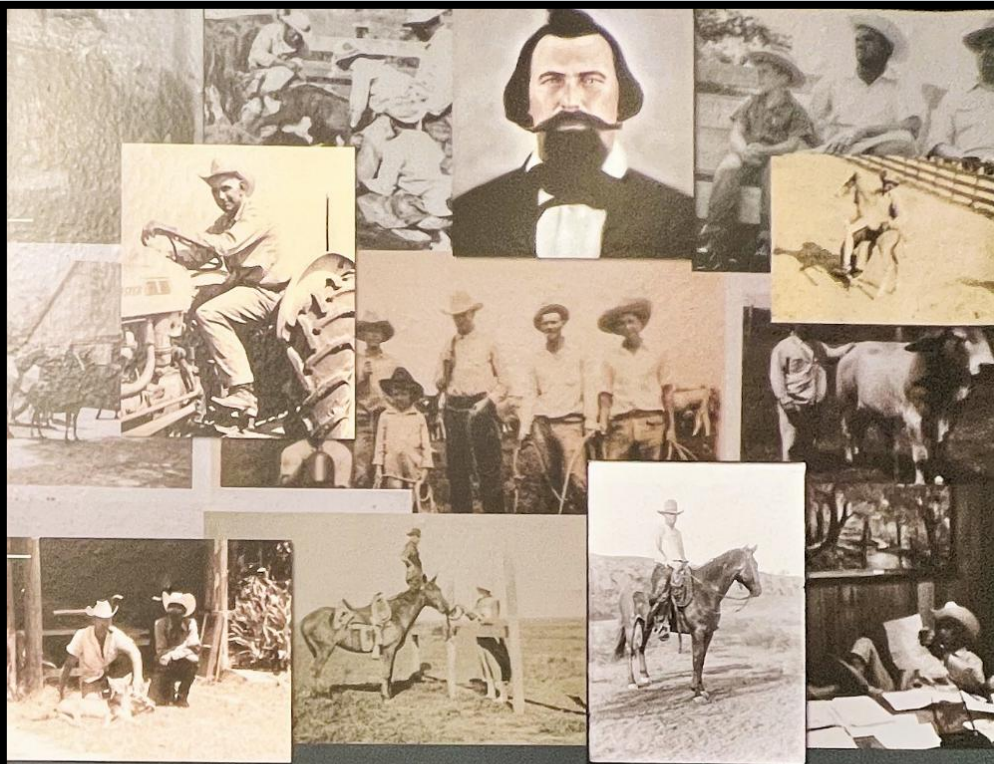
This collection of postcards by Victor Johnson (unrelated to the Coastal Cowboy exhibit) were selected from hundreds that he reviewed. Most are from the period of 1910-1950.

The postcards are intended to represent Houston's history and growth in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Collection was given to the Heritage Society in 2023.

In addition to these postcards, The Heritage Society collections include 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century furniture, art, household articles and textiles, archives, and photos.





## THE LEGACY

"The coastal plains of Texas are a vast expanse of marshes, barrier islands, estuaries, and sandy beaches, spanning nearly four hundred miles, and bracketed between the mighty Rio Grande River and the Sabine River. Here, the lush green fertile lands, nature, her pretty dangers, and the promise of good fortune lured a hearty group of settlers to tame it.

Our self-guided tour included interesting exhibits that described pioneer life and the role of the cowboy.

Amid this vast expanse, the promise of a new business came to light by the early 1800s – the cattle business. And born of necessity, a diverse and determined new breed of laborer elevated themselves to greatness. This special breed of man and horse fused together were the coastal cowboys, and as the American Civil War came to a close and cattle markets expanded and shifted north, many men learned to saddle up, emulating the coastal cowboys, and take on the challenge.

Through hell and hardship, love of the land, and the fortitude to build a grand idea, multiple generations of these pioneering families still run cattle across the vast coastal plains of Texas. They led people from every corner of the globe to know, and respect, the Great American Cowboy. This is their story!"

-Jim Hodges



# THE NEW FRONTIER

With the end of the Civil War came the emancipation of enslaved people. Many newly freed men in Texas had been working cattle all their lives. Most of these cowboys continued to work on ranches where they were formerly enslaved for wages, working on different ranches, or securing land and starting ranches of their own.

Another notable change in this era was the emergence of a new frontier in the cattle industry. Cattle drives began to move to the west and north to locations much farther than had been previously attempted. These new endeavors spurred a large increase in herd sizes and innovations for long journeys such as the chuckwagon to feed the cowboys on the trail.



Typical chuckwagon fare – biscuits, beans, and boiled coffee



In addition to the hardships of long cattle drives, “Texas fever” was reported in Illinois in 1868.

This fatal cattle disease was associated with longhorn cattle driven north from Texas.

It was discovered that the fever was being spread by cattle ticks. Large dipping vats were implemented to kill the ticks. Later, Texas A&M was instrumental in developing a method of immunization to the disease.

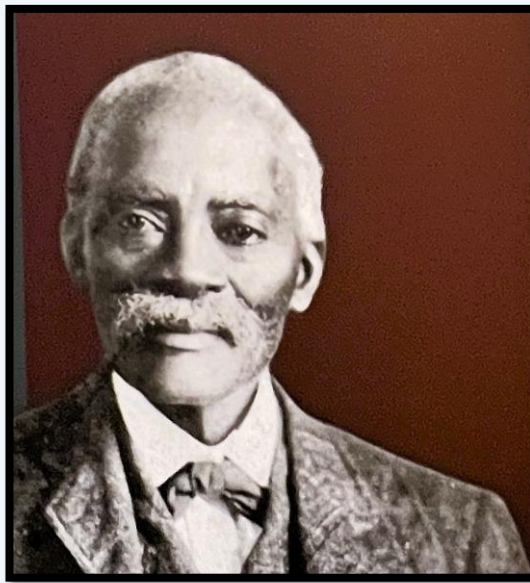


# CALVIN BELL

Calvin Bell was born in Mississippi in 1821. He served on the battlefield during the Battle of Galveston (January 1, 1863) and the Battle of Sabine Pass on (September 8, 1863). He learned basic math from the man he was enslaved to, and during the last year of the Civil War, Bell served at the Clear Creek containment camp where he assisted on numerous cattle drives.

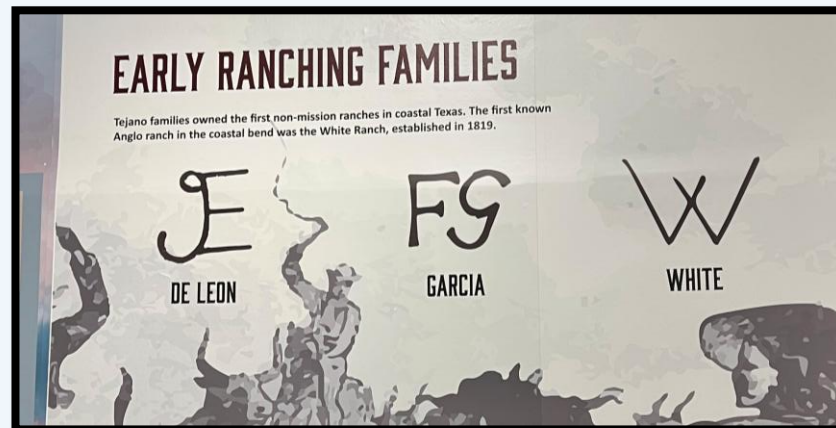
After the end of the war, Bell was hired as a cowboy at the Butler Ranch. In April 1868, he began assisting on Chisholm Trail cattle drives. Bell's knowledge of math enabled him to sort, count, and record cattle with many different brands.

In 1878, Calvin Bell registered a cattle brand and is considered the first freed slave to do so in Galveston County. The brand was a U-shape, possibly in honor of his wife's first name - Eunistine. Calvin's original branding iron was donated to the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. in 2013.



We know that cattle branding was necessary due to cattle rustling (thievery).

Below are a few of the brands created by early ranchers (Rancher Bell's is not shown).



A necessary invention used widely in the cattle industry was barbed wire, to ensure cattle remained fenced in.

Many ranchers created their own barb brand, as seen above.



# WOMEN OF COASTAL RANCHING

## POLLY RYON 1826-1896

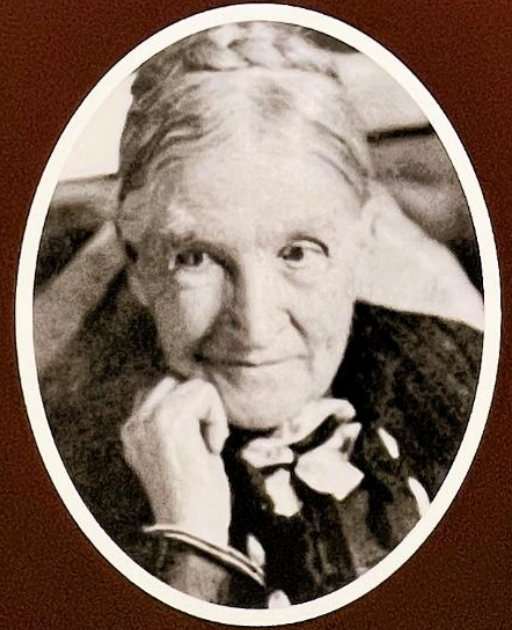
Henry and Nancy Jones received a league of land along the Brazos River in 1824 as members of Stephen F. Austin's "Old 300." Over time, they built a successful farming and ranching operation in the new wilderness. Their eldest daughter, Mary Moore "Polly," inherited the majority of the family's assets.



By the age of 18, Polly became one of the largest landowners in the region while also building a reputation as a selfless citizen. Polly and her husband, Col. William Ryon, built a farming and ranching empire amassing over 80,000 acres of land. Polly continued to serve as the family's matriarch until her death in 1896. After 200 years, and four generations of family management, the ranch is known today as the George Ranch in Richmond, Texas.

## HENRIETTA KING 1832-1925

As the wife of the founder of the King Ranch in South Texas, Henrietta King frequently oversaw the ranch and defended it from Indigenous attacks and bandits while her husband was away.



After his death in 1885, she was sole owner of the ranch for 40 years. She, along with her son-in-law, R. J. Kleberg, Sr., oversaw the management of the huge operation. Mrs. King gave money and land to establish the city of Kingsville, Texas and was particularly instrumental in setting up churches all over South Texas because of her land donations and financial support.



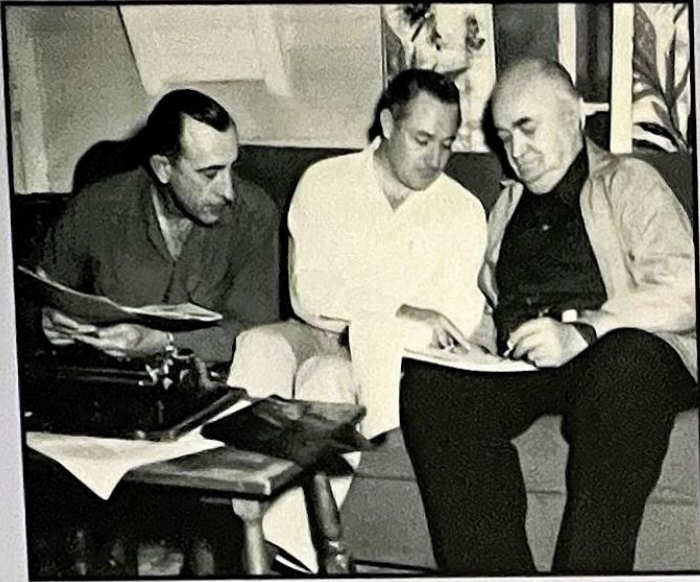


Farming was also a vital industry in Texas, including growing cotton. "Picking cotton" was a brutal, back-breaking task. Above are examples of typical cotton sacks.



Above is a recreation of the Duncan General Store as it was in the late 1800's in Egypt (Wharton County), Texas. Run by a native of Kentucky, the store sold everything from food to coffins. Most of the exhibit items are from the original inventory, along with some items from the Askew Drug Store in Houston.





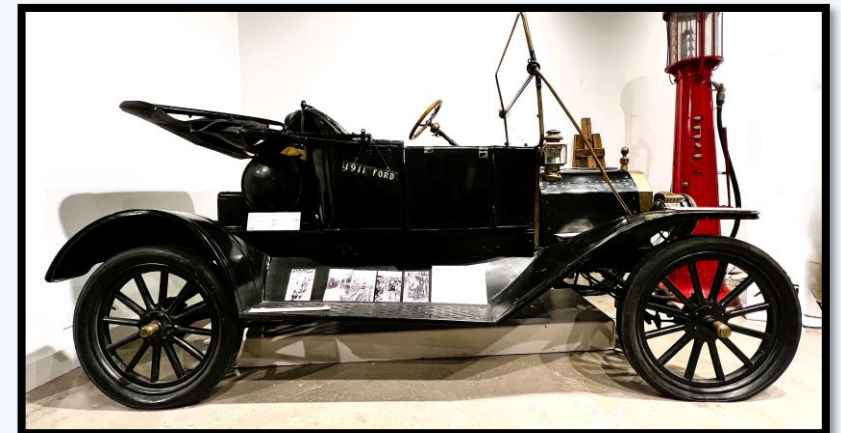
Voris Burch, John Mecom, and Elmer Woodard Boyt signing an oil lease in the 1950s



The Spindletop gusher in 1901 led to Texas becoming a major oil producer in the U.S. Land use shifted to oil exploration and fields.

Mineral leases allowed the cattle industry to continue, with smaller but newer herds adaptive to the Gulf coast.

On exhibit is a 1911 car, dependent on the fuel that became available from the oil boom.







Following the museum tour, our large group was split into two groups, between docents Julio and Gary, for a tour of three historic structures.

Above is the 1823 **Old Place**, an example of an early pioneer home.



Looking up, we were reminded that this beautiful park and historic venue is in the heart of downtown Houston. The 53-floor *Heritage Plaza*, a post-modern skyscraper, looms over the park.





Photos were not allowed inside the historic buildings we toured. To see much of what we enjoyed seeing, and to learn more, including details on upcoming events, please access [HeritageSociety.org](https://HeritageSociety.org). You can also follow them on [FaceBook](#).

The **1823 Old Place** was moved to the park from the banks of Clear Creek in 1973 and restored. After floating down the bayou during Tropical Storm Allison in 2001, it was moved to its present location. It is an excellent example of the hardships early settlers endured. It was made of cedar logs, using the mortise and tenon technique, with a pine floor. Meat and herbs were dried inside the house; food supplies were suspended on a shelf hung from the ceiling, to keep vermin out. A bell on the shelf would warn of an “intruder”. One trunk held the family’s belongings. Animal horns were useful for making certain tools, and gourds were handy for other uses. A butter churn was essential. The bed mattress was stuffed with straw or feathers and suspended on woven rope, which could be tightened by hand as needed when the rope stretched and caused sagging.





The **St. John Church**, founded in the 1860's, was built by German and Swiss immigrants for Evangelical Lutheran members. It was rebuilt following a hurricane in 1875. The original organ was restored in 1889. Originally named the St. John German Evangelical Lutheran Church, it was moved from its original site on Mangum Road to the park in 1968.

The original pews are cypress planks made by the congregation. A kerosene-burning chandelier hangs from the rafters.

Behind the altar are the words (in German) "Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it".

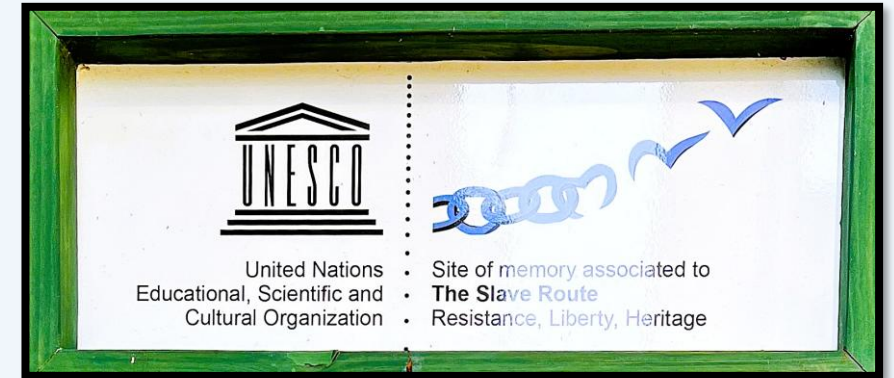
As you exit the church, you look up to see the words (in German) "The Lord preserve your coming out and going in. Amen".

The bell was used as a call to worship, as well as a call when needed for community members to gather.

Our members enjoyed the opportunity to ring the bell.

The church hosts a Christmas service, as well as weddings, receptions, and dinners.





The house, along with the 1866 Fourth Ward Cottage and the 1870 Jack Yates House, earned a UNESCO designation in 2022, related to the Slave Route project.

The **Kellum-Noble** plantation house was built in 1847 by slaves owned by Nathaniel Kellum. It is the oldest house in Houston standing on its original site. The bricks were made from clay and sand in Kellum's own brickyard on the banks of the nearby bayou. The upper level has wrap-around porches, and windows in all rooms allowed cross-ventilation.

It became home to the Noble family later. Zerviah Noble and their daughter Catherine taught school to young girls in the house at one time. A few of the samplers the girls made illustrated their accomplishments.

In 2021, the Kellum-Noble house earned a Good Brick award from Preservation Houston, following its restoration, which included the addition of HVAC. During renovation, many artifacts were found below the house.

An example of attention to detail during restoration was the selection of a paint in a pleasing shade of blue that exactly matched the original color of the walls in the first room seen upon entering the house.

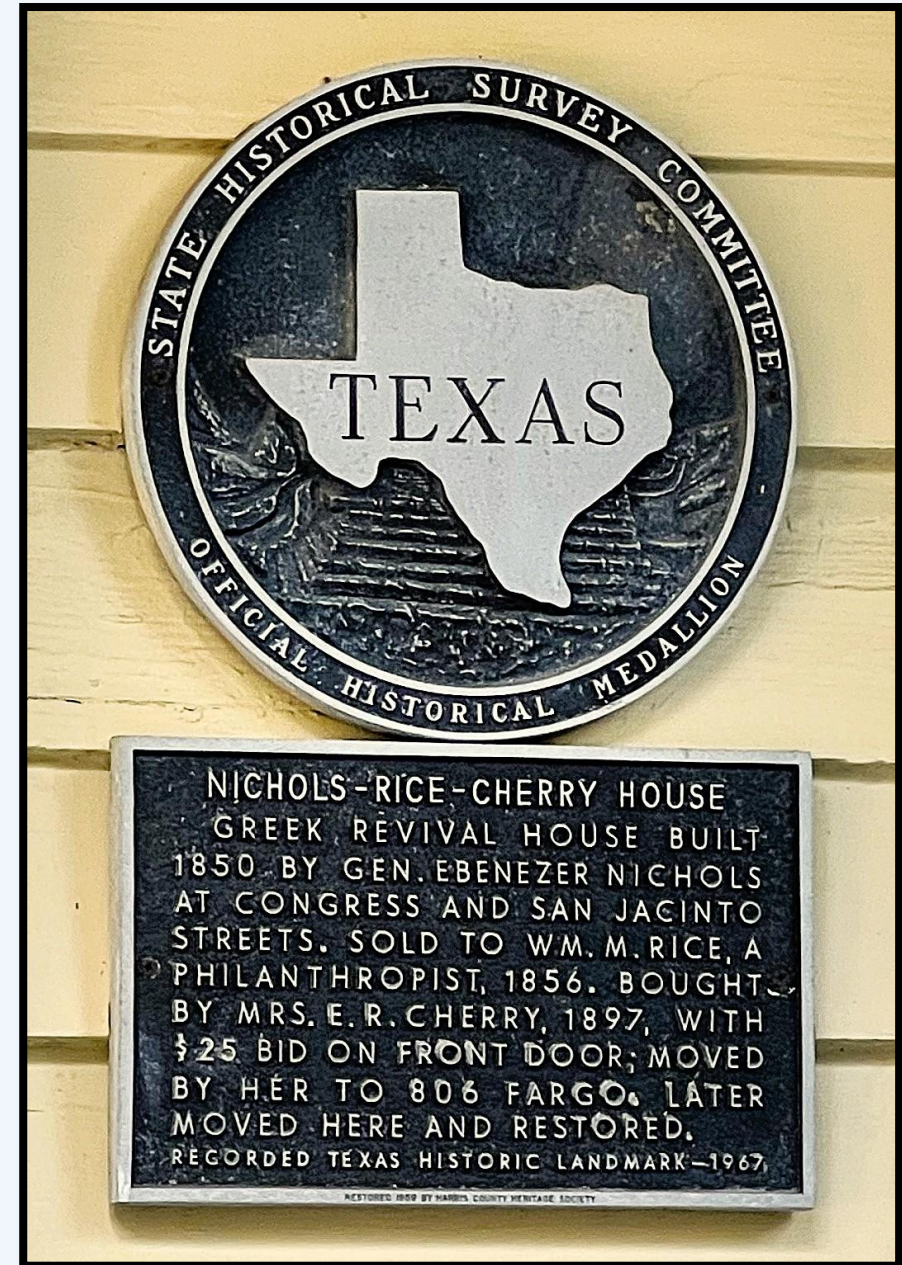
Enjoy a video on The Heritage Society website to see parts of the renovation process.





Our tour did not include this house; however, we paused there long enough to hear a little of its history and to read the plaque.

A \$25 bid?!







Near the entrance to the Museum, we stopped to admire a tree that was said to be more than 250 years old. Further on, a colorful mural painted by Jesse Sifuentes in 2018 depicts 38 places, personalities, and events representing the contributions of Hispanic heritage and history in Houston.

The pavers below the mural and elsewhere are inscribed with the names of generous donors who have contributed to the success of The Heritage Society.

The cats in the area are ferals the staff care for, including visits to the vet; all are up for adoption.

**The Heritage Society welcomes new members, volunteers, and donations. Seniors 65+ enjoy a special membership rate. It is currently gearing up for 2026, to celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.**

As a reminder: Photos were not allowed inside the historic buildings we toured. To see much of what we enjoyed firsthand, and to learn more, including details on upcoming events, please access [HeritageSociety.org](https://HeritageSociety.org), and follow them on [FaceBook](https://Facebook)



Following the tour, everyone enjoyed lunch at the downtown ***Pappas Bar-B-Q***.



*Thank you, Ann,  
for coordinating another great trip!*



*Thank you, James,  
for safe bus travel!*





# Future Trips



## **Wednesday, November 12: St. Martin's Episcopal Church**

This is a self-drive/carpool trip to this beautiful church in the Galleria area. Highlights of a 2-hr tour include viewing the church's wonderful stained glass windows, plus touring the gardens. Lunch will follow.

## **Thursday, December 4: Christmas luncheon and Toy Drive**

Self-drive or carpool to *Candelari's*, 2617 W. Holcombe. Bring a toy and meet at 11:30 to enjoy lunch/dinner/bar menu choices on their heated, covered patio.

## **Signing Up for a Trip**

Trip Coordinator Ann Fairchild may be contacted at [fairann@sbcglobal.net](mailto:fairann@sbcglobal.net) or **281-686-1325**.

She will publish complete trip details, with the opportunity to sign up, closer to the trip date.

If the traveler quota is full, you may ask to be put on a waiting list.